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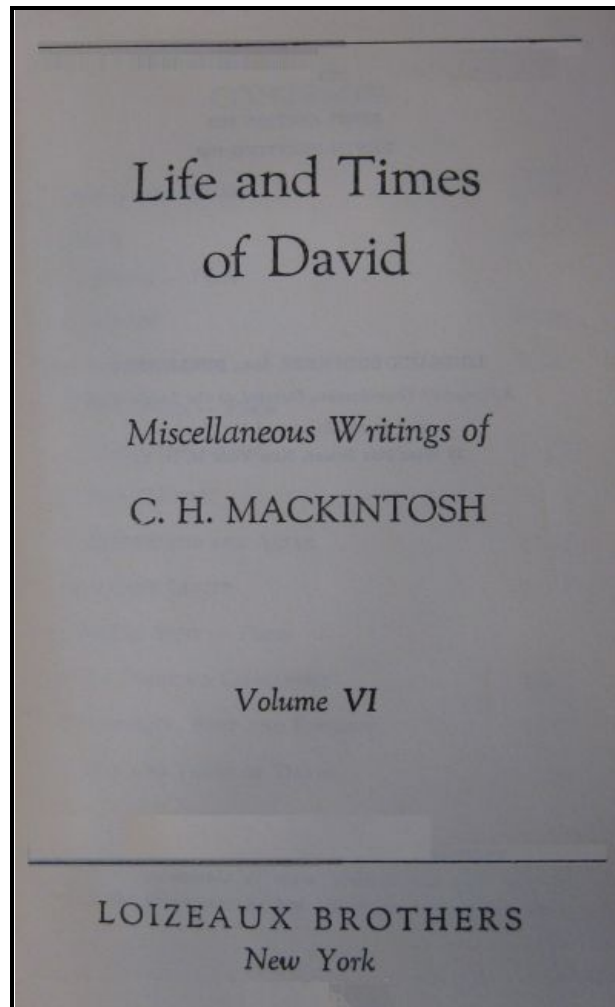
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MISCELLANEOUS WRITINGS OF C. H. MACKINTOSH, VOL. VI ***



**Life and Times
of David**

Miscellaneous Writings of

C. H. MACKINTOSH

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CONTENTS

	Pages
CHRIST IN THE VESSEL,	5-13
BETHANY,	14-55
LOVE DIVINE— <i>Poem</i>	
RESTORATION,	1-24
JERICHO AND ACHOR,	1-39
A SACRED UNION— <i>Poem</i>	
THE THREE APPEARINGS,	1-26
THE TWO "MUSTS",	1-4
THE THRONE AND THE ALTAR,	1-12
LEGALITY AND LEVITY,	1-5
THE VEIL IS RENT— <i>Poem</i>	
A RISEN SAVIOUR'S CHALLENGE,	1-12
THE REMNANT: PAST AND PRESENT,	1-32
THE LIFE AND TIMES OF DAVID,	1-204

*The original numbering of these writings has been retained.
Many of the above may be had separately in pamphlet form.*

CHRIST IN THE VESSEL

(Mark iv. 35-41.)

"Man's extremity is God's opportunity." This is a very familiar saying. It often passes among us; and, no doubt, we fully believe it; but yet, when we find ourselves brought to *our* extremity, we are often very little prepared to count on *God's* opportunity. It is one thing to utter or hearken to a truth, and another thing to realize the power of that truth. It is one thing, when sailing over a calm sea, to speak of God's ability to keep us in the storm, and it is another thing altogether to prove that ability when the storm is actually raging around us. And yet God is ever the same. In the storm and in the calm, in sickness and in health, in pressure and in ease, in poverty and in abundance, "the same yesterday, and to-day, and forever"—the same grand reality for faith to lean upon, cling to and draw upon, at all times and under all circumstances.

But alas, alas, we are unbelieving! Here lies the source of weakness and failure. We are perplexed and agitated, when we ought to be calm and confiding; we are casting about, when we ought to be counting on God; we are "beckoning to our partners," when we ought to be "looking unto Jesus." Thus it is we lose immensely, and dishonor the Lord in our ways. Doubtless there are few things for which we have to be more deeply humbled than our tendency to distrust the Lord when difficulties and trials present themselves; and assuredly we grieve the heart of Jesus by thus distrusting Him, for distrust must always wound a loving heart. Look, for example, at the scene between Joseph and his brethren in Gen. 50: "And when Joseph's brethren saw that their father was dead, they said, Joseph will peradventure hate us, and will certainly requite us all the evil which we did unto him. And they sent a messenger unto Joseph, saying, Thy father did command before he died, saying, So shall ye say unto Joseph, Forgive, I pray thee now, the

trespass of thy brethren, and their sin; for they did unto thee evil: and now, we pray thee, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of thy father. And Joseph wept when they spake unto him."

It was a sad return for the love and tender care which Joseph had exercised towards them. How could they suppose that one who had so freely and fully forgiven them, and spared their lives when they were entirely in his power, would, after so many years of kindness, turn upon them in anger and revenge? It was indeed a grievous wrong, and it was no marvel that "Joseph wept when they spake unto him." What an answer to all their unworthy fear and dark suspicion! A flood of tears! Such is love! "And Joseph said unto them, Fear not: for am I in the place of God? But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive. Now therefore, fear ye not: *I will nourish you, and your little ones.* And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them."

Thus was it with the disciples on the occasion to which our paper refers. Let us meditate a little on the passage.

"And the same day, when the even was come, Jesus saith unto them, Let us pass over unto the other side. And when they had sent away the multitude, they took Him even as He was in the ship; and there were also with Him other little ships. And there arose a great storm of wind, and the waves beat into the ship, so that it was now full. And He was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow."

Here, then, we have an interesting and instructive scene. The poor disciples are brought to their extremity. They are at their wits' end. A violent storm—the ship full of water—the Master asleep. This was a trying moment indeed, and assuredly we, if we look at ourselves, need not marvel at the fear and agitation of the disciples. It is not likely that we should have done better had we been there. Still, we cannot but see wherein they failed. The narrative has been penned for our learning, and we are bound to study it, and seek to learn the lesson which it reads out to us.

There is nothing more absurd and irrational than unbelief when we come to look at it calmly. In the scene before us this absurdity is very apparent; for what could be more absurd than to suppose that the vessel could possibly sink with the Son of God on board? And yet this was what they feared. It may be said they did not just think of the Son of God at that moment. True, they thought of the storm, the waves, the filling vessel, and, judging after the manner of men, it seemed a hopeless case. Thus it is the unbelieving heart ever reasons. It looks only at the circumstances, and leaves God out. Faith, on the contrary, looks only at God, and leaves circumstances out.

What a difference! Faith delights in man's extremity, simply because it is God's opportunity. It delights in being "shut up" to God—in having the platform thoroughly cleared of the creature, in order that God may display His glory—in the multiplying of "empty vessels," in order that God may fill them. Such is faith. It would, we may surely say, have enabled the disciples to lie down and sleep beside their Master in the midst of the storm. Unbelief, on the other hand, rendered them uneasy; they could not rest themselves, and they actually aroused the blessed Lord out of His sleep by their unbelieving apprehensions. He, weary with incessant toil, was snatching a few moments' repose while the vessel was crossing the sea. He knew what fatigue was; He had come down into all our circumstances. He made Himself acquainted with all our feelings and all our infirmities, being in all points tempted like as we are, sin excepted.

He was found as a man in every respect, and as such He slept on a pillow, rocked by the waves of the sea. The storm and the billows beat upon the vessel, although the Creator was on board, in the person of that weary, sleeping Workman.

Profound mystery! The One who made the sea, and could hold the winds in His almighty grasp, lay sleeping in the hinder part of the ship, and allowed the sea and the wind to treat Him as unceremoniously as though He were an ordinary man. Such was the reality of the human nature of our blessed Lord. He was weary—He slept, being tossed on the bosom of that sea which His hands had made. O reader, pause and meditate on this wondrous sight. Look closely, think upon it. We cannot expatiate upon the scene; we can only muse and worship.

But, as we have said, unbelief roused the blessed Lord out of His sleep. "They awake Him, and say unto Him, Master, *carest Thou* not that we perish?" What a question! "*Carest Thou not?*" How it must have wounded the sensitive heart of the Lord! How could they ever think that He was indifferent to their trouble and danger? How completely must they have lost sight of His love, to say nothing of His power, when they could bring themselves to say, "Carest Thou not?"

And yet, dear Christian reader, have we not in all this a mirror in which to see ourselves reflected? Assuredly we have. How often, in moments of pressure and trial, do our hearts conceive, if our lips do not utter the question, "Carest Thou not?" It may be we are laid on a bed of sickness and pain, and we know that one word from the God of all power and might could chase away the malady and raise us up; and yet the word is withheld. Or perhaps we are in need of temporal supplies, and we know that the silver and gold, and the cattle upon a thousand hills, belong to God—yea, that the treasures of the universe are under His hand—and yet day after day rolls on, and our need is not supplied. In a word, we are passing through deep waters, in some way or another; the storm rages, wave after wave rolls over our tiny vessel, we are brought to our extremity, we are at our wits' end, and our hearts often feel ready to send up the terrible question, "Carest Thou not?" The thought of this is deeply humbling. To think of our grieving the

loving heart of Jesus by our unbelief and suspicion should fill us with the deepest contrition.

And then the absurdity of unbelief! How can that One who gave His life for us—who left His glory and came down into this world of toil and misery and died a shameful death to deliver us from eternal wrath—how can such a One ever fail to care for us? But yet we are ready to doubt, or we grow impatient under the trial of our faith, forgetting that the very trial from which we so shrink and under which we so wince is far more precious than gold, for the former is an imperishable reality, whereas the latter must perish in the using. The more genuine faith is tried, the brighter it shines; and hence the trial, however severe, is sure to issue in praise and honor and glory to Him who not only implants the faith, but also passes it through the furnace and sedulously watches it therein.

But the poor disciples failed in the moment of trial. Their confidence gave way, they roused their Master from His slumber with that most unworthy question, "Carest Thou not that we perish?" Alas, what creatures we are! We are ready to forget ten thousand mercies in the presence of a single difficulty. David could say, "I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul;" and how did it turn out? Saul fell on Mount Gilboa, and David was established on the throne of Israel. Elijah fled for his life at the threat of Jezebel; and what was the issue? Jezebel was dashed to pieces on the pavement, and Elijah was taken to heaven in a chariot of fire. So here, the disciples thought they were going to be lost, with the Son of God on board; and what was the result? The storm was hushed into silence, and the sea became as glass, by that Voice which of old had called worlds into existence. "And He arose and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm."

What a combination of grace and majesty is here! Instead of rebuking them for having disturbed His repose, He rebukes those elements which had terrified them. It was thus He replied to their question, "Carest Thou not?" Blessed Master! Who would not trust Thee? Who would not adore Thee for Thy patient grace and unupbraiding love?

There is something perfectly beautiful in the way in which our blessed Lord rises, without an effort, from the repose of perfect humanity into the activity of essential deity. As man, wearied with His work, He slept on a pillow; as God, He rises, and, with His almighty voice, hushes the storm and calms the sea.

Such was Jesus—very God and very man—and such He is now, ever ready to meet His people's need, to hush their anxieties and remove their fears. Oh that we trusted Him more simply! We have little idea of how much we lose by not leaning more on the arm of Jesus, day by day. We are so easily terrified. Every breath of wind, every wave, every cloud, agitates and depresses us. Instead of calmly lying down and reposing beside our Lord, we are full of terror and perplexity. Instead of using the storm as an occasion for trusting Him, we make it an occasion for doubting Him. No sooner does some trifling trouble arise than we think we are going to perish, although He assures us that He has numbered the very hairs of our head. Well may He say to us as He said to His disciples, "Why are ye so fearful? How is it that ye have no faith?" It would indeed seem at times as though we had *no* faith. But oh, *His* tender love! He is ever near to shield and succor us, even though our unbelieving hearts are so ready to doubt His Word. He does not deal with us according to our poor thoughts of Him, but according to His own perfect love toward us. This is the solace and stay of our souls in passing across life's stormy sea homeward to our eternal rest. Christ is in the vessel. Let this ever suffice. Let us calmly rely on Him. May there ever be, at the very centre of our hearts, that deep repose which springs from real trust in Jesus! and then, though the storm rage and the sea run mountains high, we shall not be led to say, "Carest Thou not that we perish?" Is it possible we can perish with the Master on board? or can we ever think so with Christ in our hearts? May the Holy Spirit teach us to make a fuller, freer, bolder use of Christ! We really want this just now, and shall want it more and more. It must be Christ Himself, laid hold of and enjoyed in the heart by faith. Thus may it be to His praise and our abiding peace and joy!

We may just notice, in conclusion, the way in which the disciples were affected by the scene on which we have been dwelling. Instead of the calm worship of those whose faith had been answered, they manifest the amazement of those whose fears had been rebuked. "They feared exceedingly, and said one to another, What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?" Surely they ought to have known Him better. Yes, Christian reader, and so should we.

BETHANY

(John xi; xii.)

Turn with us, dear reader, to John xi; xii; and if we mistake not, you will find therein a very rare spiritual treat. In chapter xi. we see what the Lord Jesus was to the family of Bethany; and in chapter xii we see what the family of Bethany was to Him. The entire passage is full of the most precious instruction.

In chapter xi we have three great subjects presented to us, namely, first, our Lord's own path with the Father; secondly, His profound sympathy with His people; and, thirdly, His grace in associating us with Himself in His work, in so far as that is possible.

"Now a certain man was sick, named Lazarus, of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. (It was that Mary which anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick.) Therefore his sisters sent unto Him, saying, Lord, behold, he whom Thou lovest is sick. When Jesus heard that, He said, This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby."

The sisters, in their time of trouble, turned to the true Source—their divine Friend: Jesus was a sure resource for them, as He is for all His tried ones wherever, however, or whoever they are. "Call upon Me in the time of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me." We make a most serious mistake when, in any time of need or pressure, we turn to the creature for help or sympathy. We are sure to be disappointed. Creature-streams are dry. Creature-props give way. Our God will make us prove the vanity and folly of all creature-confidences, human hopes, and earthly expectations. And on the other hand, He will prove to us, in the most touching and forcible manner, the truth and blessedness of His own word, "They shall not be ashamed that wait for Me."

