

THE

GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST.

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DISCOURSES

By

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*THE*

*GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST.*

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“The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God.”—MARK i. 1.

**A**MONG the incidental disadvantages attending the inestimable privilege of early and life-long familiarity with the word of God, is the habit of confounding things really distinct, and especially of overlooking the characteristic peculiarities of the sacred writers, which were not at all destroyed by inspiration, and a due regard to which is often necessary to their just interpretation. In no part of the Bible is this error more common or injurious than in the Gospels, which the great majority even of devout and believing readers are too much in the habit of regarding as precisely alike in plan and purpose, whereas no other books on the same subject could be more distinctly marked by individual peculiarities, some of which are of the most minute and unimportant nature in themselves, but for that very reason less likely to have been invented or contrived for any purposes of deception.

Many who have read the Gospels all their lives, would be surprised to hear that Matthew uses the word “then” more frequently than all the others put together—that Mark is almost equally exclusive in his use of “immediately”—that John alone has the double Amen, Amen—and a multitude of other minute differences equally unimportant in themselves, but equally demonstrative of

individuality and independence in the several writers. The same thing is true as to other differences more important in themselves, and relating not to mere forms of expression, but to plan and method. Thus Matthew cites the prophecies, and points out their fulfilment so much more frequently than Mark and Luke, that his Gospel is by some regarded, not so much as a history, as a historical argument, intended to show that Jesus was the Messiah of the prophets. Mark is distinguished by his use of Latin words and explanation of Jewish customs, showing that he wrote immediately for Gentile readers; on the other hand, he frequently records the Aramaic or vernacular expressions used by Christ, with a Greek translation; such as *Talitha-cumi*, *Ephphatha*, *Corban*, *Abba*, *Father*. Another peculiarity of this evangelist is, that to him we are indebted for almost all our knowledge of our Saviour's looks and gestures; as we are to Luke for many interesting glimpses of his devotional habits,—such as his spending whole nights in prayer, his praying at his baptism, and before the choice of his apostles, and in other cases. John, besides the general differences, arising from the commonly admitted fact that he wrote to complete or supplement the others, dwells chiefly on our Lord's discourses, and relates his actions chiefly as connected with them. On the other hand, it is to him we owe our knowledge of the chronology or dates of our Lord's ministry; it is he that enumerates the pass-overs and several other feasts included in that period, and thus shows us that his ministry or public life on earth continued for above three years.

These points of difference between the Gospels are selected out of many that might just as easily be given, in illustration of the general statement, that while all were equally inspired and all are perfectly harmonious, each writer has his own peculiarities, not only of expression, but of plan and method. This is a matter not of learned criticism, but within the reach of every careful and attentive reader, and if properly noticed, would greatly tend, not only to elucidate the Gospels, but to make them interesting—in other words, to aid both the understanding and the memory. A due regard to these peculiarities would lead to the correction of another error far too prevalent in reference to this delightful part of the Scriptures, that of regarding the four Gospels not as com-

plete histories, but as mere collections of materials, out of which we are to frame the history for ourselves ; a mistake which has occasioned not only a vast waste of time and labour in attempts to reduce the four accounts to one continued narrative, but has also contributed directly to the disregard of those peculiarities which have been already mentioned as belonging to the several books, but which, of course, are overlooked and confounded in the process of condensing four books into one.

The simple truth appears to be, that God, for wise and holy purposes, which are only in part visible to us, or discovered by us, was pleased to put the life of Christ on record for the edification of his people and the glory of his own name ; not in one, but in four distinct accounts, each complete in itself, with reference to its own specific purpose, and the definite impression it was meant to make upon the readers' mind, yet all completing one another in relation to the general aggregate or sum total of the impression meant to be conveyed. In this respect they have been likened to four portraits or four landscapes, exhibiting one and the same object, but in different lights and from different points of view, yet all of course harmonious and consistent. As it would be absurd to cut up and amalgamate the paintings, so is it no less absurd to destroy the individuality of the Gospels by reducing them to one. They are, indeed, to be harmonized in order to elucidate their meaning and exhibit their consistency, but not in such a way as to destroy their separate existence or confound their individual peculiarities. No harmony can or ought to take the place of the original Gospels, which were meant to be read separately to the end of time, and with a careful observation of their several characteristics, even of such as in themselves may seem to be wholly unimportant.

Among these is the way in which they open, and the point from which they set out, in recording the biography of Jesus Christ. Matthew begins with his genealogy, and shows by a formal and authentic pedigree, perhaps extracted from official records, his descent from Abraham and David. This is not so much a part of his narrative as a documentary introduction to it, after which he sets out from the conception and nativity of the Saviour. Luke goes back to the previous conception and nativity of John the

Baptist, his forerunner. John goes still further back, to teach the doctrine of his pre-existence ; while Mark omits all this, plunging at once into the midst of his subject, and beginning with the official life or public ministry of Jesus ; “the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ.”

These words admit of several constructions, each of which has something to recommend it, and none of which are utterly exclusive of each other ; so that all of them may be allowed to suggest something to the mind of the reader.

The simplest construction, and the one most probably intended by the writer, is that which makes this a description of the whole book, or a statement of its subject. This is the beginning of the life of Christ, or here beginneth his recorded history. It is equally grammatical, however, to connect the words with what follows, as a part of the same context ; “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ was as it is written in the prophets ;” or, “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ was John the Baptist preaching in the wilderness.” These are not only positive constructions, but suggest important facts in the life of Christ, as will be afterwards particularly mentioned.

In the meantime, I invite your attention to two topics, suggested by the words themselves, however they may be connected with what follows ; one of which is really included in the other, or is a mere specification of it. The first and most general of these topics is, *the gospel* ; and the second and more specific is, *the beginning of the gospel*. Either of these would be sufficient by itself to furnish ample food for meditation and instruction, even if we merged the mere beginning in the whole of which it is the part, or considered the whole only with respect to its beginning. I prefer, however, to present the two precisely as they lie together in the text, only giving the precedence to the general subject, and the second place to its specification ; or, in other words, first considering the gospel as a whole, and then the beginning of it in particular.

In carrying out this suggestion, it may be convenient to resolve each of these topics into two inquiries, under the general subject of the gospel : Considering first, What it is ?—then, Whose it is ? Under the more specific head, Of the beginning of the gospel,

asking first, Where it began of old? And secondly, Where it begins now? By this division and arrangement, I may hope to assist both your understandings and your memories in the brief examination which I now propose to make of this interesting passage, not as a matter of mere curious speculation, but as a source of instruction and improvement.

I. Our first theme, then, is the gospel; and our first inquiry, What it is?

This may seem to some too elementary a question, and to others too extensive; but I merely ask you to consider for a moment, and in quick succession, the elements really included in this most familiar term, which, like others of the same sort, often conveys very vague ideas even to the minds of those who most familiarly employ it.

There are few kinds of knowledge, and religious knowledge is certainly not one of them, in which it is not often both agreeable and useful to go back to elementary ideas and first principles, and even to the simple definition of the most familiar terms. I do not scruple, then, to put the question both to you and to myself, *What is the gospel?* and to answer, in the first place: (1.) That the word, both in Greek and English, originally means good news, glad tidings—a delightful phrase, expressing a delightful thing, awakening a thousand sweet and tender recollections. Who has never heard good news? Who cannot call to mind the thrill of joy which such intelligence once darted through him? To some the experience may be fresh, to others faded; perhaps dimmed and neutralized by many an intervening alternation or vicissitude of bad news and of mournful tidings. Yet even in this case it is often possible to look back through these intervening changes, and to reproduce in some degree the exquisite delight occasioned at some distant period, by the reception of good news from some beloved object, perhaps far removed. This is an experience which never can grow obsolete. Increasing facilities of communication only multiply its causes and occasions. Even now, how many are rejoicing in glad tidings by the last arrival from some distant shore; how many anxiously, yet hopefully, expecting to receive them by the next! I appeal to these asso-



ciations, not for any rhetorical or sentimental purpose, but simply to awaken the appropriate feeling which belongs to the very definition of the gospel—good news—good news—not in some abstruse or transcendental sense, but in the plain, homely, every-day sense of the same words, as employed in the dialect of common life. Why is it that the very terms and phrases which inflame or agitate us in our ordinary parlance fall so lifeless on the ear and heart when uttered in connection with religion? Partly because our whole state of feeling on religious subjects is too cold and dead; partly because we wilfully divorce religious terms from their natural association, and treat them as belonging to another.

Gospel, I tell you, is good news in exactly the same sense that it was good news when you heard of the recovery or escape of a parent or a child, a husband or a wife, a brother or a sister, from some fearful peril. Recall that feeling, and then use it to explain the phrase, good news, as a definition of the gospel. If you leave this out, your whole conception is a false one. Whatever else may yet be added, and it is much, this is the original, essential, fundamental notion. There can be no gospel without good news, though there may, in a restricted sense, be good news where there is, alas! no gospel.

2.) Having settled this as the primary, elementary idea of the gospel, as glad tidings—just as the same words are used to signify good news from man to man—from house to house—from one place to another, such as burdens our mails and thrills along our telegraphic wires,—let us now take another step, and add to this simple definition of the gospel, as a term of Scripture and religion, that it is good news from God to man—from heaven to earth—from the infinitely blessed and the infinitely holy, to the lowest depths of human wretchedness and sin. It is not good news from America to Europe, or from the old world to the new; it is a voice from heaven, breaking through the silence or the discord of our natural condition. Oh, if we were half as sensible of this condition as we are of temporal anxieties, and fears, and wants—instead of listening coldly to this news from heaven, we should wait and watch for it, as eagerly as any mother now lies sleepless listening for the signal of a new arrival to relieve her fears and fill her cup to overflowing by glad tidings from her dis-

tant child ! Oh, could the tumult of this life cease to fill our ears even for a moment, we might hear another sound, to which we are now deaf—good news, good news from heaven—from heaven to earth—from God to man—to us—to you—to me—glad tidings ! This is gospel, but is it the meaning of that word to you, my hearer ?

(3.) Now let us make our definition more precise, by adding still another term. Good news, glad tidings, from the upper world, would be delightful if they related only to our natural necessities. If the voice of God were heard proclaiming peace instead of war, abundance in the place of want, and health for sickness—how might we rejoice, nay, how do we really rejoice in the sure though silent pledge of fruitful seasons and abundant harvests. But these, however free and entitled to our warmest thanks, can never meet our chief necessities—can never satisfy the soul. Its cravings are for spiritual good ; its worst pains are the consciousness of guilt, remorse of conscience, and a fearful looking for of judgment. These may be smothered for a time, but not for ever. Worldly prosperity may hide them from the view, and drive them from the thoughts, just as the excitement of business or of pleasure may distract the mind of the diseased and dying ; but only to rush back again with tenfold anguish, when the momentary interruption shall have ceased. My hearers, no good news is good news in the highest sense, unless it reaches these necessities—supplies these wants, and remedies these evils. Without this, good news, even though sent from heaven, even though uttered by the voice of God, would be but like the good news of some half-forgotten social or political success, at which your heart has long since ceased to beat, your eye to sparkle, and your blood to boil.

With such experiences—and who is utterly without them?—no good news is good news to your sober judgment and your immortal soul—but good news in relation to your sins and your salvation, your future, your eternity. Oh, if the mask could now be taken from every heart, it would be seen that many who appear engrossed with temporal and secular intelligence are really longing for good news of a very different kind—for the glad tidings of forgiveness, reconciliation, safety—for the joyful news that God is

not their enemy, that hell is not their portion, that they may be, that they are entitled to a share in that perpetual inheritance—that indefeasible possession which lies far beyond the changes, and panics, and convulsions of this present life. You must hear such news sooner or later, or be wretched ; and such, such news you may hear now, in “the gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God.”

2. This leads me to the second question under the general topic of the gospel : We have seen what it is—good news, good news from God to man—good news of spiritual good, forgiveness and salvation ; but even this view cannot be complete without considering whose, as well as what it is. It is not an impersonal or abstract gospel ; it is not the gospel of man, nor yet of an absolute and distant God ; it is the gospel both of God and man ; it is described expressly in the text as the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. I know of nothing in the Scriptures more habitually slighted and imperfectly apprehended than the names or titles of the Saviour. I could scarcely have repeated half a dozen words conveying less to multitudes of minds than those just uttered ; which some of you perhaps regard precisely as you would the names and surnames of a friend or enemy ; or even if you do admit the dignity of him who is thus described, it is only in the general, and without any definite perception of the importance of the terms employed. So inveterate and hurtful is this habit, that it may be well, occasionally, to remember what we all know, if we would consider and apply it : that all names are originally significant—that divine names are especially and always so ; that the names of the Redeemer were designed to be descriptive and expressive, not conventional and formal ; and that when they are accumulated and combined, it is not without meaning, but every name is really suggestive of some great truth or important feature in the person or offices of Christ, and in the method of redemption. This, which is true in general, is emphatically true of the solemn nomenclature with which Mark begins his gospel.

(1.) It is “the gospel of Jesus,” that is, the good news of a Saviour : “Thou shalt call his name Jesus,” said the angel who announced his birth to Joseph, “for he shall save his people from

their sins." Even Joshua, whose name is identical in Hebrew, was so called prophetically, as the saviour or deliverer of Israel from enemies and dangers ; and in this he was a type of Him who was to come, not as a military conqueror and earthly prince, though men so expected him—not as the deliverer of the Jews from Roman vassalage, and the restorer of their ancient independence—but as a Saviour from a far worse bondage, and a more terrific ruin—from perdition, from damnation, not of angels, not of devils, not of men without exception or discrimination ; but of those predestinated to belief in him ; his people, the Saviour of his people ; not from temporal or physical distresses, but from sin ; not from the sins of others, but their own ; not from its effects, but from itself ; not merely in the life, but in the heart ; not merely in the stream, but in the spring, the source, the principle, the essence. Yes, the gospel is not only good news of a Saviour, but of Him who came, of him who was called Jesus, because he was to save his people from their sins.

(2.) But the gospel is also the gospel of Christ ; to many ears a mere tautology, an irksome repetition, an unmeaning pleonasm or superfluity, or at the most, a simple combination of inseparable names, like Julius Cæsar or George Washington. But I rejoice to know, my hearers, that "ye have not so learned Christ," not even the name of Christ. The very children in the Sunday school know better, for they know that Christ in Greek, and Messias in Hebrew, mean anointed, and that anointing was the Scripture symbol under the Old Testament for spiritual effusions, especially for those which qualified men for the great representative office of Prophet, Priest, and King, and that these offices themselves represent corresponding parts of the Redeemer's work ; in other words, that he was in the highest sense to be the Prophet, Priest, and King of his people. Their Prophet, to reveal the will of God respecting them ; their Priest, to expiate their guilt and intercede for them ; their King, to govern and protect them ; that in him these offices, before divided among many individuals and generations, were to meet, and for the first time to be fully realized ; all which is really expressed by calling him the Christ or the Messias.

These are not scholastic subtleties or technical distinctions, as some would fain persuade you ; they are real, real—essential to a

clear and full view of the office and person of the great Deliverer, the source and subject of the gospel, who was called Jesus as the Saviour of his people, and Christ as the Prophet, Priest, and King for ever.

(3.) But who is sufficient for these things, or who is equal to the great work shadowed forth by these signs, and more than royal titles? If the highest earthly wisdom is evinced in separating legal and judicial functions, in dividing among many what would too severely task the powers and try the integrity of one, what human subject can combine in his own person all that is expressed by these names? It is clearly impossible. Their very application excludes the thought of mere humanity. The necessity of a divine person to assume this trust would be apparent, from the nature of the trust itself, even if it were not expressly added, that this gospel is the gospel of the Son of God, not in the attenuated sense which heresy would put upon it, but in that which the unbelieving Jews themselves attached to the expressions when they charged our Lord with blasphemy, for calling God his Father, and thus making himself equal with God. The Son of God, not merely as a creation, or an object of affection, or a subject of adoption; but as a partaker of his nature, one with him in essence, the same in substance, equal in power and glory. This is the last particular included in the description of the gospel. It is good news, from God to man, of deliverance from suffering and sin; the good news of a Saviour, of a Prophet, of a Priest, and of a King, not human, but divine, *the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.*

II. Having thus seen what the gospel is, and whose it is, it remains to consider, still more briefly, its beginning, under the two distinct questions:—

1. Where did it begin of old?
2. Where does it begin now?

In answer to the first of these inquiries, I remark:—

(1.) That the gospel, as a message of salvation, may be said to have begun in the eternal counsel of the divine will; in the eternal purpose of the God who sent it. There is no more injurious mistake than that of looking on the gospel as a sort of after-

thought, or series of experiments intended to make good the failure of another method of salvation, and continually modified to meet emergencies as they arose. Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world, and though it may not be expedient to expatiate too freely in the bewildering mazes of this great truth, and especially to speculate upon it as a mere abstraction, apart from its connection with human duty, character, and destiny, we neither may nor can displace it as the deep and adamant basis upon which alone our hopes are founded. The gospel of Christ could never terminate in our salvation, if it had not first begun in God's decree; let this, then, lie at the foundation, and from this let us ascend to explore the superstructure, and inquire what was the beginning of the gospel as a part of human history, and a phase of man's experience.

(2.) I remark, then, in the next place, that the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ was not in the New Testament, but in the Old; it began in the simple first promise to our fallen parents; in their sacrificial offerings; in the bleeding lambs of Abel's altar; in the simple faith and worship of the patriarchs. It began afresh in the Mosaic legislation, in the ceremonial law, with its passover and pentecost, and great day of atonement; with its sabbaths and its jubilees, its priests and Levites, its animal and vegetable offerings, its smoking altar and its shed blood. All these were worse than useless, worthless to man and insulting to God, except so far as they were typifying and symbolizing the "beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God."

Once more, it may be said to have begun in the predictions of the prophets, who declared in words, as the legal service did in acts, the coming Saviour, and not only foretold, but exhibited to all believers, "the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God."

(3.) Passing over the long interval between the Old and New Testaments, and coming nearer to the actual appearance of the promised Saviour, his gospel may be said to have had a new beginning in the preparatory ministry of John the Baptist. If not expressed, it is at least implied and necessarily indicated in Mark's introductory expression, that John the Baptist's preaching

in the wilderness the baptism of repentance, with a view to the remission of sins, was the beginning of the gospel,—its immediate precursor, the appointed preparation for its full disclosure, so that John's instructions and his baptisms derived all their worth and meaning from the fact, that in the verse explained they were the actual beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God. We find, accordingly, that when John's ministry was closed, and that of Christ himself succeeded, it was at first a mere continuation of John's preaching; that the burden of both cries was, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" From this beginning, and from those already mentioned lying further back in all the prophecies, the ceremonies of the law, the religion of the patriarchs, and the decrees of God, from these beginnings, the gospel in the hands and in the mouth of Him who was at once its author, and its subject, and its finisher, was developed by degrees—in his divine instructions, in his miracles of mercy, in his perfect example, but above all, in his faultless obedience and atoning passion, in his crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, in his session at the right hand of God, in the effusion of his Spirit, the erection of his Church, the diffusion of his doctrines, and the conquest of the world; that system whose beginnings we have traced, became the glorious gospel of the grace of God, even the gospel of your salvation.

2. This reference to the bearing of the gospel upon human destiny, brings us to the last remaining question suggested by the text, to which the answer must be still more brief than to the one before it; serving rather as a practical improvement than a further explanation of the subject.

*Where does this gospel begin now?* There is a sense in which this question would be senseless and irrelevant. The foundation is already laid, and neither need nor can be laid again. The sacrifice for sin has been already offered for all, and if that be rejected, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin, but a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall destroy the adversary. It were worse than vain, my hearers, to seek any other gospel than that which has begun already in the divine decrees, in the law, in the prophets, in the preaching of John, and in the saving work of Christ himself. There are other gospels,

but of such, and of such as preach them, though it were an angel from heaven, Paul has said, Let him be anathema.

But although the gospel can, in this view, have no more beginnings, yet in the subjective sense of something which may be embraced in the personal experience, and must be so embraced to secure salvation, we may ask in conclusion, as we asked before, *Where does the gospel begin now?* Without repeating what has been already said as to its ultimate source and indispensable foundation, I may say,—

(1.) That it begins for the most part in religious education,—in that simple teaching at paternal knees and on maternal bosoms, which, in our happy, highly-favoured times, supplies the place of those remote and long-protracted means by which the world was prepared of old for the appearance of a Saviour. How many children of the Church forget, how many pious parents insufficiently consider, that these lisplings of religious truth to infant ears, which may even seem to be to themselves superfluous, may be intended by divine grace, and realized by those, who scarcely can be said to hear them, as the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God.

(2.) I say intended by divine grace, for I need not add that even these distilling dew-drops of infantile training can avail nothing without superhuman influence, without the moving of the Spirit and the waters; sometimes in immediate succession to the early training without any interval of vice or unbelief; sometimes after peaceful interruptions, during which the seed sown seems to have long perished; but no, sometimes when least expected, a new life is infused into the dead mass of apparently unprofitable knowledge, the seed long buried shows itself, the tears of the departed glisten still about the leaves of the plant, and under heavenly culture and divine direction, it springs up, first the blade, then the ear, and then the full corn in the ear. To that man the gospel has a new beginning, as in one sense the original instructions of his childhood, so in another the first movement of divine power on his heart and conscience is to him the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God.

(3.) Lastly, in addition to these doctrines and gracious beginnings, there are what may be called providential recommencements



of the gospel, both to communities and to individuals. I need not specify under the latter head, seasons of affliction, or under the former, seasons of revival. These I must leave with a bare suggestion to your private meditations. I will only hint in closing the subject, that to a whole Church, even trivial incidents or epochs in their history may mark such a revival of the gospel in its power as I have suggested. A change of local situation, or of pastors, the return of one after a temporary absence,—nay, the very re-assembling of the people after periodical dispersion, though entirely insufficient of themselves, may, under the divine direction, be the signal for new zeal upon the part of true believers, and for new attention in the unconverted, and to both, in an important sense of the expression, a beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God. That I may not close without a word of application to the individual as well as the collective audience, let me say to you, my friend, who may be here to-day apparently by accident, or if a stated worshipper in this place, yet a stranger to the covenants of promise, that you have only to accept of that which is so freely offered; you have only to repent and to believe, and to throw yourself into the outstretched arms of mercy; you have only to consent to be made holy and happy in the way of your own choosing, and this favoured hour, this otherwise imperfect service, shall be remembered by you to eternal ages, as having been to your soul, through divine grace, the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God.



## II.

“Where is he that is born King of the Jews?”

“Where is he that is born King of the Jews?”—MATT. ii. 2.

WHEN these words were originally uttered, the Jews, though still a nation in the popular sense, that is, not only a people, but a state, not only a distinct race, but a body politic—had for centuries had no king of their own royal lineage. The throne of David was still empty and awaiting his successor. He who did reign over them was regarded by them as an alien in blood and an apostate in religion. And even he was the tributary vassal of a foreign state, the last of the great powers to which the Jews had been successively subjected. The first days of their monarchy were in all respects its best days. It had scarcely surmounted the horizon when it reached its zenith. The best and greatest of the theocratic kings was David. Even under Solomon the symptoms of decline began to show themselves. He was scarcely dead before the great schism took away a large part of his kingdom. The apostate monarchy of Israel waxed worse and worse, and fell at last before the power of Assyria. Its people were carried into exile, and their place supplied by heathen settlers. The captives themselves vanish all at once from history, and are still sought after by the name of the Lost Tribes. The kingdom of Judah lasted longer, but the progress of decay was constant. Now and then a king arose, who seemed to raise them for a time, but it was only to sink deeper by reaction and collapse. The Babylonian empire had supplanted the Assyrian and become the mistress of western Asia. Before the host of Nebuchadnezzar Judah fell as Ephraim had fallen long before. The holy city was dismantled, and the temple burned with fire. The king and the best part of the people went into captivity. From this they were delivered by the fall of Babylon and the rise

of the Persian power on its ruins. Cyrus the Great favoured and restored the Jewish exiles. The temple was rebuilt in troublous times. But the renovated commonwealth was weak and insignificant, compared with the old kingdom, even in its latter days ; much more when compared with its pristine glory under Solomon and David. The colony could only exist by the protection of foreign powers. It passed under the successive domination of the empires which so rapidly supplanted one another in the interval between the Old and New Testaments. First, the Persians, then the Macedonians, then the Greek kings of Egypt and Syria. The oppressions of the latter roused the old Jewish spirit and led to the erection of a native monarchy. The Maccabees, or Hasmonean Princes, united in themselves the kingly and the priestly office. For several generations they maintained the independence of the Jewish state, even against formidable foes. But they were not the legitimate successors of David ; they were not even children of Judah, but of Levi. At length a family dispute was referred to foreign arbitration.

The Roman Empire in the meantime had become the ruling power of the world. Syria and Egypt were already under its dominion. Its agents eagerly embraced the opportunity of gaining foothold in the land of Israel. Under the pretext of pacification, Pompey the Great took possession of Jerusalem, and about half a century before the language of the text was uttered, the Roman eagles were conspicuously planted upon Zion and Moriah. With their usual wise policy, the conquerors left with the conquered the appearance of self-government. Their religious institutions remained undisturbed. An Idumean family, personally favoured by Augustus, was exalted by the Senate to the royal dignity. The first that took the title was "Herod the king, in whose days wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews ?" At this question, we are told the king was troubled, and all Jerusalem agitated with him. But it was not the agitation of mere wonder. The very effect produced shows that a corresponding expectation was already in existence. The Jews still held fast to their ancient Scriptures, though with many traditions. These taught them to expect the restoration of the throne of David. From them, or from an old collateral tradition, other nations were now looking to Judea as the scene of great

events. The world was agitated by a vague foreboding. War for a time had ceased throughout the Roman Empire. Men had leisure to attend to predictions and prognostics. The Jews believed that the Star foretold by Balaam was about to come out of Jacob. Their heathen neighbours shared in the belief of and expectation of strange heavenly phenomena announcing the approach of great catastrophes and the rise of some extraordinary personage. At this critical juncture in the history of the world, when Roman power and Greek civilization had attained their height in the Augustine age, when heathen religion and philosophy had both reached the period of decrepitude, and men began to feel the need of better consolation, when the schools and the oracles alike were dumb, when the heathen were looking for they knew not what, and the Jews expecting a son of David to restore their ancient monarchy—at this very crisis wise men from the east, the cradle of science and the home of occult superstition—came to Jerusalem, saying, “Where is he that is born King of the Jews?”

They did not ask for the actual sovereign of the Jews. It was to him that they addressed the question. But they ask for the hereditary rightful king, not one to be born, but as born already. No wonder that the Edomite who held possession of the throne by the grace of a heathen sovereign, was alarmed. No wonder that his people were excited, when they heard these strangers asking, “Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and have come to worship him.” The question was not one of local or temporary interest. It was to give complexion to the history of all after ages. It has received or been susceptible of various answers, as the state of things has gradually changed. To some of these I now ask your attention, as a proof that the demand is still a stirring one, “Where is he that is born King of the Jews?”

When the question was originally asked, the answer might have been, In Bethlehem of Judah, in a stable, in a manger. Yes, the hereditary king of Israel, He who was to sit upon the throne both by divine and human right, was born in poverty, and to the eyes of men in shame. This was surprising in itself, but it was more—it was the first in a long series of surprises, of enigmas, of apparent contradictions. He that was born King of the Jews not only passed through all the pains of infancy and childhood, in an

humble station, but in mature age had not where to lay his head, —dependent on the charity of friends, despised and rejected by his enemies. These privations and these sufferings become darker and more complex as we trace his history, until at last, betrayed by one disciple, denied by another, and forsaken by the rest, we seem to lose sight of him amidst a cloud through which the spears of Roman soldiers and the Urim and Thummim on the high priest's breast are seen flashing in unwonted combination. From this scene of condemnation and disgrace we turn away, saying, "Where, then, is he that is born king of the Jews?"

When the cloud has once more been dispelled, this question may receive another answer. For on yonder hill, without the walls of Jerusalem, three crosses are erected. On these crosses three living sufferers are even now suspended. Two of them are ordinary convicts, malefactors. But over the head of him suspended in the midst there is a superscription. The characters are legible enough, and that all who pass by may comprehend them, they are written in the three sacred languages of earth—in Greek, in Hebrew, and in Latin. Draw near and decipher them. Is it a record of some common-place iniquity, on which society has wreaked its vengeance? No; the words are strange and seemingly misplaced—as if some wanton hand had torn them from the walls of a palace, or the canopy of a throne, and in mockery transferred them to this scene of execution, this Calvary, this Golgotha, this place of a skull—"Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews!" Yes, the very words! In vain did the Jews plead for a change of form—Rome, the mistress of the world, through the hand of her procurator, has become witness to the truth, and the testimony cannot be recalled. "What I have written I have written!" Read, then, above the head of that expiring sufferer the answer to the question, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews?" There, there, upon that cross.

In this case, too, the answer does but touch one link in a long chain of paradoxical events, disappointing, blasting the long-cherished hopes of Israel. Instead of a conqueror presenting them a sufferer, accused, condemned, and put to death in due course of law. Even his followers and friends could say, in deep dependency: "We trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel." Even they are slow of heart to learn, believe, and understand that

this redemption must be purchased by the sacrifice of life—that Messiah must suffer these things before he could enter into his glory. Yes, the whole doctrine of atonement and salvation by the death of the incarnate Son of God is summed up and concentrated in the answer given at this awful moment on the top of Calvary, to the question, “Where is he that is born King of the Jews?”

But Calvary is not the only height about Jerusalem. There is another on the east called Olivet—the Mount of Olives. On the acclivity of that hill what do you discern? Eleven men gazing at the sky. A moment ago and there was another with them, and they might have been heard anxiously inquiring of him, “Wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” He has scarcely spoken in reply, when he is taken up; a cloud receives him out of their sight. At first, perhaps, they doubt the testimony of their senses, then indulge the hope that he has only vanished for a moment; but they are soon undeceived; and if the question were now put to them, “Where is he that is born King of the Jews?” they would with one accord point upwards, and reply, “He is in heaven!” Yes, he who once lay in the manger at Bethlehem, and lately hung upon the cross on Calvary, is now in heaven, beyond the reach of persecution and privation; and the same is still true. Even the youngest children who are taught the name of Christ, know well that he is not here now, as he was here of old; they know, too, that he is in heaven. They know not, and the wisest of us know not, where, or what heaven is; but we know that wherever it is, he is there, and that where he is, there is heaven. And thither our thoughts naturally turn at the question, “Where is he that is born king of the Jews?”

This might seem to shut the door upon all further inquiry, but it does not. Men may think, as the eleven thought at first, that he is now beyond our reach, and we beyond his; but, like them, we may be mistaken. No; before he left them he commanded them to wait for the promise of the Father, and the baptism of the Spirit, and when that had been received, to go as witnesses of him, not only through Judea and Samaria, but to the uttermost part of the earth; and they were not to go alone, for he was to go with them, and remain with them: “Lo I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.” In some sense, then, he is on

earth—he is here—if we are indeed gathered in his name. “For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I present in the midst of them.” Here, then, is still another answer to the question, “Where is he that is born King of the Jews?” He is in heaven, but he is also upon earth; not visibly, yet really—and one day he will re-appear, and then another answer still—or the same, but in a new sense, or at least with a new emphasis—must be returned.

For look again upon the Mount of Olives, and behold the eleven gazing steadfastly toward heaven. Who are those that stand beside them, clothed in white apparel? and in what terms do they accost them? “Men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up to heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken from you, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.” And is this not still true? Did his coming at the downfall of Jerusalem exhaust this precious promise? Is it not one of the great doctrines that the Church, through all vicissitudes, has held fast as a part of her unalienable heritage that Christ shall come again, not in spirit, but in person, to the eye of sense as well as that of faith. However we may differ as to the time of this epiphany, we all believe that it will certainly take place, and that when we are asked, “Where is he that is born King of the Jews?” we shall no longer be obliged to point to a far distant heaven, or to look fearfully around us as if seeing one who is invisible—but with open face beholding the bright cloud as it descends, and him who sits enthroned upon it, we shall see amidst the halo that surrounds his head, in living characters of light, the same inscription that the hand of Pilate once appended to the cross, “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.” For when he comes he shall come in glory—the cloudy throne will be only a figure of that throne which he already occupies,—his seat at the right hand of his Father. All power in heaven and earth is already committed to him. We are assured, not only that he is in safety, but that he is in possession and in the active exercise of power, of all power, of infinite, almighty power. He who was humbled is now exalted. He who lay in the manger, and hung upon the cross, and ascended from Olivet, and is come to judge the world at the last day, is even now at the helm, guiding the complicated movements of God’s providential government. Yes, he is even now upon the throne of

the universe, and to that throne we may look up and to it direct the eye of others when they ask, whether as friends or foes, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews?"

This question, therefore, is of interest, not merely in relation to the place of Christ's abode at any period of his history, but also in relation to his dignity and office. The question, Where is he? really means, What is he? "Where is he that is born King of the Jews?" What part does he now fill? In what character, under what aspect, is he now revealed to us? In this, as well as in the local sense, we may ask, Where is he? We have seen already, in reply to this interrogation, that he is upon the throne of universal ecumenical dominion. But this throne, though real and exalted, is invisible. Hereafter we shall see it, but as yet we see it not. Yet even now, and even upon earth, his throne is standing. By a strange transmutation, he who was born King of the Jews is now King of the Christians. He came to his own, and his own received him not. The Jews as a race rejected him. They still reject him. After eighteen hundred years, the language of their hearts, and lips, and lives, is still the same that Christ, in one of his parables, puts into the mouths of their fathers, "We will not have this man to reign over us." Even at the time, and to his face, they rejected his pretensions, crying, "We have no king but Cæsar." Even that they soon lost. The Cæsar whom they chose to be their king was their destroyer. The successor of Cæsar levelled Jerusalem with the earth, threw down its walls, and tried to obliterate its very name, while no Jew was permitted even to tread the soil. In course of time the throne of the Cæsars crumbled. The Eternal City lost its secular supremacy. But the Jews continued, and do still continue aliens to the land of promise. They have sought the favour of Mohammedans, of Christians, and of heathen, and in turn have enjoyed each. But all have turned to be their enemies. Even now, when a better spirit has arisen with respect to them, they are without a country, without a government, without political or national existence. In them the prophecy has indeed been verified. They have continued "many days without a king, and without a home, and without a sacrifice." Where then is he that was born King of the Jews? Has he been thrust out of his inheritance? Has the promise to David of perpetual suc-



cession been completely nullified? By no means? He who was to come has come and been enthroned, and is at this moment reigning. He reigns not only in heaven, but on earth. He reigns over an organized and constituted kingdom. He reigns over the Israel of God. The Christian Church is heir to the prerogatives of ancient Israel. The two bodies are morally identical. It was the remnant according to the election of grace that formed the germ of the new organization. The new edifice was reared upon the old foundation. It was only the carnal Israel, the nation as a nation, that rejected Christ. Over them as Jews he is not reigning. But he is not a Jew that is one outwardly. All are not Israel that are of Israel. They may still claim to be the chosen people. But this is "the blasphemy of them which say that they are Jews and are not, but the synagogue of Satan." "We are the circumcision, which worship God in the Spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh." Over such Christ does reign, and in reigning over such he is really and truly, in the highest sense, and in the true sense of the prophecies and promises respecting him, "King of the Jews." He reigns in the heart of every individual believer. He reigns in the Church as a collective body. He is theoretically acknowledged as the head, even by many who in words deny him. By every pure Church, and by every sincere Christian, he is really enthroned and crowned, acknowledged and obeyed. He who was born King of the Jews has become the King of the Christians, without any change of character or office, without any failure in the plan or the prediction. We have only to point to the throne of the Church and to the crown of Christendom, when any ask, in doubt or scorn, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews?"

This kingdom, it is true, is not yet coextensive with the earth, but it shall be. It is growing, and is yet to grow. The kingdoms of the earth are to become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ. The mountain of the Lord's house is to be established above every other, and all nations are to flow unto it. The stone cut without hands from the mountain is to fill the earth. The watchword of its progress is, "Overturn, overturn, overturn, until he shall come, whose right it is to reign." However the great men and the wise men of the world may be affected by this revolution, it shall come to pass. They may despise the day of small

beginnings ; but the time is coming and perhaps at hand, when the providence, if not the voice of God, shall say to them, "Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish;" they may imagine that by constitutions and by legislative acts, or by the reorganization of society, they have secured themselves from all intrusion upon Christ's part. But before they are aware, his hand may be upon them, and his arrows sharp in the hearts of the King's enemies. Resistance and revolt will be for ever unavailing. The heathen may still rage, and the nations imagine a vain thing. The kings of the earth may set themselves, and rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and his Anointed. They may still say, as in ages past they have said, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak to them in his anger, and confound them in his hot displeasure. He has already set his King upon his holy hill of Zion. He will give him the heathen for his heritage, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession. If rebellious he will rule them with a rod of iron; he will break them in pieces as a potter's vessel. Let kings, then, learn wisdom, let the judges of the earth be instructed. Let them pay allegiance and do homage to this Sovereign, lest they perish in his anger, which will soon be kindled. And as his grace is equal to his power and his justice, blessed are all they that put their trust in him. Christ's kingdom is not of this world in its origin or character. He came, not to be a judge or a divider, a secular ruler or a military chieftain. But he must even here reign. His reign must and shall be universal. And the prospect of this issue is the hope of the world.

There is no more cheering anticipation than that Christ is one day to be king of nations; that his realm is not to reach, like that of David, from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean, and from the Euphrates to the desert, but from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth. To this vast empire, and to him who rules it, we, or they who shall come after us, may one day point in triumphant answer to the question, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews?" He that was born King of the Jews, and who never literally carried even that crown, shall be seen seated as it were upon the throne of all the ancient emperors and imperial

sovereignties—Sesostris and Cyrus, Alexander and Cæsar; the lost empires shall revive in him, and all the crowns of earth shall meet upon the brow of him who was "born King of the Jews"

To this general confluence of nations there shall not be even one exception. Even one, however slight, would seem to mar the triumph. There is one especially which could not but have this effect. The people that rejected him—the seed of Abraham—to whom were committed the oracles of God—to whom once pertained the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises—whose were the fathers, and of whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came who is over all, God blessed for ever. If these should still remain aloof, the glory of Immanuel's coronation might seem to be obscured or tarnished. Not that the promises of God would even then fail of their accomplishment. Not that the Israel of God would even then cease to exist, or the perpetual succession of its members be at all interrupted. But the hearts that pant for the Redeemer's exaltation might feel something to be wanting. As they stood around his throne, and looked beyond the brilliant circle that encompassed it, if they still beheld the lost sheep of the house of Israel refusing to return to the shepherd and bishop of their souls, they might recall the promise, "All kings shall fall down before him, all nations shall serve him;" and then say, "all nations?" Ah, yes, all but one, and that, alas, the very one that he was born to rule. The kings of Tarshish and the isles do bring presents; the kings of Sheba and of Seba do offer gifts; they that dwell in the wilderness have bowed before him; and all his other enemies have licked the dust;—but where is little Benjamin, and Ephraim, and Manasseh? where is Judah, with his lion? where is Levi with his Thummin and his Urim? where, oh, where are the tribes of his inheritance? The Gentiles are here, but Israel still dwells alone. Our king is, indeed, the king of nations, the king of kings, —but "where is he that is born King of the Jews?"

Even in this respect the answer will eventually be auspicious. He that was born King of the Jews shall yet reign over them. He shall be not only their rightful, but their actual sovereign. As such he shall be acknowledged by them. As he reigns already King of the Jews, over the Israel of God, which is perpetuated in

his Church, so shall he one day reign King of the Jews, over those who are such outwardly, over Israel according to the flesh. This the promise of his word entitles and requires us to expect. It is the cherished and exciting faith of some, that the seed of Abraham are to be literally gathered from the four winds, and from all parts of the earth, once more to take possession of the land bestowed by covenant on their fathers. Whether this be expressly promised in the word of God or not,—a question which will probably continue to be agitated till it is resolved by some event,—there are providential signs which seem to point to such an issue. The land of promise almost empty of inhabitants; the Jews dispersed without a country of their own; their slight connection with the countries where they dwell; the nature of their occupations tending to facilitate a general removal; and in many instances their social position making it desirable;—all this, together with a re-awakening of their interest in the land of their fathers, and the birth of a new interest in them upon the part of Christians, may be plausibly interpreted as providential indications of precisely such a change as some interpreters of prophecy suppose to be predicted. If these anticipations should be realized, and Israel should again take root downward in his own land, and bear fruit upward, how conspicuously would the regal rights of the Redeemer be asserted and established by the visible subjection of the Jewish nation to his peaceful sway! In every new accession to the swelling population of the goodly land from other nations, we should see repeated the acknowledgment of Jesus as the son of David by his hereditary subjects and his kinsmen according to the flesh—from every caravan and every fleet that bore them homeward, we might hear the voice of Israel coming back to his allegiance, asking, “Where is he that is born King of the Jews?”

But however joyful such a consummation might be, and on some accounts devoutly to be wished, the final exaltation of our Lord is not suspended on it, even with respect to his acknowledgment by Israel. Though Israel be not gathered, and externally reorganized upon the soil once gladdened by the presence, and still hallowed by the tombs of patriarchs, and prophets, and apostles; though perpetual exclusion from that precious spot of earth be part of God’s irrevocable judgment on the race as such considered, still,

we know that they shall be restored to a participation in the honours and advantages which were once exclusively their own, and from which they have fallen by rejecting the Messiah, we know and are assured that the exsiccated branches of that ancient olive shall again be grafted in—and that in some emphatic sense all Israel shall be saved; and in the glorious fulfilment of this promise, whether accompanied or not by territorial restoration, Christ's crown and sceptre shall be honoured. Every Jew who names the name of Christ as a believer, whether at the holy city or among the Gentiles, and in the very end of the earth, will individually do him homage as the Son of David. As soon as the spirit of inquiry shall begin to be diffused among that people, and the veil to be taken from their hearts in the reading of the Old Testament; as soon as the eyes of those now blind shall see clearly, and the tongue of the stammerer speak plainly; even though they should continue still dispersed among the nations; there will be something like a repetition of the scene presented eighteen centuries ago, but on a vastly wider scale, for the children of Israel will then be seen uniting with the fulness of the Gentiles in the question, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews?"

Such, my hearers, are the answers which, at different stages in the progress of Christ's kingdom, have been, or might have been, or shall be yet returned to the question originally asked by the wise men, who came from the east to Jerusalem in the days of Herod, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews?" Where is he? In the manger as a helpless infant. On the cross, as a sacrifice for sinners. On the cloud, ascending into heaven. On earth invisibly partaking in the prayers of even two or three devoutly gathered for his worship. At the right hand of the Father. On the throne of universal providential sovereignty. On the throne of Christendom. On the throne of the Gentiles. On the throne of Israel. From every such view of his exaltation let us gather fresh assurance that the purpose and promises of God can never fail; that whatever clouds may hide the sky, shall, sooner or later, be dispelled; that, however long the rights of the Redeemer may appear to be relinquished or denied or in abeyance, they shall yet be openly asserted and universally acknowledged; that he who was born to reign, shall reign, that his dominion shall be endless, that the very things

which seem to threaten its extinction shall eventually further it. If even the apostasy and casting off of Israel, the chosen race with whom the Church of old appeared to be identified, did not prevent its continued existence and progressive growth until the present hour, what disaffection or resistance, personal or national, can now arrest its onward march to universal empire. No, let Bethlehem, and Calvary, and Olivet, and Paradise, and Christendom, and Jewry, all bear witness that what he was born to bring about must come to pass; the day, though distant, shall arrive when the kingdoms of the world are to become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and when the joint halleluiahs of angels and men, of the Church on earth, and of the Church in heaven, of Jews and Gentiles, shall proclaim the final and eternal answer to the question, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews?"



### III.

## What I do thou knowest not now.

“What I do thou knowest not now ; but thou shalt know hereafter.”—  
JOHN xiii. 7.

THESE words relate to an astonishing act of condescension in our Saviour just before he suffered. Not contented with the proofs he had already given of his lowliness and willingness to be abased that we might be exalted, at his last meeting with the twelve, he crowned all by performing the most humble act of service to his own disciples. He took water, as the slaves in those days were accustomed to do for their masters and their guests, and washed the disciples' feet. It is impossible for us even now to read of this without a keen feeling of disapprobation. For a moment, at least, it seems as if the Saviour did too much, as if he went too far ; no wonder, then, that it took the apostles by surprise, and that the boldest and most free spoken of them dared to say as much,—nay, even ventured to refuse compliance, saying, “Lord, dost thou wash my feet ?” And even after Christ had answered this inquiry in the language of the text, he persevered in his refusal, saying with some violence of feeling, “Thou shalt never wash my feet.” Nor was it till our Lord had solemnly declared that, unless washed he could have no part with him, that the bold and ardent Peter overcame his repugnance to this humiliating honour, and said, “Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head.”

What I wish you to attend to now, is not the particu- lar design and meaning of his strange proceeding, but the way in which our Saviour dealt with Peter's difficulties and reluctance. He knew that Peter did not understand what he was doing, and because he could not understand it, he was not willing to explain it to him. It might have seemed that the simplest way to overcome his

scruples was by telling him exactly what he wished to know, by saying, "What I mean by this preaching is to teach you such and such a doctrine, or to produce such and such an impression on you." But he gives him no such satisfaction. He only intimates that it will be given at some future time: "What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter." This is in perfect agreement with our Saviour's customary method of proceeding. He requires implicit confidence in him, and unconditional submission. What he did on this occasion is precisely what he is continually doing in his Church. He requires his people to walk by faith and not by sight; to believe what they cannot fully comprehend; to do what they cannot altogether approve, except on his authority. This is true of some of his most sacred institutions. What he did to his disciples upon this occasion was not meant to be repeated as a public ceremony of the Church, although many have imagined that it was, and have continued to this day as a superstitious form.

But there are *other* things which *were* designed to be perpetual, and which men are sometimes disposed to slight or quarrel with, because they do not fully understand their meaning or their use. This is the spirit which has led some who call themselves Christians to tamper with the sacraments which Christ himself has instituted and required to be observed until his second coming. Some do not see the use of washing with water in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and therefore discontinue it, professing to rely upon inward spiritual baptism, although many soon dispense with this, because having once determined to do nothing and submit to nothing which they cannot fully comprehend and explain, they are forced to give up everything in turn, because, in fact, there is nothing at all which they can fully understand and account for. In like manner, some begin in changing the form of the Lord's Supper, and end with setting it aside altogether as a useless and unmeaning form. And some who do not meddle with the administration of the ordinance, refuse to partake of it, and thereby publicly profess their faith, although they claim to be believers and true Christians. They cannot see why such a form is necessary, or what useful purpose it can answer, either to themselves or others, if they have the right religious views and feelings,



not observing that obedience to Christ's positive commands is one of the most certain tests of true or false religious views and feelings, and that if this obedience is withheld there is no conclusive proof that inward piety exists at all. The spirit of all such disaffection to the ordinances of God's house is that which actuated Peter when he said, "Thou shalt never wash my feet," and to all who cherish it or act upon it, Christ himself may be heard saying, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me," but yet adding, with a gracious condescension to the weakness of the true believer, "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter."

Such is God's method of proceeding, not only in this case, but in every other. We cannot live without taking many things on trust, without believing and obeying where we do not fully understand. What is there that we do thus understand? The world is full of mysteries and wonders. The very things that seem most simple and with which we think ourselves most perfectly acquainted are really beyond our comprehension. The heavens and the earth, the water and the air, are full of strange and surprising objects. We cannot explain fully how the slightest change takes place among the thousands that are going on around us. How does the grass grow? or the fruit ripen? or the seasons change? Because we know that these things do take place, we think we comprehend them; but we only know that they are, not how they are. And those who have gone furthest in discovering and explaining what are called the laws of nature, only differ in degree from the most ignorant, and are often the readiest to acknowledge that they have not reached the bottom of those mysteries, that after all their explanations and discoveries, there is something yet to be discovered and explained. This is the general rule and law throughout the universe, that what God is, and what God does, is and must be beyond the comprehension of his creatures. We cannot find out the Almighty to perfection—such knowledge is too wonderful for us—we cannot attain to it—his counsels are unsearchable and his ways are past finding out. He lets us know and understand enough, not only to provide for our own safety and enjoyment, but to make us anxious to know more, and sensible how little we know now—and at the same time to fill us with

an awful reverence for Him who is producing all these changes, and carrying on these mighty operations in our own world and in all worlds, without even making a mistake or failing to effect his purpose.

True, to us a large part of these wonderful works are neither seen nor heard ; and if we saw and heard them, we should not comprehend them. It is not certain how far we shall ever fully comprehend them. Even after ages have elapsed, when we have grown in knowledge and capacity beyond our highest thoughts and expectations, there will still be much, not only in God himself, but in his works which we do not understand. We shall know more and more to all eternity, but never can know all. And this is one of the most gracious hopes set before us, that if saved, we shall never cease to rise and make advances in the knowledge and admiration of God's works, and of himself. If this was to cease, even millions of years hence, the promise might seem to be imperfect and unsatisfying. But it is not to cease, at any point which we can fix upon, however much we may have learned there will be something to learn still. And yet it is encouraging to know that much that now seems strange and unaccountable in the world by which we are surrounded, and of which we form a part, will one day be made clear to us. If the universe, instead of being silent, had a voice ; or rather, if we had ears to hear the voice of God himself speaking to us in the winds, the waves, in the earth and in the skies, in beasts and birds, and in the growth of plants, we might distinctly hear him saying to all these things which now surprise us most, "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter."

This may be said to be a law of nature, but it is also a law of providence. However often we may witness or experience God's dispensations, they still take us by surprise. Even those which are most frequently repeated, and which seem most alike, still have something to excite our wonder. A destructive fire still affects us as if no such had occurred before. A prevailing sickness may appear, and disappear, and re-appear, and after all seem something new. The wicked world in Noah's time was just as much surprised when the flood came as if they had received no warning. All this is really produced by a secret unbelief. But

besides this, there is always something in these great calamities and general visitations which is contrary to what we look for. When we hear of the pestilence as raging elsewhere, and approaching, we may expect it to arrive ; but when it does arrive, it takes a course, or takes a shape which we were not prepared for. We wonder why this place is visited and that passed by. We try to ascertain the cause of what we see, but all our speculations are in vain. Those who seemed likely to be swept away survive, and those who seemed safest fall the first. And so it is in some degree with other great catastrophes. A riot suddenly breaks out in a great city, and the troops are called out, and the first shot fired strikes the heart of one who merely happened to be passing. An explosion takes place, and destroys the lives of some who did not know of the existence of the danger, while those who knew it, and perhaps produced it, are miraculously saved. Disease invades a household, and destroys its members one by one, whilst all around escape. The young, the healthy, those upon whom most are dependent, fall by accident or sickness, while the old and helpless, who have long been waiting their discharge, still linger even when deprived of those by whom they were sustained and comforted. Examples of this kind are continually occurring, and exciting, even in the minds of Christians, a secret discontent and inclination to find fault, which often lurks at the bottom of their hearts even when they seem to acquiesce in the divine dispensations, and indeed until their minds are so far cleared, and their excited feelings so far calmed that they can hear God saying even in the fire, and the earthquake, and the tempest, and the pestilence, "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter."

And if this is the case of those who merely look at the calamities of others as spectators, how much more natural is such a feeling on the part of those who are themselves the objects of these providential visitations. O how hard, how hopeless, does the task seem, to suppress all risings of rebellious discontent when we are touched ourselves by what appears to us to be a cruel and untimely stroke. How natural and reasonable does it often seem to say, as some do say to themselves or others, "I could have borne this without a murmur a little sooner or a little later, but

at this moment it is hard indeed." Or the language of the heart may be, I should not have resisted or repined under a severer stroke, but of a different kind. If it had been my business, not my health ; or my health, but not my reputation ; or myself, but not my family ; or this friend, but not that, and so on through a thousand suppositions of what might have been but is not true, I could have bowed without a murmur. In all this there is certainly a great delusion. Had the stroke been different, the effect would still have been the same. And even where there would have been a difference, that difference may itself have been the reason of the choice, because a stroke which is not felt, or which is felt too lightly, would not answer the severe but gracious purpose of the Lord in smiting us at all. But even when this is acknowledged and believed, it may be hard to see wherein the gracious purpose lies, and therefore hard to acquiesce in the benevolence and wisdom of that providence which causes us or suffers us to suffer. Such submission may be wrought, and is continually wrought by sovereign grace, without imparting any clearer knowledge of God's immediate purpose, by inspiring strong faith in his benevolence and truth, so that the soul is satisfied with knowing that it is the will of God, and therefore must be right, best for his honour and his creatures' welfare.

Even such, however, may derive a pleasing solace from the hope that what seems now so unaccountable will one day be intelligible even to themselves. And when they look at the most doubtful and perplexing circumstances of their case, at which perhaps their faith was staggered and their hope sickened, but in which God has now enabled them to acquiesce, they may find it easier to do so when they call to mind that, although they are bound to yield whether they ever knew the meaning of these strange dispensations or not, they are permitted to believe that they shall yet know at least something more,—perhaps much more,—perhaps as much as they could wish to know, or need to know, in order to be perfectly contented with their lot,—and as this quieting persuasion takes possession of their souls, their ears are suddenly unstopped, and made to tingle with these sweet but solemn words, "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter."

The application which I have been making of these words to

God's providential dispensations, when they take the shape of personal or national calamities, may all seem natural enough, and be received without a doubt of their correctness, not because the text itself includes all this directly, but because the principle, the rule which it lays down, is not confined to the original occasion, nor to religious rites and institutions, but extends to every case in which men can be called to acquiesce and to obey from general trust in God, or deference to his will, without fully knowing for what reason or what purpose in particular. Now of this there are no examples more familiar or affecting than those furnished by severe afflictions, whether such as affect only individuals and families, or such as more or less affect a whole community, and therefore there will probably be little disposition to dispute the application of the text to all such cases.

But there is another application not so obvious, to which I am anxious, for that very reason, to direct your thoughts, lest the instructions and the warnings here afforded should lose a part of their effect from being too much confined in their application, so that those perhaps in most need of the lesson which the Spirit of God teaches, may depart without it. You admit, perhaps, that with respect to God's works, and the changes continually going on in nature, you must wait for clearer light, and you are willing so to do, perhaps are well content to wait for ever. You also admit that, in reference to the meaning and design of God's afflictive dispensations, with respect both to the many and the few, both to others and yourselves, it is right and necessary to be satisfied with knowing in the general that God is just and merciful, that what he does not only is, but must be right, not only right, but best—best for him and best for you—and that, therefore, you may rationally wait for any further explanation or discovery. But has the thought occurred to you that this is no more true of affliction than of any other state or situation? that the only difference arises from the fact that suffering makes men think of this and feel it, but does not make it any truer or more certain than it was before, and that this very circumstance makes it peculiarly important to remind men of the truth in question, when they are not so reminded by their outward circumstances. There is no time when men need less to be warned against intem-

perance and imprudence than a time of general sickness and mortality, for this very state of things is a sufficient warning. But when health prevails, we are peculiarly in danger of forgetting our mortality, and neglecting the precautions which are necessary to preserve us from disease and death. So, too, in the case before us, when men actually suffer, either one by one or in large bodies, they have but occasion to be told that God may have some purpose to accomplish which they cannot understand at present, but which may, perhaps, be understood hereafter.

Now, let us ask ourselves the question, May not God have purposes to answer, of which we have no suspicion, when he grants us undisturbed prosperity? Does he cease to reign as soon as men cease to suffer? Is his only instrument the rod? Is it only the afflicted that are subject to his government? And are the rich, the healthy, and the honoured, the cheerful, the thoughtless, and the gay, exempt from his control? Perhaps this is the secret of the coldness with which most of us contemplate God's strokes till they touch ourselves, despising the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth to repentance. And how few really regard this as the great end of prosperity, to lead men to repentance! How many do indeed believe that health, and wealth, and comfort are all means employed to bring men to repentance! And if this is so, how seldom does prosperity accomplish its design—I mean its purposes of mercy; for, alas! it has a twofold tendency. It is like some desperate and potent remedies for bodily disease. It either kills or cures. Are we sufficiently convinced of this? Do we feel it as we should if God were pleased to lift the veil that overhangs the hearts and inner lives of men, and show us what is passing at this moment, and to what results hereafter it is tending? If you, my hearers, could be made to see that your prosperity is just as much a state of discipline as the affliction of your neighbour; that your heart, if not subdued and softened by God's goodness, is continually growing harder; that the frivolous and exciting pleasures which engross you, or the violent passions which inflame and agitate you, or the sordid appetites which enslave and master you, are all combining to prepare you for changes which you do not now anticipate; if

I could show you God looking down upon this fearful process, and permitting it to go on, as a righteous recompense of those who do not like to retain him in their knowledge, but revolt from his authority and trample on his mercy, and treat the very blood of Christ himself as an unclean thing; if I could show you that sleepless and untiring eye for ever fixed upon your individual heart, which neither wrath nor mercy, hope nor fear have yet sufficed to break, when breaking might have saved it, and which, if it ever breaks at all, is likely to break only with incurable anguish and despair; if I could show you how completely you are at God's mercy in the height of your prosperity, and how severely he is trying you by means of it;—you might perhaps be brought to hear him say, as he does say with solemn emphasis, “What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter.”

The dangers thus attending a state of high prosperity have led many, who were destitute of true faith, to repeat the prayer, “Give me neither poverty nor riches.” And some who hear me now may be ready to congratulate themselves that the extremes of joy and grief are equally unknown to their experience. They are glad, perhaps, that though they do not suffer, they are not the slaves of passion. They do not seek their happiness in violent excitement. They enjoy tranquillity, and thank God for it. They are comfortable and content with their situation. Perhaps too contented. Yes, unless possessed of a good hope through grace, they are certainly too well contented. They have no more reason to be satisfied than the sufferer with his sufferings, or the man of pleasure with his sinful joys. Especially is this the case if they imagine that, while God directs the lot of others, he is letting them alone, that is, allowing them to be at ease without those dangers to which others are exposed.

There is a sense in which he may indeed be letting them alone, giving them up to themselves, allowing them to stagnate and to putrefy, if not in vice, in selfish indolence, spiritual sloth, and carnal security. Because they are exempt from sore distress on one hand, and from gross sins on the other, they imagine themselves safe and even happy. They forget that although they may be idle, Satan is at work, employing every art to shield them from

the light and make them sleep more soundly ; that the world around them is at work to render them more drowsy by the hum and murmur of its business and its pleasures, so that when they open their eyes for a moment, they immediately fall back again and dream on as they have dreamed before.

Nor is this all. While evil spirits and a wicked world are thus at work upon the stupid soul, it may be said without irreverence that God himself is not inactive. He is not an indifferent spectator, but a sovereign and a judge. "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God ; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man. But every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lusts and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived it bringeth forth sin, and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." "The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law." And the law is the law of God, and neither men nor devils can offend against it unless he suffer them. And when he suffers them he may comply with their governing desire. But at the same time will he take vengeance on them. To a sinner no divine stroke can in this life be so fearful as the stroke of letting him alone. As God is not and cannot be the author of sin, the worst he can in this life do is to let men do as they please. Beyond this nothing is required to ruin them. Their native tendency is downwards. There is no need of creating it. It is sufficient not to stop or change it. Nothing can possibly do either but divine grace. And in multitudes of cases it does both. And in the case of all who hear the gospel it is offered. And in the case of some, that offer is long continued and frequently repeated. But its being offered even to a single soul, or for a single moment, is a miracle of mercy. If no one has a right to it at first, much less has any one a right to it for ever. For then the longer men refused God's mercy, the more would he be bound to offer it, which is too absurd to be believed. And if this offer, even for a moment, is an act of God's free grace, and might have been withheld without the slightest imputation on his justice or his mercy, who will charge him with violating either if, when a man has long despised the Son and quenched the Spirit, he should be permitted by the Father to go on as he desires and is resolved, to do precisely what he wishes, to be just what he intends to be. Is this



unmerciful, unjust, or cruel? What, unjust to let him have what he claims as his right? cruel to leave him undisturbed? when he has over and over refused to accept God's invitation and importunately prayed to be let alone. Can he complain that God should take him at his word, and now withhold what he might have withheld from the beginning? Such an abandonment is doubly just. It gives the man precisely what he claims, and at the same time asserts God's sovereignty and vindicates his justice by allowing it to take its course.

It seems, then, that of all conditions in the present life, there is none more terrible than that of being let alone. And when this is the secret of men's calmness or contentment, they have just as little reason to congratulate themselves that they are thus left undisturbed, as the drowning man has to congratulate himself that he is left to sink without the trouble and vexation of seizing on the saving hand held out for his deliverance, or the poisoned man that he is not required to take an unpalatable antidote, or the convict on his way to execution, that he is not interrupted by a pardon or reprieve, but suffered to continue his journey in tranquil indifference. My hearers, if I could convince you that the ease which you enjoy is such as I have described, I am sure that you would instantly hear Him who would have saved you, but who now perhaps consents to leave you to yourself as you desire, saying, "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter."

In all these views we have been looking forward, trying to anticipate that which is still future. But the time is coming when we shall look back at the same objects from a very different point of observation—and look at them no longer as mere possibilities, but actual realities. It is a fearful supposition, but it cannot make your danger any greater than it is, to suppose, my hearer, that your soul is to be lost, and that when it is lost you will still be able to retrace the steps by which you travelled to perdition. When you thus look back, among the various feelings which will struggle with each other for predominance in your soul, one of the strongest must be, wonder at your own infatuation in not seeing to what end your purpose and conduct here were tending—in not knowing that the world and the devil and your own corruption were at work to make affliction and prosperity,

and even tranquillity, all contribute to your ruin—and that God himself, by every gift and every judgment, and even by his silence and forbearance, was still warning you that, though the end of your course was not yet visible, it certainly would have one, and that everything you did, enjoyed, or suffered, was contributing to give that end a character, to make it for ever either good or evil. This, I say, will be an astonishment to any lost soul—that he did not see all this beforehand—if not as certain, yet as possible—and did not act accordingly. And in addition to this wonder at the general course pursued in this life, there will no doubt be particular conjunctures, with respect to which it will appear incredible and almost inconceivable that any rational and moral being should have still continued so insensible and blinded when the gifts of God were so peculiarly abundant, or his judgments so peculiarly severe—or the comfort and tranquillity enjoyed so perfect, that to one reviewing it from that distant point of observation, it might seem that even sin itself could not have plunged the soul in such insensibility, or roused it to such madness, as to hide from it the fatal course which it was taking, or to stop its ears against the warning voice which was continually sounding from the death-bed and the grave, and the devouring jaws of hell, as well as from the cross and the throne, the mercy seat and judgment seat of Christ. Ah, my hearers, may it not be that among these recollections will be that of the very opportunity which you are now enjoying, and that, although now in looking forward you may see no sufficient reason for alarm or even for solicitude as to the end, a sovereign God is now afflicting you or sparing you—yet when you come to look back at the same things from the world of woe, you will regard it as a prodigy of spiritual blindness that you did not see what you will then see so distinctly, and of spiritual deafness that you did not hear what will then sound in your ears, in every echo from the vaults of your eternal prison, “What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter.”

Having gone so far as to transport you into the eternal world and to anticipate its solemn recollections, let me not conclude without presenting the reverse of that distressing supposition upon which I have been speaking. Thanks be to God, the power of recollection is not to be monopolized hereafter by the lost. While

it will, no doubt, add to the intensity of future torment, it will magnify and multiply the joys of heaven. Yes, in both worlds memory will survive. There will be memory in hell. There will be memory in heaven. And on what will the blissful recollections of that holy, happy place be more intently fastened, than those mysterious, but effectual means, by which a miserable sinful soul was stopped short and turned round in its career of ruin; and while others still refused to be arrested, or were arrested only long enough to give them a new impulse in their downward course, you—yes, my friend, it may be you—were taken off from all corrupt attachments and from all false grounds of hope, that you might be saved through Him who loved you.

If permitted thus to look back at the way by which you have been lead, what occasion for rejoicing and thanksgiving will be furnished by the thought that your Saviour did not suffer you to wait till you could fully understand his requisitions, before trusting and obeying him. The difference between you and the lost will not be that the lost could not see the end from the beginning, and that you could; but that the lost insisted upon seeing, and that you through grace were satisfied with believing; that the lost would only walk by sight, and that you were enabled and disposed to walk by faith; that the lost could trust the care of their salvation only to themselves, and sunk beneath the load, while you had wisdom, and humility, and grace enough imparted to you to think God stronger than yourself, and a Saviour's merit greater than your own, the Holy Ghost a better comforter than the world, the flesh, or the devil. When Jesus with divine condescension proposed to wash their feet, they replied, with Peter, in his want of faith and of understanding, "Thou shalt never wash my feet;" but you replied with Peter, in the strength of his renewed love, "Not my feet only, but my hands and my head." This is all the difference, but it is enough, for it determines your eternal destiny. Happy the soul that is now upon the right side of a question which to men may seem so unimportant. Happy, for ever happy, he who shall look back and see with wonder how his own plans were defeated, his most cherished wishes crossed, his favourite opinions contradicted, his highest hopes completely disappointed, and himself entirely set at nought, if thereby he has saved his

soul; for what is a man profited if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul, or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? The loss of all these things is to gain a new heart, to gain a heaven, to gain a God. It is the loss of God, as a consuming fire, to gain him as he is in Christ, a fountain of life. When possession is secured, my hearer, it will be a sweet or bitter recollection to our soul, that in this place and at this hour, although some around you still refuse to look beyond the immediate fruits of their misconduct, or to be persuaded that its effects would extend into eternity, the scales, through mercy, fell from your eyes, and the veil was gathered up from off your heart, and the noise of this world of a sudden ceased to fill your ears, and in the place of it a still small voice, a voice both of kindness and of authority, stole in upon your spirited senses, saying, "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter."



#### IV.

### Behold the Lamb of God.

“Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.”—  
JOHN i. 29.

HOW long our first parents remained innocent is not revealed, and cannot be conjectured. The space allotted to that portion of their history in God's word is extremely small. But this is no proof that the time itself was short. It is Bacon's maxim that the best times to live in are the worst to read about, that is, the worst for entertainment as affording least variety of incident. Certain it is, however, that we scarcely enter on the history of man before his ruin is recorded. But then, upon the other hand, we scarcely read of his fall, before we read also of his restoration. The gates of Paradise are scarcely closed, before the altar of atonement is erected at the entrance. The flame of the cherubic sword is blended with the flame of the consuming sacrifice. Cain was a tiller of the ground. His gentler brother was a slaughterer of animals. The promise of salvation to lost man was sealed and symbolized by blood—not the blood of bears and lions, but the blood of sheep and oxen—not of vultures, but of turtle doves. Was this accidental or a mere caprice? Is there anything even in man's fallen nature which disposes him to seek the death of brutes for its own sake, without any view to food or even to amusement? And is this propensity so doubly perverse as to choose the harmless and the unresisting as its victims, rather than the fierce and ravenous? If not, the ancient sacrifices must have had a meaning; and they had, for they were meant to teach by signs and emblems the essential doctrine, that without shedding of blood there is no remission—Blood being put for life, and its effusion for the loss of life by metaphors so natural as scarcely to

be metaphors. The lesson taught by this perpetual spectacle of death, was that nothing short of death could save the life which man had forfeited by sin. And this implied that sin incurred a penalty, because it was the breaking of a law, and that the penalty of this law could not be evaded by the breaker, or by him who gave it. It implied that the distinction between moral good and evil was a distinction running back beyond all arbitrary positive enactments; that the righteousness of God made it impossible that sin should go unpunished; and that as the sinner's life was forfeit on account of sin, that forfeit must be paid by the sacrifice of life.

But all this might have been revealed and understood if no remedial system had been introduced at all, if no Saviour had been promised. There was more than this implied in the ancient rites of sacrifice. They taught, not only that man was a sinner, and that sin must be punished, but (that man) what seemed to be at variance with these truths, that sin might be forgiven, and the sinner saved. The very forms of oblation taught this. Of these forms we have no exact account in the beginning or throughout the patriarchal age. But they were no doubt in essential points the same with those which were prescribed and practised in the law of Moses. And among these there was one too clear to be mistaken if regarded as significant at all, and if it was not, the whole system became merely a confused array of vain formalities.

Imagine that you see the host of Israel gathered in that vast enclosure, with the altar smoking in the midst, and by it the anointed priests in their official vestments. To some—perhaps to most—in the surrounding multitude, the sight is a mere spectacle, a raree-show; but there were never wanting some who walked by faith, and not by sight; and even now, though man may know it not, there beats among that breathless crowd some heart which feels the burden of its sin too sensibly to be content with outward show, however splendid. It sees, it wonders, it admires, but is not satisfied. Its language is, Oh, what is this to me; how much of that oppressive weight which crushes me can this imposing spectacle remove or lighten? But the crowd divides. The offerer approaches with his victim. Mild and dumb it stands; speechless

it awaits its doom. But see ! before the stroke can be inflicted, there is yet a solemn rite to be performed. The offerer must first lay his hands upon the head of the poor victim, and confess his sins—a simple rite, but full of solemn import to the mind of the spectator burdened with a sense of guilt, and taught by God to understand the sight which he beholds. For he sees that in that simple act of imposition the believing offerer transfers his guilt, and in that transfer he beholds the only possible alleviation of his own distress. If the whole system be not merely a theatrical display, its rites must be significant; and if that solemn imposition has a meaning, it must signify a transfer of the curse and penalty from one head to another; and if such a transfer be conceivable in one case, why not possible in all? and if in all, then in mine, and if in mine, then I am free. For all I ask is the removal of this burden from my conscience—I care not whither it is carried, only let it pass from me.

But here the question would suggest itself, How can the guilt of my sin be transferred to a dumb animal? Can sheep or oxen bear the weight of my iniquities, or their blood cleanse the stains which sin has left upon my soul? It cannot be. The voice of nature and of reason cries aloud, It is not possible. “It is not possible that the blood of bulls or of goats should take away sins” (Heb. x. 4). And yet the voice of the whole system cries in tones of equal strength, that “without the shedding of blood there is no remission.” How shall these discordant sounds be tempered into unison? How shall these testimonies, seemingly so opposite, be made to stand together? How shall the burdened soul, which has discovered that its only hope is in the transfer of its guilt, be enabled to go further, and to see how that transfer may be really effected? Only by looking far beyond the innocent but worthy sacrifice before him to another which it represents. Only by seeing in its blood the symbol of a blood more precious than silver and gold, a blood speaking better things than the blood of Abel; not invoking vengeance, but proclaiming pardon, as it streams from every altar. It is indeed impossible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sin; wherefore when HE cometh into the world he saith, “Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me. In burnt offer-

ings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure. Then said I, Lo I come, in the volume of the book it is written of me, to do thy will, O God." Here is the doctrine of sacrifice expounded by the Sacrifice himself, by him who is at once the great atonement for our sins, and the great High Priest of our profession. He represented the death of animals as utterly without intrinsic efficacy as a means of expiation, and as utterly abominable in the sight of God, except as a symbolical display of that great sacrifice which Christ offered up once for all upon the cross. And this is the doctrine of the whole of the Old Testament. It furnishes the only key to those apparent discrepancies which have been observed between the law and the prophets, where the latter use the language of indifference, and even of disapprobation, with respect to duties which the former had prescribed and rendered binding by the most tremendous penalties. In Christ these seeming contradictions are all reconciled. That which was pleasing in the sight of God for his sake, was abhorrent when considered without reference to him. The blood of bulls and goats which, as a sign of his blood, speaketh peace to the perturbed soul, that same blood, in itself considered, speaketh vengeance; for it speaks of cruelty, and murder, and unexpiated guilt. The faith of old believers was the same as ours, only darkened and impeded by the use of symbols from which we have been delivered by the advent of the antitype.

It naturally follows from this difference, however, that their ideas of salvation were associated with a class of images quite different from those which in our minds are connected with that great and glorious doctrine. Where we speak of the cross, the ancients spoke of the altar; and where we speak directly of the great atoning sacrifice by which our life is purchased, they would, of course, use expressions borrowed from the rites by which he was to them prefigured, and especially from those appointed animals by whose death his was represented. And among these the one most commonly employed for this end was the lamb; partly because it was more used in sacrifice than any other, partly because of its intrinsic qualities, which made it, more than any other animal, an apt, though most imperfect emblem of the great Redeemer, as an innocent, uncomplaining, unresisting victim.



Nor are these two reasons to be looked upon as wholly distinct from one another. The selection of the lamb for the perpetual burnt-offering, besides its frequent use in other sacrifices, is to be explained from its peculiar fitness as an emblem of the Saviour. It was because he was a lamb without blemish, and because he was to suffer as a lamb led to the slaughter; it was therefore that this victim was so prominent an object in the sacrificial system. And because it was so prominent, not only in the ordinary rites, but in the solemn yearly service of the passover, it naturally followed that the lamb became the favourite and most familiar symbol of atonement, and of Him by whom it was to be effected.

The image which spontaneously arose before the mind of the devout Jew in connection with his dearest hopes (and) of pardon and salvation, was the image of a lamb, a bleeding lamb, a lamb without blemish and without spot, a lamb slain from the foundation of the world. We have no means of determining how far the doctrine of atonement was maintained without corruption in the age immediately preceding the appearance of our Lord. But we have strong ground for believing that the great mass of the people had lost sight of it, and, as a necessary consequence, had ceased to look upon the rites of the Mosaic law as meaning what they did mean. It is not to be supposed, however, that this loss of the true doctrine had become universal. The sense of guilt and of necessity could not be universally destroyed, and, while it lasted, it could not fail to lead some whose hearts were burdened with it to a promised Saviour. Some, at least, who felt their lost and wretched state, still looked with a prospective faith to the coming and the dying of the Lamb of God. Some, at least, amidst the sorrows which they witnessed or endured, were waiting for the consolation of Israel. Some, at least, beneath the chains and yoke of that hard bondage under which they groaned, still looked for redemption in Jerusalem. The hopes of such were naturally stimulated by the appearance of John the Baptist. But he did not satisfy their expectations. He was a preacher of righteousness, but not a sacrifice for sin. He was a prophet and a priest, but not a sacrifice. He taught his disciples, it is true, to look with stronger confidence than ever for the coming of the great Deliverer; and, when their desires had been excited to the utmost, he revealed

their object ; when their sense of guilt and of the need of expiation had been strengthened to the utmost by his preaching of the law, and they were thoroughly convinced that no act of their own could take away their sins, he led them at last to the altar and the sacrifice, and said, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."

It is worthy of remark that the two to whom these words were specially addressed no sooner heard them than they followed Jesus and continued with him,—a sufficient proof that they were waiting for him and prepared for his reception. But in what did their preparation consist ? Not in personal merit ; they were miserable sinners. Not in superior wisdom ; they were fishermen. In one point, it is true, they were peculiarly enlightened, and in that consists their peculiar preparation to receive the Saviour. They knew that they were lost, and that he alone could save them ; so that when their former master said, "Behold the Lamb of God," they followed him at once. And so it has been ever since. The rich and powerful, the wise and learned, although not excluded from the face of God, are often last in coming to the Saviour, because accidental circumstances blind them to their true condition ; while the poor and ignorant, because they feel that they have nothing to be proud of in their personal character or outward situation, are more easily convinced that they are in a state of spiritual destitution, and more easily persuaded to employ the only means by which their wants can be supplied. But when this conviction and persuasion is effected, in whatever class or condition of society, its causes and effects are still essentially the same ; its cause the grace of God, and its effect a believing application to the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. In all such cases the same kind of preparation for the Saviour must exist as in the case of John's disciples,—a conviction of the sinner's need and of the Saviour's being able to supply it ; and where this does exist no conceivable amount of guilt, or ignorance, or weakness can disable or disqualify.

My hearers, are not you possessed of this essential requisite ? I know that you are sinners, but I know not that you feel it. I know that Christ is a sufficient Saviour, but I do not know that you have seen him to be such. If you have, or if, amidst this large

assembly, there are any upon whom the load of conscious guilt is pressing at this moment with a weight which seems incapable of being longer borne, and whose most urgent want is that of something which will take away their sin, to them I would address myself, and pointing, as the Baptist did, to Christ, say to you, as he said to his two disciples, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." But why should I restrict the declaration? It admits of universal application. There is no one, from the highest to the lowest in the scale of morals, whom I may not summon to behold the Lamb of God. Have you repented and believed? If you have, I need not tell you that you are a sinner. The more you are delivered from corruption the more deeply will you feel the power which it still exerts upon you. Do you never sin? And have the sins of Christians no peculiar aggravation? Is your conscience never stained and never wounded by transgression? And to whom do you resort for reassurance when it is so? To your own religious duties? To your sighs and tears? To the beggarly element of legal righteousness from which you were delivered? "Have ye suffered so many things in vain, if it be yet in vain? Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh? This only would I learn of you, received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? O foolish souls, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?" Your first hope and your last hope must be still the same. To you, as well as to the sinner who has never been converted, the same voice is crying, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world;" of the world,—not merely of the Jewish nation, not merely of this class or that, but of the world. There is peculiar pregnancy and depth in this expression, which means both to take up and to take away. There can be no doubt that, according to the Scriptures, Christ did really assume and bear the sins of those for whom he died. "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows." "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed. The Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all." "He shall justify

many, for he shall bear their iniquity." "He was numbered with the transgressors, and he bare the sin of many." These strong expressions, all contained in one short chapter, do but sum up the Bible doctrine that our Saviour took the sinner's place, paid his debt, bore his burden, and endured his punishment. But it is equally clear that the idea of removing or of taking away, as well as taking up, is really included in the import of the term here used. Indeed, the two things go together. It is by bearing sin that Christ removes it. It is by taking it up that he takes it away. It is the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world. While we really recognise the truth that Christ atones for sin by suffering its penalty, we ought not to forget the other meaning of the word used, as implying that he frees the world from sin and from its consequences. This is the end at which philanthropists are aiming. So far as they are really enlightened, they are well aware that all the evils which they try to remedy are caused by sin. And hence their great end is, or ought to be, to take away the sin of the world. But, in using secondary means for the accomplishment of this great purpose, they are too apt to forget that which is primary, and from which all the rest derive their efficacy. Even wise and good men, in their zealous efforts to extirpate sin and misery for ever from the world, may forget that this can never be effected without some means of atonement,—that there never can be reformation where there is no expiation, or, in other words, that it is Christ's prerogative to do both parts of this great work,—that he is the Lamb of God, who in both senses takes away the sin of the world.

But while this view of the matter shows us why some plans for the improvement of mankind have been without success, it ought, at the same time, to encourage us to hope for the success of others, and especially for that of the great means of reformation, which has been ordained of God, and without which every other must be ultimately vain—namely, the preaching of the gospel. Are we painfully affected by the sight of a surrounding world lying in wickedness! And does this view excite us, not to lamentation merely, but to active effort for the universal renovation of society? All this is well; but our desires may so far transcend our own capacity and that of other instruments which we employ, that we

may sink into despondency. But here we have the antidote to such despair. "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."

The same use may be made of this great doctrine in relation to the evils which exist in a particular community. The human heart is everywhere the same, and if abandoned to itself without restraint, would yield in every place, and always, the harvest of corruption and of misery. But even the worst men are under strong restraints imposed by Providence. And these restraints are so diversified and interwoven that they cannot be successfully controlled by man. His wisdom and his power are alike inadequate to such a task. Legal restraints and obligations are indeed within the reach of human governments, and constitute their most important office. But these checks are only one part, and a small part, of that vast and complicated system of control, which holds the malignity of human nature under a pressure strong enough to save society from utter dissolution. The external checks of law, moreover, useful as they are, not only constitute a small part of the system of coercion under which we live, but are themselves dependent for their whole effect upon the moral bonds and ligaments of which no laws take cognizance, and which are utterly beyond the reach of all municipal provision. They are in the hands of God, and he relaxes or contracts them at his sovereign pleasure. And it certainly is not to be regarded as a matter of surprise that in this, as in all other parts of his omnipotent and wise administration, his counsels are inscrutable, and even the principles on which they are conducted such as often to elude our most sagacious observation. Now and then, the reins by which he holds the hearts and hands of men in check appear to be relaxed, in order to exhibit human nature as it would be if abandoned to itself. This effect is sometimes answered by individual cases of depravity; by the commission of appalling crimes for which it seems impossible to find a motive. Such cases now and then occur in the heart of the most peaceable communities, where much religious knowledge is enjoyed, and where the penal checks upon depravity appear to be most uniform and powerful. In such states of society, extraordinary instances of crime have sometimes fallen suddenly upon the public ear, like

thunder in a cloudless sky. All eyes are riveted, all thoughts absorbed, and for a time the heart of the community appears to beat like that of one man, so coincident and uniform are its pulsations. Out of such events the providence and grace of God may bring the most beneficent effects; but such effects can never be secured by man's sagacity or goodness. Such is the wayward inconsistency of human nature, that the very action which electrifies with horror may incite to imitation, or at least to the commission of analogous offences. Ay, and even among those who are secure from any such extreme effect, there is a dangerous illusion which may easily exist. Among the multitudes who stand aghast at insulated instances of awful crime, there may be many who are not at all aware that they are daily treating with contempt the very motives and restraints which, in the case before them, God has wisely but mysteriously suffered to be powerless. He who despises in his ordinary practice the distinction between moral good and evil, has comparatively little right to wonder even at those acts of hellish malice which might almost seem to indicate an incarnation of the principle of evil in the being who commits them.

But another error which may easily arise in such a case, is the error of supposing that these fearful relaxations of the usual restraint upon men's actions take place only in the case of individuals. Alas, my hearers, it is frequently exemplified in whole communities, not by the prevalence of such extreme depravity as that referred to, which would be wholly incompatible with any form of social order, but by a general sinking of the tone of public sentiment, a growing insensibility to moral and religious motives, a gradual or sudden dereliction of established rules of order and decorum, a progressive diminution of the popular respect for age and elevated character, a sensible decay of that ingenuous shame which is at once the safeguard and the charm of youth; in creating boldness on the part of crime, and a proportionate increase of timid caution on the part of those whose work is to suppress it; increase of influence in those whose influence is all for evil, and an ominous precocity of vice in youth, portending that, without the fear of God preventing it, the next generation will be worse than this. Is this a fancy picture? Have you

never seen its counterpart in real life? Have you never even heard of such changes taking place amidst the most unusual advantages, and with an impetus so fearful that the general complexion of society was quickly changed, the seat of order and morality becoming in a few years the abode of wickedness which cannot blush, and, I had almost said, the house of prayer transformed into a den of thieves? Such changes have been, and, for aught I know, they may be passing now. The question is not whether they are possible, but whether they can be prevented.

In a community which shows some symptoms of this fatal process, what shall the friends of human happiness attempt in opposition to its progress? Shall they aim their blows at certain special evils, independent of each other, except so far as all sins are committed, and attempt their extirpation? In all such cases there are some specific reformations which must be effected. There are social nuisances which ought to be abated. There are fountains of corruption, some of which are capable of being cleansed by the infusion of divine salt; others set purgation at defiance, and can only be exhausted, choked, or rendered inaccessible. But while these specific remedies may be imperatively needed, they can never be sufficient of themselves. It matters not how many fountains of external vice are dried and stopped, unless a fountain be opened for sin and uncleanness. It matters not how many voices cry aloud in warning to the drunkard and the libertine, the gambler and the thief, exhorting them to put away their sins by righteousness, unless among them some voice cry to all without exception and without cessation, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." But between these methods there is no contrariety or disagreement. Both are but parts of one harmonious whole. It is only by attempting to divorce them that the one becomes ineffectual, if not pernicious; let them be combined, and let the same voice which exhorts men to beware of those sins which most easily beset them—let the same voice continually, earnestly invite them to behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. I know that by many he will be despised; but if this were any reason for withholding the offers of the gospel, its glad sound would long since have been hushed. One of the marks by which he was

identified in prophecy is this : " Despised and rejected of men ; " and you will bear me witness that in this point the offence of the cross has not ceased. And let us bear in mind that man's natural condition is a state of illusion, extending to the most important objects, and, indeed, becoming more profound with the importance of the object ; that one of the most natural effects of this illusion is to vitiate his estimate of things and persons, so that he highly esteems that which is abominable in the sight of God, and on the contrary, despises precisely what he ought to love and reverence. Under the influence of this illusion he can despise his own best interest for time and for eternity. He can despise the correct public sentiment by which he is condemned ; he can despise the hopes and fears and affectionate solicitude of friends and kindred ; he can despise a father's counsels and a mother's tears ; he can despise the very fundamental principles of morals both in theory and practice ; he can despise the law of God ; he can despise the means of grace ; he can despise the gospel. So profound is the illusion which produces this contempt, that he can even despise things while he thinks he honours them. The man who pastimes Christ and his religion, who allows the Church a place among his sources of amusement, and permits the Bible to alternate sometimes with his play-books and romances—who admits in words that religion is a good thing, and intimates his willingness to show it countenance—the man who does this may imagine that he really respects religion ; but if ever he is brought to see himself as a contemptible worm of the dust, a lost and ruined sinner, whose only hope is in the very gospel which he thus condescends to take under his protection, he will also see that while he thought he did it reverence he really despised it. And to crown the whole, he can despise the cross. He can despise the Saviour. He can despise the groans of Gethsemane and Golgotha. And shall he who thus despises the most glorious and precious of all objects in the universe, be still pursued with invitations to behold the Lamb of God whom he despises ? Yes, it must be so. Our Lord himself upon the cross not only prayed for the forgiveness of his murderers, but by his outstretched limbs and streaming wounds said to all who passed by, in tones more audible than language, " Behold the Lamb of God."



His servants dare not be less patient than himself. They must pursue the most inveterate despiser of the gospel with the same importunate and agonizing cry, Behold, behold the Lamb of God. Let that call follow him wherever he may hide himself. Let that call reach him at his table and his fireside, in his closet and his chamber, in his place of business and his haunts of dissipation. Let it mingle with his music and his jovial laughter. Let the rattling of his dice-box and the clink of his dishonest gains be still drowned by the echo of that distant cry, Behold! behold! And though he still continue to despise it while he lives, let it ring in his ears upon his dying bed, and let the last look of his fading eye be invited to the cross by that same word, Behold! behold! And though he die despising it, he shall not cease to hear it, for that word shall still ring in his ears when his illusions are dispelled for ever; when his soul, before it takes its final plunge, shall see the objects which it once despised arrayed in all their excellence and glory, and in spite of its endeavours to avert its gaze, shall be compelled to see them as it would not see them here; then, then shall that despised call be the last sound that strikes upon his failing sense, BEHOLD THE LAMB OF GOD, THAT TAKETH AWAY THE SIN OF THE WORLD.



## V.

### Nature-Worship.

“They worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator.”—

ROM. i. 25.

THERE is no fact in the history of the ancient Jews more certain or familiar than their constant propensity to lapse into idolatry. The particular form of the transgression was dependent upon variable circumstances—time, place, foreign associations, special opportunities; but still it was idolatry, the worship of false gods, to which they were continually tempted, and into which they were continually falling, their grand national offence, by which the dark side of their history is uniformly characterized. Their periods of corruption were all periods of idolatry—their worst men were idolaters; this was the standing form in which their national and individual depravity continually showed itself. Their unlawful alliances with foreign powers were almost invariably complicated with participation in their idol-worship. The occult arts which they are charged with practising were mere appendages of that same worship. In a word, so far as they are said to be corrupt at all, it is in this way more conspicuously and constantly than any other. The sin of ancient Israel was idolatry. The sinners of ancient Israel were idolaters. At every recorded deviation from the service of Jehovah, we come at the first turn to an altar or an image, whether of Baal, Ashtoreth, or Moloch.

This fact, however, would be less surprising when taken in connection with the universal prevalence of idolatry around them, were it not for another equally certain and familiar which their history presents as the counterpart of this one. I refer to the fact, that after a certain crisis in their history this stigma is obliterated. Since the return from Babylon, the Jews, as a community, have

never been reproached with any tendency to idol worship. Amidst all the corruption which existed in the later periods of their history as a people in their own land—amidst all their persecutions and dispersions since, they have held fast their integrity in this respect. While a large part of the Christian world has resumed the form, if not the substance of idolatrous worship, the despised and scattered Jews have still borne witness against their defection. In this the reformed Churches now unite them—so, likewise, do the Mohammedans. Among the modern Jews and Moslems, and in Protestant Christendom, the least appearance of idolatry is reckoned a sure symptom of corruption.

This extraordinary contrast very naturally prompts the question, How and why is it so? What has become of the idolatrous propensity which once appeared inseparable from the corruptions of the human heart? How is it that whenever ancient Israel went astray from God, they went astray in this direction, and that now even the most impious never seem to take it either by accident or choice? If it be said that the continued existence of the same propensity appears in the idolatrous corruptions of the Romish and the Oriental Churches, this affords no adequate solution of the difficulty; first, because the abuses in question admit of a different explanation, or may, at least, be traced to a very different origin; but secondly and chiefly, because it either takes for granted that the whole amount of human corruption is now shut up in these Churches, or else leaves us still without an explanation of the fact, that the corruption which exists among ourselves never takes this form. Leaving entirely out of view the worship of the Virgin Mary, and of saints and images in other parts of Christendom, how is it that among ourselves the same propensity is now extinct, although the general corruption of the heart and of society is still so great? Among our many crying sins why is there no idolatry? Among our flagrant sinners, no idolaters? There might be less cause to propound this question if a corresponding change had taken place among the heathen; if their false religions had been gradually passing into new forms, we might then regard the change among ourselves as part of a great alterative process, to which the whole race had alike been subjected. But it is not so. The hundreds of millions of the heathen world are as idolatrous as ever.

The stupendous revolutions which have shaken the whole structure of their civil constitutions, or resolved society into its elements and wrought them into new combinations, have still left their images and altars standing where they stood before! How is it, then, the question still returns, that in our catalogue of sins we now find no idolatry? Is it because we are too civilized? But if by this we mean a higher degree of intellectual refinement and extreme cultivation of the taste, we have only to remember Greece, to look at Athens, with all the learning and refinement of the world concentrated in her schools and works of art, yet blended, even there, with the insignia of idolatry, her sages teaching wisdom in the portico of idol temples, her artists vieing with each other in the decoration of her images and altars. Or is it civil and political wisdom, military force, and practical sagacity, that furnishes the key to this remarkable phenomenon? Then look at Rome, and see how far her arms and laws produced the same effect. Ascend the Capitoline Hill, as you before climbed the Acropolis, or enter the Pantheon as you visited the Parthenon. Survey the ruined temples which enclose the area of the ancient Forum, and then separate, if you can, even in imagination, the Roman idolatry from the Roman greatness.

Again, if the difference be ascribed to the moral elevation of our social state above that of the Greeks and Romans even in their palmyest days, the reason is fallacious, as it mistakes the cause for the effect. In cultivation of mere taste and intellect, we certainly have no advantage over those ancients whom we still acknowledge as our models and our oracles; so the moral superiority which constitutes the difference in our favour is itself the fruit of Christianity, and cannot therefore be the reason why Christianity, at least within the chosen sphere of our inquiry, is so free from idolatrous admixtures; why the unrenewed, who bear the Christian name, though unacquainted with the power of divine truth, do not fall into idolatry?

Since none of the solutions which have been suggested seem sufficient to account for this remarkable difference of the forms in which depravity and opposition to the truth have shown themselves at different times—since it seems so hard to explain why idolatry is now so rare or utterly unknown among ourselves, it may

not be without its use to look for a moment at the question in another form, and to inquire, whether after all our religion or our irreligion is so free from the idolatrous element as we have hitherto supposed; and if not, what are the appearances which bear the most resemblance to the false religions of the ancient world. In order to do this without confusion or with any satisfactory result, it will be necessary to consider and determine what we mean by idolatry. We must, of course, reject the definition founded on the etymology of the word itself, which would restrict it to the worship of material images. Then they who adored the sun and moon, and all the host of heaven, were no idolaters. They who invoked the winds, and bowed down at the fountain-head of streams, and whispered their devotions to the air, and called upon the overhanging mountains to protect them, are excluded from the catalogue. How large a part of the classical mythology would thus be shut out?—nay, how large a part of the idolatry which even now exists among nations less refined and civilized? The idolatry of which we are in search, then, is not simply the external worship of material images, of stocks and stones, though this may be considered its most palpable and grossest exhibition. On the other hand, idolatry is not to be resolved into a purely spiritual act, the preference of some other supreme object of affection to our Maker.

This, though the soul of all idolatry, is not the whole of it. This subtle essence of the sin exists now just as much as in ancient times; just as much in one kind of irreligion as another. Covetousness is idolatry, but idolatry is not covetousness. It is not the mere rejection or neglect of God as the object of our worship, but the religious preference of something else. Of what? What was there common to the false religions of the old world giving them a common character? Not image worship, in the strict sense which, as we have seen, was far from being universal. Much less the form, or name, or legendary history of the idol, or the attributes ascribed to it; for these were indefinitely various. What, then? What was it that imparted to the ancient Paganism its distinctive character, not merely as an aberration or apostasy from God, but as an outward realization and embodiment of that apostasy—not merely as a sin, but as a religion? This is a question

which has occupied the thoughts and tasked the powers of some of the most learned and profound historical explorers of the present day, and which has led them to a laborious comparison of all that still remains to illustrate or exemplify the false religions of the ancient world ; and, whether right or wrong, they are strangely unanimous in the conclusion that the unity of these religions lies in this, that they are all in origin, or tendency, or both, avowedly or covertly, the worship of nature. However they might differ in their symbols or their rites, in their theology or ethics, they are all reducible to this at last. However far they may have deviated from the first intuition—however far the crowd of worshippers may frequently have been from comprehending the full import of the services in which they were engaged, it is supposed that by a natural historical deduction, this pervading character may still be traced in all of them—the worship of nature.

This view of the matter does not, of course, exclude a vast variety of forms and of gradations in the theory as well as in the practice of idolatry. The lowest stage, above that of mere stupid acquiescence in an arbitrary and unmeaning rite, may be described as the religious worship of particular natural objects or their artificial representatives. Within this limit a diversity might still exist, determined by the nature of the objects worshipped, and their rank in the scale of existence, from the shapeless stone or mass of earth, to plants, to trees—from the meanest brutes to the most noble—from moles and bats to the lion and to the eagle—from the clod to the mountain—from the spring to the ocean—from earth to heaven.

A still more intellectual variety of such worship would be that which, instead of individual sensible objects, paid its adorations to the elements or to the mysterious powers of nature, such as heat, cold, moisture, light and darkness, life and death. By a still higher act of philosophical abstraction, some who were considered most enlightened and exempt from vulgar prejudices, worshipped Nature itself, the material universe, τὸ πᾶν, including all the power and elements and individual objects which have been already mentioned. This was the highest reach of the idolatrous theology, the worship of nature in its last degree of sublimation ; but from this down through all the inferior gradations, it was still essentially the

same religion—it was still the worship of nature—the highest knowledge was the knowledge of nature—the most sacred mysteries were the secrets of nature—sin was a violation of nature—holiness was conformity to nature—atonement was reconciliation with nature, or restoration to a state of nature. This was the god, or rather the divinity, whom they adored. When regarded as one without personality—when viewed as personal no longer one—a hideous choice between a god without life, and an army of gods with it, between Polytheism with its practical follies, and Pantheism with its abstract horrors.

But amidst all these capricious alternations, and under all these varying disguises, the same unaltered countenance still glares upon us from behind its thousand masks; the same inflamed yet lifeless eye still follows us wherever we may turn among the altars, and the idols, and the shrines of heathenism. The endless confusion of the voices which ascend in prayer and praise from these polluted sanctuaries, ever and anon are heard in unison, at least in concord. Their gods are many, but their god is one—their worship, after all, is but the worship of nature. Whatever we may think as to the truth or plausibility of these views with respect to the essential character of ancient heathenism, they derive at least some countenance from the solution which they seem to afford of the phenomenon already mentioned—the disappearance of idolatry as one of the most frequent forms in which the corruption of mankind once acted out its opposition to the doctrines and the precepts of the true religion. On this hypothesis, if on no other, it may certainly be said that, though the impious among ourselves no longer pray to stocks and stones, or beasts and birds, or moon and stars, there is still a strong taint of idolatry perceptible in our religion, science, literature, business,—nay, our very language. Yes, I say our very language; for to what strange accident can it be owing that in common parlance and in current literature there should be so constant, so instinctive an aversion to the name of God as a personal distinctive appellation. That the names of Christ and of the Holy Spirit should be shunned is less surprising, these being so peculiar to the dialect of revelation, not to say of the New Testament. But the same considerations do not serve to explain the almost superstitious care with which our irreligious

writers manage to dispense with what would seem to be the most indispensable of all words—the incommunicable name of God. Can it be reverence, religious awe, that prompts this suppression? a feeling near akin to that which led the Jews in early time and ever since to hush up, as it were, the tetragrammaton, the dread name of Jehovah, as too sacred even to be whispered in the sanctuary by his own anointed priest, or breathed by the heart-broken suppliant at the altar? Is it this makes our novelists and journalists as much afraid to speak of God as if they thought he would appear before them at the call? Alas! this explanation is precluded by the levity with which the same men often make that venerable name the theme of ribald jests and the burden of blasphemous imprecation. No; the name seems to be shunned because it means too much, suggests too much, concedes too much. Not that they would deny the being of a God, or that they have a settled creed at all about the matter, but they feel, perhaps they know not why, that other modes of speech are more congenial, and the choice of these may throw some light upon the secret motive of the change.

Not only is the grand and simple name of God exchanged for a descriptive title, such as Supreme Being—or an abstract term, the Deity—but still more readily and frequently is God supplanted by a goddess, and her name is Nature. It is nature that endows men with her gifts and graces; it is nature that piles mountains upon mountains in her sportive freaks; it is nature that regulates the seasons and controls the elements. There can be no doubt that this language has a very different sense in different cases, and that it may even be employed by the devoutest Christian without any intentional departure from the truth. There can be no doubt that, in some mouths, this definition of nature is only a rhetorical trope or a poetical embellishment—in others a euphemistic substitute for God—in others a collective abstract term, denoting the whole aggregate of second causes and of instrumental agencies, without excluding the immediate presence and efficient action of the First Cause and Prime Mover. But whether these exceptions are enough to cover all the cases, whether these solutions are sufficient to account for the increasing disposition in our popular and fashionable writers, to let nature



and her works, and her gifts, and her graces usurp the place of God and his works, and his gifts, and his graces, is another question. But even if we give it an affirmative and favourable answer, it is still an odd coincidence that this darling figure of speech or philosophical formula should so exactly tally with the spirit and language of idolatry or paganism considered as the worship of nature.

But this coincidence, though strange, would not be so surprising as it is, if it were limited to literary composition. All but the highest class of writers have their mannerism and their affectations, which, although offensive to a pure taste, must be borne with and forgiven as inevitable. These are sometimes derived from unsuccessful imitation, even of the best models. And the modes of speech in question may, in some, be the effect of classical studies, just as youthful poets often introduce the classical mythology for ornament, without the slightest faith in its reality as matter of belief. It may be said then, that so long as these imaginary traces of the old idolatry are only found in word and phrase they are innocent enough, and that they need excite no serious alarm until they show themselves in deed as well as word, and in the practical realities of life as well as in the fanciful creations of romance or poetry. They who give this challenge might perhaps be surprised to find it readily accepted, and still more to be told that these analogies are traceable in real life and its least romantic and imaginative walks, in the labours of the field and of the shop no less than in those of the study and the library. The compulsory dependence upon seasons, weather, rain, and sunshine, which accompanies the culture of the earth, is a divine appointment, and is therefore perfectly compatible with faith and a devotional spirit. But when divorced from these, it takes the form of an extreme anxiety, a breathless watching of the elements, a superstitious faith in something quite distinct from God, although perhaps below him, and a constant disposition to invest this something with an individual existence and with personal attributes; although it may prove nothing with respect to any formal opinion or belief, it certainly presents another strange approximation to the spirit and the practice of the old idolaters. The besotted fisherman who on our own coast feels himself to be the

slave of the winds and tides, without a thought of God as their creator and his own, is not so very far removed as we may imagine from the state of the old Greek or Phenician, who sacrificed to Ocean ere he launched his bark. The mariner who spends whole nights in whistling for the wind, may do it from habit or may do it in jest ; but he may also do it with a secret faith and a feeling of dependence near akin to worship, and by no means wholly different in kind from the emotions of the ancient pagan, as he poured out his libations to Eolus, or his prayers to the particular wind of which he stood in need. The social and domestic superstitions which have lingered in all Christian countries, as to signs of good and evil luck, and the methods of procuring or averting it, are not always mere errors in philosophy or morals, but religious aberrations, the relics and memorials of a heathenism which we sometimes look upon with too much confidence as finally exploded. We often hear, and are compelled to acknowledge, that there is heathenism among us ; but it is not merely negative—the ignorance or unbelief of what is true, it has always more or less a positive reality, the actual belief of what is false ; and if we should be supposed to relapse as a nation into barbarism and idolatry—perhaps the first steps of the retrocession would be found to have been already taken in the cherishing of petty superstitions, and the practice of devices, which have either been transmitted by tradition from a heathen origin, or sprung directly from the same prolific principle—the natural propensity of fallen man to the worship of nature.

But here, again, an unfair advantage may appear to be taken of the popular credulity and ignorance, and the same objection may be made to sweeping influences from the errors of the vulgar, as before from the affectations of the literary world. The very fact that the disputed proofs have been derived from quarters so remote and so dissimilar, might seem to give them new and independent weight. But even admitting that the objection is again a valid one—that men in general cannot be philosophers, and that the uninstructed multitude must always embrace errors, some of which may accidentally resemble those of heathenism : let us ascend again into the region of intellectual cultivation, and continue our inquiries there, not as before in reference to modes of

speech and styles of composition, but in reference to scientific observation." Here, again, we find the furthest reach of speculation and discovery compatible, and actually blended with the simplest faith and the lowliest devotion. But it is not always so. The philosophical explorer does not always "look through nature up to nature's God." He often stops short of that glorious object. He often looks upon God's place as empty, or as filled by another—by another, yet the same—for this usurper of the throne and of the worshipper's affections is still that nature, the appeals to which, by other classes, have already been explained away as forms of speech or ignorant misapprehensions. No one supposes that astronomers in Christian countries ever formally adore the stars, or that geologists are worshippers of mother earth, or chemists of the elements, or botanists of trees and flowers. But let the evidence that some of all these classes recognise a Nature, quite distinct from God, by whose mysterious virtues these effects are all produced, and whose authoritative laws are independent of his will, I say, let the detailed indications of this strange belief be gathered from the language, from the actions, and, as far as may be, from the feelings of these votaries of science, and then weighed against the corresponding proofs of their belief in one Supreme, Infinite, and Personal God, distinct from all his works, and sovereign over them, to whose inspection all things are open, and without whose knowledge and permission not a hair falls or a sparrow dies; but those two testimonies be confronted and compared, and then it will appear whether some who have deservedly been ranked among the prophets and the high priests of material wisdom were in heart and practice worshippers of God, or, like the blinded heathen, worshippers of nature.

The analogies which have been suggested may be fanciful, or, even if well founded, they may be restricted to the cases specified, and leave untouched a multitude in Christian and in Protestant communities who in neither of the ways described are worshippers of nature. But of these a large proportion may be comprehended in another category—as romantic and poetical idolaters of nature, who adore her, not for her material gifts, nor yet as the object of severe and scientific scrutiny, but as the source of sensible and imaginative pleasure. These are the worshippers of beauty in its

widest sense, to whom the beautiful is the chief good, or its highest manifestation. The keenest sensibility of this kind has been found in combination with the strongest faith and most devout affections; nor is there anything in either to forbid their frequent, their habitual union. But reason and experience alike bear witness that the combination is not necessary, that although the elements may coexist, they may exist apart; they have done, they do still exist apart. The voice that whispers in the trees or roars in the tornado may, to some ears, be the voice of God, and every note of that grand music may be set to words on record here; but they may also utter other inspirations, and bring responses from another oracle. Instead of calling us to God, they may but call us to themselves, or to the place where nature sits enthroned as God. This form of nature worship far surpasses all the others in the strength of its appeals to human sensibility. The eye, the ear, the memory, the imagination, the affections, may be all enslaved. The spell requires for its effect no scientific lore, no mercenary interest, but only constitutional susceptibility of strong impressions from the grand or beautiful. It requires the aid neither of superstitious fears nor philosophical abstractions. It only asks men to be pleased, excited, awed, subdued. The more delicious the sensations, the more irresistible the spell. It may be, and it is sometimes the case, that this extraordinary power is all used to make God present to the soul; but how much oftener to steep it in oblivion of him, and to bound its views by that stupendous framework which was reared to bring men nearer to their Maker, but, when thus employed, for ever hinders their approach, and even hides him from their view?

This form of idolatry has all the aid that art can yield to nature. The idolater of nature cannot but be an idolater of art. And here the coincidence with heathenism is not one of principle only, but of outward form. The high art of the ancients was a part of their religion. It was not an idle tickling of the sense or fancy. In the perfection of their imitation and the beauty of their original creations they did honour to the god of their idolatry, not indirectly, as the author of their skill, but most directly, as its only object. It was nature that they represented, beautified and worshipped. The gradual return in modern times

to this view of the arts, and the impassioned zeal with which it is pursued, if not among ourselves, in other lands, is one of the most startling analogies to heathenism that can be produced, and promises or threatens, more than any other, to result in an exterior resemblance corresponding to the essential one described already.

It may no doubt be said that this romantic and poetical apotheosis, both of art and nature, has resulted by reaction from the barbarous neglect and the unscriptural contempt, especially of God's material works, as suited to excite the powers and refine the taste, not only without prejudice to faith and piety, but so as to promote them. This is in some sense true; nor is this the only case in which the errors of the Church have served to aggravate the errors and abuses of the world. Had Christians always exercised a wise discretion in relation to the love and admiration both of nature and of art, this poetical idolatry might possibly have spared some of its most extravagant displays. But the idolatry itself springs from a deeper and remoter source. As long as man retains the sensibilities which God has given him, and yet remains unwilling to retain God in his thoughts, the voice of nature will be louder than the voice of God. If God is not in the wind, the fire, or the earthquake, these will nevertheless sweep the multitude before them, and the still, small voice of revelation be heard only by a chosen few. When certain causes now at work have had their full effect, the worshipper of God will again be like Elijah on Mount Horeb, while the vast mixed multitude are worshippers of nature.

If the agreements which have now been traced between the spirit and practice of the irreligious world and those of the heathen as worshippers of nature really exist, and are what they have been represented, it may reasonably be expected that the principle of this idolatry will not only show itself in art, and spread itself as spiritual leaven, but avow itself in doctrine. It has done so already in the pantheistical philosophy of Germany, and in the form which it has given, there and elsewhere, to theology, to science, to romantic fiction, to rhetorical criticism, to the theory and practice of the arts. The taint of this infection may be traced by critical autopsy in places where its name would not be foreseen. It may be found adhering to schemes of doctrine

highly evangelical in general form as well as in profession. At the same time, it may be detected poisoning the full flow of poetic inspiration, and insinuating its corruption into the enjoyment afforded by the imitative arts in their least offensive and apparently most useful applications. Guided in almost any direction by this phantom, he who sets out as a worshipper of God may find himself, before he is aware, a gross idolater of nature. It would seem, then, that if we once assume as an established fact that heathenism is, in origin and principle, the worship of nature, we are not so wholly free from all idolatrous propensities as we might otherwise imagine; and that although Jupiter and Baal have no images or shrines among us, the same spirit which once prompted and controlled their worship may at least be faintly traced, not only in our forms of speech, but in the various walks of life and classes of society—in the mercenary, practical, industrial, utilitarian idolatry of worldly, money-making men—in the learned, philosophical idolatry of undevout astronomers and men of science—in the poetical, romantic, and æsthetical idolatry of those who worship art and beauty—and in the formal propositions or the indirect insinuations of pantheistical philosophers and theologians.

With respect to the last cases, it is highly important to observe that they are strongly distinguished from the rest by the religious air which they assume, and their appropriation of established forms of speech to new and very different objects. This tone and dialect of piety have aided not a little in the progress of these innovations. Like the child who thought that any book was good in which the name of God occurred, some children of a larger growth appear to be persuaded that the formulas of Christian devotion must be equally significant and equally demonstrative of truth and goodness, whether applied to God and Christ, or to the woods and the waves, the lightning and the flowers. But this tone of deep religious feeling, when divorced from the legitimate objects of such feeling, only shows that this devotion to the works of God or man is truly a religion; that it is not admiration, but worship; that it is not good taste, but rank idolatry. When one of the great founders of this new religion, or rather of this resuscitated paganism, names, as the object of his love and trust, God in his most intimate union with nature, it is easy to perceive that the union be

contemplates is a union of identity, that God is still retained as a convenient and familiar name, but that the true divinity, enshrined and chanted with such exquisite appliances of painting, sculpture, poetry, and music, is not the God of revelation, but the goddess of Nature.

From all this it becomes us to take warning, that whatever we do we do with our eyes open, to see to it that we incur not the reproach, "Ye know not what ye worship," and to see to it that we are not led into idolatry by any specious figments or delusions, lest we be constrained to take up the lament of those confessors in the times of heathen persecution, who, though proof against all menace and persuasion, were at last miserably cheated into acts of worship at the altar of an idol, when they thought themselves kneeling at the altar of their God. But against this fearful issue mere precaution avails nothing. To the votaries and victims of these "strong delusions" something definite and positive must be presented, as an object of faith and of affection. To the active mind, excited and half frenzied by the vague but captivating dreams of a disguised idolatry, it is not enough to say, "Be rational." The surges of that troubled sea, the heart of man, when roused by these impetuous winds of doctrine, can be lulled by no voice but the voice of Him, who, from the storm-tossed bark upon the waters of Gennesaret, cried of old, in tones of irresistible authority, "Peace, be still." And even then the assuaging influence seems to come forth, not so much from the command as from the personality of him who utters it. To some who are already drifting into the exterior circles of this soul-destroying whirlpool, there comes not only a sound, but a sight—an unexpected sight. Where all seemed dark and black with tempest, there appears a living form, holding forth to your acceptance something real, something certain, something living, something lasting, something that may be seen, and felt, and known, and loved, and trusted; a Father, a Saviour, a Redeemer, and a Comforter. This, this is life eternal, to know, &c., falling down at the feet of this revealed, this manifested God, and opening to him your mind, your conscience, and your heart for ever. You may turn to the idolaters of every name, and say with proud humility, "Ye worship, and we know."



## VI.

### He that believeth on the Son hath Everlasting Life.

“ He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life : and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.”—JOHN iii. 36.

THIS is one of the most evangelical verses in the Bible, that is to say, one of the most strongly marked with the peculiarities of the gospel, not only in sentiment and spirit, but even in phraseology. In order to understand this peculiar quality, we must in imagination change our own position. To us who are familiar with the Bible from our infancy, its parts, in this respect, seem all alike. With all allowance for the many advantages arising from this long familiarity with Scripture, it cannot be denied that there are also disadvantages connected with it. While the general system of divine truth is impressed upon our understandings with more fulness and distinctness, particular parts of it make less impression on our hearts than if the whole were new. To those who have been trained up in a knowledge of the Scriptures, the method of redemption seems no more surprising than those attributes of God which may be gathered from his works. How different the case of a new convert from idolatry ! With him these splendid revelations are as new as they are glorious, and if he believes, he believes with his heart. If he believes, his heaven and earth are new ; he inhabits a new world ; he is himself a new creature, and he feels it. Our disadvantage, as compared with such a convert, is not wholly irremediable, for although the evil is in some degree inseparable from our situation, and to that degree compensated by immense advantages of another kind, it is unquestionably aggravated by our own remissness and stagnation in the study of the Scriptures.



Who does not feel that in certain states of mind he sees a freshness and vitality in truth, which at other times are wanting? And that these states of mind are those precisely which he ought to cultivate? Are we not bound, then, to acquire the habit of thus viewing truth, or rather, are we not bound to seek the aid of that quickening and illuminating Spirit whose prerogative it is to give these glimpses of the truth even to sinful mortals? And may we not hope, with his assistance, to approximate, if not to reach, the freshness and the richness of impression made upon the heathen convert by the grand discoveries of the gospel?

How such discoveries affect such minds, may best be imagined by selecting some one passage, and surveying it as if from the position of a heathen for the first time brought to see it. For such a purpose there is not a sentence in the Bible better suited than the text which has been read; for, as already mentioned, it is full to overflowing with the gospel. Let us suppose an ancient Greek, entirely unacquainted with the gospel, or the Jewish system which prepared the way for it, but addicted to reflection and inquiring for the truth, to have been present among John's disciples when these words were uttered. They would have been to him a mere enigma. Interpreted according to his own habitual views and feelings, they would have conveyed ideas; but how strange, how foreign, how fantastic! He that believeth on the Son. Who is the Son? Why used thus absolutely as a title? Who is this Son that must be trusted or believed? and why should he be trusted? or for what? For everlasting life. All heathen nations are believers in a future state, and this expression, therefore, would be less surprising. But how inadequate, how false the meaning which the stranger must attach to it! How different an endless life in his elysium from the gospel mystery of everlasting life! The wrath of God would also be a significant expression; but here, if possible, the contrast would be greater still between the Christian and the Gentile sense. The God of the Bible, and the gods of Olympus! The wrath of Jehovah, and the wrath of Jove! The calm eternal purpose of a holy God to punish sin, compared with the base malice of an almighty sinner. It is needless to observe how difficult it would be to prepare the mind of such a person for the light of truth. And even if, instead

of being a blind polytheist, he were one of those who sought and worshipped the unknown God, how foreign would the doctrines and the terms of this grand sentence be, from his vain speculations. It is plain that it could not be made clear to him without an exposition of the gospel as to all its leading principles. This is apparent from the nature of the truths which it expresses or involves. In order to evince this, the doctrinal and practical substance of the text may be reduced to four propositions or remarks.

The first is, that the highest good to which we can aspire is eternal life. No heathen needs to be informed that life is something more than existence. There is a sympathetic feeling with what lives, which cannot be excited by a lifeless thing. We cannot feel for a stone or a clod, as we do for a tree or flower which possesses life in its lowest form. Nor have we that community of feeling with a plant which we have with brute existence. We feel that they are nearer to ourselves, and we respect them or the life within them. But what is our sympathy for beasts compared with our regard for human nature? Individual men we may despise or hate even in comparison with lower animals, but no man puts humanity below the brutes. Because he feels that rational life is better than irrational. Even this, however, is not the highest sort of life. For we can conceive of reason without the capacity of moral distinctions, without the perception of moral good or evil. This, it is true, we possess, and it adds so much to the rank of our nature in the scale of existence. But, alas! even heathen know that this moral life, if it may so be called, is quite compatible with spiritual death. We are alive to the perception of moral good, but dead to the enjoyment of it. Is it not plain that a resurrection from this death exalts us to a sort of life still higher? This is spiritual life, that is, not merely the life of our spirits, for in a lower sense they were alive before, but a life produced by the Spirit of God. As this life consists in our being alive to God, to the performance of his will and the enjoyment of his favour, it might seem to be the highest life of which a finite being is capable. In kind it is, but not in degree. Its imperfection results from the remaining power of sin. Lazarus has come forth, but the grave-clothes of spiritual death are still about him.

The smell of the sepulchre still stupifies and sickens him. He sees, but with bandaged eyes, the glories that await him. He doubts the reality of his resurrection. There is a conflict between life and death, as if the grave were loth to give him up. Such is the spiritual life of man on earth. From its own nature it is endless and progressive; but from the circumstances of the case, imperfect.

Look back now through the scale which we have been ascending, and observe how each new degree or sort of life towers above that below it. Each might be thought the highest possible, but for that which visibly surpasses it. And now, having scaled the heights of spiritual life, what can we desire or expect beyond it, except that the evils which now mar it and obscure it should be done away, and that its duration, which appears to us precarious, should be rendered sure? This is eternal life, but is this all?

There is one stroke necessary to complete the picture. We are too apt, in thinking of eternal life, to think of it as an eternal abstraction, or at least as consisting too exclusively in mental acts and exercises. Hence, perhaps, that want of joyful expectation which is too characteristic of our religious exercises. Even to true Christians, the transition to eternity appears very often like a passage from a wakeful state to sleep. And some whose love for Christ makes them long for any change which will bring them nearer to him, are apt to torment themselves because of the enjoyment they derive from earthly and corporeal things, however pure and innocent. But what if these same sources of enjoyment are to be opened in the other world, and rendered inexhaustible, subordinate to spiritual joys, but not opposed to them. What if all those exquisite delights which we derive from sights and sounds shall be eternal, in a thousandfold degree, and pure from all contamination? Is there anything unreasonable in the supposition? Are we not still to be complex beings, soul and body, through eternity? Is not the inferior creation adapted to corporeal natures? Is it not subject to vanity and groaning until our redemption? Instead, then, of striving against God's appointment, and obscuring our own prospect of eternal life, let us make our innocent enjoyments all contribute to our hope of immortality; and when we think of the life to come, think of it as including

all that now gives real happiness, refined and sublimated and immortalized. Let us look upon ourselves as sick men in a darkened room, just beginning to be conscious of returning health, and instead of turning away from every sunbeam that steals into our chamber, and turning a deaf ear to every bird that sings without, let us rather feast upon them as ingredients of that exquisite delight which shall attend our final and eternal convalescence.

But as the sick man knows by sad experience that sights, and sounds, and sensible delights are nothing, nay, are torments without health to taste them, so let us remember that these minor sources of enjoyment are dependent upon health of soul, and that they can do nothing more than pour their tributary streams for ever into the ocean of eternal life.