No, never! He, blessed be His name, never fails a trusting heart. He cannot deny Himself. He delights to take occasion from our wants, our woes and weaknesses, to express and illustrate His tender care and lovingkindness, in a thousand ways. But He will teach us the utter barrenness of all human resources. "Thus saith the Lord; Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord. For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh; but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land and not inhabited."

Thus it must ever be. Disappointment, barrenness and desolation are the sure and certain results of trusting in man. But, on the other hand—and mark the contrast, reader—"Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is: for he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit" (Jer. xvii. 5-8.)

Such is the unvarying teaching of Scripture on both sides of this great practical question. It is a fatal mistake to look even to the very best of men, to betake ourselves, directly or indirectly, to poor human cisterns. But the true secret of blessing, strength and comfort is to look to Jesus—to betake ourselves at once, in simple faith, to the living God whose delight ever is to help the needy, to strengthen the feeble, and lift up those that are cast down.

Hence, the sisters of Bethany did the right thing, when in the hour of need and pressure they turned to Jesus. He was both able and willing to help them: yet that blessed One did not at once respond to their call. He did not see fit at once to fly to their relief, much as He loved them. He fully entered into their sorrow and anxiety. He took it all in and measured it perfectly. He was thoroughly with them in it. There was no lack of sympathy, as we shall see in the sequel. Yet He paused; and the enemy might cast in all sorts of suggestions; and their own hearts might conceive all sorts of reasonings. It might seem as though "the Master" had forgotten them. Perhaps their loving Lord and Friend was changed toward them. Something may have occurred to bring a cloud between them. We all know how the poor heart reasons and tortures itself at such times. But there is a divine remedy for all the heart's reasonings, and a triumphant answer to all the enemy's dark and horrible suggestions. What is it? Unshaken confidence in the eternal stability of the love of Christ.

Christian reader, here lies the true secret of the whole matter. Let nothing shake your confidence in the unalterable love of your Lord. Come what may—let the furnace be ever so hot; let the waters be ever so deep; let the shadows be ever so dark; let the path be ever so rough; let the pressure be ever so great—still hold fast your confidence in the perfect love and sympathy of the One who has proved His love by going down into the dust of death—down under the dark and heavy billows and waves of the wrath of God, in order to save your soul from everlasting burnings. Be not afraid to trust Him *fully*—to commit yourself, without a shadow of reserve or misgiving, to Him. Do not measure His love by your circumstances. If you do, you must, of necessity, reach a false conclusion. Judge not according to the outward appearance. Never reason from your surroundings. Get to the heart of Christ, and reason out from that blessed centre. Never interpret His love by your circumstances; but always interpret your circumstances by His love. Let the beams of His everlasting favor shine upon your darkest surroundings, and then you will be able to answer every infidel thought, no matter whence it comes.

"Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace:
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face."

It is a grand thing to be able, ever to vindicate God; even if we can do nothing more, to stand as a monument of His unflinching faithfulness to all who put their trust in Him. What though the horizon around be dark and depressing—though the heavy clouds gather and the storm rage, God is faithful, and will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able; but will, with the temptation, make a way of escape, that we may be able to bear it.

Besides, we must not measure divine love by the mode of its manifestation. We are all prone to do so; but it is a great mistake. The love of God clothes itself in varied forms, and not unfrequently the form seems to us, in our shallowness and short-sightedness, mysterious and incomprehensible. But, if only we wait patiently and in artless confidence, divine light will shine upon the dispensation of divine providence, and our hearts shall be filled with wonder, love, and praise.

"We leave it to Himself,
To choose and to command:
With wonder filled, we soon shall see
How wise, how strong, His hand.

We comprehend Him not;
Yet earth and heaven tell,
God sits as Sovereign on the throne
And ruleth all things well."

God's thoughts are not as our thoughts; nor His ways as our ways; nor His love as our love. If we hear of a friend in distress or difficulty of any kind, our first impulse is to fly to his help and relieve him of his trial, if possible. But this might be a great mistake. In place of rendering help, it might be doing serious mischief. We might actually be running athwart the purpose of God, and taking our friend out of a position in which divine government had placed him for his ultimate and permanent profit. The love of God is a wise and faithful love. It abounds toward us in all wisdom and prudence. We, on the contrary, make the gravest mistakes, even when most sincerely desiring to do what is right and good. We are not competent to take in all the bearings of things, or scan the windings and workings of providence, or weigh the ultimate results of the divine dealings. Hence, the urgent need of waiting much on God; and, above all things, of holding fast our confidence in His unchanging, unfailing, unerring love. He will make all plain. He will bring light out of darkness, life out of death, victory out of seeming defeat. He will cause the deepest and darkest distress to yield the very richest harvest of blessing. He will make all things work together for good. But He is never in a hurry. He has His own wise ends in view, and He will reach them in His own time and way; and, moreover, out of what may seem to us to be a dark, tangled, inexplicable maze of providence, light will spring forth and fill our souls with praise and adoration.

The foregoing line of thought may help us to understand and appreciate our Lord's bearing towards the sisters of Bethany on hearing of their trouble. He felt there was much more involved in the case than the mere matter of relieving those whom He, nevertheless, deeply loved. The glory of God had to be considered. Hence, He says, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby." He saw in this case an occasion for the display of the divine glory, and not merely for the exhibition of personal affection, however deep and real that might be—and with Him, surely, it was both deep and real, for we read, "Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus."

But, in the judgment of our blessed and adorable Lord, the glory of God took precedence of every other consideration. Neither personal affection nor personal fear had the smallest sway over His movements. He was ruled, in all things, by the glory of God. From the manger to the cross, in life and in death, in all His words, and all His works, and all His ways, His devoted heart was set, with firm and unalterable purpose, upon the glory of God. Hence, though it might be a good thing to relieve a friend in distress, it was far better and higher to glorify God; and we may be sure, that the beloved family of Bethany sustained no loss by a delay which only made room for the brighter out-shining of the divine glory.

Let us all remember this in seasons of trial and pressure. It is an all-important point, and when fully apprehended, will prove a very deep and blessed source of consolation. It will help us marvellously to bear up under sickness, pain, death, bereavement, sorrow, and poverty. How blessed to be able to stand beside the sick bed of a friend and say, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God!" And this is faith's privilege. Yea, not only in the sick chamber, but by the open grave, the true believer may see the beams of the divine glory shining forth over all.

No doubt the skeptic might cavil at the statement that "This sickness is not unto death." He might object and reason and argue on the ground of the apparent fact that Lazarus *did* die. But faith reasons not from appearances: it brings God in, and there finds a divine solution for *all* difficulties. Such is the moral elevation—the reality of a life of faith. It sees God above and beyond all circumstances. It reasons from God downward—not from circumstances upward. Sickness and death are nothing in the presence of divine power. All difficulties disappear from the pathway of faith. They are, as Joshua and Caleb assured their unbelieving brethren, simply bread for the true believer.

Nor is this all. Faith can wait God's time, knowing that His time is the best. It staggers not, even though He may seem to linger. It rests with calmness in the assurance of His unchanging love and unerring wisdom. It fills the heart with the sweetest confidence that if there be delay—if the relief be not sent all at once—it is all for the best, inasmuch as "all things work together for good to them that love God," and all must in the long run redound to the glory of God. Faith enables its happy possessor to vindicate God amid the greatest pressure, and to know and confess that

divine love always does the very best for its object.

II

It gives great rest to the heart to know that the One who has undertaken for us, in all our weakness, our need, and the exigencies of our path from first to last, has first of all secured, in every respect, the glory of God. That was His primary object in all things. In the work of redemption, and in all our history, the glory of God has the first place in the heart of that blessed One with whom we have to do. At all cost to Himself He vindicated and maintained the divine glory. To that end He gave up everything. He laid aside His own glory, humbled, emptied Himself. He surrendered Himself and yielded up His life, in order to lay the imperishable foundation of that glory which now fills all heaven—and shall soon cover the earth, and shine through the wide universe for ever.

The knowledge and abiding sense of this must give profound repose to the spirit in reference to everything that concerns us, whether it be the salvation of the soul, the forgiveness of sins, or the needs for the daily path. All that could possibly be a matter of exercise to us, for time or for eternity, has been provided for, all secured on the selfsame basis that sustains the divine glory. We are saved and provided for; but the salvation and provision—all praise to our glorious Saviour and Provider!—are inseparably bound up with the glory of God. In all that our Lord Jesus Christ has done for us, in all that He is doing, in all that He will do, the glory of God is fully maintained.

[1]

And, further, we may add that in our trials, difficulties, sorrows, and exercises, if instant relief be not afforded, we have to remember there is some deep reason connected with the glory of God and our real good, why the desired relief is withheld. In seasons of pressure we are apt to think only of the one thing, namely, relief. But there is very much more than this to be considered. We should think of the glory of God. We should seek to know His object in putting us under the pressure. We should earnestly desire that His end might be gained, and His glory promoted. This would be for our fullest and deepest blessing, while the relief which we so eagerly desire might be the worst thing we could get. We must always remember that, through the marvellous grace of God, His glory and our true blessing are so inseparably bound up together, that when the former is maintained, the latter must be perfectly secured.

This is a most precious consideration, and one eminently calculated to sustain the heart in all seasons of affliction. All things must ultimately redound to the glory of God, and "all things work together for good to those that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose." It may not, perhaps, be so easy to see this when the pressure is upon us. When anxiously watching by the sick-bed of a beloved friend; or when treading the chamber of sorrow; or when laid on a bed of pain and languishing ourselves; or when overwhelmed by sudden tidings of the loss of our earthly all: under such circumstances it may not be so easy to see the glory of God maintained, and our blessing secured; but faith can see it for all that; and as for "blind unbelief," it is always "sure to err." If those beloved sisters of Bethany had judged by the sight of their eyes, they would have been sorely tried during those weary days and nights spent at the bedside of their much loved brother. And not only so, but when the terrible moment arrived, and they were called to witness the closing scene, many dark reasonings might have sprung up in their crushed and desolate hearts.

But Jesus was looking on. His heart was with them. He was watching the whole process, and that, too, from the very highest standpoint—the glory of God. He took in the entire scene, in all its bearings, its influences and its issues. He felt *for* those afflicted sisters—felt *with* them—felt as only a perfect human heart could feel. Though absent in person, He was with them in spirit, as they traveled through the deep waters. His loving heart perfectly entered into all their sorrow, and He only waited for "God's due time" to come to their aid, and light up the darkness of death and the grave with the bright beams of resurrection glory. "When He had heard that Lazarus was sick, He abode two days still in the same place where He was." Things were allowed to take their course as we say; death was allowed to enter the much loved dwelling; but all this was for the glory of God. The enemy might seem to have it all his own way, but it was only in appearance; in reality death itself was but preparing a platform on which the glory of God was to be displayed. "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby."

Such, then, was the path of our blessed Lord—His path with the Father. His every step, His every act, His every utterance, had direct reference to the claims of the Father's glory. Much as He loved the family of Bethany, His personal affection led Him not into the scene of their sorrow till the moment was come for the display of the divine glory, and then no personal fear could keep Him away. "Then after that He saith to His disciples, Let us go into Judea again. His disciples say unto Him, Master, the Jews of late sought to stone Thee, and goest Thou thither again? Jesus answered, Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world. But if a man walk in the night he stumbleth, because there is no light to him."

Thus that blessed One walked, in the full blaze of the glory of God. His springs of action were all divine—all heavenly. He was a perfect stranger to all the motives and objects of the men of this world, who are stumbling along in the thick moral darkness that enwraps them—whose motives are all selfish, whose objects are earthly and sensual. He never did a single thing to please

Himself. His Father's will, His Father's glory, ruled Him in all things. The stirrings of deep personal affection took Him not to Bethany, and no personal fear could keep Him away. In all He did, and in all He did not do, He found His motive in the glory of God.

Precious Saviour! teach us to walk in Thy heavenly footsteps! Give us to drink more into Thy spirit! This, truly, is what we need. We are so sadly prone to self-seeking and self-pleasing, even when apparently doing right things and ostensibly engaging in the Lord's work. We run hither and thither, do this and that, travel and preach and write, and all the while we may be pleasing ourselves, and not really seeking to do the will of God and promote His glory. May we study more profoundly our divine Exemplar! May He be ever before our hearts as the One to whom we are predestinated to be conformed! Thank God for the sweet and soul-sustaining assurance that we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. It is but a little while and we shall be done forever with all that now hinders our progress and interrupts our communion. Till then may the blessed Spirit work in our hearts, and keep us so occupied with Christ, so feeding by faith on His preciousness, that our practical ways may be a more living expression of Himself, and that we may bring forth more abundantly the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.

III

We may now meditate for a few moments on the deeply interesting theme of Christ's sympathy with His people, so touchingly illustrated in His dealings with the beloved family of Bethany. He allowed them to go through the exercise, to wade through the deep waters, to be thoroughly tested, in order that "the trial of their faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory." Looked at from nature's standpoint, it might seem as though all hope was gone and every ray of light faded away from the horizon. Lazarus was dead and buried. All was over. And yet the Lord had said, "This sickness is not unto death." How was this? What could He mean?

Thus nature might reason; but we must not listen to the reasonings of nature, which are sure to carry us down into the regions of the shadow of death. We must listen to the voice of Jesus; we must harken to His living, cheering, strengthening, encouraging accents. In this way we shall be able to vindicate and glorify God, not only at the sick-bed, but in the chamber of death, and at the very grave itself. Death is not death if Christ be there. The grave itself is but the sphere in which the glory of God shines out in all its power. It is when all that belongs to the creature is gone from the scene—when the platform is thoroughly cleared of all that is merely of man, it is then that the beams of the divine glory can be seen in all their brightness. It is when all is gone, or seems to be, that Christ can come in and fill the scene.

This is a grand point for the soul to get hold of and understand. It is only faith that can really enter into it. We are all so terribly prone to lean on some creature-prop, to sit beside some creature-stream, to trust in an arm of flesh, to cling to what we can see, to rest in the palpable and tangible. "The things that are seen and temporal" have oftentimes more weight with us than "the things which are unseen and eternal." Hence it is our ever-faithful Lord sees it right and good to sweep away our creature-props, and dry up our creature-streams, in order that we may lean on Himself, the eternal Rock of our salvation, and find all our springs in Himself, the living and exhaustless Fountain of all blessing. He is jealous of our love and confidence, and He will clear the scene of everything that might divide our hearts with Himself. He knows it is for our souls' full blessing to be wholly cast upon Himself, and hence He seeks to purify our hearts from every hateful idol.

And should we not praise Him for all this? Yes, truly; and not only so, but we should welcome whatever means He is pleased to use for the accomplishment of His wise and gracious end, even though, to nature's view, it may seem harsh and severe. He may often have to say to us as He said to Peter, "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter."

Yes, beloved reader, by and by we shall know and appreciate all His dealings. We shall look back upon the whole course from the light of His own blessed presence, and see and own that "the very heaviest stroke of His hand was the very strongest expression of His love at the time." Martha and Mary might wonder why death had been allowed to enter their dwelling. Doubtless they looked day after day, hour after hour, moment after moment, for their beloved Friend to enter; but instead of that He kept away, and death entered, and all seemed gone.

Why was this? Let Himself reply. "These things said He: and after that He saith unto them, *Our friend* Lazarus sleepeth." What touching affection! What gracious intimacy! What a tender linking of Himself with the family of Bethany on the one hand, and His disciples on the other! "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth." It was but a gentle sleep. Death is not death in the presence of the Prince of life. The grave is but a sleeping-place. "I go, that I may awake him out of sleep." Such words could not have been uttered had Lazarus been raised from a sick-bed. "Man's extremity is God's opportunity"; and we can see without difficulty that the grave afforded God a far better opportunity than a sick-bed.

This, then, was the reason why Jesus kept away from His beloved friends. He waited for the fitting moment, and that moment was when Lazarus had lain in the grave four days already; when every human hope had vanished; when all human agency was powerless and valueless. "I go"—not to raise him from a sick-bed, but "that I may awake him out of sleep." The platform was cleared of the creature in order that the glory of God might shine out in all its brightness.

And is it not well to have the scene thus cleared of the creature? Is it not a mercy—not in disguise, as some people say, but a plain, positive, palpable mercy—to have every human prop gone? Faith says, "Yes"—unhesitatingly and emphatically. Nature says, "No!" The poor heart craves something of the creature to lean upon, something that the eye can see. But faith—that most precious, priceless, divinely-wrought principle—finds its true sphere in being called to lean absolutely and abidingly upon the living God.

But it must be a real thing. It is of little use talking about faith if the heart be a stranger to its power. Mere profession is perfectly worthless. God deals in moral realities. "What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man *say* he have faith?" He does not say, "What doth it profit though a man *have* faith?" Blessed be God, those who through grace have it, know that it profits *much* every way. By faith the sinner is brought in living relationship with God, is justified, and lives unto Him. Faith glorifies God as nothing else can. It lifts the soul above the depressing influences of things seen and temporal. It tranquilizes the spirit in a most blessed manner. It enlarges the heart, by leading us out of our own narrow circle of personal interests, sympathies, cares and burdens, and connecting us livingly with the eternal, exhaustless spring of goodness. It works by love, and draws us out in gracious activity toward every object of need, but especially toward those who are of the household of faith.

It is faith alone that can move along the path where Jesus leads. To mere nature that path is dreadful. It is rough, dark, and lonely. Even those who surrounded our blessed Lord on the occasion of the death of Lazarus seemed wholly unable to comprehend His thoughts or follow intelligently in His footsteps. When He said, "Let us go into Judea again," they could think only of the Jews stoning Him. When He said, "I go, that I may awake him out of sleep," they replied, "If he sleep, he shall do well." When He spoke of his death, they thought that He had spoken of taking rest in sleep. When "He said unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead: and I am glad *for your sakes* that I was not there, *to the intent that ye may believe*" poor unbelieving nature, speaking through the lips of Thomas Didymus, said, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him."

In a word, we see total inability to take in the true bearing of the case, as viewed from a divine standpoint. Nature sees nothing but death and darkness, where faith basks in the sunlight of the divine presence. "Let us also go, that we may *die* with Him." Alas, alas! was this all that even a disciple had to say? How absurd are the conclusions of unbelief! Let us go with the Prince of life, that—what? "we may die with Him"! What blindness even while attached to the Lord! Should not Thomas have said: "Let us go, that we may behold His glory; that we may see His marvelous doings in the very region of the shadow of death; that we may share in His triumphs; that we may shout, at the very gates of the grave, our hallelujahs to His deathless name?"

IV

We have already noticed the three prominent subjects presented to us in John xi., namely, our Lord's own path with the Father; secondly, His profound sympathy with us; thirdly, His grace in linking us with Himself, in so far as that is possible, in all His blessed work. He ever walked with God, in calm, unbroken communion. He walked in the most implicit obedience to the will of God, and was ruled in all things by His glory. He walked in the day, and stumbled not. The will of God was the light in which the perfect workman ever carried on His work. He found His *only* motive for action in the divine will—His *only* object in the divine glory. He came down from heaven, not to do His own will, but the will of the Father, in which He ever found His meat and drink.

But His great, loving heart flowed out in perfect sympathy with human sorrow. This we see attested in the most touching manner as He moved, in company with the afflicted sisters, to the tomb of their brother. If any question had arisen in their hearts during the season of trial, in the absence of their Lord, it was abundantly answered, yea, we may add, completely demolished, by the manifestation of His deep and tender affection as He moved toward the spot where the beams of the divine glory were so soon to shine out over the dreary region of death.

We do not here dwell upon the interesting interview between the two sisters and their beloved Lord, so full of teaching, so illustrative of His perfect mode of dealing with His people in their varied measures of intelligence and communion. We pass at once to the inspired statement in verse 33 of our chapter. "When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, He groaned in the spirit, and was troubled, and said, Where have ye laid him? They said unto Him, Lord, come and see. Jesus wept."

How wonderful! The Son of God groaned and wept. Let us never forget it. He, though God over all, blessed forever; though the resurrection and the life; though the Quickener of the dead; though the Conqueror of the grave; though on His way to deliver the body of His friend from the grasp of the enemy—sample of what He will soon do for all who belong to Him—yet, so perfectly did He enter into human sorrow, and take in all the terrible consequences of sin, all the misery and desolation of this sin-stricken world, that He groaned and wept! And those tears and groans emanated from the depths of a perfect human heart that felt as only a perfect human heart could feel—felt according to God—for every form of human sorrow and misery. Though perfectly exempt, in His own divine person, from sin and all its consequences—yea, because exempt—He could in perfect grace enter into it all and make it His own as only He could do.

"Jesus wept"! Wondrous, significant fact! He wept not for Himself, but for others. He wept with them. Mary wept. The Jews wept. All this is easily grasped and understood. But that Jesus should weep reveals a mystery which we cannot fathom. It was divine compassion weeping through

human eyes over the desolation which sin had caused in this poor world, weeping in sympathy with those whose hearts had been crushed by the inexorable hand of death.

Let all who are in sorrow remember this. Jesus is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever. His circumstances are changed, but His heart is not. His position is different, but His sympathy is the same. "We have not a high priest that can not be *touched* with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, apart from sin." There is a perfect human heart on the throne of the Majesty of the heavens, and that heart sympathizes with us in all our sorrows, in all our trials, in all our infirmities, in all our pressure and exercise. He perfectly enters into it all. Yea, He gives Himself to each one of His beloved members here upon earth as though He had only that one to look after.

How sweet and soothing to think of this! It is worth having a sorrow to be allowed to taste the preciousness of Christ's sympathy. The sisters of Bethany might say, "Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." But if their brother had not died, they would not have seen Jesus weeping, or heard His deep groan of sympathy with them in their sorrow. And who would not say that it is better to have the sympathy of His heart with us in our sorrow than the power of His hand in keeping or taking us out of it? Was it not much better, much higher, much more blessed, for the three witnesses in Dan. iii. to have the Son of God walking with them in the furnace than to have escaped the furnace by the power of His hand? Unquestionably.

And thus it is in every case. We have ever to remember that this is not the day for the display of Christ's power. By and by He will take to Himself His great power, and reign. Then all our sufferings, our trials, our tribulations, will be over forever. The night of weeping will give place to the morning of joy—the morning without clouds—the morning that shall never know an evening. But now it is the time of Christ's patience, the time of His precious sympathy; and the sense of this is most blessedly calculated to sustain the heart in passing through the deep waters of affliction.

And there *are* deep waters of affliction. There *are* trials, sorrows, tribulations, and difficulties. And not only so, but our God means that we should feel them. His hand is in them for our real good, and for His glory. And it is our privilege to be able to say, "We glory in tribulation also; knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope; and hope maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto us."

The Lord be praised for all this! But it were folly to deny that there are trials, sorrows and tribulations of all sorts. Nor would our God have us insensible to them. Insensibility to them is folly; glorying in them is faith. The consciousness of Christ's sympathy, and the intelligence of God's object in all our afflictions, will enable us to rejoice in them; but to deny the afflictions, or that we ought to feel them, is simply absurd. God would not have us to be stoics; He leads us into deep waters to walk with us through them; and when His end is reached, He delivers us out of them, to our joy and His own everlasting praise.

"He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee; for My strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly *therefore* will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak then I am strong." At the first, Paul longed to be rid of the thorn in the flesh, whatever it was. He besought the Lord thrice that it might depart from him. But the thorn in the flesh was better than pride in the heart. It was better far to be afflicted than puffed up—better to have Christ's sympathy with him in his temptation than the power of His hand in delivering him out of it.

V

It is deeply touching to mark the two groans of our Lord, as He moved toward the tomb of His friend. The first groan was called forth by the sight of the weeping mourners around Him. "When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, He groaned in the spirit, and was troubled." The margin reads, "He troubled Himself."

How precious is the thought of this to the crushed and sorrowing heart! The sight of human tears drew forth a groan from the loving, sympathizing heart of the Son of God. Let all mourners remember this. Jesus did not rebuke Mary for weeping. He did not rally her on account of her sorrow. He did not tell her she ought not to feel; that she ought to be above everything of that sort. Ah, no! this would not be like Him. Some heartless folk may talk in this style; but He knew better. He, though Son of God, was a real man; and hence, He felt as a man ought to feel, and He knew what man must feel, while passing through this dark vale of tears. Some of us talk largely and loftily about being above nature, and not feeling the snapping of tender links, and much in that strain. But in this we are not wise. We are not in sympathy with the heart of the Man, Christ Jesus. It is one thing to put forth, in heartless flippancy, our transcendental theories, and it is quite another to pass through the deep waters of grief and desolation with a heart exercised according to God. It will generally be found that those of us who declaim the loudest against nature, prove ourselves to be just like other people, when called to meet bodily sickness, sorrow of heart, mental pressure, or pecuniary loss. The great point is to be real, and to go through the stern realities of actual life with a heart truly subject to God. Fine-drawn theories will not stand the test of real sorrow, trial, and difficulty; and nothing can be more absurd than to talk to people, with human hearts, about not feeling things. God means us to feel; and—precious,

soothing, consolatory thought!—Jesus feels with us.

Let all the sons and daughters of sorrow remember these things for the consolation of their sorrowing hearts. "God comforts those that are cast down." If we were never cast down, we should not know His precious ministry. A stoic does not need the comfort of God. It is worth having a broken heart to have it bound up by our most merciful High Priest.

"Jesus groaned"—"Jesus wept." What power, what divine sweetness in these words! What a blank there would be were these words erased from the page of inspiration! Surely we could not do without them, and therefore our own most gracious God has, by His Spirit, penned these unspeakably precious words for the comfort and consolation of all who are called to tread the chamber of sorrow, or to stand at the grave of a friend.

But there was another groan evoked from the heart of our blessed Lord. Some of the Jews, when they heard His groan, and saw His tears, could not help exclaiming, "Behold how He loved him!" But alas! others only found, in such affecting proofs of true and profound sympathy, occasion for the display of heartless skepticism and skepticism is always heartless. "Some of them said, could not this man, that opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died?"

Here the poor human heart lets itself out, in its ignorant reasonings. How little did these skeptics understand either the person or the path of the Son of God! How could they appreciate the motives that actuated Him either in what He did, or in what He did not do? He opened the eyes of the blind, in order that "the works of God might be made manifest in him." And He did not prevent the death of Lazarus, that God might be glorified thereby.

But what did they know about all this? Absolutely nothing. The blessed One moved at far too high an elevation to be within the ken of worldly religionists and skeptical reasoners. "The world knew Him not." God understood and appreciated Him perfectly. This was enough. What were the thoughts of men to One who ever walked in calm communion with the Father? They were utterly incapable of forming a correct judgment either of Himself or of His ways. They carried on their reasonings in that thick moral darkness in which they dwelt.

Thus it is still. Human reasonings are begun, continued, and ended in darkness. Man reasons about God; reasons about Christ; reasons about Scripture; reasons about heaven, about hell, about eternity; about all sorts of things. But all his reasonings are worse, far worse, than worthless. Men are no more capable of understanding or appreciating the written Word now, than they were of understanding or appreciating the living Word, when He was amongst them. Indeed, the two things must go together. As the living Word and the written Word are one, so to know the one we must know the other; but the natural, the unrenewed, the unconverted man knows neither. He is totally blind, in utter darkness, dead; and when, without reality, he makes a religious profession, he is "twice dead"—dead in nature and dead in his religion. What are his thoughts, his reasonings, his conclusions worth? They are baseless, false, ruinous.

Nor is there the slightest use in arguing with unconverted people. It only tends to deceive them by leading them to suppose that they can argue. It is always the best way to deal solemnly with them as to their own moral condition before God. We do not find our Lord taking any notice of the unbelieving reasonings of those around Him. He only again groans and goes on His way. "Jesus *therefore*, again groaning in Himself, cometh to the grave. It was a cave, and a stone lay upon it."