Here, again, we may look down upon the path we have trodden, and like those who climb the Alps, see diminished in the distance what appeared stupendous when we saw it near at hand. At every former stage there was something to be added or desired. But now, what wait we for? Do we desire life in its highest and its purest form? We have it. Do we ask security from loss? We have it. Do we seek variety and richness of enjoyment? It is here beyond conception; and to crown all it is endless, and not only endless, but eternally progressive. The spiritual life which now beats faintly in the heart of the believer, shall beat on with ever-growing vigour of pulsation, till the pulse of eternity itself stands still.

Let us suppose a serious heathen to have formed this conception of eternal life, and to be filled with admiration of its glories. He could not long continue so absorbed in it as to lose sight of its relation to himself. He would soon learn to compare his own experience with this splendid picture, and if at all enlightened by the grace of God, to feel that between himself and this eternal life, there was a great gulf fixed, and that its happiness could only make him miserable; just as we may suppose the sight of Noah's ark affected those who caught a passing glimpse of it before they sunk for ever. No man can form any adequate conception of eternal life without some conception of that God in whose favour it consists. No contemplation of the attributes of Jupiter, or Venus, or Apollo, could result in a just idea of eternal

life. That life presupposes the idea of a holy God; holy, not only in himself, but in his requisitions; the author of a holy law, requiring perfect and perpetual obedience, not in outward action only, but in thought and desire.

The moment the pure light of this conception flashes on the mind of the inquirer, it conjures up an image of himself standing opposite to God, and odious in proportion to God's excellence. Knowing, as he now does, that eternal life is the eternal death of sin, he feels the dagger at his heart, he feels his spiritual death, and he despairs. But he awakes, and arises in the fond hope of escape. As sin has been his death, he now resolves that sin shall die. He will sin no more. Here a new revelation throws its light upon his path. He cannot cease from sin; he is its slave; it dwells within him; his evil thoughts and acts are from his heart, and his heart is dead in sin. Can he give it life? Can his own actions make their own cause pure? Here is a new despair, and it is deepened by perceiving that even if he could cease from sinning, the law already broken would not cease from its demands. His intended reformation is both useless and impossible.

Left to himself, he can conceive but one other method of escape. It is the hope that God will set aside the law, forgive him by a sovereign act, and make him a new creature. As he looks towards the light inaccessible, where God resides, in search of something to confirm this expectation, he is blinded and dazzled, but completely undeceived. He sees no dark spot in that blaze of living light, no shadow of connivance or indifference to sin. He sees, too, that this spotless brightness constitutes the glory of the God-head, and that the fulfilment of his hopes and wishes would have impaired his reverence for God. He withdraws his dazzled eyes and closes them, as he supposes, in eternal darkness. But on this darkness a new light begins to steal,—a ray from the luminous abode of God. He starts up in amazement; he considers for the first time that all his former hopes were centred in himself. His eye now follows the divine light to a point exterior to himself; he conceives the possibility of escape through another; he forms the conception of an intermediate object between God's inexorable justice and himself; and, after many alternations of despair and hope, it flashes on his mind that both the ends which he con-

sidered incompatible may thus be brought about—sin may be punished, and the sinner saved.

But a cloud passes over this celestial light. Are not all men alike? And if no man can make satisfaction for himself, how shall any man make satisfaction for another? The resolution of this doubt is the most astonishing development of all. Though man may not make satisfaction for another, may not God? The thought seems impious that God should pay the penalty of his own law, until the last veil is withdrawn, and the astonished soul beholds the great mystery of godliness—God manifest in the flesh. The Mediator is both God and man—the Son of God and the Son of man, and in both senses called the Son, a name no longer enigmatical—a perfect man without sins to be expiated. Here one difficulty falls away. At the same time he is God, and his divinity gives infinite value to his sufferings and obedience. They are, therefore, available for others also. This resolves the other doubt, the darkness rolls away, and the Sun of righteousness, without a spot or cloud,—

“Flames in the forehead of the morning sky.”

The work demanded of the sinner himself is only hard because it is so easy. It is hard to do little when we think we must do much—hard to do nothing when we think we must do all—hard to believe that we have only to believe, when we expected to achieve our own redemption. When once the soul is brought, however, to believe that this is truly God’s plan of redemption; that the Son of God is able and willing to save, and that this salvation is sufficient and secure; and, besides this general belief, accepts of this salvation for himself; the work is done, the man is justified and safe for ever. By some such process as that just described, we may suppose a heathen to arrive at the second proposition which the text involves, namely, That eternal life may be attained by simply believing in the Son of God.

From this he would readily infer that the converse must be true, and that the want of faith involves the loss of all that perfect and enduring blessedness called eternal life. But here he would be liable to error. As he himself was destitute of pure

and elevated happiness, he might imagine that continued unbelief would leave men in possession of this world's felicity or its equivalent, and merely rob them of that more exceeding and eternal weight of glory which is won by faith. But this is not the doctrine of the gospel. The loss of heaven, grievous as it is, would not affect the hearts of those who know it not. Their very reason for refusing heaven is, that they love the pleasures of sin. To deprive them, therefore, of that which they despise, and give them that which they delight in, would be rather to reward them than to punish them. The doctrine of the gospel is, that from him who hath not shall be taken even that which he hath. He that believes has the promise both of this life and of that which is to come. He that loses heaven loses this world also. In the text it is declared, not merely that the unbeliever shall not have eternal life, but also that the wrath of God abideth on him. This obviously means that the effect of unbelief will not be a mere negation, but a positive infliction. The wrath of God is a mysterious phrase full of horror. It is the array of all his attributes against a single soul for ever.

Vain as it is to attempt description of things indescribable, there are one or two considerations which may render our conception more determinate. What makes a life of sin tolerable here? Three things: 1. A participation in the outward advantages of the believer. 2. Positive enjoyment in sin. 3. Ignorance of anything better which could make the soul dissatisfied with sinful pleasure. Now, these three causes are to be abolished. The wrath of God will separate the lost soul from the saved for ever, and from all the advantages of order, comfort, mutual restraint, which now arise from the connection. The pleasures of sin, too, are only for a season; they shall cease, and its native tendency to misery remain unchecked for ever. Finally, conscience shall awake, and have sufficient light to plant its daggers with unerring accuracy; and to complete the sum of misery, the sinner shall in some degree know what he has lost. Surely these considerations are enough to give us definite, though painful ideas, of the wrath of God, whatever may be our ideas of the material fires of hell.

It only remains to add, that, as in our estimate of future happi-

ness we are too apt to preclude those sources of enjoyment which we now know by experience, it is also true and in a much higher degree, that when we think of future misery we think of it as something generically different from what we suffer here. But if we would bring home the matter practically to ourselves, we must suppose the sufferings of this life to be indefinitely aggravated and made eternally progressive. The wretch who commits suicide to shun the shame of public execution or exposure, if he believes in a futurity at all, little imagines that the very pang which he endeavoured to escape by this act of daring cowardice, shall wring his soul with everlasting and increasing anguish. Let no unbeliever, in his restless discontent, imagine that his disappointments, losses, or disgraces will be terminated by the end of life; but let him rather look forward to an endless propagation and recurrence of the self same agonies from which he hopes, by dying, to escape. The dying sinner only exchanges a temporal for an eternal hell—the short-lived wrath of man for the eternal wrath of God, not merely smiting, but abiding on him.

These, then, are the three propositions which must be included in the exposition of the text to one not acquainted with the gospel:—

1. The highest good to which we can aspire or attain is eternal life.
2. It cannot be merited or purchased by ourselves, but must be secured by simple faith in Christ.
3. Unbelief incurs not merely a privation of the positive enjoyments of eternal life, but the positive infliction of the wrath of God.
4. To these I add a fourth, which is, that these foregoing truths are of universal application. What they would be to a heathen they are really to us. If to him they involve the whole way of salvation, they involve no less to us. What more, indeed, could we desire? We have here the great end of existence set before us—the glory of God and the enjoyment of his favour, included and summed up in eternal life. Its opposite, eternal death, is also set before us. Here, too, is the *way* of life, by faith and nothing but faith. Not he that worketh, but he that believeth, hath eternal life. Finally, here we have the object of this faith presented as the Son, the Son of God, the Son of man, God mani-



fest in the flesh, a sacrifice for sin, the Captain of our salvation, the Author and Finisher of our faith—the end, the way, the guide. What more can we ask? This is all our salvation and all our desire.

By this let each man try himself. What are you seeking? Immediate gratification or eternal life? And if the latter, do you know what it consists in? Do you know that it includes all forms of happiness not stained with sin, and that the loss of it involves all misery, including such as you experience already?

And now, are you seeking everlasting life? By what law? The law of works, or by the law of faith?

And last, not least, what is the object of your faith? Is it God's uncovenanted mercy?—his mercy as opposed to his justice? Alas! there is no such mercy. It is not he that believeth in a lie shall be saved, but he that believeth in the Son of God. Other foundations can no man lay save that which is laid; for there is no other name given under heaven among men whereby we must be saved. If you have not this faith, with this exclusive object, your prospect is eternal death, and that not merely loss of life, but endless exposure to the wrath of God.

And here may be brought more distinctly into view a remarkable form of expression in the text. The threatening is not that upon the unbeliever wrath shall abide, but it abides already. Here let the procrastinating soul be undeceived. Distance of time and place works strange transformations. Tell one who violates the law of man that he will be condemned for it, and he may laugh the law and you to scorn. But how few laugh when told that they are condemned already. Look at the convict at the bar, and see how different his aspect and demeanour from his aspect and demeanour when at large. Such is your case. You are, perhaps, not yet arrested, the day of formal trial is far distant; but, strange as it may seem, when compared with human process, you are already under sentence. You were born a convict, and your past life has only served to aggravate your condemnation. When you are warned, therefore, to escape the coming wrath, it is not that you can escape conviction as a violater of the law of God. You are condemned already, and reprieve or pardon is your only

hope. What if the murderer at the gibbet's foot should prate of his expecting to avoid conviction, and talk of testimony, verdicts, and new trials on his way to execution. Remember, remember, that God's wrath abideth on you.

Here, too, may many an enigma in the life of man receive a full solution. You are rich, perhaps, and prosperous in this world's goods, and seem to the eye of others destitute of nothing. But you yourself know better. In the midst of your abundance there is emptiness; starvation in your feasts, and in your cups undying thirst. You cannot understand how, with all the materials of enjoyment, you are joyless. Hear the reason. It is the wrath of God abiding on you, and distilling wormwood into every drop you swallow.

Or are you poor, but with an unblessed poverty, striving with vain efforts to be rich, or brooding in idleness with spiteful discontent over your neighbour's wealth. Without the advantages of wealth, you have its cares; its load without its strength. You can neither attain the supposed felicity of being rich, nor the more enviable peace of contentment. Do you know the reason? It is the wrath of God abiding on you, from which you must escape before you know tranquillity.

The case is the same if you are sick, without the sanctifying grace of sickness; or in health, without the grace which makes that health a blessing. You have, perhaps, a feeling of perpetual insecurity. You tremble when you hear of death, and turn pale at the slightest pain in any of your members. And, alas! you do not know that there is reason for your fears. Look back, the avenger of blood is just behind you, and the wrath of God abides already on you.

There is yet another case, which, though less common in reality than in appearance, must be mentioned. It is that of the man who feels no changes and no fears, and who, by means of a peculiar constitution, or inveterate induration, draws from the materials of worldly happiness their full supply, without admixture. Some of you know, perhaps, how often the appearance of this calmness is an artificial mask, put on to hide the fearful writhings of the countenance. You know what is meant by a lifetime of hypocrisy, not hypocrisy in religion, but hypocrisy in sin.

We have much of false professions in the Church, but we know much of false professions in the world. The profession of indifference, and peace, and courage when ever and anon a gust of passion, or a nausea of the spirit, gives the lie to the profession.

But let the man be what he says he is. Let him neither feel nor believe the pressure of that deadly burden which he bears upon his back. Let him imagine, while he bends beneath it, that he walks erect, and in proportion as it breaks his strength, let him rise in his estimate of human nature, and even when he finally sinks under it, let him sink, believing that he soars, and die in the belief that he can never lose his life. Is this the sinner's consolation? Oh, is this the hope for which he sold the promise of eternal life? Is this your way of salvation? Oh, deceived soul, to escape the present consciousness of wrath only by laying it up in store for your eternity, by treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath, and still not know that the amount of it is growing. Oh, what a settling of accounts will that be when the vast accumulations of a life-time are brought out from God's omniscient magazine, and attached to their possessor as a mill-stone to precipitate his everlasting fall. This, and this only, is the hope and consolation of the man who feels no danger, and has no Saviour.

You gain nothing, then, when you gain a transient respite from the sense of present misery. Nay, those who have it are of all men most miserable, as their insensibility will aggravate their future woe; and even now, in spite of it, the wrath of God abideth on them. Execution is delayed, but they are condemned already.

Instead, then, of aiming at this fatal stupor, strive to feel your burden. Feel that the wrath of God is now abiding on you, and will there abide for ever, unless the Saviour soon remove it. No sense of this oppressive burden, how intense soever, can increase your danger. Nay, it will prepare you the better for deliverance. To the careless and insensible the gospel has no promises. "They that are whole need not a physician." But to the burdened and oppressed our Saviour uttered one of his most tender invitations, "Come unto me all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Here is the rest you should seek. The rest, not of stupidity, but penitence. While you continue as you are, the

wrath of God abideth on you. But the moment you believe, it is transferred to the great object of your faith, absorbed in the vortex of his meritorious passion, drowned in the many waters of his dying love, and lost for ever. Death is then swallowed up in victory, the victory of faith and life. Everlasting life becomes triumphant. "Behold, I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing." Choose life, therefore, that your souls may live.



## VII.

### Almost Sated.

“Remember Lot’s wife.”—LUKE xvii. 32.

THERE seems to be a natural and universal disposition to commemorate remarkable characters in history. Not only are monuments erected and books written to perpetuate their names, but days are set apart for the special purpose of remembrance and of celebration. Where the anniversary of the birth or of the death can be determined, this is commonly selected as the period of observance. But even when these are no longer ascertainable, the disposition to remember and commemorate must still be gratified, and in the same way by the arbitrary designation of certain times as sacred to the memory of certain persons. This propensity is not confined to civil history, but extends to that of the Church and of religion. Or, rather, it is here that it especially displays itself, as in its favourite and chosen field. The civic calendar of patriots and heroes is a meagre catalogue compared with the ecclesiastical calendar of saints and martyrs. Some have usurped a place there whose pretensions it would not be easy to demonstrate; but I do not know that Lot’s wife has ever found a place in any calendar. And yet, this is the only case in which a solemn and express divine command can be appealed to. Of patriarchs and prophets, of apostles and martyrs, there is not one,—no, not even Abraham or Moses, not even Paul or Stephen, of whom Christ is recorded to have said what Luke describes him in the text as saying of a nameless sinner in a half-forgotten age, “Remember Lot’s wife !”

The singular prominence thus given to an otherwise obscure and unimportant character in sacred history, may serve at least to

justify a brief inquiry *how* and *why* the exhortation is to be complied with. In other words, what is there in the case of Lot's wife to be thus remembered? and, of what use can the recollection be to us? These are the two points which I now propose to make the subject of discourse :—

- I. What is there to remember in the case of Lot's wife?
- II. Of what use can the recollection be to us?

I. In considering the first point, we naturally turn to other cases of historical commemoration, and recall the circumstances upon which the attention is usually fastened as the things to be remembered. These are essentially the same in every case, that is to say, there is a limited number of particulars, within which the biography of all men may be circumscribed. But these are indefinitely varied in their combinations and proportions. The entire interest of some lives is concentrated in the birth and hereditary honours of the subject. This is notoriously true as to the vulgar herd of kings and queens and nobles, whose name and titles are their whole biography. In other cases of a higher order this element of greatness is entirely wanting. The name is a new name, and the birth obscure. Whatever interest attaches to the person is the fruit of his own doings, whether martial, intellectual, or civil. There are others where the eminence arises neither from position nor achievement, but from character. This is the charm of those biographies, in which a historical, and even a poetical—I might perhaps say romantic—interest is thrown around characters who never rose above a private station; who, beyond a little circle of acquaintances, were scarcely known to live until they died, but who now live in the memory and hearts of thousands, and, when every meteor of profane celebrity is quenched in oblivion, shall still shine in the firmament of history “as stars for ever and ever.”

These are the customary topics of remembrance and commemoration, illustrious birth, splendid achievement, and surpassing excellence, not necessarily exclusive of each other, but, alas! too seldom found in combination, that among the “bright particular stars” of human history, there are few constellations, and but one

stupendous galaxy. Let us now apply this measure to the solitary case which our Saviour has consigned to everlasting remembrance, and what is the result? In which, or in how many of these several respects was Lot's wife entitled to be snatched from oblivion? Was it birth or name, good works or evil deeds, extraordinary piety or unexampled wickedness that gives her this pre-eminence? Name, did I say? Her very name has been forgotten in the record that bears witness to the fact of her existence. Of her birth we know nothing, and can learn nothing, absolutely nothing, from a history distinguished from all others by the fulness and minuteness of its genealogical details. We know who Abraham's wife and Nahor's wife were, not their names only, but their parentage; but Lot's wife, so far as the inspired record goes, is without father and without mother, her birth a secret, and her name a blank!

There are cases, however, in the sacred history where no small interest attaches to the character and deeds of those whose names are not recorded. Without going beyond the field of female biography, we may cite as examples the widows of Sarepta and of Shunem, the woman of Samaria, and several others, for whom or upon whom our Lord wrought miracles of healing. But in this case the anonymous and unknown subject of commemoration is revealed to us by no description, no characteristic actions, no glimpses of her private and domestic life. She is not even mentioned in the history of Lot's migrations or of his residence in Sodom. She is not included in the question of the angels who were sent to save him: "Hast thou any here besides? son-in-law, or sons, or daughters, or whatsoever thou hast in the city;" unless this last expression be intended to apply to her. She appears for the first and almost for the last time in the brief but vivid picture of that hurried and compulsory escape, when Lot still lingered, and "the men laid hold upon his hand, *and upon the hand of his wife*, and upon the hand of his two daughters, the Lord being merciful unto him: and they brought him forth, and set him without the city, and said, Escape for thy life; *look not behind thee*, neither stay thou in all the plain: escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed." This is one-half of the history of Lot's wife, and the whole of it contains no hint of her origin or education,

course of life, or character, except so far as this may be gathered from her end. It seems, then, that in this case thus commended to perpetual remembrance by our Lord himself, every one of the accustomed grounds or reasons for remembering is absolutely wanting.

Is this blank, then, to be filled up by indulging the imagination, by investing this anonymous, mysterious figure with fictitious qualities, and making her the centre of poetical associations? Certainly not. We can remember only what we know. The command is not to imagine or invent, but to remember. And in this case we can only know what is recorded. Our Saviour evidently takes for granted that his hearers knew the fact which he commands them to remember. They could know it only from the narrative in Genesis. Had anything beyond this been required, it would be expressed, as in other cases where our Saviour and his followers reveal something not contained in the Old Testament. Such additions to the history are the names of the Egyptian sorcerers, Jannes and Jambres, not recorded by Moses, but disclosed by Paul to Timothy; and Jude's citation of the prophecy of Enoch, and of Michael's contest with the devil for the body of Moses. But in this case there is no such addition, no completion of the history, but a simple reference to what was already known, because it had for ages been on record. It was to some familiar and notorious fact that Christ alluded when he said to his disciples, "Remember Lot's wife!"

This familiar and notorious fact could not be the one already cited—namely, the angelic intervention and deliverance of Lot's wife, with her husband and her children, from the doomed city—because this was not peculiar or remarkable enough to be appealed to as a great historical example. Thus far her experience was coincident with that of others more entitled to remembrance. Had miraculous deliverance been all, the wife of Noah might have seemed to have a better claim than Lot's to this distinction. We are therefore under the necessity of going a step further, and considering the other half of her recorded history as furnishing the lesson which our Lord inculcates in the text. That other half is all comprised in a single verse of Genesis, the twenty-sixth of the nineteenth chapter: "His wife looked back from behind him, and became a pillar of salt." So soon and so sudden is her dis-



appearance from the stage of history. She only appears long enough to disappear again. She is like a spectre, rising from the earth, moving slowly across our field of vision, and then vanishing away. Hence her history is all concentrated in a single point, and that the last. It has no beginning and no middle, but an end—a fearful end. Its course is like that of the black and silent train, to which the match is at last applied, and it ends in a flash and an explosion. Our first view of Lot's wife is afforded by the light of the sulphurous flames already bursting from the battlements and house-tops of the reprobate city; our last view, the moment after, by the same fires as they mount to heaven and light up the whole horizon, revealing, among many old, familiar objects, one never seen before—a pillar of salt upon the road to Zoar. That very pillar was the thing which the disciples called to mind when Jesus said, "Remember Lot's wife."

But, my hearers, there are multitudes of other cases upon record, where the whole interest of a lifetime is concentrated in the hour of death. Some scarcely seem to live until they come to die. Not only in the case of soldiers slain in battle, or of martyrs dying at the stake, but on many a lowly and neglected death-bed, a new character reveals itself, new powers of mind, new dispositions and affections; as if a lifetime had been needed to mature the character, and death to make it visible. It is not, therefore, merely in this circumstance that we must seek the grand peculiarity of that event to which our Lord directs the thoughts of his disciples. As it was not her escape from Sodom that made Lot's wife a perpetual lesson and memorial to mankind, so it is not the extraordinary concentration of her history in one point, and that point the last; for this, as I have just said, may be seen in other cases. I proceed directly, therefore, to point out the three particulars in which her end was so peculiar as to render it a fit example for the purpose which our Saviour had in view when he told his disciples to remember her. In doing this, I shall, of course, make no appeal to your imagination, but confine myself with rigour to the brief and plain terms of the history.

1. The first distinctive feature in the case of Lot's wife is, that she was almost saved. The cases are innumerable, no doubt, in which men have been destroyed when apparently on the very

verge of deliverance; but the cases must be few—very few, if any—where the alteration was so rapid and terrific, where the subject passed so quickly through the startling vicissitude of life from the dead, and death in the midst of life. First, entire security; then awful and apparently inevitable danger; then miraculous deliverance; then sudden death. The point to which I would direct your attention first, is the extraordinary, unexpected, and, to all appearance, certain and complete deliverance, which Lot's wife had experienced. In prospect and in expectation she was saved already; and in actual experience she was almost saved. The burning city was behind; she had been thrust out from it by angelic hands, her husband and her children at her side; the chosen refuge not far off, perhaps in sight; the voice of the avenger and deliverer still ringing in her ears, "Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain: escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed." With such facilities and such inducements to escape, with her family on one side and her saviour on the other, Sodom behind and Zoar in front—my hearers, who would not have thought, as she thought, that Lot's wife was saved? Had she been left behind to perish in the flames, the suicidal victim of her unbelief, her end would have resembled that of thousands, and our Lord would not have told us to remember her, as if one out of the multitude consumed in that hot furnace were entitled to be any more remembered than the rest. But when actually brought without the gates, perhaps against her will, and by such hands too, and already on her way to the appointed place of refuge, with the cry of the angel and the crackling of the flames both impelling her onwards—surely she was almost saved!

2. But, secondly, though almost saved, she perished after all. What I wish you to observe is not the bare fact that she perished, to have millions, both before and since, but that she perished as she did, and *where* she did. Perdition is indeed perdition, come what may, and there is no need of fathoming the various depths of an abyss, of what is bottomless. But to the eye of the spectator, and it may be to the memory of the lost, there is an awful aggravation even of what seems to be incapable of variation or increase in the preceding and accompanying circumstances of the

final plunge. He who sinks in the sea without the hope or opportunity of rescue may be sooner drowned than he who for a moment enjoys both; but to the heart of an observer how much more sickening and appalling is the end of him who disappears with the rope or plank of safety within reach, or in his very hand, or of him who slips into the bubbling waters from the surface of the rock which, with his failing strength, he had just reached, and on which for a moment of delicious delusion he had wept to imagine himself safe at last! The same essentially, though less affecting, is the case of those who escape one danger only to be swallowed by another, like the seaman who had braved all the chances of war and the diseases of a sickly climate, only to be wrecked as he was reaching home; or the case of the soldier who escapes the edge of the sword on many a battle-field, and in many an "imminent deadly breach," only to die a more ignoble death, as the victim of disease or accident. Of all such cases, in their infinite variety of circumstances and degrees, the great historical type is that of Lot's wife, of her who was almost saved, yet not saved, the article and crisis of whose safety and destruction were almost identical, of her who perished in the moment of deliverance!

3. The third distinctive feature in the case of Lot's wife is, that her destruction was so ordered as to make her a memorial and a warning to all others. You may smile at the credulity of those who imagine that the monumental pillar is still extant, and may yet be identified. Believe, if you will, in the pride of science, or the pride of ignorance, for they are near akin, and often coincide in their conclusions, that this is a strong Oriental hyperbole, a metaphorical description either of perpetual remembrance or of a natural transient effect. Even supposing that the pillar of salt had an ideal existence, or, that if real, it bore witness only for a few days to the eyes of all who passed by, God has erected it for ever in his word. The pillar of salt may have vanished from the shore of the Dead Sea, but it is standing on the field of sacred history. The Old and New Testaments both give it place; and as it once spoke to the eye of the affrighted Canaanite or Hebrew, who revisited that scene of desolation, so it now speaks to the memory and conscience of the countless multitudes who read or hear the law and gospel, saying to them, and to us among the

number, as our Lord said of old to his disciples, "Remember Lot's wife!" Remember the mysterious and awful end of one who seemed miraculously saved from a miraculous destruction, only to meet it in another form and in another place, the very threshold of deliverance, converting her at once into a pillar of salt, and a perpetual memento of the "goodness and severity of God."

II. This brings us, by a natural transition, to the second point which I proposed for your consideration, namely, the purpose to be answered, or the end to be attained, by our remembering Lot's wife. It is no unreasonable question, if propounded in a proper spirit, free from petulant levity or sceptical presumption, What have we to do with this remote event of patriarchal history, this incident attending the destruction of a place whose very site has been expunged from the surface of the earth?

In the first place, we may rest assured that the narrative was not recorded for its own sake, or to gratify a spirit of historical inquiry; because this would render unaccountable the fewness of the facts recorded, and still more so the emphatic exhortation of our Saviour to remember this particular event. The only satisfactory solution is afforded by assuming that the case of Lot's wife was recorded as a type of God's providential dispensations; or, in other words, that the event may be repeated in the experience of others, not in its outward form and circumstances, but in its essential individuality. This supposition is not only reasonable in itself, and recommended by the reading with which it solves the doubt proposed, but it may be directly proved by the example of our Saviour, in applying this historical example to a different case, to wit, the siege and destruction of Jerusalem. After warning his disciples against such security and self-indulgence as prevailed before the flood and the destruction of Sodom, and commanding them "in that day" not to delay their flight for what seemed to be the most necessary purposes, he adds, "Remember Lot's wife!" This can only mean that similar effects may be expected from like causes; that the course of divine providence is governed by fixed laws; and that the same succession of events may therefore reappear; or, as our Lord himself propounds the principle of application, in the conclusion of this same discourse, when the disciples

asked him, "Where, Lord? and he said unto them, Wheresoever the body is, there will the eagles be gathered together." It thus appears that, far from being forbidden to apply the text to other cases than the one which our Saviour had immediately in view, we are directly taught, by his precept and example, to consider it as applicable to ourselves and others, and to spiritual no less than to outward dangers. For, if they who were liable to be involved in a great temporal calamity might be warned by the example of Lot's wife against security and rash delay, and taught that men may perish in what seems to be the very moment of deliverance, how much more conclusive is the same example as a warning against fatal security and procrastination with respect to a danger as much more awful than the one in question as the soul is more precious than the body, or eternity than time; and, accordingly, with how much greater emphasis may they who are exposed to this tremendous risk be counselled and exhorted to "remember Lot's wife."

I proceed, then, in the same order as before, to point out the particular respects in which the strange and fearful end of Lot's wife may be realized in our experience, which, if it can be done, will be the best and most effective application of the text, as an exhortation to remember her and profit by her terrible example.

1. The first point of resemblance is, that we, like Lot's wife, may be almost saved. This is true in a twofold sense. It is true of outward opportunities. It is also true of inward exercises. If a heathen, who has just been made acquainted with the method of salvation, and who sees himself surrounded by innumerable multitudes still strangers to it, could be suddenly transported into this community, and see what you see, hear what you hear, and appreciate your multiplied facilities for knowing what salvation is and for securing it, he would, of course and of necessity, consider you as almost saved. Regarding heathenism as the Sodom, from which he has just escaped, and from which we have so long been delivered, he would hardly be deterred from looking upon us, not as almost, but as altogether saved. The intellectual and social influence of Christianity, apart from its saving power, the refinement, order, and intelligence produced by it, even in the lowest and the most degraded classes of our people, as com-

pared with heathens, would inevitably lead at first to false conclusions in the mind of such a stranger, and constrain him to cry out, These people, although not yet in heaven, are already saved ; and in reference even to that final consummation, they are almost saved !

We know, my hearers, how mistaken such an inference would be, and how much the fair appearances in question may resemble the smooth surface of that hollow and bituminous soil before its crust was riven and its secret fires enkindled by the lightning of God's wrath. You need not be reminded how far these external advantages, precious as they are in themselves and in their temporal effects, may fall short of securing the salvation of the thousands who enjoy them. In a word, you know, although a heathen convert might be ignorant, that men may have all this and more in actual possession, yet be neither almost nor altogether saved. You know how the deceitful surface may be agitated and convulsed by outbreaks of iniquity long cherished and concealed beneath the refinements and restraints of social discipline ; and even where the general decorum remains unimpaired, you know how many individuals may go down from the midst of it, like Korah and his company, if not into the libertine's or drunkard's grave, at least into the death-shade of a hopeless eternity. Yet, even here, and even to ourselves, there is a sense in which many who are not safe might seem almost saved. If we could read the hearts of some who hear the gospel, and, amidst the unbelief and opposition to the truth which still prevail there, mark the strong though ineffectual desires for something better, and the nascent resolutions to repent and to believe which are perpetually surging up in the commotions of that sea which cannot rest, we should be tempted to say, Surely, these struggling souls are almost saved. Yes, if we knew how often childish levity, and stoical indifference, and proud contempt, and even seeming spite, are but the mask of an interior strife which the subject would conceal, not only from his neighbours, but himself, we should be still more disposed to say of such, that they were almost saved ; or to say to them, in the words of Christ himself, "Thou art not far from the kingdom of heaven."

The grand mistake to which we are exposed in all such cases

is, the error of regarding this approach to true faith and repentance as peculiarly a state of safety. In itself, it is a state of the highest interest and moment; in itself, it is incomparably better than a state of total opposition or of absolute insensibility. But in reference to the future, it is not a safe state, and the longer it continues the less safe it is. It is not safe, because it is a critical juncture, a transition state, a turning-point, on which the future may be finally suspended. It is safe to enter, but not safe to rest in. The sooner we are brought to it the better, and the sooner we escape from it the better, if we only do so in the right direction. For, alas! there are two ways in which the doubt may be resolved and the suspense determined—by advancing or receding, going right or going wrong, escaping to Zoar or turning back to Sodom.

2. For the state described is, after all, like that of Lot's wife, when, against her will, she had been brought out of the city. She seemed to be beyond the reach of all immediate danger. She was following safe guides, and in the right direction. Yet she looked back, and she perished! So have thousands. So may you. This is a second point of resemblance. Those who are almost saved may perish—fearfully perish—finally perish—perish in reach, in sight of heaven—yes, at the very threshold of salvation. It is vain to quarrel with this fearful possibility and risk. It is vain to say, Are we not convinced of our danger? So was Lot's wife. Are we not escaping from it? So was she. Are we not near the place of refuge? So was she. But she looked back—no matter with what motive; she looked back—no matter how long or how short a time, though it were but for a moment; she looked back—whether from curiosity or lingering desire to return, we are not told, we need not care, we only know that she looked back—she violated the divine command—abjured the only hope of safety—and you know the rest. Whatever looking back may have denoted in the type, we know full well what may answer to it in the antitype. Whatever may have tempted Lot's wife to look back, we know the multiplied temptations which lead sinners to do likewise. And this terrible example cries aloud to those who are assailed by lingering desires for enjoyments once abandoned, or by sceptical misgivings, or by evil habits unsubdued, or

by disgust at the restraints of a religious life, or by an impious desperation such as sometimes urges us to eat and drink, for to-morrow we die; to all such this terrible example cries aloud, Remember Lot's wife—her escape, and her destruction. However different your outward situation, yet remember her, remember her; for if, like her, you are the destined prey of God's avenging justice, it will find you out, for "whosoever the body is, thither will the eagles be gathered together."

3. Lastly, they who are, like Lot's wife, almost saved, may not only, like her, be destroyed in the very moment of deliverance, but, like her, so destroyed as to afford a monumental warning to all others that the patience and long-suffering of God are not eternal. Looking back to the cities of the plain, they may not only be involved in their destruction, but as "pillars of salt," record it and attest it to succeeding generations. To a certain extent this is true of all who perish. God has made all things for himself, even the wicked for the day of evil. They who will not, as "vessels of mercy," glorify his wisdom and his goodness, must and will "show his wrath and make his power known," as "vessels of wrath fitted to destruction." They who will not consent to glorify him willingly must be content to glorify him by compulsion. This is true of all who perish, and who therefore may be said to become "pillars of salt," standing, like mile-stones, all along the broad road that leadeth to destruction, solemn though speechless monitors of those who throng it, and planted even on the margin of that "great gulf" which is "fixed" for ever between heaven and hell. But in another and a more affecting sense, it may be said that they who perish with the very foretaste of salvation on their lips, who make shipwreck in the sight of their desired haven, who are blasted by the thunderbolt of vengeance after fleeing from the city of destruction, and amidst their very journey towards the place of refuge, become "pillars of salt" to their successors. What a thought is this, my hearers, that of all the tears which some have shed in seasons of awakening, and of all their prayers and vows and resolutions, all their spiritual conflicts and apparent triumphs over self and sin, the only ultimate effect will be to leave them standing by the wayside as "pillars of salt," memorials of man's weakness and corruption, and of God's most righteous retri-



butions. Are you willing to live, and what is more, to die, for such an end as this? To be remembered only as a "pillar of salt," a living, dying, yet enduring proof, that sinners may be almost saved, and yet not saved at all, that they may starve at the threshold of a feast, and die of thirst at the fountain of salvation.

It is not unusual for those who have outlived their first impressions of religion, and successfully resisted the approaches of conviction, to subside into a state of artificial calmness, equally removed from their original insensibility, and from the genuine composure of a true faith and repentance. As you feel this new sense of tranquillity creep over your excited senses, assuaging your exasperated conscience, you may secretly congratulate yourself upon a change of feeling so much for the better. But you may not be aware that the relief which you experience is similar to that which often follows long exposure to intense cold, when the sense of acute suffering begins to be succeeded by a grateful numbness, and the faculties, long excited by resistance, to be lulled into a drowsy languor, far from being painful to the sense, but as surely the precursor of paralysis and dissolution, as if the limbs were already stiffened and the process of corruption even visibly begun. Or the change of feeling now in question may resemble that which came upon Lot's wife as she began to lose her consciousness of pain and pleasure beneath that saline incrustation which enchained her limbs, suppressed her breath, and stopped the circulation of her life's blood. Was that an enviable feeling, think you, even supposing it to be exclusive of all suffering? Or could you consent to purchase such immunity from pain by being turned into a pillar of salt?

It is not the least affecting circumstance about the strange event which has afforded us a theme for meditation, that although Lot's wife was fearfully destroyed, and at the very moment when she seemed to be beyond the reach of danger, we have no intimation that the lightning struck her, or that the fires which they kindled scorched her, or that the waters of the Dead Sea, as they rushed into their new bed, overwhelmed her, or that any other violence befell her. But we read that she looked back, and became a pillar of salt, perhaps without a pang of "corporal sufferance," perhaps without the consciousness of outward change; one moment full of

life, the next a white and sparkling, cold and lifeless mass. If this, my hearer, is the death which you would choose to die in soul or body, then look back to Sodom, stretch your hands towards it, and receive the death which comes to meet you in your cold embrace. Turn back, turn back, if you would fain become a pillar of salt. If not, on, on! Escape for your life! Look not behind you! Stay not in all the plain! Escape to the mountain lest you be consumed! And though you feel a secret drawing towards the scenes which you have left, yield not to it, but let memory do the work of sight. Instead of turning back to perish without hope, let it suffice you to REMEMBER LOT'S WIFE!



## VIII.

### Future Life.

“It doth not yet appear what we shall be.”—1 JOHN iii. 2.

THESE words admit of being taken either in a wide and comprehensive, or a more restricted and specific sense, as referring to a blessed immortality beyond the grave, or to futurity in general, including the as yet unknown vicissitudes belonging to the present state of our existence. It is in this larger application of the language, and, indeed, with special reference to a proximate futurity, that I invite your attention to the fact that “it doth not yet appear what we shall be.”

There is nothing in the actual condition of mankind, or in the method of God’s dispensations towards them, more surprising than the fact that, while the very constitution of the mind impels it to survey the future with intense solicitude, futurity itself is hidden by a veil which can neither be penetrated nor withdrawn. The light which glimmers through this veil is strong enough to show that something lies beyond it, and the demonstration is completed by the misshapen but gigantic shadows which occasionally flit across its surface; but the size, and shape, and relative position of the objects thus beheld in shadow are completely concealed from view. It is in vain that every artificial aid to the infirmity of sense is brought to bear upon the tantalizing spectacle; the light, the shadows, are still visible, and nothing more, except that providential barrier which at the same time brings the shadows to our view and makes the substances invisible.

This seeming contradiction between Providence and Nature, between human instinct and divine administration, is exemplified with perfect uniformity in all parts of the world and all the periods

of its history. It matters not how little or how much is known as to the present or the past ; men everywhere and always long to know the future. The historian, in whose memory events are gathered as in one vast storehouse ; the philosopher, who looks into the actual condition of all nature with a view at once minute and comprehensive, can plead no exemption from the restless and solicitous forebodings of the savage, who knows nothing of the past and but little of the present, but whose darkened and confused mind swarms, as it were, with visions of the future. Not a form of idolatry or false religion has existed which did not undertake to make its votaries acquainted with the future. This has always been regarded as a necessary means of influencing human minds, a strong proof of the universality and strength of the original principle. No pagan altar ever smoked without an oracle of some kind near it. The diviner or the prophet is in all such cases the companion of the priest, if not the priest himself. The occult arts of necromancy, sorcery, and witchcraft, in their infinite variety of form, are integral parts of one great superstitious system, the religion of fear, in which ignorance is indeed the mother of devotion. While the African bows down before his fetich and the Indian mutters to his medicine-bag, the Turk wears his talisman, the Egyptian his amulet, and even those who are called Christians sometimes watch the clouds, the flight of birds, or the most trivial domestic incidents, the breaking of a glass or the upsetting of a vessel, with as much secret dread as ever terrified the most benighted heathen ; nay, even educated men and women have been known, amidst the very blaze of scientific and religious light, to steal in secret to the haunts of the conjurer or fortune-teller, not always in jest, but sometimes with a studied secrecy indicative at once of shame, fear, misplaced trust, and inexpressible desire to know what God, in wisdom and in mercy, has decreed shall not be known.

The final cause or purpose of this determination appears obvious enough. If sin and misery were wholly foreign from the experience of man, this limitation of his view might be complained of as a hardship or privation. But since man is born to sorrow and temptation, since his heart is deceitful and his understanding fallible, since no foreknowledge could effectually guard him against sin or suffering, without the intervention of a power which can just

as well be exercised without his knowledge and consent as with it ; since the pains to be endured would, in multitudes of cases, be immeasurably aggravated by anticipation, and the most important duties often shrunk from in despair if all the preceding and accompanying circumstances could be seen at once, whenever the contrary effect results from the gradual development in slow succession, urging only one step in advance, and at the same time cutting off retreat as either shameful or impossible ; for these, and other reasons like these, the concealment of futurity is, on the whole, to be regarded, not as a privation, but a priceless mercy.

We have only to look back upon our progress hitherto, and some of us, alas ! not far, to see experimental evidence, which we at least must own to be conclusive, that, in hiding from us that which was before us, God has dealt with us, not as an austere master, but a tender parent, knowing well how his children can endure, and, in the exercise of that omniscience, determining not only how much they shall actually suffer, but how much of what they are to suffer shall be known to them before their day of visitation comes.

But this part of God's providential government, though eminently merciful, is not designed exclusively to spare men a part of the suffering which sin has caused. It has a higher end. By the partial disclosure and concealment of futurity, continually acting on the native disposition to pry into it, the soul is still led onward, kept in an attitude of expectation, and in spite of its native disposition to look downward, to go backward, or to lie stagnant, is perpetually stimulated to look up, to exert itself, and make advances in the right direction. The immense advantage of the impulse thus imparted may indeed be lost, and even made to aggravate the guilt and wretchedness of those who disregard it ; but considered in itself and its legitimate effects, it is one of the most striking proofs of God's benevolence to man, that when the soul through sin has acquired a fatal tendency to sink for ever and for ever lower, or to rest where even rest is ruin, instead of suffering this tendency to operate without obstruction as he justly might, he has created a new counteracting influence, and brought it to bear mightily, not only on the conscience and the understanding, but upon instinctive fears, and the natural desire of man to know what is before them.

This view, partial and imperfect as it may be, of the divine purpose, is abundantly sufficient to vindicate his wisdom and his goodness, in making men so curious of the future and yet utterly unable to discover it, except so far as he is pleased to make it known. For, I need hardly say, that this concealment of the future is not, and cannot be, from the nature of the case, absolute and total. In making us rational, in giving us the power of comparison and judgment, and in teaching us by the constitution of our nature to infer effect from cause and cause from effect, God has rendered us incapable of looking at the present or remembering the past, without at the same time, or as a necessary consequence, anticipating that which is to come, and to a great extent with perfect accuracy, so that all the knowledge of the future which is needed for the ordinary purposes of human life, is amply provided and infallibly secured ; while, far beyond the limits of this ordinary foresight, he has granted to some gifted minds a keener vision and a more enlarged horizon, so that objects, which to others seem to lie behind the veil of providential concealment, are detected and revealed by the far-reaching ken of their sagacity.

Nor is this all, for even with respect to things which neither ordinary reasoning from analogy, nor extraordinary powers of forecast can avail to bring within the reach of human prescience, God has himself been pleased to make them known by special revelation. Experience and reason are enough to teach us that all men must die. Professional or personal sagacity may see the signs of speedy death in one, whom others look upon as firm in health, and sure, to all appearance, of long life. But neither reason, nor experience, nor sagacity, could ever teach us that the body now dead shall again live ; that the soul now living shall yet die the death, not of annihilation, but of perdition ; that this second death is, by nature, the inevitable doom of all mankind, and yet that it may be escaped, but only in one way. Much less can that one way be distinguished or revealed by the exercise of any unassisted human power. These are things which neither eye can see, nor ear hear, nor heart conceive, until the Spirit of God makes them known. The light which shines upon the ordinary duties and events of life, is that which glimmers through the curtain of futurity ; the more extraordinary sights which are

occasionally seen by some minds in the exercise of an extraordinary power, are the vague and dubious shadows which appear and disappear upon the curtain which conceals their cause; but the view which man obtains of heaven and hell, of everlasting life and of the second death, can only be obtained through an opening which the hand of God himself has made in that mysterious curtain, or at some favoured spot where he has gathered up its folds, and given man a clear, though partial glimpse beyond it, free from all obstruction.

Revelations thus imparted do not change or modify the operation of that great law of concealment under which God's dispensations are conducted. He has indeed made known the way of life, the necessity and method of salvation, but the personal futurity of every man is still hidden from the view both of himself and others. And even with respect to that which is revealed, there is reserve and limitation, so that while men may rejoice in those discoveries which, through divine grace, now belong to them and their children, they are still constrained to say with Moses of old, "Secret things belong unto the Lord our God."

Through one such opening into futurity as I have been describing, God has permanently brought within the view of all, who have his word in their possession, a long line of light, reaching, like Jacob's ladder, from the earth to heaven, a path for the descent of ministering angels, and the ascent of such as shall be saved. The points where it begins and ends are clearly marked; and all along its intervening course, the line of its direction is identified by landmarks, by the altar erected at the gate of Paradise, the ark of Noah, and the ark of the covenant, the tabernacle, the temple, the manger at Bethlehem, the garden of Gethsemane, the cross on Calvary, the tomb of Joseph, the ascent from Olivet, the throne of God, and the seat at his right hand. Along this pathway, from the depths of sin and sorrow, thousands have made their way through fire and flood, through the blood of martyrdom and that of atonement, out of much tribulation, and with fear and trembling, to that world where there is no night, neither light of the sun, where the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest.

That there is such a way and such an end, no one can doubt

who will use the light which God has given him. Behold, O soul, behold it for thyself. Withdraw thy curious gaze from vain endeavours to discover that which is concealed, or from the useless sight of visionary phantoms; let the veil still hide the secret things of God until his hand shall rend it; but behold that luminous and dazzling point, that ray of light illumining futurity, an aperture through which you may behold the life that is to come. See that narrow pathway with its difficult approach, and straitened entrance, scaling one mountain—then another, and another, and another—till it seems to disappear among the clouds; and then again to be seen through them, indistinct, but still unchanged in its direction,—still ascending, still surmounting every intervening object, till the aching sense toils after it in vain, or the view which was afforded you is suddenly cut off. For here is an example of that limitation and reserve which I have mentioned as accompanying even the clearest revelations of futurity. If anything is certain it is this, that they who do escape perdition, and by faith in the omnipotence of grace, pursue this upward course, shall still continue to ascend without cessation, rising higher, growing better, and becoming more and more like God throughout eternity. I say that this is sure—sure as the oath and promise of a God who cannot lie can make it; and it is a glorious certainty indeed; but when we task our powers to distinguish the successive steps of this transcendent change, to compute specifically the effects which certain causes will produce, and to anticipate the actual results of the whole process, we are lost, we are bewildered; this is not yet revealed to us; it could not be without confounding all distinctions, and making the present and the future one. Hence the apostle, who is speaking in the text, although inspired to reveal the general fact that true believers are the sons of God, and joint-heirs with the Saviour of a glorious inheritance, even he stops short before attempting to describe in its details what glorified believers are to be hereafter, even his tongue falters, even his eye quails, he turns away dazzled from the light which no man can approach unto, and which even inspiration did not enable him to penetrate, saying, “It doth not yet appear what we shall be,”—we shall be something, something great and glorious, something which we are not, and never have been, something of which we



cannot form an adequate conception ; this we shall be, this we must be ; but beyond this, as to the mode of our existence, or the circumstances of our new condition, " it doth not yet appear what we shall be." So that with respect to that which is most certain as a general truth, many, at least, of the particulars included in it, may be still beneath the veil of providential concealment.

This vagueness and uncertainty, although at first sight it may seem to be a serious disadvantage, is nevertheless not without important and beneficent effects upon the subjects of salvation. It may seem, indeed, that as a means of arousing and arresting the attention, an indefinite assurance of transcendent blessedness hereafter is less likely to be efficacious than a distinct and vivid exhibition of the elements which are to constitute that blessedness ; but let it be remembered that no possible amount, and no conceivable array of such particulars, would have the least effect in originating serious reflection or desire in the unconverted heart. This can be wrought by nothing short of a divine power, and when it is thus wrought, when the thoughts and the affections are once turned in the right direction, the less detailed and more indefinite description of the glory which is yet to be experienced, seems often best adapted to excite and stimulate the soul, and lead it onwards, by still presenting something that is yet to be discovered or attained, and thus experimentally accustoming the soul to act upon the vital principle of its new-born nature, forgetting that which is behind, and reaching forth to that which is before.

The same thing may be said of the indefinite manner in which the doom of the impenitent and unbelieving is set forth in Scripture. The general truth that they shall perish, that their ruin shall be total, final, and irrevocable, and that their condition shall be growing worse, and worse, and worse for ever ; this is taught too clearly to be rendered dubious by any natural or rational interpretation of the word of God. And in the truth thus clearly taught there is a fathomless depth of solemn and terrific import, rendered more impressive by the vagueness and reserve of the description, when the mind has once been awakened to the serious contemplation of futurity ; but until this is the case, the general threatenings of perdition fall without effect upon the heavy ear

and the obdurate conscience. No attempt, however, has been made in Scripture to increase their efficacy by an accumulation of appalling circumstances. There are fearful glimpses of the world of woe, but they are merely glimpses, abundantly sufficient to assure us that there is a future state of punishment, but not to feed or stimulate a morbid curiosity. In this, as in the corresponding case before described, if the mind is awakened, such details are needless, and if not awakened, they are unavailing. Tell a poor man that he has suddenly been made rich by the bequest of some unknown kinsman or a stranger, and so long as he regards it as a jest or an imposition, you gain nothing by the fullest and most accurate detail of the possessions which have thus devolved upon him; nay, the very minuteness of your description seems to confirm him in his incredulity. But let him by some other means be thoroughly persuaded of the fact that he has undergone this change of fortune, and he listens even to the most indefinite and vague assurance with avidity, and now, instead of slighting the particulars of which before he took no notice, he is eager to obtain them, and pursues his importunate inquiries until one fact after another has been fully ascertained. So, too, in the case of warnings against some impending danger. Tell a solitary traveller, that in the forest which is just before him there are wild beasts, robbers, pitfalls, precipices, labyrinths, or any other perils, and if he believes you not, it is in vain that you exaggerate the evil, or depict it in the most impressive and alarming colours. Every stroke that you add to your description seems to make it less effective than the indefinite assurance which preceded it. But if a sudden panic should take hold of him, or, instead of being fearless and self-confident, he be naturally timid and accustomed to shun danger, even the first vague intimation of that danger is sufficient to unman him, and he either turns around, without waiting for a more detailed description of the case, or else he hears it with the eagerness of unaffected terror.

These familiar illustrations may suffice to show that in the wise reserve with which the Scriptures speak of the details of future blessedness and misery, there is no sacrifice of any salutary influence upon the minds of men; and that it does not in the least

impair the majesty, benevolence, and justice of God's dealings with the souls of men—that while the certainty, eternity, and endless progression, both of future blessedness and future misery, are clearly set forth in the word of God, the minute particulars of neither state and neither process are detailed, nor any attempt made to describe things indescribable; but both are left to be made known by a glorious or terrible experience, with the solemn premonition, clothed in various forms, that in reference, as well to our destruction if we perish, or to our blessedness if saved, “it doth not yet appear what we shall be.”

In thus extending what the text says of God's adopted children, to the misery of those whom he shall finally cast off, I have merely held up to your view the same great truth in two of its important aspects. It is the same pillar that is light to Israel and dark to the Egyptians. It was not, however, my design to dwell upon the mere doctrinal proposition, though unquestionably true and inconceivably important, that neither reason nor experience nor imagination can, in this life, furnish us with any adequate conception either of the joys of heaven or the pains of hell; nor can I be satisfied with simply pointing to the one and to the other, and in reference to both, assuring those who now hear me, in the accents of encouragement and warning, that “it doth not yet appear what we shall be.” I desire rather to bring this interesting fact of the text to bear with all its rightful power on the character, interests, and duties of my hearers. To effect this purpose, I have no need to resort to any forced accommodation or arbitrary application of the text, which I have chosen with direct view to the use which I now propose to make of it. All that is necessary for my present purpose under God's blessing, is to lead your minds a little further in the same direction which we have been hitherto pursuing, and, if possible, to show you the effect which the doctrine of the text, if rightly understood and heartily embraced, must have upon our views of human life, and more particularly of its earlier periods.

If, my hearer, it be true, as I believe, and you believe, and as God's word assures us, that in reference even to the case of those who shall assuredly be saved or as assuredly be lost, “it doth not yet appear what they shall be;” if it be true that even those who

are already saved, not merely in God's purpose, but, in fact, beyond the reach of all disturbing and retarding causes, even they who are rejoicing at this moment in God's presence as the spirits of just men made perfect, if even they are unable to enclose in their conceptions that illimitable ocean into which they have been plunged but for a moment; if it be true that even those who are disembodied spirits are now drinking of the cup of divine wrath, can, in the anguish of their torment, frame no definite idea of the volume and duration of that stream of fire which for ever and for ever fills their cup to overflowing; if both these souls, however different their actual condition and their prospects for eternity, are forced alike to cry out in a triumphant burst of grateful joy and a convulsion of blaspheming horror, "It doth not yet appear what we shall be!"—oh, with what multiplied intensity of emphasis may those whose future state is still unsettled, who are still upon the isthmus between hell and heaven, wavering, vacillating, hanging in terrible suspense between the two, unable or unwilling to decide their fate, and waiting, it would almost seem, until some heaving of the ocean of eternity should sweep them from the earth they know not, think not, care not whither—oh! with what emphasis might such exclaim, as they hang over the dizzy verge of two unchanging, everlasting states, "It doth not yet appear what we shall be!"

But is it, can it be, a fact, that rational, spiritual beings, god-like in their origin, and made for immortality, with faculties susceptible of endless elevation, and enlargement, and activity, can hesitate to choose life rather than death, and good in preference to evil? Yes, it may be so, it is so; such neutrality is possible, so far as a decisive formal action of the will goes. The performance of that last act may be long deferred, and, in deferring it, the dying soul may cherish the belief that all is still at its disposal, and that by one independent act of will, the whole work of salvation or perdition is to be begun and finished. Oh, what a delusion! when the cup, by long continued droppings, has been filled up to the brim, to imagine that the last and almost imperceptible infusion which produces its final overflow is all that it contains; or, that the withholding of that one drop, leaves it empty and removes all danger of its ever overflowing. How preposter-

ous a hope ! and yet in no respect less rational than his, who lets his life not only run to waste, but run to ruin, in the expectation that by some one energetic act at last, the countless acts which have preceded it shall all be cancelled and their effect neutralized. It is the crying sin and the stupendous folly of our race, that while they own their need of expiation, and repentance, and conversion, and acknowledge, yea, insist upon God's sovereign right to give them or withhold them, they not only make no efforts to obtain them at his hands, but, as it were, take pains to make the work which they acknowledge to be necessary, harder, and the grace, which they prefer to wait for, more and more hopeless. Does the man who looks to God for the productions of that which he has buried in the earth, demonstrate his dependence by introducing tares among his wheat, by laboriously cultivating noxious weeds, or by violently tearing from the earth the very seed on which he is depending for a harvest ? Does the man who looks to God for the recovery of health, presume on that ground to drink poison, to court exposure, and to plunge into the most insane and ruinous excesses ? Does the mariner who looks to God for a successful issue to his voyage, throw his cargo and provisions overboard, dismantle his own vessel, pierce its bottom, or deliberately drive it upon fatal rocks ? Is such madness possible ? or, if it were, would it be in the least extenuated by the calm profession of a purpose to do otherwise and better, at some future time, when all the evil may have been accomplished, and amendment irretrievably too late ?

Of all reliances the weakest and the worst is a reliance on the permanence of present motives, which now have no effect, and may one day gather overwhelming strength, and those which now seem all-sufficient, and may be powerless. Because you now wish to repent, and to believe, and to be saved hereafter, you imagine yourselves safe in your impenitence, and unbelief, and condemnation. Why, the very disposition which is now made the pretext for procrastination may forsake you. The respect you now feel for the truth, for God's law, for the gospel, may be changed into a cold indifference, contemptuous incredulity, or malignant hatred. The faint gleams of conviction which occasionally light up the habitual darkness of the mind, may be extinguished. The compunctious

visitings which now preserve your conscience from unbroken stupor, may become less frequent, till they cease for ever, or give place to the agonizing throbs of an incurable remorse. In short, the very feelings and intuitions upon which you vainly build your hopes of future reformation may themselves be as evanescent as the outward circumstances which produce them; and when these have passed away, the others may soon follow; so that, even though your judgment may be now correct, your feelings tender, and your plans of future action all that could be wished, "it doth not yet appear what you shall be."

How often—oh, how often!—has some real or imaginary sorrow touched the secret springs of your affection with a sympathy so exquisite that change appeared impossible, and you imagined, ay, perhaps, declared, that you would never smile again! Has that pledge been redeemed? In other cases, how your heart has swelled with gratitude for some deliverance or surprising mercy, which you fondly dreamed could never be forgotten? Were you right in so believing? O my hearers, where are the delights of infancy, the sports of childhood, and the hopes of youth, the joys and sorrows which absorbed your thoughts and governed your affections but a few years back? Are they not all gone? Have not their very objects and occasions in many cases been forgotten? And has not this process been repeated more than once, it may be often, till you find it hard to look back a few years, or even months, without a passing doubt of your identity, so changed are your opinions, inclinations, habits, purposes, and hopes? Recall that wish, and then consider whether its fulfilment now would make you happy, as it promised to do then; nay, does it even seem desirable, or worthy of an effort to secure it? No, the appetite has sickened, and so died. The object is the same, but you are not; your mind, your heart, your will are changed; and do you, can you, dare you think that you are now unchangeable, or capable of changing for the better only, so that what you now approve, and wish, and purpose, will still continue to be thus approved, desired, and purposed, and at last performed. Alas! my hearer, if, when you look at what you are, you can scarcely recognise what you have been, surely "it doth not yet appear what you shall be."

To some of you the period of childhood is so recent that memory

has not yet wholly lost its old impressions. You can easily remember objects upon which you then looked with a solemn awe, perhaps with terror. Do they still command your reverence? There were others upon which you looked with infantile contempt, as far less interesting than your childish sports; and yet these objects have been rising and expanding in the view with every moment of your life, and every hand's-breadth of your stature. And now, I ask you, what is the change owing to?—to lapse of time? to change of circumstances? to the growth of all your faculties? And are you not soon to be still older than you are? Must not your circumstances undergo still further change? Can you imagine that the development and cultivation of your powers are already finished? Is it not then possible, at least, that your future views and feelings may as widely differ from your present views and feelings as the present from the past? And is it rational or right to seal up your own destiny and character?

Turn not away, then, from the gracious invitations of the gospel merely because you do not now feel the need of its protection, consolations, and rewards. Life is not only short, but full of change. If you could now look back and see some golden opportunity of wealth and greatness lost for ever through a freak of childish levity, you would scarcely be consoled by the reflection that you thereby gained another hour of amusement. But oh, how inadequate is this to give the least idea of your feelings in that awful hour, when you shall see eternal life for ever lost for the mere playthings of this passing scene! Try, then, to antedate experience, to anticipate as possible feelings the most remote from those which you are now indulging. For example, when I speak of consolation, there are some perhaps among you who could smile at the idea as entirely foreign from your present feelings. And when you look before you, and imagine scenes of sorrow, they are mere fantastic images, on which your stronger feelings rest but for a moment. This may not be the case with all. There may be some here whose experience has made them prematurely old. There may be hearts among you whose deep fountains have been broken up and taught to gush already. Such need no admonition upon this point. The heart knoweth its own bitterness, and the stranger intermeddleth not with its joys. But you who are without experience of real and

deep-seated sorrow, look afar off at that strange phantasmagoria of darkened chambers, desolated houses, beds of pain, dying struggles, funeral rites, and broken hearts—and amidst all these behold that human form, and tell me whether you can realize yourself. Now, as to outward things, you may be far beyond the reach of such considerations as a motive to repentance, but you know not what an hour may bring forth. Whatever you are now, “it doth not yet appear what you shall be.”

But your danger lies not merely in disregarding motives which you are to feel hereafter, but in blindly trusting to the performance of those which you acknowledge now. I might go further, and excite your incredulity and even your contempt, by holding up as possible a total change, not only in your feelings and your principles, but even in your outward lives,—a change which you would look upon as utterly impossible, a change no less humbling to your pride than blasting to your hopes. I might startle you by holding up a mirror which, instead of giving back the smiling aspect that you now wear, the countenance of health and buoyant spirits, should confront you with a ghastly likeness of your present self, under the strange and hideous disguise of an exhausted gamester, a decaying libertine, a bloated drunkard, a detected cheat, a conscience-stricken murderer. I might present you to yourself surrounded by the wreck of fortune, family, and character, seated amidst the ashes of deserted hearths and their extinguished fires, gazing unmoved upon peaceful homes made desolate, and fond hearts broken—the wreck, the refuse, the unquiet ghost of all that you are now. I might present all this, but you would shrink with indignation from the foul aspersion. You may be unfortunate, you may be changed, but this, but this you can never be—never! My heart’s desire and prayer to God is that you never may; but what is your security? The mere intentions which you cherish now to be fulfilled hereafter? Ah, my hearer, go to yonder silent dwelling-place of crime, and learn how many good intentions have been cherished in those now degraded and perhaps now despairing bosoms. Go to some one haunt of vice, and trace the miserable victims who assemble there, back through their melancholy progress to the time when their intentions were as good as yours, their external circumstances no less promising.



Go to the gibbet, to the yard-arm, to the horrid scene of horrid vengeance wreaked by man upon himself, and learn that even there the deadly fruit has often sprung up into a rank vegetation, from the seed of good but ineffectual intentions.

It is high time for our youth to be aware that they who die upon scaffolds, and pine away in prisons, are not seldom such as once scornfully smiled at the suggestion of their ever being worse than they were then; and as they looked upon the kind friends and the multiplied advantages by which they were surrounded, and then in upon the purposes of future good they were intending, would have blushed at their own cowardice or self-distrust if they could have been brought to say, "It doth not yet appear what we shall be."

When I recall to mind the countenances, persons, manners, talents, attainments, hopes, and purposes of some whom I knew in early life, and then consider what they now are, my heart sickens at the sight of early promise, not because it is not infinitely lovely, but because the possibility of fatal change looms with a ghastly speculation through the eyes of these encouraging appearances, as evil spirits may have glared upon spectators from the bodies of the men whom they possessed of old.

From such anticipations, rendered more distressing by the growing frequency of such deterioration and of awful crime, the heart is forced to turn away in search of something to reanimate its hopes, and this is only to be found in the immovable belief that God's grace is omnipotent, and Christ's blood efficacious. To this the true philanthropist must cling, not only as the ground of his own hope, but as the only source of safety to the young around him; and when they earnestly inquire, as they sometimes do, how these fearful perils are to be avoided, instead of mocking them with prudential maxims of mere worldly policy or selfish cunning, let us lead them at once to the only secure refuge, to the only Saviour, to the cross and to the throne of Jesus Christ. Turn ye to the strongholds, ye prisoners of hope! Press into yonder gateway! Cleave to those massive pillars! Bind yourselves with cords to the horns of yonder altar! And at every fresh heave of the ocean and the earth, take the faster hold of Christ's cross and throne, and you are safe. Whatever trials may await you here, a

glorious compensation is reserved for you hereafter; final and eternal deliverance "from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God." "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God!"

But strange as the exaltation is, it is a real one. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is!" Oh, blessed sight! Oh, glorious assimilation! We shall not only see him as he is, but shall be like him! Let this bright anticipation stimulate and cheer us! Let Christ be in us the hope of glory! But let every one that hath this hope in him purify himself even as he is pure!



## IX.

### Evil Spirits.

“The last state of that man is worse than the first.”—LUKE xi. 26.

SOME of the most remarkable inventions and discoveries by which the present age has been distinguished, are of such a nature as to realize ideas which were once regarded as peculiarly visionary and absurd. The steam-engine, the daguerreotype, and the electric telegraph, are all of this description. To our fathers, these results would not only have appeared improbable or impossible, but as belonging to that class of impossibilities which most resemble mere imaginative fictions. That man should be conveyed upon his journey by the vapour of boiling water; that the sun should be constrained to do the painter's work, and that words should be communicated instantaneously to any distance by a wire, are facts which, if predicted a few centuries ago, would not merely have been disbelieved as philosophically false, but laughed at as fabulous inventions, or the dreams of a disordered fancy. And yet these realized impossibilities are now so familiar to our everyday experience, that we scarcely think it necessary to distinguish between them and the most ordinary processes of nature and of art, to which the world has been accustomed for a course of ages. The power of steam, however highly valued, is now seldom thought of as more wonderful than that of water, wind, or animal strength. The instantaneous operation of the light in delineating forms, seems scarcely more surprising than the tedious process of the chisel; and an instantaneous message from the ends of the earth may one day seem as natural and commonplace an incident as oral communication with our nearest neighbours.

The use which I would make of this extraordinary change from a contemptuous incredulity to a faith so unhesitating as even to exclude surprise, is to illustrate the position that a corresponding revolution may perhaps take place in morals and religion; that the time may be at hand when some of those religious doctrines, which are now rejected by the mass of men, not merely as unscriptural or unphilosophical, but as fanciful and visionary, shall begin to take their place among realities too certain and familiar to be even wondered at as something strange. If such a revolution of opinion and of feeling should indeed take place, there is no subject with respect to which we could expect its effects to be more striking than the subject of evil spirits; their existence and their influence on human conduct and condition. The predominant feeling with which these are now regarded, even by multitudes who hear the gospel, and profess to be believers in the Bible, is a feeling of tolerant contempt or compassionate indulgence, such as we all entertain with respect to navigation through the air, or the schemes of universal language, and such as our fathers entertained with respect to those familiar facts of our experience already mentioned. If to this suggestion of a like change in men's feelings and associations with respect to demoniacal agency, it should be objected that religious truth affords no room for new discovery, being already fully made known in a complete and authoritative revelation, it may be replied that this is true of everything essential to salvation or even to the full development of Christian character, but not of all things partially disclosed in Scripture. As the intimations which we find there of the origin and structure of the universe do not preclude physical investigation and discovery as useless, or forbid them as unlawful, because there are only incidental and subordinate subjects of divine revelation; so the knowledge, or at least the faith, of men as to the fearful doctrine of a devil and his angels, may, for the same reason, be regarded as susceptible of vast increase. At all events, the very possibility of such a change should lead us to receive with anything but levity or supercilious indifference, the faint but solemn intimations of the Bible upon this mysterious subject. There is something sublime in the reserve with which it is thus treated. The views presented are mere glimpses rendered neces-

sary by the context. Sometimes the light is allowed to rest longer on the object than at other times, as in the history of Job's temptations. Even there, however, the unusual distinctness of the view afforded, is counterbalanced by the doubt which overhangs the question whether the statement is literal or figurative, poetical or historical. Between the two Testaments there is a great difference of clearness and minuteness in the statements on this subject. Even in those of the New Testament, however, there is still the same appearance of reserve, the same entire absence of a disposition to indulge mere curiosity, by limiting the statement to such facts as seem required for some specific purpose. To the attentive reader there will everywhere be visible a marked peculiarity of tone and manner in the treatment of these matters which is well adapted and no doubt designed to keep the reader in perpetual recollection of the awful nature of the things referred to, and of the fact that their complete development is yet to come. Some have inferred from this reserve, that expressions so obscure could not have been intended to convey important matters of belief, and that they ought, therefore, to be looked upon as strong Oriental tropes or mere poetical embellishments. This may seem plausible enough when looked at in the general ; but it is not susceptible of a continued and consistent application in detail. The further we pursue it, the more clearly shall we see what may be mentioned as a second characteristic of the teachings of the Bible on the subject.

It is this, that while the revelation is reserved and partial, it is so made as to convey an irresistible impression of the literal reality of that which is revealed. Whatever different conclusion might be drawn from the language or the spirit of particular passages, it is impossible to view them all in a connected series without a strong conviction that these imperfect and obscure disclosures of an unseen world of evil spirits were intended to be strictly understood ; that the Bible does distinctly teach the agency of such a spirit in the great original apostasy and fall of our first parents, and his continued influence on fallen man, an influence which, although it exists at all times, was permitted while our Saviour was on earth, to manifest itself with extraordinary violence and clearness, in the form of demoniacal possessions, which affected

both the minds and bodies of the victims, and afforded the subjects and occasions of some of Christ's most signal miracles, designed not merely to relieve the sufferer, nor merely to display his superhuman power, but to signalize his triumph, as the seed of the woman, over the adverse party represented in the first promise of a Saviour, as the seed of the serpent, whose last desperate struggles, not for existence, but for victory, were witnessed in those fearful cases of disease and madness which the gospel narrative ascribes expressly to the personal agency of demons, the history of whose dispossession and expulsion is so prominent a feature in the life of Christ.

There are here two errors to be avoided, that of denying the reality of these possessions, and that of supposing that the influence of evil spirits upon men was restricted to the time of our Lord's personal presence upon earth. It existed before. It continues still. Its nature and extent are undefinable at present and by us. We only know that it is not a coercive power, destroying personal responsibility, but a moral influence extending to the thoughts and dispositions. The true view of the matter seems to be, that from the time of Eve's temptation to the present hour a mysterious connection has existed between fallen man and fallen angels, the latter acting as the tempters and seducers of the former, the influence exerted being mental and insensible, or, so far as it is corporeal, inscrutable by us ; but that at the time of Christ's appearance, the physical effects were suffered to display themselves in an extraordinary manner, for the purpose of manifesting his superiority to the powers of darkness, and showing forth his glory as the conqueror of the conqueror of mankind. If he were now to re-appear, the same effect might be again produced. The latent adversary might be forced to show himself, and manifest at once his fear and hatred, not only by the paroxysms of his victim, by his unearthly shrieks, and spasms, and foaming at the mouth, but by the repetition of that cry, so often heard of old, "What have I to do with thee, thou holy One of God ; art thou come to torment me before the time ?" Or, if the veil which hides the spiritual world could now be lifted even for a moment, we might stand aghast to see how large a portion of the moral history of sinners is determined by satanic influence ; not such as

to extenuate the sinner's guilt, but rather to aggravate it by disclosing that his sins are committed in obedience to the dictates of such a master, and in compliance with the suggestions of such a counsellor. The drunkard and the libertine, and every other class of sinners, might be then seen attended by their evil genius, smoothing the way to ruin and averting every better influence. The moral changes now experienced, might be then seen to have more than an ideal connection with the presence and absence of these hellish visitants. The apparent reformation of the sinner might then be found to coincide with their departure, and his relapse with their return. Yes, and in many cases the experience of such might be found to correspond, not merely in a figure, but in literal truth, with the fearful picture set before us in the text. By means of a vision supernaturally strengthened, we might actually see the evil spirit going out of this man and that man, now regarded as mere ordinary cases of reformation or conversion, and then returning with seven others worse than himself, so that the last state of that man is worse than the first.

There is something fearful in the thought that such a process may be literally going on among us and around us; that from one and another of these very hearts the evil spirit may have recently departed, and may be wandering in desert places, seeking rest and finding none, until, despairing of another habitation, he shall come back to his old house and find it swept and garnished, rendered more desirable by partial and temporary reformation, and taking with him seven others, he may even now be knocking for admission, and woe to him who opens, for the last state of that man is worse than the first.

But even granting what to some may seem too clear to be denied, that there is no such process literally going on, and that our Saviour's words contain a mere comparison drawn from a real or ideal case of demoniacal possession, and intended to illustrate a familiar fact in morals, that relapses into sin are always dangerous, and often fatal; we may still gather very much the same instruction from the parable as if it were a literal description. Whatever horrors the imagination may associate with the personal invasion and inhabitation of an evil spirit, is it really more dreadful, to the eye of reason and awakened conscience, than the constant

presence of an evil principle, not as a mere visitant, but as a part of the man himself? Is it not this, after all, which makes the other seem so terrible? The coming and going of good angels has no such effect on the imagination; nor would that of neutral spirits, neither good nor evil. Apart from their moral effects, their presence or absence is a matter of indifference. And if the effects are wrought, it matters little whether they are literally brought about, in whole or in part, by the influence of demons, or only metaphorically so described. It matters little whether our Saviour meant to represent the fluctuations of man's spiritual state as actually caused by the departure and return of these invisible seducers, or only to describe their fearful import and result by mysterious figures borrowed from the world of spirits.

The primary application of the words, as made by Christ himself, was to his own contemporaries—the Jewish nation—who for ages had been separated from the Gentiles; and from whom the demon of idolatry had been cast out at the Babylonish exile; but who now, in their malignant persecution and rejection of their born Messiah, seemed to be repossessed by devils far more numerous and spiteful than those by which they had been actuated in the worst days of their earlier history, or even those which they believed themselves to be the gods of the heathen. Of such a people—so peculiarly distinguished, and yet so unfaithful, who had proved untrue to a vocation so extraordinary; and, while boasting of their vast superiority to the heathen, had outdone the heathen themselves in crime, and were yet to sink as far below them in punishment—of such a people it might well be said, that their last state was worse than their first.

The same thing is no less true of other communities, distinguished by extraordinary providential favours, and by flagrant abuse of their advantages. If we could watch the tide of national prosperity, in such a case, until it ebbed, it would require no great stretch of imagination to perceive the evil spirit, who had seemed to forsake a people so enlightened and so highly favoured, coming back under the cloak of the returning darkness, from his wandering in the desert, not alone, but followed by a shadowy train, overleaping the defences which appeared impregnable to human foes, or mysteriously gliding through the very crevices of



fast-barred doors, and unexpectedly appearing in their ancient haunts, which all the intervening glory and prosperity have only seemed to sweep and garnish for its repossession by its ancient master and his new confederates, under whose united usurpation and oppression the last state of that race, or society, or nation, must be worse than the first.

But it is not merely to the rise and fall of whole communities that these terrific images were meant to be applied. The same law of reaction and relapse controls the personal experience of the individual. This is, indeed, its most instructive and affecting application. The vicissitudes of nations, or of other aggregate bodies, however imposing to the eye of the spectator, and however sweeping in their ultimate effects, do not, and cannot so excite our sympathies as those which take place in a single soul, and by which the experience of communities and nations, after all, must be determined. It is not as the invaders of a country or besiegers of a city, that the evil spirit, with his sevenfold re-inforcement, rises up before the mind's eye in terrific grandeur. It is when we see him knocking at the solitary door from which he was once driven in disgrace and anguish. The scene, though an impressive one, is easily called up. A lonely dwelling on the margin of a wilderness, cheerfully lighted as the night approaches, carefully swept and garnished, and apparently the home of plenty, peace, and comfort. The winds that sweep across the desert pass it by unheeded. But, as the darkness thickens, something more than wind approaches from that quarter. What are the shadowy forms that seem to come forth from the dry places of the wilderness, and stealthily draw near the dwelling? One of the number guides the rest, and now they reach the threshold. Hark! he knocks; but only to assure himself that there is no resistance. Through the opened door we catch a glimpse of the interior, swept and garnished—swept and garnished; but for whose use?—its rightful owner? Alas! no; for he is absent; and already has that happy home begun to ring with fiendish laughter, and to glare with hellish flames; and, if the weal or woe of any man be centred in it, the last state of that man is worse than the first.

Do you look upon this as a mere fancy scene? Alas! my hearers, just such fancy scenes are passing every day within you

or around you, rendered only more terrific by the absence of all sensible indications, just as we shrink with a peculiar dread from unseen dangers if considered real, and are less affected by the destruction that wastes at noon-day, than by the pestilence that walks in darkness. Come with me and let me show you one or two examples of familiar spiritual changes which, if not the work of evil spirits, may at least be aptly represented by the images presented in the text and context. To the eye of memory or imagination there rises up the form of one who was the slave of a particular iniquity, which gave complexion to his character and life. It was perhaps an open and notorious vice, which directly lowered him in public estimation. Or it may have been a secret and insidious habit, long successfully concealed or never generally known. But its effects were seen. Even those who were strangers to his habits could perceive that there was something wrong, and they suspected and distrusted him. He felt it, and in desperation waxed worse and worse. But in the course of Providence a change takes place. Without any real change of principle or heart, he finds that his besetting sin is ruining his health, his reputation, or his fortune. Strange as the power of temptation, appetite, and habit is, some form of selfishness is stranger still. The man reforms. The change is recognised at once. He is another man. After the first painful acts of self-denial, the change appears delightful to himself. He seems once more to walk erect. A new direction has been given to his hopes and his desires, and, like Saul, he rejoices that the evil spirit has departed from him. At first he is afraid of its return, and keeps strict watch against the inroads of the enemy. By degrees he grows secure, and his vigils are relaxed. The temptation presents itself in some form, so contemptible and little to be feared, that he would blush not to encounter it. He does encounter it. He fights it. He appears to triumph for a moment, but is ultimately overcome. The next victory is easier. The next is easier still. He tries to recall the feelings which preceded and produced his reformation; but the spell is over. He knows that they have once proved ineffectual to save him, and he trusts in them no longer. Even the checks which once controlled him in his former course of sin are now relaxed; he is tired of opposition, and seeks refuge from his self-contempt in desperate indulgence.

Do you believe a change like this to be unusual in real life, or too unimportant to be fairly represented by our Saviour's fearful image of the dispossessed and discontented demon coming back to the emancipated soul, and re-asserting his dominion, till "the last state of that man is worse than the first?"

Another man passes through the very same process of reformation, but with different results. His watch against the inroads of his once besetting sin is still maintained. His jealousy and dread of it continue unabated. The appetite seems to sicken and to die. He is indeed a new man as to that one sin, and rejoices with good reason that the fiend has left him. As the habit of forbearance gathers strength, he learns to trust in his own power of resistance. He naturally measures his morality by that sin which once so easily beset him. Freedom from that sin is to him a state of purity, and he flatters himself that he is daily growing better. But, alas! in his anxiety to bar one door against the enemy, he has left the rest all open. A successful breach is made in his defences by an unexpected foe; perhaps by one whom he had harboured and regarded as a friend. Before he is aware he finds himself a new man in another sense. The evil spirit has returned, but in a different shape, and taking unopposed possession, is again his master. The reformed drunkard has become a gamester; the reformed prodigal a miser; the reformed cheat a voluptuary. Such conversions are by no means rare—conversion wrought without the troublesome appliances of prayer, or preaching, or the Holy Spirit. In all such cases the dominion of the new vice will probably be stronger than the dominion of the old one. The reaction and relapse from a state of self-denial is attended by an impetus which makes itself to be perceived. The man, as it were, makes amends to himself for giving up his former sin by larger measures of indulgence in the new one. The limits which impeded his indulgence in the one are perhaps inapplicable to the other; and from one or the other of these causes, or from both, "the last state of that man is worse than the first."

I have said that in this case the anxiety to shut one door leaves the others open. Hence it often happens that the soul is invaded, not by one new spirit, but by many. Imagining that abstinence from one sin is morality, the man of course falls into others; and

the conquest of the citadel is frequently effected by the *combined* force of the enemy. If you ask the evil spirit which at first has possession, What is thy name? you may receive for answer, Drunkenness, or Avarice, or Lust. But ask the same after the relapse, and the response must be, My name is Legion. Have you not seen in real life this terrible exchange of one besetting sin for several? Have you not known men, who once seemed vulnerable only at a single point, begin to appear vulnerable, as it were, at all points, perhaps with the exception of the one first mentioned? Now, when this is the case, besides the power exerted by each appetite and passion on the soul distinctly, there is a debasing and debilitating influence arising from the conflict which exists between them. Let the reformed libertine become at once ambitious, avaricious, and revengeful, and let these hungry serpents gnaw his soul, and it will soon be seen by others, if not felt by the miserable victim, that the evil spirit which had left him for a season has returned with seven others worse than himself; and as we see them in imagination enter the dwelling swept and garnished for their use, we may read, inscribed above the portal that shuts after them, "The last state of that man is worse than the first."

Let us now leave the regions of gross vice, with the seeming reformations, and their terrible conversions from one sin to another, or from one to many, and breathe for a while the atmosphere of decent morals, under the influence of Christian institutions. Let me show you one who never was the slave of any vice, and whose character has never been subjected to suspicion. Such are always to be found among those who have enjoyed a religious education and the means of grace. Yet, so long as these advantages are unattended by a change of heart, the evil spirit still maintains possession. Methinks I see one who has long held a high place in the public estimation as a moral and conscientious person, but whose views are bounded by the sensible horizon, who sees nothing serious in religion, or deserving of profound regard. All is sunshine. Even death, while distant, has no horrors, and the world beyond is blank. The past, the present, and the future are alike themes of jest and laughter. But the scene is changed. A sudden shadow falls across the countenance and heart. The laughter becomes grave. He indulges for the first time in serious

reflection. Without knowing whence his change of feeling comes, he yields to it, and it increases. The realities of life are seen in a new aspect. What mere trifles seem momentous! Sin is no longer mocked at, and the grave looks dull and dreary. The question of salvation, and the necessary means to it, begins to be considered; and the world begins to see that he who once was so light-hearted has become, as they correctly term it, serious. The duration of this state of mind is indefinitely variable. Most men experience it for moments or for hours, many for days or weeks, and some for months, or even years. In many cases it becomes habitual—the feelings are adjusted to it; it proceeds no further, and is equivalent to a simple change of temperament. Nay, in some cases, while the appearance lasts, the feeling itself wears away. The shadows cast by some mysterious object on the soul are gradually mitigated and reduced in depth, until the sun breaks through the intervening obstacle, and broad daylight returns. The sensation of this change is naturally pleasant. It is welcomed, it is cherished, till the ancient habits of the mind are re-instated in their full dominion. Even supposing that the change is unaccompanied by any moral renovation, and is merely an alternation or vicissitude of gaiety and sadness, the return to the former state is not precisely what continuance in that state would have been. There is now a sensitive shrinking from all gloomy thoughts, a dread of solitude, an instinctive shunning of the ordinary means by which serious reflection is produced. In itself this state may be a pleasing one; but, with respect to its effects, it is worse than the first.

But some go further. Having passed through the change which I have just described—the change from levity to serious reflection—they reach a new stage of experience. Sin, which was heretofore a mere abstraction, or at most the name of certain gross enormities, is seen in its true nature. The law of God is seen to be what it is. The conscience is awakened to a sense of guilt, a dread of wrath, and a consciousness of deserving it. Every act is now seen to have a moral quality. The man grows scrupulous. He who was once bold to commit known sin, is now afraid to perform even innocent actions. The burden of unexpiated guilt becomes oppressive—nay, intolerable. An undefined

anxiety torments him. He feels that some great crisis is approaching. Earthly pleasures grow insipid. The cares of life are child's play. He becomes indifferent to life or death, except in reference to the great absorbing question of salvation or perdition. The intensity with which he seeks relief exhausts him. He begins to grow languid. His alarm subsides into a stupid desperation. As this new sensation creeps upon him, he is conscious of relief from the poignant anguish of his former state. The soothing apathy is cherished. Strong emotion is excluded. Sin seems no longer so repulsive as it once did. Words begin to have their ancient meanings and to awaken only old associations. One strong impression is effaced after another. Conscience slumbers. Hope revives. The noise of the world again rings in the ears. The dream is past, the spell is broken, and the once convicted sinner is himself again. He has recovered his reason, his false friends assure him; for they see not that the spirit of delusion which had left him for a season has returned, and found his habitation swept and garnished, and shall dwell therein for ever. Ah, sirs! whatever may have been the first condition of the man who has passed through all these changes, there is little risk of error or exaggeration in saying that "the last state of that man is worse than the first."

But the evil spirit does not measure the duration of his absence by any settled rule. He may return before the truth has made the least impression. He may wait until a serious state of mind has been induced, but come back before the soul has been convinced of sin. Or he may stay until a lively sense of guilt and danger has been wrought upon the mind, whether the views entertained be false or true; and the anguish of distress having reached its extreme point, instead of gradually sinking into cold insensibility, is suddenly succeeded by its opposite—delight, joy, happy wonder. At this most critical and interesting juncture, when the soul seems ready to embrace and rest upon the truth of God, the enemy returns, and substitutes a false hope for the true one; he encourages the false joy of a spurious conversion. In the rapture of the moment, all suspicion and all vigilance appear to be precluded, and the soul feeds upon its apples of Sodom till they turn to ashes. Then succeeds misgiving, unbelief, displeasure, shame, despondency, temptation, a new thirst for sinful pleasure,

weak resistance to the enemy, an easy conquest, stronger chains, a deeper dungeon, and eternal bondage. He who once had his periodical returns of sensibility, and his convulsive efforts to be free, now lies passive, without moving hand or foot. But out of the deep dungeon where he thus lies motionless, an unearthly voice may be heard proclaiming, with a fiendish satisfaction, that "the last state of that man is worse than the first."

Even this, however, does not seem to be the furthest length to which the soul, forsaken by the evil spirit, may be suffered to proceed. The man from being gay, may not only become serious, and from being serious, convinced of guilt and danger, and desirous of salvation, and from this state pass into a joyful sense of safety; but he may long remain there, and without suspecting where his error lies, may openly acknowledge his experience and his hopes, and pass the bound which divides professing Christians from the world. Methinks I see one who has thus been forsaken by the evil spirit, not only brought into the Church, but made conspicuous in it, set in its high places, drunk with its flatteries; but in the hour of his intoxicating triumph, as he lies unarmed and unprotected in imaginary safety, the tramp of armed men is heard without, the sacred precincts of the Church itself are suddenly invaded, his old master is upon him—has returned to his old home—he smiles to see it swept and garnished for his use. He takes possession with his fellows, never more to be cast out. Even such are not beyond the reach of divine mercy, but it is not ordinarily extended to them, as appears from the images by which the state of such is represented in the text. The oil is spent and the lamp extinct. The axe is laid at the root of the tree. Its fruit is withered, nay, it is without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots. Twice dead!—oh, fearful reflection; dead by nature—then apparently alive—and now dead by relapse and by apostasy. Twice dead and plucked up by the roots. Surely such a catastrophe is terrible enough to be the work of one, or even many devils, or whatever we may think as to the literal agency in bringing it about, it is terrible enough to be described by the figure which our Lord here uses, and emphatically summed up in those fearful words, "The last state of that man is worse than the first."

There is but one more view that I can take or give you of this

painful subject. Looking back to the nonentity from which we all have sprung, and on to the eternity which awaits us all ; tracing the downward progress of the lost from bad to worse, from worse to worst, marking the aggravated guilt of each relapse into iniquity, after a seeming reformation and conversion, and remembering by whom and of whom it was said, "It were better for that man if he had never been born," we may take our stand between the gulf of non-existence and the gulf of damnation, and comparing the negative horrors of the one with the positive horrors of the other, may exclaim as we see the sinner pass through so short an interval from nothing into hell, "The last state of that man is worse than the first !"

If what I have been telling you is true, true to nature, Scripture, and experience, there is one application or improvement of the truth, which ought to be self-evident. I mean its application to the young, to the young of every class, and character, and station, but especially to such as are peculiarly environed by temptation, and yet prone to imagine, as a vast proportion of the young do really imagine, that the wisest course is to secure the pleasures of the passing moment, and reserve repentance for a distant future, thus contriving by what seems to be a master-stroke of policy, to serve God and Mammon in succession.

Instead of arguing against this resolution as irrational and sinful, let me hold up before you the conclusion to which reason, Scripture, and experience, with a fearful unanimity, bear witness that the only spiritual safety is in present and immediate action ; that a purpose or a promise to repent hereafter, is among the most successful arts by which the evil spirit drowns his victims in the deadly sleep of false security ; that previous indulgence in a life of sin, so far from making reformation easy, is almost sure to make it utterly impossible. You who are, even at this moment on the verge of the appalling precipice beneath which millions have been dashed to pieces, stop, if it be but for a moment, and consider. The comparative innocence of childhood, the restraints of a religious education, the very resolutions you are forming for the future, may all be looked upon as indications that the evil spirit to whom you are by nature a hereditary slave, has for the time relaxed his hold upon you ; his chain, though still unbroken, may



be lengthened, but beware how you imagine that without divine grace you can ever break it. It may be that the unclean spirit has but left you for a time, and is even now wandering through dry places, seeking rest and finding none—roaming in search of a repose which is impossible, and gaining in malignity and craft at every moment—mustering new strength of purpose, virulence of hatred, and capacity of torment and corruption, to accelerate your fall, embitter your remorse, and deepen your damnation. At every access of temptation from without, and every movement of corruption from within, imagine that you hear the foul fiend knocking for admission ; and distrusting the strength of your defences, fly to Christ for aid. Without it you are lost. Without it your best efforts, in your own strength, are unavailing.



## X.

### The Doxologies of Scripture.

“To God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen.”—  
ROM. xvi. 27.

AMONG the peculiar features of the sacred writings are its numerous benedictions and doxologies. The former are expressions of devout desire that man may be blessed of God ; the latter, that God may be honoured of man. They are the strongest verbal expressions of that love to God and love to man, which are together the fulfilling of the law. Doxologies are frequent in both Testaments, benedictions chiefly in the New, because so large a part of it is in the epistolary form, affording frequent opportunities for the expression of benevolent wishes. A solemn benediction, however, formed a part of the solemnities of public worship under the old economy. The form prescribed is still on record in the sixth chapter of Numbers (ver. 22), “The Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto Aaron, and unto his sons, saying, On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them, The Lord bless thee, and keep thee : the Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee : the Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.”

The use of the doxology in public worship is apparent from the inspired liturgy of the ancient Church, the Book of Psalms. This book has long been divided into five large portions, the close of each being indicated by a doxology. Thus the 41st Psalm ends with these words : “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting. Amen and amen.” The 72d Psalm : “Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things ; and blessed be his glorious name for ever, and let the whole earth be filled with his glory. Amen and amen.” The

89th: "Blessed be the Lord for evermore. Amen and amen." The 106th: "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting: and let all the people say, Amen. Praise ye the Lord!" The 150th: "Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord. Praise ye the Lord!" Whether this five-fold division of the Psalter is of ancient date, and these doxologies were originally intended to mark the conclusion of the several parts; or whether the division was itself suggested to the rabbins, from whom we have received it, by the fortuitous recurrence of these formulas at tolerably regular intervals, may be disputed; but, in either case, the familiar use of the doxology in worship by the ancient saints is evident.

But in the New Testament there is this peculiar circumstance, that the doxologies, though still more numerous than in the Old, occur in such connections, and, as already hinted, in such kinds of composition as to be not merely formulas for common use, but spontaneous ebullitions of devout affection. As such, they show more clearly than any other form of speech could, the habitual bent of the affections on the part of the inspired writers, the favourite subject of their thoughts, the points to which their minds instinctively reverted, not only as the customary theme of usual meditation, but as the great object of desire and hope. As they never forgot, in care for self, the interest of others, so they never forgot, in care for others, that God was to be honoured; that of him, and through him, and to him, are all things—that to him must be glory for ever.

Of the twenty-one epistles contained in the New Testament, seventeen begin with a solemn benediction, and sixteen close with one. Two others close with a doxology, instead of a benediction, while one concludes and two begin with a benediction and doxology together; and another substitutes a malediction for the latter. But it is not merely in these solemn openings and closings of the canonical epistles that the doxology occurs. It is sometimes interposed between the links of a concatenated argument, or in the midst of a detailed description. This is especially the case when something has been said which seems to savour of irreverence towards God, in order to express the writer's protestation against any such construction of his language, or to disavow his concurrence

in such language used by others, or his approbation of their wicked conduct. Thus, in the first chapter (ver. 25) of this epistle Paul describes the heathen as having "changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen." And again, in the eleventh chapter, after indignantly repelling the suggestion that man can add anything to God, and argumentatively showing its absurdity, he winds up his argument by an adoring exclamation, a triumphant interrogation, and a devout doxology. "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord, or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed to him again? For of him, and through him, and to him are all things, to whom be glory for ever. Amen." It is by these apparently misplaced ascriptions of all honour to God, that is, occurring where the ordinary usages of composition lead us to expect them least—it is by these that the habitual bent of the apostle's thoughts and feelings is most clearly manifested. Such ejaculations, in the midst of ordinary speech, may indeed be the mere effect of sanctimonious habit, and have often been so; but where inspiration sets the seal of authenticity on all the emotions and desires expressed, there could not be a more unerring symptom of a heart overflowing with devout affections.

There are two things included in a doxology—the expression of a wish, and the performance of a duty. The writer gives utterance to his desire that God may be glorified, and at the same time actually glorifies him, and is the occasion of his being glorified by all who read or hear his words with understanding and with cordial acquiescence in the sentiment expressed; for God himself has said, "Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me." By these interruptions of their doctrinal discussions, therefore, the inspired writers have not only manifested their own dispositions, and actually glorified God themselves, but led to the performance of the same act by innumerable readers and hearers. There is something truly ennobling and exciting in the Christian doctrine, that although God is infinitely blessed in himself, and man incapable of adding to his essential excellence, there is yet a sense in which he may be

glorified or rendered glorious even by the humblest of his creatures. To render God thus glorious by manifesting and according his perfections is the very end of our existence, the pursuit of which sets before us a boundless field of exertion and enjoyment. The prominence given to this motive in the Christian system is one of the marks by which it is most clearly distinguished from all others, and, at the same time, of the strongest proofs of its divinity.

The constituent parts of a Christian doxology have already been described. As another essential feature may be mentioned that they are always and exclusively addressed to God. The jealousy of the inspired writer as to this point is remarkable. Their doxologies not only include the name of God as their great subject, but they always occur in connections where he has already been the subject of discourse. To him the glory is ascribed, to the exclusion of false gods and of men, but especially of self. The spirit of these doxologies is everywhere the same—"Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to thy name give glory." The very design of the doxologies of Scripture is to turn away the thoughts from man to God, from the creature to "the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen." When they occur at the beginning of a passage or a book, they seem to remind the reader that, in order to go right, he must set out from God. When at the close, they teach him to remember the great end of his existence. When they interrupt the tenor of discourse, they answer the salutary purpose of checking the tendency to lose sight of God in the contemplation of other objects. Thus, according to their relative positions, they continually teach us or remind us that "of him, and to him, and through him are all things, to whom be glory for ever. Amen." It is not, therefore, a mere incidental circumstance, but an essential feature of the scriptural doxologies that they have reference to God and God alone.

The only seeming exception to this general statement really confirms it. There are doxologies to Jesus Christ, but as a divine person. It is because he is God that glory is ascribed to him. In the present instance, there is a singular ambiguity of construction in the original. The literal translation of the words is this: "To the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory

for ever." In the common version the ambiguity is removed by the omission of the relative. The true construction may be this: "Glory be to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory likewise for ever. Amen." As it stands, however, it seems doubtful whether Christ is expressly mentioned merely as a means or also as an end, whether merely as an instrument of glorifying God, or also as an object to be glorified himself. This very dubiety of phrase, however, seems to justify us in embracing both ideas in our explication of the terms. It is highly probable, indeed, as already suggested, that both were designed to be expressed; that Christ was meant to be exhibited, at one view, as, in some sense, the medium by which God is or may be glorified; and, as himself, entitled to that glory which belongs to God; and the anomalous construction may have arisen, not from inadvertence or excited feeling, but from a desire to suggest these two ideas simultaneously. The latter, it is true, might be considered doubtful if this were the only case in which he is the subject of a doxology. But this is far from being true. When Jude, in the close of his epistle, says, "To the only wise God, our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever, Amen," it may be plausibly alleged that he is speaking only of God in his character of Saviour or Deliverer, without express allusion to the incarnation, and that the cases, therefore, are not parallel. Even admitting this to be the fact, the same thing cannot be alleged of Paul's wish, that the God of peace would make the Hebrew Christians perfect in every good work to do his will, working in them that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen." Or, if it should be said that, even here, although Christ is the immediate antecedent, the God of Peace is the main subject of the sentence, and to him the doxology must be referred, there is still a case in which no such grammatical refinement will avail to make the reference to Christ uncertain. I mean the doxology which closes the second Epistle of Peter, where there is no double subject to confuse the sense or render the interpretation doubtful. The apostle closes with a simple exhortation to "grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen." This text is not only unambiguous itself, but

serves to throw light upon those which are more doubtful. If Christ, in this case, is the evident and only subject of the doxology, there is no longer any reason in explaining the one quoted from Hebrews, for overleaping the immediate antecedent; and, with respect to that in Jude, there is at least some ground for regarding "God our Saviour" as descriptive of the same blessed person. While it remains true, therefore, that the scriptural doxologies never have reference to any subject less than God, it is equally true that Jesus Christ is a partaker in these exclusive divine honours. We need feel no hesitation, therefore, in adopting such an explanation of the text as will exhibit Christ not only in the character of a revealer and a glorifier, but in that of a glorified being; not only of creature, but Creator; not only man, but God; God over all, blessed for ever.

There is another circumstance to be attended to in the doxologies of Scripture. Being ascriptions of glory to God exclusively of all mere creatures, they might seem to require nothing more than a bare mention of his name, or the most general description of his nature. And in some cases nothing more is given. But in others, the mind of the doxologist appears to have been fastened specially on some one aspect of the Divine character, some attribute, or group of attributes, as the foundation of his claim to universal and perpetual praise. Thus, in the case before us, while the text embraces the doxology itself, the two preceding verses contain the preamble, or explanatory preface, setting forth the grounds on which the doxology is made to rest. The first of these is the omnipotence of God, or rather the omnipotence of his grace; for the allusion is not merely to the creative and sustaining power of God, but to his infinite ability to perfect what he had begun in all believers—the new creation of a spiritual nature on the ruins of that righteousness which man had lost. "Now, to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, &c., to God only wise be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen." A more general, but equally emphatic, declaration of the same kind may be found in the third chapter of Ephesians, where the apostle, after expressing an importunate desire for the spiritual progress and perfection of the Christians whom he was addressing, adds: "Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above

all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us—unto Him be glory in the Church by Jesus Christ throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.”

Another attribute thus singled out to be the ground of a doxology, is wisdom, the intellectual omnipotence of God in working out his purposes by chosen means. In rational beings, this view of the divine perfections is peculiarly adapted to excite astonishment and admiration. The universal presence and activity of mind throughout the vast frame of nature and machinery of Providence, the triumph of that all-pervading mind over matter, over other minds, over apparent difficulties springing from the natural relations of one being to another; the wonderful results evolved from causes and by means apparently least fitted to produce them; the indisputable evidence contained in such facts of one harmonious design and one controlling power, through a series of events which, as they happened, seemed fortuitous and unconnected, independent of each other, and of any higher principle than this—this Divine wisdom is indeed an ample and satisfying reason for ascribing glory to the being who possesses it, not only as considered in himself, but as compared with others; not merely as wise, but as only wise, alone entitled to be so considered, since the wisdom of all other beings is not only infinitely less than his, but derived directly from him—the gift of his bounty, the creature of his power, a drop trickling from the ocean, a spark kindled at the sun. The only true wisdom upon earth is “wisdom that cometh from above.” The wisdom that sets itself in opposition to the wisdom of God, is earthly, sensual, and devilish—is folly in the lowest and worst sense. The admiration thus expressed in Scripture for God’s wisdom, is an admiration which implies contempt of all opposing claims—an admiration which belittles, nay, annihilates all other in comparison. God is not merely wise, but only wise; not merely wiser than all other gods—which would be saying nothing, since we know that an idol is nothing in the world,—not only wiser than the brutes, than man, than devils, than angels, but so far exalted above them, each individually, and all collectively, that when confronted with the aggregate intelligence of all ages and all worlds, HE ALONE IS WISE.

This sublime description of Jehovah as “the only wise God,” is



not peculiar to the text. It occurs not only in other places, but in other doxologies, as an appropriate and ample ground for the ascription of eternal praise. The same apostle, writing to Timothy, after speaking in the most affecting terms of his own character before conversion, and expressing his gratitude that he should have been honoured with permission to preach Christ, adds, in the manner which has been described already, as characteristic of his writings and his spirit: "Now, unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, THE ONLY WISE GOD, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen" (1 Tim. i. 17). And another apostle, in a doxology already quoted, connects an appeal to the power of God in his preamble with a reference to his wisdom in the doxology itself: "Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen."

We have seen that the doxologies of Scripture, though they sometimes speak of God in general terms merely, often specify some attribute as giving him a peculiar claim to the adoring admiration of his creatures. We have also seen that the attribute of *wisdom* is repeatedly thus singled out and rendered prominent. It may now be added that it is not merely the wisdom of God in general that is thus held up to view. There is a certain manifestation of his wisdom which is placed above all others—not the wisdom displayed in the creation of the universe or in its sustentation—not the wisdom displayed in the common dispensations of his providence, or even in those extraordinary methods which he sometimes uses to effect his purpose. These are all recognised and represented as becoming subjects of our praise and meditation. But none of them is set forth as the great, peculiar, and decisive evidence that God alone is wise. That evidence is sought in the system of redemption, in the means devised for the deliverance of man from the inevitable consequences of his own transgressions. And this selection is entirely justified, even at the bar of human reason, by several obvious considerations. The first of these is the magnitude of the end to be accomplished. The second is the difficulty of effecting it—a difficulty springing, not from fortuitous or outward circumstances, but from essential principles, from the

nature of sin, from the nature of God himself. To the extent of this difficulty, justice never can be done by our conceptions. Its existence may be recognised, its reality admitted, but its magnitude cannot be adequately measured. The hypothesis of infinite holiness and justice, as essential to God's nature, seems to render the pardon of sin, if once committed, and the salvation of the sinner, so impossible, that unassisted reason reels and staggers under the attempt to reconcile apparent contradictions. But this reconciliation God has effected; he has solved the problem; he has practically shown us how he can be just and yet justify the ungodly. Reason approves of this solution when presented, but could never have discovered it. No created skill or strength could have surmounted difficulties so appalling.

This, then, is a second reason for regarding the method of salvation as the greatest and most glorious display of divine wisdom. A third is the absolute success of the experiment, if such it may be called. Where the end is so important, and difficulties so great, a partial attainment of the end might be regarded as a great achievement. Failure, in some respect, in some degree, might be forgiven, for the sake of what is really accomplished. But when all is done that was attempted and when all that is done is completely done, the means being perfectly adapted to the end, and the magnitude of the difficulties fairly matched, nay, far surpassed, by that of the provision made to meet them, this is indeed a triumph of wisdom—such a triumph as created wisdom never could achieve—such a triumph as could only be achieved by Him who claims and is entitled to the glorious distinction of *THE ONLY WISE GOD*.

It is not surprising, therefore, that in those doxologies which make the divine wisdom their great subject, this pre-eminent display of it in the system of redemption, in the person and the cross of Jesus Christ, as the great centre of that system, should be brought distinctly into view. It is not surprising that in such connections the gospel should be represented as a stupendous revelation of God's wisdom, as disclosing what the wisdom of man could neither have invented nor discovered; that the doctrine of salvation should be called a mystery, a truth beyond the reach of unassisted reason, until made known by a special revelation; a demonstration, therefore, both of human folly and of divine wis-

dom, a proof of what man cannot do and what God can do. Thus, in writing to Timothy, when Paul breaks out into that grand doxology already quoted, "Now, unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever, Amen,"—it is immediately preceded, with the exception of a parenthetical allusion to the final cause of the apostle's own conversion, by that memorable summary of the gospel, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners." It was this appearance of the Son of God for such a purpose that presents itself to the apostle's mind as the masterstroke of wisdom, and affords a ground for the doxology that follows TO THE ONLY WISE GOD. And even where the name of Christ does not appear, as in the closing words of Jude's epistle, the same idea is suggested by the epithet connected with the name of God himself. It is not to God our Creator, our Preserver, or our Providential Benefactor; it is not to God our Sovereign, our Lawgiver, or our Judge, that supremacy in wisdom is directly ascribed, but "TO THE ONLY WISE GOD OUR SAVIOUR, be glory and honour, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen." The doxology which closes the third chapter of Ephesians, is merely the winding up of one long sentence coextensive with the chapter, in which the apostle repeatedly mentions the preaching of the gospel, and especially its open proclamation to the Gentiles, as the revelation of a mystery, concealed for ages from mankind in general, but made known by the Holy Ghost to prophets and apostles—a mystery which from the beginning of the world was hid in God—a mystery, that is, a truth which human wisdom could not have discovered, the disclosure of which, therefore, tends to illustrate and magnify the wisdom of God. Precisely the same reference to Christ and the gospel of salvation, as the masterpiece of wisdom no less than of mercy, may be found in the preamble to the text before us, where the ascription of glory to God is founded on his wisdom, and his wisdom argued from the manifestation, in the gospel, of a method of salvation which the human mind could never have discovered, and which is therefore called a mystery,—a secret brought to light by no exertion of mere reason, but by direct communication from above, from Him whose wisdom was alone sufficient to devise and to reveal it.

“Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith; to God only wise, be glory, through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen.”

From a comparison of all these passages, it is evident that while the sacred writers no doubt recognised the proofs of divine wisdom, furnished by the works of nature, and the movements of Providence, their minds were habitually fastened on the method of salvation taught in Scripture, as the grand decisive proof by which all others are surpassed and superseded. It was *through Christ*, not only as the brightness of God's glory and the image of his person, but as a Saviour, a propitiation set forth by God himself, a means devised and provided by him for the accomplishment of what appeared impossible; it was through Christ, considered in this light, that the lustre of God's wisdom shone with dazzling brightness upon Paul, and Jude, and Peter. Hence there is no absurdity in holding, as some have done, that the words “through Jesus Christ,” in the text, are to be construed not with “glory,” but with “the only wise God,” by which, in the Greek, they are immediately preceded. As if he had said: “To him, who in the person, work, and sufferings of his Son, has revealed himself to us as the only wise God, to him be glory for ever. Amen.” At the same time, the unusual collocation of the words, and the irregular construction of the sentence, seem to authorize, if not to require, that Jesus Christ himself should be included in the description of the object to which glory is ascribed. “To God only wise, made known as such by Jesus Christ, and to Jesus Christ himself as God, be glory for ever.” Nor is this the only sense which may be put upon the pregnant phrase *through Jesus Christ*. The simplest and most obvious, and indeed the only one expressed by the sentence in the common version is, that Christ is the medium through which the divine wisdom is and must be glorified. Not only does he share, by right of his divinity, in all the divine honours; not only, by his mediation and atoning passion, does he furnish the most luminous display of divine wisdom;—but as

head of the Church, and as the father of a spiritual seed, to whom that wisdom is, and ever will be, an object of adoring admiration, and as their ever-living and prevailing intercessor with the Father, he is the means, the instrument, the channel through which everlasting glory shall be given *to the only wise God*, who has established a Church, and caused the gospel to be preached for this very purpose, "to the intent that now, unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places, might be known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God; unto him be glory in the Church, by Jesus Christ, through all ages, world without end. Amen." (Eph. iii. 10, 21.)

To this doxology, as well as to the others which the word of God contains, the pious in all ages have been wont to say *Amen*. This ancient expression of assent to prayer and praise is, from its very nature, full of meaning. He who says *Amen* to the doxology before us, must be understood as giving the assent of his judgment to the propositions, that there is a God; that he is infinitely wise; that his wisdom has been specially displayed in the provision made for saving sinners, without the sacrifice of justice, through the incarnation and atonement of his Son—that mystery of godliness, the disclosure of which, by the Spirit, through the prophets, in the preaching of the gospel, is the most transcendent demonstration of God's wisdom ever given to his creatures; that the being thus proved to be the only wise God is deserving, in reason and in justice, of eternal praise; that of this honour, though exclusively divine, Jesus Christ is infinitely worthy to partake; and that it is only through him, and by virtue of his mediation, intercession, and spiritual oneness with his people, that their obligation to give glory to God can, in any sort or measure, be discharged. All this may be considered as involved in the doxology, as interpreted by the context and comparison with others. Let no one who refuses to acknowledge and embrace all this as true dare to re-echo the apostle's words; but whosoever does believe and hold these precious doctrines, let him say *Amen*.

This act, however, is expressive of far more than a mere intellectual assent to the righteousness and reasonableness of ascribing everlasting glory to the only wise God. It implies, moreover, an assent of will, nay, it expresses a desire that what reason, and

a sense of right thus recognise as due to God, should be actually given to him. This has already been described as entering essentially into the structure of a scriptural doxology. It is not the dry statement of an abstract truth. It is the language of emotion, of affection, of desire, of an earnest, an engrossing, a supreme desire, that God, to use the prophet's strong expression, may not be robbed by his ungrateful creatures. It is an actual rendering to God the things that are God's, by actually giving him the praise that is his due, not by constraint or grudgingly, not from a mere intellectual conviction, or through stress of conscience, but with hearty acquiescence, with affectionate delight, with joy, with triumph, with a sympathetic sense of personal interest, of individual participation in the glory thus ascribed and given to another, not because the giver accounts himself as anything in the comparison, but for a reason diametrically opposite; because he counts himself as nothing, out of God, out of Christ, and as being something only so far as he is united and attached to him, so that the more God is glorified, the more the humble worshipper is really exalted, as the drop, which by itself would have been lost, may rise to heaven in the heaving of the ocean. This is the secret of the only exaltation which to man is safe or even possible. God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble; they humble themselves under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt them in due time. Not only then to those who disbelieve the truths involved, is this doxology a riddle or a profanation, but to those who embrace the doctrines merely with the understanding, and with no such enlargement of the heart, and going out of the affections, as the great apostle evidently felt in writing it. Let all such hold their peace, and let only such as can thus enter into the full meaning of his language say *Amen*.

But there is more than this required to a full participation in the spirit of the passage. Not only is the mere admission of the truth that God is worthy to be glorified for ever insufficient, without a sincere willingness, or rather an importunate desire, that he may receive the glory which belongs to him. Even this is not enough. Such a belief and such a wish as have been just described, either presuppose or lead to the reception of the great truth that "the Lord has made all things for himself," that his

rational creatures, especially, have been created capable of serving and of glorifying him ; and for the very purpose of so doing, that they are consequently bound, not only to acknowledge his just claims, and to desire that they may be satisfied, but to spend and be spent, to do and to suffer, to live and to die, to live, and move, and have their being for this end ; not only passively, but actively, remembering it, hoping for it, longing for it, looking towards it, hastening towards it, making every thought, and word, and act, so far as possible, contribute to it. We who have not yet reached the height from which such views are possible, have reason to lament that we are still unprepared to give a full assent to Paul's doxology ; but if, through God's grace, any have obtained, not only passing glimpses, but a clear and steady view of the great end of their existence as revealed in Scripture, and have turned their faces thitherward for life, for ever, with a fixed and hearty resolution to forget what is behind, and reach forth to that which is before, with all the heart, and mind, and soul, and strength—let all such say *Amen*.

The word *for ever* I have not supplied. It is included in the terms of the doxology ; and as it is a word of vast and deep and awful import, it becomes us to consider it before we undertake to say *Amen* to the apostle ; for by so doing, in addition to all that has been said already, we acknowledge that God's glory is not only the great end to which we now look forward, but an end to which we must look forward through eternity—not only an object which ought now to fill, and animate, and rule the soul, with all its powers and affections, but an object which can never cease to do so. If we are still unwilling thus to take God as the portion of our souls, and to seek our happiness for ever in his glory, our assent to Paul's doxology is still imperfect, if not insincere ; but let him who knows already what it is to have made God his all in all for ever, say *Amen* and *Amen*. And as this absolute assent can be produced in us by no strength or wisdom of our own, let our hopes be founded upon nothing in ourselves, but on the encouragement which the apostle's benediction and doxology afford us : "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all." "And to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, to God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen."



## XI.

### Offered Mercy.

“Come, for all things are now ready.”—LUKE xiv. 17.

WE have here, as in many other passages of Scripture, a most precious invitation, and a reason for accepting it. An invitation—“Come;” a reason—“All things are now ready.” The first of these requires no explanation. In the spiritual sense or application of the parable from which the text is taken, “come” means, of course, come to the gospel feast, to the provision of God’s bounty, to the fountain, to the cross, to Christ himself. It is equivalent to saying, Be ye saved; and includes the exhortation to repent, believe, submit to the righteousness of God, and accept of the salvation that he offers. It is, therefore, the same call that is continually ringing in the ears of those who hear the gospel, and which needs not so much to be explained as to be enforced. For this very purpose it is added, because all things are now ready. To this reason for yielding to the call of mercy I invite your attention. “Come, for all things are now ready.” In the parable it obviously means that the precise time of enjoyment was now come—that the provision was complete, and the arrangements perfect. A little earlier might have been too early; a little later was too late for ever. Such a time there is, and must be, in all human invitations. Such a time there is in every invitation of the gospel. But between the cases there is this momentous difference. In the one it may be equally amiss to come too early or too late; in the other we need only fear to come too late. It is impossible to come too early, because the provision is already and completely made for those who will receive it, and needs not be constantly renewed, as in the other case. Oh, if our eyes could



be unsealed, or these surrounding mists dispelled, so as no longer to obstruct our view of the divine compassions, we might behold the banquet-hall of mercy rise before us "like an exhalation," with its flashing lights, its music and its odours,—making the outer darkness more profound by contrast, and the cold and hunger of the gazing crowd more keen and pinching. Before such displays of human splendour and festivity, the poor and wretched often stand in envious admiration. For to them that threshold is impassable. And even those who are allowed to feed there because full already, must await the appointed moment. But how different this feast of mercy. Those who do not enter will not hear the call or cannot see the bounties spread before them. If, when their eyes and ears are opened, they still linger, it is only for a moment, in the first feeling of incredulous surprise that this provision can be meant for them, and that they need no preparation or delay, but may partake of it at once. While they stand amazed at the sights and sounds so suddenly presented to their senses, as at something quite beyond their reach, their hopes, and almost their desires, the doors fly open, a fresh flood of light, new waves of melody, new gales of odours, stream forth upon them, and loud yet gentle voices cry to them—not merely to others, but to them,—Come and see; eat and drink, O beloved! "Come, for all things are now ready." And from age to age the call is still the same. As one generation sweeps another off the stage—some heeding, some despising, some not even hearing the benignant invitation—it is still repeated: "All things are now ready." Yes, at whatever moment the poor, sin-sick, starved, exhausted sinner first begins to feel his want, and turns his dim and haggard eyes towards that scene of splendour and festivity before unknown or madly disregarded—however untimely the appeal may seem—though the prayer be breathed at midnight, in the dark, from the beggar's hovel, the field of battle, or the dungeon, or the scaffold—the response is still the same: "Come, for all things are now ready."

The resort to this supply can never be too early; it should never be too late. It can never be too early; for the soul is never without consciousness of want—a restless craving for enjoyments better than the best it has experienced. It should never be too

late—as it is, alas ! too late for thousands—because all things are now ready ; and when all things are now ready, and the opportunity afforded of securing them but transient, it is self-destruction to refuse acceptance,—it is folly, it is madness, even to postpone it. Let us, then, consider the readiness of all things as a reason for coming to Christ now. And as the simplest way of doing this, let us consider what it is that hinders us from coming. I speak not to those who are still utterly insensible—unconscious of their danger, or unwilling to confess it—for with such it is impossible to reason, and they must be left to the fearful consolation of that solemn irony : “They that are whole need not a physician.” But to you who own yourself a sinner, and in need of mercy, and expect to find it one day in the Saviour, to you I put the question—and would pray you to put it yourselves—What prevents your coming now ? what invisible hand drags you back when you are almost on the threshold?—holds your eyes fast shut when you begin to see light ? stifles your very cries for mercy ? and chokes down the throbbings of your bursting heart—what is it ? No external force ; you act freely in refusing to come. What inward cause, then,—why do you not come ? what keeps you still away ? Alas ! I need not ask ; for in the way of every sinner who knows what it is to think, there always rises up one barrier which effectually stops his course till God removes it ; it is guilt—the paralyzing and benumbing sense of guilt. The very same thing that creates the necessity of coming, seems to render it impossible. God is a holy God, a just God, and a Sovereign. His law is broken ; we ourselves have broken it. He cannot but condemn us,—nay, we are condemned already. The conviction of this truth is like an iron yoke upon our necks, and chains around our limbs ; we feel the pressure, and we would be delivered,—but we cannot move. We cannot willingly appear before the presence of our enemy—our judge—our executioner. As long as this relation still subsists, or seems to do so, we will not, cannot, dare not come, whatever may be ready. Oh, my hearers, is there none among you before whom this conviction has shot up into a massive wall which you can neither scale nor penetrate, nor go round, and at the foot of which you are now lying, neither able to go further, nor yet willing to go back ? Would to God this might be the

experience of some who have not yet been brought so far, for they might then expect deliverance. All that you need is ready—even now ready. If you cannot look up, you can listen. What is that sound which comes forth from the darkness or the light inaccessible where God resides? Is it the muttering of distant thunder, or the premonition of a coming storm? It is indeed a voice like the voice of thunders,—sweet, yet solemn to the ear,—but it speaks of mercy, not of wrath; it is a voice like the voice of many waters, saying, Come and see! Look up! Above, beyond these barriers, see the throne and Him who sits upon it; the cloud in which he wraps himself is not charged with tempest,—it is radiant with light; his diadem is not vindictive lightning, but the peaceful rainbow. He desireth not the death of the sinner, but that all should turn and live. He permits, he commands, he entreats you to be saved,—the strongest possible expression of his willingness. Oh, my hearers, if you are deterred by a sense of alienation and estrangement from your God, or by a doubt of his benignity, his willingness to pardon and be reconciled,—if this is what deters you, come, oh, come without delay, for all things are now ready.