This second groan is deeply affecting. He groaned, at first, in sympathy with the mourners around Him. He groaned again over the hardness and dark unbelief of the human heart, and of the heart of Israel in particular. But, be it carefully noted, He does not attempt to explain His reasons for not having hindered the death of His friend, although He had opened the eyes of the blind.

Blessed, perfect Servant! It was no part of His business to explain or apologize. He had to work on in the current of the divine counsels, and for the promotion of the divine glory. He had to do the Father's will, not explain Himself to those who could not possibly understand the explanation.

This is a weighty point for us all. Some of us lose a quantity of time in argument, apology, and explanation, in cases where such things are not the least understood. We really do mischief. Better far pursue, in holy calmness of spirit, singleness of eye, and decision of purpose, the path of duty. That is what we have got to do, not to explain or defend ourselves, which is sorry work at best for any one.

But let us look a moment at the tomb of Lazarus, and there see with what lovely grace our adorable Lord and Master sought to associate His servants with Himself in His work, in so far as that was possible; though, even here, too, He is sadly intruded upon by the dark unbelief of the human heart. "Jesus said, Take ye away the stone." This they could do, and hence He graciously calls upon them to do it. It was all they could do, so far. But here unbelief breaks in and casts its dark shadows over the heart. "Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto Him, Lord, by this time he stinketh; for he hath been dead four days."

And what of that? Could the humiliating process of decomposition, even if completed, stand for one moment in the way of Him who is the resurrection and the life? Impossible! Bring Him in, and all is clear and simple; leave Him out, and all is dark and impracticable. Let but the voice of the Son of God be heard, and death and corruption must vanish like the darkness of night before

the beams of the rising sun. "Behold, I shew you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

How magnificent! What are death, the grave, and decomposition in the presence of such power as this? Talk of being dead four days as a difficulty! Millions that have been mouldering in the dust for thousands of years, shall spring up in a moment into life, immortality, and eternal glory, at the voice of that blessed One to whom Martha ventured to offer her unbelieving and irrational suggestion.

VI

In our Lord's reply to Martha we have one of the most blessed utterances that ever fell on the human ear. "Said I not unto thee, that, *if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?*" What living depth, what divine power, what freshness and comfort in these words! They present to us the very gist and marrow, the essential principle of the divine life. It is only the eye of faith that can see the glory of God. Unbelief sees only difficulties, darkness, and death. Faith looks above and beyond all these, and ever basks in the blessed beams of the divine glory. Poor Martha saw nothing but a decomposed human body, simply because she was under a spirit of dark and depressing unbelief. Had she been swayed by an artless faith, she would have walked to the tomb in company with Him who is the resurrection and the life, assured that, instead of death and decomposition, she should see the glory of God.

Reader, this is a grand principle for the soul to grasp. It is utterly impossible for human language to overstate its value and importance. Faith never looks at difficulties, except indeed it be to feed on them. It looks not at the things that are seen, but at the things that are unseen. It endures as seeing Him who is invisible. It takes hold of the living God. It leans on His arm; it makes use of His strength; it draws on His exhaustless treasury; it walks in the light of His blessed countenance, and sees His glory shining forth over the darkest scenes of human life.

The inspired volume abounds in striking illustrations of the contrast between faith and unbelief. Let us glance at one or two of them. Look, for example, at Caleb and Joshua, in contrast with their unbelieving brethren, in Num. xiii. These latter saw only the difficulties which stood in their way. "Nevertheless the people be strong that dwell in the land,"—not stronger than Jehovah, surely,—*"and the cities are walled, and very great"*—not greater than the living God:—"and moreover we saw the children of Anak there." It is very clear that they did not see the glory of God; indeed, they saw anything and everything but that. They were wholly governed by a spirit of unbelief, and hence they could only "bring up an evil report of the land which they had searched unto the children of Israel, saying, The land, through which we have gone to search it, is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof; and *all* the people that *we saw* in it are men of *great stature*"—they did not *see* a single small man: they looked at everything through the magnifying-glass of unbelief. "There *we saw* the giants"—no doubt!—"the sons of Anak, which come of the giants." Anything more? Ah, God was shut out; they could not see Him at all through the glasses they used. They could only see the terrible giants and towering walls: "and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so were we in their sight."

But what of Jehovah? Alas, He was left out! Unbelief invariably leaves God out of its calculations. It can take a very full account of the difficulties, the hindrances, the hostile influences; but as for the living God, it sees Him not. There is a melancholy consistency in the utterances of unbelief, whether we listen to them in the wilderness of Kadesh, or, fourteen hundred years afterwards, at the tomb of Lazarus. Unbelief is always and everywhere the same; it begins, continues and ends with the absolute exclusion of the one living and true God. It can do naught save to cast dark shadows over the pathway of every one who will listen to its voice.

How different are the accents of faith! Harken to Joshua and Caleb, as they seek to stem the rising tide of unbelief. "And Joshua the son of Nun, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, which were of them that searched the land, rent their clothes: and they spake unto all the company of the children of Israel, saying, The land, which we passed through to search it, is an exceeding good land. *If the Lord delight in us,*"—here lies the secret,—*"then He will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey. Only rebel not ye against the Lord, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us"*—faith actually feeds on the difficulties which terrify unbelief:—"their defence is departed from them, and the Lord is with us: fear them not."

Glorious words! It does the heart good to transcribe them. "Said I not unto thee, that, *if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?*" Thus it is always. If there is a melancholy consistency in the utterances of unbelief, there is a glorious consistency in the accents of faith, wherever we harken to them. Caleb and Joshua saw the glory of God, and in the light of that glory what were giants and high walls? Simply nothing. If anything, they were *bread* for the nourishment of faith. Faith brings in God, and He dispels all difficulties. What walls or giants could stand before the Almighty God? "If God be for us, who can be against us?" Such is ever the artless but powerful reasoning of faith. It conducts its arguments and reaches its conclusions in

the blessed light of the divine presence. It sees the glory of God. It looks above and beyond the heavy clouds which at times gather upon the horizon, and finds in God its sure and never-failing resource. Precious faith!—the only thing in the world that really glorifies God, and makes the heart of the Christian truly bright and happy.

Take another illustration. Turn to 1 Kings xvii., and contrast the widow of Sarepta with Elijah the Tishbite. What was the difference between them? Just the difference that ever exists between unbelief and faith. Listen again to the utterances of unbelief. "And she said, As the Lord thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but a handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and, behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, *and die.*"

Here, truly, is a gloomy picture. An empty barrel, an exhausted cruse, and death! Was that all? That was all for blind unbelief. It is the old story of the giants and lofty walls over again. God is shut out, though she could say, "As the Lord *thy* God liveth." In reality she was out of His presence, and had lost the sense of His all-sufficiency to meet her need and that of her house. Her circumstances excluded God from the vision of her soul. She looked at things that were seen, not at the things which were unseen. She saw not the invisible One; she saw nothing but famine and death. As the ten unbelieving spies saw nothing but the difficulties; as Martha saw nothing but the grave and its humiliating results; so the poor Sareptan saw nothing but starvation and death.

Not so the man of faith. He looked beyond the barrel and the cruse. He had no thought of dying of hunger. He rested on the word of the Lord. Here was his precious resource. God had said, "I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee." This was quite enough for him. He knew that God could multiply the meal and the oil to sustain him and her. Like Caleb and Joshua, he brought God into the scene, and found in Him the happy solution of every difficulty. They saw God above and beyond the walls and the giants. They rested on His eternal word. He had promised to bring His people into the land, and hence, though there were nothing but walls and giants from Dan to Beersheba, He would most surely fulfil His word.

And so with Elijah the Tishbite. He saw the living and almighty God above and beyond the barrel and the cruse. He rested upon that word which is settled forever in heaven, and which never can fail a trusting heart. This tranquilized his spirit, and with this he sought to tranquilize the widow too. "And he said unto her, *Fear not;*"—precious, soul-stirring utterance of faith!—"go, and do as thou hast said.... For *thus saith the Lord God of Israel*, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth."

Here was the solid ground on which the man of God rested when he ventured to offer a word of encouragement to the poor, desponding widow of Sarepta. It was not in the light-heartedness, or blind recklessness, of nature that he spoke to her. He did not deny that the barrel and cruse were almost empty, as the woman had said. This could have given her no comfort, inasmuch as she knew too well the facts of her case. But he brought the living God and His faithful Word before her aching heart; and hence he could say, "Fear not." He sought to lead her soul to that true resting-place where he himself had found repose, namely, *the word of the living God*—blessed, unfailing, divine resting place for every anxious soul!

Thus it was with Caleb and Joshua. They did not deny that there were giants and high walls: they brought God in, and sought to place Him between the hearts of their desponding brethren and the dreaded difficulties. This is what faith always does, and thus gives glory to God and keeps the soul in peace, let the difficulties be ever so great. It would be folly to deny there are obstacles and hostile influences in the way: and there is a certain style of speaking of such things which cannot possibly minister comfort or encouragement to a poor, troubled heart. Faith accurately weighs the difficulties and trials, but, knowing that the power of God outweighs them all, it rests in holy calmness on His word, and in His perfect wisdom and everlasting love.

The reader's mind will no doubt recur to many other instances in which the Lord's people have been cast down by looking at circumstances, instead of looking at God. David, in a dark moment, could say, "I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul." What a sad mistake!—the mistake of unbelief. What should he have said? Denied that the unrelenting hand of Saul was against him? Surely not. What comfort would that have given him, inasmuch as he knew too well that it was really so. But he should have remembered that the hand of *God* was with him, and that hand was stronger than ten thousand Sauls.

So with Jacob in his day of darkness and depression. "All these things," said he, "are against me." What should he have added? "But God is for me." Faith has its "*but*s" and "*if*s" as well as unbelief; but faith's buts and ifs are all bright, because they express the passage of the soul—its rapid passage—from the difficulties to God Himself. "*But* God who is rich," etc. And again, "*If* God be for us, who can be against us?" Thus faith ever reasons. It begins with God, it places Him between the soul and all its surroundings, and thus imparts a peace which passeth all understanding, a peace which nothing can disturb.

But we must, ere closing this paper, return for a moment to the tomb of Lazarus. The rapid glance we have taken through the inspired volume will enable us to appreciate more fully those most precious words of our Lord to Martha, "Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?" Men tell us that seeing is believing; but we can say that believing is seeing. Yes, reader, get hold of this grand truth. It will carry you through and bear you above the darkest and most trying scenes of this dark and trying world. "*Have faith in God.*"

This is the main-spring of the divine life. "The life that I live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me." Faith knows, and is persuaded, that there is nothing too hard, nothing too great--yea, and nothing too small--for God. It can count on Him for everything. It basks in the very sunlight of His presence, and exults in the manifestations of His goodness, His faithfulness, and His power. It ever delights to see the platform cleared of the creature, that the glory of God may shine forth in all its lustre. It turns away from creature streams and creature props, and finds all its resources in the one living and true God.

Only see how the divine glory displays itself at the grave of Lazarus, even spite of the unbelieving suggestion of Martha's heart; for God, blessed be His name, delights at times to rebuke our fears as well as to answer our faith. "Then they took away the stone where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up His eyes, and said, Father, I thank Thee that Thou hast heard Me. And I knew that Thou hearest Me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that Thou hast sent Me. And when He thus had spoken, He cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth! And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with grave clothes; and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go."

Glorious scene! displaying our Jesus as the Son of God with power, by resurrection of the dead. Gracious scene! in which the Son of God condescends to use man in rolling away the stone and removing the grave clothes. How good of Him to use us in any little way! May it be our joy to be ever ready--in a holy readiness to be used, that God in all things may be glorified!

LOVE DIVINE.

Father! Thy sovereign love has sought
Captives to sin, gone far from Thee:
The work that Thine own Son hath wrought
Has brought us back—in peace, and free!

And now, as sons before Thy face,
With joyful steps the path we tread,
Which leads us on to that blest place
Prepared for us by Christ, our Head.

Thou gav'st us in eternal love
To Him, to bring us home to Thee—
Suited to Thine own thoughts above;
As sons, like Him, with Him to be

In Thine own house! There Love Divine
Fills the bright courts with cloudless joy:
But 'tis the love that made us Thine
Fills all that house without alloy!

Oh, boundless grace! What fills with joy
Unmingled all that enter there—
God's nature, love without alloy—
Our hearts are given e'en now to share!

O Mind Divine! so must it be,
That glory, all, belongs to God!
O Love Divine! that did decree
We should be part, through Jesus' blood!

O, keep us, Love Divine, near Thee,—
That we our nothingness may know;
And ever to Thy glory be—
Walking in faith while here below.

J. N. D.

RESTORATION

(Gen. xxxv.)

The words "Arise, go up to Bethel" contain a great practical truth to which we desire to call the reader's attention.

It has been well remarked by some one that "God, in His dealings with us, always keeps us up to the original terms." This is true; but some may not exactly understand it. It may, perhaps, savor of the legal element. To speak of God as keeping us up to certain terms may seem to militate against that free grace in which we stand, and which has reigned through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord. Many, we are aware, have a kind of horror of everything

bordering, in the most remote way, upon the legal system; and we may say we sympathize with such. At the same time, we must take care not to carry that feeling to such an extent as would lead us to throw overboard aught that is calculated to act in a divine way upon the heart and conscience of the believer. We really want practical truth. There is a vast amount of what is called abstract truth in circulation among us, and we prize it, and would prize it more. We delight in the unfolding of truth in all its departments. But then we must remember that truth is designed to act on hearts and consciences, and that there are hearts and consciences to be acted upon. We must not cry out, "Legal! legal!" whenever some great practical truth falls upon our ears, even though that truth may come before us clothed in a garb which at first sight seems strange. We are called to "suffer the word of exhortation"—to listen to wholesome words—to apply our hearts diligently to everything tending to promote practical godliness and personal holiness. We know that the pure and precious doctrines of grace—those doctrines which find their living centre in the person of Christ, and their eternal foundation in His work—are the means which the Holy Ghost uses to promote holiness in the life of the Christian; but we know also that those doctrines may be held in theory, and professed with the lips, while the heart has never felt their power, and the life never exhibited their moulding influence. Yes, we frequently find that the loud and vehement outcry against everything that looks like legality proceeds from those who, though they profess the doctrines of grace, do not realize their sanctifying influence; whereas those who really understand the meaning of grace, who feel its power to mould and fashion, to purify and elevate, are ever ready to welcome the most pungent appeals to the heart and conscience.