But, perhaps, your way is not yet open; your obstacles are not yet all removed. Whatever you may think of the benevolence of God, you cannot lose sight of his justice. However his compassion might consent, his holiness, his truth, his righteousness, still stop the way. He cannot lie. His threatenings must be executed. He cannot deny himself. “The soul that sinneth, it shall die.” The law is broken, and its awful penalty must be discharged. Whatever else is ready matters not while this vast debt remains unpaid. All these are certain and appalling truths. There is no danger of exaggerating their reality or fearful import. You can never gain relief from this discouragement by learning to extenuate the claims of the divine law, or the turpitude of sin, or the necessity of punishment, or the tremendous nature of the penalty annexed to all transgression, or your utter incapacity to evade it or to heal the vast breach of the violated law. You may tamper as you will with your understanding and your conscience, but the only fruit of such attempts, when most successful, is delusion or despair. The dream of self-deception must be followed

soon or late by a fearful waking; and however often or however long you may forget yourself in sleep, the awful truth will still rush back upon your waking thoughts, only rendered more intolerable by the brief oblivion which preceded. If the pressure of pecuniary debt can rob men of their sleep, embitter their enjoyments, mar their peace, make life a burden, drive them mad, and even arm them with the weapon of self-murder, so that cowards against others, become brave against themselves, and they who shrink from the sufferings of this life rashly venture on the next—if these are but familiar consequences of the agony produced by consciousness of mere pecuniary debt beyond the man's ability to pay, oh, what would be the issue if the vast account-books between us and God should be completely opened and made fully legible? by what arithmetic could we compute, or in what terms express the terrible result? It is impossible; and partly for the reason that it is impossible we shut our eyes and stop our ears, and turn away our thoughts from this confounding theme; and, even when we do attempt to scan it, and to plead the greatness of our debt as an excuse for not accepting Christ, it is not because we have, but because we have not, any adequate conception of that debt, which, if we saw it as it is, instead of filling our mouth with arguments against God, would strike us dumb, and strike us blind, and strike us dead before him. In this direction you are right in seeing no escape,—there is none; you are right in saying that this debt must be discharged,—it must; and that you cannot pay it, for you never, never can. If you are only partially and superficially convinced of this, you will remain where I now leave you, and continue to excuse yourself by pleading that your sins are inexcusable. But if you are really and thoroughly persuaded that you must and cannot pay this awful debt, the very darkness of your self-despair may give you light or serve to make it visible; at first a dim spark, then a faint gleam, then a glow, a flame, a blaze, and in the focus of that blaze you may behold, as the ancient persecutor saw, amidst the white heat of his own devouring furnace, a form like that of the Son of God standing erect beside the way which leads you to the throne of mercy. You must pass by him, or you cannot reach the footstool. Who is he that thus awaits you? his eye moist with pity, but his

features pallid, as one risen from the dead. And in his outstretched hand the eye of faith can discern something shining, something precious, something priceless; not the glare of gold or silver, or the sparkle of invaluable gems, but something wet with tears and stained with blood,—the blood still oozing from that stricken heart. It is the purchase of your life,—it is the ransom of your soul; it is the price which you could never pay,—which men and angels could not have paid for you—in default of which you had resigned yourself to perish. See, he holds it out; he presses it upon you; and the turning point is, can you reject it? If you can, oh, let your lips be sealed for ever from all mention of the penalty of God's law as deterring you from mercy; for, as you plunge into the gulf of self-destruction, the last sound from above that reaches you may be the dripping of that blood, one touch of which would have sufficed to cancel your vast debt for ever. Oh, if this alone is wanting to embolden your approach to God, I say again, my hearer, "Come, for all things are now ready!"

But now, perhaps, you feel another hindrance, one of which you took but little note before. Though God be ready to forgive you for the sake of Christ's atoning sacrifice, you find a hindrance in yourself, in your heart, in your very dispositions and affections. Besides being guilty, righteously condemned, justly exposed to punishment, unable to atone for your transgressions, you are polluted, your very nature is corrupt, averse from good, disposed to evil. How can you come into the presence of a holy God? How can you fail to be an object of abhorrence to him? How can you love what you detest, or find your happiness in that which is directly contradictory to all your nature? Here again the fact alleged is true and awful beyond your worst conceptions. There are depths, there are abysses of defilement which you need not undertake to fathom, into which you cannot even look without bewilderment and sickness of spirit. If God should lift the veil which hides them, and permit the light to shine directly on them, you would be unable to endure it. Oh, look away from that heart-rending spectacle. Here is another object to contemplate. Over against that blood-stained form which proffers ransom, what is this? A gushing spring, a flowing stream, a flood, a sea of purifying virtue. Plunge into it, and you are cleansed already.

You come up out of its waters changed, and yet the same. Coercion is no longer needed, for your very dispositions and desires are revolutionized. Old things are passed away; all things are become new—new without and new within, new heavens and a new earth, a clean heart and a right spirit; this is, indeed, a new creation, a new creature, a new birth, born again, born from above, born of God,—the washing of regeneration, the renewing of the Holy Ghost. Be not deterred, then, by the sense of what you are, any more than by the sense of what you cannot do, or what you have already done. The provision of God's mercy includes this as well as every other want. A new heart is as much his gift as expiation or forgiveness. Come, then, and receive what he vouchsafes to offer. Come without reserve, without delay, for all things are now ready.

But I hear you say you cannot come alone, you cannot struggle by yourself, you cannot brave alone the thunderings and lightnings of Mount Sinai, you cannot stand with Moses on the smoking and quaking summit,—you must mingle with the multitude below. You are not even willing to be saved alone. Having followed a multitude so long to do evil, you still feel the need of communion and example, of mutual incitement and restraint. And you shall have it. You shall have it in perfection if you will but come. "For ye are come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, to the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven." The Church of Christ stands open to receive you, to protect you, and to nourish you. Her institutions, her examples, her worship, her ordinances, her communion, all, all are ready for you. This is a want for which the grace that rescues you has specially provided. You are not asked to be saved alone, though that were surely better than to perish. You may bring as many with you as you will, and you will find many entered in before you. When we bid you *come*, you are invited to a feast, of which many, thanks be to God, are after all partakers, and though many that are bidden make excuse or even venture to make light of it, the giver of the banquet shall be still supplied with guests; for while the broad way that leadeth to destruction remains crowded with infatuated victims, another concourse is seen streaming from the bye-ways and the hedges to the table of the Lord, where they shall

sit down, clothed and in their right minds, washed and beautified, ennobled and refined, while many who appeared to be hereditary children of the kingdom, are excluded or exclude themselves from all participation in the banquet. Of the company thus gathered and transformed you are to form a part. The doors stand open, open to receive you; and yet there is room. If all obstructions have now vanished from without and from within, if atonement, and forgiveness, and renewal are accessible, and if the Church is ready to receive you into its communion of saints, what remaining pretext for delay can be imagined? "Come, for all things are now ready."

Do you still object that these are only temporary institutions? that they do not reach as far as your necessities and fears? Do you ask, When these fail, whither shall I go, and who shall then receive me unto everlasting habitations? I still reply, but in a higher sense, that ye are come unto Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, and to the spirits of the just made perfect. Heaven is ready to receive you, and in that assurance all is comprehended. Whatever local and material associations you may have with heaven, they are but the veil, the hull, the casket. We use heaven to denote a state, in which place other circumstances may be comprehended, but oh, how much more! All goodness and all blessedness. All wrong and suffering shut out for ever. Let memory and imagination do their worst in multiplying images of evil, and in calling up before the mind the forms and the occasion of distress; then add that all these will be wanting. Give indulgence to your boldest flights and wildest dreams of happiness, apart from sin, then add that all, and infinitely more than all you can imagine, will be yours and yours for ever, without the fear or possibility of change, or loss, or diminution. Every pure wish gratified, all lofty aspirations more than realized, and what is past or present still as nothing in comparison with what is yet to come. All attempts to heighten such an object only lower it, and leave our apprehensions of it less defined and satisfactory than at first. But if this ineffable condition, this negation of all evil, this perpetual fruition of the highest good awaits you, stands prepared for you;—then surely it may well be said to you, Come, oh come,

for all things are now ready. Expiation, pardon, renovation, the grace of the Father, the merit of the Son, the influence of the Spirit, the Church on earth, and the Church in heaven, safety in life, peace in death, and glory through eternity, a good hope here, and an ineffable reality hereafter,—all things, all things are now ready.

Will you come? If not, you must turn back, you must retrace your steps, and take another view of this momentous invitation. Higher we cannot rise in the conception or the presentation of inducements. If you must have others, they must be sought in a lower region. Let us, then, descend from this exalted point of observation whence you have surveyed the glorious things now ready to receive you, and surveyed them, it may be, without emotion or effect; let us descend, and from a different position take a momentary view of certain other preparations no less real in themselves, and no less everlasting in their issues. I have already mentioned one important difference between the ideal feast and others, namely, that at these we may arrive too early, while at that, the only fear is, we may be too late. Another striking difference is this, that the refusal of an earthly feast involves at most the loss of some enjoyment, or at most the alienation of the giver. But in those parables of Christ, where this is the predominant image, the refusal of the feast is represented as a crime, and they who would not partake of the supper are cast into outer darkness, where is weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth. The reason is obvious. The feast is a figure for salvation or deliverance from ruin. To refuse it, therefore, is to choose destruction. This must be taken into view, if we would estimate the motives here presented. All things are ready, and in all is included more, perhaps, than you imagine. There are other things ready besides pardon, expiation, renovation, the communion of saints, and the joys of heaven. I shall mention only two.

Such is the brevity of life, and such the transitory nature of the offer of salvation, that even the youngest who decides this question, may be said to decide it in the prospect of death, and on the confines of eternity. However numerous and long the years that stretch before you may appear when viewed in comparison with this world's trifling interests, they vanish into nothing when



confronted with eternity. I say then to you, who even now are balancing the reasons for consenting and refusing to obey the exhortation of the text, that you are really so balancing with death immediately before you, that among the things now ready and awaiting your decision, this is one. Of some this is doubtless true, even according to your customary method of computing time. An eye endowed with supernatural perception, might detect among those youthful forms and beautiful countenances, some for whom the grave, almost without a figure, may be said to be already open. But of all, of all without exception, for the reason before given, the same thing may be affirmed, because the space which intervenes between the fatal resolution, to reject this gracious invitation either finally, or till a more convenient season, and the actual close of your probation, will hereafter seem, and ought now to seem, so short and evanescent, and contemptible, that he who now rejects Christ may be fairly represented as rejecting him with one foot in the grave, or with the body half submerged in the cold waters of the river of death. Whoever you may be, then, whether young or old, in sickness or in health, I tell you plainly, that among the things "now ready," and awaiting your decision, is the grave; the grave, the cold, damp earth, is ready to receive you. If you impatiently repel this suggestion, as untimely or irrelevant, this only shows how unprepared you are to meet the fearful spectre that it raises. Even true believers may be all their lifetime subject to bondage, through fear of death, even in this restricted sense; how much more natural and rational is such a fear in you who are unwilling to obey the invitations of the gospel. Death is the king of terrors, and however we may hate his presence, it is better to encounter it, when such encounter may be possibly of use to us, than when all hope of victory or rescue is extinguished.

Look then, my hearer, with as steady and as bold an eye as your philosophy can furnish,—look into those shadowy recesses which even poetry describes to you as overhung by the funeral cypress, tenanted only by the dead, and vocal only with the dirge, the voice of weeping, and the solemn noises which accompany the rites of burial. Look at that silent shadow or the earth which it enshrouds, as your appointed place, your long home, and at that narrow chasm as the very bed in which your limbs are to repose,

perhaps for ages. Claim it as your own, assert your right to it, and give it place among the things now ready for you and awaiting your decision. Do you say that all this is as true of one as of another, and that die you must, whether you accept or refuse the invitation of the text? This is indeed theoretically true, but it is practically false. Go tell the prisoner, as he enters his dark dungeon for the last night of repose before he mounts the scaffold, that his cell is no whit darker, or his couch harder, or his chains heavier than those of his next neighbour, whose captivity expires on the morrow. Go read the countenances of the two men as they enter the same comfortless abode of crime, each knowing that the morrow is to break his chains. To both, the filth, and darkness, and confinement may be now as nothing, but how different the reason. To the one the filth seems splendour, and the darkness light, and the confinement freedom, in the rapturous anticipation of deliverance, and as he falls asleep, he hugs the very chains that bind him, in the certainty that he shall never lie down chained again; while to the other, all these same things are absorbed and annihilated in the prospect of a doom compared with which captivity itself seems perfect freedom. Go persuade yourself that when those two men enter their dark dungeons and lie down to sleep, they are alike in their condition; then come back, and we will hear you say death comes alike to all, and deny that the grave's being ready to receive you is a reason which should govern your decision. Death comes alike to all; but know, O vain man, the sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. It is appointed unto *all men* once to die, and after that the judgment; but oh, how different the case of those who can abide that judgment, and of those who cannot; of those who die but once, and of those who die self-doomed and self-predestined to the second death. It is appointed unto all men *once* to die, but some die twice, some die again, some die for ever,—and if this is your doom, you may well shrink back and shudder at the grave before you, as the vestibule, the entrance to another. For, after all, it is not the terrestrial sepulchre considered in itself that I would set before you, any further than as shutting the door for ever on all choice. I look not merely into it, but through and beyond it, into that mysterious world which seems to yawn beneath it.

There, with the eye of fancy or of faith, you may see a deeper, darker, ghastlier grave, ready for your soul, and for your soul and body when again united. You may turn from this as a diseased imagination, but imagination as it is, the day is coming when to some it will seem poor and weak indeed contrasted with the dread reality. The grave is ready both for body and for soul. I do not ask you to look into it, or listen to the wailings that come up from it, or breathe its sulphurous vapours. I only ask you to believe, and to remember that the grave and the abyss are as truly ready if you will not come, as pardon, and redemption, and sanctification, and the Church, and heaven, are ready if you will come. On both sides, therefore, all things are ready. The world of bliss and the world of woe spread out their motives in your sight. If you will die, death is easy, for the grave is ready both for soul and body; it is hallowed for you both in time and in eternity. The earth, to which you must return, is open, and the narrow house already yawning to receive you, while beneath—far off in yonder shadowy world—a funeral pile begins to send up its thick smoke, and to project its lurid flames into the air. On that pile there is room enough for you, beneath it, fire enough for your destruction. Tophet is ordained of old, he hath made it deep and large, the pile thereof is fire and much wood; the breath of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone, doth kindle it. These are strong figures, but if such be the figures, what must be the reality? Whatever it be, know that it is ready for you if you will not come, and if you choose death rather than life. Are you willing to live? Life is no less attainable. Your guilt, your weakness, your corruption, the justice, truth, and holiness of God, are all against you where you stand. But come, and all things that you need are ready for you. Come, oh come, and expiation, pardon, renovation, the Church on earth, and the Church in heaven; all things are *ready*, “All things are *yours*, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come, all are yours, and ye are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s.”



## XII.

### The Healing of the Nations.

“The rich and poor meet together; the Lord is the maker of them all.” —  
PROV. xxii. 2.

THIS is a proverb, and must be explained according to the principles and usages of proverbial language. An essential characteristic of this language is its condensation and the pregnancy of its expressions, which often imply more than the same word would in continuous composition, where there is not the same effort to concentrate much thought in a few words. This peculiarity is common, however, to the popular or practical proverb and the scientific aphorism. The difference between them is, that while the latter affects abstract and generic terms, the former shuns them, and delights to clothe its lessons of wisdom in the dialect of common life, from which its substance is in fact derived—the genuine proverb being a summary expression of the result of long experience. The same extent and fulness of meaning, which is given to the philosophical maxim by the use of comprehensive terms, is no less certainly secured in the case of the popular maxim by a means directly opposite—namely, the exhibition of particular examples to represent whole classes. The specific terms employed in this way are sometimes figurative, and even symbolical; but, in a multitude of cases, they are to be literally understood, with due regard, however, to their representative design as specimens or samples.

Of this kind of expression we have two instances in the case before us, both clauses of the verse being highly specific in their strict immediate import, yet both generic in the whole sense which they were intended to convey. “Rich” and “poor,” are terms properly descriptive of a single and familiar difference of

external condition. Yet here, as in common parlance, there can be no doubt that they are put for social inequalities in general. And this interpretation is the more admissible, because the distinction which the words immediately denote is not only one of the most universal and most palpable, but also one which, to a great extent, determines all the rest. Knowledge and ignorance, grossness and refinement, power and weakness, are, as a general fact, dependent upon wealth or poverty, that is, upon the want or the possession of the comforts and necessities of life without the necessity of constant and engrossing labour to obtain them.

It is true that the advantage of refinement and of knowledge may be often found upon the side of poverty. It is also true, not only in the case of individual exceptions, but as a general fact, that they who become suddenly possessed of wealth, or who acquire it slowly by their own exertions, may be signally destitute of that elevation and improvement which is often found accompanying scanty means and humble station. But these are only apparent exceptions to a general rule, which they really illustrate and confirm. In all such cases, wealth and poverty have not had time to operate the change which they naturally tend to produce, and what appears to be concomitant of either, is in fact the fruit of an opposite condition which vicissitude has not yet succeeded in destroying. The vulgarity and ignorance of some who have recently become rich, are not the effects of their new condition, but the exuviæ of their old one; and the opposite qualities of some who are struggling for subsistence, bear witness to the previous possession of advantages now lost. And even in the case of those who have obtained an education and experienced its refining influence, without any such vicissitude of fortune, it is plain that this could only be made possible by something, whether it be personal exertion or the aid of others, which exempted them so far and so long from the usual disadvantages of poverty, as to put them in possession of advantages naturally belonging to an opposite condition. There is nothing arbitrary or capricious, therefore, in the usage both of common parlance and proverbial diction, which puts "rich" and "poor," or "poverty and wealth," for all the inequalities of social condition.

Another example of the same thing is presented in the other

clause, which, in its strictest sense, appears to relate only to the fact of creation, or the character of God as the creator of all men without exception. But the analogy of the first clause, and the general usage of proverbial language, fully justify us in supposing that this one relation between God and man is put for all the rest, the rather as in this case the related things are really inseparable, and not merely similar, as in the other. The various distinctions among men, as we have seen, are not necessarily or invariably coincident. Riches and knowledge, poverty and rudeness, do not always go together. But the Being who created us must of necessity be also our preserver, our sovereign, our legislator, our judge, and, if we are redeemed, our Saviour. The possession of creative power implies the rest. To say that "the Lord is the maker of them all," is therefore equivalent to saying that "they have one God," or sustain a common relation to him, with all the fulness and variety of meaning, which the clearness of the gospel revelation now enables us to put upon these otherwise indefinite expressions.

The affirmation of the first clause, that the classes there described "meet together," may be best explained by reference to another characteristic feature of proverbial language, namely, its antithetic form. Besides the parallel construction so familiar to the Hebrew writers generally, there is a pointed opposition, both of thoughts and words, particularly frequent in the Book of Proverbs. Of this usage we have also more than one example in the case before us. Besides the obvious antithesis between the "rich" and "poor," there are two others not less real, because residing rather in the thought than the expression. In the first place, there is an implied comparison or contrast between human and divine, or temporal and eternal relations; between those which men sustain to one another, and those which they sustain to God. In the first point of view, they are described as rich and poor, but in the second, as the creatures of one maker. Under one of these aspects, there is variety—under the other, sameness. As members of human society, men are unequal; as creatures of God, they are alike. This, though really a mere variation of the one already stated, may with critical precision be regarded as a third antithesis—namely, that between the inequality of men in one respect, and their equality in another.

This view of the structure of the sentence will assist us in determining the sense of the expression, that "the rich and poor *meet together*," by showing that it does not mean, as some suppose, that both are mingled in society, that they oppose or encounter one another, or as others understand it, they ought to have more intercourse, for neither of these perfects the antithesis; but rather that they are alike, that with all their differences there is still something common to both, that with all their alienation and remoteness as to some points, there is one, after all, in which they "meet together."

But what is this common ground, this point of contact and agreement? Not the bare fact of a common origin, for in this way all things may be equalized, and therefore the assertion of equality would be unmeaning. Not the fact that God has made men to be absolutely equal, for in this sense the assertion, although not unmeaning, would be false, and proved so both by reason and experience. We know that men are made extremely unlike in their capacities and susceptibilities; we know still more certainly that their condition is diversified by providence, beyond all variations for which they are held responsible; and we have reason to believe that there will be as great a difference in heaven and in hell as upon earth, not, indeed, with respect to essential moral qualities, but as to the degree in which the same essential qualities will be possessed, and the amount of suffering and enjoyment by which they will be punished or rewarded. The point of contact and assimilation, then, is not an absolute identity of character or sameness of condition, but participation in a certain good common to both, and independent of external qualities. And as these latter are commonly regarded, at least by one part of mankind, as evils, and are recognised as such by the word of God itself, the substance of the whole when stripped of its proverbial form may be thus stated,—that the true corrective of all social inequalities, so far as they are evil, must be furnished, not by human institutions and arrangements, but derived from a higher and an independent source. In other words, the only practicable efficacious remedy for social evils of the kind in question, is and must be a religious one, that is, one founded, not in mere prudential changes of man's mutual relations, but in their common relation to their common God, whether

considered as their master and preserver, as their sovereign and their judge, or as their saviour and redeemer.

In further prosecution of the subject, it may not be unprofitable to consider how and why the religion of the Bible is adapted to exert this influence; and that inquiry, in its turn, will be facilitated by a brief enumeration of some other means, to which men have confidently looked, and are still looking, for the practical solution of the same great problem. These may, with reference to our present purpose, be reduced to three. The first is the idea of obliterating social inequalities by a coercive distribution of all property. This method is condemned by its violent injustice, by its doing evil that good may come. It is condemned by the unworthiness and meanness of its aims, by its assuming as the most essential element of human happiness, the very thing which may most easily be dispensed with, if the other conditions of well-being are fulfilled.

It is further condemned by the hypocrisy of his professions, as betrayed in every case where there has been an opportunity of trial, by the tendency then manifested, not to extirpate social inequalities, but simply to reverse them; not to substitute universal competence and comfort for the actual extremes of poverty and wealth, but by revolutionary and revengeful process, to make the poor rich by making the rich poor. And even if it were exempt from all these fatal errors and defects, it would still be condemned, as a practical expedient for removing evils actually felt, by the proved impossibility of carrying it into execution without sacrificing the very ends which it engages to accomplish. No municipal contrivances or constitutional provisions can repeal or thwart the providential law, by which variety of outward condition, no less than of character, is recognised, not only as an incidental evil, but as a necessary means to the attainment of the divine purpose, as with respect to man's condition in the present life, or at least in the present state of things.

The remarkable provisions of the law of Moses for the relief and sustentation of the poor, are accompanied by the no less remarkable declaration that the poor shall not cease out of the land. If this providential arrangement was intended for the moral discipline of God's ancient people, it is hard to perceive why it should be dis-



continued now, when every reason for it still exists in full force in the human heart, and in the structure of society ; and when we see around us most conclusive evidence that neither Christianity, nor civilization, nor political contrivance has succeeded in abolishing the old distinction upon which the Mosaic institutions rest. In what sense the community of goods prevailing in the apostolic Church is to be understood, and how far in the sense which is often put upon it, it affords a type of the future condition of society in this world, when the power of injustice and of selfishness shall yield to that of equity and kindness, as the governing motives in the mass of men, may be still regarded as unsettled questions. But judging the future by the past, and by the probable design for which the world still stands, we have certainly strong reason to regard it as a prophecy still valid, that the poor shall not cease out of the land.

Another remedy, less violent, irrational, and chimerical, but still inadequate, is that which aims at the removal of the evil, by securing an equality of civil rights, in spite of personal and social disadvantages. So far as this means has the negative effect of hindering oppression, and delivering the weak from the encroachments of the strong, it is a priceless blessing and a noble contribution to the sum of human happiness. But when it is considered as a positive means of rendering men actually equal, and correcting the effects of providential inequalities, it is as worthless as the other. The poor man's right to vote, or in any other way to control the power under which he lives, on equal terms with his rich neighbour, may be preventive of a thousand other evils, but it no more suffices of itself to put him on a level with his neighbour, as to knowledge, or refinement, or intelligence, or character, than an agrarian division of all property. It may be said, indeed, and said with truth, that this political equality permits the poor man to aspire to the possession of advantages from which he would be utterly shut out if living under an arbitrary or despotic system.

But here, again, the advantage is not positive, but negative, consisting in the removal of obstructions and impediments, but not of itself, and necessarily, affording either strength or stimulus, to positive improvement. The difference is like that between a starving prisoner and one who starves at liberty for want of work,

or want of strength, or want of inclination to employ it. In the absence of these personal disqualifications, freedom from all restraint is certainly a vast advantage, but of what use is it when these other difficulties all exist? of no more than the negative security afforded by political equality, when those enjoying it are endlessly distinguished from each other in capacity, improvement, character, and disposition. They are safe from the oppression of their neighbours, but it may be only to oppress themselves.

Far superior to either of these schemes is that which seeks to remedy the evil by means of intellectual increase of knowledge and refinement of taste. Unlike the first, its aim is nobler, good in itself and wholesome in its influence, and this end it seeks to reach without injustice, without violence. Unlike the second, its effect, when realized, is not merely negative, but positive. It not only makes improvement possible, but actually produces it. The objection to this intellectual remedy, when applied alone, is that its influence, though positive and real, is not necessarily or wholly good. It strengthens, but the strength which it imparts may be used for evil as well as good. It gives a capacity for higher enjoyments than those of sense, but it may create the desire without affording anything to feed it; it may render lower objects distasteful, without really exchanging them for higher. Mere cultivation of the understanding, taste, and sensibilities, may be carried so far as entirely to disqualify the subject for his actual condition without opening before him any other. If the existence of the mass of men were limited to this life, such refinement would be still more undesirable, because it would unfit them for the only world in which they are to live. It would be like the laborious and expensive education of a man for professional or literary labour, who is doomed for life to the drudgery of mechanical employment. The same expense and intellectual exertion would be nothing if it were preparatory to a corresponding period and field of labour, but extreme intellectual refinement is not only useless as a preparation for hard labour, but positively hurtful, by directly tending to unfit the person for the sphere in which he is compelled to move. Now instruction, such as social reformers commonly rely upon to revolutionize society, restricts its views and those of its disciples to the present life, while at the same time it directly

tends to make its actual duties and enjoyments more or less distasteful. So far, then, as it operates at all on social inequalities, it aggravates instead of healing them, by tending to make all, as far as possible, alike in taste and capacity, but leaving them as unlike as ever with respect to their actual condition and enjoyment. If some men after all must be rich, and others poor, some laborious and some idle, is it not better upon mere utilitarian and worldly principles, that their habits and their tastes should correspond to these diversities, than that all should desire and relish the same objects, while the objects are attainable by only some ?

Even this imperfect view of the principal attempts which have been made to remedy the real or imaginary evils of external inequality, may aid us in our subsequent inquiry, how religion, or the Christian system, undertakes to accomplish the same end, or what advantages experience has shown it to possess over every supplementary or rival system. This, as being the immediate subject of consideration, must of course be exhibited in more detail than either of the methods which have been described already.

The first particular to which I would invite your attention, is the fact that Christianity distinctly recognises the existence and necessity of some providential inequalities in the external situation of mankind. It is characteristic of the Bible that it does not address itself to an ideal class of readers, but has reference throughout to the world as it is, and to the actual condition of mankind. This is the more remarkable because its standard of moral perfection is so high, and its demands upon the race so large. It neither keeps out of view the corruption of our nature on the one hand, nor consigns us to it without hope upon the other. It neither exalts earth to heaven, nor debases heaven to earth. It places us in sight of the one, but in the midst of the other. In short, the Bible is as far as possible from that cheap and expeditious mode of remedying social evils which begins by denying their existence. The picture which it gives of human character and condition, is one drawn from the life with terrible exactness, and may be recognised in any country and in any age. The evils which it represents as calling for a remedy, are not ideal, but precisely those

which all men feel and know in their experience to be real. This creates a strong presumption that the remedies themselves will be adapted to their end, and that a book which so faithfully describes a thing to be done, may be safely relied on when it tells us how to do it. Let it also be observed, that the Bible differs from human systems of reform, by recognising not only the existence of these inequalities, but their injurious effects, so far as they are real; yet far from representing them as irremediable, it provides, as we shall see, the only practicable and effective remedy, consisting not in any one specific nostrum, but in a series and combination of corrective influences, each of which gives power and effect to all the rest, and none of which can therefore either be dispensed with or relied upon exclusively.

The first of these remedial effects is, the direct mitigation of the evils in question by the change wrought in the tempers and affections of the parties, so far as they are brought under the influence of gospel truth. In this way, the tendency of wealth to foster pride, and of privation to breed discontent, is counteracted and controlled, and thus the chasm which divides the two conditions meets with a double diminution. The hardships of the poor are greatly aggravated in their apprehension, by the luxurious abuse of wealth which they are forced to witness or too ready to imagine; while, on the other hand, the proud contempt of the rich and prosperous is embittered by the real or imputed thanklessness and insubordination of the humbler classes. So far is a mere equality of civil rights from rectifying these unhappy mutual relations, that it rather seems to render them still more unfriendly, as appears from the unquestionable fact, that under our free institutions, wherever these distinctions have a well-defined existence and are brought into collision, it is with a deeper feeling of inveterate hostility than in those countries where there is actual experience of oppression, but less intelligence or less freedom of utterance on the part of those who suffer wrong. The consciousness of independence and of equal rights, instead of soothing the repugnance to distinctions of another kind, beyond the reach of constitutions and the ballot-box, necessarily exasperates it where it is already felt, and may, perhaps, tend to produce it where it is not.

Now the gospel operates upon the same materials in a very different manner and with very different results. Instead of reconciling men to one kind of inferiority or disadvantage by abolishing another which has no connection with it, Christianity applies its alterative remedies directly to the part diseased, subdues the pride from which revenge and discontent invariably flow, creates a general and habitual disposition to forbearance, and a modest estimate of self. How? Not by philosophical abstractions, but by convincing men of sin, and prompting them to accept of a gratuitous salvation. However imperfect these effects may be, they *are* produced; and just so far as they are realized in any man's experience, just so far do they tend to heal the breaches in society produced by providential inequalities. He who heartily believes himself to be a miserable sinner justly condemned, and entirely dependent upon sovereign mercy for salvation, must and will, in some direct proportion to the strength of these convictions, lower his demands upon his fellow-men, and rise in his demands upon himself. If rich, he will, to some extent, grow liberal; if poor, contented; and if either, thankful.

For another thing observable in this whole process of correcting social evils by the positive influence of true religion, not of orthodoxy merely, but of enlightened spiritual piety, is this: that while it recognises these invidious distinctions as existing, and in some degree inseparable from the mixed condition of society in this world, it attaches to the various degrees of wealth, refinement, knowledge, influence, and leisure, their corresponding measures of responsibility. The gospel, when it operates upon the rich man's heart, does not force him to impoverish himself, but it constrains him to discharge the obligations by which wealth is accompanied. It does not necessarily make the rich man poor, but so far as it operates at all, it always makes him do the duties of a rich man; just as in the other case, it often leaves the poor man poor, or makes him poorer, but it never fails to make him feel that God requires of poverty contentment, and submission, and frugality, as truly as he calls the rich to Christian liberality. And so of ignorance and knowledge, public station and obscurity, and all the other contrasts and antitheses of our social condition.

It is not, however, by mere stress of conscience, or a painful

sense of obligation, much less by a slavish dread of punishment, that true religion exercises this corrective influence. Such a conviction by itself would only make the evil fester in concealment, while the conscience thus enlightened makes the way of duty plain, the renewed affections move spontaneously along it, so that the rich and poor, the strong and weak, not only own it to be right that they should severally bear and forbear, and sustain each other's burdens, but are inclined to do it by as natural a movement as they were once inclined to reciprocal envy and contempt.

This is the first step in the grand remedial process which the Christian religion is even now applying to the evils of social inequality. It makes each party, at least to some extent, contented with his actual condition, aware of its peculiar obligations, and spontaneously disposed to discharge them; while by thus removing or diminishing on each side what is chiefly provocative of envy or contempt upon the other, it not only makes each better in itself, but draws them nearer to each other. Now all this—and it is much—might be experienced, though all the original difference in point of wealth, or knowledge, or refinement, still subsisted in full force; because the salutary change is in the moral sensibilities, disposing them to overlook disparities in culture and condition, and does not consist in the removal or material diminution of the disparities themselves.

But, in the next place, Christianity contributes to this great change in the very way which I have just excluded from the first stage of the process. That is to say, after making men willing to regard with charity and even complacency those far above or below themselves upon the scale of intellectual improvement and of social cultivation, the gospel brings them nearer to each other upon that scale too—first disposes them to mutual benevolence while far apart, and then diminishes the interval between them, not by equalizing property, or bringing all parts of society to one dead level, but by giving to each rank or class, or whatever else you please to call it, a high degree of relative refinement, that is, of refinement suited to the actual position, and conducive to the right discharge of its peculiar duties. Here is a grand mistake of every other system for the elevation of what must be called, even among us, the lower classes of society—that they aim at an abso-

lute and uniform amount of cultivation, having reference to some arbitrary standard, whereas Christianity gives each class what is best for it, and most conducive to its harmony with every other. The kind of cultivation which some would bestow upon the poor, could only serve to render them ridiculous, while that which Christianity really imparts to them tends, on the contrary, to dignify and elevate. However it may be explained, the fact is certain that the gospel has, in some parts of the world, given even to the peasantry a species of refinement which no other means has been able to effect without it, even under the most favourable circumstances. Compare what the arts and the artistical attractions of the Romish faith have done for Italy, with what an austere Calvinism has done both for the Celtic and the Saxon race of Scotland. While in the one case the eye and the ear may have been trained, and picturesque attitudes and costumes rendered almost universal even among beggars; in the other case, a poor, laborious population has been raised to a pitch of intelligence and real cultivation, which the best advantages of education often fail to produce among ourselves.

This is the other part of the great creative and healing process by which the gospel is continually bringing the discordant elements of society together, and correcting the evils which would otherwise result from providential inequalities. By a process of *moral* elevation men are first taught to surmount the disadvantages arising from this cause, and then by one of *intellectual* elevation the operation of the cause itself is circumscribed and weakened, till in some cases it appears to be destroyed; and in all cases the result of this twofold influence exerted on the mind and heart directly by religion is a manifest reduction of the difference between the various classes of society arising from diversity of outward circumstances and position. That diversity may still continue and be formally as great as ever, but the evils flowing from it will be neutralized exactly in proportion to the action of the cause described.

If, in what has now been said, too much should seem to be ascribed to religion in the abstract or the general, without regard to precise forms and systems of belief, this has arisen from two causes—one of which is, that even the most diluted form of Christianity,

on one hand, or its most corrupted form, upon the other, will be found more efficacious for the cure of social maladies, and more especially the healing of these alienations which we are considering, than any system of means which philosophers or politicians can devise without involving the assistance of religion. The other reason is, that general terms have been used for brevity, where more specific ones would really have made the case still stronger. For it is not more certain or susceptible of proof that religion is more potent in this matter than any other principle, and Christianity more efficacious than all other systems of religion put together, than it is that among the various forms of Christianity itself. The highest influence of this kind has been ever exerted by the doctrines of grace, or what we are accustomed to distinguish by the name of evangelical religion. This is no vain boast in behalf of what we hold to be the present form of Christianity. The fact itself is a matter of history, and its causes easily explained. If a graduated scale could be constructed, showing the degrees in which the national intelligence and character have been visibly affected by the direct influence of religion on the masses of the people and the evils of social inequality thereby corrected, there can be no doubt that while the weakest influence of this kind would be found to have proceeded from the Romish and Oriental forms of Christianity, or from the most diluted systems of Socinian or deistical neology, where these have been allowed to act, not merely on the educated classes, or on very small communities, but on a large extent of population, the highest measures of the same effect must be ascribed to what its enemies delight to brand as Calvinism, even where it has been mingled and diluted, as in Holland or New England, and the highest of all, precisely where its purity and vigour have been least abated, as in Scotland.

If a direct comparison is wanted, let it be furnished by the Scotch and Irish peasantry—the two most signal instances in history of whole nations brought almost entirely under the control of certain systems of belief and certain spiritual leaders, yet how different the moral, intellectual, and social fruits of these contiguous experiments! The very evils which in one case have almost disappeared from the surface, if not from the interior of society, are even now menacing the other with terrific revolution. I have



said, too, that the cause of this notorious difference is easily assigned, I mean a cause residing in the very nature of the several systems. It is the combination of the doctrines of individual responsibility and private judgment with those of human corruption and gratuitous salvation that has produced the grand elixir to which Scotland owes her healthful social state; and as the lower degrees of the same influence are found to correspond to less degrees of purity and reform in the maintenance of these same doctrines, it may safely be affirmed, as a lesson even of experience, that this system of belief is demonstrably the best adapted to exert a purifying, healing influence on human society, and thereby to correct the evils flowing from the unavoidable diversities and outward situation and degrees of intellectual improvement, or, in other words, that it affords the safest and the best ground upon which "the rich and poor" may "meet together" and acknowledge that "the Lord is the maker of them all."

If these views be correct, they throw a welcome light on a subject of great practical importance—I mean the necessity of popular religious education, not only as the means of personal improvement and salvation, but also as the grand corrective and perhaps the sovereign cure of the disorders which now prey upon society and "eat as doth a canker." It is not enough to believe that religious knowledge is a good thing for religious purposes, and that it even may supply the want of other knowledge and of general cultivation where these last are unattainable. We are bound to believe, because experience leaves no room to doubt, that religious education has a social and secular as well as an exclusively religious use; and that it is not merely a good thing, but the good thing, the very thing, the only thing by which the masses of mankind can be extensively and healthfully affected, so that if, with reference to them, we were allowed to choose between a general intellectual refinement and complete religious training, considered simply as two rival means of social improvement and conciliation, we should still be bound to choose the latter, and to send it rolling as a mighty flood throughout the earth "for the healing of the nations."

The other point which these considerations serve to set in a clear light is the importance of the ministerial office, in its relation

to society at large, as the administrator of this reconciling, elevating, purifying system. It has been said of the English clergy that they belong to all ranks in society, enjoying free access to each, without thereby forfeiting the confidence of any. Of ministers, even among us, the same thing may be said, or rather that they properly belong to no class, because their authority and influence are not dependent upon human usages or institutions, but on God's appointment and God's blessing. Let those who seek the office bear in mind, then, that, in more than one sense, they are called or will be called to dispense "the word of reconciliation," first, by reconciling men to God, and then by reconciling man to man—healing the breaches and divisions of society, and rendering the evils which they generate as few and harmless as they can. This noble end is not to be promoted by a partial and exclusive self-devotion either to the higher or the lower ranks, by making common cause, as some do, either with the rich against the poor, or with the poor against the rich, but by endeavouring to bring the truth and power of God to bear upon the adverse parties with a moderating, elevating, and uniting influence, and thus preparing all, by mutual forbearance and assimilation, for that better country and those better times when these invidious distinctions shall no longer be remembered, but "the rich and poor" shall finally and for ever meet together in the presence of that God who "is the maker of them all."



### XIII.

## Mercy and Judgment.

“Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God : on them which fell, severity ; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness ; otherwise, thou also shalt be cut off.”—ROMANS xi. 22.

THERE is something sublime in the constancy of nature. We derive thence our strongest impressions of stability and uniformity. This association has become proverbial in many languages. It is also recognised in Scripture, and in the dialect of common life. But there is another side to this grand picture. The changes of nature are sublime too. Some of these are rare and even recondite. Such as occultations and eclipses. Some are familiar to men in certain situations. Such are the ebb and flow of tides ; still more the changes in the surface of the ocean. When calm, it seems immovable ; when roused, incapable of rest. Thus it furnishes the most vivid types of life and death. He who sees it in both states, might almost question the identity of the object. But these sights multitudes have never seen. There are other instances of change more universal. Who has not seen the cloudless sky ? Who has not seen it overcast ? What contrast can be more complete than that between a bright and lowering day ? What more unlike than their effect upon the senses, the imagination, and the nervous sensibilities ? But this is an occasional and fitful alternation, which cannot be computed or foreseen, at least in our climate. There are others, and these the most familiar, which are absolutely uniform, and from which our ideas of regularity and constancy are chiefly borrowed. Such are the vicissitudes of day and night, and the stated revolution of the seasons.

As to all these, our earliest impressions may be those of different objects. To the child, perhaps, the dark and clear sky may

have no identity ; the smooth and rough sea may be different oceans ; the world by day, and the world by night, distinct parts of the universe. Then when we learn to speculate and reason, we may verge towards the opposite extreme. We may suspect ourselves of some illusion, and conclude, not only that the object is the same, but that its changes are imaginary. The truth lies between these two extremes.

All this may be used to illustrate spiritual things. Whoever seriously contemplates God, is startled by apparent inconsistencies. While we gaze at the clear sky it is overcast ; or at the serene ocean it begins to lash itself ; or at the sunset, it merges into twilight, and that into darkness. We fasten upon some view of the divine nature and become absorbed in it, till it is intercepted by another in a kind of occultation or eclipse. The first effect may be like that of natural changes on the child ; we refuse to identify the object. This is perhaps the source of polytheism. Unable to reconcile the various phases of the divine nature, men regard them as appearances of different objects. Philosophical abstraction goes to the opposite extreme, and identifies the attributes as well as the subject in which they inhere. Thus we are told that wrath and love, justice and mercy, are the same thing. But from this, common sense and natural feeling alike revolt. We rest at last in the conclusion, that what we behold are consistent because co-existent manifestations of one and the same substance.

When Israel first saw the cloudy pillar growing luminous at night, he might have thought it was another ; when convinced of his mistake, he might have suspected some illusion of the senses ; but a little experience must have satisfied him that both these conclusions were erroneous,—that the Lord his God was one Lord, and that this one Lord did go before him in a pillar of cloud by day, and a pillar of fire by night. Especially must they have been convinced of this in that night, long to be remembered, when the Lord looked out in the morning-watch upon the host of the Egyptians, through the pillar of fire and of cloud, and troubled the host of the Egyptians (Exod. xiv. 24) ; when the angel of the Lord which went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them, and the pillar of cloud went from before their face and stood behind them, and came between the camp of the Egyptians

and the camp of Israel, and was a cloud of darkness to them, and gave light by night to these. Some—however we may speculate at ordinary times—may be brought into circumstances where it is equally impossible to doubt, that the wrath of God is something very different from his love, and yet that the justice which we dread, and the mercy we invoke, are co-existent and harmonious characters of one and the same God, “glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders” (Exod. xv. 11).

This is still more striking when historically viewed in the actual exercise of those great attributes which seemed at first to be in conflict. To one such example Paul has reference in the text. The Jews had been chosen from among the nations, and made the depository of an exclusive revelation, not for ever, but a time; not for their own sakes, but for that of men in general. But as a race they proved unfaithful to their trust. The honour which belonged to God, they arrogated to themselves. The salvation given to the world they desired and hoped to monopolize. Hence they were cut off from the Church and deprived of their national pre-eminence, while the despised Gentiles, whom they looked upon as hopelessly rejected, took their place. This the apostle finely embodies in the figure of an olive-tree deprived of its own branches, while those of a wild olive-tree are grafted in. In reference to this stupendous change, he exhorts the favoured Gentiles both to thankfulness and fear. “Behold the goodness and severity of God; on them,” &c., plainly implying that still further change was possible, and that they who had so strangely exchanged places might again be restored to their original position, and so gave occasion to a new application of the same solemn words, “Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God.”

In fact, this formula admits of an extensive application to the history of God’s dispensations towards his rational and moral creatures, and it is in this wide view of it that I have selected it as the subject of discourse. We may even go back to the age before the world began, and view the relation of Jews and Gentiles as a mere type of that between men and fallen angels. It is a fearful truth, of which we have mere glimpses in the Bible, that a portion of those unhappy spirits who surrounded the divine throne in the highest heavens, fell by their own sin to the lowest

hell, and that the same God whose goodness crowned their first estate with glory, stamped the last with the indelible impress of his wrath. As his goodness had been boundless, so his justice was inflexible. What a lesson to those who kept their first estate! how plainly does this dispensation say to them, "Behold, therefore, the goodness and severity of God!"

But the same contrast soon presents itself again. Man is created, made a little lower than the angels, in the image of God, with dominion over the inferior creation, holy and happy, yet capable of falling. What a spectacle to angels both in heaven and hell. What an object to the malignant ambition of the latter to destroy man too; thus dishonouring God, and extending the reign of sin and death; they are allowed access to the new creature, in the paradise where danger seemed unknown and sin impossible; yet God had warned them by a prohibition of the possibility of evil. That possibility is too soon realized. Seduced by one already fallen, man falls too. It might have been imagined that a divine fondness for this new creation would have stayed the exercise of justice. Higher intelligences may be conceived as waiting in suspense for the decision of this question; half-hoping that the sky would still remain serene, the ocean of divine love still at rest, the garden of Eden in the bloom of a perpetual spring. But see, no sooner is the sin committed, than the spotless purity of God is vindicated; the heavens become black, and seem to meet the ocean as it rises in its wrath, and mingles its tempestuous murmurs with the thunders from above, while every flower in paradise seems blighted in a moment; all its verdure withers, and a dreary winter overspreads the earth. The change is fearful, but it teaches us a glorious truth, that God is holy, just, and true; that he is not mocked, and that he cannot deny himself. To the spirits yet unfallen, this new demonstration seems to say again, "Behold, therefore, the goodness and severity of God!"

In the first of these cases there is no vicissitude to be expected. "The angels who kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains, under darkness, unto the judgment of the great day" (Jude 6). There is no re-grafting of excised boughs into the heavenly olive-tree; they

are not only "withered and without fruit," but "twice dead, plucked up by the roots" (Jude 12), whose end, whose only end, is to be burned.

From this hopeless prospect, let us turn to that of our own race, and consider the illustration of the same great truth afforded by its history, or rather that of God's most gracious dispensations towards it; seeking the necessary contrast, not in the comparative condition of men and devils, but in the vicissitudes presented by the case of man alone. There could not be a stronger exhibition of God's goodness, than in man's creation and original condition. He was made not only happy, but holy. His physical, intellectual, and moral state were all exalted, and yet all susceptible of further exaltation; he was in immediate contact and communion with the source and sum of all conceivable perfection. Beyond this our conceptions of God's goodness could not rise, but for the new disclosures which we meet with afterwards. True, man was put upon his trial, and that not only for himself, but for his children. But how could this detract from the divine goodness in the case of one created holy, and with nothing to complain of or desire, as wanting to his happiness? The very test prescribed illustrates the divine goodness. What seems to be its arbitrary character was all in favour of obedience, and therefore illustrative of the divine goodness; while in the same proportion it must vindicate the justice which inexorably punished the transgression.

Every stroke in the picture of man's pristine happiness sets out in more prominent relief God's subsequent severity, not as conflicting opposites, but as the lights and shades of the same picture. Whatever selfish or morbid feeling might desire in an ideal case, the severity of the divine dispensations, when man fell, is as perfectly accordant with our highest conceptions of the divine nature, as the previous exhibition of transcendent goodness. We might not be able to obtain this view by any unassisted use of our own faculties, but when presented, it approves itself to reason, conscience, and affection; we not only feel that such severity towards sin is reconcilable with what we know of God, but that without it, we could not now be satisfied; the very goodness which confounded sin with holiness in indiscriminate indulgence, would no longer seem to be goodness, or at best the goodness of inferior

natures, not the perfect goodness of a perfect God. The subsequent severity, instead of marring what precedes, throws back a new and glorious light upon it. Once convinced that the severity and goodness are the attributes of one and the same substance, we are forced to admit that they enhance each other, and even if the history of man stopped here, we should be forced to own that in its darkened mirror the divine perfections were resplendent, and to cry out in the language, not of cavil or complaint, but of profound adoration, "Behold the goodness and severity of God!"

But thanks be to God, the history of man does not stop here. The dismal scene which we have just surveyed is but the entrance to a new and strange spectacle. As we gaze upon the darkness into which our race was plunged by the great original apostasy, like men who gaze by night upon the troubled sea, beneath which some great fleet has just gone down, the day begins to dawn, light breaks upon the surface of those heaving waters, and reveals to us, at first the yawning gulf still open, into which the victims have descended, but the next moment, by a strange departure from the laws of nature, we behold them re-appear, or at least some of them, many of them; the abyss disgorges its devoured prey, and the ascending sun illuminates the unexpected spectacle of life from the dead; mercy triumphant over justice. Yes, the scene has again been shifted, or to use a figure worthier of the subject, the unchanging orb of the divine perfections has again revolved, and as we watch its revolutions, we recognise with joy the phase of mercy, the same pure light which shone on paradise, but heightened by the contrast of the intervening wrath, and mellowed by the memory of sin and sorrow, lately born into this lower world.

This re-appearance of the divine goodness, when it seemed to have been swallowed up in wrath for ever, may be likened to the rising of the sun in the west, still dyed with crimson by his setting; to the substitution of a fresh dawn for an evening twilight, and the prospect of a new day, when a long night seemed inevitable. As such a change in the order would affect our senses and habitual associations, so our hearts and consciences would be affected by a clear, full view of this astonishing vicissitude. That God, after all his lavish kindness to the first man, should requite



his first offence with such severity might seem surprising, till explained by a correct view of the divine holiness and justice as essential to his very being; but that surprise, even in its first unrectified indulgence, could be nothing to the fresh surprise of men and angels at the first announcement of deliverance—salvation, not from suffering only, but from sin itself; not temporary, but eternal; not capriciously or arbitrarily bestowed, but rendered possible, and actually purchased, by the humiliation of the Deity himself, the incarnation of the co-essential and co-equal Son,—his subjection and obedience to the law which man had broken, his endurance of the penalty which man had incurred, his substitution for the actual offence, his complete satisfaction to the divine justice, his life, his death, for such an end as this, showing the turpitude of sin in the very act of expiating it, and the utterness and hopelessness of our ruin in the very act of retrieving it—oh! if this is not goodness, where shall it be found? or how shall we conceive of it? If this is not transcendent, perfect, heavenly, godlike goodness, let the word be hushed up, and the thought forgotten. Look, though it be but for a moment, at the cross, and Him who hangs upon it, and while in breathless silence you count the drops of more than human or angelic blood that fall upon the parched earth, cursed for man's transgression, but now panting for deliverance; by the light that streams from that disfigured brow, read the old lesson written in new characters, "Behold the goodness and severity of God!"

No wonder that the angels bend with an inquiring gaze over this display of the goodness and severity of God! We, too, may well regard it with adoring wonder. But let us not lose sight of the great objects here presented. Let us not forget, in this new exhibition of the divine goodness, that it also involves a grand display of his severity. We are liable here to the same mistake as in a former case. Because God was so good to man at first, we feel surprised that he should be severe when man had fallen. And then, because of that most just severity, the exercise of mercy seems impossible. And now that mercy has been exercised, free favour to the utterly unworthy and the ill-deserving, we are apt to feel as if all danger were escaped for ever—as if ruin and damnation were utterly impossible.

This seems to be the effect of the preaching of salvation upon many minds. The very grace of God incites them to go on in sin. Since he has exercised such boundless grace as to sacrifice his own Son for the life of a lost world, they think it utterly incredible that any should be lost; or, if any, that themselves should be among the number. Their whole life is a perpetual practical abuse of the great gospel doctrine—"He that spared not his own Son," &c. The language of their lives, if not that of their lips, is that such transcendent goodness shuts out all severity, as inconsistent and its opposite. Mercy has triumphed over God's inexorable justice, and disarmed, if not destroyed it; so that henceforth it is only in recollection of the past that we can say, "Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God."

This is one of the great practical delusions of the Christian Church, or rather of the Christian dispensation, which prevails among the hearers of the gospel, and is often nourished by the very advantages which they enjoy, but which must be corrected, or it will go on slaying its thousands and its tens of thousands—the belief that because God is so merciful, he cannot be severe; that because his promise is so gracious, he will not execute his threatenings; that even the rejection of his offered grace will pass unpunished; and that they who refused to be saved through Christ, will magnify the greatness of the divine mercy by being saved without him. The error is refuted by the very nature of the foundation upon which it rests. That foundation is the proof of God's transcendent goodness in the gift of his Son to be a Saviour. But that gift is the strongest imaginable proof that God will not and cannot pardon sin without atonement. How absurd, then, to regard it as a reason for expecting what it proves to be impossible!

It is also refuted by the analogy of all God's previous dispensations, both towards men and angels. If his goodness to the angels in their first estate only sets forth in a stronger light his terrible severity when they had fallen; if his goodness to man in his original condition is enhanced by contrast with severity, which doomed him and his race to everlasting ruin, how can the goodness which provides a Saviour and salvation even for the race thus ruined, exclude the supposition of proportionate severity towards those who will not thus be saved? It does not, it cannot; even

in theory the reasoning is unsound, because opposed to all analogy, and in practice, in experience, those who hold it to the end, will one day be effectually undeceived. Yes, the day is coming when those exhibitions of God's goodness and severity, of which we have been speaking, shall be, as it were, lost sight of and forgotten in the presence of a new, and to many souls, an unexpected demonstration, when they who shall have sinned on to the verge of life, refusing to believe in God's severity as something inconsistent with his goodness, shall be made to see both stare them in the face with terrible distress,—his goodness embodied in the Saviour whom they have rejected, and on whose blood they have trampled,—his severity in that derided hell which they regarded as a phantom, and from which they would not let him save them. Between these two fires—the fire of divine love, and the fire of divine wrath—the one, through their obstinate impenitence and unbelief, beyond their reach; the other, opening its devouring jaws already to receive them—they may cling convulsively to that which is no longer theirs, even as a temporary resting-place; but, as they are thrust off from it for ever, they shall find their own perdition added to the numberless examples of the same great truth, and hear the voice of a great multitude, like the rush of many waters, say, "Behold the goodness and severity of God!" The solemn truth cannot be stated too plainly or too strongly. The gospel is a savour of death unto death in them that perish. To hear it is a blessing only to those who believe and embrace it. To all others it is a fearful aggravation of their guilt and their damnation. Better never to have heard the name of Christ, than to reject him; better never to have tasted of God's goodness, than to experience his severity.

The view which we have taken of God's goodness and severity, has reference strictly only to his dealings with the race as such, just as Paul in the text refers to the dispensation of God's mercy towards Jews and Gentiles. But the truth involved may also be applied to individuals. The general analogy holds good, though not in all particulars. It is true, my hearer, you were never in a state of personal probation. That was past in Adam, and, as his descendant, you are not in danger of perdition, but are lost already. What you want is not so much a way of escape as a method of

recovery. But in another sense, you are in a probationary state. Salvation is offered, and on your acceptance or refusal hangs your everlasting destiny. This possibility, this opportunity, illustrates gloriously the goodness of God; but the neglect or abuse of it will no less conspicuously show forth his severity. Instead of being mitigated by the goodness which precedes, his ultimate severity will by it be unspeakably augmented in intensity.

And, as this is the clearly defined course of duty and of safety for the preachers of the gospel, so it is for those who hear it. Let every person who is still within the reach of mercy, look upon his preservation, even thus far, as a signal proof of the divine goodness, and beware how you abuse it! Every gift, every exemption, every prolongation of the period allowed you for repentance and conversion; every providential warning, every fresh appeal to your understanding and conscience, every moment added to the long, long respite of your fearful sentence, every gleam of hope that you may yet escape its execution, every motion of your limbs, every heaving of your lungs, every pulsation of your heart, unless converted by a true faith into priceless blessings, will infallibly plant daggers of supererogatory torment in your ever-dying soul hereafter. While you thank God, therefore, for the gifts which you enjoy, "be not high-minded, but fear"—"Behold the goodness and severity of God, on them which fell severity, but toward thee goodness, if thou continue in his goodness; otherwise, thou also shalt be cut off."

I exhort you to depart, then, with a deep conviction that the goodness and severity of God are not at variance, or exclusive of each other; but reciprocally magnify each other; that we need not attempt to make the one of these great attributes conceal the other, but may look at them together; that we must thus view them if we would do justice to the revelation God has given of himself. The faithful presentation of the truth does not require us to exaggerate God's wrath by the denial of his mercy, or to magnify his goodness by denying his severity, or to confound essential distinctions by asserting the identity of both. We can only declare the whole counsel of God by holding up to view these two great phases of his infinite perfections. The ill effect of gazing too exclusively at one, can only be corrected by exhibiting the other.



#### XIV.

### “Be not Deceived.”

“Be not deceived.”—1 Cor. xv. 38.

TO be deceived is a misfortune so familiar to the everyday experience of all men, that some effort of reflection and abstraction is required to recognise it as an evil in itself, and irrespectively of its effects. And yet, it seems to follow from man's very nature as a rational being, that deception, even in the least degree, is both injurious and disgraceful, inasmuch as it implies some weakness, or inaction, or disorder of that faculty by which we are distinguished from the lower animals—the brutes that perish. As the act of deceiving is a certain indication of moral obliquity, so the very liability to be deceived is symptomatic of some intellectual infirmity or depravation. However insensible the mass of men may be to this important feature of their actual condition, there are not wanting partial and occasional perceptions of it, even among those who are commonly regarded as the least intelligent, or the least accustomed to reflect upon the constitution and the exercises of their own minds. Amidst the vast diversity of men's opinions and associations, as to praise and dispraise, honour and reproach, there is scarcely anything more uniform or universal than the disposition to resent a wilful fraud or imposition as a humiliation and an insult, without any reference to the injury inflicted, or the importance of the subject-matter, as a measure of the conscious degradation. To have been imposed upon or duped, even in a trivial matter, or in jest, is often felt more keenly as a personal dishonour than the foulest wrong or the severest loss, when otherwise inflicted. There are some men, and perhaps some cases in which all men, if abandoned to the government of natural,

unsanctified motives, would prefer the imputation of dishonesty to that of weakness ; and our Saviour neither spoke at random nor in reference to a merely Jewish custom, when he singled out “thou fool,” as one of the severest and least tolerable insults that a man could offer to his fellow. What is all this but the testimony of mankind, so much the stronger if unconscious and involuntary, to its own intellectual disgrace—the protest of the intellect itself against those daily and hourly humiliations which belong to its actual anomalous condition.

But this condition includes something more and something worse than any depravation or derangement purely intellectual. However humbling this might be to man, considered merely as a rational being, it is awfully aggravated by its complication with a spiritual malady, equally real and far more malignant, involving deadly alienation from the standard of all moral rectitude. However distinguishable and indeed distinct this intellectual and moral depravation may be, and however subtilly philosophers may speculate and reason as to their priority and mutual relations, the most interesting fact to us and to all men, as attested both by revelation and experience, is the fact, that the two evils coexist in one case—that to us, at least, they spring from the same cause, and must be healed, if at all, by the same remedy.

That this is really the case, apart from other most conclusive evidence, is proved by the mysterious obliquities of human intellect, in reference precisely to the most momentous subjects, where its genuine and normal operation seems essential to the welfare and even to the safety of the subject ; by the strange but certain fact, not only that the weak in other things are weak in these, though even that might be justly regarded as surprising, but that those who seem strong-minded and sagacious as to matters of the present life, so as to be beyond the reach of all deception, are, in relation to their highest interests, not only liable, but actually, constantly, ruinously, shamefully deceived.

Nor is this a mere accident of man’s condition, which might have been otherwise and yet have left him, with respect to all essentials, as he is. A rational being could not be morally depraved without intellectual debasement, whether this be regarded as the cause, or the effect, or the concomitant of that ; or if this

abstract proposition be disputed, the fact, in reference to our depravity, is settled by our own experience, confirming the incessant exhibition of our fallen state in Scripture as a state of culpable but pitiable weakness, folly, and irrationality—of constant exposure and subjection to the grossest as well as the most subtle and refined delusions. The mysterious influence of evil spirits on the character and destiny of men, is represented in the Scriptures, not as a coercive power, but as a deception, from the time of Eve, who, being deceived, was in the first transgression, to the day when the devil that deceived her shall be cast into the lake of fire. Through the whole of this long interval, there is no description of the race more true to Scripture and experience, and at the same time more completely humbling to the pride of man, than that which represents them as "foolish [*ἀνόητοι*, irrational], disobedient, *deceived*, serving divers lusts and pleasures;" or that which describes "evil men and seducers" as "waxing worse and worse, *deceiving and being deceived*." There would be something fearfully bewildering and confounding in the sight, if we could view it in a clear light and without obstruction or optical illusion, of a world of intellect, thus crazed and smitten with judicial blindness, mutually leading one another into error and to ultimate perdition—a spectacle of horror from which no relief can be obtained, except by looking up to Him who equally controls the world of matter and the world of mind, and of whom it may be said, in this as well as in a lower sense, that "with him [alone] is strength and wisdom; *the deceived and the deceiver are his*" (Job xii. 16).

Without pausing to determine or enumerate the various instrumental agencies by which this mighty process of deception is continually carried on, and which may all be resolved into the three great sources of delusion and of consequent corruption—our own hearts, our fellow-men, and evil spirits, or, as the Scripture more emphatically phrases it, the world, the flesh, and the devil—let me simply press upon your notice and your memory the intimate connection which in all such scriptural delineations is established between human depravity and human folly, so that they interpenetrate and mutually qualify each other, making sin inconceivably irrational, and foolishness unutterably sinful; representing every unrenewed heart as "*deceitful above all things,*" to itself as

well as others, and, for that very reason, “desperately wicked ;” as hard, not by accident, or by an arbitrary, inevitable effect *ab extra*, but “hardened through the *deceitfulness* of sin ;” and connecting the perdition of the lost on the one hand, indeed, with “the working of Satan,” but on the other, “with all *deceivableness* of unrighteousness in them that perish, because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. For which cause God shall send them strong delusions, to believe a lie, that all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness” (2 Thess. ii. 9-12).

Now this is the condition from which Christ redeems us. Of him as a Saviour, no less than of God as the sovereign arbiter, it may be said, “the deceived and the deceiver are his.” The effect of Christianity, that is, of personal regeneration, is, to put an end to this perpetual deception, active and passive, to the habit of deceiving, and to the condition of being deceived. Such is undoubtedly the actual experience of every penitent, believing sinner ; but as conversion, though it breaks the power and destroys the dominion of our natural corruption, does not utterly abolish it, but leaves us to struggle with the remnants of it through the present life, this new and strange condition of the soul displays itself in that specific form, or part of our corruption which we have been now considering, as truly as in every other. The fatal spell of sin is broken, the great governing delusion of the mind and of the life has been dispelled, and can never be renewed in the same form or the same degree. But it would be a great and dangerous mistake to think that all deception is henceforth impossible, even in reference to spiritual interests and objects. The continued danger of delusion, even as to these, is one of the peculiar circumstances of the Christian life on earth, or the condition of the Church militant, distinguishing it from that of the Church triumphant. The cause or ground of its continuance, though certainly mysterious, is not more so in this case than in any other part of that severe but salutary discipline by which the faith and love of God’s elect are to be purified and strengthened before they enter into glory. Of this discipline, for which multitudes who once groaned under it are now thanking God in heaven, the continued possibility of error and deception is a constituted part, and



may, therefore, be regarded as an indispensable ingredient of that "much tribulation" through which "we must enter the kingdom of God"—that "great tribulation" out of which they came who have already "washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb," and which, even in the meantime, "worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope—a hope that maketh not ashamed, because, even now, the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us."

Of the fact itself, that even true believers are in danger of deception, which, though not allowed to be destroying, may be hurtful and distressing to themselves and others, if proof be needed, it is furnished, besides others which I shall not stop to mention, by the frequent warnings against this very peril, addressed by Christ and his apostles, not to unbelieving and impenitent sinners, but to our Saviour's own disciples, and through them to the Churches which they founded and instructed. "Take heed lest any man deceive you," was a solemn form of words, employed by Christ himself upon a solemn occasion; and it finds an echo in that phrase which Paul so frequently reiterates, that it has been called one of his favourite expressions, "Be not deceived," "Be not deceived." Can this incessant warning be a false alarm, or have respect to an imaginary danger? If we think so, we have reason to regard it as especially addressed to us; for to nothing more than to the danger of delusion and deception are those warnings of the same apostle more appropriate—"Be not high-minded, but fear"—and—"Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall!"

This general view, however, of the danger to which we are exposed, can be practically and effectually useful only by prompting the inquiry, when and where, or in relation to what specific evils, are we thus in peril? The attempt to ascertain these by conjecture, or by reasoning from abstract principles, would be not only endless, from the infinite variety of cases which might be supposed, but unsafe, from the doubts which might still be entertained, if not as to the actual existence, yet as to the magnitude and nearness of the dangers which might be described. From both these disadvantages we may escape, and at the same time be

provided with a valuable safeguard against certain perils, by confining our attention for the present to the special cases which occasioned the original utterance of these solemn warnings not to be deceived, and which are all, without exception, common to the general experience of the Church and to the personal experience of its members. By pursuing this course, the same passages of Scripture which establish the existence of the danger as a general fact, may be employed as clues to guide us in the application of the salutary knowledge thus imparted to specific cases.

1. When our Saviour said, "Take heed lest any man deceive you," the particular deception which he had in view was that in reference to his second coming, and the assumption of his name and person by pretenders or impostors. The experience of the Church has shown that this was not a temporary, transient danger; for although the appearance of false Christs may not have been a frequent occurrence, this is only the gravest or extreme form of the peril against which our Lord forewarned his followers. The more refined and specious form of the deception consists, not in the personal assumption of Christ's name, but in the confident assurance of his near approach, and the attempt to determine what he has left indefinite, not as a matter of mere speculation, but as an engine of fanatical excitement, interrupting all the ordinary duties and relations of society, withdrawing men's attention from the claims of personal religion and from preparation for their own departure out of life, to fix it on a great catastrophe supposed to be at hand, and to be dreaded only as the most impious and impenitent of men might dread a deluge and an earthquake; and driving some, through mere excitement and alarm, to madness or to self-destruction. This, if only known to us historically, or by a remote tradition, might be thought incredible; and yet it is one of the most recent and familiar forms of popular delusion, the effects of which are still felt in communities and families around us, while stimulating and productive causes are continually seething and fermenting in the cauldron of fanatical religion, fanciful interpretation, false philosophy, and social revolution, which is boiling up and bubbling in the very midst of Christian Churches and of learned institutions, ready to boil over, when the necessary point of heat or fermentation has

been reached, with a fresh inundation of insane disorder, to be followed by a fresh reaction to the opposite extreme of spiritual sloth and deadness.

Nor is the warning thus afforded to be limited to this precise kind of delusion, but extended to all other enthusiastic and fanatical excitements, which produce analogous effects by like means, and which educated and enlightened Christians are too commonly contented to despise as mere absurdities, from which no danger can be apprehended. There is no intellectual or moral feature of the age more striking and alarming than the frequency with which men of strong and cultivated minds are carried away by forms of error, which to others of the same class appear simply ridiculous. It is not bad logic or erroneous reasoning that produces these results; it is delusion—it is something that prevents the proper use of reason, and by making revelation a mere nose of wax, enables the subject of deception to pass with equal ease over the smallest and the greatest intervals, to leap from truth not only into error, great or small, but into nonsense, contradiction, and fatuity, the practical negation of his own intelligence, as well as the rejection of all previous knowledge and belief. Among the victims of these strong delusions are some who once securely laughed at their pretensions as absurd, and therefore innocent,—as most men do until they are bewitched by them. The growing frequency of such irrational conversions, even in high places, and among what we regard as privileged classes, ought to teach us the necessity of something better than intellectual attainments or advantages to save us even from what now appears to us the drivel of idiocy or the rage of madness, and give us ears to hear the Master saying, even of these things, and even to ourselves, “Take heed, take heed lest any man deceive you.”

2. Twice, in the same epistle Paul says to the Church of the Corinthians, “Be not deceived!” In the first of these cases (1 Cor. vi. 9) the admonition may to many seem as needless and superfluous as that addressed by Christ to his disciples. If none of us require to be warned against false prophets or pretended Christs, how much less can we need to be admonished that the joys of heaven are not reserved for those who practise the most heinous sins, not only of a spiritual and insidious, but of a cor-

poreal and outward kind. Who is, or ever was, in danger of supposing that idolaters, adulterers, extortioners, revilers, thieves, drunkards, and the perpetrators of enormities still worse, are to inherit the kingdom of God? And yet it is precisely this impossible delusion against which Paul warns his readers, not only here, but in Ephesians (v. 6), where a similar enumeration of the blackest crimes is followed by the solemn admonition, "*Let no man deceive you with vain words, for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience.*" It was not to uninstructed heathen that this language was addressed; for he says expressly in the verse preceding (Eph. v. 5), "*Ye know that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.*" It was not addressed to uninstructed, impenitent, or unconverted hearers of the gospel, for he says in the verse following (Eph. v. 7), "*Be not ye therefore partakers with them; for ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord.*" And as in Ephesus, so in Corinth; after enumerating some of the most revolting forms of human wickedness, he adds (1 Cor. vi. 11), "*And such were some of you; but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.*" It was to justified, regenerated, sanctified believers, that the apostle addressed this apparently gratuitous assurance that those who continued in the practice of gross vices could not be saved.

What was the error against which he meant to warn them? Not the mere theoretical or doctrinal absurdity of believing that men could be saved *from* sin, and yet continue *in* it—for of this paralogism the Corinthian and Ephesian converts were in as little danger as ourselves; but the practical paralogism of thinking themselves Christians when their lives belied it—the self-contradiction of a high profession and a lawless life. Is this inconsistency impossible? Alas! it is among the most familiar features of religious life in every age and every country. Ashamed as all would be to teach it or to hold it as a formal proposition, how many practise it, and preach it by example, without a scruple and without a blush! It is in vain to say the combination is absurd; it must be an imaginary one. Precisely the same reasoning

might be used to demonstrate that there is no sin at all; for all sin is irrational, and every act of sin admits of a *reductio ad absurdum*. But in this, as in the other case, it is not a mistake in logic, but in morals. It is not weak reasoning; it is strong delusion of the heart as well as of the head, and one to which the highest are as open as the lowest, the wisest as the weakest and the most besotted, if abandoned to their own resources. Here, again, the instances of this delusion are confined to no Church, country, or condition of society. Explain it or deny it as you will, the fact is written in the records of the Church and in the memory of the world, that men of eminent endowments and conspicuous position, whatever may have been their creed or theoretical conviction, have lived precisely as they must have lived, if they had really examined and believed the monstrous blasphemy against which Paul so earnestly forewarns us, saying, "*Be not deceived.*"

3. But if this delusion, after all, should seem too monstrous in itself, or too remote from our experience, to be made the subject of a serious admonition to professing Christians, let us look for a moment at another case in which the same apostle uses the same formula, "*Be not deceived.*" The readers immediately addressed are the Galatians, who had swerved from the simplicity of gospel doctrine under the influence of Judaizing teachers; and besides the fatal error which they had embraced in theory by falling from grace—that is, from the doctrine of gratuitous salvation—seem to have been betrayed, as might have been expected, into other false opinions, tending more or less to vitiate their Christian character and course of life. Among these there appears to have been one growing rather out of the abuse than the rejection of the doctrines of free grace,—the notion that, provided men are saved, it matters little how they live, since all are to be saved alike, and the imperfections of believers, nay, their worst neglects of duty and most heinous violations of the law of God, can have no effect upon their ultimate condition or eternal destiny. In opposition to this error, far more specious and insidious than either of the others, and therefore not unlikely to be harboured where the others never gain access, he teaches that the laws of spiritual life are as determinate and uniform as those of nature, that even true believers will not be, by miracles, exempted from

their operation, and that although saved by sovereign mercy from perdition, and made perfect in holiness, the soul's capacity and actual experience of good hereafter will bear due proportion to its progress here, its growth in grace, sanctification, union with Christ, communion with God, separation from sin, and assimilation to the divine nature.

If the subtle perversion of the gospel doctrine here corrected is a natural and almost certain growth of human weakness and corruption, even under the prevailing influence of saving grace, and therefore not confined to certain periods, or places, or conditions of the Church or of society at large, but liable and likely to spring up as tares among the wheat, wherever men are men, and sin is sin, we should require no special pleading to convince us, or impassioned exhortation to persuade us, that the great apostle, "being dead, yet speaketh" unto us, as he spoke of old to the Galatians, saying, "*Be not deceived*; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting" (Gal. vi. 7, 8).

4. To some of you, my hearers, I rejoice to believe that even this monition, although recognised as resting on divine authority and certain truth, may not be specially or personally applicable on the ground of any present and immediate danger, or of actual subjection to the several delusions which have been described, and with which the apostle has associated that remarkable expression, "*Be not deceived.*" I need scarcely say that this exemption from deception, or the risk of it, is, even in the best and most favourable case, restricted and precarious, since every human heart, so long as any residue of its corruption still remains, is in itself exposed to all the evil which that corruption is capable of producing when free from the restraints of sovereign grace. But since that grace does operate, and those restraints are really imposed, you may undoubtedly be free at this time from the pressure of these strong delusions, from fanatical incitements and hallucinations, and from every form of Antinomian licence. If this be so, you will acknowledge your peculiar obligation, not only to thank God for his delivering mercy and restraining grace, but also to abstain from everything that would endanger the security and liberty

which you enjoy. Among the dangers thus to be avoided, I will name but one, and in the choice of that one I shall still be guided by the apostolic warnings not to be deceived. It is the danger of forgetting that the lowest and most moderate degrees of Christianity, though really distinct and distant, to the eye of God, from the highest attainments of a mere morality, and still more from the forms of hypocritical profession, may resemble both in human estimation, and be brought into juxtaposition with them in the ordinary intercourse of life. How natural and amiable is the wish to make this intercourse as peaceable as may be, and for this end to sacrifice whatever seems to be a needless rigour and austerity, endeavouring to obliterate or cover the invidious line of demarcation which unhappily divides the Church and world; going as far as the most yielding conscience will allow in partaking of those pleasures which a more morose religion would proscribe as dangerous, if not unlawful, under the specious pretext of avoiding sanctimonious preciseness, and of "winning souls" by wise accommodation and concession to the innocent, or even to the doubtful customs of society. If any of you are now pursuing this course, as thousands have pursued it in every age, you may not be prepared for the suggestion that perhaps you are mistaken after all, and that if the warning voice of "Paul the Aged" could now reach you from his grave in Rome, or from his throne in heaven, it might only be to say again to you as he said to the Corinthians eighteen hundred years ago, "*Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners: awake to righteousness and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame*" (1 Cor. xv. 33, 34).



## XV.

### The Churches Warned.

“Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it.”—Acts xxviii. 28.

FAMILIAR as long practice has now made it, there is still something strange in the facility with which we are accustomed to apply to ourselves and our contemporaries, terms that are strictly appropriate only to a former dispensation. I do not here refer to the prevailing practice of appropriating to the Christian Church the promises originally uttered to the house of Israel; for this, I doubt not, is in strict accordance with their true design and import. But I mean the habit of transferring to our own times what was really temporary in design, and has, in fact, long ceased to be. A striking instance is afforded by the way in which we talk about the “Gentiles,” as if we were “Jews,” and bore the same relation to the heathen that existed between Jews and Gentiles under the restrictive institutions of the old economy. Such is the force of words to influence as well as to express thought, that by dint of constant repetition men may actually come at last to think themselves a chosen and peculiar people, not only in the spiritual Christian sense, but in the national external sense.

The very existence of this disposition to confound things so dissimilar affords a proof that with all their dissimilitude, there must be strong points of resemblance, and it may not be unprofitable, therefore, to consider briefly what these points of resemblance are; in what sense and to what extent our tacit assumption of the Jewish character and standing may be justified, and also by what dangers and responsibilities, or what advantages and honours this distinction is attended. In attempting this comparison, it will be found to favour concentration and precision to select some one



turning point, some critical juncture in the history of Israel, at which the Jewish character and spirit were peculiarly developed, and if possible brought into immediate juxtaposition with the corresponding traits of Christianity. Such a conjuncture is the one at which the words of the text were uttered, when the old economy had really been abrogated by the advent of the Saviour, and the Jewish world was rent asunder through its whole extent by the great dividing question, "What think ye of Christ?" In consequence of this very agitation, Paul becomes a prisoner and is sent to Rome. But even there he preaches the gospel, in obedience to his Lord's command, "beginning at Jerusalem;" even there the first call is addressed to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel." He convokes the chief men of the Jews, of which race and religion it would seem, from the contemporary statements of Josephus, there were thousands then in Rome. To this representative assembly of his people, he addressed a vindication of himself and of his Master; of himself as guiltless even with respect to Judaism, and though groundlessly accused, devoid of malice towards his enemies; of Christ, as the "hope of Israel," for whose sake, said he, "I am bound with this chain," thus connecting, in the clearest and most striking form, his personal captivity with that great cause for which he counted it all joy to suffer.

Being assured by those who heard him of their willingness to do him justice and their wish to know more of this sect or heresy which everywhere was spoken against, he drops all personal considerations, and to the many who assembled at his lodgings on a day appointed, he "expounds and testifies the kingdom of God," that is to say, the nature of the new dispensation as distinguished from the old, "persuading them concerning Jesus," that is, proving him to be the promised Christ, the substance of the ancient shadows, and in this sense, as in others, the "end of the law;" proving all this "out of Moses and the prophets," from the "morning till the evening." When he found, as he no doubt had foreseen, that they were not agreed among themselves, and that "some did not believe," he parted from them after he had spoken "one word," and a fearful word it was, being nothing less than that appalling premonition of judicial blindness, in the sixth chapter of Isaiah, for which the prophet was himself prepared by a solemn vision

and a symbolical assurance of forgiveness. To this application of an awful threatening he adds, "Be it known unto you therefore," that is, because you thus reject the Hope of Israel, for whose sake the Mosaic economy existed, and at whose approach it was to crumble,—“Be it known unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it.” In like manner, Paul and Barnabas had said, long before, to the unbelieving Jews of Antioch in Pisidia, “It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you; but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, lo, we turn unto the Gentiles.” And again, when those of Corinth contradicted and blasphemed, “Paul shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads, I am clean, from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles.”

The same offer, the same refusal, and the same result are expressed or implied in the passage now before us. Its particular expressions need but little explanation. The “salvation of God,” literally, his saving thing, or that by which he saves, does not here mean the actual experience of salvation, but, as appears from the last clause of the verse, in which it is spoken of as something to be heard, the doctrines, message, offer, or glad tidings of salvation; the same that Paul to the Pisidians calls “the word of this salvation.” The phrase, “and they will hear it,” might perhaps be more exactly rendered, “they too shall hear it.” By a simple change of emphasis, however, the expression may be made to convey these two ideas, or modifications of the same idea, that they *shall* and that they *will* hear the message of salvation; that they shall, in the dispensations of God’s providence, enjoy the opportunity of hearing, and that through the dispensations of his grace they will give ear to it. All this may, therefore, be considered as included in the meaning of the text.

But the main point to which I would invite your attention is the contrast here exhibited between the Christianity of Paul and the Judaism of his hearers, under circumstances singularly suited to bring out in bold relief the characteristic attributes of both, so that if we would compare ourselves with either, we could hardly ask a better opportunity. And as one part of the comparison essentially involves the other, let us inquire in what points, if in

any, we may claim affinity with these representatives of Judaism at the eventful epoch of its dying struggle with the infant Church.

1. The first resemblance which I would suggest is, that they, like us, had long been in possession of exclusive privileges, and accustomed to survey without emotion the great mass of mankind deprived of them. This is the grand assimilating fact in their condition and in ours, which has led to the habitual adoption of their language, and appropriation to ourselves of what is really peculiar to their insulated and unique position. The ancient Jews were in exclusive possession of the Scriptures, a pure worship, and an authorized ministry. So are Christians now, as compared with millions of heathen, and the Protestant Churches, in comparison even with millions of nominal Christians. Hence it seems natural and not unreasonable to regard ourselves as bearing just the same relation to the Gentiles of the present day, as that sustained by Israel to the Gentiles of antiquity. But let us not, in looking at the marked points of resemblance, overlook the no less marked points of diversity between the cases. The exclusive privileges of the ancient Jews were theirs by an express divine appointment. The barriers which divided them from other nations, although temporary in design, were reared by an Almighty hand, and could be demolished by no other. Their adherence to these old restrictions, after the set time for their removal had arrived, was indeed an act of flagrant unbelief and disobedience; but until that time came, they had no choice, they were shut up to the necessity of standing aloof, and living apart, and avoiding all communion with the nations as such. Does our situation correspond with this? Are our exclusive privileges forced upon us, as it were, by irresistible authority? If not, our insulation from the world is very different from that of ancient Israel. So far as the enclosures which have shut us in are human structures, reared by selfishness and cemented by apathy, they differ wholly from the walls by which the ancient Zion was encompassed, and her sons withheld from all communion with the Gentiles. They had been taught, and by divine authority, to look upon the nations as excluded, for a time, from the covenant of mercy. We have been taught, and by the same authority, that these in all respects are heirs of the same promise. They, as a nation, were in fact the

chosen and peculiar people of Jehovah. We, in this respect, have not, and never had, the shadow of a claim to take precedence of our fellow Gentiles. In a word, considering the divine institutions out of which their prejudices grew, and the want of any corresponding pretext for our own, we may say, without irreverence or perversion, that they were straitened in Moses and the prophets, but that we, if straitened, must be straitened in ourselves. Let this essential difference be kept in view, while we still distinctly recognise the real similarity between the cases in the long-continued undisturbed enjoyment of exclusive privileges.

2. The other points of resemblance which I shall advert to, all arise from that just mentioned, as its more remote or proximate effects. And in the next place, I may specify the influence of long-continued and exclusive privileges on the opinions, the doctrinal belief, of those enjoying them. It is curious, yet melancholy, to observe with what facility advantages possessed by a few for the good of the many may come to be regarded as prerogatives belonging to the few, to the entire exclusion of the many. Of this fatal tendency to abuse, the rise of all despotic power is an illustration. It was never more remarkably exemplified, however, than in the case before us, that of a particular people, made the sole depository of the truth and of the promises of mercy, for a limited time, with a view to their general diffusion afterwards, and seduced by the very possession of this glorious trust, first into forgetfulness, then into ignorance, and then into denial, of the very end for which it was created. That this perversion was facilitated by the peculiar institutions which were necessary to secure the purpose of the temporary system, cannot be denied. But this effect of the Mosaic institutions must be carefully distinguished from their legitimate design and tendency. With all their restrictions and exclusive regulations, they were not intended to create or foster a contracted nationality and a contempt or hatred of mankind. This might be presumed from the divine authority by which they were established.

It may be more certainly inferred from many intimations in the law itself, and still more clearly read in the discourses of the prophets, its inspired expounders. One grand design of the prophetic office was to guard the institutions of the law against

abuse, and to recall the people from the gross corruptions which its outward forms were apt to generate to more enlarged and spiritual views. A single instance of this general fact, is the prophetic exposition of the sacrificial system, equally distant from fanatical rejection of appointed rites and from superstitious worship of the rites themselves. The very terms of these inspired interpretations seem to show, not only that they were required, but that, with respect to many, and perhaps to most, they were without effect except to blind and harden. The great mass of the people, far from prizing their peculiar and distinguishing advantages as present or prospective means of general good, valued them only for their own sake, and by so doing showed that they mistook their very nature, and instead of deriving from them an exclusive benefit, were utterly incapable of deriving any benefit at all.

This cardinal error, as to the very purpose of the system under which they lived, could not fail to produce a general distortion in the doctrinal views of those who held it. They who did not know, or could not be persuaded, that "the law must *go forth* from Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem," could never be expected to appreciate the truth, that the law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul, and his testimony sure, making wise the simple. They who believed that the truth or mercy of Jehovah existed for themselves alone, could surely never have obtained a glimpse of what his truth and mercy are. Such was the doctrinal effect produced upon the ancient Jews by their long-continued and exclusive privileges.

Now, its tendency to this result was not peculiar to the ancient world or to the house of Israel. It may exist and operate in us, and with a fearful force, proportioned to the magnitude of our advantages. If they, with an unfinished revelation and a heavy ceremonial yoke upon their necks, could dream of an exclusive right to God's compassions, what may not we, without preventing grace, infer from our unclouded light and our unshackled freedom? And if this grand error had a tendency to vitiate their whole view of divine truth, what security have we that an analogous effect may not be realized in our experience? Here, then, to say the least, there is a possible, if not an actual resemblance

between us and them. Because they were favoured, for a time, with an exclusive revelation, they forgot the very end for which they had received it, and forgetting this, were naturally led to take distorted views of that religion which they thus regarded as exclusively their own for ever. So may *we*, perhaps I ought to say, so *have we*, reaped precisely the same fruit from precisely the same seed, so far as we have sown it.

3. This view of the matter may be rendered clearer by selecting from the whole mass of opinions thus injuriously affected by the culpable abuse of long-continued and exclusive privileges, one or two peculiarly important and peculiarly conspicuous in the case before us. Take for example the great doctrine which divided the apostle of the Gentiles from his Jewish hearers, at the interesting juncture when they went their way after Paul had spoken to them "one word." What was the relative position of the parties? Common to both was a professed belief in Moses and the prophets, and in the promises of Messiah as the Saviour of his people. But they fatally diverged at an essential point. Paul believes that the Messiah has already come, and that Jesus of Nazareth is he, and as a necessary consequence, that the restrictions of the old economy are at an end, and the diffusion of the true religion through the world the first great duty of God's people. They, on the contrary, regard the advent of Messiah as still future, and the barrier between Jews and Gentiles as still standing. The connection of these doctrines in their several creeds is not fortuitous. It was *because* Paul believed in the Messiahship of Christ that he believed in the necessity and present duty of extending the blessings of the true religion to the Gentiles no less than the Jews. Believing, as his countrymen at Rome did, that Messiah had not come, they were consistent in believing also that the old restrictive system was still valid and still binding. I say they were consistent, not that they were right, or even excusable, in so believing. Their consistency was nothing but consistency in error, error sinful in its origin and fatal in its issue. Their mistake was not merely one of chronology. It was not that they put the date of the Messiah's advent too low down. Their rejection of Christ shows that they erred, not only as to the fulfilment of the promise, but as to the meaning of the promise itself. Their expectation was not realized

because it was a false one. They had corrupted the very doctrine of salvation, upon which all depends. They looked for a Saviour who had never been promised, and could never come. Instead of one who should destroy all national restrictions, they expected a national deliverer, conqueror, and king. This dream of national advancement could be verified only at the cost of other nations. Their mistake as to the Messiah, therefore, tended directly to cherish a spirit of national exclusiveness, and to suppress all rising of a catholic charity. And thus appears the truth of the position, that the doctrinal error of the unbelieving Jews, with respect to the Messiah, and their practical error with respect to the Gentiles, were as really and closely connected as Paul's doctrine with respect to the Messiahship of Christ, and his practice with respect to the conversion of the world.

And the same connection still exists and will betray itself between a Jewish doctrine and a Jewish practice. For, although it is impossible that any Christian, even one by mere intellectual conviction, should embrace the very error of the old Jews as to the Messiah's kingdom, it is altogether possible and easy to embrace one of a similar description, by unworthy and inadequate conceptions of the Christian system, as designed and suited for a universal faith, as well with respect to its doctrines as its institutions. There is no danger of our thinking that Christ came to be a worldly conqueror and not a Saviour, but there is great danger of our thinking, or at least of our acting, as if we thought that he came to save *us*, and to secure us in the undisturbed enjoyment of our temporal and spiritual comforts, and that the rest of the world must be consigned to his uncovenanted mercy. There is great danger of our looking through the wrong end of the telescope, and seeing that diminished which we ought to have seen magnified, the world reduced to a nut-shell, and our own house or village swelled into a world. There is great danger of our being taught and teaching others this great doctrine as some children learn geography, beginning at the spot on which they stand, and by degrees enlarging their horizon till they take in a whole country, state, or hemisphere, and at the last the world itself. This lesson in geography the Church has long been learning, but has stuck fast in the elements. In order to describe the larger circle, we must

learn to reverse the process, and begin as the apostles did with the idea of a world to be converted, and from this descend to the particulars included. There are great advantages, no doubt, in rising from particulars to generals, and in making home the starting-point of distant operations.

But however necessary this may be in practice, it is well, in theory at least, to take the other course, and to begin at the beginning, that is, where the apostolic preachers set the ball in motion, who, although they obeyed their Lord's commandment by beginning at Jerusalem, were careful not to end there, like the charity of those who in their zeal for the maxim that charity begins at home, not unfrequently forget to let their own begin at all. This preposterous inversion of the grand design of Christianity, by putting first what ought to be put next, is a doctrinal mistake to which the Church is not a stranger, and which certainly bears some resemblance; although far from coinciding wholly, or at all, in its external form, with that of the old Jews in relation to the kingdom of Messiah. And with this resemblance in the causes, we need scarcely be surprised at the analogy of their effects, or wonder that a Jewish spirit should produce a Jewish practice. If the unbelieving Jews of old were led by false ideas of the Messiah and his kingdom, to a spurious morality, an outside holiness, a voluntary humility, and will-worship, a deification of the outward and material, and a laborious groping in the darkness and the dust of mere observance, to the neglect of the rain, and sunshine, and refreshing airs of genuine religion, why should it be thought incredible that kindred errors among us may lead to the exchange of spiritual life for dead formality, factitious morals, and a senseless trifle-worship? Would it, in fact, be extravagant to state it as a lesson of our own experience, that a similar contraction of the views and feelings has been actually found to produce a similar deterioration; that the truth has not been kept most pure by those who kept it to themselves; that the habit of leaving out of view the expansive nature and design of Christianity has sometimes been coincident with that of putting mere conventional arrangements in the place of vital principles and everlasting truths?

But it is not on this general deterioration of the religious life, however real and deplorable, that we are led to dwell at present,



as the most important practical effect of long-continued and exclusive privileges, and of the errors which they tend to generate; for in addition to all this, or in the midst of it, there rises up, like a colossus, one practical abuse which may, at least for this time, be allowed to overshadow all the rest. Besides the influence exerted by this error of the Jews, upon themselves, whether doctrinal, moral, spiritual, or ecclesiastical, it led, as we have seen, at the beginning of the Christian dispensation, to a practical denial of the very end for which the old theocracy existed, and a consequent refusal to extend the true religion to the Gentiles, thus converting their own boasted and adored distinctions into a mere historical enigma, to perplex the generations that should follow, by exhibiting the strange sight of a people created to save the world, and yet fondly dreaming to be saved alone! How far it is possible for us to occupy the same position before men and angels must depend upon the sameness of our opportunities and consequent responsibilities, when tried by the avowed rule of the divine administration, that of those who have much, much will be required, and the cardinal principle of Christian charity, "Freely ye have received, freely give!"

That a marked diversity exists between the situation of the Jews and ours, we have seen already. But let it be remembered, that all the difference is in our favour. If the Jews, even while they were secluded from the Gentiles by divine authority, were bound to keep their eye upon the great ulterior end of that seclusion, and to cherish feelings in accordance with it, how much more does this same obligation rest on us, who have no external disadvantages to hinder its discharge? The Christian world, or, if you please, the reformed part of Christendom, are not intrusted with the oracles of God as an exclusive deposit, *even for a time*. We have them that we may diffuse them. There are no walls built by a divine hand around us, for whose fall we must wait before we go unto the Gentiles. The very dust and rubbish of those old barriers have long since disappeared. A great and effectual door into the heathen world is opened, and the voice of God is calling us to enter it. We have no doubts to solve, and no disputes to settle—as to the fact of the Messiah's advent—as to the question whether Jesus Christ is he. We have no associa-

tions with the old economy, or habits acquired under it, to restrain our feelings or impede our movements, even after the judgment and the conscience are convinced. Everything, both at home and abroad—in the teachings of God's word, and in the leadings of his providence—in the condition of the heathen and our own—makes us as free to think and act for their conversion, as the old Jews were paralyzed and crippled with respect to it. And yet, with all this difference in our favour, may we not be still too Jewish in our spirit and our conduct, with respect to those less favoured than ourselves? The gospel has indeed abolished national distinctions, but have we consented to their abolition? The old middle walls of partition have fallen at the blast of the trumpet, but may we not rear up others in their stead? and, if so, we may imprecate a curse upon ourselves, like that pronounced upon him who should rebuild the walls of Jericho.

This leads me, in the last place, to consider the resemblance which may possibly exist between the cases, with respect to providential retributions. We have seen the effects produced by these errors on the doctrinal views, the affections, and the lives of the antichristian Jews, and, through their neglect, on the condition of the world. These results they may have partially foreseen, and deliberately ventured on. But there were others which they dreamt not of, and which were, nevertheless, fixed in the divine determination. What means that solemn and repeated declaration of the great apostle, that he turns away from the Jews to the Gentiles? Does it mean merely that his personal ministry should now take that direction? There is evidently more, far more, implied. Does it mean that the Gentiles should, in spite of Jewish prejudice and bigotry, become partakers of their once exclusive privileges, or rather, of others far superior? Even this is not enough. There is an evident allusion, not only to a change, but to an interchange of character and state—not only to the grafting in of foreign branches, but to the excision of the native boughs—not only to the culture of the desert, but to the desolation of the vineyard. "Is it not yet a very little while," said Isaiah, in prophetic anticipation of this very change,—“is it not yet a very little while, and Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field, and the fruitful field shall be reckoned as a forest?” Had

this change literally taken place, it could not have been more complete or striking than that which has been wrought in the relative condition of the Jews and Gentiles. Left to his cherished notions of hereditary sanctity and safety, and his dreams of a Messiah yet to come, Israel has vanished from his place among the living, to haunt the nations as the restless ghost of a departed people, or to glide about the grave-yard where his hopes lie buried, while the dry bones of many nations, who appeared to slumber without hope, have been raised again and clothed with flesh, and new life breathed into their resurrection-bodies. They that dwelt in the dust awake, and the dew of God is as the dew of herbs, and the earth casts forth her dead!

But where are they who once monopolized the promises, and held fast, with a niggard grasp, the keys of heaven? Were it not for prophecies still awaiting their fulfilment, we might well say, in the words of the same prophet, "They are dead, they shall not live; they are deceased, they shall not rise; thou hast visited and destroyed them, and made all their memory to perish." Behold the goodness and severity of God! Behold the vision of the prophet verified! Lebanon has long since become a fruitful field, and the fruitful field for ages reckoned as a forest!

But how shall I venture to present the other side of this same picture, or to bring ourselves into comparison with Israel as I have just described him? Without pretending to decide what weight is due to such analogies, we can scarcely shut our eyes to the analogy itself, or fail to see that the comparison, already pushed so far, admits, at least, of an ideal consummation. We are all disposed, as individuals and nations, to exempt ourselves from the operation of the rules which we apply to others. We can look at the vicissitudes of other times, or of other subjects in our own, without imagining that we or ours may be subjected to the same great providential law. What the heathen called the wheel of fortune, we may call the wheel of providence. However imperceptible it may be on a small scale or within a narrow compass, it is impossible to take large views of human history, without perceiving that its processes are extensively, not to say uniformly, marked by alternation. We may leave altogether out of view the application of this statement to the case of individuals

and families. We may pass lightly over those vicissitudes of nations which have ever been the trite theme of declamatory moralizers; by far the most remarkable of which is that presented by the contrast of what Greece and Egypt were to the ancient world, with what they are to us.

Let us dwell, for an instant, on the map of Christendom, as it is and as it was—as it was at the death of the last apostle, or even fourteen hundred years ago—looking particularly at the western coast of Asia Minor and the northern coast of Asia—comparing their innumerable churches and multitudinous councils, not only with their present desolation, but with the actual state of Christianity in Britain and Scandinavia; and even in these nameless climes of which a Plato may have dreamed, and which Phenicians may have visited, but which have neither name nor place upon the chart of ancient knowledge, is it certain that this process of rotation has been finally arrested? or that its future evolutions will be left to the control of what we call fortuitous or accidental causes, which can neither be computed nor accounted for? Is it not possible, to say the least, that the vicissitudes yet future may sustain the same relation to extraordinary privilege and culpable abuse of it, as those which are already past, and some of which we have been tracing? In a word, is it too much to suppose that the prophetic vision may again be realized—another Lebanon become a fruitful field, and fields now fruitful be transformed into a silent and forsaken forest? What a view does this imagination, if it be no more, open far and wide before us! What a change of absolute condition and of mutual relations! What a levelling of hills and filling up of valleys! What fantastic confusion in the use of names, and in the associations coupled with them! How strange may it yet seem, to remember that Britain once ruled India—that America once talked or dreamed of civilizing Africa—that Australia and the isles of the Pacific once invited missionary labour from the northern continents, instead of lavishing it on them. Should this ever become more than an ideal picture, he who surveys it may retrace the course of time, as we have done, and as he speculates on causes and effects, and takes his stand beside the turning point, the critical conjuncture, where the tide of our prosperity began to ebb—he may imagine that he sees Paul standing, as he stood in

his own hired house at Rome, and stretching out his arms towards the perishing nations, and saying to the Christian Jews of this day, as he said to the Israelites of that, "Be it known unto you, therefore, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it."

I am far from venturing or wishing to put such anticipations in the place of higher motives, and especially of love to God and love to man, as stimulants to Christian effort. But if the bare imagination of such changes rouses us, and tends in any measure to enlarge and elevate our views beyond the dull routine of ordinary duties and of selfish interests, it cannot hurt us, and may do us good. I see not, therefore, why we should refuse to apply the last words of the text to ourselves, in the way of warning. There is no room here for invidious distinctions. None can censure others upon this point without censuring themselves. If we are conscious of inadequate exertions and of cold affections in this great cause, let us think of Israel according to the flesh, and of what he was and what he is—remember that such revolutions are still possible—that if we do not value Christianity enough to share it with the heathen, they may yet become possessed of it at our expense—nay, that while the glorious gospel is so commonly neglected and despised among ourselves, the word of this salvation is already sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it—are hearing it.

But it is not only in the way of warning that the words may be applied. They are also full of consolation and encouragement—of consolation for the eyes that weep and the hearts that bleed over our own spiritual desolations. Such, with all their zeal for God, are prone to walk by sight and not by faith, and to let their hopes and fears be too much governed by appearances. They are sometimes tempted by a spiritual pride, only more dangerous because insidious and unsuspected, to say, with the desponding prophet of old, "I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts, for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, and I, even I alone, am left." For such grief, and the unbelieving fears that breed it, an appropriate remedy is furnished by the doctrine "that God has visited the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name;" and that, although every ear and heart in

Christendom should be henceforth and for ever stopped against the word of life, "the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and they will hear it."

But the highest, best, and most important application of the words is yet to come. It is neither right nor salutary to dismiss this subject, with the tones of warning, and reproof, or even consolation, ringing in our ears. We sometimes lose as much by excessive or unreasonable lamentation over our defects and failures as by sheer neglect and apathy. The world is not to be converted, nor our quota of the work contributed, by passionate regrets that it is not yet done. The only profitable sorrow in such cases is that which, like the sorrow of repentance, ends in joy, or leads to it, by prompting to exertion. Our grief, too, must be mixed with gratitude, or it is selfish. Our paramount duty, in contemplation of the future and the past, is neither to presume nor to despair, but to thank God and take courage. To a soul thus humbled and yet excited, the tone of this scripture is encouraging, and I may even say exhilarating. For the truths of which it testifies are these—that this work is the work of God—that the salvation which we preach is his—that he has sent it, yes, and sent it to the Gentiles—and that they will hear it. And though among them, as among ourselves, many be called and few chosen, still this gospel of the kingdom must be preached in all the world, as a witness to all nations, before the end come. As Christ died, not for a nation, but a world, so all kindreds, tongues, and peoples, must be represented in that great assembly, to be gathered on Mount Zion, when the kingdoms of the world shall have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ. As a necessary means to this appointed end, and as a pledge of its accomplishment, in spite of evil omens and discouraging appearances, be it known unto you, you who long for it and hasten towards it, that "the word of this salvation," "the salvation of God" is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it.



## XVI.

### Kept by the Power of God.

“Kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.”—1 PETER i. 5.

THIS is only a fragment of a sentence, occurring in the midst of one of the most pregnant passages in the New Testament—one of the richest and most copious descriptions of the fruits of saving grace, and its effects upon its subjects. But, however undesirable it may be in general to insulate the doctrines of the Bible, and detach them from the context, upon which their just interpretation must depend, there is less objection here, because the clause selected, though really one link in a long chain, is like a literal link, complete in itself, as propounding a great doctrine of the Christian system, which admits of being separately looked at, and, indeed, must be so viewed, if we would see it distinctly, as the field of vision opened in the context is too vast to be embraced at one view, without painful effort and injurious confusion. Withdrawing our eyes, then, from the splendid but confounding spectacle presented in this passage, as a whole, of the divine love to believers, and its influence upon them, let us fix our attention, for a short time, on the apostolical description of them, as a class, “kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.”

The *odium theologicum* is now a proverb. The admiring cry of the old heathen, “See how these Christians love one another,” is supplanted by the sneer of the modern infidel, “See how these theologians hate one another.” As usual, in the judgments of the world upon the Church, there is here a basis or substratum of truth, with a lofty superstructure of injustice and exaggeration. That earnest contention for the truth once delivered to the saints, should be mixed with angry passions, is undoubtedly a fruit of

human error and corruption. But that men should be most ardent and exacting, in relation to religious doctrines, and especially the doctrines of salvation, is both natural and rational. To expect men to be zealous and enthusiastic, as to minor matters, as to questions connected with their worldly business, their political interests, or even their most frivolous amusements, but entirely calm and self-possessed, dispassionate and even callous, when the points at issue have respect to moral duty and to spiritual truth, to God's glory and to man's salvation, is indirectly to deny the value and importance of religion, as compared with the affairs of this life, or at least to question the sincerity of those who give the former the precedence. If such sincerity exists, it must display itself precisely in the way objected to, by zeal and ardour in defending what is held to be the truth, proportioned to its absolute and relative importance. That is to say, what men value most highly, they not only may, but must defend most earnestly. And where this conviction and its natural effect exist, the purest zeal is too apt to be mixed with passionate excitement, and contaminated by some form of selfishness.

This is not suggested as an apology for such unhallowed mixtures, but simply as an explanation of the fact, that they occur in the defence of great religious truths, which has been often made the ground of an invidious charge against religion itself, as the direct and necessary source of such impure excitements, whereas it is only the occasion of their rising, when they do exist at all, to greater heights of violence, because the subjects which produce them are confessedly the most important that can possibly be made the subject of discussion or dispute. It does not follow because angry brawls in private life are sinful, and should therefore be avoided, that a man is particularly blamable for being angry in defence of those who are nearest and dearest to him ; or that his passionate excitability in their behalf is justly chargeable on his affection for them ; or that in standing up for them he ought to be more cool and dispassionate, than when contending for a stranger, or for some trivial and indifferent matter. For the same reason, it is not so unreasonable as some have represented, that when Christians lose their temper, or become too ardent in contending for their own views, these weaknesses should show



themselves especially in vindicating what they prize most highly of religious truth, against weak misapprehension, artful misrepresentation, or malevolent aspersion.

Another fact often misrepresented in the same way, is the fact that theological disputes are often sharpest, and apparently most angry, between those who, as to all important points, except the one directly in debate, are nearest to each other, and most perfectly agreed. This circumstance, though sometimes used to aggravate the alleged tendency of Christianity itself to stir up angry passions, is as easily accounted for as that already mentioned. It is natural, and not at all irrational, to feel especially astonished and displeased at the errors or the faults of those who are in other respects most exempt from both, because this very exemption implies a degree of elevation and intelligence with which it is difficult to reconcile particular obliquities of faith or practice. There may also be included, as contributing to this effect, the same cause, whatever it may be, that makes and always has made quarrels between near relations and familiar friends, proverbially violent, if not irreconcilable. Whether this be an effect of the same cause already mentioned—an instinctive application of the principle, that from him who hath much, much will be required, and that near approximation to the truth, instead of extenuating, aggravates the guilt of any error still remaining, or the product of something in the state of the affections, or their very nature, which we cannot reach by our analysis or scrutiny, the fact itself is no more strange in one case than another, and can no more be alleged as a peculiar vice of theological dispute, than of private and domestic alienations. If the heat and asperity of family disputes ought to throw no discredit on the family relation, as intrinsically tending to foment such passions, with as little justice can the warmth and even rancour of religious controversy, even and especially between parties otherwise agreed, be justly charged on Christianity itself, or any specific forms of Christian doctrine, as possessing in themselves, or imparting to their votaries, the virus of malignant animosity; but as the intensity of feeling in the one case may be traced to the very nearness of their parties, and that intimate relation, which appears to make it most deplorable, so in the other case, religion and theology, and even the polemic form of Christianity,

however vitiated by the presence of this sinful element, is certainly entitled to the benefit of just such explanations as we all admit to be allowable, if not unavoidable, in matters where religious truth is not concerned at all. What we ask for ourselves and our religion is not favour at the hands of men, but "even-handed justice."

But while all this may justly be alleged, if not in vindication, yet at least in explanation, of the violence commonly ascribed to doctrinal disputes between the great divisions of the Christian world, it still remains a lamentable fact that such alienations should exist, not only between those who are in most essential points agreed, but in reference to what they respectfully regard as the most precious parts of Christian doctrine, the very parts which they consider as most intimately interwoven with their own experience, and with that of all believers. That alienations, both of judgment and of feeling, should exist just here, however it may be explained, is still to be deplored as an anomaly, to say the least of it, so painful and mysterious, that all affected by it ought to rejoice even in the possibility that it arises from misapprehension, and in all attempts, however feeble, to detect it in specific cases.

A striking illustrative example of these general considerations is afforded by that feature of the Calvinistic system, which is commonly known as the doctrine of final perseverance, as opposed to that of possible defection and perdition on the part of true believers and regenerated sinners. While the former of these doctrines has been cherished, in all ages, by a great body of professed believers, as among the clearest and most precious truths of their religion, it has been rejected by another, not simply as untrue, but as subversive of the gospel, and as fraught with the most dangerous tendencies, in reference to personal holiness and ultimate salvation. The sincerity of many, upon both sides of this question, both in general as Christians, and in particular as champions of the doctrines thus contrasted, cannot be denied without denouncing all belief in testimony, and indeed in evidence on moral subjects; but this only makes it more desirable, if possible, to reduce the opposition to a mutual misunderstanding.

Without attempting any new or philosophical solution of this ancient problem, upon which so many mighty minds and pious

hearts have spent their strength for ages, let us look once more to the objections to this doctrine, as they seem to weigh upon the minds, not of speculative theologians, but of practical experimental Christians, whose belief is, in purpose and profession, founded on the word of God, and the experience of his people. How are such, in many cases, affected by the doctrine now in question ?

The objections urged to it assume a twofold form, or may at least be readily reduced to two. The first is, that the doctrine is unscriptural ; the second, that it is of evil tendency. On close inspection, these two objections will be found to be further reducible to one, or one of them at least so dependent on the other, that they cannot be regarded as entirely distinct. That is to say, the objection to the doctrine as unscriptural, has no substantive existence or foundation, apart from its imputed or alleged pernicious tendencies in practice. It is not denied, or cannot be denied, with any show of probability, that there are expressions in the word of God, which do at first sight, and according to their obvious and superficial import, strongly favour the obnoxious doctrine. It is also certain that the strong presumption thus created, is not shaken, or at least not nullified by any explicit allegation of the contrary, or by the clear and unequivocal assertion of things plainly incompatible and inconsistent with the odious dogma of a final perseverance. That neither of these possible cases is a real one—that is to say, that there is no categorical denial of this doctrine, or any statement absolutely inconsistent with it, is abundantly clear from the existence of so large and so intelligent a class, both of interpreters and ordinary readers, who are thoroughly persuaded that the doctrine, far from being contradicted, is expressly and dogmatically taught in Scripture. They may be mistaken in so thinking ; but the error would be inconceivable if there were no ground or even colour for maintaining it, much more if it were formally or certainly condemned. The true cause, therefore, of the confidence with which it is rejected as unscriptural, must be its real or imaginary tendency to practical experimental evil ; or, in other words, it is believed to be unscriptural because it is believed to be pernicious. What appears to be said in its favour is explained away, and what is adverse to it is exaggerated, under

the impression of the foregone conclusion, that the doctrine is of evil tendency.

Since, then, the scriptural objection really depends upon the practical or moral one, the question now arises, what the latter is, and wherein it consists? What is the evil tendency imputed to this feared and hated doctrine, not by its spiteful and deliberate calumniators, but by its sincere and honest adversaries—those who really believe that an opinion so pernicious in its influence on character and conduct cannot be a doctrine of the Bible? When attentively considered, the objectionable features of the doctrine as sincerely viewed by this class, may be said to be these two: That it assumes the final perseverance of the saints, to be secured by a power inherent in themselves, or by something in the very nature of a saving change, precluding all defection as a sheer impossibility, entirely irrespective of the subject's own religious state and dispositions, or of any influence exterior to him, over and above the impulse given at conversion, or the *vis inertiae* of his new-born nature—a belief which may be justly charged with tending to indulge a proud reliance upon self, and an habitual security, alike dishonouring to God and dangerous to man.

The other feature of this doctrine, as held by its opponents, is, that the only proof which it requires of the saving change, from which it draws its proud security and absolute immunity from danger, is the consciousness or memory of inward exercises, not susceptible of formal proof, and wholly independent of the actual condition of the subject at the time when he asserts his claim to this prerogative or privilege of absolute exemption from the risk or possibility of a fall from grace. Whatever may be the specific form in which the honest opposition to this doctrine clothes itself, and which may be indefinitely varied by fortuitous or incidental causes, it will always prove, upon a close analysis, or even an accurate inspection, to involve, as the essential grounds of condemnation and rejection, the two assumptions which have just been stated, as to an inherent independent power of self-preservation, and the sufficiency of mere subjective states and exercises, to demonstrate the possession of that power, as belonging to the doctrine of a final perseverance.

Such being, then, the very grounds of the objection to this

doctrine as unscriptural, the reasons for believing that it cannot be propounded in the word of God, whatever tends to show that it involves no such assumptions as are thus imputed to it, and then made the proofs of its pernicious tendency, must go so far to clear it from the charge of such a tendency, as necessarily belonging to it, or proceeding from it, and entitle its defenders to insist upon the plain sense, now no longer admissible, at least in this direction, of the places where it seems to be expressly taught. To prove this negative, although the burden of the proof might well be left to rest on those who make the affirmation, is still not difficult, and may indeed be satisfactorily done by an appeal to any of the numerous expressions which are reckoned by the champions of the doctrine as decisive in its favour. Such a proof may be deduced, for example, from the words of the Apostle Peter, in the text, which has always been classed among the clearest recognitions, if not among the most direct and formal affirmations, of the truth in question.

So far, then, is this scripture, as expounded in our system, from referring the continued safety of believers to a power inherent in themselves, or necessarily evolved in the process of regeneration, viewed as a subjective change, that, while it clearly and emphatically represents them as securely kept, garrisoned, or guarded, as the military term in the original denotes, suggesting the idea of complete and perpetual protection from the paramount dominion of their spiritual enemies, this preservation is explicitly described as the effect of a power exterior and superior to themselves; nay, still more unequivocally and expressly, as effected by a sovereign, a divine, an almighty agency, "kept by the *power of God* unto salvation"—not merely capable of being so kept, but in fact, and actually so kept; not as a peculiar favour in the case of some, but as a constant and a necessary incident to the condition of all true believers; not as a mere contingency dependent on the unrevealed design and will of God, but as an ascertained and verified reality, attested by experience at present, and secured for the future by the promised covenant and oath of One who cannot lie.

Of such a doctrine, where is the pernicious tendency? If all depends upon the action of Omnipotence; if perseverance is as much beyond our own control as that original mutation of our

spiritual state in which we are said to persevere ; if we can no more, in and of ourselves, secure our own continuance in this state, than we could create it, or create ourselves, or than we could create a world ; if this is our position, as defined by the very texts from which we prove the doctrine to be true, "where is boasting then ? It is excluded !"

It may be said, however, that although the power which secures our perseverance is entirely exterior and superior to ourselves, and is, in fact, no other than the sovereign and almighty power of God, yet if we look upon its exercise as absolutely and irrevocably pledged for our protection, the tendency of this belief to generate security and license, is as evident and strong as if the power were inherent in ourselves ; nay, more so, since the power, instead of being finite, is now infinite ; instead of being human, is divine ; instead of being ours, is God's ; and yet completely under our control. This specious representation quietly assumes that we ascribe the perseverance of believers to an absolute immediate act of power, without the use of means or the prescription of conditions ; that God has irrevocably pledged the exercise of his omnipotence to save from the very possibility of falling, every sinner who has once believed and been converted, be his subsequent experience and his actual condition what it may ; and, as a necessary consequence, that he who once had satisfying evidence of having undergone a saving change, may now and for ever claim the covenanted exercise of God's omnipotence to save him even from the just and natural effects of his own evident apostasy and lapse into a state of impenitence and unbelief ; in short, that he who once believed, or rather once believed that he believed, will certainly be "kept by the power of God unto salvation," whether now or at any future time, or through eternity, be he a believer or an unbeliever. Of such, if any such there be, as live and die in this faith, we may well say, in the words of an apostle, "their damnation slumbereth not."

But see again, how this aspersion on the doctrine in dispute, whether cast in malice or in ignorance, is wiped off, and its foul stain utterly effaced for ever, by the simple but authoritative language of the text, which, so far from representing this conservative agency of God's grace and omnipotence, as acting independently of faith in the preserved and persevering subject, holds up

faith itself as in a certain sense the means by which the perseverance is secured, by which the preservation is effected, "**KEPT BY THE POWER OF GOD THROUGH FAITH UNTO SALVATION.**"

Now, faith, as both the parties to this controversy are agreed, is not a thing to be assumed at pleasure or at random, but to be established by conclusive evidence ; not that of consciousness, or memory, or fancy, but of actual experience and practice. "Faith without works is dead." The only true faith is the faith that "works by love," and "overcomes the world," and "purifies the heart," and brings forth "all the fruits of the Spirit," which are also the "fruits meet for repentance." "By their fruits ye shall know them." Where these fruits are not, there is no evidence of faith. Where faith is not, there is no pledge of God's omnipotence to save from falling. It is only those who have this faith and bear this fruit, that have a right to claim a place among the happy souls who are "kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation." If this doctrine, as propounded in this one text, and harmoniously exhibited in many others, and frequently implied or presupposed where it is not expressed, pervading the whole tissue of the system of salvation, like a golden thread, not always visible, but always there ; if this doctrine is pernicious in its tendency, then so is truth, and holiness itself. If this view of God's sovereignty and man's dependence, in the matter of salvation and of final perseverance ; if this view of the absolute necessity of faith, of vital, operative, fruitful faith, as the only condition on which, the only means by which, the omnipotence of God will act to save us from apostasy ; if this doctrine tends of itself to Antinomian license and security, then out of the same fountain may flow salt water and fresh—then men may expect to gather grapes of thorns, and figs of thistles, and may be excused for calling evil good and good evil, putting light for darkness and darkness for light, putting bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter !

But, although the doctrine in itself has no such tendency, its perversion and abuse ñas. It becomes us, therefore, to consider, in conclusion, its liability to such abuse. That such a liability exists, is clear from the fact which gave occasion to this whole discussion—the fact that multitudes of seemingly devout and humble Christians have learned to regard it with a holy horror.

Erroneous as their judgment may and must be, it is far less likely to have been derived from the weakness of the proofs by which the doctrine is supported, than from the lives in which it is exemplified. There is also something in the very nature of the doctrine which exposes it to misapprehension, not only on the part of its opponents, but of those who plead for it and undertake to act upon it. It presents, as it were, so many points of aberration, where the mind is exposed to a centrifugal impetus towards error. There is so much danger of mistake, and so much actual mistake, with respect to the very nature of salvation, as deliverance from punishment and not from sin, and with respect to perseverance, in the very points which we have been considering, so much danger of mistake as to the power by which it is secured, and which is nothing more nor less than the power of God himself, as to the means by which that power operates, and which is nothing more nor less than faith—a state of saving faith produced and perpetuated by divine grace; and finally, as to the evidence that such a state exists, which is nothing more nor less than holy living or good works, in the highest and most Scriptural sense of the expression, there is so much danger of departure from the truth, at all these points, that we who hold the doctrine as a precious part of our religious faith, and as one of the clearest and most unambiguous teachings of the Bible, are under a peculiar obligation to preserve it from abuse, not only by its enemies, but by its friends; not only by others, but by ourselves; not only in our theory, but in our practice; not only in the statement and defence of our belief, but in the commentary on it which is furnished by our lives. To this circumspection we are called by a regard to our own safety, which is jeopardized by nothing more than by the culpable perversion of the most important and most precious doctrines. In this sense, none are more exposed to danger than those who have within their reach the most effective means of safety. Especially let us who preach the gospel, or expect to preach it, see to it that our example and experience afford no confirmation of the old and profound saying, “Nearest the church, furthest from God.” We should also be induced to use this caution by a jealous sensibility in reference to the honour of our God and Saviour, lest through our perversion or abuse of this



great doctrine, he should seem to be capable of winking at iniquity, or even to be a minister of sin.

And, lastly, we should be induced to use a wise precaution, for the sake of those who hate the doctrine which we love, as soul-destroying error, lest their misapprehensions should, through our unfaithfulness and indiscretion, be hopelessly confirmed, and their antipathy to what they reckon false, embittered into hatred of persons who, to say the least, are quite as likely as themselves to be "kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation!"



## XVII.

### Grace and its Lessons.

“ For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us, that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world ; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee.”  
—TITUS ii. 11-15.

THE being of a God, with all that enters into that conception, being once established or assumed as true, the grand problem of humanity is to determine our relation to him ; not as creatures merely, for that is settled by the very conditions of our being, but as sinners. Sin has disturbed and revolutionized the mutual relation between God and man, and as the one is entirely dependent on the other for his being and well-being, the inquiry into this effect of sin becomes something more than a curious speculation—it becomes a practical question of the highest import, one of life and death. All other questions, whether speculative or practical, are as nothing until this is solved. Not what is God, but what is God to us ? in what aspect are we to behold him ? as an absolute sovereign, an inexorable judge, an irresistible avenger, or as a saviour, a deliverer, or friend ? What have we to expect from him, wrath or favour ?