But the pious reader may want to know what is meant by the expression quoted above, namely, "God always keeps us up to the original terms." Well, it simply means this, that when God calls us to any special position or path, and we fall short of it, or wander from it, He will recall us to it again and again. And further, when we set out under some special principle of action or standard of devotedness, and swerve from it, or fall below it, He will remind us of it, and bring us back to it. True, He bears with us patiently, and waits on us graciously; but "He always keeps us up to the original terms."

And can we not praise Him for this? Assuredly we can. Could we endure the thought of His allowing us to fall short of His holy standard, or to wander hither and thither without His uttering a word to urge us on or call us back? We trust not. Well, then, if He does speak, what must He say? He must just remind us of "the old terms." Thus it is, and thus it has ever been. When Peter was converted at the lake of Gennesaret he forsook all and followed Jesus, and the last words that fell on his ear from the lips of his risen Lord were, "Follow thou Me." This was simply keeping him to the original terms. The heart of Jesus could not be satisfied with less, and neither should the heart of His servant. By the lake of Gennesaret, Peter set out to follow Jesus. What then? Years rolled on; Peter had stumbled; he had denied his Lord; he had gone back to his boats and nets. What then? After the Lord's resurrection, as Peter, restored in soul, stood by the side of his loving Lord at the sea of Tiberias, he was called to listen to that one brief, pointed utterance. "Follow Me"—an utterance embracing in its comprehensive grasp all the details of a life of active service and of patient suffering. In a word, Peter was brought back to the original terms—the terms between his soul and Christ. He was brought to learn that the heart of Jesus had undergone no change toward him—that the love of that heart was inextinguishable and unaltered; and, because it was so, it could not tolerate any change in Peter's heart—neither decline nor departure from the original terms.

Now we see the same thing precisely in the history of the patriarch Jacob. Let us just turn to it for a moment. At the close of Gen. xxviii. we have the record of the original terms between the Lord and Jacob. We shall quote it at length. "And Jacob went out from Beersheba, and went toward Haran. And he lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night, because the sun was set; and he took of the stones of that place, and put them for his pillows, and lay down in that place to sleep. And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it. And, behold, the Lord stood above it, and said, I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed: and thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth; and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of."

Here, then, we have the blessed statement of what the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob undertook to do for Jacob and for his seed—a statement crowned by these memorable words, "*I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.*" Such are the terms by which God binds Himself to Jacob; which terms, blessed be His name, have been and will be fulfilled to the letter, though earth and hell should interpose to prevent. Jacob's seed shall yet possess the whole land of Canaan as an everlasting inheritance, for who shall prevent Jehovah Elohim, the Lord God Almighty, from accomplishing His promise?

Let us now harken to Jacob. "And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not. And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven. And Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put for his pillows, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it. And he called the name of that place Bethel.... And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to

eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the Lord be my God: and this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house: and of all that Thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto Thee."

Thus much as to Bethel and the terms entered into there. God pledged Himself to Jacob; and though heaven and earth should pass away, that pledge must be maintained in all its integrity. He revealed Himself to that poor lonely one who lay sleeping on his stony pillow; and not only revealed Himself to him, but linked Himself with him in a bond which no power of earth or hell can ever dissolve.

And what of Jacob? Why, he dedicated himself to God, and vowed that the spot where he had enjoyed such a revelation and harkened to such exceeding great and precious promises, should be God's house. All this was deliberately uttered before the Lord, and solemnly recorded by Him; and then Jacob went on his journey. Years passed—twenty long and eventful years—years of trial and exercise, during which Jacob experienced many ups and downs, changes, and varied trials; but the God of Bethel watched over His poor servant, and appeared unto him in the midst of his pressure, and said unto him, "I am the God of Bethel, *where thou anointedst the pillar, and where thou vowedst a vow unto Me*: now arise, get thee out from this land, and return unto the land of thy kindred." God had not forgotten the original terms, neither would He let His servant forget them. Is this legality? Nay; it is the exhibition of divine love and faithfulness. God loved Jacob, and He would not suffer him to stop short of the old standard. He jealously watched over the state of His servant's heart; and, lest it should by any means remain below the Bethel mark, He gently reminds him by those touching and significant words, "I am the God of Bethel, where thou anointedst the pillar, and where thou vowedst a vow." This was the sweet expression of God's unchanging love, and of the fact that He counted on Jacob's remembrance of Bethel scenes.

How amazing that the High and Mighty One, who inhabiteth eternity, should so value the love and remembrance of a poor worm of the earth! Yet so it is, and we ought to bear it more in mind. Alas, we forget it! We are ready enough to take mercies and blessings from the hand of God, and most surely He is ready enough to bestow them. But then we ought to remember that He looks for the loving devotion of our hearts to Him; and if we, in the freshness and ardor of other days, set out to follow Christ, give up all for Him, can we suppose for a moment that He could coldly and indifferently forego His claim upon our heart's affections? Should we like Him to do so? Could we endure the thought of its being a matter of indifference to Him whether we loved Him or not? God forbid! Yea, it should be the joy of our hearts to think that our blessed Lord seeks the loving devotion of our souls to Him; that He will not be satisfied without it; that when we wander hither and thither, He calls us back to Himself, in His own gentle, gracious, touching way.

"When, weary of His rich repast,
I've sought, alas, to rove;
He has recalled His faithless guest,
And showed His banner, Love."

Yes, His banner ever floats, bearing its own inscription upon it to win back our vagrant hearts, and remind us of the original terms. He says to us, in one way or another, as He said to Jacob, "I am the God of Bethel, where thou anointedst the pillar, and where thou vowedst a vow." Thus He deals with us, in the midst of all our wanderings, our haltings, and our stumblings. He makes us to know, that as we cannot do without His love, so neither can He do without ours. It is truly wonderful; yet so it is. He will keep the soul up to the old terms. Harken to those touching appeals of the Spirit of Christ to His saints in other days: "Thou hast *left thy first love*"; "Remember from whence thou art fallen; and repent, and *do thy first works*" (Rev. ii.); "Call to remembrance *the former times*" (Heb. x. 32); "Where is the blessedness ye spake of?" (Gal. iv. 15).

What is all this but calling His people back to the old point from which they had declined? It may be said, they ought not to have needed this. No doubt; yet they did need it; and because they needed it, Jesus did it. It may be said, further, that tried love is better than first love. Granted; but do we not find, as a matter of fact in our spiritual history, that upon our first setting out to follow Jesus there is a simplicity, an earnestness, a freshness, fervor and depth of devotion, which, from various reasons, we fail to keep up? We become cold and careless; the world gets in upon us and eats up our spirituality; nature gains the upper hand, in one way or another, and deadens our spiritual sensibility, damps our ardor, and dims our vision.

Is the reader conscious of anything like this? If so, would it not be a peculiar mercy if at this very moment he were called back to the old terms? Doubtless. Well, then, let him be assured that the heart of Jesus is waiting and ready. His love is unchanging; and not only so, but He would remind you that He cannot be satisfied without a true response from you. Wherefore, beloved friend, whatever has drawn you away from the measure of your earliest dedication to Him, let your heart now spring up and get back at once to Him. Do not hesitate. Linger not. Cast yourself at the feet of your loving Lord—tell Him all—and let your heart fully turn to Him, and let it be only for Him. This is the secret spring of all true service. If Christ has not the love of your heart, He does not want the labor of your hands. He does not say, "Son, give Me thy money, thy time, thy talents, thine energies, thy pen, thy tongue, thy head." All these are unavailing, unsatisfying to Him. What He says to you is, "My son, give Me thy *heart*." Where the heart is given to Jesus, all will come right. Out of the heart come all the issues of life; and if only Christ have His right place in the heart, the work and the ways, the walk and the character, will be all right.

But we must return to Jacob, and see further how our subject is illustrated in his fruitful history.

At the close of Gen. xxxiii. we find him settling down at Shechem, where he gets into all sorts of trouble and confusion. His house is dishonored, and his sons in avenging the dishonor endanger his life. All this Jacob feels keenly, and he says to his sons Simeon and Levi, "Ye have troubled me ... among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites; and I being few in number, they shall gather themselves together against me; and I shall be destroyed, I and my house."

All this was most deplorable; but it does not appear to have once occurred to Jacob that he was in a wrong place. The defilement and confusion of Shechem failed to open his eyes to the fact that he was not up to the old terms. How often is this the case! We fall short of the divine standard in our practical ways; we fail in walking up to the height of the divine revelation; and although the varied fruits of our failure are produced on every side, yet our vision is so dimmed by the atmosphere around us, and our spiritual sensibilities so blunted by our associations, that we do not discern how low we are, and how very far short of the proper mark.

However, in Jacob's case we see the divine principle again and again illustrated. "And God said unto Jacob, "Arise, *go up to Bethel, and dwell there*; and make there an altar unto God, that appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother."

Reader, note this. We have here a most exquisite feature in the divine method of dealing with souls. There is not one word said about Shechem, its pollutions and its confusions. There is not a word of reproof for having settled down there. Such is not God's way. He employs a far more excellent mode. Had we been dealing with Jacob we should have come down upon him with a heavy hand, and read him a severe lecture about his folly in settling at Shechem, and about his personal and domestic habits and condition. But oh, how well it is that God's thoughts are not as our thoughts, nor His ways like ours! Instead of saying to Jacob, "Why have you settled down in Shechem?" He simply says, "Arise, go up to Bethel;" and the very sound of the word sent a flood of light into Jacob's soul by which he was enabled to judge himself and his surroundings. "Then Jacob said unto his household, and to all that were with him, Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments: and let us *arise, and go up to Bethel*; and I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went."

This was, assuredly, getting back to the original terms. It was the restoring of a soul and a leading in the paths of righteousness. Jacob felt that he could not bring false gods and defiled garments to Bethel: such things might pass at Shechem, but they would never do for Bethel. "And they gave unto Jacob all the strange gods which were in their hand, and all their earrings which were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the oak which was by Shechem.... So Jacob came to Luz, which is in the land of Canaan, that is, Bethel, he and all the people that were with him. And he built there an altar, and called the place El-beth-el; because there God appeared unto him, when he fled from the face of his brother."

"EL-beth-EL." Precious title, which had God for its Alpha and its Omega! At Shechem, Jacob called his altar "El-elohe-Israel," that is, "God, the God of Israel"; but at Bethel, the true standpoint, he called his altar "El-beth-el," that is, God—the house of God. This was true restoration. Jacob was brought back, after all his wanderings, to the very point from which he had started. Nothing less than this could ever satisfy God in reference to His servant. He could wait patiently on him—bear with him—minister to him—care for him—look after him; but He never could rest satisfied with anything short of this—"Arise, go up to Bethel."

Christian reader, pause here. We want to ask you a question. Are you conscious of having wandered from Jesus? Has your heart declined, and grown cold? Have you lost the freshness and ardor which once marked the tone of your soul? Have you allowed the world to get in upon you? Have you, in the moral condition of your soul, got down into Shechem? Has your heart gone after idols, and have your garments become defiled? If so, let us remind you of this, that *the Lord wants you back to Himself*. Yes, beloved, this is what He wants; and He wants it now. He says to you at this moment, "Arise, go up to Bethel." You will never be happy, you will never be right, until you yield a full response to this blessed and soul-stirring call. O yield it now, we beseech you. Rise up, and fling aside every weight and every hindrance; put away the idols and change your garments, and get back to the feet of your Lord, who loves you with a love which many waters cannot quench, neither can the floods drown; and who cannot be satisfied until He has you with Himself, according to the original terms. Say not this is legal; it is nothing of the sort. It is the love of Jesus—His deep, glowing, earnest love—love which is jealous of every rival affection—love which gives the whole heart, and must have a whole heart in return. May God the Holy Ghost bring back every wandering heart to the true standard! May He visit with fresh power every soul that has gone down to Shechem, and give no rest until a full response has been yielded to the call, "ARISE, GO UP TO BETHEL."

(John xxi. 1-19.)

A careful study of these verses will enable us to trace in them three distinct kinds of restoration, namely, restoration of conscience, restoration of heart, and restoration of position.

I. The first of these, restoration of conscience, is of all-importance. It would be utterly impossible to overestimate the value of a sound, clear, uncondemning conscience. A Christian cannot get on if there is a single soil on his conscience. He must walk before God with a pure conscience—a conscience without stain or sting. Precious treasure! May my reader ever possess it! but in each

it must be a restoration to the original terms.

It is very obvious that Peter possessed it in the touching scene "at the sea of Tiberias." And yet he had fallen—shamefully, grievously fallen. He had denied his Lord with an oath; but he was restored. One look from Jesus had broken up the deep fountains of his heart, and drawn forth floods of bitter tears. And yet it was not his tears, but the love that drew them forth, which formed the ground of his thorough restoration of conscience. It was the changeless and everlasting love of the heart of Jesus—the divine efficacy of the blood of Jesus—and the all-prevailing power of the advocacy of Jesus, that imparted to Peter's conscience the boldness and liberty so strikingly and beautifully exhibited on the memorable occasion before us.

The risen Saviour is seen in these closing chapters of John's Gospel watching over His poor, feeble, erring disciples—hovering about their path—presenting Himself in various ways before them—taking occasion from their very necessities to make Himself known in perfect grace to their hearts. Was there a tear to be dried, a difficulty to be solved, a fear to be hushed, a bereaved heart to be soothed, an unbelieving mind to be corrected? Jesus was present, in all the fulness and variety of His grace, to meet all these things. So also when, under the guidance of the ever forward Peter, they had gone forth to spend a night in fruitless toil, Jesus had His eye upon them. He knew all about the darkness, and the toil, and the empty net; and there He was on the shore to prepare a dinner for them. Yes, the self-same Jesus who had died on the cross to put away their sins, now stood on the shore to restore them from their wanderings, gather them round Himself, and minister to all their need. "Have ye any meat?" developed the fruitlessness of their night's toil. "Come and dine" was the touching expression of the tender, thoughtful, all-providing love of the risen Saviour.

But let us note particularly the evidences of a thoroughly restored conscience as exhibited by Simon Peter. "Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, It is the Lord. Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt his fisher's coat unto him, (for he was naked,) and did cast himself into the sea." He could not wait for the ships or for his fellow-disciples, so eager was he to get to the feet of his risen Lord. In place of saying to John or to the others, "You know how shamefully I have fallen; and although I have since then seen the Lord, and heard Him speak peace to my soul, yet I think it more becoming in one that has so fallen to keep back; do you therefore go first and meet the blessed One, and I shall follow after." In place of aught in this style, he flings himself boldly into the sea—as much as to say, "I must be the very first to get to my risen Saviour; none has such a claim on Him as poor, stumbling, failing Peter."

Now, here was a perfectly restored conscience—a conscience basking in the sunlight of unchanging love; and is not this the true, original terms for every Christian? Peter's confidence in Christ was unclouded, and this, we may boldly affirm, was grateful to the heart of Jesus. Love likes to be trusted. Let us ever remember this. No one need imagine that he is honoring Jesus by standing afar off on the plea of unworthiness; and yet it is very hard for one who has fallen, or backslidden, to recover his confidence in the love of Christ. Such a one can see clearly that a sinner is welcome to Jesus, no matter how great or manifold his sins may have been; but then, he thinks, the case of a backsliding, or stumbling, Christian is entirely different. Should these lines be scanned by one who has backslidden, or fallen, we would press upon him most earnestly the importance of immediate return to Jesus. "Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings." What is the response to this pathetic appeal? "Behold, we come *unto Thee*; for Thou art the Lord our God." "If thou wilt return, O Israel, saith the Lord, return *unto Me*" (Jer. iii. 22; iv. 1). The love of the heart of Jesus knows no change. We change; but He is "the same yesterday, and to-day, and forever;" and He delights to be trusted. The confidence of Peter's heart was precious to the heart of Christ. No doubt it is sad to fall, to err, to backslide; but it is sadder still, when we have done so, to distrust the love of Jesus, or His gracious readiness to take us to His bosom again.

Beloved reader, have you fallen? Have you erred? Have you backslidden? Have you lost the sweet sense of divine favor, the happy consciousness of acceptance with God? If so, what are you to do? Simply this—"Return." This is God's own special word to the backslider. Return in full confession, in self-judgment, and in the fullest confidence in the boundless, changeless love of the heart of Christ. Do not, we beseech you, keep away in the distance of your own unbelief. Do not measure the heart of Jesus by your own thoughts. Let Him tell you what is in His heart toward you. You have sinned, you have failed, you have turned aside; and now, it may be, you are afraid or ashamed to turn your eyes toward the One whom you have grieved, or dishonored. Satan too is suggesting the darkest thoughts; for he would fain keep you at a chilling distance from that precious Saviour who loves you with an everlasting love. But you have only to fix your gaze upon the blood, the advocacy, the heart of Jesus, to get a triumphant answer to all the enemy's terrible suggestions, and to all the infidel reasonings of your own heart. Do not, therefore, go on another hour without seeking to get a thorough settlement of the question between your soul and Christ. Remember, "His is an unchanging love, free and faithful, strong as death." Remember, also, His own words, "Return, ye backsliding children"—"Return *to Me*." Christ, and He alone, is the centre and circumference of all the terms to which our souls are bound. And, finally, remember that Jesus loves to be trusted.

II. But the heart has to be restored as well as the conscience. Let this not be forgotten. It often happens, in the history of souls, that though the conscience may be perfectly clear as to certain *acts* which we have done, yet the *roots* from whence those acts have sprung have not been reached. The acts appear on the surface of daily life, but the roots are hidden down deep in the heart, unknown, it may be, to ourselves and others, but thoroughly exposed to the eye of Him

with whom we have to do.

Now, these roots must be reached, exposed and judged, ere the heart is in a right condition in the sight of God. Look at Abraham. He started on his course with a certain root in his heart, a root of unbelieving reserve in reference to Sarah. This thing led him astray when he went down to Egypt; and although his conscience was restored, and he got back to his altar at Bethel, yet the root was not reached for years afterwards, as seen in the affair of Abimelech, king of Gerar.

All this is deeply practical, and most solemn. It finds its illustration in Peter as well as in Abraham. But now mark the exquisitely delicate way in which our blessed Lord proceeds to reach the roots in the heart of His dear and honored servant. "So when they had dined." Not till then. There was no allusion to the past, nothing that might cause a chill to the heart, or bring a cloud over the spirit, while a restored conscience was feasting in company with a love that knows no change. This is a fine moral trait. It characterizes the dealings of God with all His saints. The conscience is set at rest in the presence of infinite and everlasting love. But there must be the deeper work of reaching the root of things in the heart. When Simon Peter, in the full confidence of a restored conscience, flung himself at the feet of His risen Lord, he was called to listen to that gracious invitation, "Come and dine." But "when they had dined," Jesus, as it were, takes Peter apart, in order to let in upon his soul the light of truth, so that by it he might discern the root from whence all his failure had sprung. That root was self-confidence, which had led him to place himself in advance of his fellow-disciples, and say, "Though all should deny Thee, yet will not I."

This root had to be exposed, and therefore, "When they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me more than these?" This was a pointed and pungent question, and it went right to the very bottom of Peter's heart. Three times Peter had denied his Lord, and three times his Lord now challenges the heart of Peter—for *the roots must be reached if any permanent good is to be done*. It will not do merely to have the conscience purged from the effects which have been produced in practical life; there must also be the moral judgment of that which produced them. This is not sufficiently understood and attended to, and hence it is that again and again the roots spring up and bear forth their fruit with increasing power, thus cutting out for us the most bitter and sorrowful work, which might all be avoided if the roots of things were thoroughly judged and kept under judgment.

Christian reader, our object in this paper is entirely practical. Let us therefore exhort one another to judge our roots, whatever they may be. Do we know our roots? Doubtless it is hard, very hard, to know them. They are deep and manifold: pride, personal vanity, covetousness, irritability, ambition—these are some of the roots of character, the motive springs of action, over which a rigid censorship must ever be exercised. We must let nature know that the eye of self-judgment is continually upon it. We have to carry on the struggle without cessation. We may have to lament over occasional failure; but we must maintain the struggle, for struggle bespeaks *life*. We must remember that the original terms are that in the flesh dwelleth *no* good thing. May God the Holy Ghost strengthen us for this vigilance against the flesh!

III. We shall close this paper with a brief reference to restoration as bearing upon the soul's position, or path. The conscience being thoroughly purged, and the heart, with its varied roots, judged, there is moral preparedness for our proper path. The perfect love of Jesus had expelled all fear from Peter's conscience; and his threefold question had opened up the roots in Peter's heart, and now He says to him, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. This spake He, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He saith unto him, Follow Me." And this is exactly the original terms by which our Lord began with Peter as His disciple. It was then also, "Follow Me."

Here, then, we have in two words the path of the servant of Christ—"Follow Me." The Lord had just given Peter the sweetest pledges of His love and confidence. He had, notwithstanding all past failure, entrusted him with the care of all that was dear to His loving heart in this world, even the lambs and sheep of His flock. He had said to him, "If you have affection for Me, feed My lambs, shepherd My sheep;" and now, in one brief but comprehensive utterance, He opens before him his proper path—"Follow Me." This is enough. It includes all besides. If we want to follow Jesus, we must keep the eye continually upon Him; we must mark His footprints and tread therein. Yes, mark them, and walk in them; and when tempted, like Peter, to "turn about," in order to see what this one or that one has to do, or how he does it, we may hear the correcting words, "What is that to thee? follow thou Me." This is to be our one grand and all-absorbing business, come what may. A thousand things may arise to distract and hinder. The devil will tempt us to look hither and thither, to look at this one and that one; to imagine we could do better here than there, or there than here; to be occupied with, and imitating, the work of some fellow-servant. All this is met by those pointed words, "Follow Me."

There is immense danger of following in the wake of others, of doing certain things because others do them, or doing things as others do them. All this has to be carefully guarded against. It will be sure to come to nothing. What we really want is a broken will—the true spirit of a servant that waits on the Master to know His mind. Service does not consist in doing this or that, or running hither and thither; it is simply doing the Master's will, whatever that may be. "They serve who stand and wait." It is easier to be busy than to be quiet. When Peter was "*young*," he went whither he would; but when he got "*old*," he went whither he would not. What a contrast between the young, restless, ardent, energetic Peter, going whither he would, and the old, matured,

subdued, experienced Peter, going whither he would not! What a mercy to have the will broken! —to be able to say from the heart, "*What Thou wilt—as Thou wilt—where Thou wilt—when Thou wilt*"—"not my will, but Thine, O Lord, be done"!

"*Follow Me!*" Precious words! May they be engraved on our hearts, beloved reader! Then shall we be steady in our course and effective in our service. We shall not be distracted or unhinged by the thoughts and opinions of men. It may happen that we shall get very few to understand us or to sympathize with us—few to approve or appreciate our work. It matters not. The Master knows all about it. If a master tells one of his servants distinctly to go and do a certain thing, or occupy a certain post, it is his business to go and do that thing, or occupy that post, no matter what his fellow-servants may think. They may tell him that he ought to be somewhere else, or to do something else. A proper servant will heed them not; he knows his master's mind, and has to do his master's work.

Would it were more thus with all the Lord's servants! Would that we all knew more distinctly, and carried out more decidedly, the Master's will respecting us! Peter had his path, and John had his. James had his work, and Paul had his. So it was of old: the Gershonite had his work, and the Merarite had his; and if the one had interfered with the other, the work would not have been done. The tabernacle was carried forward, or set up, by each man doing his own proper work. Thus it is in this our day. God has varied workmen in His house and in His vineyard; and the original terms of service are that the Holy Spirit divideth to every one as *He* will. He has quarrymen, stone-squarers, masons, and builders. Are all quarrymen? Surely not. But each has his work to do, and the building is carried forward by each one doing his own appointed work. Should a quarryman despise a builder, or a builder look down with contempt upon a quarryman? Assuredly not. The Master wants them both; and whenever the one would interfere with the other (as, alas, we are apt to do), the faithful correcting word falls on the ear, "*What is that to thee? follow thou Me.*"

JERICHO AND ACHOR

OR

PRIVILEGE AND RESPONSIBILITY

(Read Joshua vi., vii.)

The Christian reader will do well to turn, first of all, to the two chapters named above, and give them a careful reading. They furnish a very striking and impressive record of the double effect of God's presence with His people. In chapter vi. we are taught that the divine Presence ensured victory over the power of the enemy. In chapter vii. we learn that the divine Presence demanded judgment upon evil in the bosom of the congregation. The ruins of Jericho demonstrate the one; the great heap of stones in the valley of Achor attests the other.

Now, these two things must never be separated. We see them vividly illustrated in every page of the history of God's people, both in the Old and in the New Testament. The self-same Presence that secures victory demands holiness. Let us never forget this. Yea, let us keep it ever in the remembrance of our hearts. It has an individual as well as a collective application. If we are to walk with God, or, rather, if He is to walk with us, we must judge and put away everything inconsistent with His holy presence. He cannot sanction unjudged evil in His people. He can pardon, heal, restore, and bless; but He is intolerant of evil. "*Our God is a consuming fire.*" "The time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God."

Should the thought of this discourage or depress any true-hearted child of God, or servant of Christ? Certainly not. It should neither discourage nor depress, but it should make us very watchful over our hearts, very careful as to our ways, our habits of thought and conversation. We have nothing to fear while God is with us, but He cannot possibly sanction evil in His people; and every true lover of holiness will heartily bless Him for this. Could we possibly desire it to be otherwise? Would we wish the standard of holiness to be lowered at all? God forbid. All those who love His name can give thanks at the remembrance of His holiness, and rejoice in the truth that holiness becometh His house forever? "Be ye holy, for I am holy." It is not by any means on the pharisaic principle, wrapped up in the words, "Stand by thyself; I am holier than thou." Thank God, it is not this. It is not a question of what *we* are, but of what *He* is. Our character and conduct are to be formed by the truth of what God is. Marvelous grace! Precious privilege!

God must have His people like Himself. If they forget this, He will surely remind them of it. If He, in infinite grace, links His name and His glory with us, it behooves us to look well to our habits and ways, lest we bring any reproach on that name. Is this legal bondage? Nay, it is the holiest liberty. We may rest perfectly assured of this, that we are never further removed from legality than when treading that path of true holiness which becomes all those who bear the name of Christ. "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."

This great truth holds good at all times. We see it in the ruins of Jericho. We read it in the valley of Achor. What was it that caused the frowning walls and towering bulwarks of Jericho to fall down at the sound of rams' horns and the shout of the people? The presence of Jehovah. And it mattered not if it was but the city of Jericho or the whole land of Canaan, before that invincible Presence.

But what means the humiliating defeat before the insignificant city of Ai? How comes it to pass that the hosts of Israel, so recently triumphant at Jericho, have to flee ignominiously before a mere handful of men at Ai? Ah, the answer tells a sorrowful tale! Here it is; let us harken to it, and ponder it in the deepest depths of our heart. Let us seek to profit by it. Let us be solemnly warned by it. It has been written for our admonition. The Holy Ghost has taken the pains to record it for our learning. Woe be to the one who turns a deaf ear to the warning voice!

"But the children of Israel committed a trespass in the accursed thing: for Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed thing: and the anger of the Lord was kindled against"—whom? Achan merely? or his household, or his family, or his tribe? Nay, but "against the children of Israel"! The whole assembly was involved in the evil. How was this? The divine presence imparted a unity to the whole assembly; it bound them all together in such a manner as to involve all in the sin of the one. It was one assembly, and hence it was impossible for any one to take independent ground. The sin of each was the sin of all, because God was in their midst, and He could not countenance unjudged evil. The whole congregation was involved, and had to clear itself of the evil ere Jehovah could lead it on to victory. Had He allowed them to triumph at Ai, it would have argued that He was indifferent to the sin of His people, and that He could give the sanction of His presence to "an accursed thing," which were simply blasphemy against His holy name.