If man had never fallen, the answer to this question might have been readily deduced from the essential attributes of the divine nature, but the intervention of sin seems to bring these into conflict, so that what would otherwise be prompted by God's goodness is forbidden by his justice. The confusion thus introduced into the subject gives it, when seriously considered, an

aspect of awful complication and uncertainty, which may be likened to the struggle between light and darkness, clouds and sunshine, on a doubtful day. That the sun is there, no one can doubt, nor that his rays are bright and genial, but between them and the eye of the spectator there is something interposed, and how long this obstruction is to last he knows not. Upon such a sky the whole race may be said to have been gazing, with more or less attention and solicitude, for ages after the fall, as if they expected every moment to see the divine countenance revealed, but knew not whether its expression would be one of unappeased displeasure, or of grace and favour.

The great event in the history of fallen man is, that it was the grace of God that appeared, not merely as benignity in general, but as favour to the lost, the ruined, the condemned; not as an inert, though friendly disposition, but as active favour, saving grace, the grace that brings salvation or deliverance from loss, from danger, from actual ruin, and from the wrath to come. Such is the grace of God which has appeared or been revealed, and the epiphany of which is here alleged by the apostle to have been vouchsafed to all men without national or other accidental distinctions; not to the Jews or any other nation, not to the rich or any other class exclusively, but to men in general, to mankind at large.

That this is the true sense of "all men" in the text is clear from the connection. In the foregoing verses, he had urged upon servants their peculiar duties, and assigned as a motive to fidelity the honour which it would put upon the true religion as revealed and taught by God our Saviour. To some in their exclusive pride, both Jews and Gentiles, this might seem ridiculous, as if the honour of religion could depend upon the conduct of a slave; and therefore the apostle takes occasion to remind such, that the motives by which Christianity operates on character and conduct, are confined to no one class, but are common to the human race, because Christianity itself as a remedial system, as a vehicle by which the saving grace of God is brought to us, has no respect of persons in the sense assumed, but has appeared to all men; or, as the sentence may be construed, is saving to all men, that is, adapted and designed to save them without regard to difference of rank or

nation. But as this "grace of God" is not inert, but active, so its effect upon its objects is an active one,—not only efficacious in itself, but such as to produce activity, to make *them* act, not blindly or at random, but in obedience to an active principle, and in due subjection to a moral discipline. The "saving grace of God which has appeared to all men," is described by the apostle as "teaching us," or rather educating, training us in such a way as to secure the precious fruits that follow. The meaning is not, as it might seem, to a superficial reader, that the gospel simply teaches us that we ought to deny ungodliness, and so on; that is, makes us understand our obligations so to do; this is indeed included, but far more; the full sense of the language is, that Christianity subjects those who embrace it to a discipline, a systematic training, a moral and spiritual education, so that, as a natural result, nay, a necessary consequence, they do in point of fact deny ungodliness and worldly lusts. To "teach" men that they "should" do this is something, it is much, but it is far from being all that Christianity accomplishes. It is a characteristic and essential feature of the gospel that it does men good by putting them to school, by making them disciples, not simply for the purpose of communicating knowledge, but for that of forming and maturing character; for *education* in the highest, largest, and most emphatic sense.

This pedagogical design and character of true religion is stamped upon all its institutions, and legible even in its phraseology. It is not by an unmeaning figure of speech, nor with any attenuation of the primary sense of the expression, that Christians are continually called disciples, that is, learners, pupils, and that the ministers of Christ are spoken of as teachers. Equally false, though false in opposite extremes, is the opinion that knowledge, and consequently teaching, are of no avail in spiritual matters, and the opinion that perfect knowledge is a previous condition of admission to the kingdom of heaven. Some knowledge is indeed an indispensable pre-requisite, but woe to him who imagines that these elements of wisdom are enough, and that he needs no further or more complete indoctrination. Is the child sent to school because it knows so much already, or because it knows so little, and in order that it may know more? Well, in this sense too, it may be said to all who seek admission to the body of believers, and a

share in the communion of saints, "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." The Church is Christ's school; he who enters it must enter as a learner, a disciple, with as real and sincere a deference to his great teacher as the little child feels, when it trembles for the first time in the presence of a master.

Such submission is the more imperative in this case, because more truly than in any other case the process of instruction is moral as well as intellectual; it is not mere teaching, it is training, education; not the mere acquisition of knowledge, although that does lie at the foundation, but the cultivation of the powers and affections, as a preparation for the joys and services of heaven, as well as for the duties and the trials of this present state. The "grace of God" which has appeared as the only means and source of salvation to all men, does not save them by a charm or by a demonstration, but by making them disciples in the school of Christ, by teaching them and training them for earth and heaven, developing their faculties, moulding their affections, forming their characters, determining their lives. The design and the legitimate effect of this disciplinary process are distinctly stated in the text, with reference both to the present and the future; both in a negative and positive form.

The negative design of all this training is that we deny, repudiate, or abjure allegiance to the sinful dispositions and affections which are paramount in fallen nature, but the objects of which perish in the using, being limited to this world, so that they may be described as "worldly lusts" or desires, and may be said, so far as they predominate, to put man on a level with the brutes, whose highest good is present enjoyment of the lowest kind. By all who would be saved, these worldly, temporal, and short-lived lusts must be denied, renounced; and this is never done without a simultaneous or previous denial of ungodliness, of all indifference and enmity to God, which is indeed the source of the other, for when human hearts are right towards God, the paramount control of worldly lusts becomes impossible. It is because men do not love God that they love the world unduly; it is therefore that the friendship of the world and that of God are represented by another apostle as wholly incompatible. To this denial

of the world as our home, and of its lusts as our principles of action, Christianity trains us,—not merely informing us of what is wrong, but educating us to hate and shun it.

This, however, is only the negative part of the effect produced by the spiritual discipline to which we are subjected in the school of Christ. It has a positive side also. It teaches us how we are to live. It does not lose sight of the present state either in profound abstractions, or in fond anticipations of the future. It adapts and purifies the heathen maxim, *Dum vivimus vivamus*, While we live let us live to some good purpose. The positive effect of Christianity, as a system of discipline or training, is to rectify the life in all its most momentous aspects and relations in reference to ourselves, our neighbours, and our God. In reference to himself, the true disciple in this school is educated to be sober or sound-minded; the original expression denotes sanity as opposed to madness, not in its extreme forms merely, but in all its more familiar and less violent gradations—all those numberless and nameless aberrations of the judgment which give character to human conduct, even in the absence of gross crime or absolute insanity. From these irrational vagaries, true religion, as a system of discipline and education, tends to free us, and so far as we are really set free, it is by this means and by this alone. The errors thus insensibly corrected are too many to be numbered and too various to be classified.

Among the most important are those visionary estimates of self and of the world by which the mass of men are led astray; those “strong delusions,” with respect to good and evil, right and wrong, true and false, happiness and misery, which, both by their absurdity, and by their ruinous effects, fully justify that terrible description, “Madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead.” In opposition to this “madness,” the saving grace of God trains its subjects to be rational or sober, and thus in the highest sense and measure to be faithful to themselves. But at the same time it trains them to be faithful to others, to be just, in the wide sense of the term; one of constant occurrence in the Scriptures, and especially in the Old Testament; including all that one can owe another—including, therefore, charity and mercy, no less than honesty and rigorous exactness in the discharge of legal obligations. Justice or rectitude, in this enlarged and noble

sense, as opposed to every form of selfishness, is no less really a dictate and a consequence of spiritual training, than sanity or soundness of mind, as opposed to the chimeras and hallucinations of our state by nature. But "sobriety" and "justice," in the wide sense which has just been put upon the terms, have never yet been found divorced from "godliness." As we have seen already, in considering the negative effects of training by divine grace, it is man's relations to his God, that must adjust and determine his relations to his fellow-creatures. The symmetrical position of the points in the circumference arises from their common relation to a common centre. Set a man right with God, and he will certainly be set right with his neighbours. The remaining exceptions as to this point only show the imperfection of his piety, but do not disprove its existence. In spite of all such exceptions, it is still true that the man who loves God loves his neighbour and himself, not with a frenzied, but a rational attachment, and that he who enters as a pupil in the school of Christ must lay his account, not merely in the way of negative abstinence, to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, but in the way of positive performance to "live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world."

Such are the objects and effects of Christian training, that is, of the method by which Christ trains his disciples, with respect to the present state or stage of man's existence, as distinguished from those future states or stages to which he cannot but look forward. For although the sobriety of mind produced by the discipline of God's grace, causes men of a morbid, penurious disposition to lose sight of present duties and enjoyments in a vague anticipation of the future, it is so far from excluding expectation altogether, that our very salvation is prospective. "We are saved in hope," and that hope is a blessed one; a hope of blessedness to be revealed and realized hereafter; a hope, that is, an object of hope, not yet fully enjoyed, but only "looked for," and to look for which is one of the effects and marks of thorough training in the school of Christ. A religion without hope must have been learned elsewhere. The saving grace of God instructs us, while we "live soberly, righteously, and godly" in this present world, to look for the fulfilment of that blessed hope, in reference to which we are

said, by an anticipation of our own experience, to be saved already.

This hope is neither selfish nor indefinite. It does not terminate upon ourselves, our own deliverance from suffering, and our own reception into heaven; nor does it lose itself in vague anticipations of a nameless good to be experienced hereafter. The Christian's hope is in the highest degree generous and well-defined. It is generous, because it rises beyond personal interests, even the highest, even personal salvation, to the glory of the Saviour as the ultimate end to be desired and accomplished. It is well-defined, because, instead of looking at this glory in the abstract, it gives it a concrete and personal embodiment; it is glory, not in the sense of the metaphysician or of the poet, but in that of the prophets, saints, and angels; it is manifested and apparent excellence, a glorious epiphany, analogous to that which marked Jehovah's presence in the holy of holies, but unspeakably transcending it in permanence and brightness; the glorious appearance, not of any mere creature, even the most noble, but of God himself, and yet not of God in his essence, which is inaccessible to sense, nor even in some special and distinct manifestation of the Father, or the Godhead, under an assumed or borrowed form of which the senses may take cognizance, but in the well-known person of his Son, who is the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, in whom dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily; and therefore it is not the untempered brightness of the divine majesty, and holiness, and justice, which to us is, and must be, a consuming fire; and yet it is the manifested glory of God, of the great God,—great in all conceivable perfections, but, as the object of this hope, emphatically great in mercy—great in the power, not to punish and destroy, but to forgive and save, to save the sinner, to save us;—the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ. This hope is definite and vast enough to fill the mind and satisfy the heart, however vague may be its views and apprehensions with respect to the precise time, and place, and form, and other circumstances of the epiphany expected. It is enough to know that it is Christ our head who shall appear; and thanks be to God, that when he does appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. These two considerations—the



personal identity of that which is to be revealed in glory, and the prospect of personal assimilation to this glorious object—are enough to make us willing to be ignorant of all that concerns merely the chronology, or geography, or poetry of that blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, which the word of God not only suffers, but requires us to look for, as a sure sign, because an unavoidable effect of genuine, thorough, successful training in the school of Christ, and under the educating guidance of that “saving grace,” which, for this very purpose, has “appeared,” or been revealed “to all men.”

Let it not be overlooked, however, that the gospel, while it sets Christ before us as an object of believing expectation, sets him also before us an object of believing recollection, and thus brings into a delightful harmony the hope of favours yet to be experienced with gratitude for those experienced already. It is not simply as a glorious person, human or divine, that we look for his appearing; it is not simply as a Saviour or Deliverer from evil in the general; it is not simply as a potential Saviour or Deliverer, one who can save us if he will, and will if we should need it at some future time; not merely a Saviour whose ability and willingness to save are yet to be displayed and proved, but as an actual deliverer, as one who has already done his saving work, by giving himself for us, the highest gift, it may in a certain sense be said, of which even he was capable, for us, his creatures, his rebellious subjects, his despisers, and his enemies! Had he given infinitely less for us it might have been too much for justice, too much for mercy, for any mercy but for that of God; but he gave all that he could give, for he gave himself to assume our nature, to be degraded, to be mocked at, to be put to death. He did not merely give his name, his friendship, or his royal favour, but he gave himself! In the highest, strongest, most exhaustive meaning that the words will bear, he “gave *himself*,” and “gave himself *for us*.” This he *has done*, and he has done it for a purpose, and by every law of gratitude, as well as interest, we are bound, so far as that purpose concerns us, to do what we can for its accomplishment.

What, then, was his object? To *redeem* us, to buy us back from bondage, to save us by the payment of a ransom price, not only

from the punishment of sin, but from its power, from its love, from its pollution, from its foul and hideous embrace, no less than from its sword and from its chains. It was to set us free from sin itself that Christ redeemed us ; not from some sin, but from all sin ; not that we should still remain, or afterwards fall back under the dominion of the very tyrant from whose power he redeemed us ; not that we should merely exchange one hard master for another, or for many ;—no, he “gave himself for us,” he laid down his life for us, he died upon the cross for us, “that he might redeem us from *all iniquity.*”

Nor was this deliverance from sin as well as punishment intended merely for our advantage, but for His. He had an end to accomplish for himself. He died to purify us, not merely that we might be pure and therefore happy, but also to purify a people for himself ; a *peculium*, a possession of his own, a Church, a body of which he should be the head, a kingdom of which he should be the sovereign. Over none but a purified and holy kingdom could he condescend to reign. Of none but a purified and holy body could he be the Head. Justification would have done but half the work for which Christ died ; his end would not have been accomplished if he had not redeemed us from iniquity as well as condemnation, if he had not purified a people for himself, for his own use and his own honour ; a people in their measure like himself, his own exclusively, his own for ever, his inalienable right, his indefeasible possession, his “peculiar people.”

How monstrous, then, the supposition or pretence that the design of Christ’s death is reconcileable with Antinomian license on the part of those for whom he died ; that because he died to make men holy, therefore they need not be holy ; that because he gave himself for us, to purify a people for himself, therefore we may be his people, and yet not be pure ; that because his “good works” have been set to our account, we need do no “good works” for him. The very contrary commends itself as evidently true to gratitude, to conscience, nay, to common sense. The body, the Church, the kingdom, the peculiar people of Christ, without good works, without fruits meet for repentance, without experimental evidence of union to him by faith, is an absurdity, an odious contradiction, a blasphemous aspersion,—as if God could deny himself—

as if the Son of God could be the "minister of sin." So far from dispensing with "good works" on our part, he is not even satisfied with good works practised or performed from stress of conscience, or from habit, or from fear, or as a sheer formality. Good works, indeed, he denies the attribute of goodness, for they lack the very quality by which alone they could be rendered good, at least in his sight. It is not the moral or the physical effect on others, nor the outward conformity to rule, nor the solemnity with which the action is performed, that constitutes it good. It must be wrought in faith and love; not only love to man, but love to God, and love to Christ, or it is worthless. Nay, he asks still more to make good works acceptable. He asks that they be wrought with *strong* affection, with intensity of spirit, with a burning zeal; a zeal of God, according to knowledge. The people whom he died to purify for himself, must be not only pure and diligent, but zealous; not merely passive and submissive, but spontaneous, eager, emulous, to please him, "his peculiar people zealous of good works."

All the doctrines here presented are, or ought to be, familiar to our minds as household words and elementary ideas. The mode in which I have endeavoured to exhibit them, is not, as I am well aware, the most agreeable to that taste which prefers points to lines, and lines to surfaces, and surfaces to depth and substance. It is well, however, at least sometimes, to contemplate the familiar truths of Christianity, not merely as they may be picked out, and adjusted in an artificial system, but as they lie upon the face of Scripture, and as they were associated in the minds of the inspired writers and the primitive disciples. The more attentively we read the word of God, the more highly shall we be disposed to value these original associations, the affinities as well as the intrinsic qualities of saving truth, not merely the more recondite affinities disclosed by philosophical analysis, but those more obvious ones suggested by juxtaposition in the letter of the Scriptures. In this, as in so many other cases, we may learn from experience that "the foolishness of God is wiser than men."

But whatever we may think as to the form of presentation, let us guard against a mistake as to the truths themselves. They are here exhibited, not only as objects of belief, but as subjects of in-

struction. The writing which contains them is a pastoral epistle; filled with the advice and apostolical injunctions of "Paul the spiritual child and an official representative, and him to the ministry of that age, and of this, and every In reference to all the foregoing precepts, but especially to those immediately preceding, which have been the subject of discourse this morning, he says to Titus: "These things speak," talk of them, both in public and in private, make them the theme of conversation, as well as of formal preaching. Do not be content with thinking of them, understanding and believing them, but *speak them*, utter them, impart them to your hearers, to your friends and neighbours, to your pupils and parishioners, your brethren in the ministry, your equals and inferiors in office, to all with whom you come in contact, or to whom you have access, "these things speak."

But how? As curious and interesting matters of opinion, or the dictates of a mere theoretical wisdom? Not at all, but as matters to be acted *on* and acted *out*, as involving not merely truths to be believed, but duties to be done, and to the doing of which men must be aroused and prompted. "These things speak *and exhort*;" on the basis of sound doctrine rear the superstructure of sound practice, in your own case and in that of others. To yourself, to all who hear you, to all who need the admonition "these things *speak and exhort!*"

But what if men resist these humbling truths, and angrily reject them? No matter, only add *reproof* to exhortation—not arbitrary and passionate reproof, but, as the word here used denotes, reproof produced by and founded on conviction. Convince them of the truth, and convict them of their guilt, and then reprove them. Appeal not only to their reason, but their conscience, "these things speak, and exhort, and rebuke," not in your own name, nor in mine, but in His name, whose you are, and whom you serve; as asserting his rights, and as holding his commission, be not afraid or ashamed to speak the truth, but whenever the occasion is afforded, "these things speak and exhort, and rebuke with all authority!"

But what if men treat you and your message with levity: "Let no man despise thee." This suggests two ideas, both of which

are useful and appropriate to us. Let no man despising thee prevent the full discharge of certain duty. "He that despiseth you, despiseth me, and he that despiseth me, despiseth him that sent me." If men will despise God and Christ, the human messenger may well consent to be despised along with them. Let them despise thee, but let not the effect be caused by cowardly suppression, or disingenuous corruption of the truth on your part. As a faithful messenger of God and an ambassador of Christ, let men despise you, if they will or if they must—let them despise you at their peril. But as a traitor to the truth and to its Author, let no man despise thee. "For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps." "Who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good? But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye." "For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well-doing, than for evil-doing." "If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified." "If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf." These consolatory warnings drawn from the experience of another great apostle, and one who well knew what it was to suffer both for his own faults and the name of Christ, may serve to illustrate and to qualify Paul's pointed charge—"Let no man despise thee." To us, my brethren, who preach the gospel or expect to preach it, and especially to those of you who are soon to enter on that difficult but necessary, dangerous but blessed work, the words of the apostle have peculiar interest; for in reference to these simple but essential truths which we have been considering, and to the risk of error or unfaithfulness in teaching them, "he being dead yet speaketh," saying, not only to the Church at large, but more directly to each one of us, "These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee."



## XVIII.

### Conversion.

“When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.”—LUKE xxii. 32.

THERE is nothing in which self ignorance displays itself more frequently than in men’s estimation of their own strength and weakness. It is enough that they consider themselves strong when they are weak. They go still further, and consider themselves strongest at the very points where they are weakest. Hence the easy conquest of the tempter by assailing men at those points which require protection most, but which enjoy it least. Nothing is more familiar as a trait of human character, than the disposition to be vain or proud of foibles and weaknesses. A striking historical example of this error and its fruits is afforded by the character of Peter. His intrepidity and self-reliance might have seemed to constitute his strength, and yet we find them lying at the root of his defections. This was the case even in those minor aberrations which incurred our Lord’s rebuke from time to time.

But it is still more clear in reference to his great fall—the denial of his master. To himself this seemed incredible, even when predicted, as it is in the passage whence the text is taken. But along with his fall our Lord predicts his restoration or conversion: “When thou art converted.” This might seem to imply that Peter was before an unconverted man, or that his fall was an entire fall from grace. Both these conclusions are forbidden by the promise which immediately precedes the exhortation of the text: “Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired to have you that he may sift you as wheat; but I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not.” These last words prove (1) that he had faith, and (2) that his faith was not entirely to fail. Nor will the context bear any

other explanation of the word "faith," but as meaning that which constitutes a true believer. The conversion, therefore, here immediately referred to, is not the primary, original conversion of a sinner from his natural condition to the love of God, but a reconversion of one who had been before converted.

This reconversion is connected in the text with a peculiar influence to be exerted on his brethren; that is, those in the same situation, exposed to the same temptations, in danger of a like fall: "Strengthen thy brethren;" that is, confirm their faith, preserve them from the same disgrace which has befallen thee. This strengthening effect was not to be wrought by any natural power of Peter, nor by any official authority conferred upon him. It was only to be the product of a moral influence created by the very circumstances of the case; that is, by the very fact of his conversion. And as this conversion may exist in other cases too, it will, perhaps, afford a profitable theme for meditation to inquire what it is and how it operates. The only division of the subject needed, is the one presented by the text itself—(1) When thou art converted, (2) strengthen thy brethren. (1) Conversion; (2) Strengthening the brethren.

In speaking briefly of the first, I shall begin with conversion in general, and afterwards advert to reconversion in particular. The term conversion is so familiar in its spiritual sense and application, that we seldom think of it as metaphorical. But the original terms corresponding both to this word and its cognate forms *convért* and *cóntvert*, are applied even in the New Testament to physical as well as moral changes. To this primary usage of the words it may be useful to revert, not only for the purpose of determining their essential import, but to mark certain gradations in their meaning as applied both to natural and spiritual objects. The essential, primary idea is that of a corporeal turning round, without anything to limit it. The act described may be that of turning round and round indefinitely, still coming back to the original position, and then leaving it again, in a perpetual succession of rotations. But to this original notion, which is inseparable from the word, usage in many cases adds certain accessory notions. One of these is, the idea of turning in a definite direction; that is, towards a certain object. The difference is that

between a wheel's turning on its axis and a flower turning towards the sun. But in some connections there is a still further accession to the primary idea ; so that the words necessarily suggest, not the mere act of turning, nor the act of turning in a definite direction, but the act of turning from one object to another, which are then, of course, presented in direct antithesis to one another.

Thus the magnetic needle, if mechanically pointed towards the south, is no sooner set at liberty than it will turn from that point to the north. In this case, however, there is still another accessory motion added to the simple one of turning, namely, that of turning back to a point from which it had before been turned away. And this idea of return or retroversion may, of course, be repeated without limit, and without any further variation of the meaning of the term used, which is still the same, whether the turning back be for the first or second, tenth or hundredth time. All these distinctions or gradations may be traced also in the spiritual uses of the term. As thus applied, conversion is a change of character, that is, of principles and affections, with a corresponding change of outward life.

Now, such a change may be conceived of, as a vague, unsettled, frequently repeated revolution of the views and feelings, without any determinate character or end. But the conversion spoken of in Scripture is relieved from this indefiniteness by a constant reference to one specific object to which the convert turns. It is to God that all conversion is described as taking place. But how, in what sense, does man turn to God ? The least and lowest that can be supposed to enter into this conception is, a turning to God, as an object of attention or consideration—turning, as it were, for the first time to look at him, just as we might turn towards any object of sense which had before escaped attention or been out of sight. This is, in fact, a necessary part of the experimental process of conversion.

To the mind in its natural condition, God is absent or unseen as an object of attentive contemplation. When a change is effected, one of the first symptoms is a turning of the soul to look at him, to gaze upon him, often with wonder at the blindness or stupidity which kept him so long out of view. This change of feeling can by no corporeal movement be so well represented as



by that of turning round to look at something which before was out of sight. But the same influence which brings about this simple contemplation of God as an object before unknown or disregarded, gives it a higher character by fixing the attention on the attributes of the object, so that what might have been a gaze of curiosity, is deepened into one of admiration ; and, as the absolute perfection of the excellence admired becomes apparent, into one of adoration ; and as the personal affections become more and more enlisted, into one of love and confidence and self-devotion. Thus the turning which the word of God describes as necessary to salvation, is a turning to God as an object of admiring and adoring, loving and confiding contemplation. This may be so presented to the mind as to exclude or swallow up all accessory notions, by concentrating the thoughts upon Him to whom the sinner turns. But sometimes, perhaps commonly, the Scriptures so speak of conversion as to suggest distinctly the idea of that from which, as well as of that to which, we turn. We do not turn to God from nothing or neutrality. We turn from his opposites, his enemies, his rivals. God is never the first object of supreme affection to his fallen creatures. The change is not from loving nothing, but from loving self, from loving sin. When we turn, we turn from darkness to light, from death to life, from hell to heaven, from the power of Satan unto God.

The state from which we turn determines the method of conversion, or defines what acts and exercises are included in it. If our natural condition were only one of ignorance or innocent infirmity, conversion would involve nothing more than intellectual illumination and increase of strength, both which it really includes. But if our native state be one of guilt and condemnation, and of utter impotence to all good, then conversion necessarily implies deliverance from guilt by a power independent of our own ; and this presupposes faith in that gratuitous deliverance, while the very act of turning from a state of sin implies a change of mind, that is, of judgment and of feeling with respect to it. Conversion, therefore, as exhibited in Scripture, is inseparable from repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ ; because, from the nature of the case, without these it is utterly impossible, in any truly scriptural sense, to turn from sin and Satan unto God.

Sometimes, again, the idea is suggested that we not only turn to God, but turn back to him. This may at first sight appear inconsistent with the fact just stated, that our first affections are invariably given to the world and to ourselves. But even those who are converted, for the first time, from a state of total alienation, may be said to turn back to God, in reference to the great original apostasy in which we are all implicated. As individuals, we never know God till we are converted. As a race, we have all departed from him, and conversion is but *turning back* to him. But this expression is still more appropriate, even in its strict sense, to the case of those who have already been converted, and are only reclaimed from a partial and temporary alienation, from relapsing into sin, or what is called, in religious phraseology, declension, and, in the word of God itself, backsliding. That the term conversion may be properly applied to such a secondary restoration, is apparent from the language of the text, where it is used by Christ himself, of one who is expressly said to have had faith, and faith which did not absolutely fail. This usage agrees fully with the nature of conversion as described in Scripture, and with the primary import of the figurative term itself. Suppose a person to have turned completely round from one object toward another, from the west, for instance, to the rising sun, and to be so attracted and absorbed by this grand sight, that he cannot wholly turn away from it, we may still conceive of him as turning partially away, and even trying to embrace both objects in his field of vision. This is no bad illustration of the case in question. The perseverance of the saints is not secured by anything inherent in themselves, nor even by the nature of the change wrought in conversion, but by an almighty intervention, rendered certain by a special promise. They are "kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation." Upon this same power, and this same promise, they would be dependent even if transferred at once to heaven; how much more when left to struggle with temptation and the remains of their original corruption. They who have once truly turned to God, can never wholly turn away from him, so as to lose sight of him for ever. But they may turn partly round, they may turn half round, they may try to look both ways at once, as all do who endeavour to serve God and

mammon, or who, like heathen settlers in Samaria, fear the Lord and serve their own god. They may turn more than half round, so as scarcely to see anything of that towards which they lately looked with such delight, and so as to be reckoned by the world with those who have their eyes and hearts fixed upon *it*.

There is something fearful in the length to which this retroversion may be carried, in the gradual approximation of the convert to his old position, and the little that seems wanting sometimes to complete the counter-revolution when he is arrested and turned back again. When thus recovered, he must pass through much of the same process as at first. His second turning no less necessarily involves repentance and belief. The object of his faith is still the same. The pangs of godly sorrow, far from being soothed, are exasperated by the recollection of a previous repentance and a subsequent relapse. *It is* a new conversion, then, in all respects but one—the point at which the convert sets out, and the distance over which he passes. The neglect or rejection of this doctrine has a pernicious practical effect. The idea that conversion can in no sense be repeated, and that erring Christians must return to duty in a way generically different from that by which they came to God at first, has a necessary tendency to foster spiritual pride, by making all defection seem impossible; and then, when pride has had its fall, to breed despondency by leaving no means of recovery.

The truths opposed to these pernicious errors are, that even true believers may depart from God, and though, through Christ's intercession, their faith cannot wholly fail, they must experience a new conversion—must repent, believe, submit, as really as if they had been always in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity. Often, when men are using palliative remedies or resting wholly on remote experience, what they really need is to be converted, to repent and do their first works. Peter had faith, and it was not to fail, even in that fiery trial, because Christ prayed that it might not fail; but it was to be severely tried, and he was to experience a fearful, ignominious fall, from which he could only be recovered by a new conversion, by a new repentance, and new acts of faith. "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not; and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.

This brings us again to the second point suggested by the text, to wit, that conversion, whether primary or secondary, total or partial, tends to the strengthening of others, that is, to their preservation or recovery from the evils which the convert has himself escaped. In answer to the question, How does conversion tend to this result? the general fact may be thus resolved into three distinct particulars: 1. It enables men to strengthen others. 2. It obliges men to strengthen others. 3. It disposes men to strengthen others. The convert is enabled to confirm or rescue others by his knowledge of their character and state. He knows, not only what he sees in them, but what he feels or has felt in himself. Take, for instance, the new convert from a state of total unbelief and impenitence. He knows the misery of that state, as it cannot possibly be known by those who still continue in it. They know what he knew once, but he knows in addition what he never knew at all until awakened and enlightened by the grace of God. Their view of it tends only to despair or false security. His rouses to exertion. He looks at the reality as well from their point of observation as his own, and the very insensibility which he perceives in them, excites him to new efforts for their rescue, for he knows that he was once as stupid and as much in danger. He knows, too, the inefficacy of the means which they employ to strengthen or to save themselves. For he remembers his own struggles in the slough, and the momentum with which every effort sunk him deeper and deeper. This remembrance helps him to discern what is truly needed in the case of others, and prevents his relying, as he once did in his own case, upon anything except the true foundation.

On the other hand, he knows the sovereign virtue of the means which God provides—the truth, the blood of Christ, the influences of the Spirit. He appreciates the freeness with which these are offered, and the simplicity of God's way of salvation, which, without experience, men are always sure to underrate or misconceive. He knows, too, by experience, how their hearts are most accessible, what are their difficulties, doubts, and scruples, what are the vulnerable points at which they may be best assailed, as well for evil as for good, as well by Satan as by God. From this experimental knowledge of the evil, the remedy, and the application,

even the new convert is peculiarly able to do good to others. It is accordingly a lesson of experience that men are or may be more particularly useful in this way to those who are most like their former selves.

The same thing is true of the secondary, subsequent conversion from a state of declension or backsliding, to which the text more immediately refers. The person thus reclaimed knows better than his brethren who have not yet fallen, the peculiar dangers which environ them, the weakness of their faith, the strength of their temptations, the illusions of the adversary. He knows the hideous shame of the relapse, and the remorseful anguish of the first convulsive movements towards repentance. He knows the difficulties of the restoration—how much harder it is now to excite hope or confirm faith, how much less effective either warning, or encouragement, or argument is now than it once was—how precarious even the most specious reformation and repentance must be after such deflections. All that tends to make him watchful in his own case, and to arm him against those insidious foes by whom he was betrayed or vanquished, at the same time enables him to strengthen others. This advantage of experimental knowledge is accompanied, moreover, by a corresponding liveliness of feeling, a more energetic impulse, such as always springs from recent restorations or escapes. It is a matter of proverbial notoriety, that young converts, as a class, have more intensity of zeal and more promptness to engage in active effort. This zeal is often indiscreet, but when sufficiently informed and guided, it secures to those who have it an immense advantage over those whose hearts have been becoming cold, in due proportion to the increase of their knowledge and the ripeness of their judgment. It is this elastic spring of the affections, this spontaneous movement of the active powers to exertion, which, united with the experimental knowledge before mentioned, enables the new convert or reclaimed backslider, above all other men, to “strengthen his brethren.”

Out of this increased ability arises, by a logical and moral necessity, a special obligation. This is only a specific application of a principle which all acknowledge, and which the word of God explicitly propounds, “To him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin.” It needs not so much to be explained

or established, as to be exemplified from real life. The recognition of the principle is there unhesitating and unanimous. He who has been recovered from the power of a desperate disease by a new or unknown remedy, is under a peculiar obligation to apply it, or at least to make it known, to all affected in like manner. Hence the unsparing, universal condemnation of the man who, from mercenary motives, holds in his possession secrets of importance to the health or happiness of others. The man who has just escaped, as if by miracle, from the devouring flames, often feels that, if he can, he is particularly bound to save those who are still unconscious of the danger or unable to escape it. He who is mercifully saved from shipwreck, often feels especially incumbent on himself the rescue of his fellows. He must do what he can even though he be exhausted; how much more if he is strengthened. For there is a circumstance which makes the obligation of the spiritual convert to confirm or rescue others, greater, even in proportion, than that of the escaped from fire or shipwreck. These are often, if not always, more or less disabled by the very circumstances of their own deliverance from helping others. The one, though saved as by fire, may be scorched and bruised, the other stiffened and benumbed—both stupified—so that long before they have recovered their capacity to act, the opportunity of saving others is gone by for ever. But conversion is attended by no such contusions, swoons, or burnings. On the contrary, it always strengthens and prepares for spiritual action, so that they who do not act for the deliverance of others, are without excuse.

It seems to me that these considerations are sufficient to establish the existence of the obligation, if, indeed, there can be any disposition to dispute it. But in this, as in other cases, the bare conviction or oppressive sense of duty is not always followed by an inclination to perform it. And without this inclination no effects of a salutary kind can be expected. It is not the naked knowledge or belief of what is right that prompts to virtuous obedience. Such knowledge and belief may coexist with hatred of the thing required, and with a fixed determination not to do it. This state of mind is probably included in the torments of the damned. The heart must beat in concord with the reason and the conscience. And it does so in the case of the true convert, both in general and

reference to this specific duty. For conversion moves him to discharge it, first of all, by a general softening of the heart and the excitement of benevolent affections. But this, though indispensable, is not enough. There must be higher motives even to secure good will and charitable acts to men. There must be love to God and zeal for Christ as the grand motives even to benevolent exertion, or the fruit will fail.

But we may go still further, and assign a more specific principle of action prompting to the same result. This is gratitude for what the convert has himself experienced. You may possibly remember that, when one of the great vessels which long maintained a constant intercourse between the old world and the new had weathered what was looked upon as an extraordinary storm, the passengers resolved to testify their gratitude to God by establishing a fund for the relief of shipwrecked seamen and their families. The principle involved in this proceeding was a sound one, and the feeling altogether natural. True thankfulness invariably creates the desire of requital; and, as God cannot be its object, it is natural to spend it upon others, with a view, however, to glorify, please, and honour him. There is reason to believe that a large proportion of the purest charities of life are directly prompted by the gratitude of those who practise them. The mere conviction of right and sense of obligation would do nothing; mere benevolence to others would do little; and even a general desire to perform the will of God and glorify his name would do less than it does, without the operation of that special motive recognised in Christ's argumentative command, "Freely ye have received, freely give."

From all this it sufficiently appears that true conversion, whether primary or secondary, tends to the strengthening of others, by enabling, by obliging, by disposing the convert to seek the rescue of the lost and the deliverance of those in danger. This view of the subject sets before us an important test of character and an invaluable means of usefulness. If it be true that conversion always more or less disposes to the strengthening of others, it would seem to follow that wherever there is no sense of the obligation, much less any strong desire to discharge it, there is reason to suspect that we have never been converted, or, at least, that we need to be converted again. If, on the other hand, so large a part of

the efficient charities of life depends upon the influence excited by conversion on the convert himself, we may infer that the spiritual labours of the unconverted are of little worth. This is a general proposition, but admits of a specific application to the labours of the ministry. Without this, genius, learning, eloquence, may please, they may improve, they may even in a higher sense do good, but how can we expect them to be savingly effectual, to strengthen those who are ready to perish, to confirm in good, and to deliver or protect from evil? Perhaps much of the unfruitfulness which we lament proceeds directly from this very cause. How shall we strengthen our brethren unless we are converted? This applies even to declension and backsliding,—how much more to sheer impenitence and unbelief! The consciousness, or even the well-grounded apprehension of this grand defect *must* paralyze exertion. Self-deception no less certainly must make it ineffectual. Nay, the very recollection of conversion as a past event, perhaps a distant one, although correct, may have the same result by hindering the soul from turning back to God, however gross and long-continued its declensions. Instead of seeking reconversion by renewed acts of repentance, faith, and love, we linger on in a condition half dependent, half presumptuous, in expectation of some special and extraordinary grace adapted to the case of “Christians,” as distinguished from those whom we are wont to call “impenitent sinners.” We forget that every interruption of repentance makes ourselves impenitent; that every lapse of faith converts us so far into unbelievers; and that from this new state of impenitence and unbelief the way of restoration and recovery is the same as from the old.

It is easy to imagine the effect of this mistake, whenever it exists, in rendering abortive the most zealous efforts even of men really converted, but estranged from their first love and their first works through the deceitfulness of sin. Through the Saviour’s intercession their faith does not fail; but they must be converted before they can confirm their brethren. Here, then, is the test, and here the means before referred to. Would you prove yourself converted? Strengthen the brethren. Would you strengthen the brethren? Be converted. This last is indeed the best and safest course in any case. We may err in our attempts to strengthen



the brethren, but we cannot err in aiming at our own conversion. Let us secure this, and the rest will follow. We have every inducement, personal and public, to seek reconversion. There are always some conversions going on among us and around us. The wicked are becoming worse. The Christian, if not growing, is declining. In the world one form of sin is constantly exchanging for another. There are many conversions from ambition to avarice, and from pleasure to ambition. And even in countries professedly religious there is scarcely any interruption of the same mysterious process.

The best preventive of these retrograde conversions is conversion in the right direction, turning continually back to Him from whom we have revolted. Let not this be hindered by the evidence of former conversion. As long as there is sin there will be something to turn *from*. And, thanks be to God, there is always something to turn *to*. While *we* change he remains the same. Amidst all our fluctuations, the capricious ebb and flow of our affections, there is no change or motion in the everlasting rock against which they are beating. Through all our vicissitudes of light and darkness, night and morning, noon and twilight, lightning and eclipse, *he* still remains the Father of Lights, with whom is no variableness neither shadow of turning. Even when we wander furthest, if we look back we still see him where he was. It is this sublime immutability and constancy that furnishes a basis for our hopes. If, at every fresh return to God, we found some change in the attributes of his nature or in the offers of his gospel,—if we had to make acquaintance with another Saviour, and to seek the aid of an unknown Spirit, we might well despair. But, thanks be to God, there is always something, and always the same thing, to turn to, and the same altar, the same laver, the same mercy-seat, the same Sovereign, the same Saviour, the same Comforter,—in one word, the same Father, Son, and Spirit, God over all, blessed for ever. There is always something to turn *to*; and, lastly, there is always something to turn *for*. For the honour of Christ—he may be glorified in our growth rather than in our decay, in our salvation rather than our ruin. For ourselves—that we may redeem lost time, and wipe off the reproach which we have justly incurred upon the cause. For our brethren—that

they may be strengthened ; if impenitent, converted ; if backsliding, reclaimed ; if assailed, confirmed.

Let us give ear, then, to the two great lessons which the text affords. The one is, Be converted, for the first time, or afresh. And oh ! when thus converted, remember those whom you have left behind. You who are raised up by the great Physician from the bed of spiritual languishment, do not forget the sufferers still lying there, fevered, or palsied, or convulsed with pain. You who are plucked as brands from the burning, oh, remember the poor victims who are still asleep beneath the curtain of that stifling smoke, and with that horrid glare upon their eyelids, or perhaps just aroused to a benumbing sense of their condition. You who have reached the shore of mercy from that scene of spiritual shipwreck, oh, look back upon those still unconscious victims, lying just as you lay but a little while ago, or on those pallid faces, mutely pleading for deliverance, or those hands lifted up above the surface of the bubbling waves, before they sink for ever. When you go hence, you will go to witness just such scenes as this, to stand upon the wreck-strewed shore, and there see thousands perish, while perhaps you may be able to save one ! But how precious even that one in the sight of God and holy angels. How well worthy of your best exertions and most fervent prayers. But forget not, in addition to the training through which you are passing, and which claims your most assiduous attention ; oh, forget not that without which this must be for ever unavailing,—forget not to prepare your hearts, yourselves, for future toil and future usefulness, by giving present, constant heed to the first great commandment of the Saviour, “ Be converted ;” and to the second, which is like unto it “ When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.”



## XIX.

### Let the Dead Bury their Dead.

“Let the dead bury their dead; but go thou and preach the kingdom of God.”—  
LUKE ix. 60.

THE gospel history is distinguished from all others by the intrinsic dignity of its subject—the sayings and doings of our Lord and Saviour. In such a record, if inspired, there can be nothing small or unimportant. The slightest hint or trace of the Redeemer's words and deeds is precious to his people in all ages. And yet there is a secret disposition to regard these books as only fit for children, and to slight the gems of godlike wisdom which are scattered through them—always invaluable, although sometimes, as, for instance, in the text which I have read, they may be strange and enigmatical. These remarkable words are recorded by two of the evangelists—that is, the words of the first clause—and in precisely the same form, which shows how carefully the apostolical tradition has preserved our Saviour's very words there, while in the other clause the two accounts agree only in substance. According to both accounts, our Lord said, “Let the dead bury their dead;” but according to Matthew, he began by saying, “Follow me;” according to Luke, he ended by saying, “Go thou and preach the kingdom of God.” Both these versions may be literally accurate, though each has been preserved by only one historian. Or both may be paraphrases, giving the spirit, not the letter, of our Lord's reply. Or one may be such a paraphrase, and the other a statement of the words actually uttered. Upon any of these suppositions, all of which are natural and easy, and according to analogy and usage, the consistency of the accounts may be completely vindicated. At the same time, this diversity, however it may be explained, renders still more striking the exact agree-

ment of the Gospels in the other words. Whatever else our Saviour may have said besides, he certainly said, "Let the dead bury their (own) dead."

There is also a remarkable agreement and diversity in the accompanying circumstances, as related by the two evangelists. Both connect this little dialogue, in which the text occurs, with another of the same kind, and both put this other first. But Luke adds a third of the very same description, which Matthew does not give at all. They also agree in representing these brief conversations as taking place upon the road, or as our Lord was setting out upon a journey. Luke merely says, As they went in the way, or were proceeding on their journey, without specifying time or place. In the absence of all other information, it would be most natural to understand him as referring to the immediately preceding context, which is generally supposed to record the commencement of our Lord's last journey to Jerusalem. But observe, the writer does not say so; it is a mere inference, and more than half, perhaps nine-tenths, of the alleged variations in the Gospels, have arisen from confounding mere sequence or juxtaposition in the record, with exact or immediate chronological succession. All that Luke says is, that they were journeying, or on their way.

If this were all we knew about it, we might well infer that it was on the journey previously mentioned. But that inference is gone when Matthew tells us that this very conversation happened at an earlier period of Christ's ministry, when he was just embarking on that voyage across the sea of Galilee, which furnished the occasion of a miracle, evincing, for the first time, his dominion, over nature and the elements, as well as over demons and diseases. It was just before the stilling of the storm that Matthew places this occurrence; and as Luke's expressions are entirely indefinite, those of Matthew must of course determine the chronology, not in opposition to Luke's statement, or even in correction of it, but in addition to it, as a supplement or specification.

This view of the matter involves no invidious distinction between Luke and Matthew, as more or less exact or complete in their statements, because Luke, in other cases, supplies facts and incidents omitted by Matthew, and in this very case, it is only by a reference to Mark, who does not give the dialogues at all, but

does give what precedes and follows—it is only by a reference to this third witness, that we learn with certainty that all this happened on the very day when Christ uttered that remarkable series of parables beginning with the sower, or at least a part of them. Matthew prefaces the dialogue from which the text is taken, by saying that, “When Jesus saw great multitudes about him, he gave commandment to depart unto the other side.” This, taken by itself, might seem to mean that what follows in the narrative held the same position in the order of events. But he does not say so, and he may mean that it happened on a different occasion, when he saw a multitude around him. This possibility becomes a certainty when Mark informs us that this passage of the lake took place “on the same day, in the evening.” This is perfectly definite as to the time, as well as the events. It cannot possibly be referred to any other day or hour, without impugning Mark’s authority. There may have been a thousand days on which our Lord found himself surrounded by a crowd, and escaped them by embarking on the lake; and this is all that Matthew says. We are, therefore, at liberty, nay, bound to fix the date of this vague statement, in accordance with the light obtained from other sources. Such a source is Mark, and such a light is his explicit statement (iv. 35), that the voyage across Gennesaret, in which our Saviour stilled the storm, occurred in the evening of the same day—what day? why, of course, the day of which he had just been speaking.

Now, the immediately preceding context in Mark’s narrative contains a series of parables, beginning with that of the sower, and ending with that of the mustard-seed,—the same series that occurs, with some additions, in the 13th of Matthew, long after he has recorded the dialogue from which the text is taken, but which Mark, without giving it all, assigns to its exact place in the order of events, by telling us what happened just before and after. Luke merely says that they were on the way; Matthew, more distinctly, on their way to cross the lake; and Mark, still more explicitly, that they did cross it, and that Christ did still the storm, upon the evening of the same day when those parables were uttered.

This is only one out of a multitude of instances in which one of the Gospels gives the actual order of events, while another gives

them in another order suited to his own immediate purpose. This deviation from the order of actual occurrence is practised by the historians of every age, and can only be condemned as unhistorical by those who do not know the difference between history and chronology, or rather between dates and the events to which they owe their value. This practice is peculiar to no one of the evangelists, but common to them all, the attempt to make one of them the standard in chronology, to which the others are to be conformed, having proved as impracticable in execution, as it is arbitrary and gratuitous in theory. As Mark here furnishes a date which neither Luke nor Matthew gives us, so in other cases he receives from them the same additional specification. The *reason* for departing from the rigid chronological arrangement is not always the same, nor always apparent; but the one most generally applicable is, that the historian means to put together facts resembling one another, although not immediately successive in the order of occurrence.

Thus Matthew, in recording several parables that Mark gives, omits one and adds another, as more suited to his purpose, and inserts the whole series at a different point in the narrative from that to which it properly or rather chronologically belongs. Thus, too, Luke, in giving the two dialogues between our Lord and two new followers, which Matthew had recorded, not only adds a third, which may have happened at a different time, but places the whole series in a different connection, yet without the slightest intimation as to time beyond the mere juxtaposition, and, therefore, without the slightest contradiction to the more specific statements of the other Gospels.

A biographer of Washington who wished to give that great man's views on some important subject—say the subject of religion—not only might, but must, in order to attain his end, collect the expression of those views from different periods of his history, and give them seriatim, without any risk of being charged, as the evangelists are charged by shallow and dishonest infidels, with contradicting those biographers who give the very same facts or words, not together—having no such purpose to answer as the one first mentioned—but in connection with the times and places at which they happened or were uttered.

In the case supposed, too, no one dreams of charging the respective writers with mutual contradiction, simply because, in illustration of the point which they are proving, they may differ in the choice or the arrangement of their proofs, because one passes over what another has recorded, or repeats a certain part of it without the rest. When will the same principles and modes of judgment which experience and common sense are constantly applying on the bench and in the jury-box, and even in the ordinary intercourse of life, be fairly extended to the real or alleged variations in the gospel history or life of Christ ?

These considerations are abundantly sufficient for my purpose in proposing them, namely, that of showing that the question as of time and order, in the case before us, though admitting of an easy and satisfactory solution, is of little moment as an element of sound interpretation. Whether these three replies of Christ were uttered on the same or on different occasions, whether earlier or later in his public ministry, are questions which can have no effect, either upon their intrinsic value, or upon their mutual connection, which arises from their common bearing on a single subject of great practical importance.

It is also a subject of peculiar interest to such an audience as this—composed almost entirely of persons looking forward to the ministry, or actually in it—being nothing more nor less than the spirit which should actuate those seeking this high office, and the principle on which it should be chosen as the business of a lifetime, and on which its claims should be adjusted, when apparently or really in conflict with attractions or demands from any other quarter. This is a subject which can never be wholly inappropriate to us, and on which it may sometimes be expedient to let Jesus Christ speak in his own way, however paradoxical or strange it may appear when compared with the maxims of worldly wisdom, or even with those of casuistical theology.

Let this be my apology for asking your attention to this text and context, just as it lies upon the face of Scripture, or with only such departures from the form, as may render its consideration more convenient and more practically useful. In order to secure all the light which the connection can afford to the obscure words of the text, I shall include in my proposed examination all

the similar or homogeneous cases here referred to, whether by one of the evangelists, or both. At the very threshold we are met, however, by a striking instance of the way in which the Gospels mutually specify and supplement each other.

The first case mentioned, both by Luke and Matthew, is that of one who volunteered to follow Christ wherever he should go. Besides the unimportant variation in the title, by which this man addressed him, and which Matthew gives as Master or Teacher, Luke, as Sir or Lord, there is another more material and interesting difference, though not the slightest discrepancy or contradiction, the difference being only in the degree of definiteness and precision. Luke's account, by itself, might suggest the idea, that this volunteer disciple was an ordinary man, of little knowledge or intelligence, and his proposal a vague offer of discipleship in general, without reference to any special or official service. Both these impressions, although perfectly legitimate and natural, if we had only Luke's description, are removed by Matthew's statement, that this "certain man," of whom Luke speaks, was a scribe, or literally, "one scribe,"—an unusual expression, which may either mean a certain individual of that class, or more definitely, one of the scribes known to have been present then and there. Remembering, as we should do, whenever scribes are mentioned, that they were not clerks or secretaries, nor simple copyists of the law, but its official conservators and professional expounders—the successors of Ezra, without his inspiration, but aspiring to the same high trust of guarding the Old Testament canon, which he closed, from mutilation and corruption, and unauthorized addition; yes, and recognised by Christ himself as the legitimate interpreters of Moses, although grossly inconsistent in their lives, and forming a part, either collectively or representatively, of the Sanhedrim, the great national presbytery or senate—you will see at once that this was no fortuitous or vague proposal, from an unknown or unimportant person, to enrol himself as one of our Lord's followers—as multitudes were, no doubt, doing every day—but an extraordinary overture, of which there seems to have been few examples, from an educated student and interpreter of Scripture, to assume the same position in the new religion that he held already in the old; in other words, it was an offer to become what Christ himself



is elsewhere said to have described as a scribe instructed or disciplined, into and unto, that is, into the fellowship, and for the service of, the new dispensation or kingdom of heaven (Matt. xiii. 52); and that not merely upon certain terms, or in a certain place, to be selected by the offerer, but wherever he, whom by this act he owns as the Messiah, should be pleased to lead the way. Upon every principle of worldly wisdom, or of selfish policy, or even of what some regard as Christian prudence, how would this offer have been received and answered? as a flattering compliment? a condescension? a remarkable example of distinguished gifts and lofty station laid upon the altar of religion, and entitled therefore to a high place in the synagogue or church, and to a grateful recognition, even at the hands, and from the lips of Christ himself?

With such prepossessions and anticipations of our Lord's reply to this attractive offer, how should we, and how may some of his attendants upon that day have been shocked and startled, by its seeming harshness and irrelevance? Instead of thanks, instead of praise, instead of courtly acquiescence, and a graceful welcome, the poor scribe gets nothing in return for his proposal, but that wild and melancholy sentence, which has ever since been ringing in the ears of all who read or hear the gospel, like the burden of some funeral song, a snatch of some unearthly chant by "airy tongues, that syllable men's names on sands, and shores, and desert wildernesses,"—"Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head."

Sublimely touching as the weakest intellect and meanest taste must feel these words to be, considered in themselves, how strange do they appear to most, considered as an answer. How evasive, incoherent, and unmeaning have they been declared to be by many a pedantic critic! Yet the world has never heard, and the records of the world do not contain a more direct, conclusive, and exhaustive answer—not to the scribe's words; there is the error that gives birth to all these false and foolish judgments, of which every one of us has had his share,—not to his words, but to his thoughts, his wishes—those desires and purposes which lay so closely coiled about his very heart that he may have had no clear view of them himself. Not to his lips, or to his eye, or to his ear, but to his inmost soul, and to the hidden ecre of his corrupt affec-

tions, to his proud conceit and secular ambition, to his love of ease, and fame, and power to his sordid, carnal, and concealed hope of distinction and enjoyment in the kingdom of this untaught teacher, this unbribed benefactor, this amazing, wonder-working Son of man,—to these, to all these, as seen by an omniscient eye to constitute the man, did that unsparing, unexpected answer speak in articulate annihilating thunder.

But even in attempting to do feeble justice to our Master's greatness upon this occasion, let us not be led astray by any false interpretation of his language, however natural, however common. Let us not impair its simple grandeur by forcing quaint conceits upon it, by supposing an allusion, in the foxes and the birds, which he seems almost to envy, to the cunning or the other evil attributes of those who hated him, but give the expressions their most obvious import, as descriptive of familiar living things, perhaps presented at the moment to the eyes of those who heard him, or at least to their memory and imagination. Nor let us rush into the opposite extreme of giving to the words that follow too obvious and easy an interpretation, as expressive of extreme want and privation, not only of the luxuries and comforts, but of the necessary means of life. Such a description would have been at variance with the known facts of our Saviour's history, the apparent circumstances of his nearest relatives and friends, including some at least of his apostles, and still more of his disciples in the wider sense, the various comfortable homes in which we find him a most welcome guest, and the extreme devotion of a few choice spirits, whose substance and whose lives existed only for his service, and among whom, while none were poor, one was connected with the royal household. The glory of the Saviour stands in no need of romantic or poetical embellishment. Starvation, penury, formed no part of his sufferings, though often gloried in as chief points of resemblance by ascetic bearers of his cross. His food and raiment seem to have been those of the society in which he lived, and he expressly describes himself as "eating and drinking" with his neighbours, in contrast with the austere life of his forerunner, who came "neither eating nor drinking," and was therefore thought to have a devil.

The idea of extreme want and a state of beggary, is not sug-

gested by his words on the occasion now before us. To the scribe's ambitious expectations of a long triumphant reign of the Messiah upon earth, and of distinction and enjoyment in his service, he opposes that of a mere transient visit and unsettled life; the absence, not of ordinary food and shelter, but of a permanent and settled home, much more of a luxurious court and palace, using the very figure long before employed by Tiberius Gracchus, when complaining that the champions of Italian freedom were compelled to lead a homeless life, and flit from place to place, while the very beasts that ravaged Italy had lairs and pasture-grounds. The spirit of our Lord's reply to this deceived or hypocritical pretender is: "You know not what you ask or what you offer; you are utterly mistaken in relation to my presence upon earth and its design. Instead of being here, as you imagine, for the purpose of establishing a temporal and worldly kingdom, I am only here to die and rise again. I am here, not as a conqueror or a sovereign, but as a servant and a stranger, less at home than even the inferior animals; 'the foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests,' " &c.

The next place, both in Luke and Matthew, is assigned to the discourse from which the text is taken; but it may be more convenient to reserve this till we have considered the additional case found in Luke, and closing his account of the whole matter. From this we learn that, on the same occasion, or one like it, another person offered to follow him, but asked permission first to bid farewell to those at home. This request was so much like that of Elisha to Elijah, when he called him from the plough to the prophetic office, that our Lord, with a beautiful accommodation in the form of his reply to this designed or undesigned allusion, speaks of his own service under the figure of husbandry or ploughing, recommended also by the agricultural employments of the multitude before whom he was speaking, and perhaps suggested, as so many of his parables are thought to have been, by the sight of some one actually so employed. That sight, or even recollection, was sufficient to suggest the necessity of close attention, undivided thoughts, and undiverted eyes, in order to accomplish a straight furrow. The man, who with his hand upon the plough for such a purpose, could look idly back, in sport or in stupidity,

would be pronounced by every ploughman present utterly unfit for that humble but important duty. Here, too, as in the first case, the reply is to the thoughts, or to the state of mind; the character or disposition, rather than the language. And to those the answer is adjusted; having reference in this case, not to proud ambitious hopes, but to distracted views, and a divided heart-wish and purpose to serve Christ, combined with a presumptuous desire to continue the enjoyment of what ought to have been sacrificed or left behind by one who sought his service. To this very different, but perhaps more common class of false professors and unfaithful servants, our Lord spoke once for all and for ever, when he said in answer to that new proposal, "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

There is, however, still another question raised and answered in these few words: that of the comparative or relative demands of natural affection, duty and regard to relatives and friends, when brought into real or apparent conflict with the service of our Lord, or with his positive commands. But this is a subject still more clearly and impressively presented in the third reply from which the text is taken. The person speaking and addressed in this case is by Luke simply called "another," but by Matthew "another of his disciples;" in the wide sense of one who was already a believer in our Lord's Messiahship, and a receiver of his doctrine, but desired to sustain a more intimate relation to him, as an attendant on his person, and a messenger to carry his commands to others. Although mere sequence or juxtaposition, as we have already seen, is no sure sign of chronological succession, it is not perhaps unmeaning or fortuitous, that this whole narrative in Luke immediately precedes the mission of the seventy disciples, nor entirely improbable that these offers of service had respect to that important mission. If so, this renders it still more certain that the propositions and replies in all the cases, referred, as they unquestionably did in one, not merely to discipleship in general, but to preaching in particular. If anything were needed, this would seem to be sufficient to awaken our attention to a passage so directly bearing, not on Christian character only, but on the very office which we seek or hold already.

In one point, Luke is here more definite than Matthew, taking up the conversation at an earlier stage, and showing that the words which Matthew puts into the mouth of this disciple were occasioned by an express command from Christ to follow him, that is, to attend upon his person with a view to being sent out by him. The same command may be implied, though not expressed, in one or both the other cases. Unless it be, we must regard the one before us as a more direct evasion of acknowledged duty than the others, where the proposition seems to be a voluntary one, and not in answer to a special call. Be this as it may, the proposition itself is not unconditional, as in the first case, nor on the condition of a simple opportunity of bidding farewell to friends at home, as in the second, but turns upon a still more solemn and affecting duty, that of burying a father; not of waiting upon him till he died, as some interpreters have understood it, for such a proposition would have been absurd, asking to wait until his father's death before he followed Christ on this occasion. Nor is it the natural meaning of the words, Let me *first* go away and bury my father; referring just as plainly to a momentary and immediate interruption as the following request to bid farewell to those at home. Even this has sometimes been explained as meaning to adjust or wind up one's affairs, or dispose of one's possessions; but the only natural hypothesis, in either case, is that which concentrates the attention on a single act, and one connected with the tenderest domestic ties and personal affections,—in the one case, that of parting from the nearest living friends, and in the other, that of burying the body of a father.

Here, again, a different answer might have been expected, not by policy or selfishness alone, but by the kindest sentiments of human nature; and our Lord's reply may therefore seem abrupt and harsh to a much larger and more elevated class than those who are offended by his former answer. The difficulty here felt has betrayed itself in exegetical expedients to impose some other meaning on the words than that which can be gained by any natural interpretation. As a single but extreme specimen of such expedients, I may name the monstrous supposition that the dead first mentioned are those charged with the burial of the dead, so that our Lord's words are only a consolatory or encouraging assur-

ance that this sacred duty would not be neglected, even if the son should instantly obey his call.

To the same class may be referred the supposition that his words have reference to ceremonial defilement, and that his refusal is no more severe than that which would have been received from any priest, whether Jew or Gentile. The total silence of the narrative on this point, and the inconsistency of such a meaning with the whole spirit of our Lord's instructions, may serve as a sufficient refutation of this notion, and of every other which supposes the permission to have been withheld on any other ground than that suggested in the accompanying words, namely, the paramount necessity of following Christ, and preaching or proclaiming the kingdom of God.

Of the enigmatical words, "Let the dead bury their dead," there are only two interpretations which appear in any age to have commanded the assent of sober and judicious minds; and of these two, one has always had so great a majority of suffrages that it may be regarded as established by the voice of the Church and exegetical tradition. This is the old interpretation which assumes two entirely different senses of the word *dead*, in the two parts of the sentence, the first figurative or spiritual, the second literal or natural. "Let those dead in sin bury the bodies of the naturally dead." There are enough of worldly, unconverted men, or of men not called into my immediate service, to render these last offices to lifeless bodies, but do thou go and preach the kingdom of God.

To this it has been objected, not without some force, that the very assumption of a double sense within so short a compass is not to be assumed without necessity; and also that the sense obtained is not entirely satisfactory, since it is not consistent with the letter or spirit of Christianity to devolve such duties on the unconverted, to the exclusion of "devout men," such as carried the first martyr to his burial. Without pausing now to show how these objections may be answered, I may simply state that they have led some eminent, though few interpreters, to give the same sense to the word *dead* in both clauses, and to understand the whole as meaning, "leave the dead to bury one another." This, it is objected, is impossible; but that impossibility is locked upon by those who take this view as constituting the

whole force and point of the expression, like the camel passing through the eye of a needle. It is then equivalent to saying, and saying in the boldest and the strongest form, "If necessary, leave the dead unburied, but at all events obey my call to go and proclaim the kingdom of God."

According to this last view of the passage, it belongs to what have sometimes been, perhaps improperly, described as the *paradoxes* of our Lord's instructions—those unexpected and surprising forms of speech, by which he first awakens the attention of his hearers, and then states a principle or rule of action, not in its abstract form, nor yet in application to an ordinary case, but to an *extreme* case, so that every other may be readily disposed of. Thus, instead of laying down in general terms the rule of charity or Christian love, he commanded the young ruler, whom he saw to be enamoured of his wealth, to sell all that he had, and come and follow him; thus showing him at once, by an extreme test, where his weakness lay, which might have been untouched by requisitions of another kind, or of inferior degree. So, too, instead of giving rules for the mortification of sin in ordinary cases, he at once supposes the extreme case of a choice between wilful indulgence and the loss of a limb, and teaches, not that such a case is likely to be expected to occur, much less that we may lawfully produce it; but that if it did occur, we ought to be prepared to sacrifice the body to the soul. Instead of dealing out empirical prescriptions for the regulation of our duties and regards to God and man respectively, he assumes abruptly the extreme case of our love to God excluding or forbidding that to any relative, however near or dear, and then requires his followers, *in that case*, not only to prefer God, but to HATE even father or mother. Not that the case itself is one to be expected, but because the principle of paramount affection to the Saviour reaches even such a case, however rare and unexampled, and must therefore, of course, cover every other, just as every Christian at the present day is bound to suffer martyrdom rather than deny Christ, although actual martyrdom has been unknown in most parts of the earth for ages.

This seems to me to be the true key to the enigmas of our Saviour's sermon on the mount, and to the fallacies by which so many Christian men have been seduced into the effort to convert

the extreme cases thus employed into formal rules of ordinary conduct. In the case before us, the same principle would lead to the conclusion that the Christian should be willing and prepared to leave his dearest dead unburied, or to slight any other tender natural affection, the indulgence of which would be in conflict with a plain command or call of God; but not that such a conflict commonly exists, or may be brought about at pleasure, which, so far from being pleasing in the sight of God, is really the sin committed by the hypocrites who said "Corban," when they ought to have supplied the wants of their dependent parents. These are the grounds on which the literal interpretation of the words has been defended and explained, but, as I said before, almost the whole weight of authority and long prescription is in favour of the other explanation, which requires the follower, and especially the minister of Christ, to leave all natural attentions, even the most tender duties of affection, to the men of this world, when they would conflict with his obedience to the call of God.

As topics of reflection on this interesting passage, I suggest—

1. That there is still a special call of Christ to individuals, not only to believe in him, but to preach his kingdom. Without attempting to define this call at present, I may observe that it is neither miraculous on one hand, nor a matter of business calculation on the other, but a complete judgment or conclusion to which various elements contribute, such as intellectual and physical capacity, without which a call is inconceivable—providential facilities and opportunities, opening the way to this employment more than to all others—the judgment and desire of others, and especially of those best qualified by character and situation, to sit in judgment on the case. I might add a desire for the work, which, in a certain sense, is certainly included in a call, but which is apt to be confounded with a mere liking for the outward part of the profession—for example, with that mania for preaching which is sometimes found in grossly wicked men, and has been known to follow them, not only to their haunts of vice, but to the prison and the madhouse. There is also a desire which results from early habit and association, the known wish of parents, pastors, and other friends, or the fixed inveterate habit of regarding this as a man's chosen calling, even when every evidence of



piety is wanting. The desire which can be referred to any of these causes is entirely distinct from that which God produces in the heart of his true servants, as a part of their vocation to the ministry.

2. This vocation, where it really exists, is paramount to every personal and selfish plan, to every natural affection, even the most tender, which conflicts with it.

3. This conflict is not usually unavoidable, though often so regarded by fanatics. The first duty of the Christian, is not to desire or create, but to avoid it; but if unavoidable, his next is to obey God rather than man.

4. Our Saviour did not deal indiscriminately with all cases of desire to enter his immediate service. The remark is at least as old as Calvin, that in this case he repelled the man who wanted to go with him everywhere, and urged the man to follow him at once who wanted to go home for what appeared to be most necessary purposes. So far as his example is a guide to us in these things, we are bound, not only to persuade, but to discourage, as the case may be.

5. There is no more danger of excluding those whom God has called by faithful presentation of the whole truth, than there is of preventing the conversion of his chosen ones by showing them the true tests of faith and repentance. The man who can be finally driven back in this way ought to be so driven. He whom God has called will only be confirmed in his desire and resolution by such warnings against self-deception, though he may pass through the discipline of painful doubt and hesitation for a season. To you, my young brethren, whose presence here to-day is a profession that you believe yourselves called of God to this high office, my desire and prayer is, that the Lord would speak directly as he sees your case to need; that if any of you are anticipating only ease, and honour, and enjoyment of a selfish nature in his service, though you honestly believe yourselves prepared to follow him wherever he may lead you, he may say to you this morning, as he said to that deluded scribe of old, "The foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head;" that if any of you, although willing and desirous to engage in this service, have your hearts divided between it and

that which you have left, the business or the pleasures of the world, or its mere natural attachments and enjoyments, you may this day hear him say, and say with a medicinal effect, "No man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." And lastly, that if even one among you is distracted and distressed by imaginary obligations to your nearest friends, at variance with your duty to your Lord and Master, he may nerve your courage and dispel your doubts, by saying, as he said to him whose father lay unburied, "Let the dead bury their dead, but go thou and preach the kingdom of God."



## XX.

### Watchfulness.

“What I say unto you, I say unto all: Watch.”—MARK xiii. 37.

THE personal ministry of Christ was limited to one small country. On two occasions only do we read of his having crossed the frontiers of Palestine. The first was in his infancy, when he was carried into Egypt, to escape the sanguinary spite of Herod. The second was in later life, when he visited the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, in Phœnicia, and there wrought a miracle of healing on the daughter of a Syrophœnician woman, and in compliance with her urgent prayer, as if to show, by one signal action of his public life, that he came to be the Saviour of the Gentiles as well as of the Jews. With these exceptions, his whole life was passed in the land of Israel; its earlier years chiefly in the northern part, called Galilee; its later years partly in that region, partly in Judea, partly beyond Jordan.

We read repeatedly in Scripture that his fame was spread, not only through these provinces, but over the surrounding countries, and that wherever he went he was accompanied or followed by vast multitudes. These multitudes were no doubt always changing as he passed from one part of the country to another. There is reason to believe, however, that a large number followed him from place to place, forming a permanent body of attendants. These were influenced no doubt by various motives; some by vague curiosity, and a desire to see new and wonderful performances; some by a desire to be healed, or to obtain healing for their friends; some by gratitude for such gifts experienced already; some by a wish to be instructed; some by a conviction of sin and a desire of salvation. Those who were governed by the higher

class of motives, the desire of instruction and salvation, may be comprehended under the general description of "disciples;" that is, such as acknowledged Christ's authority and received his doctrines.

Out of this undefined and shifting body of disciples he selected twelve, that they might constantly attend him or be sent out by him. These were called apostles. But even among these we read of three who were admitted to more intimate and confidential intercourse, as appears from the frequency and prominence with which their names are mentioned in the gospel history, and from the fact that they accompanied their Master upon some occasions when the rest were left behind. The three thus specially distinguished were Simon Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, James and John. In this point of view our Lord appears surrounded by a succession of concentric circles; first the narrow circle of his confidential followers, then the wider circle of his twelve apostles, then the still wider circle of disciples, beyond which spreads the less defined and constant circle of his hearers and spectators, like a circle on the surface of the water spreading till it merges in the smooth face of the lake or stream.

Corresponding to these various sets of hearers is the various design of the discourses which our Lord addressed to them. Some were intended for the ear of the few nearest to him, some for the whole body of apostles, some for his disciples generally, some for the vast mixed multitude who happened to be present. In some cases, what was said had reference to the wants of his contemporaries generally, not of those merely whom he immediately addressed. Sometimes his instructions had a universal application to all countries and all ages. Sometimes, though immediately adapted to one purpose, they admitted of a wider or a more specific application. Thus the text has reference directly to the downfall of the Jewish nation, and to the dangers in which Christ's disciples were to be involved. It was against these dangers that he meant to warn them. But the warning was applicable to the case of all then living, as he intimates himself, by adding, "What I say unto you, I say unto all."

On the same principle, we may make a still further application of the precept, to ourselves and to our spiritual dangers. For if

such a warning was appropriate in reference to temporal calamities, however fearful, it can be no perversion to extend it to perils no less real, and as much more tremendous as the soul is more important than the body, and eternity than time. We need not, therefore, hesitate to look upon ourselves as comprehended in the wide scope of our Saviour's exhortation, though addressed to his immediate hearers, "What I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch!"

Let us consider, then, the duty and necessity of watchfulness in reference to spiritual dangers. The exhortation to watch may be resolved into two others: be awake, and be upon your guard. The last necessarily implies the first. No one can be upon his guard unless he is awake; but the converse is not true. A man may be awake, and yet not on his guard. Let us, therefore, consider them successively.

And first, what is meant by spiritual watchfulness? This again may be resolved into several particulars. In the first place, the mind must be awake, the understanding, the rational powers. And in order to this, it is essential that the powers should be exercised; in other words, that the man should think. There is, indeed, a sense in which the mind must always think. Thought is inseparable from its very being. In another sense, which, although less philosophical, is equally intelligible, mind may be said not to think. Hence the familiar terms, unthinking, thoughtless, and the like. The thing required is not the mere possession of rational faculties, but their use. The man must think in earnest, think with vigour, think coherently. Some thinking is not so much active as passive, not so much an exertion as an indulgence. This dreamy, indolent condition of the soul is the lowest stage of intellectual life, and that state of opinion must be morbid and corrupt which represents it as the highest mode of thought, and even as a kind of inspiration. To be mentally awake, there must be life, spontaneous action and coherence in the thoughts.

But this is not enough. The mind may be awake in this sense, and yet dreaming in another. It may act, and yet the world in which it acts may be not the present, but another. Some minds operate too fast, and some too slow. Some men's thoughts are for ever in advance of that which claims their present attention.

This is the case with those who habitually dwell upon the circumstances of our future being, and attempt to discover that which has not been revealed, and therefore has no bearing on our present duties or interests. The same is true of some who do not look so far off, who confine themselves to this life, but who constantly anticipate a state of things still future, and do now what they ought to do hereafter. On the other hand, some are either constitutionally or habitually slow; they are constantly behindhand; they think, but think too late, when the necessity for thinking has gone by. Both these mental states and habits have analogy to sleep; the first to the condition of the fitful, feverish, visionary dreamer, the last to that of the more drowsy slumberer.

Both, however, are asleep. The mind, to be awake, must not only think, and think with vigour and coherence, but think seasonably also. Even this is not enough. This may be done, and yet the mind remain absorbed in spiritual slumber. For what can vigour, coherence, or promptness avail, if the thoughts are exercised on trifling or unimportant objects? However thoroughly the mind is roused, however actively it may exert itself, however ready it be to act precisely at the juncture when its action is required, if it does not act upon the proper objects, it might just as well not act at all, it may still be figuratively represented as asleep. This is the spiritual state of many. Their powers appear to be in active exercise, but they are spent on trifles. Even when they think of serious things in general, it is not of the great doctrines of religion—the substantial truth of God, but of enigmas, difficulties, puzzles in theology, about which men may speculate for ages without reaching any satisfactory result, or doing any good to themselves or others. Such minds may seem wide awake, but they are walking and talking in their sleep; just as in real life we meet with cases where the person performs certain acts with vigour and precision, but not such as belong to his present situation: he is asleep. The mind which is asleep in this sense, never proves itself awake until it turns away from its beloved theme of speculation to the matters which deserve and claim its attention.

But even when it does this, it may still come short of the desired and necessary end, by thinking to no practical purpose.

We may think, think in earnest, think with vigour, think coherently, think seasonably, think of the right things, yet think of them merely as themes of speculation, without any reference to our own duty or practical concern in them. This is the case of those who hear the gospel, and read the Scriptures, and think much of religion, but still keep it at arm's length, or still further off from any personal contact with themselves, or with anything beyond their understandings or their speculative faculties.

This leads me, in the next place, to observe, that the conscience as well as the intellect must be awake—the moral as well as the purely intellectual faculties. There must be perception, not only of what is true, but of what is right. A power of distinguishing, not only between true and false, but also between right and wrong; and that not only in the abstract, but in reference to ourselves, our own duty, and our own transgressions. If the conscience is asleep, no liveliness of intellect can make up the deficiency. We are but talking in our sleep. We are not spiritually awake. And lastly, in addition to all this, the heart must be awake. There must be liveliness of affection no less than of intellect. We must not only feel bound, but feel disposed to do the will of God. We must see the coincidence of what is right with what is good and pleasant. When all these conditions are complied with—when the mind, the conscience, and the heart all act, and act in harmony—when the man thinks in earnest, and coherently, and seasonably of right objects and to practical purpose—when he feels his obligations, and his failures to discharge them—when he earnestly desires, and sincerely loves what he admits to be true and binding—then indeed he may be said, in the highest spiritual sense, to be awake. And being thus awake, he is a proper subject of the second precept comprehended in the text—Be on your guard.

The figure is a military one. So much may depend upon the vigilance even of a single soldier—so many lives—so many personal and public interests—so many subsequent and seemingly remote events—that there is scarcely any situation in real life more responsible. Hence the severity with which a breach of trust or even an involuntary lapse of attention has been punished in all ages. To sleep upon one's post might seem, at first sight,

to be rather a pitiable weakness than a crime—at least a crime deserving the extreme penalty of death, which has so often been inflicted. But when the remote as well as the immediate consequences of neglect in such a station are considered, the venial offence swells into a crime of awful magnitude, and worthy of the highest penalty.

But what is there analogous to this in the spiritual warfare? At whose door are we stationed as sentinels to watch, upon pain of death? If I should answer, at the door of every neighbour, friend, or fellow-christian, some might be disposed to ask as Cain did—Am I my brother's keeper? For this cause, although there is a real and important sense in which we may be, figuratively, represented as sentinels over one another, I shall confine myself to that watch which every man is bound to keep over the citadel of his own heart. The order given by the Captain of our salvation, is, "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life." If a dereliction of this duty were not liable to be punished by virtue of a positive decree, it would still be punished by the loss incurred, the total loss of that which can never be supplied; "for what is a man profited if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul, or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"

With these views of the importance of the charge, let me again remind you that, although it is essential, it is not enough to be awake. This admits of illustration from the case of literal external watching. See that sentry at the gate of an encampment or a fortress—mark his measured tread, his martial port, his anxious though determined countenance—his quiet and searching glance, as he repeats his constant walk,—that soldier is awake; but he is more—he is upon his guard—his mind is full of his important trust—he feels the weight of his responsibility. But see—his frame becomes relaxed, his form grows less erect, his movements lose their regular mechanical succession—his look is vacant or abstracted, he no longer looks afar off and at hand in search of approaching danger, he has either forgotten it, or ceased to reckon it so imminent. And yet the man is wide awake; not only are his eyes still open, but they see surrounding objects; all his senses are still active, and his mind, though distracted from his present duty, is as much at work as ever; for no sooner does the



slightest sound arouse him, than, as if by magic, he recovers his position and the tension of his muscles, he resumes his measured walk, his mingled air of circumspection and defiance, and his look of bold but anxious scrutiny. Even before, he was awake; but now he is awake, and at the same time on his guard.

Precisely the same difference exists between a simple wakefulness in spiritual matters—a wakefulness of understanding, conscience, and affection—and the active exercise of spiritual vigilance; this is impossible without the other, but the other does not necessarily involve this. In both cases, that is, in the literal and spiritual case supposed, there is a sensible gradation of remissness or the opposite. We have seen the sentry wholly losing for a moment the recollection of his solemn trust; but this is not the only way in which he may unconsciously betray it. Look at him again. Every look, every motion, now betokens concentration of his thoughts and feelings on the danger which impends, and against which he is set to watch. Perhaps he is now motionless, but it is only that his eye may be more steadfastly fixed upon the point from which the enemy's approach is apprehended. In that point his whole being seems to be absorbed. And you can see at a glance that he is ready, even for the first and faintest intimation of a moving object on that dim horizon. But while he stands like a statue, with his face turned towards that dreaded point, look beyond him and behind him, at those forms which are becoming every moment more and more defined against the opposite quarter of the heavens. He hears them not, because their step is noiseless; he sees them not, because his eye and all his faculties are employed in an opposite direction. While he strains every sense to catch the first intimations of approaching danger, it is creeping stealthily behind him, and when at last his ear distinguishes the tramp of armed men, it is too late, for a hostile hand is already on his shoulder, and if his life is spared, it is only to be overpowered and disarmed without resistance. And yet that soldier was not only awake, but on his guard—his whole being was absorbed in contemplation of the danger which impended; but alas, he viewed it as impending only from one quarter, and lost sight of it as really approaching from another. We may even suppose that he was right in looking where he did, and only wrong

in looking there exclusively. There was an enemy to be expected from that quarter, and if this had been the only one, the sentry's duty would have been successfully performed; but he was not aware, or had forgotten that the danger was a complex one—that while the enemy delayed his coming, another might be just at hand, and thus the very concentration of his watchfulness on one point defeated its own purpose, by withdrawing his attention from all others.

By a slight shifting in the scene, I might present to you the same man or another, gazing, not at one point only, but at all, sweeping the whole visible horizon with his eye as he maintains his martial vigil. See with what restless activity his looks pass from one distant point to another, as if resolved that nothing shall escape him, that no imaginable source of danger shall remain unwatched. That man might seem to be in every sense awake and on his guard—surprise might seem to be impossible—but hark! what sound is that which suddenly disturbs him in his solitary vigils? he looks hastily around him, but sees nothing, yet the sound is growing every moment louder and more distinct, “a voice of noise from the city”—“the voice of them that shout for mastery”—“the voice of them that cry for being overcome!” Doubt is no longer possible—it is—it is behind him—yes, the enemy for whom he looked so vigilantly, is within the walls, and the banner which he thought to have seen waving at a distance, is floating in triumph just above his head.

The cases which I have supposed are not mere appeals to your imagination. They are full of instruction as to practical realities. They vividly present to us in figurative forms the actual condition of the soul in reference to spiritual dangers. It is just as true of us, as of the soldier in the case supposed, that we may fail of our duty and expose ourselves to ruin, not only by actually falling asleep, but by want of proper caution when awake—by forgetting the danger or by underrating it—by admitting its reality and magnitude, but losing sight of its proximity and imminence—by looking for it from a quarter whence it is not likely to proceed, while we turn our backs on that from which it ought to be expected—by looking for it with good reason from one quarter, but forgetting that it may proceed from others also—by looking for

one enemy instead of many—and above all, by looking at a distance when the danger is at hand—by exercising vigilance without, when the danger is within—and vainly hoping to anticipate its first approaches, when the fight is finished and the battle lost.

If it be asked, Who is the enemy against which spiritual vigilance is called for? I reply, His name is Legion. There is no end to the forms under which he can disguise himself, nor to the arts which he can practise—"We are not (wholly) ignorant of his devices." But our spiritual dangers, although endlessly diversified in their specific characters, may all be resolved into one, and that is sin. Indeed, all danger, whether physical or moral, may be traced back to this source, for it is wholly incredible that suffering could ever have existed without sin. But in reference to spiritual dangers, it is still more emphatically true that they are all reducible by ultimate analysis to this same form. There is nothing to be spiritually dreaded except sin and its effects. Whatever, therefore, tends to sin, not merely to the overt act, nor even to specific acts of will, but to the love, the practice, the dominion of iniquity, in any form or measure whatsoever, is a danger to be dreaded and assiduously watched against. And this extends, not only to the actual commission or indulgence, but to all exciting and facilitating causes, such as are usually comprehended in the name temptation. However little you may be aware of it, I tell you that temptation is your danger, and the tempter your enemy. This danger, this enemy, as I have said, appears in various disguises, and assails us from a thousand different quarters. Our vigilance must, therefore, be a constant and a universal vigilance, or we can have no confidence of safety.

To concentrate and define our vague conceptions of a multiform peril, we may group the innumerable dangers which surround us under several descriptive heads; and these, in accordance with the figure hitherto adopted, and, as I think, implicitly suggested by the text, may be enumerated as so many distinct quarters from which danger threatens us, and towards which our vigilance must therefore be directed.

The first that I shall mention is the devil, both as an individual spirit and as representing the collective hosts of hell, the aggregate of the powers of darkness. This, of all spiritual dangers, is

the one which most men look upon as most remote and least substantial. However readily they may assent to what is theoretically taught upon the subject, they are practically less afraid of this than of any other adverse power. Nay, some professed believers in the Bible are by no means loth to join in the derisive language of the irreligious as to this mysterious subject. Be it so. Let those who can, derive amusement from the doctrine of a fallen spirit, far superior to ourselves in original intelligence, and now possessed of faculties strengthened and sharpened by the malignant activity of ages, allowed access to the minds of men, and suffered to exert a moral influence upon them, though deprived of all coercive power. But let such, even while they laugh, remember that the time may not be far off when they shall perceive their situation to be that of the soldier or the general who denies and even laughs at the existence of a certain enemy, until he is suddenly convinced, by being crushed beneath the very force which he derided as imaginary. If the sentinel be justly doomed to death who jeopardds his own life and that of others by neglect, or even by too narrow an attention to his trust, what shall be said of him who does the same by making light of the existence of the danger? With this premonition of the change which may take place hereafter in your views upon this subject, I am not ashamed to say to the most incredulous among you, in the words of the apostle Peter, "Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary, the devil, like a roaring lion, goeth about seeking whom he may devour."

Another quarter from which danger is always to be apprehended, is the world, a term by which the Scriptures designate the complex influence exerted by mankind upon each other, not as individuals merely, but as elements of human society, whether this influence be brought to bear upon the opinions, the passions, or the appetites; whether the bait presented be that of sensual enjoyment, social popularity, official rank, civil power or military glory, intellectual fame, or mere inglorious ease and exemption from annoyance. The reality of this danger few will dare to question. Some may be ready to exclaim, We know what this is, we believe in its existence, we have felt its power! Whether there be an infernal devil or not, we know that there are devilish

powers at work in human society. The young and inexperienced, who have not been sucked into this fearful whirlpool, may swim carelessly around it, but you whose hearts have been already blighted, and your consciences seared, perhaps, as with a hot iron, —you know, although you may not choose to tell, what depths of meaning are contained in that one syllable—the world, the world! You know, too, that it is not, as the young sometimes imagine, the enmity, the scorn, the hatred, the oppressions, wrongs, or persecutions of the wicked world that constitute the danger, but its smiles, its blandishments, its friendship; “Know ye not,” says the apostle James, “that the friendship of the world is enmity with God; whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.”

But neither world nor devil would be objects of alarm and apprehension, if they always remained without us and external to us; what makes them dangerous is, that they get within us, they obtain a lodgment in our hearts, they are leagued with our own corruptions; hence the third and most alarming source of spiritual danger is ourselves, the last to be suspected and the hardest to be watched, and yet the most in need of our suspicion and our vigilance, because one enemy within the camp or fortress is worse than many foes without; because one traitor is more to be dreaded than a host of open enemies. Yet such is our condition, exposed all at once to these three dangers, any one of which would seem sufficient to destroy us—the world, the flesh, and the devil; seduced to evil by human example, urged to it by demoniacal suggestion, and inclined to it already by the very dispositions of our fallen nature; assailed without by the united hosts of earth and hell, betrayed within by our own corruptions, bound hand and foot, and left to float upon the rapid current which every hour brings us nearer to the judgment seat of Christ.

While such is our condition, how can we look forward with joy to his appearing? This is a painful thought, but one which cannot be avoided, that to these three dangers which have been already mentioned, we must add as a fourth the coming of our Lord. Is he, then, our enemy, from whose approach we ought to shrink back in terror? It may be so. Let us see to it that it is not so; let us so resist our spiritual foes, and watch against them,

as to meet him when he comes with joy, and not with grief. Let us so live as to show that we are not of those who shall hereafter call upon the rocks and mountains to conceal us from his view, but of those who sincerely love his appearing. We have surely no need of additional inducements to obey the exhortation of the text.

The only question that remains is, How shall we obey it? We have seen the necessity and duty of spiritual watchfulness, and wherein it essentially consists, but we are like the sick man who is told of his disease and of the remedy, but still looks round for some one to apply it. It is natural to ask, Is there not some safeguard, some appointed, tried means of spiritual safety, something that will at once secure our vigilance and make it efficacious? Yes, there is such a talisman, and its name is prayer; not the mere act of supplication or devotion, whether audible or mental, but that prayerful attitude or frame of mind which is ever ready to commune with God, and of which Paul could say without extravagance, and meaning to the letter what he did say, "Pray without ceasing,"—that settled bent of the affections which makes actual devotion not a rare experience, but the normal condition of the soul, to which it naturally flies back whenever it escapes from any temporary pressure. This prayerful habit is repeatedly connected in the word of God with watch; "Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation." "Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving." And Paul, in that sublime description of the panoply of God (Eph. vi.), seems to add this as essential to the efficacy of the rest; for, after urging them to take the girdle of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, he crowns all with this closing exhortation, "praying always with all prayer and supplication in the spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance." Thus it seems we must watch that we may pray, and pray that we may watch. The influence which prayer exerts is easily explained. It operates by keeping the mind ever awake and in a state of healthful activity, by keeping it in contact with the best and highest objects, and bringing the affections and the powers to bear primarily upon them.

If, then, we would watch to any good effect against our

spiritual dangers, let us pray without ceasing, let us breathe the atmosphere of genuine devotion. And in this way we shall do far more than escape injury. The benefit of prayerful vigilance is not merely negative, but positive; a blessing is suspended on it. In the present state the best of us are like men that wait for their Lord, that when he cometh and knocketh we may open unto him. Already the flashing of his torches is beginning to illuminate the darkness, already the voice of his forerunners comes through the silent night, saying, Be ye also ready; and amidst these cries, his own voice may be heard, still afar off, saying, "What I say unto you I say unto all, Watch." "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation." "Blessed are those servants whom the Lord, when he cometh, shall find watching; whether he come in the second watch or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants."



XXI.

The End is not Yet.

“The end is not yet.”—MATT. xxiv. 6.

THE prophetic discourse of which this sentence forms a part has been the subject of conflicting explanation ever since it was originally uttered. The grand difficulty lies in the appropriateness of its terms to two distinct and distant events,—the end of the world and the destruction of Jerusalem.

But whether we assume, with some interpreters, that the one catastrophe was meant to typify the other, or, with another class, that the discourse may be mechanically divided by assuming a transition, at a certain point, from one of these great subjects to the other, or, with a third, that it describes a sequence of events to be repeated more than once, a prediction to be verified, not once for all, nor yet by a continuous progressive series of events, but in stages and at intervals, like repeated flashes of lightning, or the periodical germination of the fig-tree, or the re-assembling of the birds of prey whenever and wherever a new carcase tempts them ; upon any of these various suppositions it is still true that the primary fulfilment of the prophecy was in the downfall of the Jewish state, with the previous or accompanying change of dispensations ; and yet that it was so framed as to leave it doubtful, until the event, whether a still more terrible catastrophe was not intended. However clear the contrary may now seem to us, there was nothing absurd in the opinion which so many entertained that the end of the world and of the old economy might be coincident. This ambiguity is not accidental, but designed, as in many other prophecies of Scripture.

Another striking feature in the form of this discourse is the



precision with which several stages or degrees of the fulfilment are distinguished from each other, each affording the occasion and the premonition of the next, until the close of the whole series. Of these successive periods or scenes of the great drama, each might, considered in itself, have seemed to be the last. And no doubt each as it occurred was so regarded even by some who had been forewarned by Christ himself. To correct this error and prepare the minds of true believers for the whole that was to come upon them, he says at the close of the first scene, "See that ye be not troubled, for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet;" or, as Luke expresses it, "the end is not by-and-by"—that is, immediately. And again, at the close of the next stage of this great revolution, "All these are the beginning of sorrows."

The same intimation, although not expressed, may be supplied throughout the prophecy. At every solemn pause, until the last, a kind of echo seems to say again, "The end is not yet." When the prediction was fulfilled we may easily imagine the impression which this well-remembered formula would make upon the minds of the disciples. As each new sign appeared they were no doubt ready to exclaim, *The end cometh*, and, as each gave way to another, *The end is not yet*. And what was thus true of the several stages of this great catastrophe was also true of the whole. The impression made on many by the very structure of the prophecy, that the Jewish state and the world would come to an end together, was no sooner rectified by the event than multitudes who had been breathlessly awaiting the result, as they again respired freely, cried out to themselves or others, *The end is not yet*. The need of this caution has not ceased. Men have ever since been and are still too much disposed to precipitate the fulfilment of God's purposes, and to confound "the beginning of sorrow" with "the end." They are slow to learn the lesson that "the believer will not make haste," that an important element of faith in the divine engagements is a disposition to leave time and every other circumstance to God himself, a disposition perfectly consistent with intense desire and urgent importunity. There is something curious in the difference of men's feelings and opinions with respect to the life of individuals, and to that of the race or the continued existence of this present world. The great majority of men live as if they

were to live for ever. The effect of this upon their character and lives affords a constant theme to moralists and preachers of the gospel. In all this there is only a misapplication or undue restriction of a principle inherent in our very constitution. Man is immortal, and was made for immortality. He cannot, if he would, look only at the present and the past. He must feel and act for the future also. And that not only for a definite or proximate futurity, but also for one more remote and undefined, the boundless field of what is yet to be. The practical error lies in confounding endless existence with an endless prolongation of the present life. The negation of all end is confounded with exemption from all change. The more profoundly men reflect the more they are brought off from this illusion. But so long as they are heedless and controlled by natural feeling, they expect to live for ever. No extent of observation, no degree of familiarity with death and its accompanying changes, is sufficient to correct this practical error, for, of course, it can have no theoretical existence.

But the most surprising fact of all is, that these views may co-exist with a strong disposition to expect a speedy termination of the whole system under which we live. The certainty of this fact is clear from the effect of those fanatical predictions which at different times have agitated Christendom. In all such cases the panic has had reference to the end of the world. Let this be quelled, and all fear is extinguished. It does not occur to the alarmist that however probable the near approach of the event may be made by calculation or by reasoning, it never can be rendered half so certain as his own death in the course of nature at no distant period. Nay, the probability of this inevitable change occurring even speedily must always transcend that of a speedy occurrence of the final consummation. Yet the oldest and the least prepared to die remain unmoved by this appalling certainty, although they would be terrified by any intimation that the world was to continue but a twelvemonth longer. It matters not that they may die to-morrow or to-day, if they can only be assured that the end of the world is not immediately at hand:

In some cases it is easy to refer these very different effects to one and the same cause. The self-love which forbids some men to look upon themselves as mortal, makes them equally unwilling,

when this truth is forced upon them, to allow a longer term to others. If they must die, let humanity die with them. Something of this selfish feeling no doubt enters into the strong disposition of some good men in all ages, to regard their own times as the last, and to fix the winding up of the great drama as near as may be to their own disappearance from the stage. As Herod the Great is said to have ordered a large number of distinguished persons to be massacred as soon as he was dead, in order that his death might not be wholly unaccompanied by mourning, so the class in question seem to look upon the end of the world as a necessary part of their own obsequies. The impression of approaching change and dissolution, which is perfectly appropriate to their own case, is transferred by a natural association to the scene which they are leaving, as if it were out of the question that the world can get along without them.

This pardonable vanity, if such it may be called, seeks, of course, to justify itself by the authority of Scripture. Hence the prophecies are tortured into confirmation of the fact assumed, and every art of calculation and construction is employed to bring the end of the world as near as may be into coincidence with that of the interpreter. Nor have these been barren and inoperative speculations. Their effect has been immense and sometimes long continued, both on individuals and whole communities. The most remarkable exemplification of the general statement, is afforded by the memorable panic which diffused itself through Christendom at the approach of the year 1000. The belief had been gradually gaining ground that the close of this millennium, or first period of a thousand years, was to be the final close of human history. As the fatal term drew near, the superstitious dread associated with it grew continually more intense and powerful in its effects. These, as disclosed by the historical research of modern times, have more the aspect of romance than of true history. They might indeed be thought incredible, but for the like effects of the same causes in our own times, on a smaller scale and in less imposing circumstances. One of the most striking facts recorded is, that a large portion of those massive mediæval structures which now constitute the monuments of those times were, at least, projected under the first impulse of recovered

hope, occasioned by the transit of the fatal era. They who, a little while before, were throwing away treasures and abandoning estates as henceforth worthless, by a natural reaction, now rushed into the opposite extreme, and began to build as for eternity.

However improbable the actual recurrence of such scenes may now appear, the principle from which they spring has been too often manifested to be looked upon as temporary or accidental. It continues to exist and to exert its power, not always with the same effect or to the same extent, but so far constantly and uniformly, as to make it an interesting subject of inquiry what we ought to think, and how we ought to feel and act in reference to it, as connected with our own times and circumstances. What I believe to be the true solution of this question may be reduced to these two propositions :—

1. So far as we have any means of judging, *the end is not yet.*

2. So far as it remains a matter of doubt, it is better to assume that *the end is not yet*, than to assume the contrary.

1. So far as we have any means of judging, *the end is not yet.* This may be argued negatively and positively. The negative argument is this, that there are no conclusive indications of a speedy end, afforded either by the word of God or the condition of the world. Such indications are indeed alleged, and that with confidence, but they have no conclusive force; because, in the first place, they rest upon gratuitous assumptions. It is assumed, for instance, that a certain form or pitch of moral depravation is incompatible with the continued existence of society. That there is or may be a degree of wickedness irreconcilable with any social organization, is too clear to be disputed. But it does not follow that the present condition of the world is such. Such a conclusion is not warranted by the mere degree of actual corruption, however great, because we do not know how much is necessary to the end in question, and any attempt to determine it must rest on a gratuitous assumption.

The same thing is true as to the real or supposed predictions of the final consummation in the word of God. That these were meant, not merely to assert the general fact, and in some cases to describe the attendant circumstances, but to afford specific indications of the very time of its occurrence, so that it may be dis-

tinctly known beforehand; all this is assumed in the usual reasoning on the subject, but assumed without proof. It is not more easy to affirm than to deny it. Whatever plausibility there may be in the sense thus put upon the passage in question, there can be no certainty. It is not necessary to maintain that this *cannot* be the meaning. It is enough to know that it *may* not be. The position taken is not that the proofs alleged are manifestly false, but that they are inconclusive; they prove nothing, because they rest upon gratuitous assumptions. This, by itself, would be enough to justify the negative position, that we have no sufficient reason to believe that the end is at hand.

But the same thing is still clearer from experience. These signs have all been misapplied before. There is perhaps not a single indication now made use of for this purpose, that has not been so employed in former ages. Every striking coincidence, every verbal allusion, has been weighed already in this balance and found wanting. Nay, arithmetic itself, of which it has been said the figures cannot lie, has here misled its thousands. The most positive numerical specifications may be varied indefinitely by the variation of the term from which they are to be computed. The millennium of the Book of Revelation has by turns been proved to be present, past, and future. All this argues no defect or error in the Scriptures, but only something wrong in the interpretation. When anything can thus be made to mean anything, we have reason to believe that it was not intended to reveal so much as we imagine. In other words, the passages of Scripture thus appealed to, having been applied before in the same way and with equal plausibility, and the application falsified by the event, we are naturally brought to the conclusion, that they never were intended to disclose so much as some are able to perceive in them.

We may reason in the same way, from experience, with respect to the condition of society and the degree of actual corruption. The extraordinary abounding of iniquity at any one time, in itself considered, might well lead us to believe that such depravation must be preparatory to the final dissolution of society. But when we find analogous appearances insisted on, from age to age, with equal confidence, in proof of the same thing, and the proof as

constantly annulled by the event, we may not unreasonably hesitate to rest upon such evidence in this case, and conclude that tests, which have always led to false results before, must be at least defective, and their testimony inconclusive. Whether we look, then, at the word of God or at the world around us, or compare the condition of the one with the predictions of the other, we have no satisfactory or adequate ground for the conclusion that "the end of all things is at hand" in this sense.

Let us now look for a moment at the positive argument in favour of the same position, which may be conveniently reduced to this form, that the fulfilment of the Scriptures is still incomplete, and will require a long time for its completion.

In support of this, we may appeal in general to the grand and comprehensive scale on which the divine purposes are projected in the Scriptures. The natural impression made, perhaps, on all unbiassed readers is, that in the Bible there are vast beginnings, which require proportionate conclusions even in the present life. There are germs which were never meant to be developed in the stunted shrub, but in the spreading oak. There are springs, in tracing which we cannot stop short at the brook or even at the river, but are hurried on, as if against our will, to the lake, the estuary, and the ocean. Every such reader of the Bible feels that it conducts him to the threshold of a mighty pile, and opens many doors, through which he gets a distant glimpse of long-drawn aisles, vast halls, and endless passages; and how can he believe that this glimpse is the last that he shall see, and that the edifice itself is to be razed before he steps across the threshold?

This impression made by the very structure of the Scriptures is confirmed by their peculiar phraseology—the constant use of language, pointing not to sudden, instantaneous revolutions, but to long-continued dilatory processes of change, decay, and restoration, dissolution, and relapse, which have as yet but had their beginning, and the full course of which can only be completed in a cycle of ages. And besides these general considerations, founded on the structure of the dialect of Scripture, we can specify particular changes which have scarcely yet become perceptible, but of which the Bible leads us to anticipate the end and the completion before "the end cometh."

One of these is, the universal spread of the gospel. Without insisting on particular predictions of this great event, we may appeal to the general impression made upon all readers of the Bible, that it must and will take place before the end of the existing dispensation. Closely allied to this, as one of its conspicuous effects, is the regeneration of the race, the reconstruction of society—the realization of those glowing pictures of the earth and its inhabitants which can neither be explained as day-dreams of an imaginary golden age, nor as poetical anticipations of the joys of heaven. Nor do the Scriptures lead us to expect a mere restoration, but a continued exhibition of the race and of society in its normal state, contrasted with its previous corruptions and distortions.

To these and other mighty changes we must look, not only as important means of human elevation, but as necessary to the vindication of the truth of prophecy. The longer its fulfilment is delayed, provided it is clearly verified at last, the stronger is the proof of divine foresight. This is enhanced still further if the fulfilment of the prophecy is gradual, or marked by a series of gradations. The longer the intervals between these, the more striking the fulfilment, if the several gradations can be clearly ascertained, and their mutual connection rendered palpable. Now, there certainly are such predictions even now in the process of fulfilment, and the very fact of their existence is a strong proof that *the end is not yet*.

Before this comes, there is still another object which must be accomplished. This is the vindication of the Scriptures generally from the doubts engendered by apparent inconsistencies, not only with itself, but with history, with science, with the principles of morals. These clouds are not to rest for ever on the word of God, nor are they merely to be scattered by the brightness of the final conflagration or the clear sunlight of eternal day. We have cheering reason to believe that the reconciliations which have been effected in our own day between different forms of truth, are but the foretaste and the pledge of what is to be done hereafter and before the end cometh.

It may, indeed, be urged in opposition to this argument, that all these changes may be suddenly and speedily effected, so that

their necessity proves nothing as to the nearness or remoteness of the final consummation. That such an issue is within the reach of the divine omnipotence cannot be doubted. But it does not follow that because God can, he will produce a certain effect, or that his power is the measure of his wisdom or his actual purpose. His wisdom, on the contrary, controls the exercise of his power. Such a sudden termination of the system, therefore, although possible, is far from being probable, because some of the proofs, by which the truth of the divine word is to be established, from their very nature seem to require time for their perfect exhibition.

If, for example, it is one of the great purposes disclosed in Scripture to exhibit human society in its normal state, and the effects of holiness compared with those of sin, it is not easy to imagine how this could be brought about by any sudden, partial, transient revolution, which, although it might illustrate the omnipotence of God, could scarcely serve to show the operation of moral causes. And even where a longer period does not seem to be required by the very nature of the proof itself, it may be necessary to its full effect, as in the case of prophecy, which, as we have already seen, becomes impressive and conclusive, as an evidence of prescience, in proportion to the number and remoteness of the points at which its fulfilment may be verified. A prophecy fulfilled a day after its date may leave no doubt as to its origin; but what a cumulative increase in the clearness of the evidence and in the scope of its effect would be produced by successively enlarging the interval between the date and the fulfilment to a week, a month, a year, a generation a century, a millennium!

Now, if some signal prophecies have as yet been but partially fulfilled, and the fulfilment thus far has been marked by numerous gradations and divided by long intervals, there is, at least, a probability that what remains will exhibit the same aspect, and will, therefore, require time for its development. The sum of these considerations, negative and positive, appears to be, that there is no conclusive indication of a speedy end; that, on the contrary, there are strong reasons for believing that it is remote; but that even these are insufficient to decide the question absolutely; so that, after all, it is a doubtful point. Regarding it as such, we may



naturally hesitate between two courses. Shall we, on the one hand, follow the preponderating evidence in favour of a distant consummation? or shall we, on the other, take what seems to be the safer course of looking for that soon which *may* be still far distant, but which *may* be already at the very door? In other words, considering the case as doubtful, is it better to proceed upon the supposition that the end is near, or upon the supposition that the end is not yet?

This is a question both of principle and practice, and the way in which it is decided may exert, as we shall see, no feeble influence upon the character and life. It is therefore worthy of a brief but serious consideration, the result of which may serve as the practical improvement of a subject that might otherwise seem rather to belong to the class of curious and subtle speculations, than to that of experimental truths or Christian duties. To what quarter shall we look, then, for an adequate solution of this question?

The first consideration that presents itself is this: that the very doubt in which the Scriptures leave the thing involved, creates a presumption that it was not meant to influence our conduct by the expectation of this great event as just at hand. This, however, is at variance with the general analogy of revelation, in which, though everything of absolute necessity is clear, yet many things of high practical importance are left to be determined by laborious scrutiny and processes of reasoning. There is nothing, therefore, in the mere dubiety of this case to forbid the supposition that its practical design was to keep men in a constant attitude of expectation. But, the probability of this is greatly lessened by the fact, already shown, that the proofs are not in equilibrio, but preponderate in favour of the negative conclusion, although insufficient to establish it. It can hardly be supposed that in order to maintain a healthful expectation of approaching change, they would be so mentioned as to favour the belief that they are still far distant. Nothing, indeed, could warrant this assumption but experimental proof, that the belief just mentioned has necessarily a bad effect. But so far is this from being certain or admitted, that the contrary admits of a most plausible defence. The expectation of a speedy end seems naturally suited to enervate, nay, to paralyze exertion, while the opposite belief invigorates it.

No less dissimilar is the effect of these two causes, in relation to the credit and authority of Scripture. The perpetual failure of the signs, which some see there, of instant dissolution, though it only proves the falsehood of the principle assumed, has a practical tendency to bring the word of God itself into discredit, as if these ever-shifting whims and fancies of professed interpreters were really expedients necessary to disguise or palliate the failure of predictions which events have falsified. The existence of this danger is apparent from the ill-concealed contempt with which the irreligious argue, from the failure of fanatical predictions, to the worthlessness of prophecy in general. But no such inconvenience could result from the other supposition, even if it should be falsified by the speedy occurrence of the thing which it assumes to be remote, because the failure could occur but once, and then in circumstances utterly exclusive of effects like those which have been just described as flowing from the constant repetition of mistake and failure on the part of those who undertake to fix an early day and hour for the end of the world.

The other doctrine would seem, therefore, to be safer, both as respects the honour of the Scriptures and the zeal of Christian enterprise. The only practical advantage of the same kind which can well be claimed for the opposite opinion is, that it leads men to be always ready, as our Lord requires. This is, in fact, the grand recommendation of the theory, and that to which it owes its currency among some truly devout Christians. Yet it rests upon a fallacy, for it confounds the life of individuals with the existence of the race on earth. The readiness which Christ requires of us, is a personal readiness to leave the world and meet our God. This has existed in the case of thousands who had no such expectation as the one in question. The necessity of this individual preparation cannot justify the sacrifice of higher interests, or dispense with the discharge of duties which we owe, not only to ourselves, but to our successors, to the Church, to society, to human kind.

This preparation, too, for personal departure is not secured by a belief in the approach of the great final catastrophe. No such belief has ever wrought it. Where it really exists, it is preceded by a due sense of the shortness and uncertainty of life, and the

importance of the interests suspended on it, without any reference whatever to the subsequent continuation or destruction of the world. The strongest possible persuasion, that this world is yet to last for ages, may exist, because it has existed, in connection with the deepest sense of men's mortality and need of constant preparation for the great change which awaits them all without exception. But if the two convictions are thus perfectly compatible, we cannot, of course, argue from the requisition of the one to the exclusion of the other. The duty of constant preparation for the end of our career, may be truly and successfully performed by those who honestly believe that the existing state of things is to continue perhaps ages after they are themselves forgotten.

It may still be urged, however, that this state of mind exposes those who entertain it to be taken by surprise. What, it is sometimes said, if, after all, the great event should be at hand, how fearful the surprise of those who fancy it to be still distant! Here, again, we may see traces of that same confusion of ideas which has been already mentioned. If men are unprepared to die, they will be just as much surprised by death, as by the coming of the end while they are living. If prepared to die, they are prepared for anything. However great or sudden the surprise, it cannot be to them a fearful one. And if divested of this attribute, surprise is not an evil. Joy involves surprise as well as horror. Some of the most exquisite sensations of delight which have ever been experienced, have taken those who felt them by surprise. Nay, exclude all thought of danger, doubt, or fear from your conception of surprise, and most men would deliberately choose it, in preference even to the fullest opportunity of calculation, measurement, and deliberate foresight. But whether this be so or not, we know that the catastrophe in question will take most men by surprise at last, and not only the unthinking and the reckless, but the sober, the considerate, the wise.

This seems to be a necessary feature of the providential scheme imperfectly disclosed to us in Scripture; and among the means by which it is secured, may probably be reckoned that very ambiguity of Scripture which has given rise to so much fruitless controversy, and to so many vain attempts to render clear and definite, what God has left obscure and vague until the time for a fuller revela-

tion shall have come. There is no advantage, therefore, upon either side in this respect, and if there were, there would be nothing in the mere risk of surprise, even though it were unavoidable, to make the state of the believer less secure, or that of the unbeliever more so.

If it be true, then, that the supposition of a distant end diverts the thoughts of men from this great change, it is only by transferring them to one still more momentous, because more closely connected with the loss or gain of personal salvation, because perfectly inevitable in reference to every individual of every generation but the last, and because, according to the most indulgent computation, "not far from every one of us." Whether we look, then, at the absence of all certain indications that the end of the world is at hand, or at the existence of some striking proof that it is still far distant, or at the practical effect of both opinions, we may safely rest in the conclusion, that so far as we can judge at all, the end is not yet, and that so far as we are in doubt, it is better for ourselves and others to suppose that the end is not yet than to suppose the contrary.

The practical conclusion to which these theoretical conclusions point is obvious enough. Let us first of all prepare to die, and thus in the most effectual way prepare to live. This preparation is of course not to be made by needlessly anticipating cares which are appropriate only to the time of actual departure, but by the doing of our present duty, in reliance upon that grace which provides for all emergencies, but seldom grants to one the aid appropriate to another. Having made this indispensable provision for the future, let us cease to look upon our own salvation as the final cause of all that God is doing. Let us look away from our minute concerns to that stupendous whole, of which they form an indispensable though humble part. Instead of feeling and acting as if all must die with us, let us continue, until God shall teach us otherwise, to cherish the belief and expectation of a glorious work yet to be accomplished even here, of which the changes which we now behold are not the end but the beginning. Let us not shrink even from the thought that unknown evils are yet to be experienced before the good can be finally triumphant. Through the clouds of such anticipations we may still discern the clear sky of better days to come; nay, even in the

mean time, we may see the storm and sunshine striving for the mastery, and although we may be forced to say, as one disaster treads upon the heels of its forerunner, "these are but the beginning of sorrows," we may still console ourselves by looking further off to still remoter changes, saying, "The end is not yet."

Let this not only solace but incite us. At every new stage of our course, when we are tempted to imagine our work done, let this word rouse us, "The end is not yet." Let the same conviction follow through life. Whatever you may seem to have already suffered or accomplished, still remember that the end is not yet; and from the midst of your trials, your perplexities, your errors, your temptations, yes, your doubts of God himself, still force yourselves to look even on the beginning of sorrows as prophetic of their end, and to take refuge from the worst that can befall you, or the cause for which you live, for which you die, in the fixed persuasion that with reference both to labour and reward, "the end is not by and by." The time, indeed, is coming when the same thing can no longer be said equally of both. Yes, the time is coming when these present light afflictions shall be past, forgotten, "as a dream when one awaketh," but at no point of your history more truly than at that, will you be justified in saying as you look forward to the glory that awaits you, "These are but the beginnings of an everlasting life,—'The end is not yet.'"



## XXII.

### Awake, thou that Sleepest.

“Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.”—EPH. v. 14.

IF we would profit by the reading of the Scriptures, we must not take partial, superficial views of them. We must not be governed too much by the form in which the truth is clothed. If that form be poetical, we must not regard the passage as mere poetry; or if parabolical, as mere parable; or if historical, as nothing more than history. In like manner it would be a serious mistake to regard the devotional parts of Scripture as mere vehicles of individual sentiment. But the error of this kind, into which we are most apt to fall, has reference to the doctrinal and hortatory parts of Scripture. Our knowledge of the doctrines of the Bible will be small, if we derive it wholly from the formal doctrinal propositions which the book contains. And on the other hand, our views of Christian duty must be limited, if they are formed exclusively upon the strictly preceptive parts of Scripture. The truth is, that the doctrinal and practical run constantly into each other. Every doctrinal statement involves a precept, and every exhortation involves doctrinal instruction. For example, in the doctrine, that except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God, what a lesson do we learn as to our own interest and duty! What could be a stronger exhortation to the duty of seeking admittance to God's kingdom by means of the new birth? As an opposite example, take the text which I have read. It consists entirely of an exhortation with a promise to encourage the performance. And yet it is full of doctrinal instruction. While it formally does nothing more than call us to the performance of certain duties, it impliedly teaches us truths to be believed. And as truth

is in order to goodness, it is vain to expect that men will practise the preceptive part which lies upon the surface, without comprehending and believing the doctrinal part which lies back of it.

In order to illustrate this whole statement, let us discriminate between the doctrinal and practical elements combined in the text, and inquire first what it calls us to believe, and then what it calls us to do. The doctrinal lessons which it calls us to believe may be reduced to two. It teaches us, first, what is our natural condition; and second, how it may be changed. Let us look at both in order.

The text impliedly describes our state by several figures, all of which are natural and intelligible. It describes it, in the first place, as a state of darkness. I read this doctrine in the last clause of the verse: "and Christ shall give thee light." If the change here spoken of was to consist in the imparting of light, then the previous condition of the soul was one of darkness. This figure is so natural and common in the Scriptures that it needs no explanation. Light in the external world is the element or medium by which we see other objects. Darkness precludes light, not by extinguishing the sense, but by rendering it useless. So spiritual darkness destroys our power of discerning spiritual objects, not by impairing the substance of the soul, nor by destroying any of its faculties, but by rendering them inefficient and unavailable. The objects are still there, and the natural powers of the soul are there; but darkness cuts off all connection between them, and therefore it is as insensible to spiritual objects as if they had no existence, or as if itself had no capacity to see them.

This, at least, is the case just so far as the spiritual darkness reaches; but in order to present the case exactly, three gradations may be stated, three degrees of darkness, as it affects the soul and its perceptions. The first and highest is that which has been mentioned, and in which the soul has no perception at all of spiritual objects or "the things of God," which are, to it, as though they were not. The second degree is that in which it sees the objects as existing, but is blind to their distinguishing qualities and relative proportions. The third is that in which the qualities are seen, but not appreciated; they are seen to exist, but not seen to be excellent or the reverse. This, if I may use so inaccurate a phrase, is not so

much a darkness of the mind as of the heart,—a blindness of the affections as to spiritual objects. Now, it is not necessary, for our present purpose, to make nice distinctions as to the existence of either of these degrees of darkness in different cases. They may all co-exist in the same case, but with respect to different objects. There are some things of a spiritual and religious nature, of which the natural man may form distinct ideas, and about which he may reason, that is, about their existence and their attributes. But he is no more able to perceive or feel their excellence, than a blind man to enjoy varieties of colour. Well, there are things of a still higher order which the natural man may see to be real; but he not only cannot see the absolute or comparative excellence of their attributes, he cannot see the attributes themselves. The objects are to him a confused maze without definite figures or proportions. He sees them as trees walking. And above these there are others of the highest excellence which he neither appreciates as excellent, nor recognises as possessing an existence. He is blind to them. So far as he is affected by them, they might as well not be. And as these last are things which must be known, in order to salvation, it matters little what imperfect vision he may have of other matters. His darkness may be described as total, because it destroys his view of those things without which the sight of others avails nothing. In this sense our state by nature is a state of total darkness.

Now, darkness affects only the sense of sight. A man may grope in darkness, he may feel his way, and he may judge of what he cannot see, by hearing, smell, and taste. Such a condition is indeed inconvenient, but it does not destroy the man's perceptions. If, then, spiritual darkness is analogous to natural though it impair the comfort of the soul by blinding its eyes, it may leave it other means of knowing that which must be known in order to salvation. But observe: a man can grope his way and use his other senses to advantage only when awake. There are somnambulists, indeed, but as a general fact, the man who contrives to live in safety, though in darkness, must be wide awake.

But, alas! our text teaches us that our spiritual state is not only a state of darkness, but a state of sleep. This I infer from the command in the first clause: "Awake, thou that sleepest." Now,



sleep is more than darkness. Darkness is included in it. To him who is asleep the external world is dark. But what is there besides implied in sleep? The man who is asleep has his senses sealed; not his sight merely, but his other senses. External objects are to him as though they were not. So to the sleeping soul, all that lies beyond this life and its interests is veiled from view. It might as well not be. But while the senses of the sleeper are suspended, his imagination is awake and active. The more insensible he is of that which really surrounds him, the more prolific is his fancy in ideal objects. Though dead to the every-day world, he is alive to an imaginary world. So powerful is the illusion, and so vivid the creations of the fancy, that he lives whole years in a single hour, a lifetime in a night. Our spiritual state is also one of dreams. The life of the natural man is but a dream. He sees, he hears, he feels; but the objects of his hearing, sight, and feeling are imaginary. They are either wholly fictitious, or distorted and falsified by the imagination. That the unregenerate man enjoys a certain kind of pleasure is not more wonderful than that the dreamer has his pleasures too. That the one despises the enjoyments of religion is no more surprising than the other is unwilling to exchange the joys of sleep for the realities of waking life. In either case the judgment is perverted or suspended. Who does not know that in our dreams we form opinions and conclusions which to our waking minds appear absurd; and yet while we are dreaming, we have no suspicion that they want consistency or truth. Why should we wonder, then, that souls which are asleep form opinions so extravagant, so groundless, so preposterous, and confidently hold them, till the grace of God awakens them and shows them their own folly? Here let us learn, too, the absurdity of yielding our own judgments, if enlightened by the grace of God, to the contempt or opposition of the sleeping world around us. Will any sane man let his judgment in important matters of the present life be affected by the babble of one talking in his sleep?

I have named as points of similarity between natural and spiritual sleep, the inaction of the senses, the indulgence of the fancy, and the suspension of the judgment. Let me add the inactivity of the whole man as to external things—the sorrows, joys,

and business of the world around him. The natural sleeper is not more completely paralyzed for secular concerns than the soul asleep in sin is for the business of eternity. The existence of the sleeper is a blank in either case. This, then, is the meaning of the text, when it describes us as sunk in sleep as well as wrapped in darkness. Not only are our eyes sealed to the truth, and to our own condition, but we are the subjects of perpetual illusion. Darkness alone would be a mere negation; but a darkness full of dreams and visions is a positive infliction. It matters not that the illusions are of a pleasing nature. That can only aggravate the pain of our awaking. Did you ever forget any of the pains of real life in a delightful dream? And do you not remember the convulsive pang with which the truth rushed back upon your waking thoughts? And can you imagine that the anguish will be less when the dream of a whole lifetime is abruptly broken? Or if you know what it is to be aroused by harsh and grating noises from a pleasant dream, do you suppose that your long dream will be agreeably dissolved by the blast of the great trumpet? It is related by one of those who witnessed and experienced a late explosion, that when it occurred he was asleep, and that his first sensation was a pleasant one, as though he had been flying through the air. He opened his eyes, and he was in the sea! May there not be something analogous to this in the sensations of the sinner who dies with his soul asleep, and soars, as he imagines, towards the skies, but instantaneously awakes amidst the roar of tempests and the lash of waves upon the ocean of God's wrath? The Lord preserve us all from such a waking, yet it is to this that our condition tends—it is a state of darkness and a state of sleep. According to the ancients, Sleep is the brother of Death; and the resemblance is too obvious to be overlooked.