"And Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is beside Beth-aven, on the east side of Bethel, and spake unto them, saying, Go up and view the country. And the men went up and viewed Ai. And they returned to Joshua, and said unto him, Let not all the people go up; but let about two or three thousand men go up and smite Ai;"—more easily said than done;—"and make not all the people to labor thither; for they are but few"—yet quite too many for Israel with an Achan in the camp. "So there went up thither of the people about three thousand men; and they fled before the men of Ai. And the men of Ai smote of them about thirty and six men: for they chased them from before the gate even unto Shebarim, and smote them in the going down: wherefore the hearts of the people melted, and became as water.

"And Joshua rent his clothes, and fell to the earth upon his face before the ark of the Lord until the eventide, he and the elders of Israel, and put dust upon their heads."

Here was a strange and unlooked-for experience. "And Joshua said, Alas, O Lord God, wherefore hast Thou at all brought this people over Jordan, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? would to God we had been content, and dwelt on the other side Jordan! O Lord, what shall I say when Israel turneth their backs before their enemies? For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land shall hear of it, and shall environ us round, and cut off our name from the earth: and what wilt Thou do unto Thy great name?"

Joshua, that beloved and honored servant of God, did not see, did not understand, that it was the very glory of that "great name" which necessitated the defeat at Ai, just as it had achieved the victory at Jericho. But there were other elements in that glory besides power. There was holiness, and that holiness rendered it impossible for Him to lend the sanction of His presence where there was unjudged evil. Joshua should have concluded that there was something wrong in the condition of the people. He ought to have known that the hindrance was with Israel, and not with Jehovah. The same grace that had given them victory at Jericho would have given it at Ai, if things were right. But, alas, they were not right; and hence defeat, and not victory, was the order of the day. How could there be victory with an accursed thing in the camp? Impossible! Israel must judge the evil, or Jehovah must judge Israel. To have given them a victory at Ai would have been a reproach and a dishonor to the One whose name was called upon them. The divine presence absolutely demanded judgment upon the evil; and until that was executed, further progress in the conquest of Canaan was out of the question. "Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord." "Holiness becometh Thy house, O Lord, for ever."

"And the Lord said unto Joshua, Get thee up; wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face? *Israel hath sinned*,"—not merely Achan,——"and they have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them: for they have even taken of the accursed thing, and have also stolen, and dissembled also, and they have put it even among their own stuff. *Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies*, but turned their backs before their enemies, because they were accursed: neither will I be with you any more, except ye destroy the accursed from among you."

This is peculiarly solemn. The whole congregation is held responsible for the evil. "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump." Unbelief may inquire how all are involved in the sin of one; but the word of God definitely settles the question—"Israel hath sinned"—"they have taken"—"they have stolen"—"they have dissembled." The assembly was one; one in privilege, one in responsibility. As such, the sin of one was the sin of all, and all were called upon to clear themselves thoroughly by putting away the accursed thing from among them. There was not a single member of that large congregation who was not affected by Achan's sin. This may seem strange to mere nature, but such is the solemn and weighty truth of God. It was true in the assembly of Israel of old, and assuredly it is not less true in the Church of God now. No one could take independent ground in the assembly of Israel; how much less can he take it in the Church of God? There were over six

hundred thousand people who, to speak after the manner of men, were wholly ignorant of what Achan had done; and yet God's word to Joshua was, "Israel hath sinned." All were involved; all were affected; and all had to clear themselves ere Jehovah could again lead them on to victory. The presence of God in the midst of the Assembly formed the unity of all; and the presence of the Holy Ghost in the Church of God, the body of Christ now on the earth, binds all up in one divine, indissoluble unity. Hence, to talk of independency is to deny the very foundation-truth of the Church of God, and to prove beyond all question that we understand neither its nature nor its unity as set forth on the page of inspiration.

And if evil creeps into an assembly, how is it to be met? Here it is: "Up, sanctify the people, and say, Sanctify yourselves against to-morrow: for thus saith the Lord God of Israel, There is an accursed thing in the midst of thee, O Israel: thou canst not stand before thine enemies, until ye take away the accursed thing from among you." Were they one in privilege? Were they one in the enjoyment of the glory and strength which the divine Presence secured? Were they one in the splendid triumph at Jericho? Who would deny all this? Who would wish to deny it? Why, then, seek to question their oneness in responsibility—their oneness in respect to the evil in their midst, and all its humbling consequences? Surely, if there was unity in anything, there was unity in everything. If Jehovah was the God of Israel, He was the God of all, the God of each; and this grand and glorious fact was the solid basis both of their high privileges and their holy responsibilities. How could evil exist in such an assembly, and a single member be unaffected by it? How could there be an accursed thing in their very midst, and a single member not be defiled? Impossible. We may reason and argue about it until the tongue cleaves to the roof of the mouth, but all the reasoning and argument in the world cannot touch the truth of God, and that truth declares that "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump."

But how is the evil to be discovered? The presence of God reveals it. The self-same power that had leveled the walls of Jericho, detected, revealed and judged the sin of Achan. It was the double effect of the same blessed Presence, and Israel was called to share in the one as well as in the other. To attempt to separate the two is folly, ignorance, or wickedness. It cannot be done, and ought not to be attempted.

PART II.

We must ever remember, that, in the history of God's ways with His people, privilege and responsibility are intimately bound up together. To talk of privilege, or think of enjoying it, while neglecting the responsibility, is a gross delusion. No true lover of holiness could think for a moment of separating them; nay, he must ever delight in strengthening and perpetuating the precious link.

Thus, for example, in Israel's case, who could estimate aright the high privilege of having Jehovah dwelling in their midst? By day and by night, there He was, to guide and guard, shield and shelter them; to meet their every need, to give them bread from heaven, and bring them forth water out of the rock. His presence was a safeguard against every foe; no weapon formed against them could prosper; not a dog might move his tongue against them; they were at once invulnerable and invincible; with God in their midst they had nothing whatever to fear. He charged Himself with all their wants, whether great or small. He looked after their garments, that they might not wax old; He looked after their feet, that they might not swell; He covered them with the shield of His favor, so that no arrow might touch them; He stood between them and every foe, and flung back in the enemy's face every accusation.

Thus much as to the high privilege. But mark the corresponding and connected responsibility. See how both are indissolubly bound up together in the following weighty words: "For the Lord thy God walketh in the midst of thy camp, to deliver thee, and to give up thine enemies before thee: *therefore shall thy camp be holy; that He see no unclean thing in thee, and turn away from thee.*"

Precious privilege! Solemn responsibility! Who would dare to dissolve the hallowed connection? Had Jehovah deigned to come down into their midst, and walk with them, and tabernacle among them? Had He, in infinite grace, condescended to be their traveling companion? Was He there for the exigence of every hour? Yes, blessed be His name. If so, then what did His presence demand? We have seen something of what His presence *secured*; but what did it *demand*? Holiness! Israel's whole conduct was to be regulated by the great fact of the divine Presence in their midst. Not only their great public national institutions, but their most private habits, were to be brought under the controlling influence of Jehovah's presence with them. He regulated what they were to eat, what they were to wear, how they were to carry themselves in all the scenes, circumstances and relationships of daily life. By night and by day, sleeping and waking, sitting in the house or walking by the way, alone or in company, He looked after them. Nothing was to be allowed in any wise inconsistent with the holiness and purity which became the presence of the Holy One of Israel.

Was all this irksome? Were the privileges irksome? Was it irksome to be fed, clothed, guided, guarded and cared for in every possible way? Was it irksome to repose beneath the overshadowing wings of the God of Israel? Surely not. Why, then, should it be irksome to keep their persons, their habits and their dwellings clean? Must not every true heart, every upright mind, every tender conscience, accept as thoroughly the responsibility which the divine Presence necessarily involves as the privileges which it infallibly secures? Yea, rather must we not rank the

very responsibility itself among our richest and rarest privileges? Unquestionably. Every true lover of holiness will esteem it a signal mercy—a very high order of blessing—to walk in company with One whose presence detects and condemns every form of evil. "Thy testimonies are very sure; holiness becometh Thy house, O Lord, for ever."

The foregoing train of thought will enable us in some measure to understand the history of Achan, in Josh. vii.—a history solemn and impressive in the highest degree—a history which utters in our hearing, with deepest emphasis, words which our careless hearts are only too ready to forget, "God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of His saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about Him." Had Achan remembered this, it would have taught him the holy necessity of nipping in the very bud the covetousness of his heart, and thus have spared the whole assembly the humiliating defeat at Ai, and all the consequent sorrow and discipline. How terrible to think of one man, for the sake of a little personal gain, which at best could last but for a moment, plunging a whole congregation into the deepest trouble! and, what was worse than all, dishonoring and grieving that blessed One who had deigned, in His infinite goodness, to take up His abode in their midst! How well it would be if each one of us, when tempted to commit any secret sin, would just pause and ask himself the question, "How can I do this thing, and grieve the Holy Spirit of God who dwells in me, and bring leaven into the assembly of God's people?" We ought to remember that our private walk has a direct bearing upon all the members of the body. We are either helping or hindering the blessing of all. We are none of us independent atoms; we are members of a body incorporated by the presence of the Holy Ghost; and if we are walking in a loose, carnal, worldly, self-indulgent spirit, we are grieving the Spirit, and injuring all the members. "But God hath tempered the body together ... that there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honored, all the members rejoice with it" (1 Cor. xii. 24-26).

It may seem hard, to some, to grasp this great practical truth—hard to see how our private condition and conduct can affect our fellow-members; but the simple and obvious fact is, we must either admit this, or maintain the unscriptural and foolish notion that each Christian is an independent person, having no connection with the whole body of believers. If he be a member of a body, all the members of which are bound together, and linked with the Head by the personal indwelling of the Holy Ghost, then, verily, it follows that his walk and ways affect all his fellow-members just as really as, if any member of the human body suffers, all the other members feel it. If there is anything wrong with the hand, the foot feels it. How is this? Because the head feels it. The communication, in every instance, is with the head first, and from the head to the members.

Now, though Achan was not a member of a body, but merely of a congregation, yet we see how his private conduct affected the whole assembly. This is all the more striking, inasmuch as the great truth of the one body was not unfolded, and could not be until—redemption being a grand, accomplished fact—the Head took His seat on the throne of God, and sent down the Holy Ghost to form the body, and link it, by His personal presence and indwelling, to the Head in heaven. If the secret sin of Achan affected every member of the congregation of Israel, how much more (may we not say?) doth the secret sin of any member of the body of Christ affect all the members thereof!

Let us never forget this weighty truth. May we keep it ever in the remembrance of our hearts, that so we may see the urgent need of a careful, tender, holy walk; that we may not dishonor our glorious Head, grieve the blessed indwelling Spirit, or injure the feeblest member of that body of which, by the sovereign grace of God and the precious blood of Christ, we form a part.

But we must proceed with our subject, and in so doing call the special attention of the reader to the way in which the sin of Achan was traced home to him. It is all most solemn. He had little idea whose eye was resting upon him when he was carrying on his secret wickedness. He would, no doubt, think himself all right, and very successful, when he had the money and the garment safely hidden in his tent. Fatal, guilty, wretched treasure! Unhappy man! How dreadful is the love of money! How terrible is the blinding power of sin! It hardens the heart, deadens the conscience, darkens the understanding, ruins the soul, and in the case before us brought defeat and disaster upon the whole people of which he formed a part.

"And the Lord said unto Joshua, Get thee up; wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face?" There is a time for lying on the face, and there is a time for standing on our feet; a time for devout prostration, and a time for decided action. The instructed soul will know the time for each. "Israel hath sinned, and they have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them; for they have even taken of the accursed thing, and have also stolen, and dissembled also, and they have put it even among their own stuff. Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies, because they were accursed: neither will I be with you any more, except ye destroy the accursed from among you. Up, sanctify the people, and say, Sanctify yourselves against to-morrow: for thus saith the Lord God of Israel, There is an accursed thing in the midst of thee, O Israel: *thou canst not stand before thine enemies*, until ye take away the accursed thing from among you."

How peculiarly solemn is all this! how very arresting! how soul-subduing! God's people—those who bear His name, and profess to hold His truth, who stand identified with Him in this world—must be holy. He cannot lend the sanction of His presence to that which is unholy or impure. Those who enjoy the high privilege of being associated with God are solemnly responsible to keep

themselves unspotted from the world, else He must take down the rod of discipline and do His strange work in their midst. "Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord."

"Thou canst not stand before thine enemies, until ye take away the accursed thing from among you. In the morning therefore ye shall be brought according to your tribes: and it shall be, that the tribe which the Lord taketh shall come according to the families thereof; and the family which the Lord shall take shall come by households; and the household which the Lord shall take shall come man by man."

Ah, this was coming to close quarters! The sinner might seek to persuade himself that discovery was impossible; he might cherish the fond hope of escaping amid the many thousands of Israel. Miserable delusion! He might be sure his sin would find him out. The self-same Presence that secured individual blessing, secured with equal fidelity the detection of the most secret individual sin. Escape was impossible. If Jehovah was in the midst of His people to lay Jericho in ruins at their feet, He was there also to lay bare, in its deepest roots, the sin of the congregation, and to bring forth the sinner from his hiding-place to bear the penalty of his wickedness.

How searching are God's ways! First, the twelve tribes are summoned, that the transgressor might be manifested. Then, one tribe is fixed upon. Nearer still! the family is fixed upon! And yet nearer! the very household is actually singled out; and, last of all, "*man by man!*" Thus, out of six hundred thousand people, the all-searching eye of Jehovah reads the sinner through and through, and marks him off before the assembled thousands of Israel.

"And it shall be that he that is taken with the accursed thing shall be burnt with fire, he and all that he hath: because he hath transgressed the covenant of the Lord, and because he hath wrought folly in Israel.

"So Joshua rose up early in the morning, and brought Israel by their tribes; and the tribe of Judah was taken: and he brought the family of Judah; and he took the family of the Zarhites: and he brought the family of the Zarhites man by man; and Zabdi was taken: and he brought his household man by man; and Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was taken."