In all the negative attributes of sleep which have been mentioned, death resembles it. In death the senses are effectually sealed; the functions of the judgment are suspended, and the active powers of the man are in abeyance. It is frequently not easy to distinguish sleep from death. The repose is so profound, the frame so motionless, that one who looks upon it feels that Sleep is indeed the brother of Death. But I need not say that death is more than sleep. And wherein is the difference? He that sleeps

may wake again, and the suspension of his senses and his judgment may be terminated by his simply starting out of sleep. But in death the intellectual and bodily inaction are continuous and permanent. There have been instances in which the body, washed and dressed for burial, has amazed its watchers by resuming its vitality, but in such cases the death was an apparent one. The man once dead never starts again to life by a convulsive effort. As the tree falls so it lies.

In these two points Death differs from his brother; the suspension of the faculties is permanent, and there is no power of self-resuscitation. Now, the text teaches that the soul by nature is not only dark and asleep, but dead. It says not only, "Awake, thou that sleepest!" but, "Arise from the dead!" And in every point that has been mentioned this death of the soul is like that of the body. It is sleep rendered permanent, as to the suspension of our ordinary functions; it is a sleep too sound to be disturbed, a sleep from which no one rises of himself, refreshed in feeling and renewed in strength. Even with respect to dreams death may be described as a continued sleep.

"For in that sleep of death what dreams may come,  
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,  
Must give us pause."

But there is one distinction between sleep and death, whether natural or spiritual, that must not be overlooked. In natural sleep, although the senses are inactive, and the judgment in abeyance, and the whole man dead as to external things, the body is still under the conservative dominion of the principle of life. That mysterious power holds the elements of humanity in healthful combination, and the man still lives. But in the sleep of death, this antiseptic energy is gone; the harmonious combination is dissolved; the parts all tend to dissolution, and the whole frame hastens to putrescence. This is a subject too familiar and too painful to be dwelt upon at large. It is sufficient to observe that on this point also the analogy holds good. The spiritual death to which we are all heirs, is something more than a negation of activity. It might be said of the soul, as the disciples said of Lazarus: If he sleeps he shall do well; he may rise from this lethargic state to life and action. But in spiritual death there is

a constant tendency to moral dissolution; or rather, since this tendency begins to show itself as soon as we are born, it is for ever growing, the majority of men exhibit not a mere approach to it, but actual putrefaction. "They are altogether become filthy." If our eyes could be unsealed and disabused of all illusion, we should see ourselves to be by nature inmates of a charnel-house, surrounded by the shapeless remnants of dissolved humanity, inhaling every moment the dank atmosphere of death, and feeling in our own frames the first gnawings of the worm that breeds corruption. Yes, our state by nature is not only one of sleep, but one of death and putrefaction.

This might seem to be all; but we must take another step, and one of great importance. If men are convinced merely that their condition is a wretched and degraded one, they are prone to feel a sort of satisfaction in the fact, as if their misery entitled them to pity and respect. This absurd and pernicious feeling springs entirely from the false assumption that our wretched state by nature is a blameless one; that our depravity is not so much our fault as our misfortune. Hence you will hear men converse fluently about their own corrupt and fallen state, who would repel with rage any specific charge involving moral guilt. To do away this false impression, we have only to observe that, according to our text, the state of man by nature is not alone one of darkness, sleep, and death, but one of guilt. This is implied in the whole exhortation of the text. The sleeper is evidently called on to awake, as that which he was bound to do; and the dead man is summoned to arise, as though he had no right to remain in that condition. Every exhortation to perform a duty involves a condemnation of its neglect as sinful.

But the sinfulness of that estate whereinto we are fallen, is evinced not merely by the form of speech which the apostle uses. It is also apparent from the nature of the case. The will of God is to us the rule of right, and every departure of our will from his is a departure from strict rectitude, and therefore sin. Now the spiritual darkness, sleep, and death before described, are nothing more than figurative statements of our deadly alienation from the love of God, the defection of our will from his, and consequently our exceeding sinfulness. There is no true test of right and

wrong to which we can refer ourselves, that will not show our natural condition to be one of awful guilt as well as misery.

And if a state of guilt, it is a state of danger. For guilt is our exposure to the wrath of God as a consequence of sin. It may be said, however, that this statement is at variance with the figurative language of the text; for though a state of darkness or of sleep may be dangerous, a state of death can scarcely be so called. The evils of this life terminate in death, which cannot therefore be called dangerous. But danger may be predicated properly of all the situations which are figuratively set forth in the text, because they all admit of increase and progressive aggravation. Dark as the soul is, it may yet be darker. It admits, as we have seen, of different gradations. To some objects we are totally blind. Others we see imperfectly, and others still distinctly, but without a just appreciation of their real attributes. Now, by continuance in a state of darkness, our perceptions of this last class may become as faint as those of the preceding; and ultimately both degrees of twilight may be merged in midnight darkness,—a darkness which not only destroys vision, but which may be felt deadening the senses and benumbing all the faculties. There is something dreadful in the thought of such a change, even in relation to the bodily perceptions. To see one source of reflected light after another quenched, and at last to witness the extinction of the sun itself, and the annihilation of all light, is terrible enough. But not so terrible in truth as the removal of all spiritual light, and the gradual advance of darkness, till, like a funeral pall, it overspreads the universe, confounding all distinctions, and commingling all objects in the chaos of a night that has no twilight and no morning. Oh, it is one thing to imagine such a state of things, while actually in possession of a thousand radiating lustrous points, imparting the reflected light of heaven to our souls; but quite another thing to see them all grow dark in quick succession, and to feel the darkness creeping to our inmost souls.

If such a change be possible, then surely a state of spiritual darkness is a state of danger. And is not spiritual sleep likewise a state of danger? May not that sleep become sounder and sounder, and the sleeper more and more insensible of all surrounding objects? May not the chances of his ever waking become less

and less, until the case is desperate? Have you not heard of sick men who have fallen, to appearance, into sweet and gentle slumber, the supposed precursor of returning health, and never waked again? Oh, there are doubtless many spiritual invalids who come to a like end. After a life of irreligion and of vice, they experience a few pangs of compunction, and subside into a state of calm quiescence, equally free from the excesses of gross sin, and the positive exercises of a renewed heart. In this soft slumber they remain amidst the thunders of the law and the gospel, confident of their own salvation, and unmoved by what is said to men and sinners. And in this somnolent condition they remain, until the taking of rest in sleep is followed by the sleep of death. No waking interval seems to show them their true situation, and they are not undeceived until the first flash of eternal daylight forces their eyes open.

Is not spiritual sleep a state of danger, then? All this will be readily conceded, but the question still recurs: How can death be properly a state of danger? A man in the dark may be exposed to peril on the margin of a precipice, and so may he who is asleep upon the top of a mast; for both are exposed to sudden death. But when already dead, where is the danger? Is not death a state of safety as to temporal perils? The answer to this question involves a striking difference between natural and spiritual death. The death of the body, as it simply puts an end to all the vital functions, is an absolute and changeless state, admitting no gradations; whereas spiritual death is something positive, and constantly progressive. The man who died yesterday is just as dead to-day as he will be to-morrow. But the dead soul becomes more dead every day and every hour. The process of corruption never ceases, and, if the soul continues dead, never will cease. The worm that feeds upon the carcass of the dead soul is a worm that never dies, and the fire that decomposes it is never quenched. What we call spiritual death in this world sinks from one degree of putrefaction to another, till it gets beyond the reach, not only of restorative, but of embalming processes, until it is resolved into eternal death. And even in that lowest pit there is a lower pit of putrefaction and decay, opening one beneath another into that abyss from which reason and imagination shrink with equal horror. Yes, the

first is to the second death as a mere point of time to all eternity. The soul that dies once, dies for ever, nay, is for ever dying; not as in the first death with an agony of moments or of hours in its duration, but with a throe of anguish which shall blend with all the dying soul's sensations through eternity. And oh, what an eternity! each thought a pang, and every respiration a mere dying gasp! This is the second death; and will you say that spiritual death, which tends to this, is not a state of danger?

If it be true that our natural state is one of darkness, sleep, death, guilt, and danger, no one who really believes it to be so, can fail to be aroused to the necessity of doing something to obtain deliverance. The real ground of men's indifference to this matter is their unbelief. They do not really believe what they are told as to their state by nature. Where this faith really exists, it shows itself in anxious fears, if not in active efforts. And the soul's first impulse is, to break the spell which binds it, by its own strength. It resolves that the darkness shall be light, that the sleep of sin shall be disturbed, and that there shall be a resurrection from the death of sin; its guilt shall be atoned for, and its dangers all escaped. Such resolutions always have the same result—a total failure in the object aimed at, and an aggravation of the evils to be remedied. To save you from the pain of a severe disappointment, let me remind you, that according to our text, the state of man by nature is not only one of darkness, and sleep, and death, and guilt, and danger, but of helplessness. I say, according to the text, for although this doctrine is not taught explicitly, I read it in the promise added to the exhortation, "Christ shall give thee light." It might, indeed, at first sight, seem as if our compliance with the exhortation were a condition of the promise which is added. And so indeed it is, but like other conditions in the system of free grace, it is dependent upon that which seems dependent upon it. Repentance and faith are conditions of salvation; but the author of our salvation is the giver of repentance, the author and finisher of our faith. It seems as if God, in divine condescension to the feelings of poor sinners, had thought fit to clothe his own gratuitous bestowments in the guise of acts to be performed by us. He forgives us freely if we repent and believe, but we can just as well make expiation for our sins,

as repent and believe without divine assistance. It is as if a father should offer to forgive his child's offence, on condition that he pay a certain sum, and should then produce the sum required from his own purse. When the text says, therefore, "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light," the analogy of gospel truth constrains us to believe, that so the light which is promised in the last clause is the means, the only means, by which the exhortation can be possibly complied with.

Nor is it only from the text that this appears. It results from the very nature of the state in question. Would it not have been a bitter irony to call upon the Egyptians to strike light out of the palpable obscurity in which they were involved? Would it not have been worse than irony to wait till Lazarus should raise himself? Above all, would you tantalize the breaker of God's holy law by promises of pardon, on condition of his perfect obedience for the future, and satisfactory atonement for the past? Does he not know that every effort for the expiation of his guilt adds something to its depth and its enormity? That having his face naturally turned from God, the further he proceeds, the more remote he is from God, and every impulse which he feels, instead of bringing his soul nearer, drives it further from the centre of perfection? What a condition! If it were possible to sit still and do nothing, we should surely perish through our own neglect. And if we exercise our strength, we only stir up a centrifugal impetus which drives us to perdition! Surely this is helplessness in the highest sense. And I appeal to any one who ever was awakened to a sense of sin and the desire of salvation, whether his own heart does not respond to my description. If it does, we have experimental confirmation of the scriptural doctrine, that our state by nature is not only miserable, dangerous, and guilty, but pre-eminently helpless.

But will not this doctrine tend to paralyze the efforts of the sinner for salvation? And what then? The more completely his self-righteous strength is paralyzed, the better. No man can trust God and himself at once. Your self-reliance must be destroyed, or it will destroy you.

But if, by a paralysis of effort, be intended a stagnation of feeling, and indifference to danger, I reply that this doctrine has no



tendency to breed it. Suppose it should be suddenly announced to this assembly that a deadly malady had just appeared, and had begun to sweep off thousands in its course; and that the only possibility of safety depended on the use of a specific remedy, simple and easy in its application, and already within the reach of every individual, who had nothing to do at any moment but to use it, and infallibly secure himself against infection. And suppose that while your minds were resting on this last assurance, it should be authoritatively contradicted, and the fact announced, with evidence not to be gainsaid, that this specific, simple and infallibly successful, was beyond the reach of every person present, and could only be applied by a superior power. I put it to yourselves, which of these statements would produce security, and which alarm? Which would lead you to fold your hands in indolent indifference, and which would rouse you to an agonizing struggle for the means of safety? I speak as unto wise men: judge ye what I say. Oh, my friends, if there is any cure for spiritual sloth and false security, it is a heartfelt faith in the necessity of superhuman help. The man who makes his helplessness a pretext for continuance in sin, whatever he may say, does not really believe that he is helpless. No man believes it till he knows it by experience. The firmest believers in man's plenary ability, are men whose hearts are hard through the deceitfulness of sin. Those, on the contrary, who have been taught to fathom the abyss of their own hearts, and who know what it is to have leaned upon the reed of their own strength until it pierced them, will be forward to acknowledge that our state of nature is not only one of darkness, sleep, death, guilt, and danger, but of utter helplessness.

Here we may pause in our enumeration. Each item in the catalogue has made our state by nature more degraded and alarming, and we now have reached a point, beyond which we need not, and indeed cannot advance. Darkness is bad enough, but its perils may be shunned by men awake. But we are also asleep; and sleep, though it suspends our powers, is a transient state. But, alas! our sleep is the sleep of death. Yet even in death some men take pleasure, as a state admitting of no further change. But our death is progressive, and therefore far more dangerous than any state in life. Yet even here we might take refuge in the consciousness of our

own innocence, and draw a kind of desperate consolation from the proud thought that we have not brought this ruin on ourselves. But even this poor consolation is snatched from us. We are guilty! we are guilty! This puts an end to all self-pleading, and impels us to escape from a condition which is equally miserable, dangerous, and guilty. But even here we are encountered by a last conviction. We are helpless! we are helpless! This is the death-blow to our hopes, and we despair. Yes, despair may be described as the conclusion to which we are conducted by the text. Not absolute despair, but that despair which is essential to salvation. For there is salvation, even from this lowest depth to which we have descended. The text teaches us, not only what our state by nature is, but how it may be changed. Our bane and antidote are both before us. And what is this great remedy? Hear the answer of the text: "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." Light, light is the specific for our case. And as light is the opposite of darkness, the description before given of our spiritual darkness, will teach us what is signified by spiritual light, and what are its effects upon the soul.

In the first place, it dispels that blindness of the heart and the affections, which disables us from seeing the true qualities of spiritual objects. That which before seemed repulsive, becomes lovely; that which was mean, is glorious. That which was pleasing or indifferent, is now seen to be loathsome. The beauty of holiness and the ugliness of sin, are now revealed in their true colours. Moral and spiritual objects which before were undefined and indistinct, are now seen clearly, and invested with their true proportions. Things which, through the mist of sin, were magnified, distorted, and confused, fall at once into their natural position and their real size. Nor is this all. The light which beams upon us, not only rectifies our views of what we saw before, but show us what we never saw. We are like the prophet's servant, who imagined that his master and himself were left alone, until his eyes were opened, and he saw the mountain to be filled with chariots, and horses of fire. Have you ever read, or heard, of the effect produced upon the feelings by the sudden restoration of the sight? Those objects, which to us are too familiar to affect us, are to the blind man full of glory. In the moment of his restoration, a

whole lifetime of enjoyment seems to be concentrated. But what are these sensations to the feelings of the soul when the scales fall from its eyes, and the curtain is withdrawn from the spiritual world, and the intense light of divine illumination, with gradual dawn, or sudden flash, lights up the amphitheatre by which we are surrounded, and shows us that, instead of standing by ourselves in a contracted circle, we are a spectacle to angels and to devils, and spectators of a universe !

Light, then, is the remedy ; but how shall we obtain it ? We are still driven back upon our helplessness. We see that light we must have, but we see not how it can be kindled by us. Here the text teaches us another lesson. It teaches us not only that we must have light, but that it must be given to us. Christ shall *give thee light*. If it comes at all, it comes as a free gift. This harmonizes fully with the sense of our helplessness, and, indeed, confirms it. Think not that I lay too much stress upon this incidental form of speech. This circumstance I hold to be essential to the doctrine. It matters not how sensible we may be of the need of light, nor how intensely we may long for it, unless we know that it can only come to us by being *given*. Thousands come short of everlasting life, because they trust for light in sparks of their own kindling. The light which we need is not from any earthly luminary. It is not from any twinkling star, revolving planet, or erratic comet. It is from the sun, the Sun of righteousness. And where is he ? In what part of the firmament is his tabernacle set ?

This is the last question answered by the text. It not only shows us that we must have light, and that this light must be given to us by another, but it shows us who can give it—who alone can give it. “Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and *Christ* shall give thee light.” Brethren, from whatever point you set out when you trace the gospel method of salvation, if you follow the Scriptures, you will always come to Christ. And that way of salvation which conducts to any other point, is not the way for us. Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. This world, to the believer, is a dark, perplexing labyrinth, and in its mazes he would lose himself for ever, were it not that ever and anon, at certain turnings in the

crooked path, he gets a glimpse of Calvary. These glimpses may be transitory, but they feed his hopes, and often unexpectedly return to cheer his drooping spirits. Sometimes he is ready to despair of his escape, and to lie down in the darkness of the labyrinth and die. But as he forms the resolution, an unlooked-for turn presents a distant prospect, and beyond all other objects and above them, he discerns the cross and Christ upon it. Look to Christ, then ! look to him for light to dissipate your darkness—to arouse you from your sleep, and to raise you from the dead ; for though these figures are not carried out by the apostle, he obviously means that the light here promised is to be a cure, not only for our darkness, but our sleep and death. And, indeed, the perception and enjoyment of light, implies that we are living and awake. If, then, you would have this sovereign remedy for all your evils, look to Christ ! Perhaps you have already looked unto him and been lightened. Oh, then, look on, look always ; for it is not enough to have looked once. The believer's face must be fixed continually on this source of light, and fastened there for ever. Have you not had your hours of darkness, nay, your days, weeks, months, and years of darkness, even since you obtained light from Christ ? Ah, it was when you turned away your steadfast gaze from the pillar of fire which went before you, that it became to you a pillar of cloud. To all who are now in darkness, I hold up the only source of spiritual light ; and in the ears of every one slumbering at ease within the Church of God, I cry aloud, "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light !"

But its exhortation is not only or chiefly to the believer who is wrapped in darkness. Its voice is still louder to the soul asleep in sin, dead in trespasses and sins, "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light !" And oh, remember that you cannot shut your eyes upon this light without an aggravation of your future wretchedness—without adding a deeper shade of blackness to the darkness of your grave. It is said that, in some of the great light-houses built on rocks lying mostly under water, the brightness of the lantern attracts multitudes of sea-birds, which dart headlong towards it, like the moth into the candle, and are violently dashed back dead into the sea.

And oh, is it not a fearful thought that the salvation of the gospel, that the cross of Christ itself may be a living, yet not a saving sight—that souls may be attracted by it only to perdition? But that same radiant lantern which sheds its saving beams upon the souls of the elect, shines no less brightly upon those that perish. But, alas! instead of using its divine light to escape the wrath to come, they only dash against it with insane hostility, and fall back stunned into the dark abyss which washes its foundations. God forbid that you or I should die so terrible a death, and be lighted to perdition by that very blaze which might have guided us to glory.



## XXIII.

### The Night Scene in Gethsemane.

“Sleep on now, and take your rest : it is enough, the hour is come ; behold, the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.”—MARK xiv. 41.

THE Bible is full of exhortations to awake ; but a command to sleep is rare and paradoxical ; so much so, that many interpreters have chosen to regard this sentence as a question : “Do you still sleep, and take your rest? you have slept enough : the hour is come, behold, the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.” This construction of the passage, though it yields a good sense, is less consistent with the form of the original than the common version, which is supported by a great majority of the ablest critics. Viewing it therefore as an exhortation, or at least a permission, I repeat that it is something rare and paradoxical. And this first impression is increased by the reason which is given for the exhortation. Had the language been, “Sleep on, and take your rest, my hour is not yet come,” it would have been at once intelligible ; but it is, “Sleep on and take your rest, the hour is come ;” and as if to leave no doubt that “the hour” was that mysterious hour of darkness, towards which the voice of prophecy and the finger of providence had been so long pointing with incessant premonition, “behold the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.” Was there ever a command so strange, supported by a reason so much stranger? I call your attention to this singularity, because we are too apt to overlook these striking points in the familiar Scriptures, and because I see wrapped up in these remarkable expressions a rich volume of instruction to myself and to my hearers. To unroll it, and decipher at least some of its most solemn lessons, is my present purpose.

From the very nature of the case, however, it is not by meta-

physical or logical analysis that this leaf in the book of life is to be rendered legible. So far from it, that I design to call in the aid of your imaginations in pursuing my design. I know that the very name of this unruly power is cast out as evil by many sincere Christians. But I also know that almost every page of Scripture calls for its due exercise; that neither prophecies nor parables can do their office without its assistance; that even those who dread it as an instrument of evil, habitually use it as an instrument of good; and that much of our indifference to the word of God arises from the want of a chastened imagination giving colour and vitality to what we read. But while I thus call in imagination to my aid, it is with no romantic or theatrical design. It is not to invent unreal forms, but to call up before us those already in existence. The materials upon which she is to work are simple facts recorded in God's word, and rendered still more tangible and real to our apprehension by the minutiae of time and place.

On the east side of Jerusalem, between the city and the Mount of Olives, flows a stream called Kedron. Beyond this, at the very foot of Olivet, there is a small enclosure, with a low stone wall, containing a very few ancient olive-trees, the offspring and successors of an elder race. This place is now called Jesmaniah, but according to a tradition of the country, which there seems to be no reason to discredit, it was called in ancient times Gethsemane. Into this enclosure, on a Thursday night, there entered four men from the Mount of Olives. I cannot describe their persons, but I know their countenances must have been dejected, for their hearts were full of sorrow; and on the heart of one among the number there rested at that hour a load of grief, compared with which the aggregated sorrows of the human family, before and since, are nothing. Yes, if we could collect the tears of widowed wives, and childless mothers, and forsaken orphans, the cries of every battle-field, the groans of every hospital, the shrieks of every torture-room, the unheard sobs which have been stifled in the prison-house, and all those deeper agonies which never find expression—they would be as nothing to the single pang which wrung a single heart upon that awful night.

Here, if we chose, we might indulge imagination without any

fear that our conceptions would transcend the truth, or that the longest line that we could heave would ever reach the bottom of that deep, deep sea of sorrow. But such indulgence would be no less vain than painful. Let us rather, in imagination, follow the four men till their forms are almost lost among the olive-trees. Three of them sit upon the ground, while the fourth passes on into a deeper shade and a remoter solitude. Do you know him, Christian brethren? Oh, I believe that if that blessed face should now appear among us, as it then looked in Gethsemane, we all should know it. I am aware that many wild imaginations have been cherished, and that painters and poets have exhausted their invention in conjectural embellishments. But if that living countenance could now be set before us, I believe that, in its aspect of benignant sadness, in the lines of sinless sorrow which had marred its surface, we could read the name of its possessor no less clearly than in Pilate's superscription on the cross. It was the Son of man. His companions were the sons of men, but he the Son of man. He sustained a relation to humanity itself, for in its coarse integuments his deity was shrouded. The Son of God, by a voluntary act, became the Son of man, and from the bosom of the Father, where he dwelt before the world was, took up his abode in the bosom of our fallen and unhappy race. We cannot pierce the mystery of that transition, nor explain how the divinity was held in abeyance, that humanity might exercise its finite powers; but we know that from the moment of that union there arose an identity of interest and feeling which shall never end; that no sooner had the Son of God become the Son of man than there began to gush within his human heart a well-spring of sympathy which angels cannot know; that the pains of his infancy were pains of human infirmity; that the tears of his maturity were drops of human sorrow; that the sins for which he suffered were the sins of humankind; that he stood in our place, not only as our sacrifice, but also as our sympathetic fellow-man—not only on the cross, but in the lingering crucifixion of a life of sorrow, from the stable in Bethlehem, where we find him first, to the olives of Gethsemane, where we see him now.

And in what position? Prostrate on the ground. See that blessed brow in contact with the cold, damp earth! See the con-



vulsive agitation of the frame! And though the grief which it betokens lies too deep for tears, see the sweat, like drops of blood, streaming out of every pore! Sons and daughters of men, it is the Son of man; it is the burden of humanity that crushes his unspotted heart; it is the heart's blood of our race that oozes from him; it is the Son of man in anguish for mankind! I need not ask you to recall the words he uttered—the vocal anguish of a broken heart; but I beseech you to imagine that you see him rising, not refreshed, as we might be by such a burst of feeling, but with that load upon his heart still undiminished, see him come back to his friends, whom he had left, as if for sympathy! And does he find them weeping, or engaged in sad discourse, or musing in sad silence? No, he finds them sleeping! How does he treat neglect so shameful? He arouses them, but gently, with this mild expostulation: “What, could ye not watch with me one hour?” He goes again; he falls again upon the ground; he repeats that prayer which we ought never to repeat without profound emotion. He returns to his companions, and again they are asleep. He utters no severe rebuke, nor even a complaint, except by asking as before, “Could ye not watch with me one hour?” He goes again, and for the last time, to his place of prayer. He prays again, and with that prayer unanswered, his distress unmitigated, he comes back to his friends, and they are sleeping! Does he spurn them? Does he rouse them by contemptuous reproof? Or does he leave them, in anger, to their own ignoble slumbers! He does neither.

The deportment of the Son of man on that occasion has a transcendent, a divine sublimity, which no imagination could invent or heighten. No exhibition of Almighty wrath, however grand, though executed by a legion of angels armed with lightning, tempest, and the winds of heaven, could have invested him with such a glory, as the air of serene sorrow with which he at once rebukes, forgives, and warns them of their danger. “Sleep on now, and take your rest: it is enough, the hour is come; behold, the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.” And as he speaks, the glare of torch-light is perceived among the olive-trees, and the betrayer comes. You know what follows; you know what went before; I need neither ask nor tell you who the three men

were. I need not tell you that among the number was the same bold spirit who, a little while before, had almost sworn, that though all men should forsake him, he would follow him to death, and who, a little after, actually swore that he had never known the man. I need not tell you, that another of the number was the man who leaned upon his Master's bosom, and was called his friend. You know the history, and I shall leave it to your private meditation. Do not neglect it. This is surely no unworthy theme for your reflections. I am afraid that it is not a common one. I am afraid that even Christians may grow weary of their Saviour's passion. I am afraid that there are men, and Christian men, who can allow themselves the pitiable luxury of weeping over fiction, but who have no tears to shed with Jesus in Gethsemane. They regard it as a waste of time to dwell upon the circumstantial statements of the gospel, which cannot be reduced to abstract, systematic form. Or, at best, they are contented with a cold, dry knowledge of the facts related. They do not regard it as a matter of feeling; they would be ashamed to do so. I speak the experience of some who hear me. But ought this so to be? We must go back to the simple faith and feelings of our childhood. We must, at least in this respect, become little children. Those same imaginations which have so often been the ministers of sin, must be used for better purposes. By their aid we must stand on Olivet and Gethsemane, mix with the rabble which surrounds the Master, hear the deep imprecation of the Roman soldier, and the louder curses of the Jewish mob; follow to the house of the High Priest and the Pretorium; look at the false Procurator as he dooms the innocent, and vainly tries to wash the blood away with water. But I need not go further.

Fix your thoughts, I pray you, on these scenes as real scenes. and try to see and hear as if the sights and sounds were present to your senses. Having so done, let us gather from this night scene in Gethsemane the lessons which it teaches for our own instruction. That it teaches such lessons is not the less true, because the external circumstances of the case recorded are entirely different from our own. That which renders the narratives of Holy Writ instructive, is not identity of outward situation, but analogy of motive and of moral relations. The same guilt may

be incurred by us as by the twelve apostles, and in these ends of the earth as well as in Jerusalem. Neither sloth nor treachery derives its moral quality from time or place. In further illustration of this statement, and in application of the text, let me call your attention to a few thoughts which it has suggested.

1. The first is, that the Son of man may even now be betrayed into the hands of sinners. Men are apt to imagine, that had they lived in the time of Christ, they would not thus and thus have treated him. This is, for the most part, mere illusion. They who hate Christ now, would have hated him then. They who despise him unseen, would have spurned him to his face. They who maltreat his members, would have persecuted him. This is a test proposed by Christ himself. That which is done to the humblest of his followers, as such, is done to him. The interests of Christ's Church are the interests of Christ. The enemies of Christ's Church are the enemies of Christ. Even in our own day Christ may be betrayed. He may be betrayed by his own disciples. He may be betrayed with a kiss. For such treason the ungodly world is waiting. There are always sinners to receive him at the traitor's hands, and pay the traitor's wages. He can no longer be betrayed by the delivery of his person into hostile hands. But the disposition to surrender him to enemies may still exist; a disposition to procure the favour of the world at his expense. In short, the same state of feeling may now operate in various directions, and in various forms, which, if the Saviour were now present upon earth, would cause him to be first forsaken, then betrayed.

In this sense, for example, it may well be said that the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners, when the truth respecting him is given up to errorists, or cavillers, or infidels; when his divinity is called in question; when his eternal Sonship is degraded or denied; when the sinless perfection of his human nature is tainted by the breath of dubious speculation; when his atonement is disfigured and perverted; when the value of his cross and bloody passion is depreciated; when his place in the system of free grace is taken from him and bestowed on something else; when the purchase of his agonies is made to be the purchase of our own good works; when faith in him, as a means of salvation, is exchanged for mere submission to the government of God; when his

present existence, as a man, is forgotten ; when his personal presence, as a God, is overlooked ; when his exaltation and his future coming are lost sight of by his people. By conceding so much to the unbeliever, we betray the Saviour to him to be buffeted and spit upon.

To mention only one other example ; Christ is betrayed into the hands of sinners when his gospel is perverted, his example dishonoured, and himself represented as the minister of sin. The honour of the Saviour is in some sense committed to the care of his disciples ; and this sacred trust is shamefully betrayed, when they give the world occasion, in despising them, to treat their Master with contempt. O Christian ! have you ever thought, that every inconsistent and unworthy act of yours is one step towards betraying Him whom you profess to love ? And if, while you thus habitually act, you hold fast your profession, it is only adding the betrayer's kiss to the betrayer's perfidy. My first remark, then, is that even now, the Son of man may be betrayed into the hands of sinners. And let me add, that there are times when such a disposition shows itself in more than common strength ; when through the abounding of temptation and iniquity, the faith of multitudes is sorely tried ; and after the experiment is finished, it appears that many whose profession was as fair as that of Judas, have like Judas gone to their own place, and that others whose pretensions were as high as those of Peter, have like him denied their Master, and then gone out and wept bitterly. For such times, when the Saviour or his cause are in danger from betrayers, it behoves us all, my friends, to stand prepared.

2. Another thought which I suggest is, that when the cause of Christ is about to be betrayed into the hands of sinners, his disciples are to watch, to watch unto prayer, lest they enter into temptation. This is incumbent upon all disciples, but especially on some. And among those there is many a bold, self-trusting Peter, and many a Boanerges. Those who are office-bearers in the Church are the honoured but responsible companions of their Master in the day of trial. He asks not for the exertion of their strength in his behalf. He asks not for their sympathy ; he asks not for their prayers ; but he does demand their vigilance. When he looks upon the purchase of his blood, spoiled and ravaged by the enemy ; his little flock pursued and torn by wolves ; his vine-

yard spoiled and trodden by wild beasts,—the great Intercessor pours out his own cries and tears before the Father, and although he says no more, “My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death,” he does say, and to you, my brethren, “Tarry ye here and watch with me.”

3. Another thought, and that a melancholy one, is, that when Christ’s disciples are thus left to watch, while he is interceding with the Father, they too often fall asleep. Some, in the touching language of the gospel, may be “sleeping for sorrow.” But oh, how many others sleep for sloth and sheer indifference. And if any sleep for sorrow, they do wrong. For when our Saviour found his chosen friends asleep upon their post, he aroused them and reproached them with that mild expostulation, “Could ye not watch with me one hour?” He said, indeed, as if to extenuate their guilt, that the spirit was willing though the flesh was weak. But even admitting what is commonly supposed, that flesh and spirit here mean soul and body, it does not follow that their slumber was excusable. Christ would not repeatedly have roused them from an innocent and necessary slumber. Much less was it excusable, if, as some excellent interpreters have thought, spirit here means the better principle, the new heart, and flesh the remnant of indwelling sin. If this be so, it was hardness of heart and spiritual sloth that made them sleep for sorrow. Oh, my brethren, if your hearts are full of sorrow, because men make void God’s law, it is no time for you to sleep! The Church, Christ’s weeping bride, and the dying souls of men, are at your pillow, shrieking in your ears, like the shipmaster in the ears of Jonah, “What meanest thou, O sleeper? Arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not.”

4. But, alas! this warning voice is often heard in vain. Amidst a world lying in wickedness, amidst the untold miseries produced by sin, amidst the dying agonies of unsaved souls as they go down to their perdition, amidst the fierce attacks of open enemies upon the Son of man, and the devices of false followers to betray him to those enemies,—his friends, his chosen friends, sleep on. Yes, even those who were the loudest in profession, and the boldest in defiance, when the danger was far off, are found asleep when it approaches. And that sleep would prove to be the sleep of death,

if we had not an High Priest who can be touched with the sense of our infirmities, and when he sees us thus asleep, comes near and rouses us. Dear friends, there may be some before me now, who, though sincere believers, have been overcome by sleep. Your senses and your intellects may be awake, your conscience has its fitful starts and intervals of wakefulness, when scared out of its slumbers by terrific dreams. But your affections are asleep. Your love to Christ, your dread of sin, your hope of heaven, your abstraction from this world, your taste for spiritual food, your zeal for God, your charity,—all these are exercises which you have experienced; but, alas! they are but “shadows, not substantial things;” the ghosts of past experience, the echo of hushed voices; you hear the gospel, but it is like the drowsy lull of distant waters, making sleep more sound; you see its light, but with your eyelids closed, and so subdued its splendour, that it only soothes the sense and deepens its repose. You feel the breathings of the Spirit, but so gently, that they only add illusion to your dreams. Is it not so? No wonder, then, that your religion is a visionary and ideal thing: I do not mean that it has no reality, but that its outward actings are suspended, and its power wasted in conceptions and imaginations never to be realized.

If this is your experience, I appeal to you, and ask you whether, even in this dreamy state, you have not felt the gentle hand of Christ at times upon you? Has not the most slothful and obdurate of us all, the most absorbed in worldly cares and pleasures, sometimes, in his calmer and more serious moments, felt that mild but potent pressure? Oh, is there one of us so given up of God, so forgotten of the Saviour, as to be left to slumber with the blaze of the betrayer’s touch upon his very eyelids? God forbid! No, there is not a man or woman here to-night, believing, but asleep, who has not once and again been roused, in one form or another, by the Son of man himself. Do you doubt it? Let me aid your recollection by a few suggestions. Have you not had your personal afflictions? Has not your house been visited by sickness? Are there no chasms at your table or your fireside? Are there no shadows on the last leaves of your history, no doubts, no darkness, no perplexity, no pain of mind or body, no disgrace, no losses? And do you wonder at these hard, these unkind strokes

of the Redeemer's hand? O sleeping Christian, he is but touching you to save you from perdition. And if the noise of this world would but cease to fill your ears, you would hear the injured, but forgiving Saviour, saying in that same sad gentle voice, with which he said to Peter, James, and John, "Could ye not watch with me one hour?"

But it is not only in personal afflictions that the Saviour rouses you. Have you not felt his hand in public trials? Have you not felt it in the trials of the Church? Have you not felt it in the creeping growth of error, in the strife of tongues, and in the lacerating schism? Have you not felt it in the abounding of iniquity, and in the waxing cold of many a burning heart? Have you not felt it in the growth of a censorious, harsh, and bitter spirit, and the exchange of kindly charities for ostentatious righteousness? Have you not felt it in the decay of Christian knowledge, in the prevalence of shallow, superficial Christianity, and in the consequent triumph of fanaticism! Have you not felt it in the shock of revolution, threatening the foundations of society itself? Have you not felt it in the leanness of your own souls, and in the barrenness of your Master's vineyard? And in each and all of these successive visitations, can you not hear the accents of the Son of man, gently reproaching your long spiritual slumber as the cause of all these evils? Can you not hear him saying, even to yourselves, as he said to his disciples, with a bursting heart, that night, "Could ye not watch with me one hour?"

But it is not merely in afflictions and in public trials that he thus accosts us. If you have not seen him in the fire of fanaticism, if you have not felt him in the earthquake of commotion, if you have not heard him in the whirlwind of intestine strife, you may have heard him in the still small voice of mercy. Have you had no signal mercies, since you fell asleep? No surprising deliverances or unexpected restorations? No relief from sorrow, and disgrace, and care? No increase of substance, no additions to your comfort, no enlarged opportunities of usefulness to others, no occasional glimpses of heaven for yourself? And can you hear all this enumerated, and yet fail to hear the Master, in and through these mercies, saying, "Could ye not watch with me one hour?"

Nor is this all. Besides the voice of personal afflictions, and of public trials, and of private mercies, there is a voice in public mercies too. I ask not whether you have felt Christ's hand, or heard his voice in national prosperity, in the continuance of national advantages, and in deliverance from national calamities, too well deserved. But have you not felt his hand in mercies to the Church. I refer not to the vindication of her civil rights, however timely and remarkable, but to those spiritual mercies which are apt to be forgotten in the tumult of political and party exultation. Has he not visited some forsaken spots even in the midst of surrounding desolation! Has he not appeared there, to heal divisions, to reform abuses, to arouse attention, to decide the wavering, to reclaim backsliders, to increase the spirit of prayer, to give life and vigour to the preaching of the word, to make temporal affairs look small, and eternal things as large as life? "To open the eyes of many blind, to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God?" And what is the language of these signal mercies to us, who, all around, have stood still and seen the salvation of God? Stood still! nay rather, who have lain asleep. Is it not the voice of God, reproaching our unwatchfulness and spiritual slumber? Is it not the voice of the Son of man, in sorrow, not in anger, saying to us here, as he once said in Gethsemane, "What! could ye not watch with me one hour?"

These words were twice repeated, after the first and second agony and prayer. But when our Lord had for the third time fallen prostrate and arisen, when he came a third time to his friends and found them sleeping, he no longer expostulated; he no longer asked whether they could not watch with him one hour. He aroused them indeed, but with another form of speech: "Sleep on now," or "hereafter," as it might have been translated. There is something far more awful in this mild, but significant permission to sleep on, than in all the invectives or reproofs he could have uttered. "Sleep on henceforth and take your rest." Oh, what a rest is that which must be taken while our Master is betrayed, and scourged, and buffeted, and spit upon! "It is enough," or rather, "it is finished; it is now too late to watch." "Behold," and here perhaps he pointed to Iseariot as he drew



near with his gang,—“behold the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.” Brethren, do your hearts swell with shame and indignation, as you hear the Son of man thus addressing his disciples, who had slept, instead of watching to protect his sacred agony from premature intrusion, and to protect themselves from coming danger? What, then, will be your feelings when he thus addresses you! when after rousing you, reproaching you, and warning you in vain; after saying, by afflictions and by mercies, public and private, both to you and to the Church, “Could ye not watch with me one hour?” and seeing you, in each case, relapse at once into a state of slumber, he shall cease to visit you with salutary warnings, give you up to the stagnation of your spiritual sloth, and, by his providential dealings, say to you, and those around you, “Sleep on now, and take your rest?” Can you bear it? Can any of us bear it? Yes, we can bear it, without pain, and with indifference, because he will not say it till all other means have failed, and till our hearts are hard through the deceitfulness of sin. If we wait for this last, sad, terrible farewell to break our slumbers, before we begin to watch and pray, we wait for ever. The only hope is to anticipate that moment; to hear our Lord beforehand saying, “Sleep on now;” to imagine, while we have some feeling left, what we should feel, if we heard him tell us now to take our rest, because it is too late to watch, because the hour is already come, and the Son of man is just about to be betrayed into the hands of sinners.

I fear it is a growing sin and error of the Church, to forget that the man Christ Jesus still exists; to act as if we thought that his humanity evaporated, or became assimilated to the cloud which bore him from the mountain to the skies. Or if we believe in his continued existence as a man, we are too apt to think of him as feeling no concern, no human sympathy in our affairs. I dare not lift the veil which God has hung around our Saviour’s present residence, or, with profane conjecture, try to penetrate its mysteries; but, as long as I believe the Bible, how can I forget that Christ is still a witness of terrestrial things, and that he has a heart to feel, not only for the sorrows, but for the sins of his disciples. Oh, if instead of our jejune conceptions of an abstract deity, an abstract Christ, and an ideal heaven, we could think and

feel about him as the twelve did when he was absent from their sight; when, for example, he had just ascended, and their minds were stamped with fresh impressions of his person; if we could think of him, not as a nonentity, not as an ancient half-forgotten personage, but as we think of friends whom we have lost;—then we should read his history with other eyes, and other hearts. Oh, then, it would be easy to believe that he, who was with the disciples in the garden, is now here; that he, whose heart was touched by their neglect, may still be touched by ours; that he, who said to them, “Sleep on now,” may say the same to us. God grant that the time be not at hand, when he shall thus speak to all or any of those present! God grant that the spiritual dearth which we experience, and the multiplied evils which have vexed the Church, be not so many voices, in which Christ is saying to us, “Sleep on now, and take your rest; the hour is come.”

That this may not prove to be indeed the case, we must arise and call upon our God; we must come up to the help of the Lord against the mighty. But oh! remember, that the weapons of our warfare are not carnal. When the presumptuous Simon was at last aroused, and saw his Master’s danger, he thought to atone by violence for past neglect. And many a modern Simon does the same. When once aroused they draw the sword of fiery fanaticism, to wound themselves and others, and it is often not till they have shed much precious blood, that they are calm enough to hear the Saviour saying, “Put up again thy sword into his place, for all they that take the sword shall perish by the sword.” And it is not too much to say, that most of those who, in our own day, have conspicuously grasped the sword of fierce vindictive zeal, have perished by it, not in their souls, but in their character and influence. God’s retributions are infallible and just. The torrent of ferocious zeal which recently swept over us, and threatened all our ancient landmarks with subversion, has subsided, or been hardened, like the lava, into rock, while the landmarks, which it hid from sight, at one time by its surges, still retain their ancient places, unconsumed, unshaken. But is there no danger from an opposite direction? Is it any consolation that the sword is in its scabbard, if the bearers of the sword are fast asleep, instead of watching? Is there no cause to fear, that having vanquished

error and disorder, as we think, we shall fall asleep upon our arms and laurels? Oh, let us remember, that the enemies of Christ are still to be contended with, not only in the Church and world, but in the hearts of men, and in our own hearts individually! Let us bear in mind, that although every heresy were banished from our pulpits and our schools, we may not cease to watch and pray, lest we should enter into worse temptation; lest, in the midst of an unprofitable orthodoxy, souls should be lost through our untimely slumbers. If this is to be dreaded above all disaster, watch, brethren, watch and pray!



## XXIV.

### The Kingdom taken by Force.

“From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.”—*MATT.* xi. 12.

**WHAT** we call the old economy or old dispensation, was a temporary or preparatory system, extending only to the advent of the Saviour, or, at most, to the completion of his saving work. His appearance necessarily brought with it a change of dispensations, which had been foreseen and provided for from the beginning. But this part of the divine purpose had been gradually lost sight of, and the Jews had learned to regard their temporary system as perpetual, and its symbolical rites as intrinsically efficacious. To such a state of feeling and opinion the abrogation of the ancient system seemed a monstrous revolution, a calamitous catastrophe, the prospect of which shocked their strongest prepossessions, and seemed to blast their dearest hopes. In order to correct this error, and prepare the way for the event so much dreaded even by many devout Jews, it pleased God to adopt a method which should symbolize, and, as it were, embody the true relation of the old and new economy, and the change by which the one was to replace the other.

To secure this end, Christ did not come abruptly, but was preceded by a forerunner, whose personal relations to him, and whose public ministry, presented, in a kind of type or emblem, the peculiar features of the Law as contrasted with the Gospel—or rather, exhibited, at one view, both the points of resemblance and of dissimilitude. These points are obvious enough. As, on the one hand, both the old and the new dispensation were alike from God, equally genuine and equally authoritative; as they were both intended for man's benefit, and ultimately for the benefit of men

in general ; as the grand design of both was moral and spiritual, not material and temporal ; so, on the other hand, while one was provisional, the other was permanent ; one was preparatory to the other, and, by necessary consequence, inferior in dignity. The peculiar features of the one were, in a great measure, arbitrary and conventional ; those of the other necessary and essential. The one was typical and ceremonial in its character, the other spiritual and substantial. The one was meant to teach the need and excite the desire of what could be fully supplied only by the other.

These resemblances and contrasts of the two great systems were to be embodied in the person and the ministry of two individuals as their representatives. Of the gospel, no such representative was needed except Christ himself. In the one employed to represent the law, it might have been expected that these prerequisites would meet ; that he should be personally near akin to Him whose way he came to prepare ; that he should be a person of high rank and sacred dignity ; that he should live, secluded from the rest of men, a life of abstinent austerity ; that the moral tone both of his doctrine and example should be high ; that his appeals should be directly to the conscience, and intended to excite the sense of guilt, danger, want, and weakness ; that, for this very reason, his entire ministry should be prospective and preparatory, introductory to something intrinsically better, and practically more efficacious than itself. All this might have seemed beforehand necessary in the forerunner who was to symbolize the old dispensation, as distinguished from the new ; and all this was actually realized in the person and ministry of John the Baptist. He was a kinsman of our Lord ; he was a little older, both in person and in office ; he was of sacerdotal rank and lineage ; the child of eminently pious parents ; one whose birth had been announced and accompanied by messages from heaven and remarkable divine interpositions ; a Nazarite from the womb ; a dweller in the desert from early youth “until the day of his showing unto Israel.”

With the old dispensation he was clearly connected by remarkable prophecies, as the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord—as the messenger who should come before the face of the Angel of the Covenant—as the new Elijah or Elias, in whose ministry the spirit and power of the old re-

former were to be revived in Judah, scarcely less apostate now than Israel was then. His connection with the old dispensation was made still more clear and marked by external coincidences, providentially secured and made conspicuous. His local habitation carried back the thoughts of those who saw or heard him to the forty years' error in the desert, and the giving of the law upon Mount Sinai. His ministrations at the Jordan called to mind the passage of that river at the conquest of Canaan. His hairy garments and abstemious fare reminded all spectators of the prophets in general, and Elijah in particular. His distant calls upon the people to go out to him, instead of seeking them in their usual places of resort, was perfectly analogous to the segregation and seclusion of the chosen people under the law, and to the local and restrictive institutions of the law itself.

With all this agreed his preaching, which was preparatory. He called men to repentance, as essential to remission of sins, but he did not offer remission itself. He preached the kingdom of heaven, not as already established, but as at hand. He described himself as a mere forerunner, inferior in dignity and power to one who was to follow, and to whom he was not worthy, in his own strong language, to perform the menial office of unlacing or carrying his sandals.

The same thing is true of the significant rite by which his preaching was accompanied, and from which he derived his title. The baptism of John was merely the forerunner of the baptism of Christ—the baptism of repentance as distinguished from the baptism of faith—the baptism of water as distinguished from the baptism of fire and the Holy Ghost. From all this, it is evident that John's preparatory ministry was perfectly adapted to its providential purpose—that of embodying, and, as it were, personifying, the true relation of the old dispensation to the new, of the law to the gospel, not as rival or antagonistic systems, but as the beginning and the end, the inception and perfection of the same great process.

That the resemblance of the type and the things typified might be complete, it was ordered that John's ministry, instead of ceasing when our Lord's began, should be contemporaneous with it for a time, just as the old and new dispensations, for important provi-

dential reasons, were to merge or fade into each other, without any clearly defined point of transition or line of demarcation, so that the Church, under both its manifestations, might maintain its identity, and be, like its master's robe, "without seam, woven from the top throughout" (John xix. 23). The consequence of this was, that, while some rejected both, and some passed through John's, as a preparatory school to that of Christ, others remained in it after its preparatory work was done, just as the body of the Jews eventually clung to the Mosaic dispensation, after it had answered its design and been superseded by the dispensation of the Son and Spirit. To such it is not, perhaps, surprising that the proofs of the Messiahship of Jesus should have seemed inconclusive. It is much more surprising that the faith of John himself should seem to waver, after his imprisonment, as some suppose to be implied in his message, sent by two of his disciples to our Lord: "Art thou he that is to come, or are we waiting for another?" However easy it may be to explain this, by supposing it to be intended merely to confirm the faith or solve the doubts of his disciples, neither of these solutions is absolutely needed, or so natural as that which supposes that the message was expressive of John's own misgivings, not indeed as to the person of Messiah, which had been made known to him by special revelation, and to which he had repeatedly and publicly borne witness, but with respect to our Saviour's method of proceeding, which appears to have departed too much from the spirit and the forms of the Old Testament, to be entirely satisfactory or even intelligible to the last prophet of the old economy, whose inspiration did not reach beyond the close of the system which was done away in Christ. The person of Christ himself, as the founder of a new dispensation, he distinctly recognised, but he does not seem to have been prepared, by any divine teaching, for the total revolution in the external mode of serving God and saving souls, which began to be disclosed in the personal ministry of Christ himself.

That this is the true solution of John's seeming vacillation—namely, that he still stood on the ground of the Old Testament, and still belonged to the Jewish dispensation, and was, therefore, not prepared, without a special revelation, which had not been vouchsafed to him, to understand or appreciate the new state of

things which Christ had partially begun to introduce—may be gathered from our Saviour's treatment of his message. After sending back the messengers, with a reference to the miracles which they beheld, as proofs of his Messiahship, he seems to have hastened to prevent any unjust or unfavourable inferences, by the multitudes, from what they had just heard, as if John the Baptist had retracted his testimony, or wavered in his own belief. To this end, he reminded them, in lively, figurative terms, peculiarly adapted to affect an Oriental audience, that when they went forth in such vast crowds to the wilderness, to hear and be baptized of John, the man whom they had sought and found there, was like anything rather than a reed shaken by the wind—a man of versatile and fickle temper, or of uncertain, fluctuating judgment—and like anything rather than a softly dressed and smooth-tongued courtier, who suppressed the truth to flatter and conciliate his hearers. On the contrary, they knew that John the Baptist was an eminently bold, uncompromising, plain-spoken witness to the truth of God, and against the sins of men. It would be folly, therefore, to suppose that his public testimony to our Lord's Messiahship was either given insincerely, through the fear of men and the desire to please them, or was now retracted from a wavering faith or fickleness of temper. This would be inconceivable in such a man, though uninspired; how much more in a prophet—a prophet in the full and highest sense of the Old Testament expression—a prophet equal in authority to any who had gone before him; nay, in one respect superior to them all, as the immediate forerunner of the new dispensation, as the last in the long series of Old Testament prophets, in whom the succession was to cease, or from whom it was to pass and be for ever merged in the prophetic ministry of Christ himself. All the prophets of the law, that is, all the prophetic intimations of the old economy, whether formal predictions or typical prefigurations—not excepting the general prospective character which stamped the system as a whole, as well as some of its more salient points—all these, our Saviour tells the people, prophesied as far as up to John the Baptist; not that he was the great end to which they pointed,—this was Christ himself, as John had again and again solemnly declared,—but he was the last of the forerunners, of the heralds who proclaimed the



advent and prepared the way of the Great Deliverer: down to John the Baptist, and including him, this preparatory and premonitory system still continued, and in him, as the immediate predecessor of the Saviour, it must have an end.

The very same considerations, therefore, which exalted John the Baptist in the scale of the old economy, proved that he belonged to it, and not to the new. While it was still true that there had never before appeared a greater man, when measured by that standard, it was equally true that the least in the kingdom of heaven—the new dispensation—was greater than he, that is, more enlightened as to the nature of that dispensation, and the points in which it differed from the old, and better able, both to appreciate and carry into execution this new form of the divine administration, than even the greater of those, who, though invested with divine authority, were still but ministers of the old restrictive system, and might, therefore, be expected to feel some surprise, if not displeasure, at the sudden disuse of the ancient methods, the neglect of mere externals, so inseparable from religion under the Mosaic institutions, and the casting down not only of the barriers between strict Jews and notorious sinners of their own race, but between that race itself and those from which it had for ages dwelt apart,—a change already unequivocally intimated in our Lord's instructions and his practice, and which, viewed from the ground of the old dispensation, might well seem to confound unchangeable distinctions and to make Christ the minister of sin.

That such misapprehensions should exist in the mind of John the Baptist, as a prophet of the old dispensation, is certainly less strange, and in itself not more incredible, than that Peter, even after the effusion of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, should have still cherished the belief that, although the Gentiles might be saved as well as Jews, through faith in the Redeemer, they could only exercise that faith by first becoming Jews, or conforming to the law of Moses. Of this error he was disabused by a special revelation; and as none such seems to have been sent to John the Baptist, it is not surprising that without it, and in prison, he should have looked at what was going on beyond the walls of the fortress where he lay, with the eyes of an Old Testament prophet, rather than with those of a New Testament saint.

This seems, as I have said, to be implied in our Lord's vindication of him, as a true believer and a great prophet, but still a minister of the Old Testament, not of the New, to whom the freedom and enlargement of the course on which our Lord had either actually entered, or prospectively marked out for his apostles, might very naturally seem to be a general removal of old landmarks, and a lifting of the flood-gates which had hitherto shut off the appropriated waters of the Jewish Church from the natural stream and current of the nations. Even in vindicating John, our Saviour seems to intimate that this distinguished prophet had been led, by his peculiar position with respect to the outgoing and incoming dispensation, to expect that the kingdom of Messiah would be set up by a methodical and formal process, perhaps not without a large admixture of ceremonial services; at all events, with due conformity to ancient usages and regulations; "whereas," he adds, as if appealing to their own observation for the proof of the assertion, "from the days of John the Baptist until now," that is, since the work of my forerunner was completed, and my own begun, "the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence and the violent take it by force."

That this does not refer to persecution, is apparent from the notorious fact, that the only persecution which had yet taken place, was that of John himself, who had just been excluded from the kingdom of heaven in the technical, distinctive sense, or, at least, assigned the lowest place in it, which, of course, forbids his treatment by his enemies to be regarded or described as that experienced by the kingdom of heaven. Equally incorrect is the assumption, that the violence here mentioned in connection with the kingdom of heaven, is active, not passive—the kingdom of heaven exercises violence or irresistible power over men. This is equally at variance with the usage of the words immediately in question and with the other clause, "The violent take it by force." The only natural interpretation is the one which takes the whole as a bold and strong, but striking and intelligible figure, to denote the eagerness and freedom from restraint, with which men of every class and character, Pharisees and publicans, reputed saints and sinners, Jews and Gentiles, had begun or were soon to begin to press into the kingdom of heaven, through or over every barrier, moral, legal, ceremonial, or natural distinction.

The particular image most readily suggested by the words, is, perhaps, that of a fortress long maintained by a veteran garrison, but suddenly thrown open by its new commander, and impetuously entered by what seems to be a multitude of foes. To those within, this might well appear to put an end to the defence and to decide the contest. But after a while it is perceived that those who have thus tumultuously entered, are not enemies, but friends, and that this violent accession to the strength of the defence is more effective than any which could have been secured by gradual recruitings or occasional desertions from the enemy, however necessary these resources may be when the other fails, or in the intervals between these sudden and extensive movements from without to the interior of the fortress or the besieged town. In some points this comparison, like every other, does not hold good; but it may serve to illustrate the essential difference between John the Baptist's expectations, and the course actually taken by our Saviour, and referred to in the words of the text: "From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force."

The circumstances of the case to which these words had primary reference, were so peculiar, so incapable of repetition or recurrence, that it may seem impossible to draw from them any lesson directly applicable to ourselves or to the actual condition of the Church or of the world. It is not, however, as a matter of historical curiosity, an interesting reminiscence of antiquity, that this and many other similar discourses of our Saviour have been left on record. They were rather intended to exemplify the nature and distinctive character of his kingdom, as distinguished not only from all false religions, but from all that was temporary in the ancient manifestation of the true, and thereby to preserve us from falling into errors which were committed and corrected eighteen centuries ago. We are, therefore, at liberty, nay bound, to apply these instructions to our own use, not by fanciful accommodation, not by allegorical confusion of things utterly distinct, but by a fair application of the principle involved in the original case to any other case, however distant and however different in form and circumstance, to which that principle is naturally applicable. Let us briefly inquire then, in the present instance, wherein the essence of the error here

exposed consisted, and what analogous forms of error may exist among ourselves.

That the old dispensation, while it lasted, was entitled to respect as a divine institution, if it needed any proof, might be established, both by the precept and example of our Saviour. Even after it was virtually abrogated by the death and resurrection and ascension of our Lord and by the advent of the Holy Spirit, the apostles, acting by divine direction, still paid a certain tribute of respect to the framework of the old economy, until it was for ever shaken down and scattered by a great convulsion. The error now in question, therefore, did not lie in any undue deference to the law as a temporary system, but in making it the standard and the rule of God's most gracious dispensations under an entirely different state of things; and more particularly in supposing, that access to the Messial's kingdom was to be as circuitous, and slow, and ceremonious, as the approach of Gentile converts to the altar and the oracle of God had been for ages, when, in fact, the kingdom of heaven had already begun to suffer violence, and the violent were actually taking it by force.

Into this identical mistake there is, of course, no danger of our falling. The change of circumstances already spoken of has rendered it impossible. But may not a kindred error, and one equally pernicious, be committed now? God has appointed certain means to be assiduously used for the extension of the Church and the conversion of the world. The obligation to employ these means is imperative, and cannot be dispensed with. The very fact of their divine authority entitles us to look for the most salutary effects from their constant and faithful application. We cannot err, therefore, by excess in the employment of these means. But may we not err by limiting the Holy One himself to means—even those which he has sanctioned and blessed? May we not err by supposing, that because it is our duty to make constant, prayerful, and believing use of these means, and to watch for their effect, there is nothing more to be expected—even from the free and sovereign operation of divine grace? In other words, by looking too much, or, at least, too exclusively, at the ordinary results of ordinary means, may we not cease to hope for those extraordinary gifts, with which the Lord is sometimes pleased, as it

were, to reward the faithful use of the stated and appointed means of grace ?

There is, no doubt, an opposite error, into which we are no less prone to fall, and from which the Church has suffered incalculable loss and damage. This is the error of expecting all from God's extraordinary gifts, to the exclusion of those stated means which he has ordained, and on which he has not only promised, but bestowed a blessing. This error, pushed to an extreme, becomes fanaticism, and is the fruitful source of doctrinal corruptions, practical abuses, spiritual pride, and all the other evils springing from a violent excitement followed by reaction towards the opposite extreme of lethargy and deadness. The error which produces all these evils, does not merely lie in the denial or oblivion of the fact that God's extraordinary blessings must, from their very nature, be occasional, but also in denying or forgetting that extraordinary gifts are, according to a law of God's most gracious dispensations, not bestowed at random, but conferred as blessings in the faithful use of ordinary means.

To expect an extraordinary harvest, without using the means necessary to secure an ordinary one, would be scarcely more absurd than to concentrate all our hopes and wishes on extraordinary spiritual visitations, while we wilfully or negligently slight the stated and invariable means of doing and obtaining good, on which God sometimes sets the seal of his approval by remarkable outpourings of his Spirit. As the manna in the wilderness did not take the place of ordinary food, but supplied its deficiencies, and furnished special proofs of the divine presence and favour to his people, so the greatest spiritual gifts to the Church now, are not intended to supplant the use of ordinary means, but rather to encourage it by signs of the divine approbation ; and the hope of such extraordinary gifts is never better founded than at those times when, instead of intermitting ordinary duties, we perform them with redoubled zeal.

But no extreme of judgment or of practice is to be corrected by another. While we shun the error of relying on extraordinary gifts as a substitute for ordinary duties, or as an apology for slighting them, let us not lose sight of such extraordinary gifts altogether, or regard them as impossible and hopeless, or as in-

consistent with the faithful use of ordinary means. By so doing, we gratuitously throw away one of the most powerful incitements to duty, and most efficacious stimulants to hope and zeal. Nothing is better suited to invigorate habitual exertion than a firm belief that God bestows his most invaluable and special gifts on such as diligently seek for those of a more ordinary nature. To relinquish this belief and hope, is to cut the sinews of our spiritual strength even in relation to our ordinary duties. At the same time, this extreme of error and misconduct tends more directly to diminish the amount of good which we might otherwise accomplish. While it still remains indisputably true, that the extension of the Church and the conversion of the world are suspended, under God, upon the constant use of ordinary means, for the neglect of which nothing can compensate or atone, it is equally certain that the aggregate result of these means would be comparatively small, without occasional accessions of divine and human strength, making good, as it were by a single movement, the arrears of many years, and giving a new impulse to those means which, though they cannot be dispensed with, are too apt, in human hands, to grow inert and inefficient, unless frequently renewed and set in motion by a special divine influence. In other words, and in accordance with the figurative language of the text, although the kingdom of heaven, even now, as when it was first visibly erected upon earth, must grow by constant gradual accession, and although, if this mode of increase should fail, its place could be supplied by nothing else, yet even this increase is stimulated, and the aggregate result indefinitely multiplied, by those occasional seasons of awakening and commotion, when "the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force."

I rejoice to know that I address some, I trust many, to whom the extension of this kingdom is a subject of intense desire and fervent prayer. But do the hopes of such bear due proportion to their conscientious labours and their zeal for God? Are we not, Christian brethren, too prone to despondency, as well as to presumption and security,—extremes which are continually found in close proximity, not only among members of the same community, but in the vacillating, varying experience of one and the same person? And may not one of these extremes, at least, arise from

the mistake which we have been considering,—the mistaken notion, that because Christ's kingdom must be built up by a slow and sure increase, there is no such thing to be expected as a general and powerful commotion of men's minds, producing the same result upon a larger scale and in a shorter time; that because that vast reservoir of God's grace and man's happiness is fed by rivulets and drops in ordinary times, there is no such thing to be expected as the sight of an irresistible current impetuously setting in the same direction; that because we are accustomed to see men gained over, one by one, from the service of Satan and the world to that of God, there is no such thing to be expected in our days as that of the kingdom of heaven suffering violence, and the violent taking it by force? Oh, let us see to it, that even our attachment to the stated ordinary means of grace, and our well-founded fears of spurious and fanatical excitements, do not unfit us for the reception of extraordinary mercies, and betray us, for a time at least, into unreasonable trust in accustomed forms and methods, and a groundless dread of irregularity and insubordination, simply because in this day, as in that day, "the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force."

Is there not still a class to whom I may, without offence, address myself in terms of solemn warning and entreaty, in application of the subject which has been before us? I mean such as have long enjoyed the stated dispensation of God's word, but as yet seem not to have experienced its power. To such I venture to address myself directly, and to put the question, Are you not, perhaps unconsciously, relying on this passive enjoyment of religious privileges as a means of safety, independent of all serious reflection or exertion on your own part? Such a state of mind may be produced by a misapprehension or abuse of the doctrines which you have ever been faithfully taught, of God's sovereignty and man's dependence. But this only makes your error more alarming, and your danger more imminent. God is, indeed, the only Saviour, the Alpha and Omega of our hopes, the Author and the Finisher of our salvation; but he does not save men in their sleep, or carry them to heaven stupified in death-like lethargy. If he means to save you, be assured he will awaken you. However various the degrees and forms of that alarm which enters into all evangelical,

repentance, or prepares the way for it, you must experience some disturbance of your long and deep sleep of security. If the absence of any such emotion is the fault of God himself, derive what consolation you find possible from this blasphemous apology; but do not forget that after all, whatever be the cause, and wherever the blame lies, your deep sleep must be broken or you never will be saved. With all allowance for the freedom and variety of God's dispensations towards the souls of men, and for the difference produced by constitution, education, and the previous mode of life, it is still true that you cannot doze or dream yourself into salvation; that in some sense, and to some extent, a vehement exertion is required and produced in every soul to which God has purposes of mercy; and that this is not peculiar to one age or country, but characteristic of God's saving methods in all times and places. So that, in a certain sense, it may still be truly and emphatically said that "from the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force."





## Ho, Every One that Thirsteth.

“ Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money ; come ye, buy and eat ; yea, come, buy wine and milk, without money and without price.”—ISA. lv. 1.

AS Christ came to seek and to save that which was lost, his servants must do likewise. Their work, like their Master's, is to save lost souls. They cannot save, like him, by their own power or merit ; but as instruments in his hands they may be the means of saving. Not the preacher only, but the humblest Christian in his little sphere, is bound, in some way and in some degree, to seek and to save that which is lost. With this commission we are all sent forth. We are not sent to a world which is merely in danger of being lost ; it is lost. It is condemned already. The gospel is not merely a method of prevention, but of cure. Christ came to save that which was lost already, and to seek it, in order that it might be saved ; and we, as his instruments, are bound to seek the lost, that we may save them. We are not to keep back the salvation of the gospel till men seek it for themselves ; we must offer it to them—we must press it upon them. We must not only spread the feast, but bid men to it. It is our business to invite men to the Saviour. We must, therefore, learn the art of invitation ; and we cannot learn it better than from God's example. The Bible is full of invitations, varied in form, but alike in principle, proceeding from the same source, addressed to the same objects, and conveying the same offer. Let these invitations be the models of our own, and let us, upon this occasion, take a lesson from the one before us, which is among the most earnest, free, importunate, and touching in the word of God.

In order to appreciate and understand it, let us look back for a moment to what goes before. After various partial exhibitions of the Saviour as a prophet or divine teacher, he is fully set before us in the fifty-third chapter as a priest and sacrifice, who bore our griefs and carried our sorrows, who was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities, upon whom the chastisement of our peace fell, and by whose stripes we are healed ; upon whom the Lord laid the iniquities of us all ; who was stricken for the transgressions of his people ; who made his soul an offering for sin ; who justified many by bearing their iniquities ; who poured out his soul unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors ; who bare the sins of many, and made intercession for the transgressors. These strong expressions, which are all collected from that one short chapter, leave no doubt as to its subject. The utmost ingenuity of Jews and Gentiles has been baffled in the effort to invent another.

Here, then, the foundation of the sinner's hope is laid, the only one that can be laid ; "for there is no other name given under heaven among men whereby we must be saved." In the fifty-fourth chapter the Church is assured that, notwithstanding her afflictions, she shall taste the fruit of this great expiation. She is exhorted to prepare for an immense accession ; to enlarge the place of her tent, and stretch forth the curtain of her habitations ; to lengthen her cords and strengthen her stakes. She is told that her seed shall inherit the Gentiles ; that although her national pre-eminence shall cease, her spiritual greatness shall be vastly magnified, by being rendered co-extensive with the earth ; that her children shall be taught of the Lord, and great shall be the peace of her children ; that no weapon formed against her shall prosper, and that every tongue which rises against her shall be condemned. "This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is of me, saith the Lord."

Having thus assured the Church of her enlargement and prosperity, the prophet takes a wider range ; he looks towards those from among whom this accession to the Church is to be gathered ; he remembers the mixed multitude of lost men who are wandering in the wilderness, aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise. He sees them fainting

there with spiritual thirst, a sense of guilt, an undefined, uneasy longing after something not possessed—something as necessary to refresh the soul as water to the panting hart, or to the gasping Arab in the desert. He sees them not only parched with thirst, but gnawed by hunger. Nature craves something to support as well as to refresh her ; and, in obedience to her call, he sees them labouring with desperate exertion to dig up some nutritious root, or some buried fragment from the burning sand. He sees them wading through that soil of fire to some distant shrub which holds out the last dying hope of food, and as they reach it, he beholds them turn away from its barren stalk and withered leaves, to lie down in despair, while others, scarcely less exhausted, follow in the same vain search.

Such scenes are not uncommon in the deserts of the East, where men are often found to choose between starvation and the use of food from which nature even in extremity revolts, while the agony of thirst is rendered ten times more acute by the deceitful water of the desert, which becomes hot sand upon the traveller's approach. And yet all this is nothing more than a faint image of the desert in which men are born, and where they wander till reclaimed by God—a desert which is not without its hot sands and its leafless shrubs, its weariness, its bitter pangs, its thirst, its famine, rendered more tormenting by the cruel mockery of its illusions. This is the picture which the world presents to every eye from which the scales have fallen. This is the picture which the prophet seems to have beheld in vision when he stood upon the walls of Zion, and looked far off into the recesses of that desert stretching all around her, out of which he knew that some were to be gathered into Zion, and at which he, therefore, gazes with a yearning pity—not his own merely, but the pity of that God whose Spirit gave him utterance.

For as he looks he speaks, he cries aloud, as if to persons at a distance. He no longer addresses himself merely to the Church. His language is as wide and comprehensive as the sins and wants of suffering humanity. It is to men as men that he appeals : “Unto you, O men, I call, and my voice is to the sons of man,” without distinction or exception. “Ho, every one that thirsteth.” He does not say every child of Israel ; he does not say every

godly proselyte ; he does not say every upright, blameless man ; he does not even say every one who repents, or every one who believes ; but every one who thirsts. He presupposes nothing but a sense of need ; no knowledge but the consciousness of misery and helplessness ; not even a knowledge of the method of salvation. Here, then, it is thus that God begins his invitations. He appeals to that uneasy sense of something needed, what or why the sinner knows not—to the spiritual thirst by which his soul is parched, he knows not how. Where this exists, no other qualification is demanded.

That so few accept of it is not owing to the want of freeness in the offer, nor to the want of merit in those whom it is made to. But they will not hear. The voice cries in the wilderness, but those to whom it is addressed refuse to hear ; or if they listen, it is so incredulously that they hear in vain. If their attention could be fixed but for a moment, they would surely hear in earnest. When the starved and panting pilgrim, as he lies extended in the desert, hears a distant cry, exhaustion may have stupified him so that he regards it not ; or if the sound arouses him, he may mistake it for the cry of the wild beast, or the voice of other sufferers like himself. But if these words distinctly fall upon his ear, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters," unless despair has made him utterly incredulous, he must be startled and aroused. And even though he deem the tidings too good to be true, he will, at least, put forth one effort more to reach the spot from which the sound comes.

But, alas ! in the spiritual desert it is harder to gain the ear of those who are dying with thirst, even by urgent calls to drink and live. They are the subjects of perpetual illusion. They continue still to hope for quick relief from some phantasma, some deceitful sight or sound, in chase of which they will not listen to the only voice which offers them substantial relief. Think how constantly the offers of the gospel are reiterated in the ears of thousands who are really athirst, whose life is spent in seeking to allay that inward thirst by copious draughts of knowledge, fame, or pleasure, or by filling their parched mouths with the burning sand of this world's gains. They are partly conscious of a void within them which the world can never fill, and yet the only voice

of invitation which they will not hear is that of God crying, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters." The only stream at which they will not try to slake their thirst is the river of the water of life. What shall be done, then? Shall the offer be suspended? Shall the voice of invitation be less loud and urgent? No; let those who utter it cry aloud and spare not. Let no deluded soul be lost, because the calls of salvation were too faint and few! It is true the cry will never be obeyed, nor even listened to until the ear is supernaturally opened. Till then, the sinner will be deaf as the adder to the voice of the charmer charming never so wisely. And the Christian's consolation under all discouragement from man's unwillingness to hear is this, that the call is God's call, and that when he pleases, he can render it effectual.

But while we draw from this consideration all the comfort which it is adapted to afford, let it not be made a pretext for unfaithfulness or negligence in doing our part as the messengers of Christ. While it is certain that no soul will perish which does not abundantly deserve to die, and on the other hand that none whom God elects to everlasting life will fail to hear the voice which calls them to the fountain of salvation, it is also certain that the loss of some sinners will bring aggravated guilt upon the souls of those who should have called them and who did not; or who called so faintly that it never reached the ears of those to whom the word was sent, or if it reached their ears, it never touched their hearts, so calmly and so coldly was the invitation uttered.

Let us ask ourselves this question: Are the calls and invitations of the gospel, at this moment, uttered loud enough? Are there voices enough joining in the cry, to make it audible? Is it heard in the desert? Is it heard in those dark places of the earth which are full of the habitations of cruelty? Is our voice heard there, through the messengers whom we have sent? Is it heard at home? Even among ourselves is the cry as loud and piercing as it ought to be? Even where purity of doctrine is maintained, and where the evidence of practical religion does exist, may there not be a want of earnestness and fervour in proclaiming that which is really believed? May not the very dread of spurious excitement,

which the Church has seen abundant cause to feel, be pushed so far as to produce a coldness and appearance of indifference in publishing the offers of the gospel, which amounts in practical effect almost to a denial of the very truths affirmed, and a retracting of the invitations offered? It is a question to be seriously pondered, whether much of the indifference with which the invitations of the gospel are received, does not arise from the apparent absence of all lively feeling on the part of those who make them. And this, not only in relation to the public formal preaching of the word, but also in reference to those private occasions upon which the individual Christian may be called to say to those who hear his voice, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters!" Let the invitations which we offer in the name of Christ be, like his own, earnest and free, addressed to all who feel the need of them. "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters!"

The figures here used need but little explanation, and that little only to secure a just discrimination between things which differ. The same divine grace is exhibited under three distinct aspects; water refreshes, milk nourishes, wine cheers. To the thirsty soul the prophet offers water, to the famished milk, to the despondent wine. The same grace which relieves our spiritual lassitude and weariness of life, removes the cause of these distressing symptoms by supplying the materials of spiritual strength, feeding the soul with knowledge—not only religious, but experimental knowledge—and the same grace which thus strengthens, while it gives repose, goes further, and produces holy joy. To all this the sinner is invited in the gospel. Is he thirsty? Is he conscious of a want within him which must be supplied before he can enjoy repose, and does he find that this vague feeling of deficiency is more distressing, the more undefined it is? And does this exhaust and, as it were, dry up the very fountains of his life, with an effect equivalent to that of parching thirst, until his soul is ready to cry out, My moisture is turned into the drought of summer? Even amidst the press of secular employments and the whirl of frantic gaiety, this thirst of spirit has been often felt; nay, it has been itself the means of plunging men in business or in pleasure, in the hope of extinguishing that fever in the veins which will not let them rest. But in vain do they drink at the polluted springs of pleasure and

the broken cisterns of man's wisdom; the fire still rages—it consumes and exhausts them more and more, until, at last, the excitement of unsatisfied desire subsides into a desperate apathy, beneath which smoulder the remains of half-quenched passions, which, if once rekindled, will burn unto the lowest hell.

Society is full of those whose hearts have thus been scorched and blasted in the vain attempt to satisfy a craving soul with anything but God. The sense of want remains, but it no longer stimulates to action; it is like the thirst of those who have exhausted nature in the effort to find water in the desert, and have fallen down to die. The thirst which they before felt, is now but one among a multitude of symptoms which premonish speedy death. Perhaps you know such. If you do not, you at least know those whose minds are restless under disappointment, and a sense of insufficiency in everything which this world offers to allay their inward thirst. If you know such, and would act the part of Christians towards them, do not foster their delusive hope of finding yet among the untried springs and cisterns of the world, what they have thus far sought in vain; but taking your stand by the fountain of life which Christ has opened, cry to them in a voice too loud and piercing to be heard without attention, “Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters!” Here bathe those burning brows and steep those parched lips, and slake that never-dying thirst which has become inseparable from your very being.

There are few scenes in fiction or in real life better suited to create a vivid impression of refreshment and relief, than those descriptions given by some travellers in the great Sahara of the finding of a well, after an interval of terrible privation. The delirious joy, the frantic struggle for precedence, the impetuous delight with which the panting sufferer plunges his head into the long-sought element, the very picture brings refreshment with it; but, alas! our sympathies are few and faint with spiritual objects, or we certainly should find what I have just described an imperfect emblem of the new life breathed into the soul, when plunged into the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness, first, to be cleansed, and then, when all impurity has passed away, to drink. Ah, my hearers, is it possible for those who have once tasted of

those waters to forget them? "Will a man leave the snow of Lebanon, or shall the cold flowing waters be forsaken?" Yes, such a thing is possible; for if it were not, we should not only come more constantly ourselves to this exhaustless fountain, but should cry more frequently to all them that pass by, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters!"

It is related by one who had experienced the horrors of the great African desert, that the thirst which had absorbed all other feelings while it raged, was no sooner slaked, than the feeling of hunger was revived in tenfold violence; and I scruple not to spiritualize this incident in illustration of the prophet's language. The sensation of relief from undefined anxiety, or from a positive dread of divine wrath, however exquisite, is not enough to satisfy the soul. The more it receives, the more it feels its own deficiencies; and when its faculties have been revived by the assurance of forgiveness, it becomes aware of its own ignorance, and of those chasms which can only be filled with knowledge of the truth. This is the sense of spiritual hunger which succeeds the allaying of spiritual thirst. The soul, having been refreshed, must now be fed. The cooling, cleansing properties of water cannot repair the decaying strength. There must be nutriment, suited to the condition of the soul. And it is furnished. Here is milk as well as water. We are called, not only to refreshment, but to nourishment. The voice cries, not only, "Come ye to the waters," but, "Come ye, buy and eat." If refreshment only be supplied, the soul, though freed from thirst, will die of hunger. Do you know any soul in this state, fresh from the laver of regeneration, and rejoicing in its change? Let us all hope to know many such. And when we do, or if we know them now, let us see to it that the first relief obtained from the waters of this fountain be succeeded by instruction—by instruction suited to the wants of babes in Christ—the sincere milk of the word. It may never be known, at least to us, in time or in eternity, how much of the fanatical abuses which have followed what appeared to be instances of genuine conversion, has arisen from neglect or error in this very juncture. The soul has been refreshed, but it has not been fed, and inanition has excited it more fatally than it could have been excited by excess.



Has it not been a matter of familiar observation, that the same men who are most successful in alarming sinners, are not always most successful in the training of new converts or the edification of established saints? And has not this diversity of gifts been made a reason for infringing on the order of God's house, and multiplying orders in the ministry? They who pursue this course forget, that while the prophet invites every one that thirsteth to the waters, he invites them at the same time to partake of milk and wine—of milk to nourish, and of wine to cheer. The supply of nature's cravings, though the first thing in order and necessity, is not the last. It is not all. The man must not only be continued in existence—his existence must be happy; it is for happiness that he desires to live, and when that which is necessary even to existence is supplied, he is not satisfied, he must have more; as the feeling of thirst gives way to that of hunger, so the sense of hunger yields to the desire of enjoyment. To be satisfied with mere life, and with that by which it is supported, would be brutal. The nobler instincts of our nature point to something for which life is worth possessing, and the very satisfaction of inferior necessities renders those which are higher more perceptible and urgent. As the relief of doubt and dread is not enough without the knowledge of the truth, so the knowledge of the truth is not enough unless it yields enjoyment. And it does, if rightly used. The gospel offers wine, as well as milk and water. Come and drink, not of one, but of all, of all together. Come and slake your thirst, appease your hunger, and dispel your cares—not by different means, but by the same abundant, all-sufficient grace. God makes provision, not for one want merely, but for all. If you are cooled, and not fed—if you are fed, and not exhilarated, it is not his fault, but yours; his call is not to this or that exclusively, but, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money: come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money, and without price."

I have already directed your attention to the fact, that thirst is the only qualification required of those who are invited to the fountain. No merit, no purchase money; nay, the want of this may be considered as a negative condition. Merit and money are not only needless, they are excluded; for, you see, the invitation

is to those who have no money, who can pay no price. "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he, (or even) he that hath no money." It is true, the word "buy" is added—"Come ye, buy and eat"—but the Hebrew word is not the usual equivalent to *buy*; it is a word used elsewhere to denote no purchase except that of food; and even in that application may mean, properly, the mere act of *procuring*, by whatever means, though commonly applied to purchase, in the strict sense. If so, it may here be understood to mean, "supply yourselves." But even granting that the word means *buy*—and it must be admitted that it could not fail to suggest that idea to a Jewish reader—it appears to me that it is evidently used here for the very purpose of expressing with more emphasis the perfect freeness of the offer made. They are called to buy, indeed, but who? who are to be the buyers? Why, those who have no money; and, lest this should be misunderstood as implying that some other mode of payment would be called for beside money, all misconstruction is precluded by the paradoxical, but most expressive phrase—BUY WINE AND MILK WITHOUT MONEY, AND WITHOUT PRICE. This full and unambiguous description of the offer as gratuitous, is anything but needless or superfluous. It has its use, a most important use, in guarding men against a natural and common error.

The offers of the good things of this world are all made on a contrary condition; the calls of this world are to those who have money, those who can render some equivalent for that which they receive. So universal is this rule, that it is often hard for men to be convinced that the offer of salvation is gratuitous. They feel that something must be rendered in return, and, therefore, they conclude, that the forms of invitation, which imply gratuity and freeness, are to be understood as excluding merely some gross forms of compensation,—that if money in the strict sense be rejected, as it must be, it is only to make way for some equivalent; and thus men, in the face of God's most solemn declarations, feed the pride of their own hearts with the delusive hope that they shall yet pay down the price of their salvation. In others, the same error may assume a humbler form. Knowing the principles on which men are accustomed to distribute their gifts, and imper-

fectly instructed in the principles of God's most gracious dispensations, they are ready to infer that, as they have no price to pay, they are excluded from the offer. It is just as if the poor, exhausted pilgrim in the desert, seeing others crowd around the well or cistern, should imagine that the water must be purchased, and, aware of his own poverty, relinquish all attempts to reach it.

But suppose that, just as he has come to this conclusion, a voice is heard proclaiming, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters!" and, as if to preclude all possibility of doubt as to the freeness of the offer, adding, "He that hath no money." How would such a person be affected by the sound? And how ought thirsting, starving, and desponding souls to be affected, when they hear the want of merit upon their part made an express condition of the offer of salvation? And, above all, how ought those who make the offer, to be watchful against everything at all at variance with this first principle of free salvation? Shall the ignorance, or negligence, or shallow experience of those who are sent forth to seek and save the lost, be suffered to convert the free and gracious invitations of the Saviour into legal bargains, in which grace is bought and sold under some specious pretext? This is no trifling or unmeaning question. There is a spurious liberality of feeling and opinion upon this point, a spirit of concession to the legal doctrine of salvation by works, as if there were really a mere verbal difference between the two. And this feeble, compromising temper, may gain access to the pulpit and the press, without any formal dereliction of the strictest forms of orthodox belief.

The half-instructed youth who rushes hastily into the field of labour, under a strong conviction that the world is ready to perish for the want of his individual services, is very apt to carry with him a confused, unsettled view of this essential matter, and, by way of shunning metaphysical distinctions and scholastic formulas, to clog the glorious offer of a free salvation with the pitiful conditions of a mere self-righteousness. It has been done. It may be done again. But who will dare to do it? Who will dare, with his eyes open, to exclude from Christ those who are specially entitled to approach him, for the very reason that their guilt is great, their misery extreme, their own strength nothing, and their

merit less than nothing? for instead of meriting reward, they merit punishment. Will you exclude them, or impede them, on the ground that a gratuitous offer will encourage sin? If you do it at all, this will no doubt be your motive. And to what does it amount? That you are more afraid of sin, and more unwilling to encourage it, than God himself. The necessary consequence of what you do is to condemn your Maker,—

“ Snatch from his hand the sceptre and the rod,  
Re-judge his justice, be the God of God.”

They who are good enough or bad enough for Christ to save, are good enough for you to seek in order to salvation. The objection is a merely theoretical objection; it is utterly at war with all experience; the abusers of God's grace have never been the true recipients of gratuitous salvation. They have been the cavillers and carpers at it. They have often been the self-sufficient formalist, and the self-deceiving hypocrite. There is no danger in obeying God, and following his example. And as he has made the want of merit, and of all reliance upon merit, a condition of acceptance with him, let us go and do likewise. Let us not act the part of the ungrateful and uncharitable servant, who no sooner had obtained from his master the remission of his own debt, than he cruelly exacted the inferior obligation of his fellow-servant. In the parable, indeed, the debt exacted was one due to the very man whose own debt had been just remitted. But we may be sure that if he had been equally severe in the exaction of debts owing to his lord, although his guilt would have been less, although his error might have sprung from an unenlightened zeal for the rights of him by whose free favour he had been himself forgiven, he would not have escaped censure.

Nor shall we, if we do likewise. No, my brethren, it is not the will of Him who, as we humbly trust, has pardoned us so freely, that in publishing the gospel of His grace, we should lay hold of our wretched fellow-sinners by the throat, and say, Pay my Master what thou owest. It is not the will of Christ that the salvation which he died for, which he bought by death, and which he paid for with his heart's blood to the uttermost farthing, should be brought into the market and exposed to sale by us, as if it could

again be purchased by the groans wrung from the heart of the despairing sinner, who instead of being brought to Christ is thus put from him, it may be for ever. If any perversion of the truth can be insulting to the Saviour, it is this. "It must needs be that offences come, but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!" The way in which that woe may be avoided is too plain to be mistaken. It is one which brings us back to the same point from which we started; the necessity of following God's own example in the offer of salvation.

If we do this we are safe. Let us all, then, learn to do it. Both in public and in private, as we have occasion, let us open to the sinner's view the fountain of life; and if he will not look, or if he be so far off that he cannot see it, while he dies of thirst and hunger, let us lift up our voices and with piercing accents bid him come and live; let us tell him that he must come or be lost for ever,—but beware of adding any other limitation; let us call with special emphasis to those who are most destitute of all meritorious pretensions to be saved,—to the ignorant, the desperately wicked, to the heathen; and as they pass by, rushing madly to destruction, whether near us or afar off, let us make their ears to tingle with the memorable words of the prophetic preacher, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat: yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price."



XXVI.

Wherefore do ye Spend Money for that which  
is not Bread?

“Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.”—ISAIAH lv. 2.

HAVING set forth, in the first verse, the perfect adaptation of the grace which is offered in the gospel, to the wants of sinners, as a source of refreshment, spiritual strength, and divine exhilaration; and having, at the same time, exhibited its absolute and perfect freeness, by inviting men to buy it “without money, and without price,” the evangelical prophet now expostulates with those who are unwilling to receive it, and exposes the absurdity of thus refusing to embrace the only real good, while at the same time they are toiling in pursuit of that which is imaginary. If it were possible for men to forego all desire of happiness, and all attempts to gain it, such a course would be demonstrably unworthy of a rational and moral agent, whose entire constitution shows him to have been created for the future. But in that case, notwithstanding the stupendous guilt and folly of his conduct, he would have wherewith to parry the attacks of conscience, and evade the invitations of the gospel, by alleging that he asked for nothing more than he possessed, that his desires were satisfied, and that it would be folly to disturb his own enjoyment and exhaust the remnant of his days in seeking that of which he felt no need, and the attainment of which could not possibly afford him any satisfaction.

It is easy to perceive the self-deluding sophistry of such a plea, assuming, as it does, the non-existence, nay impossibility of all degrees of happiness not actually experienced; an absurdity so palpable, as of itself to be an adequate preventive of that stagnant

apathy which it defends. But the necessity of any such preventive is excluded by the very constitution of our nature, which has made it impossible for sentient creatures to be wholly regardless of their own well-being. Blinded and grievously mistaken they may be as to the best means of securing it, and as to the comparative amount of good attainable in that course which they are pursuing and in others. But they must pursue some course as the way to happiness. The living creature clings to life until he finds it insupportable; and even then he chooses death not as a greater, but a lesser evil. It is not against a hatred of enjoyment, therefore, or an absolute indifference to it, that the grace of God and the salvation of the gospel must contend; it is against the most intense desire of happiness acting in the wrong direction, and impelling him who feels it to the use of means which must ultimately thwart the very end which they are now employed to bring about.

The expostulation of the preacher is not, "Why, oh why, are you not hungry? why do you refuse to spend your money and your labour in obtaining food?" but it is, "Why do ye spend money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not?" Observe, too, that he does not seek to remedy the evils which arise from perverted and unsatisfied desire, by the extinction of the appetite itself,—of that immortal, inextinguishable craving, which can only cease by annihilation, or by full fruition. This, indeed, is a distinctive mark of true religion, as opposed to other systems. Since the evils under which the human race is groaning may be clearly traced to the inordinate indulgence of desires after happiness, under the influence of "strong delusions" as to that which can afford it, we are not to wonder that when unassisted reason undertakes to do away with the effect, it should attempt the extirpation of the cause; and you will find, accordingly, that every system of religion or philosophy, distinct from Christianity, either indulges, under some disguise, that perversion of man's natural desire after happiness which makes him wretched, or affects to cure it by destroying the desire itself.

Between these Epicurean and Stoical extremes, all systems of religion but the true one have been oscillating since the world began. The one has found favour with the many, the other with the few; the one has prevailed in society at large, the other has

arisen from the over-refinements of a vain philosophy. And thus these two antagonist errors have existed and produced their bitter fruit simultaneously, and under every outward form of practice and belief. While the one has shown itself in the prevailing self-indulgence of all heathen nations, in the sensual creed and practice of the Moslem, in the Papist's compromise between his pleasures on the one hand and his periodical confessions on the other, and in a similar but more concealed mode of compensation on the part of those who hold the truth in unrighteousness; the other has appeared in the speculations and self-denial of the old philosophers, the austerities and self-inflicted sufferings of heathen, Mohammedan, and Christian self-tormentors. And with what effect? that of plunging men in the bottomless abyss of self-indulgence on the one hand, or in that of a desperate unbelief upon the other. But while one voice cries to the bewildered sinner, "Cease to hunger, cease to thirst," and another from an opposite direction bids him "Eat and drink, for to-morrow we die," the voice of God and of the gospel is, "Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not?"

The question presupposes that the soul is hungry, that it must be hungry until it is fed, that the gnawings of this hunger will constrain it to seek food, and that the instinct of self-preservation, no less than the desire of enjoyment, will induce it to give anything it has in exchange for the necessary means of its subsistence and enjoyment; that the fatal error lies not in the seeking after something to sustain it and to make it happy, but in imagining that this end can be answered by the pleasures, gains, and honours of the world, which are not only brief in their duration, but unsuited in their nature, even while they last, to satisfy the wants of an immortal spirit. It is this view of man's natural condition upon which the invitations of the gospel are all founded; and the absolute coincidence of this view with the lessons of experience is among the strongest proofs, not only that Christianity is better suited to the actual necessities of man than any other system of belief, but also that it is a plan devised by one who had an intimate and perfect knowledge of our nature; while the most ingenious speculations of philosophy, even when aided by a partial reception



and appropriation of the doctrines of the Bible, at every step have betrayed the grossest ignorance of man's original and actual condition, and of the only way in which his restoration can be possibly effected.

The Christian, in endeavouring to win men to the Saviour, may proceed in full assurance, that the plan which he develops and the offers which he makes are in perfect accordance with the natural capacities and wants of those for whose salvation he is labouring; and under this encouraging conviction he may cry aloud and spare not, to the starving souls around him, "Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good."

For let it be observed, that while the prophet shows the insufficiency of temporal enjoyments or advantages as means of happiness, he is far from leaving us to be content with this as a mere theoretical opinion, which can lead to nothing but a painful consciousness of want unsatisfied, and to that sickness of the heart produced by "hope deferred." But, on the contrary, he makes the utter insufficiency of earthly good an argument, a reason, not for ceasing to desire, which is impossible, and if it were not, would be wrong and foolish, but for fixing the desires upon other objects, good in themselves, and adapted to our nature. He assures the disappointed soul that happiness is really attainable; and while the last achievement of philosophy (falsely so called) is to make man acquiesce with a sullen apathy in the frustration of his dearest hopes, the gospel soars immeasurably higher, and assures him that his hopes shall not be frustrated; that there is a good as perfect, nay, immeasurably more so than his fondest wishes ever yet conceived; a good, substantial and enduring, ay, and satisfying too, at which he may, at which he ought to aim, and aiming at which he shall not be disappointed, because God invites him to desire it and to seek it, holding it out as an equivalent, a substitute, for that ideal and fallacious good in quest of which he is exhausting nature and despising grace. To such, to all such let the voice of invitation come in tender and persuasive tones. Let all who are employed in the laborious, but vain attempt, to feed a spiritual nature with material good, hear God's voice like the voice of a compassionate father to his erring children, saying, "Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not

bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness."

But is this all? Is this indefinite assurance that there is a good sufficient and attainable, the highest and best offer that the gospel makes to sinners? Must the soul, disappointed in its quest of earthly good, be left to gaze at random on the infinite variety of possible contingencies by which the cravings of its nature may be satisfied? Alas! if this were all, the tender mercies of the gospel would be cruel. If the sinner is to be convinced of the unsatisfying nature of the objects he is actually seeking, only in order to be taught that there is somewhere in the universe an object truly worthy of his choice and suited to his nature, but without direction where or how he is to seek it; how can this tantalizing process be regarded as a favourable change, or one promotive of his happiness? If he is ever to know more than this, that there is only one way of becoming blessed, and that he has missed it, it were better for him to remain in his delusion. But, my friends, if Christianity has ever left men in this state of mere negation, it is not because its Author or the word of God has thus revealed it, but because the heralds who were sent forth to proclaim it were mistaken in their own views, or unfaithful to their trust.

But the voice of God himself has no such "uncertain sound." He does not proclaim merely that there is salvation somewhere, and exhort mankind to seek it; but he leads them to it: he stands at the fountain of life and cries, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters,—" to *these* waters. "Look unto *me* and be saved, all ye ends of the earth." "Incline your ear, and come unto me; hear, and your soul shall live." He does not merely tell the wanderer in the desert that he has lost his way; he does not merely show him how he may regain it; but he stands, and calls him to come hither: Come to me; turn away your eyes from every other object, and especially from those which have hitherto misled you; listen no longer to the voices which have tempted you astray, and which are still loudly ringing in your ears. Regard them not, for they would lead you downwards to despair and death. "I am the way, and the truth, and the life." "Incline your ear, and come unto me; hear, and your soul shall live."

This direction of the soul to a specific and exclusive object as its only ground of hope and trust, without allowing any interval of doubt, or any liberty of choice, is a distinctive feature in the gospel system, and should never be forgotten in the dispensation of the grace of God by his ambassadors. The soul, when really convinced of its own error in resorting to the world and to itself for happiness, if suffered to remain without a fixed point of attraction and dependence, will infallibly revert to its abandoned idols, or to some new form of self-delusion, more incurable and fatal than the old, because adopted under the excitement of a groundless hope, and amidst the raptures of a spurious joy. The only safeguard against such delusions is a full exhibition of the one way of salvation; and in this as in other points already mentioned, we have only to follow a divine example. For the prophet, speaking in the name of God, after calling men to come to him, to hear him that their souls may live, annexes to this gracious invitation the specific promise of a sure salvation; a salvation not contingent or fortuitous, but one provided by a gracious constitution on the part of God himself; a salvation promised and confirmed by oath; a covenant of mercy, eternal in its origin, and everlasting in its stipulations, comprehending in its wonderful provisions the essential requisite of an atonement, a priest and sacrifice, an all-sufficient Saviour;—not a Saviour whose performance of his office should be partial, or contingent, or uncertain from the change of person, but the one, the only Saviour, “the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever;” a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec; the Son of God, the Son of man, the Son of David, who should sit upon his royal father’s throne for ever; who was promised to the dying king himself, and of whom that expiring saint exclaimed, “This is all my salvation, and all my desire!” It is to this exclusive object that the sinner’s faith and hope are turned when God says by the prophet: “Incline your ear, and come unto me; hear, and your soul shall live: and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.”

Some suppose that Christ is here expressly mentioned by the name of David, an interpretation not by any means so arbitrary as it may appear to those who have not made themselves acquainted with the remarkable variety of names by which the prophets

designate the Saviour. In the words before us, however they may be explained, there is an evident allusion to the promise made to David, and recorded in the Second Book of Samuel (vii. 16), "Thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee, thy throne shall be established for ever,"—namely, by the succession of Messiah, of whom it was said, before his birth, by a messenger from heaven, "He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end" (Luke i. 32, 33).

It was in the prospect of this glorious succession, by which David was to live again and reign again for ever, that the ancient prophets uttered some of their most cheering and sublime predictions: "Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely; and this is the name whereby he shall be called, Jehovah our Righteousness" (Jer. xxiii. 5, 6). In these words of Jeremiah, Christ is represented as a branch which should be raised up unto David; in those of Ezekiel which follow, he appears in the character of David himself: "I will save my flock, and they shall no more be a prey; and I will judge between cattle and cattle; and I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd, and I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David a prince among them: I the Lord have spoken it" (Ezek. xxxiv. 22-24). And again: "So shall they be my people, and I will be their God, and David my servant shall be king over them, and they all shall have one shepherd: they shall also walk in my judgments, and observe my statutes, and do them. And they shall dwell in the land that I have given unto Jacob my servant, wherein your fathers have dwelt; they shall dwell therein, even they, and their children, and their children's children for ever: and my servant David shall be their prince for ever" (Ezek. xxxvii. 24, 25). These are clear cases of the application of the name to Christ, and will perhaps suffice to justify a like interpretation in the case before us, even in the absence of all parallel expressions in the writings of Isaiah.

There is, however, no necessity for any such interpretation, as the words here used, unlike those of Ezekiel, may be referred either to the future or the past; and because, if taken in their obvious meaning, as referring to the literal king David, they afford a sense good in itself and perfectly coherent with the context. There is less reason for departing from the obvious and common-sense meaning, because, in either case, the reference to Christ is clear, though more explicit in the one case than the other. On the one supposition, he is spoken of as David; on the other, as the great blessing promised to David. In the one case, the promise is: "Come unto me, and I will make you partakers of the blessings promised in and through the second David, the Messiah;" in the other case it is, "Come, and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, securing to you the *sure mercies*, the blessings faithfully and irrevocably promised to the ancient David,—all which blessings meet and terminate in Christ." In either case, therefore, the promise is specific, and the offer made is not an offer of salvation in the general or the abstract, but of free salvation through the blood of Christ.

Upon these two points in the offer of salvation let us look with fixed attention. It is specific. It is sure. It is not mercy in general that is offered, but the mercies of David, the mercies purchased by the second David, the mercies promised to the ancient David, which he hoped for, which he trusted in, and of which he could say, "This is all my salvation, and all my desire." It is this peculiar, special exhibition of God's mercy to lost sinners that is here held forth to them; it is this that he offers to make theirs by the provisions of an everlasting covenant, even the sure mercies of David; for the blessing offered is not only definite but sure. It is a covenanted blessing, and it therefore cannot fail; it is a permanent blessing, and can undergo no change; it is a durable blessing, and shall last for ever.

These two attributes or qualities of Christ's salvation, though to some they may appear of little moment, seem not so to the convinced, alarmed, and half-despairing soul, after trying every source of natural enjoyment, but without obtaining rest or satisfaction, while the vast variety of objects sought and tried serves only to distract and weary it. Hope faints and the heart sickens,

till at last, through sovereign mercy, the inviting voice of Christ and of his servants gains access to the reluctant ear; and with the ear the eye is turned to that quarter whence the voice proceeds; and there, no longer roving among many objects, fixes finally on one, and there abides for ever.

But to this concentration of the sinner's hopes, there must be added an assurance of security and constancy in that which he relies upon, or he can never rest. And this the gospel offers when it calls him to partake of "the sure mercies of David." It is the glory of this great salvation that it is thus "sure;" sure, from the very nature of the change which it produces in the relation of the soul to Christ; and sure from the irrevocable oath and promise of a covenant-keeping God. When the soul is awakened to a sense of its condition, the first great object of its wonder is the depth and aggravation of its guilt, which seem to render its escape from wrath an impossibility. Soon its wonder is excited by another and a nobler object,—by the revelation of the truth that God can be just and yet a justifier of the ungodly. Nor is this its last discovery; for after vainly struggling to acquire some legal right to the salvation which is thus seen to be possible, the soul is filled with new amazement as it forms at last a just conception of the glorious truth, that this salvation is as free as it is full and efficacious, that none can taste of it at all but those who are content to purchase it on God's own terms—"without money and without price."

But even after this conception has been formed, and has become familiar, weakness of faith and a remaining leaven of self-righteousness will often lead to sceptical misgivings, and suspicions that, although the gospel method of salvation be a perfect one, and perfectly gratuitous, it may, like other favours, be withdrawn, and he who rested in it perish after all. But when it pleases God to throw the rays of his illuminating grace upon the soul, and to dispel the clouds of ignorance and error which involve it, one of the first objects which stand forth to view in that self-evidencing light, is the unalterable steadfastness and absolute security of that salvation which is offered in the gospel. It is there seen, too clearly to admit of doubt, that the believer's hope is founded, not at all upon himself, but altogether on another, and the merit of that other always the same and always infinite. This "great sal-

vation" is as sure as it is free, sure as the merit of the Saviour and the covenant of God can make it, and may therefore well be called, as the prophet calls it in the text, "the sure mercies of David."

And is it not an interesting thought, that the same sure mercies upon which the dying king so confidently rested, and in praise of which "the sweet psalmist of Israel" aroused the farewell echoes of his harp, that these same mercies are the song and rejoicing of the humblest convert in the darkest spots of Africa, and Asia, and the islands of the sea, and that on this same foundation are erected all the hopes of those who name the name of Christ in these ends of the earth?

Was this extension of the truth foreseen by David and Isaiah? or did they imagine, with their carnal and narrow-minded countrymen, that "Israel according to the flesh" should continue to monopolize the promises of God for ever? There are some parts of Scripture where the promises of God are so exclusively connected with the name and local circumstances of his ancient people, as to furnish some apology, at least, for the pretensions of the modern Jews, and at the same time to divide interpreters, who harmonize in other matters, as to the question whether these predictions are to be literally verified hereafter, or have already been accomplished in a figurative, spiritual manner. In all such cases it may be disputed whether the promise, in its original and proper sense, extended further than the Jewish Church; but in the case before us, the ungrateful necessity of such restriction is precluded by the language of the prophecy itself; for the attention of the thirsting, starving sinner has no sooner been directed to the Saviour as the son and yet the Lord of David, than the prophet, speaking in the name of God, as if to encourage even us who are "sinners of the Gentiles" to confide in the same all-sufficient Saviour, says, "Behold, I have given him for a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people."

The connection leaves no doubt that Christ is here the subject of discourse. He was a witness of the truth, but an authoritative one, because he spoke what he did know: he spoke on his own authority, not that of others; hence he was, at the same time, a leader and commander of the people. To the mere English reader, this important verse is shorn of half its meaning and of all

its emphasis, by the unhappy use of the word "people," which in English has no plural, to translate a Hebrew word not only plural in its form, but most emphatically plural in its sense. It may be given as a general suggestion to the readers of the prophecies in English, that in multitudes of cases, where the very thing predicted is the calling of the Gentiles, it is utterly obscured in the translation by this idiomatical defect of form in the equivalent selected for the word denoting "nations;" a defect which cannot possibly have failed to render that illustrious event less conspicuous and striking to the mind of the unlearned English Christian than to the readers of some other versions. In the case before us, the divine declaration is not merely, or at all, that God had set Christ forth as a witness and commander to the Jews; but, on the contrary, that he had made him, by express appointment, a witness and a leader to the other nations, by whose convincing testimony and almighty power, God's elect were to be gathered out of every kindred, tribe, and people under heaven. Christ is a witness of the truth, a prophet, a divinely constituted teacher, not to this or that community or race of men, not even to God's chosen and peculiar people, but to nations,—to all nations; and his office as a Prince of Peace and Captain of Salvation is no less extensive. To the nations generally he reveals the Father, and brings life and immortality to light. This wide extent of his official influence is furthermore expressed in what immediately follows, where the Father speaks of him no more in the third person, but addresses him directly, and assures him that his saving power should extend to nations which he knew not in his human personality, to nations which were aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the old restricted covenants of promise. To the carnal Jews, this doctrine was a stumbling-block and foolishness, because they reckoned as political and natural advantages those means which God had used to prepare the way for Christ's appearance and the calling of the Gentiles. Hence they clung with impious folly to the means, when the end had been accomplished, and imagined, in their blindness, that the system which they worshipped had been framed for *their* sake, when the word of God on every page assured them that its object was to glorify Jehovah; and that when this great end could be answered more effectually by the



abrogation of the ancient system, it should cease for ever. And in view of that cessation, and of Him who should accomplish it by breaking down the middle wall of partition which divided Jews from Gentiles, it is here said of him, or directly to him (ver. 5,) "Behold, thou shalt call a nation which thou knowest not, and nations that knew not thee shall run unto thee, because of the Lord thy God, and for the Holy One of Israel, for he hath glorified thee." As Messiah was to glorify the Father by revealing him not only to the Jews, but to the other nations which had never known him, so the Father was to glorify the Son by making him a witness and commander of the nations, and by granting him a glorious accession from the Gentile world; by giving him the heathen for his inheritance, the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession; by inviting all the ends of the earth to look unto him for salvation, and thus making good to all who hear the call, the stipulations of that everlasting covenant which seals to all believers, without national distinction or respect of persons, "the sure mercies of David."

If, in addition to the doctrinal instructions of this interesting passage, we would learn from it a lesson in the art of invitation, let it be observed, 1. That we must not address our invitations to a nature of which man is not possessed, but to his actual capacities and wants, admitting or assuming their reality and strength, and striving to convince him that they never can be satisfied by anything but that which is so freely offered in the gospel. 2. In the next place, let us see to it, that this great offer of the gospel be distinctly and specifically held up to the sinner's view, instead of suffering his mind to rest in a mere negative conviction that the world is not a satisfying portion, or allowed to roam at large in search of untried sources of enjoyment, which can never prove more lasting or abundant than those which have already been resorted to in vain. 3. Let no man be invited to a general, indefinite reliance upon mercy as an attribute of God, without regard to that particular and only way in which it can and will be exercised to fallen man; but let him be invited to a share in the provisions of that everlasting covenant which God has promised to bestow upon him.\*

\* A few pages of the conclusion wanting.



## XXVII.

### Seek ye the Lord.

“Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near.”  
ISAIAH lv. 6.

IN the preceding context these truths are taught: that there is an abundant supply for the spiritual wants of men; that this supply is suited to their various necessities; that it includes refreshment, strength, exhilaration; that the constitution of man's nature forces him to seek some satisfaction; that the multitude are actually seeking “that which is not bread,” and cannot satisfy the soul; that instead of this, the gospel offers them “that which is good,” and invites the soul to “delight in fatness;” that this offer is a free one; that the blessings offered may be bought, and must be bought, “without money, and without price;” that they can only be obtained by hearkening to God, and coming unto him; that there is only one way of access to him; that this one way is opened by a covenant; that this covenant is “an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure” (2 Sam. xxiii. 5); that the Mediator of this covenant is the Son of David, the second David, the Messiah, in whom are fulfilled the promises made to the son of Jesse, so that the mercies which are secured to men through him may well be called “the sure mercies of David;” that these mercies are not offered to the Jews alone; that Christ is the Saviour of the Gentiles also; that his office is that of “a witness to the nations, a leader and commander of the nations;” that however unlikely the extension of the gospel to the nations might appear, it must take place; that Christ will call nations which he knew not, and that nations which he knew not will run unto him; that this event must happen as an appointed means of glorifying God and doing honour to the Saviour.

All this was addressed, in the first instance, to the Jews; and now the prophet seems to press upon them the practical question—What then ought *you* to do? If God designs thus to save the heathen, who have never known him, what effect should a knowledge of that purpose have on you, to whom he is well known? Shall the Gentiles enter the kingdom of heaven before *you*? Shall publicans and harlots press into the kingdom, while the very children of the kingdom, whose inheritance it is, are excluded? This would be a shame and a calamity indeed; but how will you prevent it?—by excluding *them*?—by gaining possession of the key of knowledge, and neither entering yourselves, nor suffering those who would to enter? This, if it were possible, would be the height of wickedness and folly. No; the true course is to enter with them; or, if you will, before them. Your true course is to seek the Lord, his favour, his protection; to call upon him, pray to him, confess to him, acknowledge him, and that without delay—before it is too late—now, even now—now, while he may be found, while he is near, while he is still your God by special covenant. If you would not see the heathen, whom you now despise, preferred before you, and received into the kingdom of Messiah, while you yourselves are shut out, use the only sure preventive—“Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near.”

This view of the meaning of the text is perfectly consistent with the context, and with other passages in which this motive is presented to the Jews, as an inducement to be prompt and diligent in making their calling and election sure. But it may well be doubted whether this is the whole meaning. It may be doubted whether this is even the chief meaning. The terms of the text are in no respect more restricted than those of the preceding verses, and especially the first part of the chapter, which obviously relates to the wants of men in general, and the best way to supply them. If the invitation of the first verse is general, the exhortation of the text must be general also. If it is to all mankind that the prophet cries, “Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters!” it is surely not to any one community or nation that he here says, “Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near.” Besides, if this address be

restricted to the Jews, the reason implied for the command is irrelevant. If the words "while he is near" denote "while he continues in a special covenant relation to the Jews," then the command would seem to imply that by seeking the Lord and calling upon him, that peculiar, exclusive covenant relation might be rendered perpetual, which was not the case. Or if, on the other hand, "while he may be found" denotes in a general way the possibility of finding favour and forgiveness at his hands, then the reason suggested is in no respect more applicable to the Jews than to the Gentiles. In this sense God was just as near to the one as to the other. The principles on which he would forgive and save were just the same in either case. The necessity of seeking, the nature of the object sought, the way of seeking it, are wholly independent of external circumstances. As in the context, so here, the exhortation is addressed to all who are in need. It is therefore universal, or, at least, admits of a universal application. Even supposing that it has a special reference to the Jews, it is clear that the prophet says, and that, in imitation of him, we may say likewise, both to Jew and Gentile, "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near."

I do not scruple to address the call to all who hear me. Are you disappointed and unsatisfied? then seek the Lord. Are you oppressed with a sense of guilt? seek the Lord. Are you careless and at ease? I warn you to seek the Lord. Sooner or later you will certainly seek him. However careless you may now be, the day is coming when you shall seek and not find; when you shall call upon him and receive no answer. There is a limit to the offer of salvation. If there were not, sin would be without control. If the sinner could suspend his choice for ever, there would be no punishment. The offer is limited to this life. And even in this life there is a limit. There is a day of grace in which men may be saved, and this day may be shorter than the sinner's lifetime. There is a time when God is near, and when he may be found. There must be a time, therefore, when he is no longer near, and is no longer to be found. Consider this, you who are now asleep in sin. From that sleep you must and will awake. You will either awake to righteousness or to despair. However deep your sleep may now be, and however long it may continue,

you shall awake at last, and in your terror seek for God, when he is no more to be found, and call upon him when he is no longer near: when he is grieved, and has departed, then you shall "feel after him" in vain amidst the darkness which surrounds you, and shall be constrained at last to take up the sorrowful and bitter lamentation, "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved." If this be true, and it cannot be disputed, "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found."

But how shall you seek him? Not in this or that locality. Regard not those who say, "Lo, here,—lo, there;" but go to him in secret, make confession of your sins, renounce yourselves, accept the Saviour whom he offers, devote yourselves to him, and thus "call upon him while he may be found." Is this too much to ask of a poor ruined sinner, as the price of his salvation? But is this indeed all? Is no reformation, no change of life required? Not as the meritorious cause of your salvation. It is purchased by another. But you cannot avail yourselves of it, and continue as you are. You cannot be saved in sin. You may be saved from it. The same voice which says, "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near," says likewise (ver. 7), "Let the wicked forsake his way." He cannot continue in that way and be saved. "No man can serve two masters;" but "whosoever committeth sin, he is the servant of sin." Between sin and holiness, between God and Mammon, he *must* choose. The refusal to choose is itself a choice. To refuse to choose God is, in fact, to choose sin. In relation to this question there is no neutrality—there can be none.

If, then, the sinner would indeed seek God, he must "forsake his way,"—a common figure for the course of conduct. Life is a journey which may be pursued by many distinct paths; but the way of God and the way of sin lead in opposite directions. He who would tread the one, not only will, but must, forsake the other. How?—by a mere external reformation? No; the change must be a deeper and more thorough one. The law of God, which condemns the sinner's life, extends, not only to his outward acts, but to his thoughts, desires, dispositions, and affections. The moral quality of outward acts arises from the motives which produce them; and the reformation which the gospel calls for, reaches

far beyond the mere external conduct. This is often an unwelcome discovery. Men are at first hard to be convinced that there is any danger in the course which they pursue. When this becomes too evident to be disputed, they are prone to cling to the idea that the gospel asks no change or reformation; and when this truth can no longer be denied, they still delude themselves with the belief that the required reformation extends merely to the outward life. But this delusion is dispelled, and they are made to hear the voice of God not only saying, "Let the wicked forsake his way," but, "the unrighteous man his thoughts."

This is merely negative. It cannot be that what God calls men to is a mere negation, a mere abstinence. There must be something positive. There must be commands as well as prohibitions. The mere cessation of former habits would be insufficient; nay, it is impossible. An active being must have something to seek as well as something to avoid. Evil courses can be really abandoned in no other way than by exchanging them for good ones. If men would "cease to do evil," they must "learn to do well." This is a dictate of nature, of reason, of experience, of revelation. It is the voice of God himself, who says, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord." The fact is assumed that all have departed from him. The words may seem strictly applicable only to backsliders—those who have falsified their own professions—who have apostatized from a voluntary, visible relation to Jehovah, and who may with strict propriety be summoned to "return,"—to return to Him from whom they have "so deeply revolted." To any such now present I apply the words, however far you may have gone back in the wicked way which you appeared to have forsaken—however far your present thoughts may be from God and righteousness—I call upon you to give ear to God's rebuke and invitation: "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord." This is your only hope, and even this may soon be gone; therefore, "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near."

But it is far from being true that this appeal is applicable only to backsliders. However strictly understood, it is appropriate to all mankind. It is true, the word "return" is used, and this

word certainly implies departure from a previous state of nearness; and it may at first sight seem, on this account, inapplicable to the mass of men; for how, it may be asked, can they *return* to him from whom they never have departed, but from whom they have always been wholly alienated? But this view of the matter is extremely superficial. It is true, most true, that the invitation to "return" implies a previous departure; and can any departure be more real or deplorable than that which involves, not merely individuals, but the whole human family? The terms of the summons do indeed point back to that original apostasy under the curse of which the whole race groans. When the rebel is exhorted to return to his allegiance, the call comes with emphasis enhanced, not lessened, to the ears of those who are hereditary traitors, born in rebellion, inheriting the taint, and living in the practice of notorious treason. Such is our condition. It is under this double burden that we sink; it is from this double penalty that we must be delivered; it is therefore to us all, without exception, that this solemn call is addressed—"Return unto the Lord"—"Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord." All who are aliens from your God, to you he says this day, Return! return! Return with penitent confession of your sins, with self-renunciation, with submission, with a solemn consecration of yourselves to God; but, above all, and before all, in the exercise of faith, believing in the Saviour, and accepting him as yours. This includes all the rest. Where this exists, they follow, as a thing of course; where this exists not, they are null and void, without worth, nay, without existence. In the exercise of this faith, and of that repentance which has never yet failed to accompany it since the world began, and of that zeal and obedience which can no more fail to spring from such repentance and such faith than the fruit can fail to spring from the prolific seed, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord."

But what is the inducement to return which is here held out? It is man's part to forsake his evil ways and thoughts, to return to God, to seek him, and to call upon him. None of these will he do until God draw him. None of them can he do until God

enable him. But this is true of every service which man ever renders. Though unable of himself to do these things, he is still bound to do them. It is his part to do them; and when he has performed his part, what does God promise in return? What will he do for man? He will have mercy upon him: "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him." Mercy is the inducement offered, and mercy is precisely what the sinner needs. Nothing else can meet his case but this. Without this nothing can be given, or, if given, can do him any good.

Mercy implies two things, misery and guilt. Innocent suffering may be relieved through pity, but it cannot, strictly speaking, be regarded as an object of mercy. And, on the other hand, if guilt could exist unaccompanied by suffering, it might be pardoned, and the sinner might, in that sense, be said to obtain mercy. But, in strictness of speech, the term is applicable only to those cases in which misery and guilt co-exist. And, alas for us! this is, without exception, the condition of man. No one sins without suffering. No man suffers without guilt. Individual sufferers may be innocent in reference to those who immediately cause their sufferings; and, on the other hand, guilt may, for the present, seem to be accompanied by pleasure only. But in due time both these false appearances will be removed. Every sin will be seen to be the necessary cause of sorrow, and every sorrow will be seen to flow more or less directly from sin. And, in the meantime, we have no need to look further than ourselves for objects upon which mercy may be exercised. In us, in all of us, the two pre-requisites are found abundantly—misery present and prospective, the experience of it here and the dread of it hereafter—misery not produced by chance, but by ourselves—by sin, and that our own sin. To us, then, this inducement ought to be a strong one. To induce, then, "the wicked to forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts," and to "return unto the Lord," it ought to be enough to know that the Lord "will have mercy upon him."

But, alas! he is insensible of his condition. The more he stands in need of mercy, the more blind he is to that necessity. By nature, man is never prompted to implore God's mercy on account of his iniquities. He either asks nothing, or he cries for



justice. While he is prosperous, and life seems long, he is content to remain always as he is. And when death stares him in the face, or anything compels him to think seriously of his end, he assumes the character of injured innocence; he claims eternal life as the reward of his obedience; he appears before God not to plead for mercy, but to demand justice; and, with that demand upon his lips, or in his heart, he is often swept into eternity to get what he presumptuously asked for. Then, then, if not before, he cries for mercy; for that very mercy which he spurned before, and with that last despairing cry upon his lips, he goes "to his own place." Such is the end of those who presumptuously ask for justice and will not have mercy. But it often pleases God to undeceive the soul before it is too late. And then, when the sinner's eyes are opened, he beholds with wonder what he never saw before; he sees his own condition, his own guilt—the misery to which that guilt consigns him, and his utter incapacity to help himself. Ah, what a change takes place then in his feelings, and the tone of his addresses to the throne of grace! He who once called for justice at the hand of God, now sues for mercy. He who once stood erect, and said, "I thank thee, God, that I am not like other men," is now unable to lift so much as his eyes to heaven, but smites upon his breast, and says, "God be merciful to me a sinner." Is it not better that this opening of the eyes should take place now than in eternity? "Seek ye the Lord, then, while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, *and to our God.*" Do you observe that expression, "our God?"—the phrase by which the Jews expressed their covenant relation to Jehovah. As addressed to Jews, the phrase may be understood to mean, that God was still their God by a special engagement; and that notwithstanding their departures from him, if they would forsake their evil ways and thoughts, and return unto him, he would have mercy upon them, as their God, as their own God, and fulfil the promises made unto their fathers.

But is there any such encouragement to us who are sinners of the Gentiles? May we return to God, not merely as an absolute

and righteous sovereign, but as our own God, bound to us by covenant, who will not, cannot cast us off? Yes, we may. Even the vilest sinner who forsakes his evil courses and returns to God, may trust not only in his sovereign mercy, but in the faithfulness of his engagements. Even such he is bound by covenant and by oath to save. Even the poor, benighted heathen, who has never been a sharer even in the outward privileges of the Christian Church, may come, and, as it were, lay claim to the salvation of the gospel, not in his own right but in that of another. Yes, my hearers, whoever you may be, and however ignorant of God and of salvation until now, if you will but come to him, and come to him in the way before described, if you will but come to him, forsaking your sins and repenting of them, seeking him and calling upon him, and believing in him, then he is yours, your Saviour; and you have a right to say, not only that the Lord will have mercy, but that our God will pardon. He will not only pity and relieve, but pardon; he will not only pity and relieve distress, but pardon sin. And this is absolutely necessary; without this there could be no real permanent relief.

There is no mercy opposed to justice. In the nature and the works of God, these attributes must harmonize. He cannot exercise mercy until justice be satisfied. He cannot be merciful to man until his justice is appeased. But justice demands punishment. And man, if punished, must be punished for ever, because a finite being cannot exhaust the penalty of the broken law. How, then, can mercy be extended to him? Only by punishing another in his stead. In this substitution lies the sinner's only hope. God gives his own Son to be punished for him; not for ever—ah! how would that impair the rapture of forgiveness and salvation; not for ever—but long enough to answer the demand, through the infinite dignity and merit of the sufferer. In this way and in this way only, God can be just and yet a justifier. In this way he can pardon sin. In this way he will pardon all who come unto him. Is not this enough? Is not this a sufficient earnest of his willingness to save? “He that spared not his own Son, but freely gave him up for us all, shall he not with him also, freely give us all things?” Come then, seek the Lord and call upon him, and that without delay. Seek

him while he may be found; call upon him while he is near. The way you are in is a bad way—a destructive way, however it may now appear. “There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.” But “let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him.”

What is there to prevent such a return? Does guilt stand in the way? He has provided for this difficulty. Guilt is itself a reason for returning. “He will pardon.” Is your guilt too great? Too great for what? To be atoned for by yourself? Yes, it is indeed, even the least sin, such as you took no note of at the time, or have long since forgotten; even the least of such sins is too great for expiation by yourself, and unless otherwise atoned for, will rise up hereafter to condemn you, aye, will seize upon your soul and plunge it into endless ruin. You who are wont to say or think that you are not a great sinner, you shall yet be made to see that the most despised and trivial sin, as you esteemed it, is enough to slay your soul for ever. But if you mean that your sins are too great for divine forgiveness, that is another matter. Even if pardon were a mere sovereign, arbitrary act of mercy, without regard to justice, you would have no right to limit the power and compassion of God. Much less when pardon is in one sense really an act of justice, not to you but to another, when the penalty is paid and justice fully satisfied for all believers. Is not this enough? Is Christ not great enough? Is his blood not rich enough? Were his pangs not keen enough to pay *your* debt, however great and overwhelming? Do you not see that the fountain which is opened for sin and uncleanness is the fountain of Christ’s merit, and is, therefore, inexhaustibly abundant, so that God, for his sake, can not only pardon, but abundantly pardon?—that Christ’s atonement is sufficient in itself for all, however great the multitude, aye, and for all the sins of all whoever sinned, however many and however heinous? So that God, for Christ’s sake, can not only pardon but *abundantly* pardon? And he will, he will, if he pardons at all, “he will abundantly pardon.” Oh, then, hear the voice of invitation, whether old, inveterate offenders or beginners in the ways of sin—whether the burden of

your guilt be overwhelming or comparatively light—whether your minds have hitherto been careless, or alarmed about your state—you are all alike in danger and in need of speedy rescue. “Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord.”

These last words are connected with what goes before, by the conjunction “for”—“*For* my thoughts, &c.” To what is this “for” to be referred—of what does it assign the reason? Some have thought that it relates to the national prejudices of the ancient Jews, to whom the calling of the Gentiles and the abrogation of the Mosaic system seemed impossible events, and to whom the prophet may be understood as saying, Do not imagine that because this dispensation has so long existed, it will last for ever, or that because you are so blindly attached to it, I will not be willing to annul it when the time for its cessation shall arrive, “for my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways.” But however good this sense may in itself be, it is far from being obvious in this connection, and refers the eighth verse to a remote and doubtful antecedent. Besides, as we have seen before, the terms of this whole passage cannot be understood as having reference merely to the Jewish dispensation. Even if that were the primary and obvious sense, we have abundant reason and authority to superadd another more extensive and more spiritual. But it is not the primary and obvious sense, as we have seen, and it is therefore necessary to connect the “for” with one of the clauses of the seventh verse. If with the first clause, then the eighth verse gives a reason for the call to reformation and repentance—“Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts—for my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways.” Here the same two words are placed in opposition—“ways” and “thoughts”—let the wicked, &c.,—that is, You cannot walk in my ways and the ways of sin; you cannot think my thoughts, and yet cherish thoughts of sin; sin and salvation are irreconcilable, and you must choose between them.

This is, to many who would fain escape perdition, "a hard saying." Having cherished the delusive hope that free salvation implies liberty to sin, they are painfully surprised at the discovery that God's ways and thoughts are wholly incompatible with theirs. They are afraid of hell, and they are willing to be saved from it, but that is all. That slavish fear is the sum of their religion. They must keep their sins. At first they plead for all sin, then for some; and as one after another is torn from them by the hand of the inexorable law, although their conscience, now enlightened, can no longer question or deny the truth, they hate what they acknowledge, they would gladly shut their eyes upon the light which has revealed to them this odious truth; and in the vain hope of escaping it, many—ah, how many!—"draw back to perdition," and as they rush along that downward course, they still hear that gracious but inexorable voice crying after them, "Turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die?" I have given my Son to die for sinners, and all who come unto me through him I will abundantly pardon; but the wicked *must* forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, for my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways—there is, there can be no communion between light and darkness, between Christ and Belial. Ah, my hearers, God only knows in how many ears this expostulating voice has rung, and rung in vain; how many sinners on the verge of death have stopped their ears against it, or at most have paused and listened, with one foot upon the precipice, perhaps looked back, and even wavered with a momentary impulse to return, and then for ever disappeared.

But there are others whom divine grace has arrested, even those upon the dizzy verge of that abyss, and made to hear the warning voice, and see the saving light as it shines upon this fundamental truth, that sin must be forsaken or the sinner cannot possibly be saved. But this conviction often generates a new doubt of another kind—I see it to be not only true but right that sin must be left, or God cannot pardon; but can he pardon even then, or if he can, will he pardon, will he pardon me? Can he, will he, pardon so abundantly that I shall be included? This misgiving, under Satan's artful and malignant influence, would drive men to despair, unless the grace of God prevent. The soul admits the freeness

and sufferings of Christ's atonement as a truth revealed, but rejects it practically against itself; it makes a merit of its unbelief, the cross fades from its view, its light begins to disappear, the invitations of the gospel are less audible, and at this crisis, some who did not sink before, sink now for ever; but to others, when the voice of man is hushed, the voice of God becomes more audible—a voice both of reproof and encouragement—"Who art thou, O man, that repliest against God? Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself." It is not man who pardons, it is God. It is not you who merit, it is Christ. As long as you stay away from him, nothing is pardoned, not even the least sin, it will sting your soul for ever; but come, and all is pardoned, abundantly pardoned. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord."

Man may be unforgiving when he is not just. God can be just, and yet not unforgiving. Oh, glorious difference! Man can be himself unjust, and yet condemn the innocent. God can be just, and yet justify the guilty. Judge not God by man. Judge not his mercy by the compassions of his erring creatures. The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel. Well, then, may he say to those who find such mercy too stupendous to be trusted in, "My thoughts are not as your thoughts," &c. God pardons nothing, or he pardons all. Let the convicted sinner cease to doubt—let him cease to linger, for any reason or on any pretext—let him cease to call in question either his danger or his guilt—let him cease, on the other hand, to make its greatness an excuse for unbelief or a pretext for despair;—but since he is in danger, imminent danger—since deliverance from it is so freely offered—since the grace which offers it is limited in time—since that grace will not save men *in* sin, but will freely save them *from* sin—since it will pardon sin itself to the believer, and whenever it pardons at all, will abundantly pardon even the chief of sinners—however foreign such forgiveness may be from human passions and human feelings, let the sinner hesitate and doubt no longer—"Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near:

let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon: for my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord: for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."



## XXVIII.

### Press toward the Mark.

“Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended; but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”—PHIL. iii. 13, 14.

WITHOUT attempting any formal exposition of the text or context, and without enlarging on the obvious allusion to the ancient games, from which the sacred writers borrow many of their strongest figures, such as that of *pressing forward to a mark for a prize* in the case before us, I propose to call your attention for a short time to the doctrine here suggested by the apostle’s own example, and explicitly taught elsewhere, that religion in the heart is a progressive principle—a principle impelling to progressive holiness—and that not merely by a positive appointment, but from its nature and the nature of the circumstances under which it operates—that this progressive character affords the only satisfactory evidence that piety exists at all, and is therefore necessary, not to an absolute assurance merely, but to a comfortable hope; and finally, that this new disposition to forget what is behind, and reach forth to that before, is a chief source of happiness to Christians here, and is to be a large ingredient of their blessedness hereafter.

In alleging that progress is essential to true piety, it is not, of course, intended to affirm that this essential progress is at all times equally discernible and marked, or that it can at any time be measured step by step; but merely that the changes which the soul is ever undergoing are, in the case of true conversion, on the whole, in one direction—to deny which on the ground of certain fluctuations, or because we cannot measure and compute the



progress with unerring accuracy, would be as absurd as to remain upon the beach at the mercy of a rising tide, because the motion of the waves, when separately looked at, is not uniform. If it be true in this case, that in spite of all apparent reflux, the sea is still encroaching steadily upon the land, until it reaches that mysterious point at which God says to it, *Hitherto shalt thou come, and no further, and here shall thy proud waves be stayed*; it is no less true that genuine religion in the heart, in spite of all its seeming fluctuations, rises and still rises, and that this rise must at some intervals, greater or smaller, become visible and palpable, and may not therefore be assumed at pleasure, when appearances, not only in some one case, but in every case, and always, are entirely against it. Let no man therefore judge his neighbour as a hypocrite because he thinks he sees a retrograde movement as to some particular, or on some occasion; nor let any man adjudge himself a saint, and cherish the belief that the standard of his piety is rising in the gross when it is evidently sinking in detail; but where we see another making progress from year to year, or month to month, if not from week to week, or day to day, let us thank God for the grace that is given unto him; and when, on the other hand, we find ourselves from day to day, or week to week, receding, let us not dream that at the month's end, or the year's end, the defect will cure itself, or even that past attainments will atone for future losses; but forgetting that which is behind, let us reach forth to that which is before.

The authority of Scripture is sufficient to establish that the fact alleged, as to the progressive nature of religion, is so. That it must be so, may be further argued from the nature of the subject in which the change is wrought, from the nature of the cause by which it is effected, from the nature of the means employed in its production, from the nature of the end designed to be effected, and from the nature of the change itself so far as it can be distinctly scrutinized.

And, first, it may be argued from the nature of the subject, which is man, an active being, one essentially active. As the soul, anterior to conversion, was in progress, going from one degree of evil to another, strengthening its habits, settling its judgments, fixing its affections, so it may and must be expected to

make progress in the new direction given to it, unless there be something in the very nature of a saving change adverse to such a process; but this, as we shall see, is so far from being true, that what may be said of the natural condition of the soul, may be still more emphatically said of its new state, that it cannot be happy without progress; nay, that whether happy or not, it cannot exist without progress, because it cannot exist without some exercise of its powers and affections,—and this very exercise gives strength, and this increase of strength is progress. Because man, then, is the subject of the change which takes place in conversion, there is reason to believe that the new character imparted to the soul will not continue as it is, but constantly become more marked and permanent.

The same thing seems to follow from the nature of the power which effects the change. If this effect could be ascribed to chance, or to a momentary impulse, it might be expected to continue as it is at first, or even to cease and disappear; but when the power of God, almighty and unceasing, is the sole efficient cause of what we call conversion, it seems unreasonable to suppose that that cause is to operate for ever, or even for a time, with a view merely to the sustentation of these faint beginnings of a spiritual life which we experience within us. If the spark which grace has kindled had been left to itself, or to the feeble breath of mortals to preserve it, we might well suppose that nothing more than its continued existence was intended; but when we find an unbroken current of life-giving air from the breath of the Almighty brought to play upon that spark, we may conclude with safety that it was meant to glow and kindle to a flame, and that the flame was meant to rise and spread, and to become a conflagration; so that what at first was but a seed of fire, smothered in ashes, drenched in rain, or blown at random by the viewless winds, shall yet light up the whole horizon, and dye the very heavens with its crimson.

Look again at the *means* which are employed for the implanting of religion in the soul, and judge by these whether it was intended to be shortlived or stationary. If we found no other means employed but those of a natural and ordinary nature, such as human wisdom might devise and human power set in motion,

then we might plausibly infer that what we now have in possession is the whole that God intended to bestow upon us, and might strive to rest contented with our actual attainments. But, my hearers, could it be to keep alive such piety as you and I possess, without improvement or increase, that God the Father gave his Son to die, and that God the Son assumed our nature, took our place, paid our debt, and bore our chastisement? Was it that you and I might be for ever what we now are, even granting that our hopes of salvation were well-founded? Is it for this that the Almighty Spirit bloweth where it listeth, and though grieved from many a hard heart, returns and lights again that spark which sin quenched, and opens the blind eyes, and teaches the poor stammering tongue of the wretched sinner how to pray; yea, itself maketh intercession for him with groanings, with groanings that cannot be uttered? Is there not in the seeming prodigality of means so infinite, so godlike, a presumptive proof that these effects which we experience are but partial and inchoate, that the end is not yet, and that it doth not yet appear what we shall, what we must be, to attain not only the great end of our existence, but the end for which a sovereign God has moved all heaven, and, as it were, poured himself out upon creatures? O my brethren, if such are the means which God has used to bring us thus far, we must not stop here, we must go on, we must go on, we must forget what is behind, we must reach forth to that which is before. Remember, too, that such an agent cannot use such means without a purpose, and an adequate purpose.

What, then, is the end for which this change is wrought, if wrought at all? Not mere deliverance from present pain. That does not always follow in fact, and if it did, would be wholly disproportioned to the power working and the means employed. Not mere deliverance from future misery, for that is still inadequate. Not even man's restoration, though this is infinitely more and better than the others; but it is not all. If the ultimate end of all this were in man, he would usurp God's place: there cannot be two Gods—there cannot be two last great ends to be accomplished; it is all for God or none—it is for God—it is for God—it is for his praise and glory that the whole work is accomplished. And, my hearers, can it be that the whole tribute of our rational

and spiritual natures to the honour of our Maker, is this feeble, faint beginning of spiritual life which we profess to feel within us? Is this all? Oh, if almighty power, and benevolence, and wisdom have provided a sacrifice of infinite merit, and a spiritual influence of boundless efficacy, and have brought these means to bear upon our miserable souls, not for our own sakes, but that God may be honoured by our restoration to the knowledge and enjoyment of the highest good; where shall the limits of that knowledge and enjoyment be assigned, so long as God is God, his praise the end of our existence, and his desert of praise as endless as his being? O my hearers, if we are saved to honour God, and if we can never honour him enough, surely we may not, dare not think of remaining as we are, if that were possible. Surely, if we would answer the great end of our salvation, we must forget that which is behind, and reach forth to that which is before.

Once more the nature of the *change itself*, so far as Scripture and experience reveal it, shows that it is but an incipient change, and must be carried on for ever. What does the change consist in? Not in anything external, not in anything corporeal, but in the mind, and yet not in the structure of the mind; not in the creation of new faculties or in the destruction of old ones, but in new desires, dispositions, and affections. These must have their objects, and their actings on these objects must increase their strength, enlarge their scope, and stimulate their energies. If God, then, has created new desires within us, or the desire of new objects, to wit, holiness, and truth, and God himself, and if these new desires from their very nature reproduce themselves, and if this process cannot possibly be cut short by the failure of the objects which are infinite, then surely from the very nature of the change which God has wrought upon us if we are converted, we not only may, but must go on. If we are changed at all, we must be changed still further. If we are not what we once were, if we have left as it were ourselves behind, we must forget ourselves, we must forget what is behind, we must reach forth to that which is before. Thus from the nature of the subject of the change, namely, the soul of man; from the nature of the power by which the change is wrought, namely, the power of God; from the nature of the means employed, namely, the death of Christ to save from death

and purchase life, and the influence of the Spirit to produce life in us; from the nature of the end proposed, namely, the endless glory of an infinite being; and from the essential nature of the change itself, consisting in such a new creation and direction of the powers as must necessarily result in spiritual progression; from all this, as well as from the express declarations of the word of God, confirmed by the experience of all true converts, it is plain, it is certain, that whoever has come thus far must go further; that no one may, or can rely upon, or be contented with, that which is behind, but must forget that which is behind, and still reach forth to that which is before.

It seems to me that these considerations are abundantly sufficient to evince that the divine intention in effecting such a change as some of us profess to have experienced is, that we should go on further and for ever glorifying God by new degrees of holiness and new acts of obedience. And unless we are prepared to disown the authority of that God who is not only our Creator but our Saviour, we must humbly acknowledge that a solemn and eternal obligation rests upon us, no matter what we have attained or may attain hereafter; to forget, in a certain sense, all that is behind, and to reach forth to that which is before. But it has pleased God to enforce those obligations under which his sole authority suffices to lay us, by showing us how clearly our own interest depends not only on obedience to his will in general, but on submission to his will in this particular, and on a cheerful co-operation with it. In the case before us this is clear from the fact, that if progress is essential to the very nature of a saving change, there can, of course, be no proof of its having taken place, in which this circumstance is not involved. The present is transitory; what is future now will be past in a moment, and so on for ever. Before us and behind us stretch the future and the past. Our hopes and fears from their very nature have relation to the future, yet we seek to found them upon something in the past. Even while we lean forward with intense anxiety to scan the future, we still cast a longing, lingering look behind, at something there on which to fasten as a ground of hope. So, in seeking to satisfy ourselves that we have undergone the change which is essential to salvation, we accumulate and hoard up our experiences, even when their

emptiness is proved by subsequent events; our native disposition is to trust in that which is behind, whereas the Scriptures teach us to tread upon it, that we may rise higher, and instead of believing that all will be well hereafter, because we thought that all was well some time ago, to grapple with futurity itself, to hasten towards the consummation of our course, not by recalling what we once thought and felt, but by thinking now and feeling now as God requires us to think and feel with respect to what is coming.

We are like one sailing down a rapid stream, intensely anxious as to the issue of our voyage, and fearful of the dangers which await us, and yet turning our backs on both, and trying to derive encouragement from gazing at that portion of our course already past, and every moment growing less and less visible. Of what avail, to such a mariner, is even a distinct view of some distant point long since swept by, when his vessel is approaching some perilous pass, or passing through some vast and foaming estuary into the deep sea. Oh, surely it is then time to forget what is past, and to bend forward to reach forth to that which is before. My hearers, we may please ourselves with other proofs of piety, but if we would be well assured that we have moved at all from our original position, we must move still further. We may spend our lives in measuring or guessing at the distance passed already, but the strongest assurance of our having come to any given point in the appointed course, is furnished by our travelling beyond it to another. Are you doubtful whether you have come as far as you imagine? then go further. Are you doubtful whether you possess as much religion as you fain would think? then try to possess more, and the attainment of the greater will involve the attainment of the less. To you especially, my hearers, who believe that you have lately found the entrance to the way everlasting, and yet can scarcely believe you have passed through it, make assurance doubly sure by leaving the entrance door afar behind you. If you would have a satisfactory persuasion that the world, and the flesh, and the devil are forsaken, you must attain it not by standing still, and looking at your past course either with complacency or doubt, but by forgetting that which is behind, and reaching forth to that which is before.

God, by making this the only solid ground of confidence that

you are saved, has shut you up to the necessity of progress, has compelled you to move on, if you would know and be assured that you have moved at all. And thus he brings your personal anxieties and care for your own safety to enforce the obligation of a duty which, although you could not utterly neglect it, might have been too carelessly performed. Not only because God commands it, but because you cannot otherwise be sure of your conversion, you must learn to forget that which is behind, and to reach forth to that which is before.

But there is yet another way in which the same thing is accomplished. All that has just been said would be true if stagnation or repose in religious life were possible. I have hitherto proceeded on the supposition that the only alternative is progress or stagnation; that the worst which can befall the soul which will not go on is, that it must stand still. And I have tried to show that even then it would be aggravated sin and folly not to advance. But oh, how unspeakably is this conclusion strengthened by the fact which I have hitherto left out of view, that there is no such thing as standing still, or resting on your oars. Forward or backward, up or down the stream, you must and will go. Yes, my hearers, reason and experience but echo the instructions of God's word as to this momentous truth, and I call them both to witness, to set to their seal that God is true, when he declares that from him that hath not, that is, hath not more abundantly, who does not gain, who does not make advances, shall be taken away even that he hath.

It would be easy to show from the very constitution of our nature and the circumstances in which we are placed, the reason of this universal fact; but I choose rather to appeal to your experience, and ask you when you ever wilfully neglected or ceased to use the means of improvement without a positive deterioration. Let us take it for granted, as we safely may, that the choice is not between onward motion and repose, but between onward motion and recession. Will the convalescent choose to be a convalescent all his life, instead of seeking to regain his health? Does he not know that unless he soon regains it, he may look for a relapse, and for peril of death greater than before. He does, he does, and so may you, my hearers. God has shut you up to the necessity of going on, by limiting your choice to that or going

back; by showing you that motion cannot be avoided; that you must rise or sink; that you must grow worse or better; that you must draw nearer to God, or be driven further from him; that you must love him more than you do now, or love him less; that you must go on and live, or go back and die; that however unprepared you may have been for the necessity now laid upon you—however far you have been from foreseeing the solemnity and peril of the juncture where you now are, it is even so, it is too late to seek another choice, another alternative; you are shut up for ever to this one, you must either forget what is before, retrace your steps, repent of your repentance, and go back to that which is behind; or, on the other hand, forgetting that which is behind, you must reach forth to that which is before.

And now, my hearers, how are you disposed to regard this law of the new life, which forbids not only retrocession but repose, which insists upon perpetual progression, and accepts of nothing short of this progression as conclusive evidence of its own existence? Are you ready to say, as the disciples said of old, "This is a hard saying, who can hear it?" Are you ready, like some of them, to go back from the Saviour and walk no more with him? Ah! consider what you do, and if such thoughts rise within you, crush them, I pray you, in their very birth. For I assure you that this, so far from being cruel, is a merciful economy, required not only by God's honour, but your interest; a dispensation tending purely and directly to your highest happiness in time and in eternity, so that if you could but see its operation and its issue, you would rather die than be subjected to a different constitution,—that is, one which should allow you to go backwards, and to stagnate instead of urging you for ever onwards. And you would thus choose, not because you felt yourself constrained to sacrifice a present and inferior good for a greater one still future; not because you were enabled by divine grace to forego all ease and happiness at present, lest you should finally come short of it for ever, but because you would perceive in this "hard saying;" this inexorable law of progress, an exhaustless source of purest satisfaction, an unfaltering incitement to exertion, an abundant consolation under trials. Yes, the trials of the Christian would be hard indeed to bear, bitter alike in blossom and in fruit, if it were not



for this new-born and immortal disposition to know more, to do more, to rise higher, to grow better, to grow more like God, to approach nearer to him, and the accompanying disposition to regard the past, not past sins, but past attainments, as a mere fulcrum, a mere stepping-stone, a round upon the spiritual ladder, by which higher things may be attained.

But this conviction, reasonably as it might be founded on the daily experience of its efficacy even in the least affairs of life, cannot be felt in all its strength until it is obtruded, forced upon the mind, by the working of the self-same principle in great emergencies and critical junctures ; as, for instance, when the mind is first awakened by the Spirit to a sense of sin. Remember, oh, remember, when that light first beamed into your soul with an intolerable brightness, and you saw yourself, your heart, your past life, your innumerable sins, set before you in a light which you could neither bear nor shut your eyes upon. Recur to that point of your spiritual history, recall the feelings which that retrospect produced ; the shame, the sorrow, the remorse, the self-abhorrence, and I do not ask you whether you could then have consented to remain in that abyss of filth and darkness where you saw yourself to have been rolling till the voice of God aroused you, and a light from heaven showed you your condition ; for with such views that would be impossible. You could not thus repent of your repentance, and become your former self again. But I ask you whether you could have consented, or whether you can wish that you had been left to languish and to stagnate till the end of life ; not, indeed, within that slough, but just without it, on its verge, in sight of it, in sight of nothing better ; safe, safe, but only safe without the power or desire of onward progress ; chained for a lifetime to the contemplation of what you had been ; forced to look upon the hideous corruption of your former state, without relapsing into it, but at the same time without getting further from it than at the moment of your actual deliverance ; a shipwrecked sailor chained to the rock on which he had found refuge ; a convalescent leper, bound at the threshold of the lazar house, whose poison he had been for years inhaling. Could you have borne it ? No, my hearer, you could not.\*

\* The conclusion of this sermon is wanting.



## XXIX.

### Pray without Ceasing.

“ And he spake a parable unto them *to this end*, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint; saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man : And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. And he would not for a while : but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; yet, because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me. And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them ? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth ? ”—LUKE xviii. 1-8.

ALL is not easy that appears so to a hasty, superficial observation, which is apt to mistake the simplicity of strength for the simplicity of weakness. The most wonderful discoveries, when once made, may seem obvious. The highest creations of genius appear level to the humblest capacity. The profoundest wisdom often shows no more surface than the shallowest folly. Of this the parables of Christ are eminent examples. Many a sage and scholar has neglected them as only fit for children. Others have looked upon them as befitting themes for first attempts and young beginners in the work of exposition. The best corrective of this error is experiment. As few have failed to entertain it, few, perhaps, have used this means without being undeceived. What appeared at first incapable of two interpretations, is successively subjected to a dozen. Whatever this may argue with respect to the interpreter, so far as the Scriptures are themselves concerned, it is not a fault, but a perfection.

These divine discourses were intended to accomplish more than one end, and to this variety of purpose their structure is adapted with an exquisite precision. Some were to see clearly, more were

to be dazzled. They were also meant, at least in many cases, to be variously applied. A lesson crowded with allusions to the actual condition of our Lord's immediate hearers, is often so constructed that these very points enforce its application to a thousand other cases wholly different externally. Either from this or other causes, there is sometimes an illusion, like that produced by a painting, seen from a certain point of observation, while from any other it is a distorted daub. The imagery of the parables, when seen from a particular distance, may be definite in outline, faultless in perspective, perfect in colouring. But approach a little nearer, and the figures lose their symmetry, the tints their richness. This is often a key to the correct mode of exposition. It forbids the coarse manipulation of the little-souled grammarian, no less than the cloudy indistinctness of the speculative dreamer. It compels the one to stand back, and the other to draw near, until they both see neither too much nor too little, but precisely what they ought to see, and must see, if they would see to any purpose. In this way, some of the most valuable lessons may be learned as to the folly of over-refinement and extravagant minuteness in the explanation of strong figures.

But sometimes this advantage seems to be precluded or diminished by a doubt as to the general design of the whole parable. This doubt may extend to the very doctrine taught, or be restricted to its application. The truth embodied in some parables is plain, but it may be questioned whether it is predicted of the Jews or the disciples, or some other class exclusively, or meant to be applied to men in general. In other cases, both the doctrine and the application may be clear; but there is something obscure in the mode of illustration, an apparent incongruity between the substance and the shadow. This appearance often springs from a misapprehension of the image or its use, and then occurs one of those instances of self-interpretation which have already been mentioned. As soon as the true principle is once applied, the incongruity is gone. This proves the principle itself to be correct, and furnishes, or may furnish, valuable aid in solving other cases.

To this last class belongs the parable from which the text is taken. There is no indistinctness in the images themselves, nor

any doubt as to what they were designed to represent. The widow and the judge stand out before the mind's eye as fully and clearly as the forms of flesh and blood which we remember seeing yesterday or expect to see to-morrow. The widow's wrong, the judge's wickedness, his equal scorn of God and man, the prayer, the refusal, the return, the ceaseless importunity, the selfish tyrant's reasoning with himself—all this is like an object of sense. We do not merely read—we see, we hear, we feel it as a real, present living spectacle.

The moral, too, is not left to be guessed at or inferred; it is explicitly propounded. This parable was uttered for a certain end, to teach a certain lesson, to produce a determinate effect; and that was, that they who heard it should pray always and not faint, nor give up, or desert their post—the Greek word having properly a military sense and application. As to the length which we may go in applying it, the only question that has ever been raised is, whether it had a special reference to the prayers of Christ's disciples after he should leave them, till he came again for the destruction of their nation. But even if it had been so intended, it is one of those cases where the lesson taught to one class is evidently universal in its nature and the purpose of the teacher.

This is the more certain here because the terms used are so comprehensive, and without any qualifying adjunct. "He spake a parable unto them to this end, that it is right or binding to pray always." If, then, there is any obscurity or doubt, it is neither in the images presented, nor in the doctrine taught, nor, to any practical effect, in its application. But it lies in an apparent incongruity between the illustration and the thing which it illustrates. This may be rendered palpable by placing type and antitype over against each other. That the elect of God should be represented by the wronged and helpless widow, agrees well with the fact and with the usage of the Scriptures. But the prayers which these are bound to offer without ceasing, must be prayers to God; and, therefore, he would seem to be the object corresponding to the judge of the parable.

But this judge is an unjust judge; he neither fears God, nor respects man. He has no restraining motives either here or here-

after. In addition to this general habitual corruption, he is actually guilty in this very case of gross injustice. He is faithless to his trust in refusing to discharge the solemn duties of his office. He perverts the right by constantly refusing to redress the wrongs of the injured. When at last he consents to do so, it is from the meanest and most selfish motive. It is merely to escape trouble and annoyance,—“Lest by her continual coming she weary me.” Between this character, this conduct, and this motive for a change of conduct, on one hand, and the reasons for our importunity in prayer, upon the other, what connection, what resemblance is there or can there be?

To some the difficulty may seem hopeless, as their rules of interpretation force them to admit that the unjust judge is here a type or representative of God as the hearer of prayer, and that being such, there must be a minute resemblance of the type and antitype. There have been those who would not scruple to assume and carry out this monstrous notion. They would say, perhaps, that the resemblance is a limited specific one; that God resembles the unjust judge only in his turning a deaf ear to the petitions of his people, and in granting their requests because of their unceasing importunity. In order to sustain this view, they are compelled to extenuate the guilt of the unjust judge, and to exaggerate the supposed resemblance between him and God, lest the comparison should be revolting.

But this is utterly at variance with the drift and with the terms of the description. Why is it said that the judge was an “unjust” one? Why is it said that he “feared not God, neither regarded man?” These terms prohibit all extenuation. They are evidently added for the very purpose of determining the character. Injustice and contempt of God and man, are not incidentally mentioned; they are prominent. They do not modify the character; they constitute it. It is as an “unjust judge” that he is held up to our view; and, lest we should mistake his quality, we are told that he neither feared God nor respected man. This accumulation of condemnatory phrases makes it certain that the wickedness of the judge is an essential stroke in the description. The idea evidently is, that the worse we make him out, the better we shall understand the parable. We cannot, therefore, substitute

a merely careless, sluggish, or forgetful judge, much less a weak, but honest one, without destroying all the point and meaning of the apologue.

How, then, are we to reconcile this seeming incongruity? How can the conduct of this selfish tyrant to a helpless sufferer, be any illustration of a just and merciful God's dealing with "his own elect?" One thing, at least, is certain, that in this, and by parity of reasoning in all like cases, it does not follow, because two things are compared in one point, that they must be alike in every other; nor even that they must be alike in all the points which are specifically mentioned. For neither the character in general, nor the conduct in this one case, nor the motive for reforming it, can possibly have any counterpart in the divine nature or dispensations. The only points of contact are the mutual relation of the parties as petitioner and sovereign, the withholding of the thing requested and its subsequent bestowal. In all the rest there is, there can be no resemblance; there is perfect contrariety.

Why, then, was this unsuitable image chosen even for the sake of illustration? Why was not the Hearer of Prayer represented by a creature bearing more of his own image? Why was not the judge of the parable a conscientious, faithful magistrate, who, though compelled to put off a compliance with the prayer of the poor widow, still designed to grant it, and allowed her to come often and return unsatisfied, in order that her wishes might be kept upon the stretch until it became possible to satisfy them? Because this would not have answered our Lord's purpose, but would only have taught feebly by comparison what is now taught mightily by contrast. The certainty of our prayers being answered could not possibly be strengthened or evinced by any similar proceeding upon man's part. The ground of confidence here furnished is not the similitude of God to man, but their infinite disparity. The argument implied is not, that if imperfect goodness goes so far, that perfect goodness must go further; but, that if a certain good effect may be expected to arise fortuitously out of what is evil, it may surely be expected to arise necessarily out of what is good. If even such a character, governed by such motives, may be rationally expected to take a certain course, however alien from his native disposition and his habits, there can be

no risk in counting on a like result where all these adverse circumstances favour it.

This view of the parable, or of the reasoning involved in it, as founded not on mere comparison, but contrast, does away at once with the necessity of strained constructions and unnatural refinements. Instead of trying to exculpate the unrighteous judge, or even to extenuate his guilt, we are at liberty, or rather under the necessity of taking the description in its strongest sense. The worse he is, the better for the beauty and effect of our Saviour's illustration. We are also freed from the necessity of seeking points of fanciful resemblance between this ideal person and the Father of Mercies, to whom all flesh come as to the Hearer of Prayer. When the object is no longer to assimilate, but to distinguish and confront as opposites, we may give the language of the text its full force, without any fear of blasphemy or even of irreverence.

The three main points of the antithesis are these—the character, the practice, and the motive of the judge—his moral character, his official practice, and his motive for acting upon this occasion in a manner contrary to both. His official practice is intimated by the word unjust applied to him near the conclusion of the parable. If this were meant to be descriptive merely of his inward dispositions, it would add nothing to the previous description. It refers more probably to the habitual discharge of his functions, to his exercise of power. He was not only destitute of any love to justice or any wish to do it, but unjust in practice. The interior source of this exterior conduct is then described in other terms. He feared not God. He neither revered him as a sovereign, nor dreaded him as an avenger. Without this fear, justice is impossible. He only can command who knows how to obey. He only can direct the fears of men to right and wholesome uses, who is himself governed by the fear of God. A judge who “fears not God,” is of necessity an “unjust judge.”

But this, though decisive of the real character, is not necessarily so of the outward conduct. If the acts of men were always an unerring index of their moral state, the world would be a very different world from what it is. If human society depended for its temporal advantages exclusively on genuine virtue, it would

soon come to an end. There are appearances of goodness which, although abominable in the sight of God, are highly esteemed among men, and for that very reason have a social, civil, or political value, wholly irrespective of their moral worth or worthlessness. These outside virtues, having no pure fountain in the heart, must spring from other sources. They are not the fruit of politic contrivance and collusion, being only overruled for civil ends by Providence. Their real source is in the selfishness of those who practise them.

Among the motives which may act upon this principle, not the least potent is the fear of man. This may include the dread of his displeasure, the desire of his applause, and an instinctive shrinking even from his scorn. Shame, fear, ambition, all may contribute to produce an outward goodness having no real counterpart within. This is particularly true of public and official acts. How many magistrates and office-bearers, who have no right principle to guide or check them, are controlled by a regard to the decencies of life, to the conventional exactions of society, in short, to public sentiment. Such fear not God but man. They can brave the terrors of eternity, but not the nearer retributions of the present life. They can consent to risk their souls, but not to jeopard their respectability. Under the influence of this selfish but most salutary fear, they do what they would otherwise leave undone, and abstain from what would otherwise be done without a scruple.

There would thus seem to be three grounds for expecting justice and fidelity in human society, and especially in public trusts. The first and highest is the fear of God, including all religious motives—then the fear of man or a regard to public sentiment—and last, the force of habit, the authority of precedent, a disposition to do that which has been done before, because it has been done before. These three impulsive forces do not utterly exclude each other. They may co-exist in due subordination. They may all be necessary to a complete official character. The first in that case must control the others, but the others, under that control, may answer an important purpose. The man who fears God does not, on that account, despise the judgment of his fellows, though it cannot be to him the ultimate, supreme rule of his conduct.



The same is true of a regard to settled usage, or even to personal habit, when correctly formed. Indeed, these latter motives never have so powerful an influence for good, as when they act in due subordination to the fear of God. It is only when this is wanting, and they undertake to fill its place, that they become unlawful or objectionable. And even then, although they cannot make good the deficiency in God's sight, they may make it good in man's. Although the root of the matter is not in them, a short-lived verdure may be brought out and maintained by artificial means. In this case, the defect is one which cannot be supplied. But even where the secondary lower motives fail or cease to act, the consequence may be unhappy. The most conscientious man, who disregards the public sentiment or tramples on established usage, may do far less than he might have done, though far more than the demagogue who lives on popular applause, or the precisian who acknowledges no higher law than custom. The want of any one of these impulsive forces may detract from the completeness of the ultimate effect. How much more the absence of them all!

If the judge, for instance, who is governed by the fear of God, and pays due respect to the opinion of mankind, may fall short of the standard, through a want of fixed habit, or contempt of settled usage; if he who, in addition to this, sets at nought the judgment of his fellows, sinks still lower in the scale, how low must he sink who has not even honesty, much less religion, to compensate for his minor errors! In other words, how utterly unjust must that judge be who neither fears God nor regards man. It seems then, that the few words which our Saviour uses, are so happily chosen and so well applied as to exhaust the subject, by affording a description of an absolutely worthless judge, on whom none of the ordinary motives to fidelity have any influence, and from whom nothing, therefore, can be expected. What could be more hopeless than the case of the poor widow at the feet of such a tyrant? If he knows neither fear nor shame—if there is nothing to restrain him either in the present or the future—if she has not the means of appealing to his avarice—how clear it seems that his refusal to avenge her is a final one, and that continued importunity can only waste time and provoke him to new insult.

I dwell on these particulars to show that, in their aggregate, they are intended to convey the idea of a hopeless case. The petitioner was helpless—she was poor—she was at the mercy of her enemies. The judge was habitually unjust, and uninfluenced either by the fear of God or by respect for man. What is this but to say—and to say in the most graphic and expressive manner—that the case is hopeless—that her importunity is vain? And yet she perseveres; so have thousands in like cases. Why? Because there is nothing more to lose, even though there may be nothing to hope. And there always is some room for hope. For hope does not depend on certainties nor even probabilities, but on possibilities. When there can be no change for the worse, and a change for the better is even barely possible, men will hope, from the very constitution of their nature. When the widow's case is said to be hopeless, it is not said with respect to her own feeling, but with respect to any rational, appreciable ground of hope. She hopes against hope. An indomitable instinct triumphs over reason. She persists in her entreaties. So have thousands

The ideal case was meant to bring before us a familiar practice. It is equivalent to saying, Men in such situations still confide in the effect of importunity. When everything seems plainly to forbid it, they persist, because success is possible, and on that possibility the natural repugnance to despair exerts itself. Yes, even in the most discouraging condition, men will pray to their fellow-men, so long as there is a possibility of having what they ask. And in this perseverance they are often justified by the event. Of this fact too, the widow's case is but a type. With every reason to cease praying, she prayed on, and she was heard at last. When every higher motive failed, a lower one was still available. She could not bribe, but she could weary him. He who neither feared God nor regarded man, was tenderly mindful of his own ease. He did not say, "lest God be angry," or "lest man despise me," but he said, "lest by her continual coming she weary me." This might have seemed a frail foundation for the hope of the petitioner, or rather it would never have occurred to her as likely to decide her case, and yet, on this it turned at last. Lest she should weary him he did her justice. Her continued importunity was therefore justified by its success. She did well in con-

tinuing to urge her claim, however little reason she might have to look for its success. The widow in the parable, and those of whom she is the type or representative, do right, act reasonably in thus persevering, even where the case seems desperate and every rational consideration is in favour of abandoning the suit.

There is often a divine art in our Saviour's parables, by which we are led unawares to pass judgment on ourselves. This is sometimes recorded as the actual effect produced upon the unbelieving Jews. But the effect is often still more general. It arises partly from the peculiarities of structure which have been described. The indistinctness of the images presented seems at times to be intended to disguise the final application of the lesson till its truth is fully recognised. In this way the Pharisees were made to utter their own sentence, and in this way we too may become our own judges without knowing. The simpler, the more natural the case supposed, the more tremendous is the force of its recoil upon the real object.

In the parable before us, we are all led irresistibly to own that the widow's persevering application to the unjust judge was rational and right, although apparently the case was hopeless. Though there seemed to be nothing in the character, the habits, or the circumstances of the judge, on which a reasonable expectation could be founded, yet we know that she was right, because she gained her end, and that not by accident, but in a way entirely natural and likely to occur again. The true force and application of the parable may best be shown by varying the ideal case presented, first a little, and then more, until it merges in the real case it was intended to illustrate.

The conclusion which we have already reached is, that the widow in the parable did right, acted a reasonable part, in hoping against hope, and still persisting in her suit when everything combined to prove it hopeless. If so, the converse of the proposition must be true; and by abandoning her suit or suspending her entreaties, she would have been chargeable with folly and with sin proportioned to the interests at stake. If it had been her own subsistence merely, that would be enough to condemn her dereliction; how much more if that of others were dependent on the same decision! She would have had no right to sacrifice the

comfort and tranquillity, much less the life or the salvation of her children to her own despondency or weariness of effort. All this is certain, and will be at once admitted in the case which the parable supposes, to wit, that of an unjust, unmerciful, and selfish judge, "who feared not God, neither regarded man."

But let us suppose that he had been an upright, conscientious, faithful judge, whose execution of his office was delayed by some mistake or want of information. How much less excusable would she have then been in relinquishing her rights or those of others in despair! Suppose, again, that there had not been even ignorance or error on the judge's part to make the issue doubtful, but that his decision was delayed by temporary circumstances which were likely soon to have an end. The case would then be stronger still, and the folly of abandoning the suit still greater.

But advance another step. Imagine that the granting of the widow's prayer had been deferred for the sake of the petitioner herself, in order that the favour when obtained might be enhanced in value. Suppose that, instead of knowing that the judge was in principle and habit unjust, she had known him, by experience, to be just and merciful, as well as eminently wise. Suppose that she had been protected by him, and her wrongs redressed in many other cases. Suppose that she had, even in the present case, his promise, nay, his oath that justice should be done her. How easy must it then have been to trust! How doubly mad and wicked to despair!

There seems to be room for only one more supposition. Those which have been stated, from the lowest to the highest, all imply the *possibility* of error or delinquency, however strong the reasons for expecting the actual exercise of wisdom and integrity. But now remove this possibility. Exclude all chance of intellectual or moral wrong. Enlarge the attributes before supposed, until they reach infinity or absolute perfection. What, then, would be left as the foundation or the pretext of a doubt? The bare fact of delay? Under this pretence, suppose the suitor to despair and to renounce his suit. Is not this, indeed, a case of madness too extreme to be supposed, because it could not occur often, even if it occurred once? Alas, my hearers, this extreme case is our own! It is to this view of ourselves that the consummate wis-

dom of the Master brings us by a way that we knew not. Just so far as we practically doubt the promises of God, or fail to use the means of his appointment, we reverse the conduct of the widow in the parable, and that, too, under the most aggravating circumstances. If she was wise in hoping against hope, what must we be in despairing against evidence ?

From this conviction we perhaps take refuge in the false view of the parable before exposed. We would fain deny the possibility of arguing from one case to the other. For this purpose we exaggerate and multiply the points of difference. She asked for justice ; we for mercy or free favour. Her judge was unjust, impious, and reckless ; ours is the infinitely Holy God. She gained her end by exhausting his patience ; but “the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary.” How, then, can we be either bound or condemned by her example ? Because she at last wearied an unjust judge into doing right in order to escape a worse annoyance, what ground have we to hope that we can weary the Most High into compliance with our wishes ? It need scarcely be said now, that this is not the true state of the case. The true state of the case is this : if she would have been chargeable with sin and folly in despairing of justice from an unjust, impious, and reckless judge, who feared not God neither regarded man, what may we be charged with if we despair of mercy, freely offered, dearly purchased, clearly promised, on the part of God himself ? If she was right in trusting to the selfish love of ease in such a man, how wrong must we be in distrusting the benevolence, the faithfulness, the truth of such a God !

Every point of dissimilitude between the cases does but serve to make our own still worse and less excusable, by bringing into shocking contrast men’s dependence on the worst of their own species, with their want of confidence in God. For what the widow in the parable did, all men do substantially. They will not be deprived of any temporal hope, however great the human wickedness which seems to crush it. On the contrary, they will not, in a multitude, alas, a vast majority of cases, be persuaded to trust God, and to prove their trust by importunity in prayer, however ample the encouragement, however strong and unequivocal the promise.

The extensive application of the lesson here taught is apparent from the nature of the principles involved. It is impossible to feign a case at all analogous, to which it may not be as properly applied as to the one expressly mentioned. The only grounds of limitation which have ever been suggested, are the supposed reference to the downfall of Jerusalem, and an alleged restriction of the parable by Christ himself to the specific grant of *vengeance* on the enemies of his elect. The first has been already shown to be really no limitation, even if the primary intention were the one supposed. The other rests upon a twofold misconception. In the first place, the avenging here meant is judicial or forensic vindication ; the redress of wrongs endured, and the assertion of disputed rights. The adversaries meant, as appears from the form of the original expression, are the adverse party in a case of litigation. There is no allusion, therefore, to the gratification of malicious or revengeful passions. In the next place, even if there were, it would belong to the type and not to the antitype, and be no better reason for restricting the import of the passage, than the fact that the petitioner is represented as a widow. Because the ideal judge says, "I will *avenge* her, lest by her continual coming she weary me," our Lord, adapting his expressions to the case supposed, says, "Shall not God do likewise ; shall not he *avenge* his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them ?" This evidently means, Shall he not at last hear their prayers, though he long defer an answer ? So instead of saying, Yes, he will surely hear them, he still retains the costume of the parable in answering his own demand, "I tell you that he will *avenge* them speedily," that is, he will do what they ask more certainly, because for reasons altogether different, and from motives infinitely higher than those for which the unjust judge consented to *avenge* his helpless but importunate petitioner.

But how shall it be speedily, when by the very supposition it is long deferred ? Because the longest term of expectation, when surveyed by an eye of faith, and not of doubt or jealous apprehension, will be short enough to the believer ; and because continued expectation of the right sort, while it fortifies his faith, is constantly diminishing the period of its exercise. If we really believe that God will grant us our petitions, we shall gladly

acquiesce in his appointed time, and own, when he "avenges" us, whether it be sooner or later, that he did it "speedily." The only question is, Have we that faith to which, as to the Lord himself, "one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day?" The only difficulty of the case is in ourselves, and hence the Saviour winds up his divine instructions with a "nevertheless," that is, notwithstanding the immense weight of preponderating reasons for implicit confidence in God, expressed by importunity in prayer—notwithstanding the gross folly, and the aggravated guilt of that despondency which "casts off fear and restrains prayer before God"—though the faith required is so simple, so reasonable, so delightful—is it common, is it ever to be universal? The reasons for believing are the most complete and satisfactory conceivable. "Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth? This solemn question comes home just as really to us, as if we were to meet the Lord on earth to-morrow. And if we would answer it aright, let us remember that the faith in question is a faith that must be proved and exercised by prayer; so that if men would either have it or demonstrate that they have it, they "ought always to pray, and not to faint."



### XXX.

## True and False Fear.

“They feared the Lord, and served their own gods.”—2 KINGS xvii. 33.

“THE fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge”—“the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,” are two of Solomon’s most pregnant maxims (Prov. i. 7; ix. 10); or rather two forms of the same, which is again repeated in the Book of Psalms (cxi. 10). The word “beginning” in all these cases, may be strictly understood as having reference to time. This is the point from which all successful students of true wisdom must set out. Their first lesson is to fear the Lord. If they cannot learn this, they can learn nothing, to any valuable purpose. They can no more attain to high degrees of wisdom without this, than a child can learn to read without a knowledge of the alphabet. This comparison, however, like all others, ceases to hold good at a certain point of the application. The elementary knowledge, with which the culture of the child begins, is afterwards left far behind, as something which no longer claims attention. But in spiritual culture the first elements of knowledge and its ultimate attainments may be said to be identical. “The fear of the Lord” is as really the end as “the beginning of wisdom,” although not in such a sense as to exclude progression, and a vast variation of degree in the experience of one and the same person.

“The fear of the Lord,” which is thus both the Alpha and Omega of the spiritual alphabet, may be taken either in a generic or a specific sense. The former is, in fact, co-extensive with the general idea of religion or true piety, including, either directly or by necessary inference, every right disposition and affection on the part of man, as a dependent and unworthy creature, towards the



infinitely great and holy God. All such affections may be readily deduced from fear, in its specific sense, as signifying not a slavish but a filial feeling, not mere dread or terror, which, from its very nature, must be always tinged with hate, or at least with repugnance, but a reverence impregnated with love. This genuine and spurious fear of God, unlike as they may seem, and as they are, have often been confounded, on account of their having something really in common, to wit, a sense of God's power, and an apprehension of his wrath as awaiting all transgressors of his will. But this common element, which justifies the use of the word fear in reference to both these dispositions, is blended in the one case with a consciousness of alienation and hostility, while in the other it is lost, as it were, in the feeling of attachment, confidence, and common interest. The varying proportion, in which these distinctive qualities are blended with the fundamental property of fear, determines the facility with which a filial awe may be confounded with a slavish dread.

To discriminate between the two might sometimes be impossible, but for a practical criterion or test which the Word of God has laid down, in accordance with our Saviour's fundamental rule of moral diagnosis, "By their fruits ye shall know them." In one of the passages which recognise the fear of the Lord as the beginning of wisdom, it is closely connected with obedience to his will. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all they that do them," that is, his commandments (Ps. cxl. 10). "Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord, that delighteth greatly in his commandments" (Ps. cxli. 1).

This intimate connection between genuine fear and obedience is recognised in the law itself, when Moses warns Israel "to do all the words of this law that are written in this book, that thou mayest fear the glorious and fearful name, The Lord thy God" (Deut. xxviii. 58). The negative aspect of the same truth is exhibited by Job, when he winds up his sublime inquiry after wisdom with the solemn declaration, "Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding" (Job xxviii. 28). Here then is the touchstone of a genuine and a spurious fear of God. The one disposes us to do his will, from a sincere complacency and acquiescence in it. The other prompts

us rather to resist it, except so far as our compliance may seem necessary to escape his wrath, which is the only real object of this slavish dread. The one is a fear of punishment as the consequence of sin; the other a fear of sin itself, as intrinsically evil, or, which amounts to the same thing, as opposed to the will of God, and to his very nature, which is thus assumed as the ultimate criterion of right and wrong, of good and evil. Only a filial fear disposes men to *serve* God. Selfish and slavish fear disposes them to flee from him. This uneasy sense of insecurity would be relieved and gladdened by the assurance that there is no God; whereas the same assurance would be anguish or despair to the affectionate and reverential fear of the believer. These two things, then, are to be regarded as inseparable, the fear of God and service of God. He who will not serve God does not fear him, that is, in any good sense of the term. His fear, so far as he has any, is a slavish fear; and slavish fear is never free from some admixture of hostility.

This distinction, however obvious as it is in Scripture and familiar in experience, is not practically recognised by all men. There seems to be a natural propensity to look upon fear, blank fear, as the essence of devotion, as the whole of what is due to God, the rendering of which absolves from all obligation to believe, to trust, to love, or to obey. Among the heathen, this idea of religion is perhaps predominant, or certainly far more prevalent than we frequently imagine. It may well be questioned whether their deities are ever the objects of their love, excepting in those cases where the god is but a personification of some darling lust. Beyond this homage rendered to the unchecked sway of their own appetites and passions, there is strong reason for believing that their devotion is nothing but the tribute of their fears to a superior power which they hate, and which they look upon as hating them. The service rendered under the influence of such a motive, is in no case more than they regard as absolutely necessary to secure them from the wrath of the offended godhead. If they could be convinced that less would gain their end, they would joyfully diminish the amount, and still more joyfully receive permission to withhold it altogether. But this complete immunity is rendered unattainable by conscience. They feel that they are guilty, that

is, justly liable to punishment, and cannot rest without an effort to escape it.

But this universal and unconquerable sense of guilt may co-exist with an indefinite variety of notions as to the means of propitiation, and the extent to which those means must be applied. Some men may feel it to be necessary to expend their whole time in appeasing the divine wrath; but by far the greater number, under every known form of idolatry, consider less than this sufficient, and rejoice to appropriate the residue to self-indulgence. They give no more than is extorted by their fears, and have no conception of religious service as a voluntary, cheerful, joyous consecration of the whole man to an object which he venerates and loves, and in the doing of whose will he finds his highest happiness. The only service of this free, spontaneous, and absorbing nature that the heathen devotee pays, is the service rendered to himself, in the indulgence of his own corrupt desires. He gives even to his chosen idol only what he is unable to withhold, his fears; and by so doing proves himself a stranger to all genuine religious fear, which cannot be divorced from the willing and devoted service of its object.

I have stated this as a grand practical error of the heathen, in order that we may be able to judge of it impartially, and not at all because it is confined to them. Of men in general it may be affirmed, that they are prone to separate religious *fear*, in their conceptions and their practice, from religious *service*, and by that separation to convert the former into a slavish dread, as far as possible removed from the filial reverential fear of genuine devotion. Whether the proffered object of their worship be the true God or a false one, they naturally slide into this error. Hence it is that the majority of men adore their god or their gods with a divided heart, and try to obey two masters, *servi*ng whatever they love best—the world, their fellow-creatures, themselves; *feari*ng whatever they believe can punish or destroy them, which for that very reason they consider as entitled not so much to love as hatred. Wherever conscience is at all awakened, and religious means, no matter what, are used to pacify it, it will be found a brief but just description of the multitude thus influenced; that they *fear* one thing and *serve* another. To the judge and the

avenger they give what they must, and lavish all the rest upon themselves, their pride, their malice, their ambition, their insatiable appetites, their raging passions.

An apt illustration of this general truth is afforded by a singular and interesting passage of the sacred history. The king of Assyria had carried into exile the ten tribes of Israel, and supplied their place with settlers from his own dominions. These were heathen, and brought with them their own idols and idolatrous rites. Having no knowledge of Jehovah, whom their predecessors had professed to worship, even under the forbidden form of golden calves, they had, of course, no fear of his displeasure, till he sent wild beasts among them, and slew some of them. Regarding this correctly as a penal visitation from the god of the land, they procured from their own sovereign the assistance of an Israelitish priest to teach them how to worship him. He accordingly taught them, as the narrative expresses it, "how they should fear the Lord," and they acted promptly upon his instructions. They took care, however, to provide gods of their own, each tribe or nation for itself, while at the same time they offered to Jehovah a worship of fear prompted more by the recollection of lions than by faith or reason. "So THEY FEARED THE LORD, AND SERVED THEIR OWN GODS." How far the sacred writer was from recognising this as any genuine religious fear at all, we learn from his saying, in the very next sentence, "unto this day they do after the former manners; THEY FEAR NOT THE LORD." Why? Because "they feared the Lord, and served their own gods."

We may be disposed to smile with some contempt at the absurd and inconsistent conduct of these wretched pagans. But wherein did their folly and their sin consist? Certainly not in being afraid of the displeasure of Jehovah and in seeking to avert it; for in this they acted wisely. But it lay in their imagining that forms of worship, extorted from them by their selfish fears, would be sufficient to propitiate the Most High and secure them from his vengeance; while their voluntary service, their cordial and habitual devotion, was expended on his enemies and rivals. If this is the absurdity which we condemn, our judgment is a just one; but let us impartially condemn it wherever we may find it, whether in ancient or in modern times, whether in eastern or in western

climes, whether in heathendom or Christendom, whether in our neighbours or ourselves.

To facilitate this self-denying process in your case and my own, let us look for a moment at some ways in which precisely the same folly, and with incomparably less extenuation, may be practised, and is practised now in the nineteenth century, and here, amidst the blaze of gospel light. Let us not shrink from the unwelcome truth, if it should be discovered that this race of idolaters is not extinct ; that “unto this day they do after the former manners ;” fearing the Lord and serving their own gods ; “as did their fathers, so do they unto this day.”

To make the transition easier from the heathen to the Christian world, we may begin with our own heathen, the heathen at our own doors, in our own streets ; I mean those who approach nearest to the heathen both in the positive and negative circumstances of their spiritual state, their ignorance of truth, and their enslavement to sin. Look at the worst part of your population, as it pours its turbid streams along in times of more than usual excitement ; hear its muttered or vociferated curses ; mark the bestial character of its propensities and habits. All this you have seen, and as you saw it, you have been disposed perhaps to say that here, at least, there is no divided worship or allegiance ; here, at least, are men who serve their own gods, but who do not, even in profession, fear the Lord. No, in profession, certainly not ; in form, in purpose, not at all ; but do you think they never fear him, that is, feel afraid of him ? Be not precipitate in drawing such conclusions.

In the vast mixed multitude of those whom you regard as the most ignorant, and reckless, and besotted of your countrymen, observe, on some occasion of extraordinary concourse, how many haggard faces, and contracted brows, and strangely gleaming eyes encounter yours. Do you believe all this expression of anxiety and dread to be the fruit of poverty, or sickness, or domestic cares ? If so, you are mistaken ; for the same expression may be seen in those who are not poor, who are not sick, or outwardly distressed at all ; and on the other hand, its absence may be marked in thousands who are poorer, and who suffer more from care and sickness than do any of those whom you are observing. There is some-

thing back of all these causes to produce this uniformity of countenance, and I will tell you what it is—IT IS FEAR. Yes, even the boldest and most insolent defier of all outward peril, the foolhardiest provoker of temptation and destruction, at the very moment when he is repelling, with vindictive rage, the charge of cowardice, is often chilled with fear, unqualified, unmitigated fear ; and that of the most paralysing kind, because it is a vague fear and of an invisible object—a fear which is written in the face of some as legibly as on the brow of the first murderer. We sometimes speak lightly of the fear of ghosts and phantoms, as a childish folly ; but it is often nothing more than a disguised fear of the great avenger ; the man shrinks and trembles as seeing him who is invisible. Tell him of storms and earthquakes, and he shudders, though the danger be distant or long past. Tell him of sudden casualties, and he turns pale, though the same form of accident, in *his* case, be impossible. Tell him of pestilence, of fever, plague, or cholera, as slowly, steadily approaching, and judge for yourself whether the emotion caused by this announcement can be all referred to dread of bodily suffering, or even of death as a physical change only. No, his thoughts run onward to the dread tribunal where he is to stand, and to which this may be his summons. What he now feels is that “fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation,” which the apostle represents as following the obstinate rejection of an offered Saviour. I do not mean that this is always present to the mind ; it may be rare, it may be momentary. These forebodings may but occasionally interrupt the ordinary current of the thoughts and feelings, like a dark cloud swept across the sun, or a lurid flash, making darkness visible. The attempt to banish such reflections may be commonly successful, and the man, instead of being weaned from his accustomed cares or pleasures, may plunge into them more madly and more desperately, for the very reason that he wishes to avoid these fearful premonitions. He may never cross the threshold of a church—he may never look between the covers of a Bible—he may shrink from the touch of a religious book—he may run from the presence of religious men as he would shun contagion—but he has that within him which he cannot flee from or for ever silence ; he is guilty and he knows it, and he knows that God will punish sin, and that his

own time may be near at hand ; and often, in the interval of business, or the necessary lulls of his tempestuous enjoyments, in the silent watches of the night, or on a sick-bed, or when some affliction forces him to serious reflection, he hears that whisper which he heard in childhood ; a mysterious voice syllables his name, as it has often done before, and mutters of some fearful secret soon to be disclosed. Nay, the same unwelcome premonition sometimes reaches him when all around is gay and joyous ; in the very moment of indulgence, with the cup of pleasure at his lips, he hears that sound ; he knows not whence it comes, he sometimes even knows not what it says ; the very vagueness of the warning makes it more terrific. His very ignorance of God and of religion adds a strange, peculiar terror to these pangs of conscience ; and the man, however brave at other times, is really afraid ; he fears, he fears the Lord, although he knows him not ; he fears him as the unseen and anonymous avenger who has followed him through life, and now awaits his death ; and if, in spite of all this he still plunges deeper into worldly cares or sensual indulgence, and vainly strives to seek oblivion from them, this only shows that, like the settlers of Samaria, he fears the Lord and serves his own gods.

The case of which I have been speaking is the case of those who are excluded, or exclude themselves from the operation of all ordinary methods of religious influence—who are not permitted, or refuse to hear the gospel—who avoid association with its preachers and professors—and who lead a heathen life on Christian ground. Such may well be likened to the foreign idolaters who occupied the territory of the ten tribes, in immediate juxtaposition with the chosen people ; and in such it may not seem surprising or unnatural that, like their prototypes in history, they should fear God and serve the devil. But is such a compromise or combination possible within the precincts of the Church itself—within the bounds of even nominal Christianity—among the decent and respectful hearers of the gospel and professed believers in its truth ? Can *they* be charged with this stupendous folly of dividing or multiplying what they worship—giving half to good and half to evil, believing half in truth and half in falsehood, living half in light and half in darkness ? Perhaps the very form which I have given to

the question may suggest an answer, by presenting no exaggerated picture of the life which some of us are actually living.

You fear the Lord; you are unwilling to provoke his anger; you acknowledge your obligation to serve him, and you discharge that obligation by attending on his worship; but is he the master that you daily serve? Where is your treasure and your heart? By whose will do you regulate your life? A man may so far fear the Lord as to frequent his house, and join in the external acts of worship there; but what if he has other gods at home, and there bows down to Mammon or to Belial? What if the world is in his heart, and the prince of this world on the throne of his affections? Will the stain of these habitual idolatries be washed out by patiently enduring the penance of a Sabbath service? Will the Lord, who is thus feared with a slavish dread of his displeasure, be contented, for the sake of this, to pass by all the rest—all that is done, or all that is not done, in defiance of his absolute authority and positive command? My hearers! let us not deceive ourselves. There *are* idol-temples sometimes reared against the very walls of Jehovah's sanctuary. There are heathen oracles which give forth their responses "fast by the oracle of God." There are those who seem to fear the Lord on one day in the week, but during all the rest of their existence are unceasingly employed in serving their own gods.

The charge which is here brought is not one of *hypocrisy*. It is one of *delusion*. I do not say that those of whom I speak pretend to fear the Lord when they know they fear him not. I say that they *believe* they fear him, when in *fact* they fear him not. Or rather, which is really the same thing in another form, they *do* fear him; but it is not with a fear which honours, or conciliates, or pleases him, as they imagine; and here, just here, is their delusion. They are *sincere* enough in thinking that they fear God; but they are terribly mistaken in supposing that they fear him as they ought. This is a painful truth to those of us whom it concerns; but it is one which, sooner or later, must be told. And it requires not many words to tell it. It may be summed up in this short sentence: If you do not *serve* the Lord, you do not *fear* him. You may attend upon his worship, you may respect religion, you may believe the Bible to be true, you may hope to be saved through Christ, you may expect to die the death of the righteous.



But how do you live? How are you living now? From what source is your present happiness derived? What influence do you exert? What are you doing, not as a weekly recreation, or a mere periodical solemnity, but as a daily business, for the honour of God and the good of your fellow-men? If your fear of the Lord shows itself in these particulars, and in the constant dispositions and affections of your mind, it may be genuine. But if you fear God only in the church, or only on the Sabbath; if your life, beyond these bounds, is atheistical; that is, if you live precisely as you would if you believed that there is no God; if your fear of him is nothing but a natural unwillingness to suffer at his hands, and a consequent desire to avert his wrath; if you joyfully redeem from his service what you can, to be expended on the world; if you come before him reeking from the sordid cares or frivolous pleasures of a selfish and unprofitable life, and then leap back from the threshold of his presence into the hot and steaming atmosphere of that same world from which your fears had detached you for an hour or a day;—if this is your experience, or anything like this, however clear it may be to your own mind that you fear the Lord, it is still more clear to others that you serve your own gods. Is not this an object of compassion? Has this delusion no share in the pity which we lavish on the heathen? Yes, to those really enlightened there is something peculiarly pitiable in the state which I have been describing. The degree of knowledge really possessed, and the hopes so fondly cherished, only render their inevitable disappointment more affecting to the heart of one who can foresee it. Looking out from the inner sanctuary into which he has found access by the blood of the everlasting covenant, he compassionates not only those who still wander in the court of the Gentiles, but those who have penetrated into the interior enclosure, within sight of the laver and the altar of atonement, or have even found their way into the holy place, and there continue, unsuspecting that the holiest of all is still beyond them, that the mercy seat is not yet reached, and that, without this, neither the loaves spread upon the golden table, the light that streams from the golden candlestick, nor the incense that rolls upward from the golden altar, can be theirs, or made available for them; that notwithstanding their near bodily approach

to God, they are still far from him;—over such a sight the true penitent might weep even in the presence of the ark and under the shadowing pinions of the cherubim. Especially might this be the effect if these deluded worshippers were seen leaving their idols at the entrance of the temple, and casting many a fond backward glance at these beloved objects from the holy place, or even bringing them in, half concealed, beneath some flimsy pretext, or some fair appearance, and then hastening forth to worship them; yes, scarcely waiting till the veil has again fallen on the sacred scene, before they drop down in the dust before the gods of their idolatry. This, this is a spectacle to draw tears at the very mercy-seat and under the cloud of the divine presence. But, sad as is this, would to God it were the worst! It were surely enough that we, who profess to have found access to the mercy-seat, should be compelled to sorrow over those who, though externally almost as near it as ourselves, are still, in heart, as far from it as ever, and who serve their own gods in the presence of Jehovah. But what if our lamentations should be interrupted by a voice from the holy of holies, saying, “The time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God!” (1 Pet. iv. 17). What if the cloud should rise or open, and disclose to us the fearful sight of idols in immediate contact with the ark of the covenant and the mercy-seat itself!

This is no hideous imagination of a wild impossibility. The thing supposed is not impossible at all. It is a palpable reality. It has been, is now, and will be hereafter, until human corruption ceases to exist, or is no longer suffered to exert an influence on true believers. False gods may be brought into the holy of holies. I speak not now of false profession, or of total self-deception, but of those who give evidence of having really passed from death unto life. Even these may cling to idols; even these may give themselves to other masters; even these may fear the Lord and serve their own gods; and in so doing, I should hesitate to intend the possibility of Christians, even by profession, being tainted with the poison of a literal idolatry, did not notorious contemporary facts demonstrate the existence of this monstrous combination. In proof of this, we need not go to India, and contemplate the connivance of a Christian government at heathenish abominations,

and its violation of the rights of Christian consciences, in order to maintain those of a heathen population, which it ought to have enlightened in the knowledge of the truth. We need not join in the censure which the world has passed upon these false concessions, or attempt to trace the marks of the divine displeasure in the blood and ashes of that great catastrophe, the sound of which has not yet died away in Europe, Asia, or America; because, admitting all that is alleged, or even all that is conferred, and rating at the highest mark the guilt of such connivance or encouragement, it cannot, after all, be justly charged with actual participation in the idolatry itself, but only with a sinful and pernicious toleration of it, on the part of those who really despised or pitied it, as the wretched but incurable delusion of a half-enlightened and inferior race. But what shall we say of those who, nearer home, and in a Christian country, and amidst the light of a reformed and purified religion—nay, perhaps with the profession of it on their lips and on their conscience, can sanction by their presence, or sustain by their pecuniary gifts, a worship which, though nominally Christian, they confess to be idolatrous—crowding its sanctuaries even with their children, led, perhaps, by simple curiosity, but strengthening the faith of others by example, and themselves incurring the tremendous risk of learning first to tolerate, and then to admire, and finally to worship what at first they viewed with wonder and contempt. Be not surprised, my brethren, if you should encounter such phenomena in your fields of ministerial labour; and if you do, be not afraid to tell those who exhibit them, that such compliances, so far from being justified by simultaneous or alternate acts of purer worship, or by the continual profession of a purer faith, are thereby only brought into a closer and more hideous assimilation to the mixed religion of these ancient settlers, in the land of Israel, who, in that consecrated soil, and not far from the temple of Jehovah, almost in sight of its majestic rites, and within hearing of its solemn music, while they owned the true God as a God of judgment, and experienced his wrath as an avenger—were so mad upon their idols, that with fatal inconsistency “they feared the Lord, and served their own gods.”

But, returning to the figurative spiritual meaning of idolatry, with which we are immediately concerned, and to its fearful eom-

bination with the worship of the true God, which I have described as introducing idols into the most holy place—as a complete enumeration of these idols would be neither possible nor needful, let me sum up a vast number of them under the collective name, so often used in Scripture, of the world—the world, including all the various and complex influences exercised by men, not only as detached individuals, but as an aggregate body, called society—the various allurements by which true Christians are seduced into compliance with its questionable practices. It may be under the pretence or in the hope of doing good, without experiencing evil—the oldest and most specious of the arts by which the tempter has achieved his conquests, since he whispered in the ear of Eve, “Ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil,” and displayed to her the fatal tree so “good for food,” so “pleasant to the eyes,” and so “desirable to make one wise.” Here is an idol temple—vast, magnificent, inviting, at the very threshold of our churches,—nay, out of which idols are continually brought into Jehovah’s presence, not by false professors merely, but by deluded worshippers, who fain would fear the Lord, and worship their own gods.

But what are the gods which may thus be served by those who, at the same time, seem to fear the Lord? Leaving wholly out of view, as I have said, the case of those who worship self and the world, under the mask of hypocritical profession, or the fatal spell of “strong delusions,” let us look exclusively at those who seem sincerely to *fear* God, but who do not *serve* him with a perfect heart, because their affections are divided and seduced by idols. What are these idols? I might almost say, their name is Legion. I can mention but a few of them. But leaving these and other more familiar forms of this idolatrous delusion, let us glance at some less palpable, and more compatible with light and even genuine profession. Such is the idol of self-righteousness, a very different thing from self-indulgence. While the latter owns no obligation to obey any other master than its own imperious lusts, the other recognises God’s authority, consents to do his will, and thinks it does it, yes, and makes a merit of it. Its very reliance, or professed reliance, on the merit of the Saviour, is transformed into an idol, and usurps the honour due exclusively to Christ. It submits to the righteousness of God in order to exalt its own.

Of such it may be said, without injustice, that they fear the Lord, and serve their own gods.

Closely allied to this idol is another—the idol of spiritual pride—a disposition to exult in the extent and depth of our religious experience, and in the variety of our attainments, a complacent estimate of our own love to God, a zeal for his honour, and submission to his will, as meritorious achievements of our own, and not as the gratuitous products of his sovereign grace. Alas! how many sincere Christians are led far astray by this insidious seducer, till at last they seem to fear the Lord still, but to serve their own gods.

To the same race and family of idols belongs that pharisaical censorious spirit which regards the essence of religion as consisting in vindictive opposition to the sins of our fellow-men, and imagines that the surest way to rise in the divine life is to lower our neighbours, whether saints or sinners, drawing a morbid satisfaction from this painful view of others as no better than ourselves, and expending on this object the attention which might better have been given to our own defects, or better still, to the desire and pursuit of excellence. This, too, is to fear the Lord and serve our own gods.

Further enumeration is superfluous. It is enough to know the general fact that such things are possible, are real. If we do know it, and acknowledge it, what shall we do next? Let judgment begin at the house of God. Let every image which defiles it be cast down without mercy from its pedestal and dashed in pieces, like Dagon on the threshold of his temple. Let us, like Jacob and his household, put away our false gods, before we come to Bethel to renew our vows. Instead of weeping over the delusions of our neighbours, let us first seek to have our own dispelled. Let those who gaze from without into the temple of the Lord, or from its holy place into the holiest of all, be under no mistake, or even doubt, as to the object of our worship. Through the cloud of incense which ascends from our altar, let not even the unfriendly or malignant eye detect the semblance of an idol placed above it. Let friends and enemies alike be constrained to acknowledge that our Lord is one Lord, and that we his people have no other gods before him. Then, with our consciences cleared from

dead works, to serve the living God, we shall be able, with consistency and good hope of success, to say to those who hear the gospel with us, but have not yet avouched the Lord to be their God, Forsake your idols, crucify the flesh, die to the world, serve Him whom you fear already, fear him no longer with a slavish dread, but with a filial reverence, believe in him whom we trust as our Saviour, "Walk about Zion, and go round about her : tell the towers thereof, mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces, that ye may tell it to the generation following ; for this God is our God for ever and ever : he will be our guide even unto death." Yes, and then with this accession to our strength, we may go forth beyond the precincts of the sanctuary into the highways and the hedges of the world, in search of those neglected and bewildered outcasts who are trembling at the presence of an unknown God, who have fearful forebodings of his wrath, with no cheering anticipations of his mercy, fearing the Lord, and serving their own gods. Yes, even these may be compelled to come in, to join the procession of experienced saints and recent converts from the world, as it draws near to the footstool of God's mercy, and pointing to the fragments of forsaken idols which lie strewn around it, say, "O Lord our God, other lords beside thee have had dominion over us ; but by thee only will we make mention of thy name. They are dead, they shall not live ; they are deceased, they shall not rise ; thou hast visited and destroyed them, and made all their memory to perish."



XXXI.

The Fountain of Strength.

“I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.”—PHIL. iv. 13.

CHRIST is revealed to us in various characters ; that is to say, the relation he sustains to his own people is presented under various figures. Sometimes he is represented as their redeemer, who sets them free from bondage ; sometimes as their prophet, who instructs them ; sometimes as their king, who protects and governs them ; sometimes as their priest, who makes atonement for them ; sometimes as the sacrifice itself, which is offered for them ; sometimes as their friend, sometimes as their physician, sometimes as their provider, sometimes as their strengthener. It is in this last character that he is presented by the text, which may be considered as expressing not only the personal experience of Paul, but of all who are partakers of the “like precious faith.” In this character it well becomes us to contemplate Christ. We all need strength ; we all need one to strengthen us. Whether conscious or unconscious of our weakness, we *are* weak. Our very strength is weakness. We may trust it, but the more we trust it, the more completely shall we be deceived. This is a defect which no effort of our own can supply. We have not strength enough to be strong. The exertion of weakness cannot produce strength. Imbecility, nay, impotence, in spiritual matters, is a part of our hereditary curse. We must look out of ourselves for its removal. And to save us from a vain search in forbidden and unsatisfying quarters, the word of God sets Christ at once before us as our strength, our strengthener. What Paul says, every true believer, in his measure, has a right, and is disposed, to say, I can do all things through Christ enabling me. Of my-

self I can do nothing ; but through Christ I can do all things, all that is obligatory, all that is necessary, either for my own safety, for the good of others, or for the honour of Christ himself.

In further considering this gracious aspect of our Saviour's character and work, as a source of spiritual strength to those who have no strength in themselves, it may be conducive to the clearness and distinctness of our views, if we inquire (1) how he strengthens us, and (2) for what he strengthens us, that is, in what particular emergencies, or in reference to what specific objects.

First, then, in what way, and by what means, does Christ strengthen us? I answer, negatively, not by miracle or magic, not by acting on us without our knowledge or against our will, but through our own intelligent and active powers. I answer positively, and particularly, in the first place, that he strengthens by instructing us, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of himself and of ourselves, and especially by making us to feel our weakness and to understand its causes. He shows us that it is a moral weakness, and connected with a universal moral depravation, involving all our powers and affections, from the supreme control of which the Christian is delivered, but not from its entire influence. He shows us our dependence on God's mercy for relief from this debilitated helpless state, and teaches us to seek it in himself. Thus the Lord Jesus Christ, as our prophet, or infallible instructor, strengthens us.

Again, he strengthens us by his example. It is not by precept or by doctrine merely that he works this necessary change upon us. He has not merely told us what is right ; he has shown us how to do it ; he has done it himself. He has embodied in his own life what might have been inoperative if set forth only in theory. This is one of the unspeakable advantages arising from our Saviour's incarnation—the community of nature which exists between us. He has set us an example ; he has gone before us. When we hesitate, or go astray, or stumble, we not only hear his voice behind us, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, but we see his form before us—sometimes nearer, sometimes further, sometimes more, and sometimes less distinct, according to the keenness of our vision and the clearness of our spiritual atmosphere. But



even when our eyes are dimmest, and our heavens are haziest, if we are believers, we can still see something. Through the mist, and smoke, and dust, and over or between a thousand intervening objects, we can still discern a form like that of the Son of man, not merely pointing out the path, but often breaking it, clearing away obstructions, opening unexpected passages, surmounting obstacles, transforming difficulties into helps, levelling mountains, filling up valleys, bridging streams that seemed impassable. Oh, what a blessed work is this in which the Son of God condescends to be employed for our advantage! How can our hopes sink or our fears prevail while this forerunner is in sight; and even when he ceases to be visible, because we fall so far behind or drop upon the earth exhausted, we can still trace his footsteps where we lie, and sometimes track him by the tears and blood with which the path is moistened. At the sight of these, the fainting Christian often breathes afresh, recovers new strength, and starts up to resume his painful journey, willing even to take up his cross in imitation of his Master, who has left us an example that we should follow his steps. Brethren, Christ strengthens us by his example.

But precept and example are not all. We might have these in perfection, and lie motionless. There must be something to excite and prompt, as well as guide. We may hear Christ's precepts, and yet not obey them; we may see his example, and yet not follow it. With both in full view, we may still be impotent to spiritual good, unless some new spring of activity be set at work within us—just as a machine may be complete and well adjusted, yet without effect or use until the moving power is applied. But when it is applied, when all is set in motion, how distinctly do the parts perform their office, and harmoniously contribute to the aggregate result! In one particular, this illustration does not hold good. We are not machines, propelled by an external force, without a conscious co-operation on our own part. We are active and spontaneous in our spiritual exercises; but we have no such exercises until set in motion. If we can imagine a machine composed of living, conscious parts, but perfectly inert till started by an impulse from without, and then performing its appointed functions with entire precision, we may have an idea of our spiritual

state. Or, to drop the questionable figure of machinery, imagine that you see a living man set down to the performance of a given task, with his materials, his instructions, and his models all before him, but completely paralyzed, unable to move hand or foot. He is a man; he is a living man; he knows, he understands the work before him, and he has within his reach whatever is required for the doing of it; yet he neither does nor can perform it. That paralysis as utterly prevents it as if he were dead or absent. But suppose that fatal spell to be dissolved by skill, or chance, or magic, or a sudden divine interposition, and see how instantaneously the mind and body move in concert, how they act and react upon each other, till their joint exertion has accomplished in an hour what before seemed likely to remain undone for ever. Such is our condition, even after we are taught both by precept and example. We are still not strong to any practical effect until we are constrained to move by some new principle of action. And such a principle is actually set at work in every renewed heart: "The love of Christ constraineth us." If love be wanting, all is lost—we can do nothing—we are practically just as weak as ever. But let the love of God be shed abroad in our hearts, and all the knowledge and the motives which had long lain as an inert, lifeless mass, begin to move, and in the right direction. All the powers and affections are aroused, and at the same time checked and regulated. What seemed impossible is now felt to be easy. He who once could do nothing, is now able to "do all things." Brethren, the power of Christ strengthens us when the love of Christ constrains us.

Again: Christ strengthens us by working faith in us, and by making himself known to us as the object of that faith. In this life the most favoured have to walk by faith, and not by sight. Christ is to all of us an unseen Saviour. His word and his example are indeed before us; but the reason and the purpose of his requisitions and his dealings with us may be wholly unaccountable. We admit our obligation to obey him, and to follow him through evil and through good report. But when our minds are filled with doubt and wonder as to the reality, or meaning, or intent of his commands, how can we energetically do them? Such a state of mind necessarily produces weakness. We delay, we

vacillate, we stop short, we begin afresh, until our strength and patience are expended. And as we cannot hope to see these difficulties all removed at present, we can only become strong by trusting, by confiding, by believing what we do not see, by looking forward to what is not yet revealed. Now "faith is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen." Faith, therefore, strengthens. To be strong, we must believe, confide, and trust. The reason of this fact is obvious. If we wait until we see and comprehend the solution of all difficulties, we shall never begin to act, and such inaction is, of course, a state of weakness. If we refuse to take anything for granted, or to receive anything on trust, prompt and energetic action is impossible. The emergencies requiring it will pass away before we have put ourselves in motion. The corrective of this weakness is a well-placed trust in something out of ourselves. A blind, capricious trust is worse than weakness; but a firm trust in something or some person that deserves it is a source, a never-failing source of strength.

Now Christ permits us, and invites us, and enables us to trust in him. And what can be a more secure foundation upon which to build? His almighty power, his omniscience, the perfection of his wisdom, truth, and goodness, and the infinite merit of his saving work, all warrant an implicit and unwavering trust. Relying upon him, we may dismiss our doubts and fears, collect our wandering and distracted thoughts, concentrate all our energies on present duties, and do wonders of obedience, encouraged by the testimony and example of "so great a cloud of witnesses," "who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, *out of weakness were made strong*, waxed valiant in fight, and turned to flight the armies of the aliens." Out of weakness were made strong—precisely what we want, and faith accomplishes it; faith in Christ, both as its object and its source; that faith of which he is the "author and the finisher." Christ strengthens us by working in us faith.

Once more: he strengthens us by union with himself. This is the office and effect of faith. We trust an unseen, not an absent Saviour. He is not afar off, but at hand. We should seek the

Lord, if haply we might feel after him and find him, though he be not far from every one of us ; for in him we live, and move, and have our being. This is not more true of the natural relation we sustain to God, than of the spiritual relation we sustain to Christ. If we are true believers, it is in him we live, and move, and have our spiritual being. He is, indeed, not far from every one of us. Nor are we merely near him ; we are united with him, we are ingrafted on him, we are inserted in him. The nature of the union thus denoted by strong figures is to us inscrutable. We only know that they express a great and glorious reality, of which we can judge by its effects ; and its effects are such as these—that the life we now live is no longer ours, but Christ's ; that the spiritual strength we now exert is, in the same sense, his ; that his strength is made perfect in our weakness ; so that when we are weak, then we are strong ; and instead of despairing, we can glory in infirmities. This new, transcendent, real, though mysterious strength, is the fruit of union with the Saviour ; and the union which produces this strength is itself produced by faith. In giving faith, then, Christ gives union, and in giving union he gives strength. No wonder that the same soul which desponded when cast upon its own resources should feel strong as it grows conscious of its union, its identity with Christ. In itself it could do nothing ; in him it can do all things. This is the true sense of Paul's language. I can do all things, not merely *through*, but *in* Christ enabling me ; not merely by his help, but by spiritual union and incorporation with him, so that he lives in me, and I live in him. Brethren, Christ strengthens us by uniting us to himself.

In all these ways, then, by instruction, by example, by his love constraining them, by faith uniting them to himself, the Saviour strengthens true believers, even the weakest, till at last in the assurance of this strength they lose the sense of their own weakness altogether, and can face the most appalling dangers, and the most gigantic difficulties, saying, I can do, not merely this or that, but all things, not merely one thing, or a few things, or many things, but all things, in Christ enabling me.

Let us now consider more particularly what is comprehended in the general expression "all things." We cannot add to its extent

of meaning, which is already universal; but we may give additional distinctness to our own conceptions, by observing separately some of the detached particulars summed up in the collective phrase "all things." And as the very strength of this expression makes complete enumeration impossible, we must be contented to distinguish a few classes, among which the particulars may be distributed. When the apostle or the humblest Christian, in the triumph of his faith, exclaims, "I can do all things," he means, of course, all that is required or necessary. He may, therefore, be naturally understood as saying, "I can do all duty." Christ came, not to destroy, but to fulfil. The Christian is no longer under the law as a way of salvation, but he is under law as a rule of duty. The Saviour freed men from the heavy yoke of legal, ceremonial bondage, but he did not free them wholly from restraint. For he invites them to take *his* yoke upon them, and assures them that his yoke is easy and his burden light. The believer still has duties to perform, and the remainder of corruption often makes them hard indeed. He knows not how to go about them. He shrinks from them. He would gladly evade them, or persuade himself that they are not obligatory, but in vain. As soon as his sophistical reasoning is concluded, he reverts, as if by instinct, to his old conclusion. He admits the obligation. He attempts to discharge it. But a thousand difficulties spring up in his way, until at last, despairing of escape, he manfully resolves to brave them, in reliance on divine grace. And no sooner is this resolution formed, than all his difficulties vanish. He beholds with astonishment the mountain levelled to a plain. He is ready to ascribe the change to outward causes, but he soon finds that the change is in himself. He is conscious of strength, but not his own, and knowing whence it comes, he is ready to cry out, in the presence of the very obstacles and perils which before unmanned him: "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

We may safely appeal to the experience of every Christian, for the truth of the assertion that nothing so effectually overcomes the hindrances to duty, and supplies the want of strength for its performance, as the teaching of Christ by his word and spirit—the inciting influence of his example—the consciousness of love to him as an impelling motive—the active exercise of faith in him as the

foundation of our hope,—and, above all, the controlling sense of oneness with him—from the joint operation of which causes, the most fearful and infirm of his true followers, who, abandoned to himself, could do nothing, absolutely nothing, “can do all things,” in the way of duty.

Taking “duty” in the widest sense of which the word admits, what has now been said may be considered as including all emergencies. For if the Christian can do all he ought to do, nothing more can be demanded or desired. Thus explained, this is not so much a special case to which the text applies, as an additional description of all cases. But if we take the doing of duty in a more restricted sense, as signifying active compliance with a positive command, there are other cases left to which the doctrine of the text may be applied. For they whom Christ thus strengthens, are not only qualified to do his will in the specific sense just mentioned, that is, to perform the acts which he requires, as pleasing in his sight, but also to resist the evil influences which assail them from another quarter. The believer is not only called to the performance of duty; he is also tempted to the commission of sin. He is therefore in danger of offending God, both by omission and by positive transgression.

This twofold danger is enhanced by his own weakness. As he has not spiritual strength to do what is right, so he has not strength to resist or avoid evil. This arises from the nature of our fallen state. That state is not one of mere indifference or even of repugnance to what God requires, but of inclination and attachment to what God forbids. When left to ourselves, therefore, we cannot remain in equilibrio. The scale of evil instantly predominates. Our native dispositions and affections are not neutral, but enlisted on the wrong side of the controversy. This is the case, even with true converts, just so far as their corruption is permitted to control their conduct. That control is no longer, and can never again become paramount, much less exclusive. But it may continue and extend so far as to make resistance to temptation one of their severest trials—so severe that they are sometimes ready to despair of being able to withstand. And yet, if such be truly the desire of their hearts, their own experience shall effectually teach them that what is impossible with man is possible with God. The

same voice that says to them in tones of solemn warning, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. x. 12), shall also say to them in tones of merciful encouragement, "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will, with the temptation, also make a way of escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Cor. v. 13).

Now what is this way (*ἐκβάσις*) of escape but Christ himself, and how shall our weakness and corruption become able to endure temptation, but through Christ enabling us? Here then is another great emergency to which the text applies; and I put it to yourselves, Christian brethren, whether you have not experienced, in some degree, the efficacy of the means which God has thus provided. Is there no well-remembered juncture in your history—in that of some among you have there not been many—when the conquest of yourselves and the defeat of your spiritual foes seemed as hopeless as the conquest, nay, as the creation of a world; and you were ready, though unwilling, to succumb, in sheer despair of a successful resistance? but precisely at the moment when this self-despair had reached its height it was transformed, as by a miracle, into a childlike trust in Christ, for which it seemed to be the necessary preparation; and before that new-born strength, the force of your temptations seemed to melt and vanish, so that, as you looked with a serene contempt upon what a little while before appeared invincible, you could say as Paul says, and as every true believer in his turn is called to say, I can do all things through Christ enabling me. Yes, through him you can do even that which seems most hopeless; you can endure, resist, subdue, despise, all temptation!

In the two cases which have now been mentioned, we have seen the Christian actively performing and resisting through the power of Christ enabling him. But there is still a third case which must not be overlooked—a case in which the Christian is not active, but passive. He is not called merely to performance and resistance, but to patient endurance. This is in some respects more trying than either of the others. Not merely because it involves the painful sense of suffering, but because it contains nothing to excite, and stimulate, and foster pride. To obey and to resist are active duties

which require an energetic exercise of will. But to endure, to suffer, to lie still, to be incapable of action or resistance—this is to many a severer test—it is to all hard, hard indeed. When this part of God's providential discipline begins to be applied to individual believers, they are sometimes ready to repine and quarrel at its being used at all in their case. They cannot see the need of remedies so painful, when a milder treatment, as they think, would answer every needful purpose. At length, perhaps, they are convinced of their error, and made willing, by painful but wholesome experience, to believe that the evidence of God's paternal favour towards them would have been less clear and perfect if they had not been thus visited. Their minds are satisfied, at least, as to this *kind* of spiritual discipline being adapted to their course. But still they may be ready to find fault with the degree, with the extent, to which the process is continued. They are ready to say, It is good that I have been afflicted, but they cannot restrain themselves from adding: "How often and how long, O Lord? for ever?" Yet even this hard lesson many have been made to learn, and learn it so effectually, that they may be said to have become accustomed even to the long continuance or frequent repetition of some providential strokes, as peculiarly adapted to their case, and perhaps essential to their spiritual safety.

But this familiarity with certain forms of suffering may destroy or at least impair its medicinal effect, and when the Great Physician suddenly changes his accustomed mode of treatment, and applies some untried, unexpected remedy, the first smart of the new process often forces, even from the hearts of true believers, the expostulating question, Why this new infliction? I had learned to bear the other; I had almost ceased to feel it; but this new stroke opens all my wounds afresh, and reproduces my almost forgotten agonies. In thus saying, or thus thinking, how unconsciously may those who suffer answer their own arguments, and vindicate the very course of which they venture to complain. They little think, at least in the first moment of surprise, that this new form of the divine dispensations may have been adopted for the very reason that the old one had become endurable, and therefore ineffectual. But even this consideration, when suggested and received, is not enough to give the necessary power of endurance.



That is still afforded only by the presence of Christ, and the believer's union with him. It is only when that union has been consciously effected and has borne its necessary fruit, that the afflicted soul can say with full assurance of its sorest trials, however frequent, various, or protracted, as it said before of duty and resistance to temptation, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

If this view of the strength derived by Christians from their union with the Saviour enabling them to act, resist, and suffer, even in the most extreme emergencies, could be presented clearly to the mind, the belief of those who are still strangers to him, it is almost inconceivable that they should fail to experience a kind of envious dissatisfaction. Even some of you, my hearers, may be ready to exclaim, All things are possible to the believer, but to me belief itself is the greatest of all impossibilities. If I repent and believe, I can do all things, but I cannot comply with the condition, and I cannot therefore lay hold of the promise. Yes, yes you can. If you are truly willing, you are able; for the same grace that enables, must dispose. If you are willing, you are able, not in your own strength, but enabled by the same Christ who enables the believer to do all the rest. The first step that he takes in his journey heavenward, he takes leaning on the same arm that supports him to the end. This is one of the mysteries of the gospel, hard to explain, but glorious to believe, that a gracious God bestows what he requires, and gives us even that without which he gives nothing. If you would really be saved, that desire is as much his work as the salvation which it seeks, and he who wrought it in you will not suffer it to remain unsatisfied. Look up then, sinking and desponding soul, and put not from you the last hope, and, it may be, the last opportunity of safety. Repent, believe! These are among the "all things" which, through Christ enabling, even you may do, and having done them, you shall then be able to do all things else, until at last looking back upon difficulties conquered, nay, impossibilities achieved, and forward to the course yet to be run, in time or in eternity, your farewell shout of victory shall still be the same as the first faint, feeble cry of your new-born hope, "I can, I can do all things, through Christ which strengtheneth me."



## Prayer an Index of the Heart.

“Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me and I shall be whiter than snow.”—Ps. li. 7.

THERE is no surer index of men's real dispositions and desires than their prayers; not their forms of prayer, whether written or unwritten, whether prescribed by others or imposed upon themselves, but their real prayers, the genuine expression of their own desires, extorted from them by the urgent sense of want, or danger, or distress; such prayers as are sometimes offered by men who do not habitually pray at all; nay, such as even the blaspheming atheist has been heard to pray in his agony of terror, when a storm at sea, or a dangerous illness has not only convinced him that there is a God, but forced him to his footstool as a suppliant for mercy. Such prayers are prayed perhaps by all men at some time of their lives, and may therefore be appealed to, as exemplifying what is meant by saying, that the surest index to men's real dispositions and desires is that furnished by their prayers.

These may also be described as affording the most certain test of men's disagreement or agreement with each other, as to that which constitutes the theme or burden of the prayer. Whoever can appropriate the prayers of others, as the genuine expression of his own desires, must desire the same things. However they may differ as to other matters, here they must agree, or else their union in prayer is hypocritical. This is true of all prayer, whether heard in public, or overheard in secret, or read in books. So far as that which is thus read or heard is found to express the religious feelings or desires of him who reads or hears it, so far must those feelings and desires be coincident with those of the man by whom the prayer was offered. In this way we may judge of the agree-

ment of our own experience with that of others, not merely of our own contemporaries, but of those long since departed. When we read the biographies of pious men, and find there the petitions in which they expressed the fulness of their hearts, if ours respond to them, if we can say amen to them, if we can use them to express our own desires, then we may safely conclude that we are sharers, so far, in the same experience which they have left on record.

But delightful as this feeling of communion with the pious dead may be, it is attended with a certain danger, that of sharing in their weaknesses and errors, as well as in their pure desires and heavenly aspirations. This hazard must exist in every case except where inspiration sets its seal, not only on the truth of the record, but on the genuineness of the exercises there recorded. It was not the special inspiration of the "holy men of old" that produced their faith and repentance; if it were, we could not hope to be partakers of the same, unless inspired as they were. But their inspiration does assure us, in the first place, that their faith and repentance are correctly stated, and in the next place, that they were genuine; so that if we wish to bring our own to the test or comparison with theirs, we may do so without fear of risk or error. For this very purpose the Bible contains many such expressions of the faith and repentance, the hope and love, exercised by ancient saints, to serve not only as examples, but as formulas, in which to clothe our own desires and emotions, and so far as we can do so with sincerity, we have a right to claim a share in their experience. This is one main design of the Book of Psalms, and to this use it has always been applied by true believers, not in public worship and instruction merely, but in their most intimate communings with themselves and God. And if there is any one psalm which above all others has been found appropriate to this end, it is surely that from which the text is taken, and in which the broken-hearted penitent of every age has found expressions suited to convey his otherwise unutterable groanings. If ever there was genuine conviction and repentance, and reliance upon free grace, it was in the case of David, which affords us therefore a most interesting opportunity of bringing our own feelings to the test or standard which has been described. And as the psalm abounds in varied, yet harmonious exhibitions of the same essential

truth, let us fix our attention on the one prayer recorded in the text, and consider how far we are able and prepared to appropriate it as the expression of our own desires. To this end it will be necessary to inquire how much is involved or presupposed in the petition. And this may prove to be far more than appears at first sight.

For, in the first place, no one can sincerely offer this petition unless conscious of pollution and defilement. This is necessarily implied in the very terms of the petition. He who says, "Cleanse me," says by implication, "I am filthy." But this is a confession from which pride revolts. Not even all who are in a certain sense convinced of sin are willing to acknowledge this, or even able so to do without hypocrisy. A man may be conscious of sin as a negation, as want of conformity to a standard which he recognises as the true one, or even as a positive violation of a rule which he admits to be obligatory; not only intrinsically right, but binding on himself; and yet he may recoil from the acknowledgment of sin as a pollution or defilement; and something which makes him an object of loathing and abhorrence to all holy beings, and even to himself so far as he is really enlightened in the knowledge of God's nature and his own. Yet this profound and painful self-contempt is an essential part of true repentance, because it is a necessary consequence of just views as to sin and holiness. And even if not necessary to salvation, it would be necessary to an earnest and sincere appropriation of these words of David as the expression of our own desires. For even common sense may teach us, that unless a man is conscious of defilement and uncleanness, he cannot with sincerity ask God to cleanse him.

But there is still another thing implied in this request, or rather expressed by it,—consent and willingness, nay, an importunate desire to be purified. This is by no means identical with what has been already said, nor even necessarily included in it. The sense of pollution is perfectly distinguishable from the wish to be delivered from it. True, when the sense of pollution is a product of divine grace, it is always accompanied or followed in experience by the desire of purification. Nor has any one a right to plead or to profess his consciousness of defilement, unless corroborated by such a desire. But for that very reason it is highly

important to look at this desire as a distinct prerequisite or element of true repentance. And another reason for so doing is, that in the experience of the unregenerate a painful sense of degradation and defilement may and often does coexist with a prevailing wish to continue in it. Why? because the man loves the very thing which he acknowledges and really feels to be debasing. What his better judgment, and his conscience partially enlightened tell him is disgraceful, his vitiated appetite, his perverted affections, cleave to and delight in. The drunkard and the libertine, and other classes of notorious sinners, have frequently an overwhelming sense of their own baseness, a distressing consciousness that they have sunk themselves below the level of their kind, and almost to the level of the brutes that perish. And this not only in their lucid intervals of abstinence and partial reformation, but often in the very paroxysm of indulgence, the unhappy victim of his own corruption feels himself to be an object of abhorrence and contempt to all around him, and in proportion to the light which he enjoys and the restraints which he has broken through, may even be said to despise himself.

But this consciousness of degradation, however real and however strong, is never sufficient of itself to overcome the evil dispositions which occasion it. It is not enough for man to know that sin degrades him, if he still so loves it as to be willing to submit to degradation for the sake of its indulgence. Nor will a mere sense of pollution ever drive a man to God for cleansing, if his affections are so utterly depraved, that his polluted state is one of pleasure and enjoyment to him, not for its own sake, not considered as defilement, but as an indispensable condition of those sinful joys which constitute his happiness. He does not deliberately choose to be polluted and debased, for this is inconsistent with the consciousness of degradation which we are supposing to exist. But he does choose to endure the degradation which he cannot hide even from himself, for the sake of the enjoyments which degrade him. Now, with this unbroken love to evil, no sense of pollution can enable him to offer the petition of the text; for he who says with sincerity, "Cleanse me," says not only, "I am filthy," but "I consent, I desire to be cleansed."

But suppose this desire to be felt. Suppose the sinner to be

not only conscious of defilement, but desirous of purification. And suppose, at the same time, that he considers himself perfectly able to produce it or secure it by an act of his own will, or by a series of such acts, or by the use of means invented by himself. Will such a man, can such a man seek purification at the hands of another? Is it not a dictate of reason and experience, that what men can do for themselves they will not solicit others to do for them? True, there are exceptions, but only such exceptions as confirm the rule. Some are so indolent, or proud, or helpless, that they gladly devolve upon others what they should do for themselves; but the public voice condemns their sloth, and in so doing bears witness to the general fact, that what men are conscious of ability to do themselves, they do not invite others to do for them. The same thing equally holds good in spiritual matters. No man comes to God for cleansing who believes that he can cleanse himself. It matters not how deep his sense of degradation and corruption; no, nor how desirous to be purified he seems, if he believes that he can do the necessary work himself, he will not, cannot join in this petition. He may try a thousand other methods; he may mortify his appetites and macerate his flesh; he may go on a pilgrimage and cross the seas; he may give all his goods to feed the poor; he may give the fruit of his body for the sin of his soul; he may give his very body to be burned; but so long as he believes in his capacity, by these or any other means, to cleanse himself, he cannot pray the prayer of David in the text; for he who with sincerity says, "Cleanse me," says by that very act, "I cannot cleanse myself."

But here, as elsewhere, Satan has an opposite extreme for men to rush to. The extreme of impious presumption often leads directly to that of unbelieving despondency. From the absurd belief that man can do everything, they leap to the absurd belief that God can do nothing. Once convinced that he cannot cleanse himself, the sinner is in danger of concluding that purification is impossible. And in this desperate belief, some go on in their sins, not that grace may abound, but because grace is believed to be for ever unattainable. Now, if there is anything which may be reckoned a certain dictate of reason and experience, it is that men will never seriously ask that to be done which they believe

to be impossible, or ask another to do that of which they know him to be utterly incapable. How can a man, then, ask God to cleanse him, if he despairs of being cleansed, as something utterly impossible? Or what will it avail that he believes himself polluted, and is willing to be purified, and knows himself to be incapable of doing it, if at the same time he believes it to be equally beyond the power of the Almighty? No; whoever earnestly and sincerely says to his Maker, "Cleanse me," says implicitly as the leper in the gospel said expressly, "If thou wilt, thou canst."

Nay, this belief in God's ability to do what we demand of him, is not merely implied but expressed in the petition of the text, "Purge me with hyssop, and *I shall be clean*; wash me, and *I shall be whiter than snow*." This is equivalent to saying, "If thou purge me, I shall certainly be clean; if thou wash me, I shall certainly be whiter than snow." But the words thus added have another meaning, or rather another application, which is not to be neglected. They are also equivalent to saying, "Purge me with hyssop, *that I may be clean*; wash me, *that I may be whiter than snow*." Thus understood, they give the reason why, the end for which, the royal penitent desires to be cleansed. But, "Cleanse me that I may be cleansed," would be a mere tautology, unless we give the latter words a pregnant and emphatic meaning—"that I may be cleansed"—that is, that I may be entirely, thoroughly, completely cleansed. And that this is really the meaning, is apparent from the words expressly added in the other clause, "Wash me, that I may be whiter than snow." Snow, wherever it is known, is the natural and customary standard of this quality. "As white as snow," suggests to every mind the idea of unsullied whiteness, without any tinge or shade of darker colour. "Whiter than snow," is a hyperbole, denoting, in a still stronger manner, absolute or perfect whiteness, perhaps with an allusion to the purity here spoken of as something supernatural, both in its origin and its degree. If the most spotless and unsullied whiteness known to nature is the whiteness of snow, the expression "whiter than snow" is well adapted to suggest the idea of a whiteness, to which nature furnishes no parallel, and of which she can furnish no example. This, when applied to moral and spiritual qualities, must signify a perfect purity and entire freedom from moral taint

and even imperfection. And the prayer, "Wash me, that I may be whiter than snow," expresses a willingness, or rather a desire, not only to be cleansed, but to be fully and entirely cleansed. And nothing less than this desire can be sufficient on the part of one who claims to be a sharer in the faith and penitence of David, and in proof of that participation echoes his petition, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." Whoever makes this prayer his own, is to be understood as saying, "I desire to be cleansed from all pollution."

This may, at first sight, seem to be the same thing that was stated as the second particular. But near as the two things are in theory, in practice and experience they differ widely. A man may be willing to be cleansed, and yet not anxious to be cleansed completely; he may consent to be "white," yet not aspire to be "whiter than snow." In other words, he may be satisfied with partial or external renovation. He may wish to see some stains washed out and others left untouched; or he may earnestly desire to have the outward surface cleansed from its pollution, while the inner part is full of all uncleanness. He may not even be aware of the extent, the depth of his corruption. He may be disposed to look upon it as a superficial or cutaneous affection, and to wish for the removal of its unsightly and disgusting symptoms in which it manifests itself, not aware that these are but the outward symptoms of a deep-seated malady within; and that, unless this be reached by remedies, the disappearance of the symptoms could be only temporary, and might aggravate the malady itself. It is not until the minds of men are thoroughly awakened and enlightened in relation to the turpitude of sin, and of their own sin, as it is in itself and as it is in them, and filled with a desire to be saved from it as well as from the punishment which it incurs; it is not till then that they are fully able to adopt the prayer of David, as a prayer, not for partial but complete purification; and to understand that he who says, "Cleanse me," asks, not only to be white, but also to be "whiter than snow."

To this desire of perfect purity, however, even the heathen may attain, and some of their philosophers have actually made it the great theme of their moral speculations. But their efforts have



been no less vain than those of many Christian errorists, to solve the mighty problem of human restoration by every means but that of God's appointment. Even those who profess to rely, and do rely, on God as the sole efficient cause of this momentous revolution, may expect to see it brought about by moral suasion, or by mere instruction, or by good example, or by ceremonial forms, or by meritorious abstinence or penance, or by mere connection with the Church, or mere enjoyment of its privileges, or by mere intellectual reception of the truth, or by any other means distinct from Jesus Christ and his atoning sacrifice, or independent of it.

And yet this is the very way, the only way, in which the sinful soul of man can possibly be cleansed from the guilt or the pollution of its sins, the only way in which it can either be justified or sanctified. And therefore this must enter into men's desires of renovation as a necessary element, or they can never pray the prayer of David in its true sense and its genuine spirit; no, nor even in the plain sense of its actual expressions. For he does not simply say, "Purge me," but specifically, "purge me with hyssop," an expression borrowed from the purifying ceremonies of the law, by which the fact of human depravity and the necessity of moral renovation were continually kept before the minds of the people, in connection with the doctrine of atonement by the sacrifice of life for life. This connection was intimated and enforced, not only by the constant combination of these purifying rites with those of sacrifice, but also by the actual affusion or aspersion of pure water, as the natural and universal symbol of purification in general, and of the sacrificial blood as the symbol of purification from the guilt and stain of sin by the blood of Jesus Christ in particular. Among the substances combined with the water and the blood in these symbolical purifications was the plant called hyssop, which was also used as a mechanical instrument of sprinkling, and was thus connected in a twofold manner with the purifying rites of the Mosaic ritual, so that its very name would call up, in the mind of every Hebrew reader, the idea of purification by atoning blood, and in the mind of those especially enlightened, the idea of that promised Saviour, by whose blood alone this moral renovation could be rendered even possible.

To all, then, that has been already mentioned as essential to an

intelligent and full participation in this prayer of David, and in the penitence and faith of which it is the genuine expression, we must now add that all is unavailing, because either spurious or defective, without a hearty willingness, not only to be cleansed, and to be cleansed by God, but to be cleansed in God's own way; not only to be "purged," but to be "purged with hyssop," "not by water only, but by water and by blood," and through him who "came both by water and by blood, even Jesus Christ;" for the blood of Jesus Christ his Son, cleanseth from all sin.

If then, my hearer, you are still unconscious of your guilt and danger as a sinner before God; or if you are convinced of sin only as a failure to come up to the standard of God's law, or at most as a positive transgression of that law, but not as a pollution and a degradation, loathsome in itself, and making you an object of abhorrence to all sinless intelligences; or if you are in some degree aware of your debasement, but yet willing to continue in it for the sake of the enjoyments which it now affords you; or if, though willing and desirous to be cleansed from this pollution, you are trusting in your own strength to effect it; or because you cannot do it, are unwilling to believe that even the Almighty can; or if you are willing and desirous to be only cleansed in part, and shrink from the idea of complete purgation as too humbling or too self-denying; or if you are even willing to submit to this revolutionizing process, but unwilling to resort to Jesus Christ as your purifier, and to his blood as the only purifying element; on any of these suppositions, and, alas! how many individual cases do they comprehend, whatever else you may do with effect, whatever else you may say with sincerity, I tell you there is one thing which you cannot so do or so say, you cannot join sincerely in this prayer of David, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." To yourself such a prayer is but an empty and unprofitable form; while to God whom you invoke, it is a mockery and insult.

But if, through God's grace, your experience is the opposite of all this, if you do indeed feel yourself to be a sinner; if you feel your sin not only as a burden and a debt, but as a stain and a pollution; if you are willing to forego the pleasures of sin for the purpose of escaping from this deadly degradation; if you are

thoroughly convinced that you cannot cleanse yourself, and yet that God can cleanse you ; if you can heartily consent to be cleansed by him, not superficially or partially, but thoroughly and perfectly—not in the way of your own choosing or of man's devising, but of God's providing—then my prayer is, that God may deal with you this moment as he dealt of old with Hagar in the wilderness of Beersheba, when he “ opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water ;” but in this case, not by water only, but by water and by blood, for ye are come, perhaps without suspecting it, “ to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, a blood that speaketh better things than that of Abel.” “ See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh ; for if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven. For (out of Christ) our God is a consuming fire.”



## Take Heed to Thyself.

“Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.”—LUKE xiii. 3, 5.

THESE are among the most familiar words of Scripture, and among those most frequently employed to rouse the consciences of the impenitent. They are so full of meaning, that even the most commonplace and superficial exposition of the sentence must convey enough to fill the mind and agitate the heart of one who has been really awakened. There is, however, a peculiar point and pregnancy of import in the words, which may be wholly overlooked in making them a simple basis for the general affirmation that *All sinners must repent or perish*. This, true and awful as it is, is rather presupposed than positively stated. To confine ourselves to this, as the whole meaning, is to lose sight of two emphatic words in the short sentence; “ye” and “likewise.” Assuming, as a truth already known, that all men must repent or perish, the text affirms that they whom it addresses must repent, or perish likewise, that is, like those particularly mentioned in the context. Another feature of the passage which is apt to be neglected is, that it not only teaches the necessity of repentance to salvation, but presents a specific motive for its exercise, or rather teaches us to seek occasions of repentance in a quarter where most of us are naturally least disposed to seek them; nay, where most of us are naturally and habitually prone to find excuses for indulging sentiments as far removed from those of penitence as possible; uncharitable rigour and censorious pride.

The only way to get a full view of this deep and varied import, is by looking at the text in its connection, which may serve, at the same time, as a single but remarkable example, to illustrate the

importance of deriving our instructions from the Scripture in its integrity and continuity, and not from certain salient points, which frequent handling has made sharp and bright, but at the same time often put into a false position with respect to that by which they are connected, and without which they cannot be duly appreciated or even correctly understood.

During our Lord's last journey to Jerusalem, of which this part of Luke contains a full and deeply interesting narrative, his mind seems to have been filled with sad forebodings of the fearful doom impending over Israel. After warning his disciples and exhorting them to watchfulness, by various striking parables and figurative illustrations, he turned, on one occasion, to the multitude who were present, and, addressing them as representatives of the nation at large, upbraided their stupidity and insensibility, in so sagaciously anticipating changes of the weather by indications gathered from experience, while even the most solemn premonitions of approaching moral changes and catastrophes escaped their notice. "When ye see a cloud rise out of the west," that is, from the Mediterranean Sea, "straightway ye say, There cometh a shower," or rather a storm of rain, "and so it is," for these were not mere random guesses or fanciful prognostications, but the fruit of long-continued and repeated observation. "And when ye see the south wind blow," from the direction of the great Arabian wilderness, "ye say, There will be heat, and it cometh to pass." The same observant and sagacious faculties, applied to things of infinitely greater moment, might have convinced them that there were storms and heats at hand, of which they were at present wholly unsuspecting. This absorption in mere outward interests and changes, to the neglect of inward spiritual things, is the hypocrisy with which our Saviour here reproaches them. "Ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky and of the earth; but how is it that ye do not discern the signs of this time?" the prognostics of momentous revolution, with which that most eventful period of history was crowded.

Without reckoning anything purely preternatural which we find recorded by contemporary writers, that solemn interval, extending from the advent to the downfall of Jerusalem, was full of strange occurrences, all showing that Jehovah had, according

to his prophecy, begun to shake the nations. Yet of these exciting and alarming symptoms, the contemporaries of our Saviour took so little note, that it was only by explicit, or at least by solemn warning that he could bring these fearful futurities before their minds. No wonder that, impatient of this strange judicial blindness, he exclaimed, "Why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right." Will you apprehend no evil, unless I predict it in so many words? This he would not do, but he apprised them indirectly of their danger, by comparing their condition to that of one against whom his neighbour has a righteous quarrel, and who is just about to be arraigned before the judgment seat, without any prospect but of condemnation, and whose only hope is therefore in a speedy compromise and reconciliation, in default of which the law must have its course, until the last farthing of the debt is paid.

This illustration, drawn from an incident of real life, which comes home, with peculiar force, to the business and bosoms of the mass of men in every civilized community, appears to have produced at least so much effect upon the feelings of some hearers as to turn their thoughts towards strange and startling casualties, as tokens of divine displeasure, not without a secret wish to understand and represent them as denoting that displeasure, towards the few and not the many—towards their neighbours, not themselves. With some such feeling, certain persons present in the multitude related to our Saviour a revolting incident, of which they had probably just heard,—a massacre of Galileans by the cowardly but sanguinary Roman procurator, Pontius Pilate, at the very altar, so that their blood might be said to have been "mingled with their sacrifices." That God should have abandoned them to heathen cruelty in that most sacred of asylums where, if anywhere, they might have hoped for his protection, did indeed look like a terrible judicial visitation, and it may naturally be supposed that they who told and they who heard it, while they shuddered at the sacrilegious murder, were disposed to say within themselves, "Yet surely they must have been atrocious sinners, to be given up to such a fate!"

Among the hearers there was one, however, who felt no sympathy with this self-righteous and uncharitable judgment; whose

mind was free from all confusion, and his feelings from all bias; who saw at once the truth of the whole case, and its secret effect upon the minds of those around him; and who hastened, with his usual benevolent severity, to check the fermentation of insidious error, and to turn the thoughts of those who had embraced it in upon themselves. Instead of chiming in with what appeared to be a pious recognition of God's justice in the punishment of sinners, our Saviour tears with a relentless hand the mask from the secret workings of his hearers' hearts, and forces them at once upon their own reluctant sight by what seems to be a simple and unstudied answer, but in whose simplicity there was a sting for many a hitherto invulnerable conscience. "Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered these things?" It was no doubt to his Galilean hearers that he especially addressed himself. It was no doubt from them that this report of Pilate's conduct to their countrymen proceeded. Hence the peculiar force of our Lord's answer to his own searching question, "I tell you nay, but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."

Not contented with this startling contradiction of their secret thoughts, he cites another case himself, also perhaps of recent date, and vastly stronger in appearance as a ground for the opinion which he meant to demolish, because one in which the hand of God himself was visible directly, without any intervention of a wicked human instrument, or any consequent confusion of this agent's sin with God's most righteous retributions,—a case in which a number of lives had been lost by a sudden providential casualty: "Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men dwelling in Jerusalem?" Having put the first unanswerable question to his Galilean hearers, he puts this to the Jerusalemites, still more self-righteous, and still more apt, it may be, to imagine, that in this case, if in any, God had drawn a broad line of distinction between them and these atrocious sinners, whom he not only suffered to perish, but destroyed, as it were, with his own hand. Yes, they might have said, if they had spoken their whole heart, we do think that they were more guilty than the rest of us, and we think so on the authority of God himself, who has spared us,

even in the act of destroying them. But whether uttered or suppressed, this interpretation of God's judgments meets the same indignant contradiction as before, and the same unexpected introversion of the sentence upon those who had pronounced it, "I tell you nay, but except ye repent,"—yes, you, of Jerusalem, no less than these despised Galileans, "except *ye* repent, ye shall all likewise perish."

There is something so paradoxical in this repeated contradiction of what seems to be a plausible and pious sentiment, that a correct apprehension of the latent error, and of the truth which our Saviour, with such emphasis, opposes to it, may serve not only to vindicate the truth of this authoritative declaration, and its perfect consistency with all God's attributes and all his acts, so far as either can be known by us, but also to correct the same insidious error, if it should make its way into our own minds, or should now be lying hid there under some specious pretext of hostility to sin, and zeal for God's vindicatory justice.

1. That suffering is a penal consequence of sin, seems to be a dictate of reason and conscience, no less than of revelation. At all events, it is a doctrine of religion which, above most others, seems to command the prompt assent of the human understanding. They who acknowledge the existence of a God at all, have probably no impressions of his power or his justice stronger than those which are associated with his providential strokes, and more especially with death as the universal penalty. War, pestilence, and famine, are regarded by the common sense of men, not merely as misfortunes, but as punishments, and nothing more effectually rouses in the multitude the recollection of their sins than the report or the approach of these providential scourges. In all this the popular judgment is according to the truth. The miseries which we witness or experience are but so many memorials—

"Of man's first disobedience and the fruit  
Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste  
Brought death into the world and all our woe."

In the recognition and assertion of this great truth there is no fear of excess. The fact is one which cannot be exaggerated, and ought not to be extenuated, much less dissembled or denied. Sin is the ultimate and universal source of sorrow, and all God's provi-



dential visitations are unequivocal signs of his displeasure against sin.

2. What is thus true in the aggregate must needs be true in detail. If all the suffering in the world proceeds from sin, then every divine judgment in particular must flow from the same source. Not only in reference to the sum total of man's sufferings, but in reference to every pang, it may be said with truth and certainty, that sin has been at work; that this is the natural and necessary consequence of sin, and that not of sin as an abstraction, nor of sin as the common undivided heritage of Adam's offspring, but of sin as the property and character of individual responsible agents. In other words, wherever we see suffering, we see a proof, not only that there is sin somewhere, to account for and to justify that suffering, but that the individual sufferer is a sinner. The only exception to this general statement which the world has ever seen, in reality confirms it. Christ was beyond comparison the greatest sufferer of our race; yet Christ was "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners." But his sufferings were vicarious; "he bore *our* griefs and carried *our* sorrows; he was wounded for *our* transgressions, he was bruised for *our* iniquities." This, which is one of the great fundamental doctrines of the Bible, while it shows, on the one hand, the indissoluble connection between sin and suffering, shows on the other, how the greatest sufferer could be free from sin, although, in every case but this, the least sufferer must be a sinner. We need feel no hesitation, therefore, in asserting either of these two propositions: 1. That all suffering is the fruit of sin; and 2. That every sufferer is a sinner.

3. And yet it cannot be denied that there is something in this doctrine thus presented, against which even the better feelings of our nature are disposed to revolt. This is especially the case when we contemplate instances of aggravated suffering endured by those who are comparatively innocent; and still more when the sufferings of such are immediately occasioned by the wickedness of others. Can it be that the dying agonies of one who falls a victim to the murderous revenge or the reckless cupidity of others, are to be regarded as the punishment of sin? Against this representation all our human sympathies and charities appear to cry

aloud, and so intense is the reaction in some minds, that they will not even listen to the explanation, which may nevertheless be given, and which I will endeavour to give now.

4. This feeling of repugnance to the doctrine now in question, though it springs from a native sense of justice, is mistaken in its application, because founded upon two misapprehensions. In the first place, it assumes that the sufferings, in the case supposed, are said to be the penal fruits of sin committed against man, and more especially against the authors of the sufferings endured. Hence we are all accustomed to enhance the guilt of murder, in some cases, by contrasting the virtues of the victim with the crimes of the destroyer. And in such a state of mind, not one of us, perhaps, would be prepared to hear with patience that the murder was a righteous recompense of sin. But why? Because at such a moment we can look no further than the proximate immediate agent, and to think of him as having any claim or right of punishment is certainly preposterous. But when the excitement is allayed, and we have lost sight of the worthless and justly abhorred instrument, we may perhaps be able to perceive that, in the presence of an infinitely holy God, the most innocent victim of man's cruelty is, in himself, deserving only of displeasure; or, at least, that no difficulties hang about that supposition, except such as belong to the whole subject of sin and punishment.

5. If any does remain, it probably has reference to the seeming disproportion of the punishment to that of others, or to any particular offence with which the sufferer seems chargeable in comparison with others. Here, again, the feeling is not only natural, but in its principle a just one, yet entirely misdirected under the influence of a second error with respect to the doctrine of the Bible on the subject. The misconception lies in the confounding of the general propositions which have been already stated and affirmed—1. That all suffering is the penal consequence of sin; and 2, That every individual sufferer is a sinner—with the very different proposition, that every providential stroke is a specific punishment of some specific sin, or that the measure of men's sufferings here is in exact proportion to their guilt, so that they upon whom extraordinary judgments seem to fall are thereby proved to be extraordinary sinners. These doctrines are not only quite dis-

inct from those before propounded ; they do not even follow from them as logical deductions. They may be consistently, and actually are, repudiated and abjured by those who steadfastly maintain that all suffering is from sin, and that all sufferers are sinners. The same mistake is palpable enough, and therefore easily avoided, when confined to matters of the present life or questions of mere temporal morality. If men would be as rational and candid in their judgments of spiritual matters as they often are in those pertaining to this world, there would be less disposition to reject important doctrines of religion on account of their abuse, or the unauthorized additions made to them.

6. The effect of this last error is the more pernicious, and the cure of it more difficult, because the doctrine which it falsely imputes to Christianity is really maintained by many Christians, as well as by many who make no such professions. There has in all ages been a disposition to regard remarkable calamities as providential judgments on particular offences, and a morbid curiosity in tracing the connection between such crimes and such punishments. The existence of such a disposition in the human heart, and the plausibility with which it can defend itself by confident appeal to undisputed facts and to undisputed principles of morals, have never been more forcibly and fully set forth, or more pointedly and solemnly rebuked, than in the book of Job—one grand design of which, to say the least, is to expose this error and refute it. That it still existed in the minds of those to whom our Lord addressed the language of the text, is obvious enough ; and its continued existence at the present day is, alas ! no less so. It may not now be pushed to the extreme reached by some of Christ's disciples, when they "asked him, saying, Lord, who did sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind ?" But it exists and operates, and often unexpectedly betrays itself in a censorious attempt to trace the sufferings of others back to certain causes, often more offensive in the sight of human censors and inquisitors than in that of a heart-searching God. But even where the sin charged is indeed a sin, its existence is hastily inferred from the supposed judgment, without any other evidence whatever. This uncharitable tendency can be cured only by the correction of the error which produces it.

7. But in attempting this correction, there is need of extreme caution, as in all other cases where an error has arisen, not from sheer invention or denial of the truth, but from exaggeration, or perversion, or abuse of truth itself. And the more certain and important the truth thus mistaken or abused, the more imperative the need of caution, lest, while we gather up the tares, we root up also the wheat with them. In the case before us, this necessity has not been always practically recognised by those who have undertaken to vindicate the ways of God to man, but who, in consequence of this neglect, have verified the proverb that the remedy is sometimes worse than the disease. They, for example, who would guard against the error now in question by denying a particular providence, are not only chargeable with wilfully receding from the ground of Christianity to that of heathenism—nay, from the higher ground of Plato to the lower ground of Epicurus—but with making Christ himself guilty of the grossest inconsistency, forgetful that the same authoritative voice which twice said, in the case before us, “I tell you, nay,” had expressly taught in the foregoing context, that without God’s knowledge and his leave, not a hair falls, or a lily withers, or a sparrow dies. This is one of those cases in which the simplest and apparently most child-like teachings of religion coincide with the ultimate attainments of philosophy, since no reasoning or speculation on this subject has availed to get beyond the grand, yet elementary conclusion, that if there is a providence at all, it must be universal, and that no distinction can be drawn between the great and small as objects of God’s notice and his care, without infringing on the absolute perfection of his nature by restricting his omniscience, or at least by applying to it terms and conditions which have no propriety or truth, except in reference to our own finite nature and the necessary limitations of our knowledge.

8. Another false and dangerous corrective of the error now in question—still more insidious because it approximates more nearly to the truth—is that which, admitting a particular providence and a general connection between sin and suffering, denies any penal or judicial connection between particular providential strokes and the sins of the individual sufferer. This doctrine, when fairly stated, is opposed, not only to the word of God, but to experience

and the common sense of mankind. To deny that the bloated countenance, the trembling limbs, the decaying mind, the wasted fortune, and the blasted fame of the drunkard or the libertine, are penally consequences of sin, of his own sin, of his own besetting, reigning, darling sin, would be ridiculous, and all men would regard it in that light. And the same thing is true of some extraordinary providences. When a bold blasphemer, in the act of imprecating vengeance on his own head, falls down dead before us, it would argue an extreme of philosophical caution or of sceptical reserve to hesitate to say, as the magicians said to Pharaoh, when they found themselves confronted with effects beyond the capacity of any human or created power, "This is the finger of God." It was conceivable, indeed, that even this might be a magical illusion, near akin though far superior to their own; and yet the evidence appears to have convinced them. So in the case supposed, it is conceivable and possible that even such surprising correspondences may have some other cause than that which forces itself on the mind of every spectator; but it does so force itself, and does amount, in the vast majority of cases, to a conclusive proof of a direct judicial act of God's vindicatory justice on a flagrant and notorious sin.

Now, any one such case would be sufficient to refute the doctrine that men's sufferings have nothing to do with their personal sins in the way of penal retribution. What, then, it may be asked, is the error, theoretical or practical, which Christ condemns, and against which we are warned to be for ever on our guard? If it be true, not only that suffering in general is the fruit of sin, and that every individual sufferer is a sinner, but that particular sufferings may be recognised as penal retributions of particular sins, where is the harm in tracing the connection for our edification or for that of others? The answer to this question is a prompt and simple one, and may be stated under three particulars.

The first is, that even if the general rule be granted, the exceptions are so many and notorious as to render it inapplicable as a standard or criterion of character. A rule which, if applied with rigid uniformity, would directly gainsay the divine decision in the case of Job's three friends, and brand as the chief of sinners the glorious company of the apostles, the goodly fellowship of the

prophets, the noble army of martyrs, and a countless host of less conspicuous, but no less patient sufferers, unknown, perhaps, to man, but precious in the sight of God, must needs be a precarious and uncertain test. The second answer is, that this is a matter which God has not subjected to our scrutiny. Although, in certain cases, both of common experience and extraordinary judgment, he has lifted the veil from the judicial import of his dispensations, as a timely warning to presumptuous sinners, it is still true, as a general fact, that this mysterious connection between causes and effects is not among the things which may lawfully and usefully excite our curiosity, but rather among those of which the Scripture says, "Secret things belong unto the Lord our God." The final cause of this reserve may, perhaps, be found in the third reason to be stated for abstaining from such inquiries, to wit, that their tendency, as shown by all experience, is not so much to edify as to subvert—not so much to wean from sin as to harden in self-righteousness, by letting the censorship of other men's sins and other men's punishment divert our thoughts entirely from those which *we* commit, or those which *we* are to experience.

This brings us to the lesson taught directly in the text and context, as to the only safe and effectual corrective of the error which we have been considering. For even after men have been convinced that this censorious inquiry into the sin and punishment of others is not only unavailing but pernicious, they may still be drawn to it by natural dispositions which they cannot resist or overcome. To counteract this wayward tendency, our Saviour here employs the only efficacious method. Without diverting the attention of his hearers from the great humiliating truth that suffering is the fruit and penal consequence of sin, he shows them, with consummate wisdom, that it admits an application much more certain and more salutary than the one which they were accustomed or disposed to make of it. Their favourite inference from the doctrine was, that those who suffered more were greater sinners than themselves. The one which our Lord teaches them to draw is, that if some members of the human family were thus overtaken in their sins and visited with condign punishment, the same perdition must await the rest, however long deferred by the divine forbearance. Instead of valuing themselves because they

had escaped thus far, they ought rather to assure themselves that they should not escape for ever. The judgments which they saw descend on others did not prove them to be greater sinners than themselves; they only proved that the guilt, of which they were themselves partakers, was entitled and exposed to the divine wrath, and that the course of wisdom, therefore, was to flee from the wrath to come, instead of fancying themselves to be beyond its reach or able to resist it.

This is only one out of a multitude of instances in which our Saviour's divine wisdom is evinced by the facility and power with which he converts a curious, or even an insidious question, into an engine of conviction. On this very same occasion, when a person in the multitude requested him to act as an umpire between him and his brother in a matter of inheritance, our Lord took occasion, from the untimely and irrelevant request, to unmask and reprove the covetousness latent under what might seem to be a lawful and commendable assertion of one's legal rights. A little afterwards, when Peter asked him whether his injunctions of watchfulness were meant for all believers, or for those who held official station—perhaps not without some complacent reference to his own position—instead of a direct reply, our Lord describes, in clear though figurative terms, the character of a faithful office-bearer in his Church, leaving the application to the consciences of those who heard him. So in the case more immediately before us, instead of expressing indignation or astonishment at Pilate's cruelty, and far from conniving at the secret inferences drawn by those around him from this atrocious act, and the casualty mentioned with it—to the disadvantage of the victims as compared with themselves—he teaches them to look at home—to tremble for themselves—to cease from all invidious speculation on the magnitude of other men's offences, as determined by the weight of their misfortunes or the manner of their death—and look towards the similar perdition which, in one form or another, sooner or later awaited all involved in the same general condemnation.

Another characteristic of our Saviour's teaching here exemplified is, that even in his most severe denunciations he is far from shutting up the door of mercy. By the very act of holding up repentance, or a thorough change of mind, and character, and life,

as an essential, indispensable condition of escape from the destruction which he threatens, he reveals the glorious and blessed truth that such escape is possible. The promise, "Repent, and ye shall live," is wrapped up in the threatening, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."

Here, then, is the use which this instructive passage teaches us to make of the calamities of others, whether those which fall on individuals in private life, or those which strike whole classes and communities. The whole secret may be told in one short word—Repent. As the goodness of God to ourselves ought to lead us to repentance, so ought his judgments upon others to produce the same effect. Every such judgment should remind us that our own escape is but a respite—that if they who perish in our sight were guilty, we are guilty too, and that unless we repent we must all likewise perish.

This means something more than *perish also*; it means *perish in like manner*; if not with the same external tokens of perdition, with a ruin no less real, no less fearful, no less final. As addressed by Christ to the contemporary Jews, the words had a terrible significance, which they were not prepared to comprehend or to appreciate, but which received a fearful illustration from subsequent events. In less than half a century from the date of this solemn admonition, the atrocities of Pilate and the casualty of Siloam were to be repeated on a scale of horrid and terrific grandeur. The blood of thousands, in the frenzied desperation of intestine strife, was mingled with their sacrifices, not by Roman swords, but by their own; and as the eighteen had been crushed by the fall of a single tower, so an untold multitude were to lie entombed beneath the prostrate walls of their polluted temple.

In reference to these points of resemblance, the two incidents referred to in the context, might be said to typify or symbolize the national catastrophe which was then approaching; and, in reference to the points, Christ might say to those who heard him, as representatives of Israel, if not as individuals, "Except ye repent, ye shall all *likewise* perish"—as if he had said, Except ye repent, your blood shall be mingled with your sacrifices, too; you, too, shall be crushed beneath the towers of your temple; even in reference to the mode of your destruction, "ye shall all *likewise* perish!"



But, even leaving out of view these outward coincidences, striking as they are, the words are full of solemn warning and instruction, not only to the old Jews, but to us, upon whom these ends of the world are come. They give a tongue and an articulate utterance to every signal providence, to every sudden death, to every open grave, to every darkened house, to every scattered fortune, to every blighted reputation, to every broken heart, in society around us. They command us, they entreat us to withdraw our view from the calamities of others, as proofs of *their* iniquity, and to view them rather as memorials of our own, of that common guilt to which these manifold distresses owe their origin, and in which we, alas, are so profoundly and so ruinously implicated. Oh, my hearers, can you not hear all this, as it were, articulately uttered by the Providence of God? If you can, then the Lord Jesus Christ is saying, just as really and solemnly to you as he said to those around him eighteen centuries ago, Think ye that this or that man, overtaken in his sins, and swept away by some terrific judgment, was a sinner above all that dwell in New York or America? "I tell you nay; I tell you nay." You are yourself, perhaps, a greater sinner; you are certainly so great a sinner that, "except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish," if not in the same way to the eyes of man, yet as really, as terribly, as hopelessly, as endlessly. Why should we think of measuring gradations in perdition, or of comforting ourselves that we are not so bad as others, if we perish after all? Oh, my friends, to perish is to perish, whether as the chief of sinners, or as something less. The circumstantial differences in the fate of those who perish will be lost in its essential identity. And even the momentary consolation of this difference may be denied us. When you hear of war, of famine, and of pestilence, as wasting other lands or other portions of our own, you may, perhaps, congratulate yourself that these desolating scourges are far distant; or, if any of them be approaching, that they only sweep away the refuse of society, and move beyond the precincts of the magic circle where you are yourself entrenched. Alas! so thought the people of Jerusalem and Galilee, who told our Saviour of the massacre of Pilate and the downfall of the tower in Siloam. You, like them, may be mistaken—like them, and like their fathers, in the days of Isaiah, to

whom he said, "Wherefore hear the word of the Lord, ye scornful men, that rule this people which is in Jerusalem. Because ye have said, we have made a covenant with death, and with hell are at agreement; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us, for we have made this our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves. Therefore, thus saith the Lord God, Behold I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone, a sure foundation; he that believeth shall not make haste. Judgment also will I lay to the line and righteousness to the plummet, and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding-place. And your covenant with death shall be annulled, and your agreement with hell shall not stand; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, then ye shall be trodden down by it," &c., &c. If that consumption is again let loose upon the earth, and if it has a voice, methinks I hear it saying even now to us, Suppose ye that they who died in Ireland of famine, and in Mexico of battles, and in Asia, Europe, and America of cholera, were sinners above all who dwell in the four quarters of the earth? I tell you nay; I tell you nay; but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish!



#### XXXIV.

### Despised and Rejected of Men.

“He is despised and rejected of men.”—ISAIAH liii. 3.

THERE is scarcely anything more characteristic of the masses of mankind, than the facility with which they can be roused and set in motion, by any specious promise to improve their temporal condition. Even where their actual state is not one of extraordinary suffering, nor that which is offered in its place peculiarly attractive, nor the means by which it is proposed to accomplish it remarkably appropriate or efficacious, some natural propensity to change still operates in favour of the new proposal, and vast multitudes are instantly pervaded, as it were, by a galvanic influence, entirely disproportionate to the visible inducements, and apparently independent of all rational considerations.

There *are* individuals, and even classes of society, which seem to remain proof against this popular susceptibility, and take no part in the exciting movements which it generates. But, on the other hand, there are cases, still more numerous and marked, in which this same susceptibility is carried to a length which verges on insanity; and this extreme may fairly neutralize or cancel that already mentioned, so as to leave the general statement still emphatically true, that this mobility and readiness to catch at new schemes for improving the condition of society, does really belong to the masses of mankind, as a prominent feature of their common character. I speak of the masses, not in any invidious or unfavourable sense, as opposed to the select few who are thought, by themselves or others, to monopolize refinement and intelligence; but in the proper sense of the expres-

sion, as denoting great numbers, and even whole communities, in opposition to smaller bodies, and still more to insulated individuals. For, one of the most striking points connected with the general fact in question, is the uniformity with which it may be verified, upon the largest scale of observation and comparison. Not only may the same cause be seen to operate in a vast aggregate of individual cases, but the actual and visible effects which it produces, are of a social, not to say a national, description. That is to say, the movements prompted by this potent and mysterious spring in man's constitution, are not merely personal, or limited to small organic bodies, but the movements of societies, communities, or nations, by a common impulse, as if suddenly endowed with a rational and moral individuality.

This is abundantly verified by history, which exhibits, when surveyed upon a large scale, nothing more distinctly marked, or more impressive to the eye of the intelligent observer, than those great migrations, the unsettling and removal of whole races, which have so often changed the whole condition of society, and given complexion to all after times. The profane traditions of the old world are unanimous, amidst their variations as to all things else, in showing us the surface of primeval history, however stagnant and monotonous in general, as repeatedly broken and enlivened by these earth slides and avalanches of migration—the abrupt, and, for the most part, unaccountable removal of the vast living masses from their original or immemorial homes to new ones.

The earliest history of Greece is nothing but a complicated maze of such migrations; and the same thing may be said, in due proportion, of the infantile reminiscences of every other ancient people. Even the New World forms no exception to this general statement. According to the Mexican traditions, the old race which established the empire overthrown by Cortez, had been wandering eight centuries before it settled on that lofty tableland. With all allowance for traditional corruption and exaggeration, there is, no doubt, truth in these accounts, for several reasons, and especially because they substantially agree with sacred history, which sets before us, at a very early period, the imposing sight of a great human current, setting from the source

of population, in the central valley of South-western Asia, and represents even God's peculiar people as passing through a series of remarkable migrations.

To show the confirmation of the same thing, in the history of later times, I need only allude to the repeated inundations of the Roman empire by immense and overwhelming floods of foreign population from some unknown reservoir or fountain, following each other like successive floods of lava, from repeated eruptions of Vesuvius or Etna, sweeping away existing institutions, and almost obliterating every ancient landmark; so that Europe, as it now is, or as it lately was, derives the most marked peculiarities of its condition, from the presence and the power of these so-called barbarians.

For these great movements of the human race, historians have been puzzled to account. No one hypothesis affords an adequate solution. That the shifting masses have been started by the want of room, or of subsistence, or by a definite desire of better settlements, may serve to explain some cases, but admit not of a general application, since, in many instances, the current of migration has set out from spacious regions, rich but thinly settled, to lands already overstocked, if not exhausted, so that one large population must be destroyed, or at least displaced, to make way for another; while in many cases there appears to have been no desire of settlement at all, but the masses, once set in motion, have continued to move on, until lost in the surrounding nations or destroyed by collision with bodies harder than themselves.

This difficulty in explaining the phenomenon on any ordinary principles of action, only makes it more adapted to the end for which I cite it, as an illustration of the restlessness and feverish mobility which is characteristic of the masses of mankind. That it has not been destroyed by the spread of civilization or of free institutions, we may satisfy ourselves by simply looking round us—watching the movements—counting the pulsations of the great body politic, of which we form a part. Look at the symptoms of susceptibility in reference to the three great worldly interests of health, wealth, and freedom. Observe the easy faith, the persuasible docility of men in general with respect to sovereign remedies for some or all diseases. See how the popular credulity keeps

pace with the very extravagance of the pretensions, so that men seem, by some strange inversion of the ordinary laws of reasoning, to believe and be convinced in inverse proportion to the evidence afforded.

Look, again, at the avidity with which new fields of speculation, or new mines of wealth are seized upon without a disposition to contest the most improbable assertions, or rather with a perverse disposition to lay hold of what is most improbable in preference to what is less so, and to make a mine of merit of believing it, and proving the sincerity of the belief by corresponding action, not unfrequently involving painful sacrifice of actual possession or of cheering prospect for what may be a chimera, for what must be an unsatisfying portion. All this is exemplified among ourselves.

For a third example, we must look abroad at those tumultuous excitements in the sea of nations, from which we, through the divine mercy, dwell apart, as having already realized the vision of which others dream. Without detracting in the least from the value of the object aimed at, the secure enjoyment of civil and religious freedom, it is impossible to look at these commotions from our post of observation without seeing how the rational and right desire of liberty is diluted on the one hand, or poisoned on the other, with childish folly, with insane illusion, with corrupt ambition, and, above all, with an utterly irrational credulity, a blind and superstitious faith in the sufficiency of theories and systems to heal wounds which have been bleeding and discharging nearly six thousand years, and an impious reliance upon men, and not the best men, to effect what God has solemnly reserved as an inalienable, incommunicable part of his divine prerogative.

From all this it is easy to infer that we do no injustice to ourselves or others, when we represent it as a characteristic feature of man's actual condition, that he is predisposed to look with favour upon any specious project of amelioration—that his bias, in relation to such schemes, is rather to credulity than scepticism, and that this propensity is not a matter of prudential calculation, but proved to be as much an affection of the heart as of the head, by the avidity with which the inclinations constantly outrun the judgment, and in some cases wholly supersede its action.

It would, however, be at variance with man's nature as a

rational being, if his reason were completely set at naught, or even held in abeyance, by his sense of want, and his impatience to supply it. While the restless character in question does undoubtedly arise from an instinctive consciousness of something needed to appease the cravings of unsatisfied desire, and a vague belief in the reality of something more desirable than anything as yet attained, it seems impossible that man, without a forfeiture of that which raises him above the brutes, should systematically act in opposition to the dictates of his reason and his better judgment, or perversely choose what he cannot but see to be least entitled to his choice. Passion, and appetite, and strong delusion may obscure his perceptions and impede the action of his rational powers, but cannot utterly destroy them. And, accordingly, we find that in relation to these very schemes and hopes of temporal advancement, there is a vast expenditure of cunning and sagacity in order to secure the advantage and to baffle competition. It might, therefore, be expected from analogy, that the influence exerted upon men by offers to ameliorate their actual condition would bear some proportion to the greatness of the evils which they actually suffer, to the fitness and efficacy of the means employed to bring about a change, and to the value of the positive advantages bestowed or promised.

Seeing how credulous men are, how ready to believe and act on the authority of questionable evidence, and under the control of interested guides, provided there is any possibility of bettering their condition after all, it might be supposed that this facility of faith and action, this promptness to believe, and this eagerness to act on the belief, would rise with the clearness of the evidence afforded, and the authority by which the movement has been sanctioned or required. And, as the strongest case conceivable, it might have been expected, with the highest antecedent probability, that if the prospect, opened to mankind or any portion of the race, was that of complete deliverance from the worst of evils by the use of means infallibly effective, and if they were summoned and encouraged to the use of these by an authority alike incapable of error and deception, I say, in such a case as I have just supposed, it might well have been inferred from all analogy, that the restless disposition of our race to better its con-

dition, and the readiness with which it is convinced that such amelioration is attainable, would operate at once, without restraint, and with complete unqualified effect, in the production of the change proposed.

With this antecedent probability let us now compare the fact as attested by the most authentic evidence. The key to history, both sacred and profane, is furnished by the fact that, after man had fallen through the influence of evil spirits, and God had determined to restore him by the gift of his own Son and Spirit, he foretold to our first parents, or rather in their presence to the great seducer, that there was to be a protracted contest between two antagonistic races, called in the prophecy the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman ; a warfare full of fluctuations and reverses, but ultimately tending to the triumph of the cause of truth, and righteousness, and mercy.

This prospective division of mankind into two great parties gives complexion to all history, and may be traced distinctly from the date of the prediction to the end of time. The first visible triumph of the good cause was reserved for the appearance of its champion upon earth, when it was symbolized and really begun by victories openly achieved over the adverse powers of darkness. To prepare for his appearance, the explicit revelation of God's will was limited for ages to a single race, and everything in their condition was so ordered as to excite, in the highest possible degree, the sense of want and the correlative desire of something to supply it.

As the time for the fulfilment of the promise drew near, this restless expectation reached its height. From the Jews it passed over to the Gentiles, where it seems to have combined with a collateral tradition, reaching back to the first periods of human history, and both together generating in the palmiest days of Roman domination, a pervading apprehension of some great event or personage as near at hand, a state of feeling attested both by Jewish and classical historians. This general condition of the public mind throughout the Roman empire, at the very acme of its greatness, and the widest sweep of its victorious yet pacific sway, was nothing more than an extraordinary and simultaneous exhibition of those same uneasy movements of the mind and will



which we have seen to be exemplified, in more irregular and insulated forms, throughout all nations and in every period of history. It was the innate consciousness of want, and the irrepressible desire of something better and yet unpossessed, subjected to new stimulants, and brought, by providential means, to bear upon the great scheme of human renovation and advancement which was about to be unrolled by the hand of God himself.

This scheme possessed, in the highest degree, everything which we have seen to be required as passports to men's confidence. The evil which it undertook to cure was the greatest in itself, and the cause of every other ; the means such as only the divine compassion could have brought to bear upon the end proposed ; and this end, far from being merely negative, or limited to freedom from existing evils, comprehended the experience and possession of the highest good conceivable, both natural and moral. Here, then, was a case in which that native impulse might have been expected to have full scope and activity.

It is left to conjecture, or to reason from analogy, how natural and easy to imagine the effect of this stupendous revelation on the hearts and lives of the expectant nations. As all eyes had, by some mysterious influence, been turned towards the spot where the Deliverer of mankind was to appear, and the great men and wise men of the world, no less than the vast mixed multitude around them, held their breath, half in hope and half in dread of the event, it might have been imagined that when He, the incarnate Son of God, and yet the Man of Sorrows for our sake, rose on the view of this vast amphitheatre of nations, not as a gladiator in the arena of Vespasian's matchless structure, for the amusement of the world, but for its ransom, for its rescue from the greatest of all evils, and indeed from all the evils that had stained or crushed it since the first sin was committed—the wonder, gratitude, and joy of the spectators would have found vent, not in noisy acclamations, not in silent and inactive tears, but in a mighty simultaneous rush of nations towards the cross, and the gushing life-spring which flowed from it—a unanimous, enthusiastic self-appropriation of this heaven-descended panacea for all pains, this inexhaustible supply of all necessities, this talisman of entrance to eternal glory, comprehending in itself all the true, and superseding all the false

expedients for attaining the same end, by which these very nations had again and again been roused to frenzy, and excited as one man to energetic but insane exertion. Yes, it might have been imagined that the men who had been thus roused by the false, or partial and inadequate devices of philosophy, philanthropy, or practical experience of plotting craft or soaring ambition, would have fallen down in speechless adoration at the feet of Him, invested with divine authority and power to do what men and angels had essayed in vain.

With this imagination, natural and reasonable as it would have been beforehand, let us now compare the simple, unexaggerated fact as recorded in the text by the prophetic historian, of a suffering Messiah. "He was despised and rejected of men." This is no hyperbole or Oriental figure of speech, it is the literal history of Christ's reception by the nations; the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. He was despised and rejected. He for whom they had been waiting with an eager curiosity, when he came was despised and rejected by the very people who had hung with idiotic faith upon the lips of augurs, pythonesses, magi, and false prophets. Even by the Jews themselves, who had existed as a nation to prepare for his appearance, he was despised and rejected, that is, by the masses of the people; while among the Gentiles, with the exception of the chosen few who joined with the elect Jews to compose the Christian Church, the exciting anticipation of his coming was exchanged for bitter spite, or frivolous contempt, or stupid indifference, and they who were too wise and too refined to believe the record God had given of his Son, went back to their oracles, and fanes, and mysteries, to the filthy rites of Venus and the bloody rites of Moloch, "as the dog returns to his own vomit, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire."

These expressions may be strong, but the reality is stronger, and the utmost license in the use of language would fall short of the loathsome folly and ingratitude of this reception given to God's highest, best, and most invaluable gift. Nor was it a mere temporary fit of madne, an ephemeral delirium. It has lasted ever since without so much as a lucid interval in the case of the great masses of mankind. And never has this scornful rejection

of an offered Saviour been more odious in its spite, or more pitiable in its senselessness, than at the times, and in the places, and among the men where the natural credulity of which I have been speaking, and the practical docility which is its fruit, were most conspicuously manifest.

These darkened glimpses of a distant past may prepare our eyes for the intenser and less grateful light of times and places nearer to ourselves. Why should we talk of the old Romans and the Jews, of the Crusaders and the mediæval generations, when we have only to look out of our windows to behold precisely the same spectacle, the same susceptibility of strong impressions, the same lively hopes and fears, the same credulity or easy faith, disposing to believe the most extravagant inventions, if embellished with a promise of long life, or boundless wealth, or unstinted freedom; the same restless inquiry after some new bait to this insatiable appetite; the same precipitation in obeying any call to fresh indulgence, without stopping to compute the chances or to count the cost; the same compassionate Redeemer knocking at the door of men's hearts, as a man of sorrows bruised for their iniquities, entreating, as it were, for leave to save them, and the same contemptuous repulse. As this was, in prophecy, a constituted token of the true Messiah, so has it been in history, and still is, the invariable character of Christ's reception by the world, by the nations, by the masses of mankind. The offence of the cross has not ceased. "He is despised and rejected of men."

This would be bad enough and strange enough, even if it were in perfect keeping with the character and conduct of mankind in general. Even if men were naturally unsusceptible of strong excitement in relation to the future, even if it were hard to rouse their hopes and fears, or to render them available as means of practical control; if they were not easily imposed upon by falsehood or exaggeration, or disposed to act without sufficient evidence or warrant, it would still be an unspeakable infatuation to refuse to believe or act on God's authority. They might be inaccessible to dreams of wealth, and independence, and longevity, and yet be chargeable with madness in rejecting everlasting life. But how shall we find words for the description of this madness when the ordinary conduct of mankind is all the other way; when

they are credulous and tractable, and eagerly precipitate in everything that promises to better their condition in the present life, and only sceptical, and self-willed, and refractory, when it is God who calls, and Christ who pleads, and everlasting life or death that is at stake! This astonishing exception to the general rule of human character and conduct seems to call for explanation, and the Bible gives it. The secret of this startling inconsistency lies in the simple but humiliating fact, that men are most insensible precisely to the greatest evils and the greatest good. This is a part of their hereditary curse. "Madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead," to be for ever undeceived. One decisive symptom of this madness is, that it regards eternity as less than time, the soul as inferior to the body, God as less entitled to belief than man, an hour of animal indulgence more attractive than all heaven, a year of bodily privation or endurance more terrific than the gnawings of a guilty conscience, and the fire of divine wrath in the hottest hell for ever. I am speaking now of those who do not pretend to doubt the truth of Christianity or to dispute the authority of God, but who nevertheless act in direct opposition to their own avowed convictions. With such delusions, why attempt to reason? "Madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead."

This view of the delusion, under which the whole race naturally labours, casts a melancholy light upon the actual condition of the world, and more especially on those great national convulsions which are continually reaching even these ends of the earth with the prolonged reverberation of their noise, and the sympathetic shock of their concussions. However highly we may estimate the prize for which the nations are contending, how should we be affected by the thought that, after all, these struggling masses are unconscious of their greatest dangers, and unsuspecting of their deepest degradation. To us the fearful events that are now passing, seen by a dim light at so vast a distance, are like some great nocturnal conflagration, or some scene of shipwreck; and to one who takes the view which I have just presented, most of the actors in this fearful drama must appear like men enveloped in the flames, or sinking in the waves within reach of the only means of

possible escape, yet unaware of it, or in their blindness and confusion disregarding it; catching with desperate eagerness at this or that expedient, only to relinquish it anon or to perish in reliance on it, when a single step, a motion of the hands, a turning of the body, nay, a look or a word of admonition from another, might insure their safety.

He who could gaze on such a scene in real life without a sickening of the heart, must be without one altogether. And a kindred feeling may be naturally stirred by the sublime but awful spectacle of burning empires and of shipwrecked nations. As in the case supposed, however distant or however feeble, the humane spectator would experience an involuntary impulse to do something, to hasten towards the scene of death, to shout or cry aloud in warning; so the man who looks upon contemporary changes in the light of truth and of eternity, may feel an irrepressible yearning to extend a helping hand, or raise a helping voice to those great masses now in violent commotion, and too soon perhaps to be baptized in blood, to warn them that there is a worse oppression than the one beneath which they are chafing, and a nobler freedom than the one in which they are rejoicing, to divert their eyes and their idolatrous affections from the objects of their overweening trust—the men whom they worship as their national deliverers—to One who is a Saviour indeed, a deliverer both of men and nations, but whom, in common with their enemies and tyrants, they are still rejecting.

To a mind susceptible of such impressions, and capable of large and lofty views of human interests, as well as open to the calls of suffering humanity, the question may perhaps present itself as one of individual duty. What can *I* do? what shall *I* do for the remedy of this great evil? I will answer the question, if it comes from one who is himself a voluntary subject of Christ's kingdom. I say, follow your leader into the thickest of the fight, into the hottest of the fire, into the heart of the deep sea if need be; do what you can to let his name be heard and his victorious banner seen on every bloody field, on every wreck-strewn sea or shore. But if, alas! you are yourself an alien from the very Christ whom you would preach to others, then my answer is, remember that the ocean is made up of drops, and all societies of rational,

responsible, personal agents. If every man among the masses now in motion on the surface of society, like conflicting icebergs in the Arctic Sea, were personally loyal and devoted to the Saviour, the entire mass could not despise or reject him. If the greater portion were thus faithful, the controlling influence in nations and communities must be a good one. Let us not then be so far absorbed in the condition of the mass as to lose sight of its constituent elements.

For a moment, at least, insulate yourself from the surrounding mass in which you are, perhaps, too much disposed to lose sight of your individuality, and let me put a parting question, to be answered, not to me, not to any fellow-man, but to your conscience and your God. "He was despised and rejected of men." Of these men you are one by nature; are you still one in the heat of your affections and the conduct of your life? Are you still one of those by whom the offer of salvation is rejected? Do you still refuse or delay to trust him, and to give yourself away to him? Ah, then! I beseech you, think no longer of the nations or the masses who reject him. Waste not your pity on mankind in general, but reserve it for that one deluded heart, which, in the midst of all this light and all this mercy, still despises and rejects the Saviour. While you thus bar the door of your own heart against him, shed not the tear of sentimental sorrow over his exclusion from the hearts of others, lest he turn and—pointing to that untried future which is still before you—say to you as he said to the women who lamented him, when on his way from Gabbatha to Golgotha, from the judgment seat of Pilate to the place of crucifixion, "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but for yourselves and for your children."



## The Hope of Abraham.

“ He looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.”  
—HEB. xi. 10.

THESE words refer to the patriarch Abraham, one of the most extraordinary characters of any age. Without going into his biography at large, let me call your attention to two circumstances, which especially distinguished this great man from others. In the first place, he was the Friend of God. I mean not merely that his history entitles him to this honourable appellation; not merely that God treated him and looked upon him as his friend; but that he is expressly called the Friend of God in Scripture. By the mouth of the prophet Isaiah, the Lord said to Israel: “Thou art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend.”

And why was he thus honoured? Was not Abraham a child of wrath even as others? Yes. He could not therefore be entitled meritoriously to the distinction which his name implies. No, he himself well knew that it was not for any merit of his own, that he was allowed to be the friend of God. On the contrary, it was by renouncing all dependence on himself that he acquired this honour. Faith was his grand distinction; simple reliance on the word of God; belief in his promises, and acquiescence in his method of salvation. It was thus that Abraham became the Friend of God. But was not this a meritorious faith? Did not this very self-renunciation and reliance upon God entitle Abraham to claim his favour? It would have done so, but for this simple reason, that his faith was the gift of God, and that the same glorious Being who rewarded him, bestowed upon him that which was rewarded. Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By

what law? The law of works? Nay, but by the law of faith: It was faith, my brethren, faith that rendered Abraham pre-eminently great, so great as to be called the Friend of God, and the Father of the Faithful.

This is the second honourable title which I propose to mention. Abraham, the Friend of God, was also the Father of the Faithful. Not, as the Jews supposed, the father of their nation merely. This mistaken notion made them cry out, in reply to our Lord's severe reproofs, "We have Abraham to our father." And what was his answer? "God is able even of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham." That is to say, though all Israel should fail, Abraham might still have a numerous spiritual seed; and God can give him such even from the most unexpected quarters, the most unpromising materials. While the unbelieving natural descendants of Abraham are cast out, the degraded heathen can be put into their place by the power and grace of God. He is able, even of these stones, to raise up children unto Abraham. It was not of Jews then, but of true believers, that Abraham was the spiritual father; the Father of the Faithful.

He was their father, first, as being their exemplar. He is held up as a model of strong faith to all believers, and they who follow the example of his faith, are in that respect his children. In this sense he is the Father of the Faithful. But he is also the Father of the Faithful, because the promise made to him embraced all believers who came after him. The condition of this promise was not obedience to the law, but faith in the gratuitous mercy of God, and in the atoning sacrifice of Christ. And this was the condition, not to Abraham only, but to his spiritual seed, that is, to all who should believe as he believed. "For the promise that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith." As one of the contracting parties in this gracious covenant, or rather as the representative of those to whom these promises were given, Abraham was the Father of the Faithful.

Passing over all his other claims to high distinction your memory will readily suggest, I desire you to fix your eyes on these two titles of nobility bestowed upon Abraham in the word of God, and measuring his rank by these, to take into consideration the



remarkable fact in his history to which I now invite you attention. This fact is, that Abraham, the Friend of God and the Father of the Faithful, was a homeless man, a wanderer, who sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tents like an Arab or a Tartar. This fact, though not inexplicable, is so far singular as to deserve our particular attention.

1. Why, then, was Abraham a wanderer, a homeless man, a sojourner in the land of promise? I remark that it was not on account of poverty. In the East, indeed, the wandering mode of life is not in any case a sign of poverty. Powerful chieftains and whole tribes of warriors lead such a life from choice, or because it is necessary for the subsistence of their flocks and herds. But even if it were in general a criterion of poverty, it could not be so in this case. Abraham was rich—rich by inheritance—rich by acquisition—rich by the blessing of God on the increase of his possessions—and rich through the favour of the kings and chiefs whose friendship he enjoyed. His history is that of one who lived in ease and affluence, practising the characteristic hospitality of an Eastern chief.

2. Was it then because he had no real estate, no landed property, to which he could lay claim, and on which he might reside? The whole land of Canaan was in one sense his own. It was his by express grant from Jehovah—made sure to him and to his heirs for ever. It is true that when he needed a possession of a burial-place he bought it with his money of the children of Heth. But this was a part of that same course of self-denial and forbearance which is now in question. The same motive that made him a sojourner and wanderer, led him to forego his rights as the legitimate owner of the soil, and the question still arises what these motives were.

3. We read that when Abraham first crossed the Jordan from the East, "the Canaanite was in the land." The Hivite, the Hittite, the Jebusite, the Amorite, and other sons of Canaan, had possession of the country. And so thickly were they settled, in the central part at least, that there was not room for Abraham and Lot to live together. May it not be, therefore, that these actual possessors of the country would not suffer him to dwell among them? Had they known his pretensions, or, to speak more properly, his rights,

they might have hated him and driven him away. But as he made no efforts to enforce those rights, nor even to assert them; and as he came among them from the East with flocks and herds, and as an independent chieftain, they received him with respect, and this respect increased.

It is, indeed, an interesting feature in the history of Abraham's expatriation, that in Egypt, in Philistia, and in Canaan, he was treated by the natives, not only as a man respectable for wealth and power, but as a prince, a "prince of God," and as a prophet, one who held immediate intercourse with God, and was an interpreter of the divine will. In these characters he was known and revered by the heathen who surrounded him; and except in the case of the attack on Sodom and Gomorrah by the "confederated kings," all his relations with the Canaanites were amicable. And in the only case where he applied for land, it was granted by the Hittites in a manner most courteous and cordial. It was not, therefore, on account of any enmity between him and the Canaanites, that, instead of founding or accepting a great city, he preferred to live a wandering and what we would call a homeless life. There must be other reasons for his course.

4. Since then it was neither poverty, nor the want of land, nor opposition on the part of its possessors, that deterred him from inhabiting a city, or, at least, from leading a more settled life, it may be suggested, that his perseverance in a wandering course, shows him to have been a mere barbarian, one who was unable to appreciate the comforts of a settled life, or rather, who had never had experience of them. Thus we find that in Arabia there are tribes of Bedouins who regard their wandering life as the most honourable possible, and laugh to scorn those pleasures and advantages of civilized society about which they know nothing by experience. But let it be observed that these tribes inhabit the Arabian desert, where cultivation exists only in detached spots, and where the herdsman is obliged to change his pasture-ground and home continually.

Abraham, on the other hand, was in a fertile, cultivated, thickly settled country, full of proud cities, walled towns of inferior size, and villages innumerable. There is strong reason to believe that the Canaanites who were then in the land, had reached a

pretty high degree of civilization. Scanty as our information is about them, there are incidental indications of improvement which are not to be mistaken. But even supposing that they were barbarians, it does not follow that Abraham was also one. Coming as he did from that part of the globe which seems to have been first settled after the flood—from a country, which in later times, claimed, and was allowed to be, the cradle of knowledge by the heathen world, it is not to be supposed that he was a barbarian. The mere possession of the true religion would have had, in this as well as other cases, a refining influence. No, he was no barbarian. It was not because he knew no better that he chose to sojourn as a stranger in the land of promise—to dwell in tents instead of houses—and to govern an encampment, not a city or a kingdom.

5. Was it then because he thought it wrong to lead a settled life in towns and cities, that he dwelt in tents? There is no trace of such a doctrine in the word of God, and Abraham was too well grounded in the divine will, to hold it as a superstition. He was no ascetic. His mode of life, as I have said already, was a generous one, without fanatical antipathies—without the practice of monastic austerities or the will-worship of self-inflicted mortifications. It was not because he looked upon a settled life and civilization as sinful, that he was willing to relinquish them. What then was his motive?

6. To some the thought may here occur, that we are searching for the explanation of a fact which needs none. Why should Abraham's wandering be considered stranger than the wandering of any other Eastern chief? And as those of the highest rank lead such a life to this day, it need not be regarded as below the dignity even of the Father of the Faithful and the Friend of God. He came into the country with his flocks and herds; and as the land was densely peopled, he was under the necessity of frequently changing his encampment and his pasture. This would be wholly satisfactory, but for the apostle's mention of the patriarch's unsettled life as a remarkable evidence of faith. If it arose merely from the nature of his property, and in fact contributed to his convenience and increase in wealth, it would hardly have been said of him, that "by faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange

country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise." We are, therefore, forced to the conclusion, that his motive for pursuing such a course was very different from that which leads the ordinary herdsmen of the East to shift from place to place, and to live and die beneath a roof of camel's hair or goatskins.

7. Having thus determined negatively, that it was neither poverty, nor want of title to the land, nor opposition on the part of the inhabitants, nor ignorance, nor mere ascetic self-denial, nor a regard to temporal convenience that induced him to reside in tents, rather than in a palace and a city worthy of so great a prince, we are ready to receive the explanation of the text, which is this, "he looked" or was looking "for a city." There is an ambiguity in the English version which is not in the original. "To look for," in modern English, means to search for or to seek. In the English of our Bible, where the phrase is not uncommon, it means simply to expect. The sense, then, is not that Abraham was wandering in search of a city upon earth, but that he lived in quiet expectation of a city. "If we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it." It was this "patience of hope" that rendered Abraham indifferent to the walled cities of the Canaanites around him, whose antiquity was of ancient days, and whose defence was the munition of rocks. Nothing so effectually breeds indifference to present objects, as the hope of better things to come. The traveller pressing homewards after a long absence, can pass, with a contemptuous smile, or absolute unconsciousness, those very objects which the homeless traveller dwells upon with rapture. As the venerable patriarch journeyed from Dan to Beersheba, passing among the cities and domains of the Canaanites, we may imagine that we saw him looking ever and anon beyond these objects to one more remote, and losing sight of Kirjath-Arba and Jebus, since called Hebron and Jerusalem, with their tall towers and heaven-scaling walls, amidst the loftier battlements and turrets of that real yet ideal city, towards which he was journeying. "He looked for a city."

8. And what sort of a city did he look for, in contempt of those around him? How did the city of his expectations differ from the cities of the Canaanites and the Philistines, from old Damascus,

and from Ur of the Chaldees? It had foundations. "He looked for a city which hath foundations." And had not they foundations? In one sense they had none. They were liable to change. In the same sense, Abraham's city, which he looked for, had foundations, has them now; for observe the present form of the expression. It was a city, therefore, not of this world; for in this world there are no foundations time-proof. And whence had the city of his hopes these firm foundations? From the Architect.

9. Whose builder and maker is God? God does not build like man. The foundations of his structures are laid deep in his decrees, and the cement has been growing hard from all eternity. His power over the materials he uses is not merely the disposing power of a builder, but the absolute power of a maker. What he builds he creates. The city of which he is the maker and builder, is eternal; it has foundations which decay can never weaken, and which laugh at the violence of storm and earthquake. Abraham lived in expectation of a city which was not of this world. It was what we call heaven, in the highest sense, the residence prepared by God for his true followers after death—a faithful city in which dwelleth righteousness, the new Jerusalem which John beheld in vision. It is a city which has no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it; for the glory of God lightens it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.

And who are its inhabitants? "The nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honour into it. And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day; for there shall be no night there. And they shall bring the glory and the honour of the nations into it." And are none to be excluded? Ah, yes! "There shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life." And no names are found there but the names of those who wash their robes and make them white in the blood of the Lamb. This is the grand distinction of the city for which Abraham looked. It is a city free from sin. In this it differs from all earthly cities. It is hard to conceive of one of our great cities without the associated images of filth, riot, drunkenness, debauchery, and wretchedness. But if we ever reach the

city of Abraham, and rest upon his bosom at its sumptuous feasts, we shall know how to separate these hateful concomitants from our conceptions of a city.

And why is it called a city? Because with a city we associate ideas of substantial strength, immense wealth, regular government, social intercourse, refinement of manners, and external splendour. But what are all these, in the cities of the earth, to the surpassing glories of that city for which Abraham looked, and where the saints shall be enthroned as kings and priests unto God? No wonder, then, that Abraham, forgetting things around him, looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

10. Here, then, we begin to see a marked resemblance between his case and our own. However foreign and remote from our experience, what has hitherto been said of his condition, at last we are alike, we are all sojourners and strangers upon earth, we seek the same city as the patriarch. However well we may be pleased with it, however fully satisfied with what it can afford, we know that our abode in it is only for a time: it is not the place of our rest. And of this we are receiving constant admonitions. If man's relations to his fellow-man remained unaltered during the present life, he might be tempted to believe that this was his final resting-place. But Providence has left no room for such an illusion. The cords that bind us to the world are breaking one after another, and the very ground on which we stand seems to slide away from under us; so that, in middle life and old age, we appear to tread no longer the green and smiling earth we trod in childhood. We have within us also abundant indications that we are mere sojourners. The sense of a hereafter, the instinctive stretching of the thoughts towards it, teach us the same lesson; while the voice of conscience sometimes shrieks, and sometimes whispers, Arise and depart hence: this is not your rest. You may, perhaps, have heaped up wealth, and used various methods, in order to persuade yourself that you are here at home, and you may be ready to exclaim, What, am I a mere sojourner, surrounded as I am by all this permanent prosperity? You are like a man upon a journey homeward, who should tarry at a wayside inn, and expend his time and money in furnishing and decking

his temporary lodgings. And do you not at times feel yourself that it is so? Have you not often an uneasy sense of present insecurity and approaching change? And is not this sufficient to obscure the brightness of your precious metals, and to impair the verdure of your pleasant fields? And you, O men of pleasure, have not you the same experience? In the midst of your exciting and degrading pastimes, have you not paroxysms of alarm and restlessness? Amidst your voluntary madness, have you not your lucid intervals, in which you feel you are mere sojourners in a foreign country? All feel it; all know, though all will not allow themselves to act as if they knew that they are not at home, and that a journey is before them.

11. Now, this feeling of uneasiness, this sense of homelessness, is, as you well know, incompatible with happiness. In order to be happy, you must have a home, either present or in prospect. Have you such a home? Remember that earthly homes, in reference to eternity, are nothing worth. Look at the households breaking up around you, and say whether these can be your solace and your stay for ever. What will you do then? Will you waste yourselves in misanthropic discontent? No! do as Abraham did: look forward to the city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. The more unsatisfactory you find this world, look the more eagerly and steadfastly on that which is to come. Are you just beginning life, and have you, as yet, experienced no vicissitudes? Oh, then, be wise beforehand. Do not wait till your heart is sickened and your temper soured by disappointment. But now, when your feelings are elastic, and your affections ardent, even now, look for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

If, on the other hand, experience has taught you the treacherous hollowness of sinful pleasures, and your heart is almost breaking with defeated hopes, unsatisfied desires, and a sense of want, then have you the less excuse for looking any longer at those objects which you have already proved and found unsatisfactory. Oh, begin at last to look away from this world, with its cloud-capped towers and gorgeous palaces—look away from the baseless fabric of a vision, to a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

12. But here let us guard against a fatal error—the error of imagining that mere expectation is alone required. Believe me, multitudes have looked for that city who have never reached it. There is but one path to it through the wilderness of life, and that path is a narrow one. It was by that path that the Father of the Faithful gained the object of his faith and hope. If you would gain it likewise, you must walk in the footsteps of the Friend of God. Do you ask what path he travelled? I reply, the path of humble, childlike faith. We know from the life of Christ himself, that Abraham desired to see his day, and saw it, and was glad. It was faith in God's mercy, and that was counted to him for righteousness. It was a firm belief that God would set forth a propitiation for the sins of men, and a hearty acceptance of the pardon thus provided for himself.

These are the footsteps of the Father of the Faithful. If, then, you are merely looking forward to the happiness of heaven, without knowing or caring how it is to be obtained, learn from the example of Abraham that you must renounce all sin and self-reliance, and believe in Jesus Christ for the salvation of your souls, if you would look, with any well-grounded hope, for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

13. And now let me turn to you who have your faces turned to Zion, and are already looking for that city to which Abraham aspired, and where he reigns in glory. It is said that when the caravan of pilgrims to the sepulchre of Christ cross the mountains of Judea, worn with hunger and fatigue, they are sometimes ready to relax their efforts and despair of safe arrival. They may even repent of their own folly in attempting so adventurous a journey, and wish themselves in safety at their own distant fire-sides. But these thoughts all vanish when the summit is attained, and from the mountain's brow they catch a glimpse of Olivet and Zion, and the Forsaken City seated in her widow's weeds upon her throne of hills. That sight reanimates their courage and renews their strength. With simultaneous energy they rise and hasten onward, and the roughness of the journey is forgotten in the presence of Jerusalem. O brethren, we are also strangers and pilgrims, and our way through the world may be precipitous and rugged, and so long as we look only at the things around us, our



hearts may well grow faint and our knees feeble. But amidst these trials and discouragements, look upward to the heavenly hills, and through the dust and smoke of this world's troubles, keep the Eternal City steadfastly in view. That sight will make your hearts beat with new vigour. It will nerve your arm for battle and your bosom for resistance. It will enable you to look down with contempt upon the pleasures and temptations of the world; it will preserve you from illusions, painful even to the Christian, and ah! how often fatal to the unbeliever. With such illusions, we may rest assured the world, the Church, the experience, and the souls of men are ever teeming.

Upon one or two such, I may dwell for a moment in conclusion. If the scenes which I describe are but ideal, they may serve, at least, as types of a most solemn reality. Let us imagine that we see one standing, even now, upon an eminence, a rising ground in life, and looking forwards. He sees nothing but green fields and waving forests—all is fresh and all is smiling—an unruffled stream of pleasure rolls through his imaginary landscape, and the distinctions which he hopes for rise like mountains in the distance. Upon these delightful and inspiring objects his eye rests and feeds. He has no desire to look beyond them. At times, indeed, he may catch a momentary glimpse of something bright, and towering above the highest of the heights before him. Sometimes, when the sun breaks out with sudden splendour from behind a cloud, it seems to be reflected, for an instant, from a thousand glittering points, as though there were a city in the sky. But in a moment it is gone, and he forgets it, or congratulates himself that he is no enthusiast, to give up the real and substantial splendours of the scene before him in exchange for cloud-built palaces and castles in the air.

This proud reflection brings him back, with new complacency, to the Elysian fields which lie before him, and he drinks in with new pleasure the delightful sights and sounds presented to his senses. No wonder then that he refuses to listen, or listens only with incredulous contempt, to the fanatic who would tell him that this fairy prospect is a cheat, a mere illusion—that its colours fade and its music ceases on a near approach, and that the city in the clouds, which he supposed he saw, is not only real, but the only

refuge from approaching dangers. He turns with pity or disgust from such forebodings, and then passes on, until he stands upon the verge of the eminence from which he has been gazing. He looks down into the valley, and beholds with fresh delight its verdure and its fruits, its sunshine and its shade. He envies the retirement of its peaceful hamlets, and listens with awe to the distant murmur of its populous cities. All seems delightful—all substantial—and above all, near at hand.

Enchanted with the prospect, he contemplatively lifts his eyes to yonder dim horizon, as if to satisfy himself that there is nothing there to lure him onward. And nothing does he see but fleecy clouds, or "the body of the heavens in its clearness." Or if he does for an instant see again that strange unearthly gleam, and catch a faint sound like the dying swell of distant music, the flash is transient, and the sound no sooner heard than it is hushed. He pauses for a moment at the point where the upward and the downward paths diverge; he looks up the narrow winding way into the mountains, and then plunges into that which leads him gently down through groves and gardens into the deep valley. Once and again he may stand still to listen as a voice of warning comes again upon his ear. But his election has been made. He passes downward and still downward, guided by the hum of distant voices, and the gentle rush of water far below. He observes with surprise that as he passes on, the distant prospect still seems bright and beautiful, but objects near at hand have no such charms. However far he journeys, the green fields are still as far off as at first; the fields around him appear parched and barren. Flowers are in the distance, but at hand are thorns and briers. Gardens like that of the Hesperides are yonder, but here a garden like that of the sluggard, full of weeds and unenclosed. He begins to imagine that all nature droops and fades at his approach. The grass seems to wither where his footsteps fall; his breath seems to poison vegetation and the atmosphere. The healthful airs of heaven become hot winds of the desert when they touch his cheek; and the glassy streams which were to slake his thirst dry up as he bends over them, and leave a putrid slime in their forsaken channels. The birds whose song allured him, become owls or vultures, or drop lifeless from the branches. Hamlets and

cities turn to rocks and sandhills; and the shadowing trees, now leafless, leave his head exposed to scorching rays from an unclouded sun. As he looks up to tell him how he hates his beams, his torment is enhanced by another passing glimpse of that mysterious city in the clouds above the mountain tops, and another dying echo of its music. In despairing spite he stops his ears and hastens onwards, and the heat soon grows more tolerable, for the sun is hidden and the sky is overcast. Winds begin to howl and whistle; thunders mutter angrily, and a thousand echoes from the hills around proclaim the coming tempest. The very earth beneath him quakes, and the illusions of the fairy landscape cease, and cease for ever. All, all is desolate, not even a shelter from the driving rain. The traveller looks desperately around for refuge from the storms of life, and then madly plunges into some dark cavern of pre-eminent iniquity; and now unable to arrest his progress, passes furiously onwards in the midst of darkness and strange noises, till he suddenly comes forth into the light of day upon the margin of a precipice. With convulsive energy he pauses on the brink; for nature sickens at the gulf below, and the instinct of self-preservation gives him strength to stop, but only for a moment. The impulse of his downward progress is too strong to be resisted, and a fierce wind from behind still pursues him. Forced to look down, his brain begins to swim; he loses his balance; he falls in; he sinks; he catches with the strength of desperation at a twig or a projecting point, and looks up from the mouth of that devouring chasm with a piercing shriek for mercy. And in that last, dying, and despairing upward look, he is entirely and for ever undeceived. He knows what he has done, and oh, unutterable anguish! he knows to a degree which plants a thousand daggers in his dying soul, he knows what he has lost. For there, far above him, at the end of the narrow path which he despises, is the city in the sky which he had learned to laugh at as a baseless vision. But he sees it no longer as a shadowy pile of clouds. Its walls and battlements are of adamant; its deep foundations reach beyond the view of the lost sinner, as he loses his last hold upon the upper world, and after unavailing and convulsive struggles, sinks, sinks, like lead in the mighty waters, his eye still fixed upon that city with foundations, whose builder and

maker is God, until it is withdrawn to be fixed for ever upon sights which, God forbid that you or I should ever see.

Let me for one moment shift the scene, and show you another instance of illusion equally powerful, but oh, how different in its nature and its end! Let me show you a small company of pilgrims who have chosen the rough, narrow, upward path which leads away from the green valley into the recesses of the bleak and barren mountains. Some you might see passing onwards with alacrity, forgetting all below them and behind them, or remembering it only to accelerate their progress towards that city with foundations, upon which their eyes are fastened. It is not of these that I would speak.

Others I might show you pressing on in the same course as long as sunshine lasts, or moonlight gilds the pinnacles of yonder city; but when black clouds hide the sky, and thick mists veil the earth, they avert their faces, they begin to linger, and to cast a longing glance into the depth below them, where the world and its temptations are arrayed in fatal splendour, and from which the voice of mirth and business constantly ascends, until sooner or later they hang over the edge with too intense a curiosity, and what follows is only known by the sound of a heavy plunge in some depth below.

But it is not of these that I would speak. It is of one who neither lingers nor looks back, nor gazes down into the valley, but whose face is still turned Zionward, whose progress, though now faster and now slower, is perceptible and constant. I wish to show you one who, while he thus moves onward in the right direction, is no less the subject of illusion than the wretch whose end I have described to you.

He journeys towards the heavenly city, but he sees it not. Jerusalem is in his heart, but not before his eyes. He even dreams that he has taken the wrong path. Imagination magnifies the dangers of the journey. Every step appears to lead into some hidden snare, and every stone to be the mark of some deep pitfall. Every thicket is an ambush; every dark spot an expected place of conflict. The hardy plants that bloom along the rugged path seem poisonous; the springs provided by the Master for his pilgrims are passed by in timid and suspicious thirst. And when

at length the body sinks exhausted and in need of slumber, all seems lost; and the man of little faith sleeps in the belief that he shall never wake. And when he does awake, it is only to a repetition of the same illusion. He is still afraid that he shall never reach the city. He is still unable to discover it in the distance; he will not look for it, but keeps his eyes fixed on the ground; or if he looks, he will not look to the right point; or if he looks to the right point, he finds the mist too dense, or the light too bright for his diseased vision. Or if he sees the object, he refuses to believe his senses, and suspects delusion on the only point where he is free from it.

Thus goes the doubter on, often ready to lie down and die, and sometimes tempted to go back or turn aside, but still moving onward because Christ is in his heart, and the secret hope that, notwithstanding all his fears, he shall yet appear in Zion before God. But see, the prospect changes. Real dangers now arise. The storm which deluges the valley sweeps across the mountain also. The doubting Christian gives up all for lost. But the very dangers which alarm his fears, quicken his footsteps, and although he may believe that he is going wrong, the tempest and the earthquake drive him on and up, until the last ascent is gained, until the last cloud breaks away, and he who thought himself approaching to the verge of an abyss, finds himself standing on an everlasting rock, and at the threshold of an everlasting door. If shame can then be felt, he blushes as he looks back for a moment at the scene of his imaginary terrors, which now seem so sweet; the sun breaks out upon the path which he has trodden, and gladdens every dark spot where he wept or trembled; the noises which once terrified him and have still pursued him, now begin to blend with shouts and songs of triumph within; the everlasting doors lift up their heads, and with one farewell look at earth's baseless fabrics, the emancipated soul enters, never to return, the city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.



XXXVI.

Intercessory Prayer.

“Brethren, pray for us.”—1 THESS. v. 25.

THIS brief request, standing as it does in a series of laconic exhortations, is a striking illustration of the importance which the Scriptures attach to intercessory prayer. “Rejoice evermore,” “Pray without ceasing” “Quench not the Spirit,” “Despise not prophesyings,” “Prove all things: hold fast that which is good,” “Abstain from all appearance of evil,”—these are some of the precepts with which it stands connected. With an evident design to close his epistle with a series of pointed practical directions, the apostle gives a place among them not only to the general precept, “Pray without ceasing,” but also to the special request, “Brethren, pray for us.” The request itself is one very frequently repeated in the Pauline epistles, under different forms, but always expressive of the writer’s confidence in the real efficacy of such intercessions, as means of spiritual good to himself, and of furtherance to the glorious cause in which he was engaged. To the Hebrews Paul says, “Pray for us: for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly. But I beseech you the rather to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner” (Heb. xiii. 18, 19). The same request is made to the Romans with reference to the same result, but with greater earnestness of importunity: “Now, I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ’s sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me; that I may be delivered from them that do not believe in Judea; and that my service which I have for Jerusalem may be accepted of the saints; that I may come unto you with joy by the will of God, and may with you be

refreshed" (Rom. xv. 30-32). In asking the same favour, and exacting the same duty of the Ephesians, he sets before them, as the end to be attained, his greater fidelity and success in the performance of his ministerial functions: "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints; *and for me*, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in bonds; that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak" (Eph. vi. 18-20).

In all these passages there are several points of resemblance, connecting them together, and identifying them as characteristic manifestations of one and the same Spirit, the same personality. In the first place, there is the absorption of the whole soul, with its powers and affections, in the one great object of the writer's life. In the next place, there is the habitual disposition to do something more than think of it, or wish for its attainment—the disposition to employ with energy the necessary means and all the means available. In the third place, there is the appearance, or rather the conclusive evidence of a thorough persuasion, that among these means the prayers of true believers held a place, and an important place; that the apostle asked them and enjoined them, not merely as a salutary exercise to those whom he addressed, not merely as a token of affection and of confidence on his part towards them, but as a real efficacious means to the attainment of that end for which he lived and was prepared to die, as actually helping him, procuring him divine grace, and in a certain sense securing his success, and even his salvation.

This idea, which is not obscurely implied in the passages already quoted, is distinctly expressed in others, as when writing to the Church at Corinth, after speaking of the dangers and sufferings from which God had delivered him, he adds, "In whom we trust that he will yet deliver us; ye also helping together by prayer for us, that, for the gift bestowed upon us by the means of many persons, thanks may be given by many on our behalf" (2 Cor. i. 10, 11). But the strongest expression of this confidence, in connection with the great apostle's governing desire, and we may almost say his ruling passion, is contained in his address to the

Philippians, with respect to one of the severest trials which he had experienced : "What then ? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence or in truth, Christ is preached ; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice. For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, according to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Phil. i. 18, 21).

With this sublime expression of humility and triumph, of indifference and superiority to life and death, and at the same time of believing reliance on the power even of human intercession, I close the examples of Paul's habitual desire and entreaty for the prayers of others. What has been cited will suffice to show that, at his own request, and in obedience to his own command, "prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him" (Acts xii. 5), throughout the wide field of his apostolic labours, in Italy, in Greece, in Asia Minor, and in Palestine—at Rome, at Corinth, at Philippi, at Thessalonica, at Ephesus, and among the Churches of the Hebrew Christians. This extensive organization of a systematic and concerted intercession in behalf of the apostle and his work, is a practical demonstration that he not only believed in the necessity and efficacy of prayer in general, but of intercession in particular, and that so far from regarding the ministry or even the apostleship as superior to this means of grace, as exempted from the need of it, he looked upon the exaltation of his office and the greatness of his work as creating a peculiar and more urgent necessity for this assistance, that his official movements and his intercourse with the Churches might be unobstructed ; that his mouth might be opened to speak boldly as he ought to speak ; that the very trials and discouragements with which he met might tend to the salvation of himself and others, and that, whether living or dying, he might gain his darling end, that of magnifying Christ. With such an end in view, and with such convictions of the means by which it was to be accomplished, Paul uttered volumes when he wrote these four words, "*Brethren, pray for us.*"



Let us now consider, for a moment, whether Paul regarded this important spiritual service as incumbent only upon others towards himself, or whether he expected it to be reciprocal, both as an obligation and a benefit. The solution of this question will be greatly facilitated, and the result rendered far more striking, by applying the inquiry to those very Churches upon which we have seen the apostle so importunately calling for their intercessions. Near the end of his Epistle to the Romans, we have heard him asking "for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit," that they would strive together with him in prayer to God for him (Rom. xv. 30). The prayers of the apostle, in which they are asked to join, might seem to be prayers only for himself and for his work. But near the beginning of the same epistle, with a solemn appeal to the Searcher of hearts, expressing his anxiety to be believed, and implying the importance of the fact in question, he says, "God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son [still keeping in his own view and the view of others his official relations to the Church and to its Head], that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers" (Rom. i. 9). Observe the strength of the expressions, "always," "without ceasing," lest he should be understood as speaking only of periodical or occasional intercession, and not of the habitual and constant burden of his prayers. What follows might indeed seem to describe even Paul's own prayers, as having reference simply to himself, "Making request (if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God) to come unto you" (Rom. i. 10). But how utterly unselfish even this desire was breaks out in the next sentence, "For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established" (Rom. i. 11). It was for their sake that he thus desired to come to them, yet likewise for his own, "That is, that I may be comforted together with you," or jointly comforted in you, "by the mutual faith both of you and me" (Rom. i. 12),—a beautiful expression of the truth, that he who prays for others not only will pray for himself, but does so in the very act of intercession, by identifying his own spiritual interest with that of those for whom he prays, and regarding every blessing granted to them as being more or less directly a blessing to himself.

We have seen that Paul prayed for the Romans always, without ceasing. In like manner he says to the Ephesians, "I, also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love to all the saints, cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers" (Eph. i. 15, 16). Here, again, the constancy of his intercessions is particularly mentioned; but there are two additional circumstances not to be neglected. The one is, that the apostle's prayers for the Ephesian Christians included thanksgiving for what they were already and had already experienced. The other is, that these attainments in the spiritual life, although calling for grateful recognition, did not preclude the necessity of earnest prayer that God would grant to them the spirit of wisdom and of revelation, in the knowledge of him and of the riches of that glorious salvation to which he had called them. Gratitude for past gifts did but stir up the apostle to ask more. To the Philippians, through whose prayer the apostle knew that even his sorest trials should turn to his salvation (Phil. i. 19), he says, as he said to the Ephesians, "I thank my God upon every mention or remembrance of you, *always, in every prayer of mine* for you all, making request with joy" (Phil. i. 3, 4). Here, again, the prayer is a daily, a perpetual prayer, a thankful, nay, a joyful prayer, a prayer for further, greater gifts, increasing knowledge, holiness, and usefulness, as instruments in glorifying God—"And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; that ye may be sincere, and without offence, till the day of Christ; being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God" (Phil. i. 9, 11). To the same Thessalonians whom Paul exhorts to pray without ceasing (1 Thess. v. 17), and to pray for him (v. 25), he could say and does say, "We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers" (1 Thess. i. 2),—and again, with his favourite combination of thanksgiving, joy, and importunate desire—"What thanks can we render to God again for you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God; night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith?" (1 Thess. iii. 9, 10.) As he shows how far he was from stagnant acquiescence in what he had obtained

already for them, by his prayers for their advancement in the spiritual life, so he shows how far he is from flattering their spiritual pride, by making the deficiency of their faith a reason for continuing to pray even for those whose actual attainments he regarded as a matter of gratitude and joy. In the same spirit, he says in another epistle to the same Thessalonians, "We pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power; that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thess. i. 11, 12). I shall only add, under this head, that for the same Corinthians, whom Paul describes as helping together by prayer for him and his associates, he prays to God, in the same epistle, that they may do no evil, and rising still higher, that they may be perfect (2 Cor. xiii. 7, 9).

It is surely no fortuitous coincidence, that in these five cases, the same persons, whose prayers he importunately asks for himself, are represented as the subjects of his own unceasing, thankful, joyful, fervent intercessions. The general inference is therefore obvious enough, that one of the most uniform and intimate relations which subsisted between Paul and his spiritual children, throughout the vast field of his labours, was that of mutual intercession, not as a mere interchange of spiritual compliments, but as an indispensable and efficacious means of grace. That this was not an incident of the apostleship, a relation growing out of anything peculiar in the circumstances under which these Christians were converted, is clear, not only from the absence of any terms implying such restriction, and from the fact that Paul's fellow-labourers are more than once apparently included with himself in the profession and request, but also from the obvious consideration that, as soon as we are able to perceive and willing to admit the existence of sufficient reasons for this mutual relation in the case of the apostle and his spiritual children, every one of these reasons bears with double force upon the case of other ministers and other converts. If they who had received the gospel under the impression of inspired preaching, and attended by the tokens of miraculous power, needed still the wrestling intercessions of the

man of God, to shield them against danger, to preserve them from error, and to fill up what was lacking of their faith, how much more must this necessity exist, or rather, how much clearer is it, in the case of those who have had no such outward pledges of divine interposition. And if he, clothed with extraordinary powers, accredited from heaven by the signs of an apostle, had occasion so repeatedly and earnestly to ask the prayers of others for his personal safety and the progress of his work, how much more pressing should the sense of this necessity be on the hearts of those who with ordinary powers are called to the same difficult and responsible work.

If these considerations are sufficient to extend the application of the principle involved in the precepts and the practice of Paul, to all Christ's ministers and those who are in any sense their spiritual children, it is easy to foresee that the very same reasoning will carry us still further, and require us to recognise the right and duty of mutual intercession as extending to all Christians, and as arising, not from any peculiar official relations, but from a common character and interest. Whatever special motives and incitements to the duty may be afforded by the mutual relations of the teacher and the taught, the spiritual father and the spiritual children, the essential ground of the necessity in question must lie back of these, in something not confined to these relations, but existing in the common experience of all believers. Especially is this the case if we regard the right and duty of mutual intercession, not as a mere token of affection, but as an appointed and effective means of grace, as well to those who ask as those for whom they ask. If God has indeed ordained this as an efficacious instrument of spiritual good, it cannot be supposed that he intended to restrict its use and operation to the case of those who sustain what may be called an accidental relation to each other in the family of Christ. The necessity of mutual intercession may, indeed, appear to some to be so clearly involved in the admitted necessity of prayer in general, as to supersede all argument for or against it. The difference between prayer for others and ourselves, being merely circumstantial, the essence of the prayer, as consisting in sincere desire addressed to God, for something in accordance with his will, is of course the same in either case. The exclusive

object of address is still the same. The same moral qualities, sincerity, humility, and faith, are requisite in both to make the prayer acceptable. The warrant of encouragement to pray, in either case, is furnished by God's mercy in the precious promises with which his word abounds. There is but one throne of grace and one way of access to it. The meritorious intercession of the Son, and the auxiliary intercession of the Spirit, are in all cases equally necessary.

Why, then, should the question even be propounded, Whether prayer for others is a right and duty of all Christians? Not, of course, because the answer is in any measure doubtful, or the grounds on which it rests in any measure recondite or susceptible of novel illustration, but simply because a brief consideration of these grounds may serve to place the duty in its proper place, not only as a duty, but as an important means of grace. Because we are familiar with the precepts and examples of the Scriptures on this subject, it does not follow that truth respecting it might have been inferred as a matter of course from the general teachings of God's word respecting prayer, even without specific teachings as to this kind of prayer. It is conceivable, to say the least, that the efficacious influence of prayer might have been confined to the suppliant himself. Christian benevolence, it is true, must prompt him to desire the good of others, and to use the necessary means for its promotion. But this might not have been among the number. The power of men to help each other might have been restricted to the use of physical and moral means externally. Such an arrangement is indeed so foreign from our scriptural associations and habitual ideas as to the duty and the means of doing good to one another, that we may find it hard to form a definite idea of it as really existing. But as no man can believe, or repent, or obey for another; as each man must in this respect bear his own burden; as the wants and dangers of each are numberless, requiring all the grace that he can ask; it would not be absurd, in the absence of explicit revelation and experience, to suppose that every man was called upon to pray for himself, for the pardon of his own sins, for the sanctification of his own corrupt nature, for his own deliverance from the power of temptation, and his own preparation for the joys of heaven, without presuming to

address the throne of grace in behalf of any other, however strong his sympathy, however ardent his desires for their good. Such a supposition, however foreign from the actual state of things, is, in itself, no more surprising than that all participation in the faith, repentance, and obedience of each other, is impossible to true believers, however earnestly they may desire to supply each other's lack of faith or service, or to bear each other's burdens. On these grounds, and in this sense, the right and duty of intercessory prayer, however certain and familiar, may be represented as a doctrine of revelation, rather than a necessary rational deduction from the necessity of prayer in general, as a means of procuring the divine favour, and an immediate source of salutary spiritual influence. This view of the matter, so far from obscuring the glory of divine grace as beheld in the economy of man's salvation, greatly enhances it by making that a free gift, a gratuitous concession, which might otherwise have seemed to be a natural necessity. If men might justly have been suffered to pray only for themselves, as they are actually suffered to repent and believe only for themselves, then the privilege of doing good to others by our prayers, and of deriving benefit from theirs, is a distinguishing feature in the gospel system, and a notable instance of divine compassion. That the system does, in point of fact, include such a provision, is a proposition which requires no proof. That it occupies a prominent position, and is insisted on as highly important, is sufficiently established by Paul's precept and example as already exhibited. We have seen that with a frequency and emphasis too marked to be mistaken, he addresses to the same persons urgent requests for their prayers in his behalf, and strong assertions of his constancy in prayer for them. We have seen that the blessings which he hopes to obtain through their intercession, are deliverance from danger, consolation under sorrow, but especially boldness and success in his ministry, and more abundant honour to the name of Christ; while the mercies which he asks on their behalf are steadfastness, increase of faith, of love, of knowledge, more abundant usefulness, and full salvation. From these examples we may easily deduce a safe and comprehensive rule as to the objects and the compass of our intercession.

The induction may, however, be made more extensive by in-

quiring briefly what other cases are particularly mentioned in connection with this duty, that is to say, for whom and for what the Scriptures teach us, either by precept or example, that we may or ought to intercede. The right and duty once established, it is true, there can be no practical difficulty in applying the principle to special cases, any more than in applying the general rule of charity or Christian love. It has pleased God, however, to incite and regulate our best affections, not by general rules merely, but by particular directions and examples, so as to leave us under no doubt either with respect to our right and duty in the general, or to particular cases and emergencies. Lest the mention of some cases should be understood as simply exclusive of all others, we have general precepts of the largest kind. "I exhort, therefore, that first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, should be made for all men," then with a distinct specification of a certain class, "for kings, and all that are in authority," not merely for their own sake, but for the peace of society and the edification of the Church, "that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty" (1 Tim. ii. 1, 2). But while we are thus authorized and taught to pray for men in general, and for that class on whom the peace and welfare of the whole depend, we are especially encouraged to expect a blessing on our prayers for true believers, "praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints" (Eph. vi. 18). A different apostle exhorts believers to "pray one for another" (James v. 16), that they "may be healed," whether of bodily or spiritual maladies, for both are mentioned in the context. This peculiar obligation to pray for all saints does not destroy our right to pray for sinners, and especially for those who are particularly near to us. While we pray that saints may be saved from error and from temporal distress, we should pray that sinners may be saved from death and everlasting ruin. Paul's heartfelt desire and prayer to God for Israel was, "that they might be saved" (Rom. x. 1). So intense was his desire for this blessing, that he could wish himself accursed from Christ for his brethren, his kinsmen according to the flesh" (Rom. ix. 3).

While these specifications teach us that the most expansive

Christian benevolence has no need to consider itself straitened in God, there are others to warn us against being straitened in ourselves. As we are taught not to restrain prayer before God on account of exceptions which we may suppose him to have made, so likewise we are taught not to restrain it on account of exceptions which we make ourselves. To pray for children may be deemed a thankless or a needless form ; and so when "there were brought unto" our Saviour "little children, that he should put his hands on them and pray, the disciples rebuked those that brought them ; but when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said, Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven : and he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them." This was an exercise of his divine prerogative. The only way in which a mere man can effectually bless is by invoking the blessing of God, that is, by praying for the object. This example of the Saviour, therefore, furnishes a rule for our intercessions, by teaching us that even little children may be prayed for. Here the exception, if made at all, would rest on the supposed insignificance of the object.

But there are other cases where a deeper feeling and a stronger motive may be supposed to hinder intercession. To pray for fellow-Christians is an obligation easily acknowledged. To pray even for sinners, if they be our friends, can scarcely be denied to be a duty. To pray for those unknown to us, or those to whom we are indifferent, is still an obligation which may be externally discharged, at least without repugnance. But to pray for enemies might seem to be impossible, or if possible, extravagant, the mere romance of charity, if we did not know it to be the glory of the Christian morality, the triumph of the gospel over Jew and Gentile. "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy : but I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you" (Matt. v. 43, 44). Well might the Saviour add to such a precept, "Be ye therefore perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect." No religion or morality but that which aims at the highest perfection could find place for such a privilege or such a



duty. Nay, not only are our enemies to be the subjects of our intercessions, but forgiveness of injuries is made the condition of our being heard at all for others or ourselves. By this variety of precept and example, we are not only assured of our right and duty to pray for others as well as for ourselves, but are taught, in every variety of form, that in our application of the general rule, we need make no exceptions on account of the unworthiness or insignificancy of the object prayed for, and we must make no exceptions, in compliance with a spirit of malignant partiality. Nevertheless, we may and must pray more earnestly for some than others. While we own the obligation to make supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks for all men, and especially for kings and all in authority, that we may lead quiet and peaceable lives in all godliness and honesty, it is natural and right that we should pray with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watch thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints, and even among these we may pray with special emphasis for God's ambassadors, that utterance may be given them, or for his new-born children, that they may be sincere and without offence until the day of Jesus Christ. We may pray for all men, but there are some who have a special right to say to us and we to them, *Brethren, pray for us.*

To the questions, may we pray for others? must we pray for others? a sufficient answer seems to have been given from the word of God. To the further question, whether we sufficiently appreciate the value of this doctrine, and its influence upon the whole condition of the Christian, we may all, perhaps, safely and sincerely answer, No. In order to recover or obtain a correct notion of the value of salvation, it is not unusual to recur to the position, that without injustice, and without detracting even from his goodness, God might have left the world to perish without hope. But even supposing that he meant to save some from eternal misery, he might have left them in a dubious state of mingled good and evil like the present life. Or even if he meant to make them ultimately blessed, he might have suffered ages of expurgatory suffering to intervene. But God has magnified the riches of his wisdom, power, and grace, by revealing a method of total deliverance from evil, and of introduction to eternal bliss,

directly subsequent to the present state. The transition of the saved is not from darkness into an eternal twilight, or through twilight into a far-distant day. It is from darkness to light, from total darkness to unclouded light, from death to life, from hell to heaven, from the power of Satan unto God. And yet, so familiar are our minds with this great doctrine, that we compare it only with itself, forgetting the innumerable terrible alternatives which might have been presented. Forgetting what might have been, we look upon what is as that which must be, and detract so much from our inducements to adore the saving grace of God. Now the error thus committed with respect to the whole method of salvation, may be repeated likewise with respect to many of the particular provisions comprehended in it. By regarding what is actually done as the result of a fatal necessity, we fail to consider what our condition might have been, and thus withhold from God a large share of the praise which would have been extorted from us by a view of what he has gratuitously added to the bare hope of deliverance from hell. He might have left us, as it were, within its jaws, and hanging over the abyss of fire. He might have left us on its verge, enveloped in its thick smoke, and deafened by its ascending shrieks; in a word, he might have done immeasurably less for us, and yet have saved us. To borrow a single illustration from the subject which has been before us, God might have given us the hope and promise of eternal life, and yet excluded us till death from all communion with himself, from all approach to him in prayer. Oh, what a dispensation even of free mercy, yet without a throne of grace, or way of access to the Father! Or again, he might have suffered us to pray, but only for ourselves, without the right of intercession on behalf of others, or the hope of human intercession for ourselves. The way in which we are affected by this supposition may perhaps afford a measure of the value which we put upon the privilege. If we regard it with indifference, its practical value is, to us, as nothing. If we shrink from the idea of a different arrangement with sincere aversion, it can only be because we estimate in some degree aright that wonderful provision of God's mercy which, by suffering his redeemed ones to pray not only for themselves, but for others, with the hope of being heard, and with the promise of the Holy

Ghost to aid their infirmities, establishes an intimate connection between every renewed soul and every other, through the throne of grace;—a subtile and mysterious power, by which one may reach another—nay, may reach a thousand—nay, may reach a world, and be himself the object of as many influences as he thus puts forth; of influences tending all exclusively to good, for God will not hear the prayer of malice and hypocrisy, nor answer that of well-meant ignorance;—one soul interceding for all saints, and all saints, as it were, for one—sending up the exhalation of a pure desire for others, and receiving in return a rain of heavenly influence; each drop, each shower, representing the petition of some pious heart, on which his own prayers had invoked a blessing, either individually, or as one in the nameless but beloved company of “all saints,” for which the Bible taught him, and the Spirit prompted him, and aided him to pray! The hope of such a recompense, even in this life, together with the impulse and variety imparted by a man’s prayers for others to his prayers for his own soul, may well incite us both to utter and obey more readily the precept of the text; like Paul, to “*pray without ceasing*” for the brethren; like Paul, to say, “*Brethren, pray for us!*”



## Patient Waiting upon God.

“Here is the patience of the saints; here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.”—REV. xiv. 12.

THE duty, necessity, and good effects of patience, are often set forth in the word of God. This is the more remarkable, because, by the wisdom of the world, patience, unless accompanied by selfish cunning, or a proud contempt of others, is regarded rather as a weakness than a virtue. Strongly contrasted with this vulgar estimate of patience, is the prominence with which it is exhibited, commended, and enjoined in Scripture. The application of the term, however, by the sacred writers, does not coincide exactly with its ordinary usage. Nor is its use in Scripture altogether uniform. The name is sometimes applied to the humble, submissive endurance of suffering; sometimes to consistent perseverance in any good course. It is used, however, in a higher sense, including both the others; and even where the lower sense would seem appropriate, there is often at least an allusion to the higher. Evangelical or spiritual patience is not mere resignation to the ills of life and the dispensations of Providence, nor mere perseverance in the path of duty, although neither of these can really exist without it. It is something more than either, or than both combined, that is described in Scripture as the characteristic patience of the saints, or, as it is frequently expressed, their patient *waiting upon God*.

This English phrase, to *wait upon*, has gradually undergone a change of meaning. In modern usage it denotes a personal service or attendance, either literal, as when the servant waits upon his master, or metaphorical, as when one friend is said to wait upon another. The original words which it is used to represent signify simply the act of waiting for, including expectation and a

personal interest in the thing expected. This, too, is the primary import of the English phrase itself, *waiting upon* and *waiting for*, having been once synonymous, and being often interchanged in our translation of the Bible. As applied to servants, it expresses strictly nothing more than their habitual expectation of their master's orders. Its general sense, of service or attendance, is a secondary one, derived from this. In those parts of Scripture where the duty of waiting upon God is explained or enforced, the idea of serving him is certainly implied, but the direct and primary meaning of the phrase is that of waiting for, expecting God, his presence, his favour, the fulfilment of his promises, as well as the utterance of his commands. That state of mind which waits for God in this sense, is spiritual patience. The apostle's declaration to the Hebrews, "Ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye may inherit the promise" (Heb. x. 36), seems, at first sight, to mean merely that the complete fulfilment of the promise would be long deferred, or, in other words, that they must wait long for it, because it could not take place until after they had done the will of God. But the words are applicable, in a higher sense, to the necessity of spiritual patience, as a characteristic and essential element of Christian life, without which no one can perform either part of the great work described; that is, can neither do the will of God, or be partaker of his promises. The same necessity is intimated by the same apostle, in the same epistle, when he expresses his desire that those to whom he writes may be followers of them who, through faith and patience, inherit the promises (Heb. vi. 12). So far, indeed, as the necessity of any act, or habit, or affection, can be expressed by an exhortation to perform or cherish it, the necessity of spiritual patience may be said to be frequently alleged in Scripture, both directly, as a matter of religious obligation, and indirectly, as an object of God's favour and a source of blessing. "Blessed are all they that wait for him" (Isa. xxx. 18). "It is good that a man should hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord" (Lam. iii. 26). "The Lord is good to them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him" (Lam. iii. 25). This patient waiting upon God is represented not only as acceptable to him, and as a source of good in general, but of specific benefits, without which spiritual life can never flourish,

if it can exist. For example, it is represented as a source of strength, that is, spiritual strength, the power of performance, and endurance, and resistance,—of withstanding evil and of doing good. This strength, the soul, convinced of its own weakness, cannot cease to long for, since, without it, it can neither do that which is pleasing in the sight of God, nor shun that which offends him. Now, this strength is exhibited in Scripture, not as the result of any natural power, inherent or acquired, nor external advantages, defences, safeguards, and facilities of action; but of patient reliance upon God. “Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thy heart; wait, I say, on the Lord” (Ps. xxvii. 14). It is, indeed, contrasted with all other means and causes of strength, as being the only one that can be trusted, while all the rest are imperfect and delusive. Even the strongest who rely on these, shall fail and be exhausted; but, “they that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint” (Isa. xl. 31).

So far from warning us against excess in the employment of this means for the recruiting of our spiritual strength, the Scripture points it out as the highway to perfection: “Only let patience have its perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing;” not only perfect and entire in patience, but in all that spiritual patience tends to generate and foster (James i. 4). It is presented, likewise, as the only security against the disappointment and frustration of our strongest confidence and highest trust. They who rely upon themselves or upon any other creature for this same security, shall surely be confounded; but God himself has said, “They shall not be ashamed,”—that is, according to the usage of the Bible, disappointed and betrayed,—“that wait for me” (Isa. xlix. 23). This assurance against future disappointment comprehends within its scope the highest hopes of the believer, the reality of which is expressly connected with the exercise of patience. “They that wait on the Lord shall inherit the land” (Ps. xxxvii. 9). “Wait on the Lord, and keep his way, and he shall exalt thee to inherit the land” (Ps. xxxvii. 34). Nay, eternal life is spoken of as sure only “to them who, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, honour, and immortality” (Rom. ii. 7).

Such are the terms in which the duty, necessity, and blessed fruits of patience are exhibited in Scripture. The very strength of the expressions, and the comprehensive nature of the promises which they involve, might suffice to show that the patience of which such things are affirmed is neither resignation, fortitude, nor constancy of purpose, but something more than either, though inclusive of them all. The idea of patience, in its ordinary sense, is of course presupposed. That the heavenly patience thus enjoined and blessed, is, like all other patience, tranquil and quiet, the negation and the opposite of turbulence, disorder, and undue excitement, is clear, not only from the name applied to it, but also from the declaration, "It is good that a man should hope and *quietly wait* for the salvation of the Lord" (Lam. iii. 26); and from the junction of the two commands, "*Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him*" (Ps. xxxvii. 7). Is it, then, a mere inert quiescence, a stagnation of the soul, without affection or activity, that God's word sets before us, as a duty, as a necessary source of strength, and as the highway to perfection. Such a conclusion is well suited to the tendency of human nature to extremes; but if it were correct, the apostle could never have used such a combination—in exhorting the Hebrew Christians—"That ye be not *slothful*, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises" (Heb. vi. 12). The patience that is heir to the promises of God, is therefore not a mere negation, not a stagnant patience, not a slothful patience. It is urged on to action by a potent principle, the love of God, without which patient waiting, in the true sense, is impossible. "The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ" (2 Thess. iii. 5).

But this divine love may itself be personated by a mere inert affection or by a corrupt one, which refuses to be subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. He has therefore taught us that obedience to his will is an essential characteristic of true patience. "Wait on the Lord," and "*keep his way*," that is, walk in the way of his commandments, are inseparable precepts, forming, not severally, but together, the condition of the promise: "He shall exalt thee to inherit the land" (Ps. xxxvii. 34). They for whom glory, and honour, and immortality, and eternal life are re-

served, are they who seek it, not simply by patient continuance, but "by patient continuance *in well-doing*" (Rom. ii. 7). "Ye have need of patience, that *after ye have done the will of God*, ye may inherit the promise" (Heb. x. 36). The patience of the saints, then, is neither an inactive nor a lawless patience, but a loving and obedient patience. The same perverse tendency which leads men to convert *quiet and patient waiting* for salvation, into absolute inaction or a disregard of duty, will lead them to convert the requisition of obedience into an exhortation to reliance on themselves or their own meritorious service. But the patience of the saints is a believing patience, which not only believes the truth, but trusts the promises,—a trust implying self-renunciation and despair of self-salvation; for without these an implicit trust in God's grace is impossible. It is through *faith and patience*, a patient trust and a believing patience, that the saints in glory have inherited the promises. From such a faith hope is inseparable. He who would not be slothful, but a follower of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises, must do so by "showing diligence" in every duty "to the full assurance of *hope* unto the end" (Heb. vi. 11). The patience of the Scriptures springs neither from despair nor fear, but from hope, which is the opposite of both. It is not a mere quiet endurance of the present, or a quiet retrospect of the past, but a quiet expectation; and that not a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, but an expectation of good—a hope, an assurance of hope; the more assured the hope the more perfect the patience; patience can have her perfect work only where there is full assurance of hope to the end—"For if we hope, for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it" (Rom. viii. 25). "It is good that a man should *hope and quietly wait* for the salvation of the Lord" (Lam. iii. 26).

The faith and hope which are thus represented as essential to the patience of the saints, are not merely a vague trust and expectation, founded upon no sufficient reason, or simply on the attributes of God, or his promises in general, without regard to the restrictions and conditions by which they are accompanied, but a specific trust and expectation, having a definite object, reason, and foundation. We have seen already that the exercise of Chris-



tian patience is described in Scripture as a patient waiting, not for something unknown—not for evil—not for good in the general, but for God. “Blessed are all they that wait for *him*” (Isa. xxx. 18). “Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him.” “Those that wait *on the Lord* shall inherit the earth.” “Wait *on the Lord*, and keep his way.” “Wait *on the Lord*, and he shall save thee.” “They that wait *on the Lord* shall renew their strength.” “The Lord is good to them that wait *for him*.” “They shall not be ashamed that wait *for me*.” Here is a definite object of patient expectation set before us. It is not mere *waiting*, nor mere *patient waiting* that will answer this description; but patient waiting for the Lord, by loving him, obeying him, believing him, confiding in him, seeking him. “The Lord is good to them that wait for him, to the soul that *seeketh* him.”

The object of the Christian’s patient expectation is made still more definite. It might be asked how or why should men wait for or expect the Lord? He will be for ever what he is. He will be for ever, as he is now, intimately present to his creatures. If the object of expectation be supposed to be some special or extraordinary manifestation of his presence or his power, such an expectation would be apt to prove fanatical, and instead of promoting quietness and patience, would more probably destroy it. But the definite object of the true believer’s patient expectation is the manifestation of God’s mercy in his own salvation, in his complete and final deliverance from suffering and from sin. “Wait on the Lord, and he will save thee” (Prov. xx. 22). “It is good that a man should hope and quietly wait *for the salvation of the Lord*.” But even here, the expectation of the Christian might be too vague to secure the exercise of genuine patience. He might look to God for salvation, but without understanding how it was to be procured, or how it could be reconciled with the divine justice. While this doubt or ignorance existed, he could hardly rest with implicit trust even on God’s mercy, and could not therefore be expected to possess his soul in patience. The only remedy for this uneasiness and restlessness of spirit, is a just apprehension, not only of God’s nature as a merciful Being, but of the precise way in which his mercy can and will be exercised, in which he can be just and yet justify the ungodly. In other words, the soul must not only see God as he is

in himself, but see him in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, and not imputing their trespasses unto them, but imputing them to Christ; making him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. The man whose hope is fixed, not on abstractions or on generalities, not even on the attributes of God, as such, nor on his promises at large, but on the positive, distinct, specific promise of justification and salvation even to the chief of sinners, who renounces his own righteousness and submits to the righteousness of God, by a simple trust in the righteousness of Christ, that man may indeed be said to "wait for the hope of righteousness by faith" (Gal. v. 5). The attitude of that soul is indeed one of waiting, of patient waiting, of patient waiting for God, of patient waiting for the salvation of the Lord, of "love to God and patient waiting for Christ."

Beyond this it is impossible to go in making the object of our patient expectation either greater or more definite. He who waits for the hope of righteousness by faith, through the love of God and the patient waiting for Christ, may have a faint hope through his own infirmity, but cannot have a vague one through the vagueness of the object. His hope, and, by necessary consequence, his patience, may be variable, fluctuating, and capricious, but not from any want of amplitude, or fulness, or distinctness in the object. The more he sees of that, the more profoundly tranquil and unbroken will the patience of his spirit be. If we know not what we hope for, or if we doubt of its reality or excellence, or of its being attainable by us, we may still have hope, but we cannot have patience. Our hope will be a restless, an unsteady, an impatient, a capricious hope. "But if we hope for that" which, though "we see not, we believe" and know to be real, and excellent, and within our reach, "then do we with patience wait for it;" not because we no longer desire it, but because we do; not because we are willing to postpone the full fruition of it, but because we are so filled with the joyful expectation and the assured hope of obtaining it at last, that we are willing to wait the will of Him on whom it all depends, and whom we know to be able to keep that with which we have intrusted him, until that day, however distant. This is the kind of hope that generates true patience; and if we

would indeed "be followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises," let us lay aside our fluctuating, short-lived hopes, which are extinguished at the first blast or drowned by the first wave that washes over us, and let us not be slothful, but diligent in duty, in the full *assurance of hope* unto the end (Heb. vi. 11, 12).

We have now seen reason to conclude that the patience of the true believer, though a state of rest, is one of rest in God, and therefore not a slothful or inert one, but a diligent and active one; not lawless, but obedient; not compulsory, but willing; not fearful, but loving; not despondent, but hopeful; not vague, but definite; not resting on the reason, or the fancy, or on nothing, but on God, on Christ, on salvation, on the righteousness of faith; not capricious and short-lived, but constant, uniform, and persevering. The connection which has been already pointed out between this patience, and the love of God and faith in Christ, is a sufficient answer to the question, Whence does this patience spring, by what is it produced, and how shall we obtain it? Are we still without the love of God and faith in Christ? Then patient waiting is for us impossible. We may wait long, we may wait for ever, in the sense of doing nothing, sinking deeper in sin, and growing harder under it; but if in the sense before explained we would possess our souls in patience, we must believe, and love, and hope. Faith lies at the foundation. Where faith is wanting, there can be no patience. With little faith there can be little patience. Not that the highest degrees of faith are necessary to a genuine patience; much less that faith which is assailed and tried can breed no patience. But of these trials, patience often springs; patience not only in the lower, but the higher sense; not only the passive power of endurance, but the active power of humble, hopeful, joyful, and believing expectation; only "let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing, knowing that *the trial of your faith worketh patience*" (James. i. 3, 4).

But this effect supposes an internal preparation, without which mere external trials of our faith, instead of working patience, would render it impossible. And this internal preparation can be wrought by nothing but a spiritual influence, not only from without, but from above, from heaven, from God. None but the

Holy Ghost can work, in our darkened and corrupted heart, that humble yet triumphant expectation of deliverance through the righteousness of Christ, which is the life of spiritual patience. "For we *through the Spirit* wait for the hope of righteousness by faith" (Gal. v. 5). This hope, and the faith from which it springs, and the love to God by which it is accompanied, are all his gift. Patience and all the elements of which it is composed must come alike from him. The Lord alone can "direct [our] hearts into the love of God, and the patient waiting for Christ" (2 Thess. iii. 5). The sum of all these scriptures seems to be, that there is a patience necessary to the Christian life, a patience which includes resignation and endurance, but includes far more; a patience which God approves, and upon which he has promised his blessing, as a source of strength and as a means of perfection; that this patience is a rest in God, not slothful, but diligent, obedient, loving, and believing, springing from the hope of salvation through the righteousness of Christ and from faith in him, augmented even by the trial of that faith when it is genuine and does not fail; a patience wrought by the Holy Spirit directing our hearts into the love of God, and the patience of Christ, or patient waiting for him.

If, in what has now been said, the declarations of the Scriptures should appear to be distorted from their natural, simple meaning, as applied to patience in the lower sense, let it be considered, in the first place, that some of the things predicated of patience in the word of God are wholly inapplicable to a mere submissive temper, power of endurance, or freedom from uneasy restlessness and discontent. In the next place, let it be considered that the higher patience which the word of God describes, and which the grace of God produces, is so far from being opposed to the one just mentioned, or in any sense at variance with it, that it includes it as the whole includes the part, or as the spring includes the stream, or the plant its fruit or flower. While it still stands true, attested both by Scripture and experience, that a mere philosophical or natural patience can never lead to those results which are ascribed to Christian patience in the word of God, it is equally true and equally well ascertained, that this is the only certain and unfailing source of meekness, resignation, and tranquillity accessible to man. The patience of wrong, or suffering, or hope deferred, which springs

from mere prudential motives or from self-control, can never rise higher than its fountain in the heart, and must therefore prove unequal to the greatest emergencies of human life. But break a man's heart with a conviction of sin; open his eyes to the impending danger; make him feel his incapacity to help himself, and his urgent need of superhuman help;—then let him see Christ as an all-sufficient Saviour, just such a Saviour as he needs, and has at last been made to wish for; let him understand and appreciate the freeness of the gospel offer; let him close with it in hearty acquiescence by a true faith; let him feel the love of God shed abroad in his heart and controlling his affections; let him see the hope of full salvation and of future glory streaking the horizon like the dawn of a celestial morning;—on this dawn let his eye rest with a full persuasion that the day is breaking, that the sun is there, that it will rise, that it will soon rise; and with this conviction what will he care for the expiring of the few flickering tapers that surround him? The patience which will best enable men to bear the wrongs, and sorrows, and delays of life, is patient continuance in well-doing; the patient waiting for Christ; the patience which is joint heir of the promises with faith; the patience of hope, which waits for things unseen, looks for the hope of righteousness by faith, and quietly waits for the salvation of the Lord. Where this exists, the forgiveness of injuries, the endurance of sufferings, the loss of all things, are comparatively easy.

If, then, we would exercise the lower forms of patience, we must do it by securing the possession of the higher. If faith and repentance are unknown to our experience, we must repent and believe before we can expect to bear and forbear, even in this world's matters, with a truly Christian spirit. If we have repented and believed, we must learn to love and hope, as necessary elements of patience. If we have already studied in this school, and begun to practise its celestial precepts, let us show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end; let patience have its perfect work, that we may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. Let us wait on the Lord, and keep his way. Let us rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him. Let us hope and quietly wait for his salvation. Let us through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. Let us by patient continuance in well-

doing, seek for glory, and honour, and immortality. If we hope for what we see not, let us with patience wait for it, and ere long we shall see it. We shall see it! Faith shall be turned into sight. The work of patience shall be done for ever; and while the patience of the philosophers and worldlings shall be seen in all its hollowness and emptiness, a voice from heaven shall say, even of the weakest and unworthiest of us who have thus preserved our souls in patience, "Here is the patience of the saints; here are they that keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus."



## XXXVIII.

### The Word of God not Bound.

“The word of God is not bound.”—2 TIMOTHY ii. 9.

THIS is the language of a prisoner at Rome. The imperial city had seen many a captive brought in singly, or to grace the triumph of her conquering chiefs. In comparison with these, there was little to attract attention in the case of a Cilician Jew, sent by the Roman prefect of Judea to be tried before the judgment-seat of Cæsar upon charges pertaining to the Jews' religion. To the Romans, such a case was too familiar and too unimportant in itself to excite much interest, especially before the prisoner's actual appearance at the emperor's tribunal. With the exception of a few official functionaries, and of his own brethren, who were numerous in Rome, it is probable that few were aware of his presence, or even his existence. It was little imagined by the soldiers whose swords rattled on the ancient pavement of the street where Paul dwelt, or by the vast mixed multitude of citizens in gown or armour who continually passed before his prison, that within those doors sat one whose influence was to be felt throughout the empire, and beyond its furthest pale, for ages; one who, as well by self-devotion as by divine appointment, was the apostle of the Gentiles, the official founder of the Christian Church among the nations.

He was now a prisoner; and this his actual condition bore a significant analogy to some points of his earlier history. In lineage and breeding he was a thorough Jew—a Hebrew of the Hebrews—a Pharisee of the strictest sect—brought up in Jerusalem at the feet of Gamaliel, a famous doctor of the law. His attachment to the faith of his fathers was attested by his zeal in opposition to what seemed to threaten it. In the first persecution of the Chris-

tians at Jerusalem, he was present, at least as a spectator. The upper garments of those who stoned the protomartyr Stephen were laid at the feet of Saul of Tarsus. This sight, instead of softening his heart towards the sufferers or rousing his indignation against the persecutors, seems to have kindled in his own breast the flame of an intolerant zeal. Our next view of him is in the service of the persecuting priesthood—making havoc of the Church—entering into every house, haling men and women and committing them to prison. A little after he appears again, still breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, soliciting employment as their enemy, and volunteering his services to the high priest, and demanding letters to the synagogues of foreign cities, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them *bound* unto Jerusalem.

This was known to Christians abroad before he actually came among them; for when Ananias received the divine command to visit him and restore his sight, he expostulated, saying, “Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem; and here he hath authority from the chief priests to *bind* all that call on thy name.” So after he began to preach Christ in the synagogues of Damascus, all that heard him were amazed and said, “Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them *bound* unto the chief priests?”

The prominence given in this narrative to Paul's eagerness in *binding*,—that is, arresting or imprisoning all converts to the new religion,—is not an accidental one. It re-appears in his own statement of his conversion, before the multitude on the castle-stairs in Jerusalem: “I persecuted this way unto the death, *binding* and delivering into prisons both men and women. I went to Damascus to bring them which were there, *bound* unto Jerusalem.” And in answer to the Lord's command to go forth,—“Lord, they know that I *imprisoned* and beat in every synagogue them that believed on thee.” And again at Cesarea, before Festus and Agrippa, “Many of the saints did I shut up in prison.” To the circumstance thus marked in his own recollection of his persecuting ministry, it pleased God that there should be something corresponding in his later history as a Christian preacher and confessor. In the cata-



logue of his sufferings for Christ, one item is, "In prisons more frequent." When he was bound with thongs upon the castle-stairs, it was but the beginning of this series of captivities, the last of which was terminated only by his martyrdom.

Thus he who once breathed only to bind the followers of Christ, became himself the prisoner of the Lord; "for whose sake," said he, "I am bound with this chain." How much his own mind was affected by this providential coincidence, is clear from the frequency and point of his allusions to it in his epistles, from the earliest in date, to this to Timothy, in all probability the last of all,—“Wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil-doer, *even unto bonds*; BUT THE WORD OF GOD IS NOT BOUND,”—that is, though I who preach it am a prisoner, the word itself is not confined, and cannot be. As he once said, in writing to the Roman Christians, “Let God be true, but every man a liar;” so here he seems to say, “Let me abide a prisoner for ever, if the glorious gospel may but run, have free course and be glorified.” This was the prisoner’s consolation in captivity—a consolation at once rational and trustful, pregnant with lessons of practical wisdom, some of which it may not be inappropriate or unjustifiable to consider in detail.

1. The first idea suggested by the words in their original connection is, that Paul’s incarceration did not hinder his own personal exertions as a preacher of the gospel. His countrymen and others were allowed access to him. Through the wise and tolerant indulgence of the Roman government, he “dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.” Though *he* was bound, therefore, the word of God was not—not even as to his personal share in its promulgation.

This was, of course, a precious consolation to the captive. How much would the pains of his confinement have been aggravated if, in addition to the restraint upon his limbs or his movements, his mouth had been stopped as an ambassador of Christ! How fervently may we suppose that he would then have prayed, and called on others to pray for him, that his mouth might be opened, that utterance might be given him, to speak freely, as he ought to speak! But such facility he did possess; and, in the joyful con-

sciousness of this advantage, he here puts the bane and antidote together: "Wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil-doer, even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound."

The practical lesson taught by Paul's example, in this view of it, is obvious. It is a reproof of our disposition to regard external disadvantages, restraints, and disabilities as either affording an immunity from blame if we neglect to use the power still left us, or discouraging the hope of any good effect from using it. Because we cannot do all that we would, we are too apt to do nothing; or, because we cannot command the means with which we are familiar, we are often ready to abandon the whole enterprise. In this disposition there is more pride than humility. It is tainted with the selfish ambition of a Cæsar, who must be all or nothing. It is also condemned by the experience of the world. Some of the greatest achievements in science and the arts, in warfare and in government, in morals and philanthropy, have been effected in the absence of what some men would regard as indispensable appliances, and in a wise contempt of them. It is not the music or the uniform, the burnished metal or the flaunting flag, that secures the victory, however useful they may be in their own places. Had they been the indispensable conditions of success, the tattered and unshod champions of our own independence must have yielded to the brilliant and well-appointed forces of the enemy. Nay, the very loss or interruption of accustomed comforts and accommodations has been sometimes the not remote occasion of a victory.

It may be so, too, in the spiritual warfare. Men may form the habit of regarding the conventional facilities to which they are accustomed, even in benevolent exertion, as essential means to the desired end, and when these are withdrawn, may look upon the case as hopeless—as if Paul, when made a prisoner at Rome, had given up all for lost, and ceased to speak or labour for the cause of Christ—as if he had said, I am bound, and the gospel is bound with me. It must share my bondage, and continue shut up within the walls of my compulsory abode. Such a course would not have been irrational or sinful on the principles which many of us Christians seem to hold; but it was wholly inconsistent with the sentiments and character of Paul. When he could not do all, he

still did what he could ; he had learned both to abound and to suffer need ; he could be all things to all men, that he might save some. When he could not preach Christ as a freeman, he must preach him only the more zealously as an ambassador in bonds. When forced to say, "Wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil-doer even unto bonds," he could cheerfully and thankfully add, "but the word of God is not bound."

2. It was still true, however, that Paul's bonds diminished his efficiency. While he avoided the extreme of abandoning all hope, he equally avoided that of foolishly imagining that he could personally do as much for the diffusion of the gospel in his own hired house at Rome, as in the wide sweep of his itinerant apostleship. This was impossible, as he well knew ; and knowing it, he needed something more to comfort him in his confinement than the consciousness that, though he could no longer do as much as he had once done, he could still do something. This might be enough for him, but it was not enough for the honour of his Master. It might satisfy his conscience, but it could not satisfy his heart or appease the cravings of his thirst for the salvation of the world. His work, though not yet at an end, was interrupted, and how should his lack of service be supplied ? The answer is a plain one : By the labours of others. This was a large ingredient in the cup of the apostle's consolation. He rejoiced not only in the labours of others during his comparative inaction, but in that inaction as the occasion, the exciting cause, of other men's exertions. Nay, he could even go so far as to consent to be wronged and dishonoured, if by that means his ruling passion might be gratified. To the Macedonian Christians in Philippi he writes as follows from his confinement in the city of the Cæsars : "Brethren, I would ye should understand that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel ; so that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places ; and many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife ; and some also of good-will. The one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds ; but the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defence of the

gospel. What then? Notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice. For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, according to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

What is the principle involved in this sublime profession of heroic devotion to the cause of Christ? Plainly this, that while Paul was even ready to magnify his office as apostle to the Gentiles, and correctly appreciated both the honour and the difficulty of the work assigned to him, he never dreamed that it was meant to be entirely dependent upon his individual activity. It was not at himself, but at the world that he continually looked. He regarded his own labours as important only so far and so long as it pleased God to employ them as means to the appointed end; and when they seemed to lose this peculiar relation to the cause, instead of lamenting that his agency was suspended, or dreading the success of any other than his own, he loses sight of his own share in the great work, to look at the great work itself, as something dear to him, yet independent of him, which he was willing to promote either by his life or death, as God might please to order, but which he desired to see promoted at all costs and at all hazards, whether by himself, or by his friends, or by his enemies.

This is a spirit worthy of a hero, nay, of an apostle; of one who could and did rejoice that Christ was preached, by whomsoever, and whose highest hope was that Christ might be magnified in him, whether actively or passively, by life or by death. Here, too, the lesson to ourselves is obvious. The apostle's example ought to shame us out of all undue reliance upon certain human agencies and influences. Especially ought this to be the case in relation to our *own* share of the work to be performed for the honour of God and the salvation of the world. If Paul, with his apostolic dignity, confirmed by all the signs of an apostle, regarded his own personal exertions only as appointed means with which the sovereign Power that prescribed them could as easily

dispense; what are we, that we should think ourselves or our assistance necessary to the divine purpose, or that purpose in danger of defeat and disappointment at any momentary interruption of our share in its promotion, or that we should frown upon the emulous exertions of our neighbours in the same cause, as a kind of encroachment upon our prerogative, an insolent intrusion on our chosen and appropriated field of labour? How completely does the spirit of the great apostolic captive put to shame all such exclusiveness and self-emulation, as displayed too often by the individual labourer, and still more by large bodies of such labourers, however zealous and sincere!

This last is but another form of the same error, more insidious, because clothed in the garb of humility. He who professes to distrust, nay, who really distrusts himself, as insufficient for this work, may be guilty of an undue reliance upon others, either singly or collectively. However little he may look for from his own individual exertions, he may repose an uncommanded confidence in those of his neighbours, or his leaders, or in the united strength of his party, of his Church, or of his nation; and to these corporate bodies may transfer the idolatrous trust and admiration which he dare not arrogate to himself. But this kind of dependence upon human strength for that which God alone can do, though less offensive in its manifestations, is equally at variance with a spirit of true faith, and equally condemned by Paul's example. The principle which actuated and controlled his conduct, comprehends in the wide scope of its application all dependence upon human agencies as absolutely or intrinsically necessary to the execution of the divine plan, whether the objects of this misplaced trust be individuals or communities, ourselves or others. The primary meaning of Paul's joyful exclamation is, that though *he* was a prisoner, the word of God was free; but it obviously implies that though *all* the preachers of the word were altogether like him, not even excepting his bonds, it would still have been true, that the word of God was not their fellow-captive, but might run and be glorified. Though I and every other human instrument be paralyzed or shattered, God can perform his own work in his own way; though I and every other messenger endure affliction, even unto bonds, *the word of God is not bound*. There is no need,

however, of our stopping even here. We are not required to content ourselves with knowing that the word of God is not bound to the hand or foot of any human instrument, however eminent, however useful. Let us view the teaching of the text in its uttermost extent, and sound it in its lowest depths, or rather to the depth of our capacity, even though it should conduct us to what may at first sight seem a more abstract and artificial view of the apostle's meaning.

One of the most important lessons, couched in this significant expression or deducible from it, would be lost upon us if we went no further. I refer to the doctrine that the truth of God is independent, not only of particular human agents, but of all human systems of opinion, organizations, and methods of procedure. This must be apprehended and believed as a distinct proposition. We may grant the insignificance of any particular personal agency, and yet rely upon the intrinsic efficacy of certain theories and certain plans, whatever be the agency by which they are reduced to practice. As in politics, so in religion, and especially in its active benevolence, the maxim, "Principles, not men," may be delusive, by leading only from one error to another, by withdrawing confidence from personal advantages of character or talent, only to fix it the more blindly on the real or imaginary attributes of systems, schemes, contrivances, and methods. It is important, therefore, that the words of the apostle should be taken in their widest sense, as intimating that "the word of God is not bound" with this chain any more than with the others. The diffusion and triumph of the truth are not suspended on our methods of promoting them, however excellent. The truth we circulate is not a lifeless, inert mass, which we may shape and regulate, and bear about at our discretion or caprice; it is a living element, which we can neither generate nor kill, but to which God allows us the honour of furnishing conductors and assigning a direction with a view to certain applications. Whatever reason we may have for cherishing our own accustomed modes of doing this, we must still remember that, in reference to these as well as other things, "the word of God is not bound."

There may seem to be but slight ground or practical necessity for this admonition; but the fact is otherwise. This error is a

real and an operative one. Its tendency, if not directly to relax effort, is to weaken faith, discourage hope, damp zeal, contract the views, and thereby most effectually stop the wheels of all great enterprises. The error itself does not lie in the contrivance of ingenious and effectual plans, or in their zealous execution, but in looking upon their operation and results as the aggregate effect produced by saving truth; as if one should suppose that there was no light in the world but that employed in optical experiments, and no electric, or magnetic, or galvanic influence but that subjected to our senses by the pile or battery. It is an honour and a happiness to be allowed to gather up a portion of revealed truth, as the Hebrews gathered manna in their vessels, and to cast it into certain moulds without destroying its vitality or virtue, and to blend it with other things congenial, though distinct, and to clothe it in legitimate though uncommanded forms of our own choosing, and to apply it, as we find expedient, for our own advantage or for that of others. But we must not let this privilege mislead us into the delusion of imagining that this is all the truth of God can do, or rather that there is no truth at all except as we choose to exhibit or diffuse it; that if our machinery should burst or fall to pieces, it would leave the world to spiritual darkness and starvation;—in short, that the word of God is bound to us and to our methods of preserving and diffusing it. In this, as in the other senses heretofore considered, be assured, my hearers, that “the word of God is *not* bound.”

The mistaken views, of which I am now speaking, arise from natural and moral causes, some of which are easily detected. Our ideas of value, from their very nature, are connected with our customary modes of measurement and estimation. Whatever we can count or weigh, we own to have a real, tangible existence. Whatever we can thus treat to a certain point, even without being able to include the whole, we look upon as vast in its extent or worth, but no less real than if we could measure it by pounds or inches.

But that which cannot be subjected to our measurement at all, we are disposed to reckon as imaginary, or as only half existing, not entitled to a place among the tangible realities by which we are surrounded. The very air we breathe, because it is invisible, is apt to be regarded by the un instructed mind as almost a

nonentity; and even when it proves its own existence, when it sweeps over the earth in the tornado, tearing up whole forests, some would rather trace the terrible effect to causes utterly unknown, than to an agent in immediate contact with their bodies, yet apparently beyond the reach of their investigation. It is true that some of these mysterious agencies in nature have been brought to bear with wonderful effect upon the interests of real life. The indomitable light is made to do the slow work of the artist's pencil in a moment of time, and the fitting shadow is arrested in its flight and rendered permanent. An unsubstantial vapour now replaces, on the ocean and the land, on the road and in the factory, a vast amount of animal exertion. A power once reckoned too mysterious for scrutiny, or even for belief, now apes the wonder of annihilating time and space, and instantaneously conveys men's whispers, not only over continents, but under oceans. Effects so real must have real causes, and the world reluctantly admits the fact.

Now, there are triumphs of advancing knowledge in the field of natural discovery—her triumphs over ignorant and stubborn prepossessions. And why may not the truth, though in itself immutable, gain kindred victories in morals and religion? Why should they who no longer venture to dispute the existence and activity of physical causes, which they cannot estimate or measure, still persist in believing that the truth of God is only operative through their channels and in their machinery—that when they have computed the amount of saving knowledge spread through these, by counting the words, or the pages, or the volumes that contain it, they have stated the sum total of the cleansing, strengthening, illuminating influence exerted by the truth upon this evil world? The doctrine which I would oppose to this delusion is the simple doctrine that “the word of God is not bound” or restricted, in its salutary virtue, to the formal and appreciable power exerted upon Churches and Christian communities, or through the ordinary modes and channels of religious influence, however great this power may be, however indispensable to the completion of the work which God is working in our days. We may even admit that it is relatively almost all, but it is still not quite all; and the residuary power may be greater, vastly



greater, than it seems to us before attentively considering the other less direct, less formal, less appreciable ways, in which the word of God, the truth revealed in Scripture, is at this moment operating on the condition of society, apart from its constant and direct communication through the pulpit, the school, and the religious press. These are the agencies, indeed, by which sound doctrine is maintained in your Churches and impressed upon your youth; and this, in its perfection, is the highest end that can be wrought by the diffusion of the truth.

But let us not forget that much may be effected even when this highest end is not attained. In many a heresy, for instance, how much truth may be mingled, saving it from absolute corruption, and perhaps the souls of those who hold it, from perdition. Infidelity, in all its forms, affects to treat religion with contempt, as the offspring of ignorance; but its own discoveries are mere mutilations of the truths which it has stolen from its despised enemy. The attempt of infidelity to do away with the great doctrines of religion, is the prowess of a dwarf mounting on a giant's shoulders to put out his eyes. The best constructed system of unscriptural philosophy, however close and dark, still has its crevices, and through these some light cannot fail to percolate, if only to be seized upon as proof that the system is not one of darkness after all.

The same thing is true as to those slighter and more trivial, but for that very reason more effective forms of unbelief, which are propagated, not in philosophical abstractions, but in poetry, romance, and other current literature. The novelist or journalist who, with a scorn of Christianity only to be equalled by his ignorance of what it teaches, undertakes to show his readers "a more excellent way," often brings them at last to some elementary truth, already wrought into the mind and stamped upon the memory of every child who reads the Bible. What a tribute is this to the pervading, penetrating force of truth, that it can find its way even into such dark places, and at least serve to make the darkness visible! Look, too, at the schemes of civil government and social order framed by irreligious men, or unbelievers in the Scriptures, and observe these two facts easily established: that every departure from the lessons of God's word is a demonstrable evil or defect in relation even to the lower object aimed at; and that

everything conducive to a good end in the system is an adaptation of some Christian doctrine to a special purpose. It is, no doubt, far more flattering to the pride of theorists and system-mongers, to regard what they have borrowed or stolen from the Bible as a common stock from which both parties are at liberty to draw ; but they have no right, upon this ground, to deny the notorious fact, that this pretended common fund was given to the world by revelation ages before their own inventions came into existence.

It would be easy to pursue the same inquiry through every field of science and every walk of art, and to show that even there, the word of God has first been followed as a guide, and then expelled as an intruder ; that its light has first been used to kindle others, and then vain attempts made to extinguish it for ever ; in a word, that its enemies have first resorted to it in their time of need, and then ungratefully forgotten or unblushingly denied the obligation. In all these cases it is no doubt true that the result of the mutilating and perverting process is something unscriptural and antichristian. It is not pretended that the few drops of pure water neutralize the poison ; or that the single ray of light dispels the darkness into which, as if by accident, it finds its way. The general result may still be evil, although these foreign elements are there ; but if they *are* there, who will undertake to say how much less, after all, the evil is than it would otherwise have been ?

Here, then, is a case in which an inappreciable cause may be known to be producing great effects. The indirect and incidental influence of Bible truth upon erroneous systems of religion, the various forms of infidelity, on science, art, and literature, on manners, government, and social morals, cannot be measured, but it cannot be denied. It may be inscrutable, but it is real, and we must not leave it out of our account when we would estimate the power of divine truth, or our own obligations to diffuse it, or our causes and occasions of encouragement to persevere and look for great results from the diffusion of that light which, though it sheds its full effulgence only on a few most highly favoured spots, at the same time sends some of its rays into the dark places of the earth, which are full of the habitations of cruelty. Thanks be to God, that the beneficent effects of his word are not entirely confined to those who willingly receive it, but that even in relation to the

Church and to Christendom, however vast their advantages above the heathen, "the word of God is not bound."

If this be a correct view of the influence exerted even indirectly by the word of God; if over and above its certain and complete results, it shines through the interstices of unknown caverns, and mitigates the darkness of unfathomed depths; if in fertilizing one spot, it sheds even a few scattered but refreshing drops upon a multitude of others; if in doing all for some, it incidentally does some for all, let me ask, in conclusion, What should be the practical effect of this belief? Not that of paralyzing hope or crippling effort, but the very contrary. It should forbid despair; it should excite to new exertion. Its tendency to this effect may be exhibited in three particulars:—And first, if all these things be so, we need not tremble for the truth itself. Our efforts to preserve it and improve it may be vain; but it will take care of itself, or rather God will take care of it. If his word were something that existed only here and there, like precious stones and metals, we might fear that it would be drained off to meet some urgent demand elsewhere, or that it might be actually lost or destroyed. But who can fear the loss of that which penetrates all substances, and reaches even the remotest regions? Who can fear the loss of water, air, or fire? To individuals, to families, to entire communities, the truth may, indeed, be wholly lost, to their eternal undoing. But it shall not be banished from the world. There may be savages to whom the use of fire is unknown. There *are* deserts which are always almost wholly void of moisture. But the flames can never be extinguished on these millions of hearths, or if they were, they would be soon rekindled by the electric clouds of heaven, or the volcanic craters of the earth. The world cannot die of thirst until the windows of heaven are for ever stopped, and the fountains of the deep for ever emptied. So shall it be with the word of God. He has not only spread it over the surface of society, but given it a lodgment in its innermost recesses. Every system, every institution, every community, has received of its fulness, more or less. Should its regular depositories be destroyed, it will burst forth from its hiding-places where it lay forgotten, to regenerate the world. Its champions may be overcome, its heralds carried captive, "but the word of God is not bound."

Another aspect of the same thing is, that if such be the indirect as well as the direct effects of truth, there is some hope for the world itself, and even for those parts of it, and those things in it, which otherwise might seem to be confined to hopeless, irrecoverable ruin. The mass may in itself be wholly corrupt, yet there may be present in it, and diffused throughout it, a potent antiseptic principle, a salt, not superficially applied, but absorbed into the pores, and lodged in the vessels of the body politic, not so as entirely to purge out its impurities, but so as to preserve it from immediate dissolution. When we hear of wars and revolutions, when we see the weakness of all human safeguards proved experimentally by one convulsion following another, till the cause of human freedom and good government seems desperate, let us remember that amidst the corruptions and infirmities of even the best human institutions, there is still a power working, it may be insensibly, but constantly, and not without effect, to procrastinate, if not to prevent for ever, the catastrophe which sometimes seems so inevitable. The statesman and the demagogue are far from dreaming that what sometimes saves them from the ruin which they had long ceased to think avoidable, is that despised religion which they have in vain endeavoured to exclude from all participation in the honours of their boasted system, but which, in spite of them, has so far leavened it, that even their own suicidal violence fails of its effect. The hand of power may be palsied, or the wild force of the multitude coerced by various accidental causes; but this mysterious principle still lives, and moves, and acts upon society, if not enough to give it health, enough to save its life. The ruler and the ruled may be alike in bondage; "but the word of God is not bound."

Lastly, if this be a correct view of the powerful and multiform energies of truth, of its oblique as well as its direct effects upon the world, it may teach us a valuable lesson as to the true spirit of philanthropy, as being not a formal, rigid, mathematical attempt to save men's souls by certain rules, and in the use of certain ceremonial forms; but a generous, impulsive, and expansive zeal for the glory of God in the salvation of the lost. If such be even the remote and secondary influence of truth upon men's social, intellectual, and moral state, their science, literature, arts, and government, let us give them excess of it, whether they will

hear, or whether they will forbear. And as the surest way of gaining this end, let us flood the world with the pure and unadulterated word of God.

To our several and our separate systems of belief, we owe a diligent use of the necessary means for their establishment and propagation. But to God, to Christ, and to the souls of men, we owe an energetic and unceasing effort to saturate the whole earth with that word in which we all agree. Even when we have done all that seems incumbent on us through the channels of our own ecclesiastical relations, we may still do more through the deep and broad channel of our common Christianity. The word of God has already been repeatedly compared to water, the natural emblem of purification and refreshment. Its diffusion may be likened to the measures for supplying a whole population, such as that of a great city, with this precious element of cleanliness, comfort, health, and safety,—great municipal measures now. Other supplies may be acceptable, or even indispensable, to certain classes or to certain spots, but this is requisite alike to all. To provide it may cost labour, time, skill, and vast expense; but it is worth the price. By some it may be wasted; some may mix it with intoxicating drinks, or use it in other noxious preparations, or directly apply it to the injury of others; but in spite of all these possibilities of evil, and a thousand more as easily imagined, it is still a blessing, and may safely be afforded in unlimited abundance. So is it, and so be it, with the word of God. Whatever some may choose to do with it or mix with it, however some may lavish or neglect it or pervert it, it is still the word of God, and in its unadulterated form may be poured upon the nations as a flood, without a fear of either poisoning or drowning them. Then let it gush, and let the world bear witness that though every other channel be obstructed, and every other source of influence exhausted,—though philosophy and fancy be found unavailing,—though prophecies fail, and tongues cease, and all other knowledge vanish away,—though the very ministers of truth be fettered in civil or religious bondage, the word of God is not bound. It is not bound; it is free; it is alive; it is in motion; it shall win; it shall have free course and be glorified, till “the earth shall be full of the knowledge of God, as the waters cover the sea.”



XXXIX.

How Excellent is thy Name in all the Earth!

“O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!”—Ps. viii. 1, 9.

THERE is no traditional and uncommanded usage of the Jews, among the many with which they have overlaid and darkened their own Scriptures, half so affecting to the imagination and religious sensibilities, as that immemorial suppression of the name Jehovah, which has for ages been a kind of negative or tacit shibboleth, to mark and to perpetuate the difference between Jew and Gentile. However false in principle, however destitute of Scriptural foundation and divine authority, it cannot be denied that there is something in this national and everlasting reticency as to the most solemn and significant of all the divine names, not far removed from the sublime, and that even their extreme of superstitious silence, when at all combined with feelings of elevation, is far better than the frivolous levity with which that venerable name is tossed from mouth to mouth, not only in profane discourse, but even in public offices and courts of justice, not to say in the pulpit and the private circles of Christian and religious intercourse.

The want of agreement and congruity between this singular usage and the characteristic absence of all mysteries and esoteric doctrines in the Church of the Old Testament, while it affords a strong presumptive proof that the usage is one foreign from the principle and spirit of the Jews' religion in its purest days, only adds to its imaginative grandeur and effect, by bringing it out in bold relief, like a dark spot on a luminous or shining surface. The religious awe which the suppression was originally meant to indicate, and which has no doubt often since attended it, if right

at all, could not have been associated with a more legitimate or worthy object, than that pregnant tetragrammaton, in the four characters of which, as in a sacramental symbol, is wrapped up the germ, or rather the quintessence, of that wonderful preparatory system which excited and sustained the expectation of a Saviour till the time of his epiphany was fully come. However difficult it may be to determine in detail the reason for the use of the two principal divine names by the sacred writers in specific cases, there is no ground for doubt, or for diversity of judgment, as to the main fact, that Jehovah is distinguished, in the Hebrew Scriptures, from all other designations of the Godhead, as the name which attested his peculiar relation to his Church or chosen people, and the clear revelation of himself and of his purposes, vouchsafed exclusively to them ; so that the very sound of this word, now supposed by many to be lost through immemorial disuse, or its very sight, when that disuse had grown inveterate, suggested not the vague idea of divinity, nor even that of a personal God, viewed merely in himself and at a distance, but the warmer feeling of a God in covenant with his people, making himself known to them as he did not to the world at large ; nay more, literally dwelling in the midst of them, and actually, personally, reigning over them. With such associations, this significant and pregnant name must soon have grown as different in meaning and effect, from the generic name Elohim, which was common to the true God with all others, as the corresponding terms in modern parlance are from one another ; and as all men among us are free to use the name of God, in season or out of season, blasphemously or devoutly, while the name of Lord is for the most part shunned by irreligious lips, as properly belonging to the dialect of personal religion ; so the ancient Jews, although they still continued to adore God as the God of all men, under the name Elohim, with more or less of that religious reverence which the name implies, praised him and served him as their own peculiarly revealed and covenanted God, by the distinctive name Jehovah.

This being the case, it might have been supposed that the distinctive name, thus used to designate the God of revelation and the God of Israel, if significant at all, would have been significant

of something closely connected with this singular relation between God and his peculiar people, so that when the name was heard or seen by others or themselves, its very etymology and meaning might suggest ideas of a national or local kind, and irresistibly convey to all minds the conception of a special propriety in Israel on God's part, and in God on theirs. But so far is this from being true, that there is none of the divine names so remote from such associations, or so little suited in itself to rouse them ; none so lofty, or profound, or comprehensive, as an expression of what God is in himself, without regard to the relations which he may sustain to all or any of his creatures, who are recognised in their description only as unlike him, or contrasted with him, whom it represents as not only the Supreme, but in a certain sense the only Being, of whom alone existence can in the highest sense be rightfully affirmed ; who was when nothing else was ; who is what nothing else is ; without whom nothing else was, is, or can be ; the source of being in all others, the self-existent, independent, and eternal essence, whose most perfect designation of himself was given in that paradoxical but grand enigma, of which the name Jehovah is but an abbreviated symbol—I shall be what I shall be, or I am what I am.

That a name suggestive of all this should be applied to the peculiar relation between God and his people, seems entirely unaccountable, except upon the supposition that it was intended to remind them, by the very name employed to designate their national and covenanted God, that he was not a God distinct from the Creator of the universe, not an inferior and derivative divinity, not even a co-ordinate, co-equal, co-eternal being, but the one, sole, self-existent, independent, and eternal essence, “the blessed and only potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords ; *who only hath immortality*, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto ; whom no man hath seen or can see ; to whom be honour and power everlasting, Amen ” (1 Tim. vi. 15, 16).

This precaution against such an error may at first sight seem gratuitous and inconsistent with the very idea of a chosen people ; but the whole tenor of the history of Israel shows that such a notion would be perfectly erroneous, and that the native tendency of fallen man to transmute truth into falsehood and pervert the



richest blessings into curses, was never more remarkably exemplified than in the national experience of that extraordinary race, who, when they had been severed from the rest of men by a divine choice, for a temporary purpose, and for the ultimate advantage of the whole, strangely imagined that their segregation was designed to be perpetual, and sprang from some intrinsic or innate superiority, or at least had reference to their own exclusive aggrandizement as its final cause and providential purpose. Had this error terminated on themselves, and merely served to aggravate their overweening self-esteem, it would have been comparatively harmless ; but, alas ! the transition was an easy one from false views of themselves to false views of the God whose favour they affected to monopolize as not the God of the Gentiles also ; and from this the fatal step was almost unavoidable to the conclusion, that their God was not the God of nature or the universe, but either the antagonistic principle in some monstrous scheme of dualism, or an inferior deity restricted to the Holy Land. When such views became possible, even to the least enlightened Jews, no wonder that the Greek and Roman learned to sneer at the provincial God of Palestine ; no wonder that the modern sceptic still delights to represent him as a local deity ; no wonder that the great apostle had occasion to demand in his day : "Is he the God of the Jews only ? is he not also of the Gentiles ?" (Rom. iii. 29.)

How far this process of deterioration went, even among the most corrupted of the people, cannot now be ascertained ; but it is certain that these false views are never prescribed among the enlightened and believing class, and that they are without the slightest countenance or shadow of authority from the experience or example of the ancient Church, as such, or of the men who were inspired to furnish it with forms and models of devotional experience, some of which are still on record, and contain the clearest exposition of the true sense of the name Jehovah, and of the divine intention, in revealing it, to hinder the indulgence of a grovelling nationality and sectarian bigotry, even under institutions in themselves so capable of breeding it ; or if it could not be prevented, to condemn it and expose it by means of the perpetual contradiction between such a spirit and the very name by which they were accustomed to invoke God, as the God of their

fathers, and the God in covenant with themselves. Throughout the law, the prophets, and the psalms, the uniform tendency of revelation, and of the spirit which the ancient saints imbibed from it, is to identify the God of the Jews with the God of the Gentiles, the God of revelation with the God of nature, and the God of nature with the God of grace ; to say, O Lord, our Lord, our King, our national, our covenant God ! how glorious is thy name, the revelation of thy nature, not only among us, but in all the earth !

Nor was this effect suffered to depend upon the dictates of reason or of conscience ; much less was it left to the discretion or caprice of the collective Church or individual believers. It was forced, as it were, upon the very senses, which could not refuse to recognise the name of God inscribed upon the frame of nature, as the human architect or sculptor leaves his own indelibly impressed upon the incorruptible and almost unchangeable material upon which his skill and genius work their wonders. It is the doctrine, not of poetry or mere æsthetics, but of Scripture, that the heavens are telling the glory of God, that the perpetual interchange of light and darkness furnishes a long unbroken series of witnesses for him,—day unto day poureth out speech, night unto night imparteth knowledge ; that the absence of articulate expression only adds to the sublime strength of this testimony—no speech, no words, not at all is their voice heard, and yet their voice is gone out into all the world, and their words unto the end of it ; that the whole frame of nature is instinct and vocal with the praises of another than itself ; that throughout the majestic temple of the universe, all of it says, Glory—not its own, but God's—whose name, Jehovah, is distinctly legible all over the stupendous structure, and whose glory is placed upon and above the very heavens. The instinctive adoration of that glory is not limited to men of science and cultivation ; it is felt by the most ignorant and uninformed ; it is felt by the savage as he eyes the heavens from his forest or his desert ; it is felt by the young children whose intelligence is still but partially developed, but whose wonderful structure and mysterious progress do not more truly bear a passive testimony to the glory of their Maker, than their unconscious admiration actually contributes to the same end, affording a strong

defence against the unbeliever who would question God's holiness or obscure his glory; so that out of the mouth of babes and sucklings he has ordained strength to silence even his most spiteful enemies.

To all this, the very name Jehovah should have led the least enlightened of the Jews, as it did to all this lead the most enlightened, who were wont to read that sacred name, not only in the volumes of their law, and on the high priest's forehead, but on everything; so that, to their believing eyes, the very bells of the horses were, as if in anticipation of the prophecy, inscribed already, Holiness to Jehovah. As in God's palace, all says Glory, all its contents and inmates, so did they among the rest. Some of the noblest of the Psalms of David, those in which even an irreligious taste can see most to admire, were written for the very purpose of identifying the Jehovah of the Scriptures with the God of nature. Of this, the nineteenth and the twenty-ninth, besides the psalm before us, are remarkable examples. The sublime description, which has been already quoted, of the heavens as witnesses for God, is merely introductory to a description of this same God as the author of a still more glorious law; and in the other case referred to, the God whose mighty and majestic voice the psalmist hears upon the waters, and sees crushing the cedars of Lebanon, heaving out flames of fire, shaking the wilderness, and stripping forests—the God whom he sees riding on the flood and enthroned as King for ever, is not, as the infidel pretends, a faint copy of the cloud-compelling Zeus or the Thunder-god of Scandinavian mythology, but a God who must be worshipped in the beauty of holiness—the Lord Jehovah, who gives strength unto his people, who blesses his people with peace.

With these views of his physical supremacy, as well as of his moral perfection, the inspired poets of the old economy, and those for whom their compositions furnished vehicles of pious sentiment, were not unwilling to look nature in the face, or afraid to look up from the ground on which they trod, at the magnificent creation overhead and all around, as if it were the devil's handiwork, or that of some inferior god, or that of fallen man, and, therefore, necessarily contaminating to the eyes and ears of saints; but in that very character of saints or holy ones, and in the exer-

cise of those affections which determined them to be such, they looked nature in the face, not by chance, but of set purpose; not by compulsion, but spontaneously; not rarely, but often; not as an occasional indulgence, but as a habitual duty; not with a gaze of vacant listlessness, but with a serious contemplation, they considered, they attentively considered the heavens; yet with no idolatrous and overweening reverence, as if self-made; with no atheistical indifference, as if not made at all; but with a genuine, devout, believing interest, as knowing them to be the handiwork of God—not the gross product of a blind and brutal power, acting irresistibly, yet wholly without purpose, but the perfect and symmetrical result of a divine intelligence, as really designing and constructing what it brings into existence, as the mind of man directs his fingers in the nicest operations of mechanical contrivance or artistic skill; so that the psalmist, by a bold and beautiful assimilation of the finite to the infinite, describes the heavens as the work of God's fingers—a work not abandoned to its own control, or left without control, when once created, but ordained, fixed, settled, by the same creative and almighty power, each celestial body in its own allotted sphere or orbit; so that when he considered the heavens, the work of God's fingers, the moon and the stars which he had ordained, he looked through the contrivance to the great contriver, through the building, in which all says "Glory!" to the builder, by whose skill and power, and for whose everlasting praise it is and was created.

Such religious views of the material universe must, of necessity, re-act on the spectator, to whom the works of God perform the office, not only of a telescope, but of a mirror, *through* which he sees God, *in* which he sees himself; and, as some celestial phenomena can only be observed by the assistance of reflectors, so in morals, man can only see himself in God, and never becomes conscious of his littleness until it is reflected from God's greatness. Hence the atheist must be proud, because his standard is so low, because he substitutes for God, in his comparison of magnitudes, not only man, but self, not only an inferior species, but the individual example of that species, as to which he knows, or ought to know, most evil, while the true believer in a God employs a very different measure, and sees his own diminutive proportions

constantly reflected from the glass of God's majestic works above him and around him, he can say with David, When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast ordained, what is man that thou shouldst think of him, or thinking of him, shouldst remember him or bear in mind so insignificant an object,—not as implying any serious doubt as to the fact; for if there is a providence at all, it must be a particular one. Nor does the difficulty of the subject turn upon the greatness or smallness of the objects comprehended in its scope, but on its being exercised at all; and if it is, as we are well assured, and if, without it, not a hair falls or a sparrow dies, how much more may man expect to share in this divine protection, the reality of which is not denied or even called in question by the psalmist, who is not laying down a proposition or establishing a doctrine, but expressing a strong feeling, namely, that of conscious insignificance before God, under the sense of which he wonders, not whether God thinks, but that he should think of an object so diminutive; or having once thought, should remember; or remembering, should visit man, considered as a race, or any son of man in particular. Whether the reference be to figurative visitations, such as men are hourly receiving, or to those more sensible theophanies, appearances of God in human or angelic form, by which the saints of the Old Testament were sometimes honoured, when about to be called to some extraordinary duty, or distinguished by some signal mercy,—what is man that God should thus remember him, or the son of man that God, in either of the senses just explained, should visit him? This feeling of surprise, though always reasonable and becoming, never seems so natural as when it is immediately suggested by the sight of God's stupendous works, especially the heavens, which are the work of his fingers, the moon and the stars which he has ordained.

It is not, however, before these material works themselves that man is called to bow with such a deep conviction of his own inferiority. Matter is no more above mind upon a large scale than a small one, in an earth than in a clod, in a sea than in a drop, in a sun than in a spark, in a world than in an atom. The least mind is superior, in itself and in the scale of existence, to

all matter. Man is not bound to recognise either the heavens or the heavenly hosts as his superiors. His homage is due, not to them, but to their Maker. He stands in speechless admiration of them, only as stupendous proofs of God's existence and perfections. In themselves considered, they are man's inferiors; he looks down upon them, nay, he exercises a dominion over them, and that not by chance or usurpation, but express divine authority. For strange as it might seem, that he who made and manages those shining worlds, in all their complicated systems, should remember man and visit him in favour, it is true, for God made man in his own image, and invested him with power as his own vicegerent, with dominion over the inferior creation, so that even sun, and moon, and stars, and elements, and seasons, should contribute to his wealth and his enjoyment, and the earth from which he was originally taken be compelled to yield her fruits for his subsistence, and the most mysterious powers of nature made to minister to his convenience; and besides this strange subjection of inanimate creation to his interest and his will, the lower animals are pressed into his service, even those whose strength is far superior to his own, and who might well seem able to shake off his yoke at any moment, and yet bear it with submission, not as a necessary consequence of reason upon his part—for the highest animal sagacity brings with it no such relative superiority among the brutes themselves—but as a relic and a proof of man's original formation in God's image, and his original vestiture with delegated power as God's vicegerent over the material and irrational creation, in admiring retrospect of which the psalmist says: "Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou didst put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field, the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas."

Even this honour put on man as an intelligent and spiritual being, partaking, in this cardinal respect, of God's own nature, although infinitely less, might seem sufficient of itself to justify the bold assertion, "Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels," or, as the words literally mean, "hast made him to lack little of divinity," so richly hast thou crowned his head with glory and honour. But the full justification of this bold description is

afforded by another fact, as to the most essential and conspicuous feature of that image in which man was created—his moral similarity of nature and uniformity of will to God—coincidence of judgment, disposition, and affection; in a word, true holiness, the crowning excellence of God himself, without which his created image must have been a sightless mask, a lifeless statue, or a living but soulless form, but with which man was really invested, and possessing which he may, without irreverence or extravagance, be said to have been “made a little lower,” not “than angels” merely, but than God himself, from whom he differed only, although infinitely, in degree.

But although Adam might have triumphed in this glorious and blessed likeness, how can we, or how could even he, who was the man after God’s own heart, but who so often and so bitterly bewails his own corruption, as one conceived in sin and shapen in iniquity, whose only hope was in the mercy of the God against whom he had sinned, through what illusive medium could even he behold himself or the race of which he was a member, as still holding this sublime position, as little lower than the angels, nay, as lacking little of divinity? If he, if men in general, had lost their chief resemblance to their Maker; if the image in which they were made at first had been defaced and broken, and their mutual communion turned into estrangement, and the prospect of perpetual favour bantered for a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, how could David wonder at the honour and glory with which man was crowned, instead of standing horrorstruck to see it torn from his dishonoured brow? Was it because he did not know or had forgotten this great fact in human history? Alas, his psalms are full of it! Was it in musing recollection of a state of things now past and never to return? But such a glowing exhibition of a happiness and greatness irrevocably lost, would be unnatural, irrational, and as such, inconsistent with his character whether intellectual or moral.

Nor are these unworthy suppositions needed to explain his language, which receives its full solution from the fact that he contemplates man, both in the future and the past, as fallen and raised again, as cast off and restored, as lost in Adam and as saved in Christ, not only re-instated, but exalted higher; for the

first Adam was indeed a living soul, but the last Adam is a quickening spirit; the first man is of the earth earthy, the second man is the Lord from heaven. Yet as the offence, so also is the free gift, for if by one man's offence death reigned by one, much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness, shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ. Without this link the chain is broken; without this simultaneous view of man as he was and is to be, of the first and second Adam, there is something wanting in the psalm itself, a flaw, an incongruity, a contradiction between revelation and experience, which can only be removed by looking down as well as up the stream of time, forward to Christ as well as backwards to Adam. It is therefore no fanciful accommodation, but a true and necessary exposition of the psalmist's meaning, when the apostle, after quoting these words, speaks of Jesus as made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, that he by the grace of God might taste death for every man, and thereby re-instate us in our pristine exaltation, renewed in the spirit of our minds and clothed upon with that new man, which is created after the likeness of God, in knowledge, and righteousness, and true holiness (Eph. iv. 24; Col. iii. 10).

Not only as a model or example does the second Adam thus restore the race of which he has become the head by his assumption of its nature, so that in him as their representative they see themselves again exalted, but by actual union with him, they experience a real and substantial exaltation from the depths of sin and misery to a state of justification through his righteousness and sanctification by the power of his Spirit, and a consequent participation in the elevating and ennobling process by which he has raised humanity from being almost lower than the brutes to be again a little lower than the angels, than divinity, than God himself. How much of all this David clearly saw, we can no more determine than we can look back at noon and tell how much of what we then see bathed in light was visible at sunrise or at daybreak; but we do know that the Saviour whom he saw and whom we see, however great the difference of clearness, is the same, just as we know that the skies which are now telling the glory of God, and the starry firmament which now shows forth



his handiwork, are literally and truly the same objects of which David said, "When I consider the heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained, what is man that thou shouldst remember him, or the son of man that thou shouldst visit him and make him lack but little of divinity, and crown him with glory and honour, and make him have dominion over the works of thy hands, and put all things under his feet." In Christ as the head, and in his people as the body, this is gloriously fulfilled, "for he hath put all things under his feet" (1 Cor. xv. 27), and given "him to be head over all things to the Church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all" (Eph. i. 22, 23). In prophetic foresight of the Saviour the inspired king could say, and in believing recollection of him *we* can say, of man not only as he was before the fall, but as he is, already fallen, yet susceptible of restoration to God's image and to the dignity inseparable from it, "Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour."

The train of thought which we have been pursuing, is not only in accordance with the general tenor of the word of God, but identical with that which runs through the psalm before us, as expounded and applied in the New Testament, and may be profitably used by us for the correction of some common and pernicious errors. It may serve, for example, as a corrective of that spurious and vitiated taste which many cherish for the beauties of nature, and which sometimes verges towards the worst form of idolatry. It is true, the views which we have taken are equally adverse to the opposite extreme of sanctimonious indifference or fanatical contempt for the material works of God; to both these forms of error they afford the only safe and efficacious antidote, by teaching us to "consider the heavens" as "the work of God's fingers," "the moon and the stars" as things which he has "ordained," and to derive, from the view of his perfections thus suggested, new impressions of our own insignificance, and his benignant condescension in originally placing man above this glorious creation, and again restoring him when he had fallen. A habitual contemplation of this aspect of God's works would be the best corrective, both of the spurious religion which ignores them, and of the atheism which beautifies or the pantheism which deifies external nature.

Nor would this corrective influence be limited to the domain of sentiment or taste; it might extend to science, and restore a healthful circulation in the otherwise inanimate and soulless frame of mere material wisdom, from astronomy, whose chosen work it is to "consider the heavens, the work of God's fingers, the moon and the stars which he has ordained;" to zoology, which prys into the habits and the constitution of the animal creation; "all sheep and oxen, yea, and beasts of the field; the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the sea."

But why should I speak of this ameliorating process as one merely possible, when it is really a matter of experience; when the cases of eminent investigators and discoverers who believe in God and Christ, and who apply to the connection between physical and moral truth the maxim, "What God hath joined together let not man put asunder," are no longer rare exceptions to the general rule of sneering scepticism or dogmatizing unbelief, but bid fair, in our own day and country, to reverse the old relation between faith and infidelity in scientific studies, by affording in their own example the most striking and conclusive proof that ignorance of God or hatred to him is by no means a pre-requisite to thorough knowledge, and correct appreciation of his works. When the change, thus auspiciously begun, shall be completed, we may hope to see it followed by another in the feelings and the dialect of common life, as to the dignity of human nature, a cessation of that strong delusion which leads men to shut their eyes upon the most notorious fact in human history, the fact of man's apostasy from God, and with impotent energy try to struggle back to their original position by their own unaided strength, speaking and acting just as if the fall and its effects were a mere phantasma and a hideous dream, from which the world was now awaking, when in fact the dream and the illusion are all the other way, and whoever is awakened from them, must awake to the discovery, however humbling and unwelcome, that man, though once exalted, is now fallen, and can only be restored by sovereign mercy, as offered and exercised through Jesus Christ. The soul, once roused from its protracted stupor, may distinctly read this truth by looking inwards at the ruins and remains of man's original condition, at his present degra-

dation and pollution, and at the aspirations after something better which disturb him even in his deepest slumbers and his worst excesses.

The same thing, if he looks out of himself, is legible, not only in the word, but in the works of God, or rather in the word and works of God together,—in his works as expounded by his word and Spirit. However blank or dark the universe may seem till thus illuminated, when the light does shine upon it, the re-awakened soul can no longer “consider the heavens, the work of God’s fingers, the moon and the stars which he has ordained,” without inquiring, “What is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou shouldst visit him, and make him want but little of angelic, nay, of godlike exaltation, crowned with glory and honour, and invested with dominion over the irrational creation !”

This conception of man’s pristine elevation sometimes rises before the mind’s eye, as a beautiful and splendid image of unfallen humanity, standing like a statue upon some triumphal arch or commemorative column, or suspended in mid-air like some celestial visitant surveying with compassion this inferior world. But as we gaze upon it, and indulge the fond imagination that the relative position of the race and of the individual man is still enchanted, the light of revelation and experience grows brighter, and as it reaches its extreme degree, the image vanishes away, as if absorbed in the intense light, and the lofty place so proudly occupied by man, is seen to be a blank, a vacuum, an empty space, through and beyond which may be seen the pure effulgence of the divine perfections, “unobscured, unsullied by a cloud or spot, though man is fallen, fallen from his high estate.” And as the eye of the spectator shrinks from this unveiled, dazzling brightness, it is suddenly relieved by an intervening object, at first undefined and dubious, like a radiant cloud or mist, which by degrees assumes a shape and a distinguishable outline, till at length it can no longer be mistaken, as a human form, a man, the Son of man, but oh, how changed, how transfigured before us ! his face shines as the sun ! his raiment is white as the light ! and from the bright cloud overshadowing him, a voice comes forth out of the excellent glory, saying, “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased ;

hear ye him." It is indeed the Son of God, it is indeed the Son of man, the type of our humanity restored and glorified. Oh, if this blessed sight could be associated, even in imagination, with our daily contemplations of the face of nature; if we could not look upon the heavens, the work of God's fingers, the moon and the stars which he has ordained, without remembering what man once was, what he now is, and above all what he yet may be; we might find not only pleasure in prosperity, but solace under sorrow in contemplating the works of God, not as poets, or artists, or philosophers, or atheists, but as Christians, whose perspicuous faith cannot rest in what is visible, but pierces through the thin material veil in search of hope and consolation, just as Stephen, on the very verge of martyrdom, and from the very midst of his judicial murderers, "looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of the Father." Yes, there is a sense in which even we might have a right to say as he did, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God." And though the blinded world around us might cry out with a loud voice, and stop their ears, and run upon us with one accord, even they might be compelled to take knowledge of us as having been with Jesus, even they, if they looked steadfastly upon us, might see the face of every one among us beaming with unearthly radiance, as if it were the face of an angel.

Having reached this point in our experience, having thus learned to associate the material works of God with the profoundest views of spiritual truth, we should need no further remedy for that groveling nationality or party spirit, which is apt to spring up even in renewed hearts and enlightened minds, not only in spite, but in consequence of those very privileges which ought to have forbidden its existence, just as the Jews learned to associate their most narrow and uncharitable prejudices with that very name of God—which ought to have reminded them, at every moment, that Jehovah, though in covenant with them, was not the God of the Jews only, but of the Gentiles also. If we would shun the kindred, but more odious error of degrading the God whom we worship, and the Christ in whom we trust, to the level of a local chief or party leader, let us here learn to identify the object of our

faith and adoration with the God of creation and of providence ; let us not only read the name of God our king, and God our Saviour, traced in characters of light upon the whole material universe, but strive to make it legible to others also, till the book of nature and the book of revelation are enveloped in one vast illumination, in the blaze of which all lesser lights are lost, and in the midst of which all human tongues of man shall be heard in harmony or unison, responding to the loud but speechless testimony of the heavens, “ O Lord, our Lord, how glorious is thy name in all the earth ! ”



XL.

The Way of Life.

“This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.”—JOHN xvii. 3.

IT is a glorious doctrine that there is a God. We are forced to assume it, as a first principle of our religious knowledge, and perhaps for that very reason, are prone to underrate or to forget its value. To correct this practical error, we need only ask ourselves, what should we be without a knowledge of this great truth? Men may dispute as to the mode in which our first conceptions of a God have been obtained. Some may derive it from an observation of his works, and subsequent reflection on them. Some may regard it as innate—a kind of invisible writing on the soul, to be educed and rendered legible by intellectual and moral culture. But this much appears certain; we can form a conception of a rational soul without any definite notions of God, even of a God, of any God.

We can conceive of such a soul with its ideas restricted to itself, or to beings like itself, with no higher standard or more perfect model than that afforded by its own experience, or its observation of its fellows. Or if we suppose it to rise higher, as imagining one like itself, but differing in degree, conceiving only of itself exalted to a higher rank, but with no conception of a lawgiver, a sovereign, an almighty deliverer,—such a mind would be truly dark, compared with the light which blazes around us.

But suppose a portion of that light to be let in upon it by degrees, and with it a conception of something intrinsically higher, better, nobler than the man himself, distinguished from him, not merely by an individual or even a specific, but by a generic difference, possessing all that appears good in us, but without the limitations and defects which mar it; possessing more of knowledge,

power, and goodness, much more, vastly more, infinitely more;—this is a great advance upon his previous conceptions; this is the idea of a God, however vague and immature; it is a new and grand idea, it presents a new aim and a higher standard, something to which the awakened soul can now look up, and towards which it can stretch in emulous desire to rise above itself. Even by removing all limitation, and by raising every excellence to the highest pitch conceivable, we come to the idea of perfection, at least negatively; and this, if not all that is attainable, is certainly a great advance from nothing or from self to God, to the notion of a perfect object for our contemplation, our desire, our love.

But this idea of perfection may itself be imperfect. The mind may leave out of view some essential attributes, or view them in a false light and in disproportion. It may even view them as abstractions not inherent in a personal subject, inherent only in the universe, or in its parts, or in the powers of nature, or in deified men, or in lower animals, or in artificial idols. This is heathenism in its various gradations. But even where these grosser errors are avoided or escaped, the view may be confined to what the older theologians called the natural attributes of God, to the exclusion of the moral. The power, wisdom, omnipresence, and omniscience of the deity may be contemplated alone. Increase the light so far as to afford a glimpse of his truth, justice, holiness, benevolence, and mercy. What an advance is this upon the previous conception, even of an all-wise and almighty being! It is scarcely less than that before described!

But even among the moral attributes of deity so called, some may be acknowledged to the exclusion of the rest. He may seem all mercy and no justice, giving license to transgression; or all justice and no mercy, driving the guilty to despair. So too with his natural perfections; his wisdom may be exalted at the cost of his omnipotence, a wisdom utterly unable to effect its own designs; or his power may appear divorced from wisdom, a blind, unintelligent brute force. All these varieties of error are not only possible, but have been really exemplified in systems of religion and philosophy, and in the tentative inquiries of the individual speculator on the mode of the divine existence. But let these discordant views be brought into harmony and due proportion, as

the light of day reduces objects magnified and distorted by the dubious twilight, and how astonishing the change! It is like a new revelation. What before appeared in conflict now harmoniously co-operates; things which seemed contradictory, illustrate one another. This is indeed perfection. What was seen before was but a name, this is the reality; that was *called* a perfect being, but this *is* one; that was the vague conception of a god, this is *the* God, this the *true* God.

But even here experience proves that men may cling to the idea of plurality, as something at least possible. Why may there not be many perfect beings? The very question implies some defect in the idea of perfection. That supreme perfection in one being must exclude it in all others, is a higher refinement to which even wise men have not always attained. Hence the doctrine of the divine unity; of monotheism as opposed both to polytheism and to pantheism, is a further advance upon the steps which we suppose to have been already taken in the ideal progress of a soul from total ignorance of God towards just and clear conceptions of his nature. That the unity of the divine nature stands nearer to the end than the beginning of this progress, is apparent from the fact, that in proportion as the unassisted powers of the human mind have risen to more just views of the deity, the number of the beings in whom it was supposed to reside has always been diminished, sometimes from many thousands to a few hundreds, then to scores and tens, until it has reached two, where many, with the Gnostics and the Manichees, and other dualists, have stuck fast, unable to account for the existence of evil, except upon the supposition of two co-eternal but antagonistic principles. When this last difficulty has been vanquished, and the oneness of the Godhead seen to be essential to his absolute perfection, men have sometimes stood still in amazement at their own delay in reaching a conclusion which now seems to them not only obvious, but unavoidable. And if we may suppose a single mind to have been brought through all these stages of conviction and illumination, and to look back from the last through those by which it was preceded, to the distant starting-point of its ascent, it is easy to conceive of the astonishment with which such an inquirer would survey the vast strides by which he had passed from darkness to twilight, from twilight



to the dawn, and from the dawn to the meridian blaze of clearly revealed truth—from no god to a god, from a god to the God, the first to whom there is no second, the whole in whom there are no parts, “the only true God.”

I say this is a glorious doctrine. It is a glorious thing to know the true God, even in the lowest sense; to know that he exists, to see the proofs, to feel the necessity of his existence. Even in this, supposing it to be possessed alone, there would be something elevating and enlarging in the capacity to frame such a conception of the true God, even as remote, even as an object of mere speculative contemplation. How much more to feel his influence! If it is a privilege and honour to behold, by the artificial aid of glasses, those heavenly bodies which directly and sensibly affect us least, how must we feel towards those which are revealed to the unassisted eye, if free from all obstruction and disease, and whose effects are matters of perpetual experience? So, too, the soul, when once brought to contemplate God, the only true God, feels a desire, or at least a need of some more intimate relation to him. Not contented with his light, it craves his heat, or in its absence, feels itself to be for ever cold and dead. Under this impression, in obedience to the law of our original constitution, many a great but half-enlightened mind has yearned after intimate communion with that God whom it has learned to contemplate, with an eye of speculative reason, as possessed of all conceivable perfection. But this instinctive movement is repressed by new discoveries, disclosing the necessity of further and still clearer revelations of the object which appeared to be completely unveiled to the eye of the spectator.

I have supposed the inquirer, in the process which has been described, to set out from himself, and by removing all that seems imperfect and corrupt, and indefinitely magnifying all that we regard as good in his own constitution, to arrive at last at the conception of a God. From the very nature of this process, it involves comparison at every step between God and himself. And this comparison inevitably carries with it a conviction of inferiority, a sense of insignificance and meanness. This could not fail to arise, even from the contemplation of God's natural perfections, his power and his wisdom, as contrasted with the ignorance

and weakness of his creatures. No wonder that it should be so, when God and he are at the opposite extremities of the scale, through which he has been passing in his quest of infinite perfection. In proportion as his views of God have risen higher, must his views of himself have become more humbling, even in reference to natural qualities.

But he cannot confine his view to these. If really enlightened as to the divine nature, he must see that its moral perfections are not only real but essential, and that these must be taken into the account in measuring the interval between himself and God. This new and more complete comparison invariably produces a deep sense, not only of physical inferiority, but of moral uncongeniality. The more correct his notion of God, the more clearly must he see that holiness is necessarily included in it, and the more distinct his view of that holiness, the more vivid and painful the sense of his own sinfulness, because it essentially consists in opposition to that holiness of God which he now sees so clearly. This is in fact necessary to a just view of the divine nature on the part of fallen creatures. Where there is no sense of sin, there is no appreciation of God's holiness.

This is to fallen man the natural order of his thoughts and his discoveries. We do not first see God, and then by contrast with his holiness discover what sin is. It might be so with other beings, or with man before his fall, but it is not so with us. It is the gnawing sense of guilt that leads men to their first discoveries of God in the perfection of his nature. The reproofs of conscience presuppose a law, discriminating between right and wrong; and such a law presupposes a lawgiver. It is not before a mere abstraction that man trembles, but before a personal avenger. While the conscience still remains insensible, the proofs of God's existence may make slight impressions on the understanding. But when conscience is aroused, and man confesses to himself, if not to others, that he is a sinner, his thoughts are irresistibly borne onward to the bar at which he is to be arraigned, to the judgment-seat and Him who sits upon it.

This indivisible connection between conscience and the being of a God is far beyond the reach of sophistry; this witness cannot be silenced or gainsayed, and if its testimony be for a time suppressed

or disregarded, it will yet speak out, in shrieks or whispers, in some emergency of life, upon the death-bed, or in hell, bringing home the irresistible conviction that there is a just and holy God, against whom we have sinned, and from whom we are to receive our everlasting portion. It is the want of this convincing evidence, at least in any adequate degree, that dims the clearest speculations of the heathen sages. Because they had no due sense of sin, they had and could have no correct conception of that God against whom all sin is committed, and to whose very nature, no less than his will, it is essentially opposed. Hence, too, the wisest of the heathen, those who approached nearest to the Scriptures in their views of the divine perfections, are precisely those who seem to have had the most definite, experimental sense of sin. The same thing is exemplified in Christian errorists. The further they recede from deep and thorough views of sin, the more they are disposed to extenuate it, the more jejune do they become in their conceptions of the divine nature, till in many cases God becomes to them a name, an idea, an abstraction, a nonentity.

On the other hand, the clearer the conception of God's holiness, the deeper the conviction of man's vileness; so that nothing more contributes to this deep humiliation than enlarging views of the divine perfection, forcing the self-convicted sinner to exclaim with Job, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee; wherefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes!"

And this sense of vileness cannot be separated from an apprehension of God's wrath, and a desire to escape it. The man can no longer be contented with a scientific contemplation of the deity; he feels his alienation, and his need of reconciliation, and he asks, Can God communicate with fallen creatures? will his holiness admit of it? his justice suffer it? And if he can thus condescend to deal with sinners, will he? has he done so? has he ever sent a message to man since the fall? The knowledge that he can renew the intercourse without a violation of his attributes is blessed knowledge that he will; still more so that he has already actually done it is a glorious revelation, prompting the earnest, passionate inquiry, when, where, how? what has he sent? whom has he sent?

The answer to this question brings us on still further in our

search for God. He has sent us a message in his word, indited by his Spirit, a written revelation, perfectly consonant with that in nature, but transcending it, and going far beyond it; so that one of these great volumes serves to illustrate and expound the other. When we open this new volume, it is to meet a new disclosure. He has not only sent a message, but a messenger—a living representative, a personal ambassador. He has sent not only his own Spirit in his word and in the hearts of men, but his own Son, the brightness of his glory, the express image of his person—not a created representative, but God manifest in the flesh, the great mystery of godliness, or of the Godhead, the unity of persons in that one divine essence—a secret hidden from philosophers, and held back even from the chosen people, or imperfectly disclosed to them in types and symbols, perhaps to save them from polytheism, until they were established in the doctrine of God's unity, but now brought to light in the gospel, a new and glorious light, transcending all our previous discoveries—three persons and one God—the Son and the Spirit the revealers of the Father, sent by him for this very purpose, the Spirit in his word and in the hearts of his people; but his mission is dependent upon that of the Son, who comes in human flesh to reveal the Father, to instruct, to conquer, to atone—first as the Angel of the Covenant, then as the Messiah, the Anointed—as a Prophet to instruct, as a King to conquer, as a Priest to expiate, as a Saviour to redeem—the Christ—Jesus—both together Jesus Christ—the anointed Saviour, the Son of God and the Son of man—God and sent of God—man and sent to man. This is indeed the only true God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent. What a privilege to know this Saviour, not apart from God or independently of him, but as essentially one with him! None knoweth the Father but the Son, and he to whom the Son revealeth him. We cannot know God without him. He is the great revealer of the Father—his Word, his Wisdom. Our notions, which might else be too abstract, are embodied and realized in him. Even in theory, our views of God are too vague without Christ, and unless taken through him. But there is still another and a far stronger reason why we must come to God through him. God is holy, and we are sinners. As an absolute sovereign, as a righteous judge, he is

for ever inaccessible. Our God is a consuming fire, to which no man can approach and live. Christ is the way, the truth, and the life. We may come to God through him, not only as a man but as a Saviour. It is through this new and living way that we may venture to approach. God brings us near to himself through the blood of the everlasting covenant. There is forgiveness with him that he may be feared. We are forgiven that we may know him.

It is only thus that we can know him, and that not speculatively, but experimentally. We may know him as a merciful and sin-pardoning God. We may know him as ours by faith and a self-appropriating knowledge. In our own happy experience we may know, not only that he is, but that he is the rewarder of those diligently seeking him. We may know him as a child knows its parent, with a knowledge which cannot be mistaken, or confound its object with another—a knowledge necessarily including trust, esteem, and intimate communion. To know God is to love him. All alienation here implies some defect of knowledge. To know God in Christ is to know him as a Saviour, and to trust in him as such. To know him is to know his Holy Spirit, and to seek his influences, and to have them. All this is really included in the knowledge of the only true God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent.

Now this experimental knowledge of the highest good, when imparted to a lost and ruined world, is life. Look abroad upon the valley of dry bones by which you are surrounded,—see all the elements of our moral constitution dislocated, decomposed, dissolved,—a wide-spread scene of confusion and corruption, in which matter and form may still be recognised. But life is wanting—all is dead. Philosophy has lavished its experiments upon it for a course of ages, but with no effect, except to aggravate the ghastliness of death by occasional spasms of apparent life. To this scene of mournful desolation and decay introduce the knowledge of God, the true God, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent. This is precisely what was wanting—it is life, it is life from the dead: the effect is instantaneous and electric; the graves of humanity are opened; see, it bursts its cerements and comes forth in a blessed resurrection, alive to God, to holiness, to happiness; the paralyzed faculties begin to move; the affections are restored to their forsaken objects; the harmony and balance

of the powers are re-instated; darkness is turned to light, weakness to strength, death to life; old things are passed away, all things are become new.

But what if this new life, all glorious as it is, should prove to be but transient, evanescent, like a pleasing dream? But see, it stretches out into the future, and as it advances, all checks are removed. It swells, it grows; life from the dead is followed by no new vicissitude: man lives to die no more. We may look for decay and retrocession, but it comes not. God is unchangeable, so is the new relation of the soul to him; it cannot fail until the mercy of the Father and the merit of the Son, and the influences of the Spirit are exhausted; it is a new creation; it is a new world; and the life, instead of failing, grows more real and abundant, till it reaches the verge of this world, and launches forth into a new state of existence, but not there to die; it lives in those waters of eternal being, buffets the waves of that shoreless ocean, rises and falls upon their crests, and by them is borne on and on beyond our view. It is for ever. Yes, it is for ever. Yes, this new life is eternal. Well might the great High Priest of our profession, in his sacerdotal prayer, say of his followers and of all who should believe upon him through their word,—“And this is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.”

To be ignorant of all this is a terrible condition; but there is another still more fearful, I mean that of knowing it but only as a speculative truth. Yes, the thickest darkness of the heathen mind in reference to these great truths, though more degrading in itself, and in its present effects, is less appalling in its influence on character and destiny, than barren, unavailing, unbelieving knowledge. Why? because opposition or indifference to the truth is never a mere intellectual deficiency or error, but invariably the fruit of moral dispositions. The ear which will not hear when God speaks, and the eye which cannot see with all the light which he affords, are sins of a corrupted and hard heart; and he who finds himself in this position, instead of pitying the blindness of the heathen, and the doom to which it is conducting them, may almost envy their superior chance of clemency at God's bar, in comparison with those who know and even boast of knowing who

he is and what he has already done for man's salvation, and yet proudly say by every action of their lives that they will not be saved in this way, or rather that they need not to be saved at all. For this, disguise it as you will, my hearer, is the genuine spirit of your life, if not the language of your lips, so long as you remain contented with a cold intellectual assent to the great doctrine of one only true God and of Jesus Christ whom he has sent. For nothing can be clearer than that this one true God is a God of infinite holiness and justice, and that these perfections of his nature make the punishment of sin an absolute necessity, and that this necessity can only be avoided in the person of the sinner by the transfer of his guilt to another, and that Jesus Christ whom God has sent was sent for this very purpose.

These are not mere circumstantial adjuncts of the great truths which we have been considering, but integral and essential elements. There is no revelation of the one true God which is not a revelation of his holiness, that is, the opposition of his nature to all sin; for what is sin but opposition to his nature and his will, and how can he but be opposed to his own opposite, or fail, in the exercise of infinite rectitude and power, to destroy it? And again, if you exclude from your idea of the Christ whom he has sent the capacity and will to save, by self-substitution for the actual offender, what is left? If you leave this out, you have not even a correct intellectual apprehension of the one true God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent, and must suffer the same consequences from the want of this essential knowledge that you pity in the doom of the poor heathen.

If you take all this in—if you know God as a God of perfect holiness and justice, and Jesus Christ whom he has sent as a divine and all-sufficient Saviour, and yet bid defiance to the one by refusing to accept the other, your fate can differ from the heathen's only as the fate of one who stumbles in the dark ought to differ from the fall of one who rushes to destruction with his eyes wide open, and amidst the blaze of noon. The course of duty and of safety, then, is plain. Repent, believe, submit to God by accepting of his Son, and thus prove by your own experience that this is indeed eternal life, to know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent.



XLI.

A Broken and a Contrite Heart.

“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.”—Ps. li. 17.

THE process of salvation is, and must remain, a mystery to those who never shall experience its power. They may apprehend correctly the great doctrines of religion; they may make nice and accurate distinctions in theology; they may speculate ingeniously, and reason powerfully, as to the nature and the means of conversion; but they never can be made to understand, without experience, the mysteries of saving and regenerating grace; the practical mysteries of that deep, noiseless, thorough, total, lasting change, effected in the hearts of men by one touch of God's finger—by one breath of his Spirit. And yet the work is going on among them without ceasing. Ah! how little do the unconverted know of what is passing in the bosoms of their neighbours. How little does their shallow, superficial experience, teach them of the depths of their own hearts, until the fountains of that great abyss are broken up, and the windows of heaven opened from above by the same almighty power.

The sanctuary where the broken-hearted sinner seeks and finds a refuge, may be likened to a temple in the midst of a great city, passed by thousands every hour, but entered only by a few; and yet it is separated from the crowded thoroughfare by no solid wall, or massive seats, but by a veil or curtain which the hand of faith and penitence may raise at pleasure, and through which a strange light glimmers from within, and strange sounds fall upon the ear of passers by. And ever and anon some one stops to gaze and listen; he stands still for a moment and then hurries on; another stops, and moved by curiosity draws nearer to the entrance, listens,



wavers, turns away, and passes on. Another draws still nearer, looks and listens, lays his hand upon the curtain, and then draws back from the very threshold, and is seen no more. Another stops to look and listen, not from idle curiosity, but weary, weak, and sick at heart, despairing of a refuge from the evils which pursue him; he falls prostrate on the threshold—the veil rises for a moment—he is drawn within its shelter, and is seen no more.

But I have represented some who do not enter as listeners at the threshold; these are they who treat religion with respect and curiosity, but never know its power. As they stand and gaze at the mysterious shadows which are thrown upon the curtain from within, the sound of many mingled voices strikes their ears. These they know to be the voices of regenerated sinners, the elect of God. But it is not the voice of triumph which they thought to hear; it is not the voice of them that shout for mastery, nor yet the voice of them that sing for joy; it is more like “the voice of them that cry for being overcome.” It is a voice of suppressed wailing from a multitude of broken and of breaking hearts, going up like melancholy music to the ears of the Lord God of Sabaoth! As the veil of the temple is shaken by the wind, the listener gets a glimpse of its interior; he sees an altar—an altar of atonement—not an altar of oblation—not an altar of burnt offering—but an altar of incense. The bloody sacrifice has been already offered, and accepted, and applied. The blood has been sprinkled and the vapour has ascended; and the penitent who laid his hand upon the victim’s head approaches to the golden altar, not to purchase pardon, but to offer gifts. And on the altar the oblation lies—a heart—a bruised and broken heart—a heart once stained, alas, how deeply, but now fresh from the laver of regeneration; a heart pierced with many sorrows, the deep scars of which remain, but now melted and broken by the fire and the hammer of God’s efficacious word. There it lies encompassed in the newly kindled flame of pure and holy love; and as it burns there unconsumed, a sweet and solemn voice, like the voice of a parent to a suffering child, says: “My son, give me thine heart;” and another one, still tremulous with weeping, cries out from beneath the altar: “My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed;” and then a mul-

titude of voices, like the sound of rushing waters, are heard saying all together: "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise."

It is this that the proud, the sensual, and the frivolous cannot understand. It is this mysterious sacrifice of broken hearts at which they wonder or at which they laugh. Apart from all mistake as to the fundamental doctrine of atonement, they still stumble at this stumbling-stone. Who can tell what merriment the men of this world have derived, in this and other ages, from the sighs and tears of penitence? How many sound and good hearts, in the world's estimation and their own, have been made glad and proud of their own greatness, by the anguish of some broken spirit, by the agonizing throbs of some contrite and broken heart. In multitudes of cases the contempt and the derision have been never known to him who was their object, but in multitudes of others, the first pangs of godly sorrow have been strangely mingled with the painful sense that all who pass by wag the head and shoot the lip in bitter scorn; and that the man whom God has smitten is the song of the drunkards in their secret haunts or in their public gatherings to strengthen one another's hands and hearts in Satan's service. Under the pressure of these complicated pains, the penitent is often ready to cry out: "For thy sake I have borne reproach: shame hath covered my face. They that sit in the gate speak against me, and I am the song of the drunkards. Reproach hath broken my heart, and I am full of heaviness. I looked for some to take pity, but there was none, and for comforters, but I found none." The dread of this has stifled the incipient convictions of its thousands and its tens of thousands.

Are there none now present, who have thus been driven back, first to silence, then to apathy, and then to sin? Are there none now present who at this very moment are aware of such a struggle in their hearts? And are there none, nay rather, are there not very many, who can now thank God that they have passed through this fiery ordeal?—who remember when reproach had well-nigh broken their hearts too, until the sense of man's derision was absorbed in that of their own guilt before God; until they felt that their excessive sensibility to men's reproaches was a relic of un-

broken pride ; until they saw that they were but sharers, and small sharers, in the Lord's reproach ; and comparing their own trials as to this point with his buffetings and cruel mockings, they were suddenly inflamed with zeal to vindicate *his* honour and forget their own, crying out, "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up : the reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me." Then were they made to understand that the best cure for a heart which pride has broken, is a heart bruised and broken on account of sin ; and that while this brokenness of heart is matter of derision to the worldling, "the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit : a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise."

How different from this is the experience of the unconverted, unsaved sinner, even when his theoretical opinions of the method of salvation are correct. Let us suppose the case of one well instructed in the doctrines of religion, and unable to obliterate the deep intellectual impressions of his early training, but a stranger to the power of religion in his heart. He knows and will acknowledge that he is a sinner ; that his sins deserve the wrath and curse of God in this life and the life to come ; that if saved at all he must be saved through Christ ; that no outward acts or mental exercises of his own can expiate the guilt of sin ; that even faith, to which eternal life is promised, has no merit in the sight of God, but is a mere reception of the grace which brings salvation. All this the man appears to understand and professes to believe ; and, under some auspicious influence, he resolves, perhaps, to act upon his principles, believing as he does that atonement has been made ; and relying, as he thinks, upon the merit of that sacrifice, he wonders that he has not the assurance of forgiveness, joy and peace in believing, peace of conscience, peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. But, alas ! he has to learn that, though the sacrifice which purchases salvation has been offered once for all upon the cross, and though he cannot cast an atom's weight into the scale of Christ's preponderating merits, there is still a sacrifice which *he* must offer, and without which he can never be accepted,—a sacrifice so far from being meritorious or in any degree capable of making expiation for the sins of him who makes it, that it never can be offered but by one whose sin is already covered, and to

whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity. The expiatory altar of the Jewish ritual was situated in the open court, and only they who passed by this could draw near to the altar of incense. This secondary sacrifice can be accepted from no hands but those which are already reeking with the blood of the sin offering. In short, the sinner knows not that although his guilt can be removed by nothing but the sacrifice of Christ, his interest in that atonement can be proved by nothing but the sacrifice of himself—"a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God."

Here is the rock on which the Antinomian of every age concerning faith has made shipwreck. On the pretext that the sacrifice of Christ is all-sufficient, he withholds the oblation of himself to God. Because he has no merit he believes he has no duty, and throws off at once his sense of goodness and his sense of obligation; and because the grace of God abounds to sinners, he goes on in sin, that grace may abound. But the day is coming when the wood, hay, and stubble of such hopes shall be consumed in the crackling furnace of God's righteous retributions; and even they who thus abused the doctrine of gratuitous salvation and the all-sufficiency of Christ's atonement, shall see by the glare of the final conflagration that the sacrifice of Christ for any individual, upon the altar of atonement, is inseparably connected with the self-immolation of the man himself upon the altar of God's service; that no man who rejects the one can lay claim to the other; that Christ gives the purchase of his agonies to no one who refuses or neglects to give himself to God; and that although this self-sacrifice is not demanded as a previous condition of access to Christ, it does arise from it as a necessary consequence, and does, therefore, serve as an infallible criterion of any person's interest in Christ's atonement.

But let us suppose the sinner to be now convinced of this important truth,—to believe that, while his only hope of everlasting life is in the sacrifice of Christ, he has no right to believe that it was offered up for him until he offers up himself, through Christ, to God. Here, again, he is liable to fatal error. He may wash his hands in innocency, and so compass the altar of God; he may bind the sacrifice with cords to the horns of the altar; he may offer it upon the altar with the most imposing rites; but no sweet

savour rises from it to the throne of God. The victim and the offerer are alike rejected,—

“For God abhors the sacrifice  
Where not the *heart* is found.”

The man has brought his body and his outward wealth, his time, his talents, and his acquisitions, but his heart is left behind. This is the error of the formalist who, whether right or wrong in his conceptions of the method of salvation, whether trusting in his own works as an adjunct of Christ's sacrifice, or believing truly that the sacrifice is all-sufficient, but that it requires and indeed produces a self-sacrifice on man's part, fails, after all, to present the right oblation. Ah, how many well-instructed and apparently sincere professors are there who, acknowledging their obligation to give all to God, and professing so to do, do in fact withhold the very thing which God requires, endeavouring to please him and to satisfy their consciences by strict compliance with external rules, without a yielding up of the affections of the soul, and of the soul itself, which is their reasonable service.

But the heart is not only a necessary part of the required oblation. It is itself the very thing required. It is the heart which gives vitality and value to the rest. It is because words and actions come forth from the heart that they have any value; and without this they are worthless, nay, offensive, as professing to be what they are not. Not only is the sinner bound to sacrifice himself upon the altar of God's service, but to sacrifice his heart, which is indeed himself.

This is a second stage in the progress of discovery to which we may suppose the inquirer's mind to have attained. He knows that if Christ gave himself for him he must give his heart without reserve to Christ. And here again begins to show itself that spiritual blindness which has been before described. The man consents to give his heart to God, just as it is; but what a heart! It must be laid upon the altar whole, unbroken, unmelted. He consents, perhaps, that it should first be cleansed. He is willing that those deep, dark stains should be washed out, and that those ulcers should be healed by the application of another's blood. This is all that he will offer—all he has to give. But ah, what changes are to pass upon that heart before it is accepted! How

little does he think that it must first be pierced, and bruised, and broken! Or if informed of this necessity, how quickly does his pride revolt! The natural man may be brought to acknowledge his corruption, and to assent in profession to the only means by which it can be purged; but he never can divest himself of his old feelings with respect to the firmness and the stoutness of his heart. He may plead guilty to a mere superficial depravation, but he openly or secretly exults in his integrity and strength of heart. He boasts in time of trouble that his heart does not fail him, and prides himself upon his openness of heart. He would rather be thought to have a heart of iron than a heart of wax. He lays his hand upon his heart, as if to swear by it; and, in short, deifies that very heart which is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; and with these very feelings, and especially this confidence and pride in the integrity and firmness of his heart, he sometimes draws near to the altar of his God, there to offer up his hard heart as a sacrifice. But there he is thrust back, with an assurance that his stony heart must first be broken. The result of this discovery is very different in different cases. Some are disgusted by it, and go back for ever. Others, towards whom God has purposes of mercy, are subjected to a process which results in an effectual contrition of their hearts. However reluctant they may feel at first to undergo the change, the time comes when they not only feel it, but rejoice in it,—as the same apostle who at first said, “Lord, thou shalt never wash my feet,” said at last, “Not my feet only, but also my hands and my head.”

And thus they are brought by the winding course of their experience to the knowledge and belief of these three propositions:—

1. Every sinner who is saved through the sacrifice of Christ must also sacrifice himself to God.
2. This self-immolation must include the heart, or rather it is really an offering of the heart.
3. The heart thus offered must be broken and contrite.

But it is now time to consider in what this brokenness of heart consists. The figure is a common one, perhaps, in all languages. In our own it is one of those expressions which most vividly arouse the sympathies, and with which are associated some of the most tender and affecting images that fancy can create or memory recall. Who is there here, however narrow his experience, who

cannot call to mind some memorable case of deep affliction, in which the hopes of the sufferer, so far as this life is concerned, were not only nipped in the bud or blasted in the flower, but suddenly and violently plucked up by the roots; in which the affections which had twined themselves around earthly objects were at once and for ever snapped asunder, and the soul became dead to the world, not by spiritual crucifixion, but by a providential flash and thunderbolt? It is to such cases of abrupt separation from the hopes and the enjoyments of the present life that we familiarly apply the figure of a broken heart. And the phrase appears especially appropriate and natural when those who suffer are in character and circumstances such as to excite compassion unalloyed with any harsh or acrimonious feeling—such as cannot or will not seek a stoical relief in moody silence or in proud endurance—such as suffer without fault, or through the fault of others—and, above all, such as suffer without hope of reparation in the present life. It is of such that we are wont to speak as broken-hearted; and when the sufferings of such extend to the sudden or gradual decay of life, they are said familiarly to die of broken hearts.

I refer to the ordinary usage of this phrase, in order to illustrate its true sense in application to contrition and repentance—not because there is any sort of sanctity belonging to the sorrow of this world, which worketh death. An eminent writer upon practical religion, speaks of that compound of pride and madness, which is usually termed a broken heart; and there can be no doubt that the broken hearts of poetry and romantic fiction are too often such as, if they really existed, would be followed in the next life by a brokenness of spirit, which no balm would ever heal, and no physician ever bind. Still, the very application of this metaphor to cases of profound and hopeless sorrow, even where it is essentially unholy in its origin and sinful in its exercise, will help us to illustrate its true import when applied to godly sorrow, as a sorrow which involves a loss of hope and a privation of enjoyments and dependences long fondly cherished. While the heart remains unbroken on account of sin, there are certain prospects upon which the eye is prone to fasten and to feed—the illusive forms of future happiness are seen through certain vistas and in certain quarters

only. To these points, when the mind conceives the thought of being happy, it instinctively reverts. But when the bruising and the breaking process has begun, these vistas are obstructed, and these prospects fade away; and when the mind instinctively reverts to its accustomed points of joyful expectation, they are veiled in darkness. Thus its fixed associations are dissolved, its ancient hopes unsettled, and its ancient fears give place to new ones; so that, in the confusion of its passions and affections, the heart may be described as being broken in pieces.

But the change which is properly and specially denoted by this figure, is the change from insensibility and apathy to a directly opposite condition—to a keen susceptibility of shame and grief. It is equally amazing to behold how much the heart can bear, while yet unbroken, and how little is enough to make it quiver with emotion, when the hammer has descended, and the rock is dashed in pieces. If the secrets of two hearts could be disclosed at the same moment—for example, in the hearing of a single sermon—we should see the one receiving, with a calmness too unnatural to be called philosophical, the most momentous doctrines; while the other, by the same enunciation of the same things, is not only agitated, but convulsed. The same wind which excites the living waters of Gennesaret into a storm, is said to leave no trace of its effect upon the smooth and silent waters of Asphaltites, the Sea of Death. But the difference of feeling in the cases now supposed, however great, can never be distinctly seen by others.

There is a case, however, which presents the contrast, at successive turns, indeed, but with a vivid clearness to the eye of an observer,—I mean when the observer is himself the subject of both states of feeling; when he looks back with amazement to the time when he could hear with cool indifference the same things which now freeze his blood, or make it boil. Has it never happened in your experience, that you have been apprised of some appalling danger after it was past; of your having just before been standing on a spot where the motion of a limb in one direction would have been your death, a death perhaps of aggravated horror? and when thus apprised of your deliverance, do you not remember the strange thrill of horror which at once shot through you, suspending for a time your sense of safety, and recalling the sensations proper to



your former state? This may serve to illustrate very faintly the retrospective feelings of the sinner, when his heart is broken, in relation to his exercises while it was yet whole;—but with this difference, that his amazement has respect not only to the awful danger which he did not feel before, but to the turpitude and guilt of sin to which he was insensible, and his own base ingratitude to God, at whose feet he now lies subdued and humbled. It is in sorrow for his sins, as sins against a God of justice and of mercy, that the sinner's heart is said to be broken,—not merely softened, but broken in pieces and reduced to powder, as the word translated *contrite* really denotes. True contrition, then, includes sensibility of conscience and the tenderer affections, with a just apprehension of the evil of sin, not only as considered in its own nature, but also as inherent in the penitent himself. Upon spiritual brokenness of heart as thus explained, I invite your attention to a few remarks, some of which have been implied in what has been already said.

The first remark is, that the broken spirit and the contrite heart are really a sacrifice, a sacrifice to God. I recur to this idea, on account of the opinion which extensively prevails among the hearers of the gospel, and particularly those who are not thoroughly instructed in the doctrines of the Bible, that contrition is a price which we must pay for our salvation; the death of Christ being either excluded altogether, or admitted merely to give weight and value to the sorrows of the penitent. How strange it is that an opinion which men never think of acting on in common life should be maintained so seriously and with such tenacity in spiritual matters! He who should undertake to cancel any civil obligation in like manner, to discharge his private debts or pay the penalty of violated laws by mere regret that he had broken or contracted them, would be regarded either as dishonest or a fool. And yet there are wise and honest men,—wise and honest as to this world's matters,—who regard repentance as an ample compensation for their worst transgressions, and who fasten with avidity on every phrase which seems to favour that opinion. Such a phrase is that before us, which describes the broken spirit as a sacrifice.

Some may be ready to inquire, If this does not mean a satisfac-

tion to God's justice, what else can it mean? It means, as we have seen, a consecration of the heart to God, not in its natural, obdurate state, but broken and contrite; a consecration which can never go before the application of Christ's blood and the remission of our sins, but will invariably follow it. They love much to whom much is forgiven, not because forgiveness is the purchase of their love, but because their love is the effect of their forgiveness. So, likewise, all who are redeemed will offer up a broken heart as a sacrifice, not because their brokenness of heart redeems them, but because whenever Christ saves a sinner, he invariably breaks his heart. The same almighty grace which sets him free from the dominion of the law, sets him likewise free from the obduracy of nature. And as these two deliverances always go together, there can be no assurance of the one without a satisfactory assurance of the other. We have no right to believe that Christ has died for us, unless we are ready and resolved to live for him. Let us maintain our hold upon both doctrines, and remembering that the only efficacious sacrifice for sin is that of Christ, at the same time remember that "the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit."

My second observation is, that this is an offering which God does not despise. In the language of the text, it would appear to be implied that God might well have been expected to despise it. And is this not true? Are these worthless, wicked, and deceitful hearts a fit oblation for God's altar? There is wonder in the psalmist's exclamation. God despises and rejects the costly offerings of princes; gold and silver, pomp and pageantry, he spurns: thou despisest all that wealth or pride can offer at thy footstool; but "a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." It is also an expression of his thankfulness. The broken heart itself is thy gift, thou alone canst break it; and having thus bestowed it, thou art pleased to accept of it again at our hands: thou requirest nothing but a broken, contrite heart; "a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." At the same time there is humble and rejoicing confidence. Since thou art pleased to ask nothing but a broken and a contrite heart, I despair no longer; only break my hard heart more completely by the sense of thy forgiving mercy, and I ask no more, for I can then come

before thee with a broken and a contrite heart for ever, and "a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise."

In the third place, I remark that though a holy and a righteous God accepts the sacrifice, ungodly men despise it. It is better to fall into the hands of God than into the hands of man. The chastisements of God are tender mercies to his people, but the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel. The licentious, proud, and selfish worldling, who believes that he does honour to God's word by hearing it, and whose religion is a condescending patronage of Christ and his salvation, hates and scorns a broken spirit and a contrite heart as heartily and proudly as the evil one himself. Let the humble Christian be prepared for the contempt of those whose hearts were never broken; and amidst "the proud man's contumely," let him lift his heart to heaven and breathe the psalmist's confident assurance, "A broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise."

Again, we may remark that in the Church itself there may be those who, while they wear the yoke of Christ, appear impatient of its pressure; these are the worshippers of manly Christianity, who love religion in its fierce, and proud, and insolent disguises, but disdain it in its unadorned simplicity and meekness. How far such a spirit is compatible with brokenness of heart and deep contrition, let those who cherish it determine for themselves, by comparing their own feelings and habitual dispositions with the language of the psalmist, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise."

In conclusion, there are, no doubt, many who now hear me that are perfectly unconscious of the slightest feeling which could be, without absurdity, described as a broken spirit and a contrite heart. To such the subject is, and must be, unintelligible; and they are, perhaps, disposed in secret to rejoice that it is so. Believing, as they do, that the experience of this change would deprive them of the only pleasures which they are now capable of relishing, they may, perhaps, console themselves by thinking that "where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise." It is not my design, by a vain reiteration, to attempt to change your present feelings in relation to this matter. But I wish, before I close, to

guard your minds, if possible, against a very natural illusion with respect to the future.

The unbroken heart is always loath to think that it can ever be subdued. As it invariably glories in its strength, it cannot bear the thought of losing it. Some, in the madness of their pride, resolve that they will rather lose eternal life, than gain it by humiliating weaknesses. Others, unwilling to proceed so far, merely dismiss the subject from their thoughts ; while a third class persuade themselves that though they must repent and be converted, they may certainly do this without a loss of native dignity or the indulgence of unmanly weakness. And accordingly their purpose is to keep a good heart even in repenting, and to quit themselves like men in the salvation of their souls. The eye of my imagination rests upon one who would rather be detected in a crime than in the shedding of a tear for crimes already perpetrated ; one who would rather break than bend ; one who would rather be broken by God's wrath than by his mercy ; one in whose nature this Satanic pride is so profoundly fixed, that he is utterly unable to conceive of it as possible that his heart ever can be broken either by misfortune or repentance.

The scene is changed, and I behold that same man still a hearer of the gospel ; but his countenance is altered. He still maintains a posture of resistance ; but his eye is restless and his brow contracted, and I read in his vain efforts to suppress and hide his feelings, that the enemy he once despised has found his way into the fortress of his heart. There is commotion there. There is a deadly struggle between flesh and Spirit. With desperate strength the strong man guards his palace, but a stronger than he is there. He would rather die than yield to his convictions. His soul chooses strangling rather than life. He reflects with horror on the scorn and contumely which await his fall ; and in the anguish of that fear, he summons every motive and musters all his strength to hold united his already bursting heart. But in the crisis of his last convulsive effort it is broken—it is broken. The most incredible of all impossibilities is realized. The stony heart is broken, and the man who feared and hated it in prospect now rejoices in it. The tears which once he would rather die than shed, flow freely. The man is willing in the day of God's power ;

and as he looks up at the cross beneath which his obdurate heart was broken, and beholds the bleeding Sacrifice by which his life was purchased, he throws, as it were, the bruised fragments of his heart at the Redeemer's feet, beneath the droppings of his blood, and says, "Lie there for ever;" while from every wound of him who hangs upon the cross a voice responds, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise."

Of such, some, no doubt, are saved—saved, perhaps, as by fire. Would to God that this might be the end of all who now despise the gospel, and resolve that no misfortune and no spiritual influence shall ever break their hearts. Well might the contrite and the broken-hearted Christian bear "the proud man's contumely" and the scoffer's sneer, if by such endurance he could purchase the consolatory hope that his despisers should be one day broken-hearted like himself. But, alas! with Scripture and with history before us, where shall we take refuge from the fear that to many who now make a mock of sin and of repentance, and who trample on the broken heart, the last words of the Saviour, as he points to his despised ones, will be, "Behold, ye despisers, and wonder and perish!"

It is matter of thankfulness that we who preach the gospel are not authorized to read the future history of those who now reject salvation, and that God has invested this distressing subject with a shroud of intermingled hope and fear. But notwithstanding this compassionate reserve, it may be said without presumption, that among those who are now disposed to laugh at the idea of a broken heart, there are some who, though they never shall experience the power of subduing grace, shall yet know by experience what it is to be heart-broken. Methinks I see one of this class, also, at another time and in another place. I see him surrounded by the comforts, and the honours, and the pleasures of the world. I see him still a cold, fastidious hearer of the gospel. I see him regarding with a proud contempt the penitent contrition of his fellow-sinner. I see him laugh in scorn at the idea of his own heart being broken. I see him arm himself with stoical philosophy, with heathen fortitude, with hellish pride. But while I see him watchful upon one side, I behold his enemy approaching on

another. While he surrounds the garden of his happiness with walls or hedges to repel wild beasts, I see the flower on his favourite vine begin to droop and sicken, till it drops into the earth a withered weed. I see the vine itself decaying in its branches and its stock, until the root alone is left. I see the soul of the proud sinner touched with exquisite exactness in its most unguarded and most vulnerable points. I see the appetite for earthly pleasure "sicken and so die," with nothing better to succeed it. I see the man as he looks back upon the wilderness and forward to the ocean, as he turns with a sore conscience from the trackless sands, gaze with anxious apprehension on the trackless waters. "His strength is hunger-bitten," and his courage spent. Is this the man who braved misfortune and defied conviction? Is it he who laughed at the idea of a broken heart, and vowed that his heart never could be broken? Is it he who even now has only strength enough to hide, and that at the expense of most excruciating torments, the approaching fracture of his own proud spirit, for a few more days of unimaginable anguish, till in the very article of death his heart and flesh give way together, and he who boasted of a whole heart while he lived, dies of a broken heart at last! Ah, my hearers, you may think it a mere fiction of romance that men should die of broken hearts; but when the records of God's righteous retributions are unfolded, some of us may see that this and that man, whose decease was here ascribed to accident or bodily disease, were the victims of an obstinate, unbending spirit, and of a wounded, ulcerated conscience—were consumed by secret efforts to suppress conviction, and at last, after all their proud derision and bravado, died of broken hearts! Is it, then, the case, you may be ready to inquire, that they who pass through life without experience of sorrow and devoid of sensibility—who steep themselves in selfish and ignoble pleasures till their souls are callous—is it true that these alone are to escape the sad experience of a broken heart?

My hearers, there are two very common errors in relation to the future state of those who die impenitent. The one is the idea, that because the tree must lie just as it falls—because he who is filthy must be filthy still—men can deprive themselves in some degree of that susceptibility of pain which is essential to the misery

of hell. Hence there have been men who, as their death approached, chose to stupify their minds with intoxicating liquors ; partly, no doubt, for the purpose of excluding all reflection on the future ; partly from unbelief of any future state ; but in many cases, I have no doubt also, in the hope that their stupified and brutal apathy would still continue in the other world. Think of this vain attempt to quench the flames of Tophet with intoxicating liquors, or with any other stupifying drug, and then imagine, if you can, the awaking of that spirit after death ! The only gift of God to the lost sinner is the gift of sensibility unknown before ; a gift which shall overwhelm with shrinking shame the man, the woman, to whom shame is now a stranger ; agitate with terror those who now are brave ; and sting with keen remorse the consciences of those whose hearts are never visited in this life by the dread of wrath or by the consciousness of guilt. Whatever other changes may await us, be assured, my hearers, that the day is coming when the most unfeeling shall be made to feel.



## XLII.

### The Christian's Duty in Times of Trial.

“My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering: for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord. A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways.”—  
JAMES i. 2-8.

THE questions which have been raised in reference to the author of this epistle, however interesting they may be to the historical critic, are of very little exegetical importance. Whether it be the work of James the son of Zebedee, as the old Syriac translators, and perhaps some others, thought; or of James the son of Alphaeus, which has been the prevalent opinion in all ages of the Church; or James the brother of the Lord, not a member of the apostolic body, but the bishop or pastor of the Church at Jerusalem, of whom contemporary history relates that he was called the Just or Righteous, and whose death, at the hands of the infuriated Zealots, is described by the same author as an immediate cause or occasion of the fall of Jerusalem; these are alternative hypotheses, our choice of which cannot materially affect our view of the design and meaning of the book itself.

The doubts respecting its canonical authority among the ancients, as in the case of the Epistle to the Hebrews, sprang from its having been addressed to Jews, or Jewish Christians, and not made known to the Gentile Churches until after some time had elapsed. The like doubts, entertained by Luther and some other modern writers, have been founded on a supposed contrariety between



the teachings of James and Paul, as to the fundamental doctrine of justification. The little currency which this opinion has obtained among believing readers and interpreters shows that its supposed ground is imaginary, and that there is no reason even for assuming two divergent types of Christian doctrine,—an ingenious figment which has been carried to extremes by certain German theologians of our own day. A key to all the difficulties of the case is furnished by the simple supposition that the epistle presupposes what is taught in other parts of the New Testament, and is intended, not to communicate the fundamental truths of Christianity, but to correct abuses of them which had already shown themselves, perhaps especially in certain portions of the Church, and under certain circumstances,—among which one was probably the influence of persecution, and the peculiar trials and temptations which it brought along with it, and in which the apostle here exhorts his readers to rejoice, just as Paul, in still more general terms, exhorts us to “rejoice always.”

This positive injunction of the Christian ethics may seem too difficult, if not impossible to be obeyed. And even if the natural repugnance to suffering can be so far vanquished as to make distress itself a subject and occasion of rejoicing, the moral sense still shrinks from what is here commanded, to rejoice in temptation. The paradox is not to be removed by violently changing the established meaning of the word, which never means affliction simply, but in every case conveys the idea of a moral trial, or a test of character. The petition which our Lord himself prescribes, “Lead us not into temptation,” cannot be a mere deprecation of adversity, as something painful. Had not popular usage lowered the meaning of our own word “trial,” as applied to providential changes, so that it now expresses little more than pain or privation, it would correspond exactly to the Greek term here used, and applied to sufferings or afflictions, not as such, or as mere chastisements, or means of grace, but as tests or touchstones of the sufferer’s dispositions and affections, of his faith, and patience, and obedience; to which the term is as legitimately applicable as it is to those direct solicitations to evil which are commonly denoted by the word “temptation.”

But even this word “temptation” strictly denotes trial, that is,

moral trial of character, and merely comprehends within it that specific mode of trial which consists in direct attempts to make men sin, by exciting their sinful dispositions, setting before them the unlawful object, and affording them the means and opportunity of actual transgression. All this, I say, which is the ordinary meaning of the word "temptation," is but one form—though undoubtedly the worst form—of that whole testing process which the term in Greek as well as English primarily signifies. The question whether it is here used in its narrower or wider sense may be determined by the context, where the fruit of sanctified temptation is described as patience, patient endurance. But the fruit and remedy of temptation in the ordinary sense is not the habit of endurance, but of strong resistance. To be patient under the suggestions of the devil, the seductions of the world, and the corruptions of our own heart, would imply acquiescence, not to say complacency in evil. A temptation, to which patience is the proper antidote, must be specifically a temptation to impatience, insubordination, a rebellious and repining temper, and these are just the sinful dispositions and affections to which we are tempted by a state of suffering. We must, therefore, understand the words as having reference to those providential trials of men's faith and patience in which they are rather passive than active, and under which their appropriate duty is not so much resistance as submission. But even these trials and temptations are not to be sought for or solicited. It is not in voluntary, wilful subjection to them through our own fault, or in the indulgence of our own perverse ambition to be martyrs or confessors, that we are encouraged or commanded to rejoice, but when we "fall into" them or among them, so as to be quite encompassed and enveloped by them, as the traveller from Jerusalem to Jericho, in the parable of the good Samaritan, "fell among" thieves or robbers, the original expression being just the same in either case; and in the only other place where it occurs (Acts xxvii. 41), although applied to a kind of trial altogether different, the running of a ship aground, it still suggests the same idea of unstudied, unintentional, unforeseen emergencies, and therefore makes it still more certain that the trials in which we are commanded to rejoice are not those into which we presumptuously rush, but those into which we unintentionally

fall, and which, for that very reason, are better suited to make proof of our obedience to the will of God, and of our trust in his power and willingness to keep us. The difficulty of complying with this general injunction may appear to be enhanced by the variety of outward forms and circumstances under which the work of providential trial may be carried on, including all the numberless and nameless "ills that flesh is heir to."

How can all these be reduced to one description, or provided for by one prescription? Though it may be rational and right, and therefore must be possible if not always easy, to rejoice in one variety of such temptations, it does not follow necessarily that it is possible or right in all. But this objection or misgiving as to the extent of the apostle's requisition, is anticipated and precluded by himself in the express use of the epithet "divers," manifold, multiform, diversified, the sensible quality originally signified being that of variety in colours, particoloured, piebald, motley, and therefore well adapted, by a natural association, to express in a lively manner the idea of diversity in general, as if he had said,—However varied the complexion of the trials into which you fall, or by which you are encompassed, I tell you still to "count it joy" and "all joy," not by a figure of speech or paradoxical abuse of language; so that, according to the famous saying of a great diplomatist, it serves to conceal thought rather than express it, saying one thing and meaning another; not in a limited degree, as implying that a little joy may possibly be squeezed out of the heart surcharged with grief; not with a stoical apathy, affecting to confound or identify pain and pleasure, joy and sorrow; but in the true sense, and the full sense, and the Christian sense of the expression, let us count our providential trials "all joy," nothing but joy, as Paul tells the Ephesians, Christ has abounded towards us "in all wisdom and prudence," and exhorts them to walk worthy of their vocation "with all lowliness and meekness" (Eph. i. 8; iv. 2), all kinds and all degrees of wisdom in the one case, and of meekness in the other. So here, it is not the mere name, or the mere pretence, or some infinitesimal degree of joy, that believers under trial are to exercise, but "all joy" as opposed to none, and to too little, and to every kind of counterfeit. So far from grieving or repining when you fall into divers

trials, "count it all joy." But as we know, both from Scripture and experience, that no "chastening *for the present* seemeth to be joyous, but grievous, and that *afterward* (ὕστερον) it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness to them which are exercised thereby" (Heb. xii. 11), it is not unreasonable to suppose that the joy here required is not a joy to be experienced in the very article or stress of the temptation, but a joy to be engendered by a believing, grateful retrospection of the trial after it is past, or at least, after the first shock is over, and the soul is able to reflect upon it. This is perfectly consistent with the form of expression (ὅταν περιπέσῃτε) which might even be translated to mean "when" or "after," "ye have fallen into divers trials," so as, at least, to suggest the idea, that this is not a joy to be indulged in prospect of the trial or temptation, which might too easily degenerate into a proud, presumptuous, self-confident defiance, or even a fanatical solicitation of such trials, which is something very different from the humble, grateful joy of having been subjected to them for a wise and gracious purpose, and brought through them, and then out of them in safety.

This precise determination of the time at which the joy is to be exercised, as not the time of actual endurance, much less that of previous expectation, but rather that of subsequent reflection—I mean subsequent, if not to the whole trial, yet at least to its inception—this, I say, may throw some light on two points which have been already mentioned, but perhaps not yet made wholly clear. The first is the paradoxical aspect of the exhortation to rejoice in that which necessarily involves pain and suffering. The paradox, to say the least, may seem less startling if we understand the text as calling upon men to rejoice, not that they *are* suffering, or *while* they suffer, although even this does not transcend the limits of experience, as we know from the triumphant joy of martyrs at the stake, and of many a lowlier believer on his deathbed, but that they *have* suffered, that it *has* pleased God, without their own concurrence, to afford them the occasion of attesting their fidelity, and patience, and submission to his will. Such joy, in the recollection of past trials, has so many analogies in general experience, that it cannot even be called "paradoxical" without injustice.

The other point on which the same consideration may throw

some light, is the choice of an expression which, although it primarily signifies no more than moral trial or a test of character, in general usage does undoubtedly denote a positive solicitation to do wrong. For even in this worst sense of temptation, it may be a subject of rejoicing, not beforehand, no, nor in the very crisis of the spiritual conflict; but when that is past, and when the soul, unconscious of its danger till it could no longer be avoided, looks back upon the fearful risk from which it has escaped, not merely with gratitude for its deliverance, but with unaffected joy that there was such a risk to be delivered from, because it has now served to magnify God's grace, and at the same time to attest its own fidelity. Just as the soldier, who would have been guilty of the grossest rashness and the most unpardonable violation of his orders, if he had deliberately thrown himself into the way of a superior enemy, may—when unexpectedly surrounded and attacked, he has heroically cut his way through—rejoice, not only in his safety, but in the very danger which compelled him to achieve it.

But the joy experienced in the case before us is not merely retrospective, but prospective also. It is not an ignorant or blind joy, but is founded in knowledge, knowledge not only of the principles on which men ought to act, but of the consequences which may be expected from a certain course of action or of suffering; for as we have already seen, it is of passive, rather than of active or positive obedience, that James is speaking. The trials or temptations of the Christian are the test or touchstone of his faith, both in the strict and comprehensive sense. They put to the proof his trust in God, his belief of what God says, of what he promises. But in so doing, they afford the surest test of his religion, of his whole religious character. Specific trust in God's veracity and faithfulness is not and cannot be an independent, insulated quality, or act, or habit. It must have its causes and effects homogeneous to itself in the man's creed, in his heart, in his life. Among these is a definite reliance on God's mercy, not as a mere attribute of the divine nature, but as offered and exercised in a specific form, the only form in which it can be offered or received by sinners. The text says nothing expressly of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, but every believer in the Saviour who peruses this epistle, feels that it is presupposed, assumed, or taken for granted, so that the

contracted form of speech here used, conveys to such a reader all that is expressed in the beginning of the second chapter, where the one word "faith" is amplified into the "faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Glorious," or "the Lord of Glory." What is there said explicitly, is here said by necessary implication. He who could use the longer form, could not use the shorter without meaning to suggest more than he says. There is therefore no violence whatever done to the apostle's language, when we understand him to describe temptation as a test of sincere belief in Christ as "the only name given under heaven among men whereby we must be saved" from sin as well as punishment, and not of mere reliance on the power and willingness of God to deliver or preserve from suffering. In both these senses, or in both these applications and extensions of the term, faith is necessarily included in the religious character, of which a test is furnished by providential trials or temptations.

But it does not merely furnish present evidence of faith. It produces a permanent effect upon the character. It generates a habit—that of patient endurance, that of steadfast perseverance in the way of God's commandments. For of patience, as of faith, it may be said that it cannot stand alone, it cannot exist independently of other virtues, other graces, other traits of Christian character. The principle of active and passive obedience is the same. He who will not do God's will cannot endure it in a Christian spirit. He can only endure it in the way of punishment. Evangelical patience presupposes, includes, or carries with it evangelical obedience or activity. It therefore comprehends a very large part of experimental and practical religion, and to say that it is fostered and matured by trial, is to say that trial or temptation, in the sense here put upon the term, is an important means of grace, of spiritual growth, and instead of being angrily complained of or sullenly repined at as a hardship or a cruelty, ought not indeed to be desired or courted any more than medicines, especially when composed of poisons, should be used as ordinary food; but when administered, without our agency or even option, by the Great Physician, should be thankfully submitted to, and afterwards rejoiced in, as a potent agency of God's appointment which produces great effects, not by a sudden or immediate

change, but as the original expression seems to mean, by a gradual, and long-continued alterative process; for the trial of our faith "worketh out," elaborates, and as it were laboriously cultivates a habit of persistent and unwavering obedience and submission to the will of God, both in the way of doing and suffering.

That the patience thus commended is not an inert and sluggish principle, much less a mere condition of repose, but something active in itself and tending to activity in others, is evident enough from the apostle's exhortation, not to hinder it or check it in its operation, but to give it free scope, let it have its perfect work or full effect. Could this be said of mere inertia, or even patient nonresistance? Is it not implied, or rather is it not expressly said that this divine *ἵπομονή*, this principle and habit of patient continuance in doing and suffering the will of God, is not a mere superfluous embellishment of Christian character, a work of supererogation added to its necessary elements by way of doing more than man needs or than God requires, but itself an element that cannot be dispensed with, and without which neither sufferers nor actors in God's service can be "perfect and entire, wanting nothing." How many, in compounding their ideal of a perfect Christian character, forget to put in patience, and how many, who in theory acknowledge its necessity, refuse to let it "have its perfect work" in their experience and practice!

All this affords abundant room for wise discrimination and a sound discretion. It is evidently not a matter which can be disposed of or conducted to a safe and happy issue by mere audacity or force of will, by cutting knots which ought to be untied, or by a reckless disregard of delicate distinctions and perplexing questions which arise from the very nature both of God and man, and from their mutual relations, and which can neither solve themselves, nor be solved by any intellectual force short of wisdom in the highest sense; not mere knowledge, not even genuine and solid knowledge, much less the capacity of barren speculation, but wisdom in the noble sense attached to it even by profane philosophers, intellectual powers and resources under the control of moral principle, and faithfully applied to moral uses; a wisdom shown in the selection of the highest ends, and in the application of the most effective means to gain them. This wisdom, the idea of which

was familiar to the wisest of the heathen, has been realized only in the school of revelation. And woe to him who undertakes, without it, to solve the intricate and fearful problem of man's character and destiny! This can be done successfully, and even safely, only by the wise man, and in the actual use and exercise of real wisdom. He who attempts it otherwise can only be regarded as a madman throwing about firebrands, arrows, and death, and saying, Am I not in sport? This is no arbitrary or unmeaning requisition, for unless we abandon the very definition and idea of true wisdom as chimerical, we cannot possibly conceive of any higher or more necessary use to which its possessors can apply it, or for which those who have it not are bound to seek it.

But how, or where? they may be ready to demand. In what quarter, or by what means is this transcendent, superhuman wisdom, to be made available for those who need it? If no exertion of man's unassisted reason, no reach of speculation, no variety of knowledge, no extent of observation, no depth of experience, can supply this want even to the wisest, what shall he do who lays claim to so much dignity, but feels himself to be deficient in this most essential point? My brethren, whoever does feel this deficiency, whoever in his own conviction does lack wisdom, and does really desire to have it, is the very man who has no right or reason to despair of it—the very one for whom this Scripture makes express provision—first, by pointing out the only source from which his want can be supplied, and then by assuring him that he may confidently draw upon it. “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God.” The “if” is not expressive of a doubt, but presupposes an unquestionable fact, or rather the doubt which it does seem to express relates not to the fact itself, but to the *sense* of it—not to the actual necessity and absence of true wisdom in the case of every fallen man, of every sinner to be saved, for this is certain and notorious, attested both by revelation and experience, but to the *consciousness* of this deficiency, the want of which is part and parcel of our native blindness; nothing but wisdom can reveal our folly. We do not even *feel* our mental maladies until the healing process is begun, in strict accordance with the wisest saying of the wisest of the ancient Greeks, that he knew nothing certainly, except that he knew nothing. This epigrammatic



maxim is the shell or wrapper of a very profound truth, to have discovered which is the highest honour of the man who uttered it—a truth, however, which to him and to the wisest of his followers was a mere negation, one of sweeping magnitude and awful import, but a negation still; the positive correlative of which was, what “the world by wisdom” was for ages striving after without ever grasping, till at length God pitied them; and seeing that the world, with all its wisdom, knew not God, was pleased to save them that believe by the foolishness of preaching,—by the promulgation of a new philosophy which seemed mere folly to the wise men of the world, as it reduced their wisdom to the simple and most unphilosophical acknowledgment of Socrates, and made the conscious lack of wisdom as to spiritual matters indispensable as a condition of reception into its school among its disciples; and to those who felt it, and confessed it, simply saying, “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God.”

My hearers, familiar, elementary, and almost tritcal as this may seem to *our* eyes, bleared and dazzled by the blaze of gospel light, it was a grand discovery and a vast advance upon the previous achievements of the human mind. It is like uncovering the sun to those who have been trying to strike light from the flint, or digging for it under ground. All that the schools of Greece and Egypt and the East had been saying for a course of ages was, Let no man think that he lacks wisdom, for he has it in himself—or, at most, If any man lack wisdom, let him come to me; but when the voice of the evangelizing Angel, whom John saw in his apocalyptic vision, became audible, the schools were silent, and the oracles were dumb, before that simple precept to which we attach so little value, “If any one of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God.” But this asking of God was to the Greeks a mockery. Even those who believed in God had no conception of immediate spiritual intercourse with God, still less of intellectual illumination, sent directly from him. They knew what it was to work out wisdom for themselves, or to seek for wisdom at the hands of human sages; but this was a new idea, “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God.” And that not as a ceremony, but a means, a certain means of acquisition,—not of God the unknown and the unapproachable, but God the giver, God who gives, who

actually gives, has given, will give again, will give for ever. This is no rash venture, but a matter of experience. You are only asked to do what others, nay, what multitudes have done before you,—ask of God, of God himself;—what, directly, without any mediation, without any but his Son's, without any influence but that of his Spirit, which is his own, without the intervention of philosophers or priests, without circuitous or ceremonial methods of approach! As simply as a child asks food of a parent, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God," "of God the giver, God who giveth,"—who habitually giveth, not to certain favoured nations, castes, or individuals, but to all men,—not to Greeks or Jews alone, not to philosophers or priests alone, but to all men; yes, to all men, that is, all who ask, all who really desire it, all who ask aright.

Like other great discoveries, it seems almost incredible that this should never have been stumbled on before; that among the numberless expedients for supplying the deficiencies of human wisdom, this should never have occurred, in its simplicity, to any of the heathen sages, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who actually giveth unto all men." How? In what way? In what spirit? There is something really sublime in the simplicity with which this question is here answered. It is not only simple, but simplicity itself. "He giveth simply." The very grandeur of this phrase has hindered and embarrassed its interpretation. It seems to say too little, when in fact it says too much for us to compass. It seems to be irrelevant, when nothing can be more precisely adapted to the end proposed. The doubtful and secondary meanings which have been preferred, if not inadmissible, are all superfluous. "He giveth liberally" is suggested rather than expressed; "He giveth simply" is the naked sense of the original, or perhaps it may be rendered more precisely still, "He simply gives,"—he gives—he gives—and that is all. He does not give and not give, as some men too often do; he does not give and take as some men do; he does not give and nullify the kind act by unkind words or disclosing unkind motives; he does not give as many a proud human benefactor gives, and then upbraid the beneficiary with his wants, his weakness, his unworthiness, his former gifts,—“he simply gives;” “he gives to

all men and upbraideth not." This human propensity to mar the value of a gift by mixtures of unkindness or ill-timed severity, was so familiar to the ancients as to be embodied in their proverbs. But from all these mixtures, and from others like them, and from everything that poisons human favours, God's are infinitely, wholly free. The best of men give only to some objects, and with some accompanying drawbacks; but he simply gives,—he gives to all men and upbraideth not.

My brethren, for such a giver is it too much to expect, that he who asks shall ask in faith and in sincerity, desiring what he asks, believing in God's willingness and power to bestow it? If God giveth, simply giveth, and upbraideth not, is it too much to require that man should ask, and doubt not, and dissemble not, and waver not? If God gives simply, singly, with a pure, un-mixed, unqualified benevolence, is it too much to require that man should not ask doubly, hypocritically—no; nor even with a double mind or soul in a less offensive sense, the sense of instability and vacillation, sometimes wishing, sometimes not,—now asking this, now that,—asking, and then refusing to receive the very thing before desired. Respect for even human benefactors requires that the petitioner should know his own mind before asking, and not lightly change it after asking. And is less respect due to that glorious Giver, who, with every reason to refuse, still giveth, and with every right to make distinctions, giveth unto all men alike? and with every right and every reason to accompany his gifts with hard conditions, and with harsh upbraidings, simply giveth, freely giveth and upbraideth not? Is it too much for him to say of every one who asketh, "Let him ask in faith, nothing wavering," either in trust or purpose—not at variance with himself—not self-contradictory in his petitions—not a man of two minds, or of two souls, or of two hearts, but of one, and that one fixed on God, on Christ? No; so easy and so reasonable a condition scarce deserves the name, especially as he who asks it gives it. Well might the wisest of the fathers pray, "Give what thou requirest, and require what thou wilt!" It is an insult of the grossest kind to God the giver, to bring into his presence a mind tossing with tumultuous and inconsistent passions, like the troubled sea which cannot rest, but casteth up mire and dirt. "Let not that man

think that he shall receive anything of the Lord," but only he who, through divine grace, can exclaim, "My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed!" The man whose heart is wavering and double is not merely deficient in his prayers, but in his whole religious character, of which his prayers are but an index; he is inconsistent and inconstant, fickle and "unstable in all his ways." While he thus reasons he cannot therefore expect God to give him wisdom, that transcendent wisdom, without which patience cannot have her perfect work, or extract her spiritual food out of the medicine of trial and the poison of temptation. And yet this is our last resort; if this fail us, there is no hope elsewhere. Whither shall we turn in search of wisdom but to Him who giveth freely unto all men and upbraideth not? We come back, therefore, to the conclusion, that if any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God.



### XLIII.

## Woe unto them that call Evil Good, and Good Evil.

“Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil ; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness ; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter.”—  
ISA. v. 20.

IF the judgments of men are habitually influenced by their affections, it is not surprising that their speech should bear the impress of the same controlling power. What we hear men say in the way of passing judgment upon things and persons, unless said deliberately for the purpose of deceiving those who hear them, will afford us, for the most part, a correct idea of their dispositions and prevailing inclinations. There is, indeed, a customary mode of talking, practised by some men, in which familiar formulas of praise and censure, as to moral objects, are employed as if by rote, involving the admission of important principles, and recognising in its full extent the grand distinction between moral good and evil. Such men will speak familiarly of other men, and of their acts, as right or wrong, as virtuous or vicious, in a manner which implies not only preference of judgment, but of inclination ; so that if we draw conclusions from their language merely, we should certainly infer that they not only understood the principles of sound morality, but loved them and obeyed them. The latter conclusions would, in too many instances, be found to be erroneous, not because the person, in his talk, was guilty of deliberate hypocrisy, or even intended to deceive at all, but because his words conveyed more than he meant, especially when phrases used of course, and by a sort of habit, came to be subjected to the rules of a strict interpretation. But in all such cases it will soon be found, upon a little observation, that the dialect in question, however near it may approach to that of evangelical morality, is still distinguished from it by indubitable marks,—to one of which I shall direct your notice, and have no doubt it will be confirmed by your own experience.

If, then, you know any one who thus indulges in the use of such conventional expressions as imply a recognition of those principles of morals which are laid down in the Bible, but whose conduct, on the other hand, repudiates and nullifies them—have you not observed, that in expressing his opinions upon moral subjects, he avoids, as if instinctively, those terms of censure and of approbation which belong distinctively to Scripture, and confines himself to those which are common to the Bible and the heathen moralists, to Christian ethics and the code of honour? He will speak of an act, or a course of acts, as wrong, perhaps as vicious,—it may even be as wicked, but not as *sinful*. There are crimes and vices, but no sins in his vocabulary. The difference between the terms, as viewed by such a person, seems to be that vice and crime are referable merely to an abstract standard, and perhaps a variable one; while sin brings into view the legislative and judicial character of God.

Sin, too, is associated in most minds with the humiliating doctrine of a natural depravity, while vice and crime suggest the idea of a voluntary aberration on the part of one by nature free from taint, and abundantly able to stand fast in his own strength. By tracing such diversities, however slight and trivial they seem to be when in themselves considered, we may soon learn to distinguish the characteristic dialect of worldly moralists from that of evangelical religion. It will also be found, that in the use of terms employed by both, there is a difference of sense, it may be unintentional, denoting no small difference in point of principle. Especially is this the case in reference to those important principles of morals which bear most directly upon the ordinary business of life, and come most frequently into collision with the selfish interests and inclinations of ungodly men. Two men, for instance, shall converse together upon truth and falsehood, upon honesty and fraud, employing the same words and phrases, and, perhaps, aware of no diversity of meaning in their application. In their principles and feelings they shall seem to coincide, both approving and condemning with a perfect unanimity. And yet when you come to ascertain the sense in which they severally use the terms employed by both, you shall find that while the one adopts the rigorous and simple rule of truth and falsehood which is laid down in the Bible and by common sense, the other holds

it with so many qualifications and exceptions, as almost to render it a rule more honoured in the breach than the observance. The one is so tolerant of innocent deceptions, and of jocose lies, or of conventional concealments and pretences in the way of business, that the other, when he comes to understand him, finds the ground on which he stood swept away by these insidious refinements, and begins to feel that even in morals the old proverb is a true one—what is one man's food may be another man's poison.

There can be no doubt that this unperceived and undefinable diversity in the use of language exerts a constant and extensive influence on human intercourse, and leads to many of those misconceptions which are tending daily to increase the mutual distrust of men in one another's candour and sincerity. But while it is unquestionably true that the language which men hold in regard to moral subjects is not, in every case, a sure criterion of their own dispositions, even where there is no direct intention to deceive, there remains, after all allowable deduction upon this score, an extensive field of curious and profitable observation. There are multitudes of instances to which the force of habit and colloquial usage, as explained already, do not reach, and which are, therefore, fair occasions for employing men's expressions as a test of their secret inclinations and the state of their affections. And in this there is very little danger of injustice to the subject of the scrutiny. The cases which have been already mentioned are exceptions to the general rule, or rather to its rigid application, that "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." All tend to favour him whose words are taken as an index to his character. The exception which has been admitted is, not that men are often better than their words would represent them, but the contrary. If, indeed, it were commonly or often true that men employ language which implies a denial or a disregard of moral distinctions, and, indeed, a preference of evil to good, while, in fact, they are not only sound in judgment upon this essential point, but cordially disposed to give the preference to virtue, then, indeed, it might be possible to do them gross injustice by the use of such a test.

But who pretends to think that men are often, I might almost say ever, better in the bent of their affections and their moral dispositions than in the general drift of their discourse? Who does

not know that they are often worse, and that where any marked diversity exists, the difference is commonly in favour of his words, at the expense of his thoughts and feelings? If we err, therefore, in the application of the test proposed, we are far more apt to err in favour of the subject than against him. If his words are, in truth, an exponent of his feelings, we shall do him justice; if not, there is every reason to believe that he is worse than he appears to be. Let it, however, be observed, that nothing could be more unjust or utterly subversive of impartial judgment in this matter, than to choose as tests or symptoms mere occasional expressions. Few men are so bad that they never speak good sentiments. And alas for the best, if they must stand or fall by their ability or inability to prove that they have never uttered splenetic, or frivolous, or unbecoming language! The holiest men have had occasion to lament their own delinquencies in this respect; while, on the other hand, notorious profligates and unbelievers have been known to utter sentiments of pure and stern morality, with such apparent earnestness and candour, that the hearers might have been excused for crying out, "Is Saul also among the prophets?" It is not by such ebullitions, whether good or evil, that the heart is to be judged, but by the general tone and tenor of the conversation upon moral subjects. It would not be just or safe to say that he who has been known to bear his testimony to the excellence of virtue, is a good man even in the worldly sense; or, on the other hand, that he who has been heard to speak deridingly, or spitefully, or doubtfully of fundamental principles in morals, is infallibly a villain, though the latter conclusion would be far more warrantable than the former, for a reason before stated. But it may be said with due regard to truth and justice in the abstract, and in application to the character of individuals, that he who habitually, and as if by impulse, takes the side of virtue, without partiality and without hypocrisy, is virtuous himself; and that he who in like manner is invariably prompted, when there is no outward counteracting influence, to call evil good, and good evil, is one who, like the fallen angel, says in his heart, "Evil, be thou my good!" and is, therefore, a just subject of the woe denounced by the prophet in the text. It may, indeed, be thought that this expression is descriptive, not so much of those who hate



good and love evil, as of those who err as to what is good and what is evil.

But it must not be forgotten that a rational nature is incapable of loving evil, simply viewed as evil, or of hating good, when simply viewed as good. Whatever thing you love, you thereby recognise as good; and what you hate or abhor, you thereby recognise as evil. To hate a thing, and yet regard it as a good thing, is a mere contradiction, if the terms be taken in the same sense, or referred to the same standard of comparison. No man can dislike a taste, or smell, or sound which, at the same time, he regards as pleasant, nor can he like one which he thinks unpleasant. To regard a thing as pleasant is to like it, and to dislike it is to think it disagreeable. But change the standard of comparison, and what appeared impossible is realized. The music which is sweetest to your ear may be offensive when it breaks the slumber of your sleeping friend; the harshest voice may charm you when it announces that your friend still lives. The darling sin is hated by the sinner as the means of his damnation, though he loves it as the source of present pleasure; and in proportion as the present and the future world are present to his thoughts and his belief, may his affections vary as to the same object. When, therefore, men profess to look upon that as excellent which in their hearts and lives they treat as hateful, and to regard as evil and abominable that which they are seeking after, and which they delight in, they are not expressing their own feelings, but assenting to the judgment of others. They are measuring the object by a borrowed standard, while their own is wholly different. And if they are really so far enlightened as to think sincerely that the objects of their passionate attachment are evil, this is only admitting that their own affections are disordered and at variance with reason. It is virtually saying: Such a thing is good to my perceptions, but I know that they are wrong. It is just as if a man's sense of taste should be so vitiated through disease, that what is sweet to others is to him a pungent bitter. He may be convinced by argument and testimony, that according to the natural perceptions of mankind the thing is sweet, and that the bitterness is in his own disordered palate. This may satisfy his reason, but whenever that same object comes in contact with his palate, it will

still be bitter, till its qualities are changed, or his organs of taste resume their natural and healthful functions. So the sinner may believe on God's authority or man's that sin is evil and that holiness is good, but as a matter of affection and of inclination, his corrupted taste will still reject the sweet as bitter, and receive the bitter as sweet; his diseased eye will still confound light with darkness, and his lips, whenever they express the feelings of his heart, will continue to call good evil and evil good.

These three forms of expression in the text appear to be significant of one and the same thing. The thought is clothed, first, in literal, and then in metaphorical expressions. To put darkness for light and light for darkness; to put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter; is nothing more nor less than to call evil good and good evil, or, as the same idea is differently worded in the margin, to say of evil it is good, and of good it is evil. The character thus drawn is generally applicable to ungodly men. They all put darkness for light and light for darkness. They all put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. They all call evil good and good evil. If the verse be taken merely in this general sense, the woe which it pronounces is a general woe, or declaration of divine displeasure and denunciation of impending wrath against the wicked generally, simply equivalent to that in the third chapter (ver. 11), "Woe unto the wicked! it shall be ill with him, for the reward of his hands shall be given him."

Such a declaration, awful as it is, and perfectly in keeping with the uniform tenor of the word of God, would furnish no specific test of character, because it would still leave the question undecided, who it is that chooses evil and rejects the good. But it is very obvious that, in the case before us, the prophet is very far from meaning merely to assert the general liability of sinners to the wrath of God. The text is the fourth in a series of six woes, denounced upon as many outward manifestations of corrupt affection. Under the figure of a vineyard which, though sedulously cultivated, only produced wild grapes, he had represented the ungrateful and unprofitable service of the ancient Israel, explaining the parable and summing up its lessons in the seventh verse: "The vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant: and he looked for judgment, but

behold oppression ; for righteousness, but behold a cry." From this general and sweeping charge against the nation, he proceeds to an enumeration of particular offences then especially prevailing, but by no means limited to that age or country ; and he sets these forth, not as the product of so many evil principles, but as the varied exhibition of that universal and profound corruption which he had just asserted to exist in general terms.

The first of these specified corruptions is the avaricious and ambitious grasping after great possessions, not merely as a means of luxurious indulgence, but as a distinction and a gratification of pride : "Woe unto them that join house to house, that lay field to field, till there be no place, that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth" (ver. 8). Is this an obsolete iniquity in our day, and especially in our favoured country, where the rich and poor so often exchange places, and where the children of poor parents can aspire to be the masters of the soil, ay, and stop their ears against the claims of their poor creditors, that they whose inheritance was nothing may lay field to field, and be placed alone in the midst of the earth ? "In mine ears, saith the Lord of hosts, of a truth many houses shall be desolate, even great and fair without inhabitant." It was to such that the prophet threatened woe, and to such that the apostle James exclaimed long afterwards : "Behold the hire of your labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth ; and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth" (James v. 4).

The next form of iniquity denounced is drunkenness : "Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink ; that continue until night till wine inflame them" (ver. 11). Is this, too, a peculiar vice of ancient times, unknown in modern civilized society, and alas, that I should say it, in the Church of God ? In this, as in the first case, the description of the crime is followed by its punishment, including not only personal but national calamities, as war, desolation, and captivity. The third sin is that of the presumptuous, blaspheming sinner, who goes on to sin, not that grace may abound, but that God may take vengeance : "Woe unto them that draw iniquity with cords of vanity, and sin as it were with a cart rope : that say, Let him

make speed and hasten his work, that we may see it; and let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw nigh and come that we may know it" (ver. 18, 19). Have we no such blasphemers, or at least such tacit challengers of vengeance? Let your eyes, and ears, and memory, and conscience answer.

The fourth form in iniquity is set forth in the text. The fifth is that of overweening confidence in human reason as opposed to God's unerring revelation: "Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight;" another marked and hideous feature in the age in which we live. The sixth is drunkenness, considered, not as in the former case, under the aspect of a personal excess, producing inconsideration and neglect of God, but as a vice of magistrates and rulers, and as leading to oppression and all practical injustice: "Woe unto them that are mighty to drink wine, and men of strength to mingle strong drink, which justify the wicked for reward, and take away the right of the righteous from him" (ver. 22, 23). I should blush for my country if compelled to answer to the question, whether such excesses have not been associated even in her borders with official power and official influence; and I must tremble for my country, when I hear the voice of God proclaiming as the consequence of this incestuous connection between vice and power: "Therefore as the fire devoureth the stubble, and the flame consumeth the chaff, so their root shall be as rottenness, and their blossom shall go up as dust: because they have cast away the law of the Lord of hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel" (ver. 24).

This rapid recapitulation of the context I have given for two reasons: 1, To show that in this whole passage, the prophet has reference to species of iniquity familiar to our own time and country; and 2, Chiefly to evince, that in the text we have not a mere denunciation of God's wrath upon wickedness in general, but the description of a certain outward form in which the prevailing wickedness betrayed itself. It does not teach us merely that punishment awaits those who choose evil in preference to good, but that an outward mark of those who hate God, and whom God designs to punish, is their confounding moral distinctions in their conversation; calling evil good and good evil, putting darkness for light and light for darkness, putting bitter for sweet and

sweet for bitter. As the other symptoms of a general corruption, which are here enumerated, have their counterparts in modern times, and in the world around us, we are warranted in thinking that the analogy holds good in this case also, and that among the surest signs of those who hate God, and whom God abhors, is their habitual, instinctive disposition to call evil good and good evil.

How this is done, I now invite you to consider, not as a theme of abstract speculation, or as a matter of fact in which you feel no individual concern, but as a practical and personal inquiry of the deepest moment, which, as rational and conscientious beings, you are bound to answer each one for himself. And in suggesting this inquiry, I assume that all who hear me are respectful hearers of the gospel, and professed believers in the truth of Christianity; that none of you are wont to call in question any of its fundamental doctrines, much less to carp at the first principles of morals. You admit distinctly the essential difference of right and wrong; the excellence of truth, and the turpitude of falsehood; the superiority of reason and conscience to appetite and passion as the guides of human conduct; you allow the will of God to be a binding rule of action, and the Bible to be a revelation of that will. You grant that it reveals the only method of salvation for a ruined world, and that whatever tends to make it known, and give it practical efficiency, contributes to the happiness and elevation of the human race.

From none of these important doctrines would you perhaps be willing to dissent in terms, and so far you are innocent of calling evil good and good evil. I do not ask you whether by your conduct you are not belying your profession of these principles; for difficult to answer as the question might be, it would interrupt the train of thought which we have been pursuing. But the question which I ask is this: when one who thus admits in words the great first principles of morals, takes away so much on one hand, and grants so much on the other, as to obliterate the practical distinction between right and wrong; when with one breath he asserts the inviolable sanctity of truth, but with the next breath makes provision for benevolent, professional, jocose, or thoughtless falsehood; when in the abstract he asserts the claims of justice, and the obligation to give every man his own, but in application to specific cases thinks it lawful to enrich himself at other men's

expense, or to take advantage of another's weakness, ignorance, or error; when he admits the paramount importance of religious duties in the general, but in detail dissects away the vital parts as superstition, sanctimony, or fanaticism, and leaves a mere abstraction or an outward form behind; when he approves the requisitions of the law and the provisions of the gospel in so far as they apply to other people, but repudiates them as applying to himself;—when any one does this, or any part of this, or anything analogous to this, I ask, whatever his professions or his creed may be, whether he does not virtually, actually, call evil good and good evil.

Again, I ask you, whether he who in the general admits the turpitude of fraud, impurity, intemperance, malignity, and other vicious dispositions with their practical effects, and thus appears to be an advocate for purity of morals, but when insulated cases or specific acts of vice are made the subject of discussion, treats them all as peccadilloes, inadvertencies, absurdities, indiscretions, or perhaps as virtues modestly disguised; whether he who condemns drunkenness, but clears the drunkard; he who frowns upon fraud, but smiles upon the fashionable swindler or defaulter; he who hates licentiousness, but loves the libertine; is horror-struck at murder, but can fawn upon the duellist and flatter the assassin; I ask, whether he who does all this can be protected by the mere assertion of a few general principles from the fatal charge of calling evil good. And, as the counterpart of this, I ask you whether he who praises and admires all goodness, not embodied in the life of living men or women, but detests it when thus realized in concrete excellence; who praises piety, but blames the pious; who extols benevolence, but doubts the motives of the few who practise it; who honours warm devotion, but laughs the wretched devotee to scorn; in short, who worships virtue as a being in the clouds, but hates her when incarnate in the form of a reproving example; whether he who does all this, does not really and practically call good evil.

And I ask you, lastly, whether he who, in relation to the self-same acts, performed by men of opposite descriptions, has a judgment suited to the case of each, a pillar of fire one way and of cloud the other, but the dark side turned to Israel and the bright to the Egyptians; all compassion to the wilful transgressions of the wicked, and all inexorable sternness to the innocent infirmities

of godly men; he who strains at a gnat in the behaviour of the meek and conscientious Christian, but can swallow a camel in the conduct of the self-indulgent votary of pleasure; he who lauds religion as exhibited in those who give him no uneasiness by their example, but maligns and disparages it when, from its peculiar strength and brightness, it reflects a glare of painful and intolerable light upon his own corruptions;—I ask whether he who does all this, let his maxims of moral philosophy be what they will, does not, to all intents and purposes, incur the woe pronounced on those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. Ah, my hearers, these distinctions may at present appear arbitrary, frivolous, or false, and as a necessary consequence, the guilt of confounding them may fade almost to nothing, to a stain so faint upon the conscience as to need no blood of expiation to remove it. In the present darkness of your minds, that stain may even disappear. But methinks I see already the faint glimmer of a light which is to play upon that fatal spot until it glows and sparkles, a deep, indelible, and damning spot. The day is coming when the eye of reason shall no longer find it possible to look at light and darkness as the same; when the moral perceptions, from acute to agony, shall cease for ever to confound the sweetness of true holiness with the envenomed gall and wormwood of an evil conscience; and the woe already heard, shall then be seen and felt; seen by the sinner in the writhings of his fellow-sinners, felt more intensely in his own. From that state many will look back and wonder at themselves, and at what they now are doing in despite of reason, conscience, and experience, and with that solemn admonition ringing in their ears, “Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter.” From the darkness and the bitterness of that damnation, may we all find deliverance through Jesus Christ our Lord!





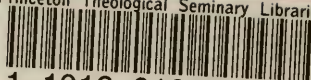








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