"Our God is a consuming fire." He cannot tolerate evil in the ways of His people. This accounts for the solemn scene before us. The natural mind may reason about all this—it may marvel why the taking of a little money and a garment from amid the spoils of a doomed city should involve such awful consequences and entail such a severe punishment. But the natural mind is incapable of understanding the ways of God. And may we not ask the objector, How could God sanction evil in His people? How could He go on with it? What was to be done with it? If He was about to execute judgment upon the seven nations of Canaan, could He possibly be indifferent to sin in His people? Most assuredly not. His word is, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore will I punish you for your iniquities." The very fact of His taking them into relationship with Himself was the ground of His dealing with them in holy discipline.

It is the height of folly for man to reason about the severity of divine judgment, or the apparent lack of proportion between the sin and the punishment. All such reasoning is false and impious. What was it that brought in all the misery, the sorrow, the desolation, the sickness, pain, and death—all the untold horrors of the last six thousand years? What was the source of it all? Just the one little act—as man would call it—of eating a bit of fruit? But this little act was that terrible thing called sin—yea, rebellion—against God! And what was needed to atone for this? How was it to be met? What stands over against it as the only adequate expression of the judgment of a holy God?—What? The burning in the valley of Achor? Nay. The everlasting burnings of hell? Nay; something far deeper and more solemn still. What? The cross of the Son of God! The awful mystery of the death of Christ!—that terrible cry, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Let men remember this, and cease to reason.

PART III.

It is always well for the Christian to be able to give a calm and decided answer to the objection which infidelity is sure to offer to the actings of divine government. The answer is this: "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" If the creature is to be allowed to judge the Creator, there is an end of all government in the vast universe of God. Hence, when we hear men daring to pronounce judgment upon the ways of God, and undertaking to decide what is or what is not fit for God to do, this grand preliminary question invariably suggests itself, "Who is to be judge?" Is man to judge God? or is God to judge man? If the former, there is no God at all; and if the latter, then man has to bow his head in reverent silence, and own his utter ignorance and folly.

The fact is, if man could fathom the government of God, he would no longer be man, but God. What contemptible folly, therefore, for a poor, shallow, ignorant, short-sighted mortal to attempt to pronounce an opinion upon the profound mysteries of divine government! His opinion is not only utterly worthless, but, in the judgment of every truly pious mind, positively impious and blasphemous—a daring insult offered to the throne, to the nature and to the character of God, for which he will, most assuredly, have to answer before the judgment-seat of Christ, unless he repent and find pardon through the blood of the cross.

The foregoing line of thought has suggested itself in connection with the solemn scene in the valley of Achor. The unbelieving mind may be disposed to start an objection on the ground of the apparent severity of the judgment; to institute a comparison between the offence and the

punishment; to call in question the equity of Achan's children being involved in their father's sin.

To all this we simply reply, "Are we competent to judge?" If any one thinks he is, it is tantamount to saying that God is not fit to govern the world, but should give place to man. This is the real root of the whole matter. Infidelity wants to get rid of God altogether, and set up man in His place. If God is to be God, then, most certainly, His ways, the actings of His government, the mysteries of His providence, His purposes, His counsels and His judgments must lie far beyond the range of the greatest human or angelic mind. Neither angel, man nor devil can comprehend Deity. Let men own this, and hush into eternal silence their puny, ignorant and contemptible reasonings. Let them take up the language of Job when his eyes were opened: "Then Job answered the Lord, and said, I know that Thou canst do everything, and that no thought can be withholden from Thee. Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge? therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not. Hear, I beseech Thee, and I will speak: I will demand of Thee, and declare Thou unto Me. 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." When the soul gets into this attitude, there is an end of all infidel questions. Till then there is little use in discussion.

Let us now turn for a few moments to contemplate the solemn scene in the valley of Achor; and let us remember that "whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning." May we learn to watch with holy jealousy the incipient workings of evil in our hearts. It is on these men ought to sit in judgment, and not on the pure and perfect actings of divine government.

Joshua's address to Achan is solemn, weighty, and powerful: "My son, give, I pray thee, glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession unto Him; and tell me now what thou hast done; hide it not from me."

Here is the all-important matter. "Give glory to Jehovah, God of Israel." All hinges upon this. The Lord's glory is the one perfect standard by which all is to be judged—the perfect gauge by which everything is to be measured—the perfect touchstone by which all is to be tried. The one great question for the people of God in all ages and in all dispensations is this: *What is suited to the glory of God?* In comparison with this, all other questions are less than secondary. It is not a question of what is suitable to us, or what we can tolerate or agree with. This is a very minor consideration indeed. What we have ever to look to, and think of, and provide for, is the glory of God. We have to ask ourselves the question, in reference to everything that comes before us, "Will this comport with the glory of God?" If not, let us, by His grace, fling it aside.

Well would it have been for Achan had he thought of this when his eye rested on the cursed treasure! What misery it would have saved him! What sorrow and trouble it would have saved his brethren! But, alas, alas, people forget all this when lust dims the eye and vanity and folly possess the heart! and onward they go until the heavy judgment of a holy, sin-hating God overtakes them. And then, forsooth, men presume to comment upon such judgment as unworthy of a gracious and beneficent Being. Ignorant presumption! They would fain have a god of their own imagination, one like themselves, who can make light of sin and tolerate all sorts of evil. The God of the Bible, the God of Christianity, the God of the Cross, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, does not suit such infidel reasoners. Their deep heart-utterance to Him is, "Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways."

"And Achan said, Indeed I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel, and thus and thus have I done: when I saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, then I coveted them, and took them; and, behold, they are hid in the earth in the midst of my tent, and the silver under it."

Here the dark, defiling stream is traced up to its source in the heart of this unhappy man. Oh, how little did he think whose eye was resting on him during the entire progress of this melancholy and disastrous affair! He thought of but one thing, namely, the gratification of his covetousness. He *saw*, he *coveted*, he *took*, he *hid*; and there, no doubt, he thought the matter would end. He would have his treasure, and no one would be the wiser.

But, ah, the eye of Jehovah, the God of Israel, was upon him—that holy eye, from which no secret thing is hidden, which penetrates the depths of the human heart, and takes in at a glance all the hidden springs of human action. Yes, God saw it all, and He would make Israel see it, and Achan also. Hence the lamentable defeat at Ai, and all that followed.

How perfectly solemn!—the whole assembly involved in shameful defeat and disaster—Joshua and the elders of Israel, with rent garments and dust upon their heads, prostrate on their faces from morning till evening! And then, the divine challenge and rebuke! the solemn muster of the hosts of Israel, tribe by tribe, family by family, household by household, man by man!

And why all this? Just to trace the evil to its source, bring it out, and have it judged in the sight of every creature. All created intelligence must be made to see and confess that the throne of God can have no fellowship with evil. The same power that had leveled the walls of Jericho, and executed judgment upon its guilty inhabitants, was to be manifested in detecting Achan's sin, and in evoking from the very depths of his convicted heart the confession of his terrible guilt. He, in common with all his brethren, had heard Jehovah's solemn charge, "And ye, in any wise keep yourselves from the accursed thing, lest ye make yourselves accursed, when ye take of the accursed thing, and make"—not merely any one individual's tent, but—"the camp of Israel a

curse, and trouble it. But all the silver, and gold, and vessels of brass and iron, are consecrated unto the Lord: they shall come into the treasury of the Lord."

All this was plain enough. No one could mistake it. It only needed an attentive ear and an obedient heart. It was as plain as the commandment delivered to Adam and Eve amid the bowers of Eden. But Achan, like Adam, transgressed the plain and positive command. Instead of hiding it in his heart, that he might not sin against God, he trampled it under his feet, that he might gratify his sinful desires. He fixed his covetous gaze upon the accursed thing, in itself nothing but a wretched pile of dust, but, through Satan's power and Achan's erring heart, turned into an occasion of sin, shame, and sorrow.

O reader, how sad, how sorrowful, how terrible a thing it is to allow the poor heart to go after the wretched things of this world! What are they all worth? If we could have all the garments that were ever made in Babylon; all the gold and silver that ever issued from the mines of Peru, California, and Australia; all the pearls and diamonds that ever glittered on the kings, princes and nobles of this world—could they give us one hour's true happiness? Could they send a single ray of heavenly light into the soul? Could they impart to us one moment's pure, spiritual enjoyment? Not they. In themselves they are but perishable dust, and when used of Satan a positive curse, misery, and degradation. Not all the riches and material comforts which this world could offer are worth one hour's holy communion with our heavenly Father and our precious Saviour. Why should we covet this world's wretched wealth? Our God will supply all our need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. Is not this enough? Why should we put ourselves within the range of Satan's power by setting our hearts upon the riches, honors, or pleasures, of a world which is ruled by the archenemy of God and of our souls? How well it would have been for Achan had he rested content with what the God of Israel had given him! How happy he might have been had he been satisfied with the furniture of his tent, the smile of Jehovah, and the answer of a good conscience!

But he was not; and hence the appalling scene in the valley of Achor, the record of which is enough to strike terror into the stoutest heart. "So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran unto the tent; and, behold, it was hid in his tent, and the silver under it. And they took them out of the midst of the tent, and brought them unto Joshua, and unto all the children of Israel, and laid them out before the Lord. And Joshua, and *all Israel* with him, took Achan the son of Zerah, and the silver, and the garment, and the wedge of gold, and his sons, and his daughters, and his oxen, and his asses, and his sheep, and his tent, and all that he had: and they brought them unto the valley of Achor. And Joshua said, Why hast thou troubled us? the Lord shall trouble thee this day. And *all Israel* stoned him with stones, and burned them with fire, after they had stoned them with stones. And they raised over him a great heap of stones unto this day. So the Lord turned from the fierceness of His anger. Wherefore the name of that place was called, The valley of Achor (that is, trouble), unto this day" (Josh. vii. 19-26).

How deeply solemn is all this! What a warning note it sounds in our ears! Let us not attempt, under the false influence of one-sided notions of grace, to turn aside the holy edge of such a passage of Scripture. Let us read with earnest attention the inscription on that awful monument in the valley of Achor. What is it? "God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of His saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about Him." And again, "If any man defile the temple of God, him will God destroy." And further, "Our God is a consuming fire."

Weighty, solemn, searching words these!—much needed, surely, in these days of flippant, easy-going profession, when the doctrines of grace are so much on our lips, but the fruits of righteousness so little seen in our lives. May we learn from them the urgent need of watchfulness over our hearts, and over our private life, that evil may be judged and nipped in the bud, so that it may not bring forth its sad, shameful and sorrowful fruit in our practical career, to the gross dishonor of the Lord and the grievous sorrow of those with whom we are linked in the bonds of fellowship.

PART IV.

There is a very interesting allusion to "the valley of Achor" in Hos. ii., at which we may just glance in passing, though it does not connect itself with the special line of truth which we have had before us in this series of papers.

Jehovah, in speaking of Israel, by His prophet says: "Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her. And I will give her her vineyards from thence, and *the valley of Achor for a door of hope; and she shall sing there*, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt" (vers. 14, 15).

What touching grace shines in these words! "The valley of Achor"—the place of "trouble"—the place of deep sorrow and shame—the place of humiliation and judgment—the place where the fire of Jehovah's righteous wrath consumed the sin of His people—*there* shall be "a door of hope" for Israel by and by; there, too, she shall sing as in the days of her youth. How wonderful to hear of songs of praise in the valley of Achor! What glorious triumphs of grace! What a bright and blessed future for Israel!

"It shall be at *that day*, saith the Lord, that thou shalt call me Ishi (my husband), and shalt call me no more Baali (my lord). For I will take away the names of Baalim out of her mouth, and they shall no more be remembered by their name.... *And I will betroth thee unto Me for ever; yea, I*

will betroth thee unto Me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies: I will even betroth thee unto Me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the Lord."

From this digression to "the valley of Achor" in the future, we now return to our special theme; and in so doing we shall ask the reader to turn with us, for a few moments, to the opening chapters of the Acts. Here we find the same grand results of the presence of God in the midst of His people as we have seen in the opening of the book of Joshua; only in a much more glorious manner, as we might expect.

On the day of Pentecost, God the Holy Ghost came down to form the Assembly, and take up His abode therein. This great and glorious fact was grounded on the accomplishment of the work of atonement, as attested by the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, and His glorification at the right hand of God.

We cannot attempt to unfold this truth in all its bearings in this brief article; we merely call the reader's attention to the two practical points which have been before us—namely, the privilege and responsibility connected with the Lord's presence in the midst of His people. If He was there to *bless*,—as He most surely was,—He was also, and quite as surely, there to *judge*. The two things go together, and we must not attempt to separate them.

And first, then, we see the effect and blessings of the divine Presence in the Assembly: "And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all, as every man had need." The blessed effect of the realized presence of the Holy Ghost was to bind their hearts together in a holy and loving fellowship; to cause them to let go earthly things, and to lead them to merge their personal interests in the common good.

Precious fruits! Would that we saw more of them! No doubt times are changed; but God is not changed, and the effect of His realized presence is not changed. True, we are not in Acts ii. Pentecostal times are passed away; Christendom has lapsed in complete failure; the professing Church has hopelessly fallen. All this is sadly true; but Christ our Head abides, in all His living power and unchangeable grace. "The foundation of God standeth sure"—as sure, as safe and as solid to-day as it was on the day of Pentecost. No change here, blessed be God; hence we may say, with all possible confidence, that where His presence is realized, even though it be only by "two or three" gathered to the name of Jesus, there the same lovely fruits will be found. Hearts will be knit together; earthly things will be surrendered; personal interests will be merged. It is not a question of throwing our goods into a common heap, but of the grace which once took that special form, and which at all times would lead us, not merely to surrender our possessions, but ourselves, for the good of others.

It is a very grave mistake indeed for any one to say, or to think, that because we are not in Pentecostal times we cannot count on the presence of God with us in the path of holy obedience to His will. Such a thought should be judged as sheer unbelief. We are certainly shorn of many of the Pentecostal gifts, but we are not bereft of the Giver. The blessed Comforter abides with us; and it is our happy privilege to be in a position in which we can enjoy His presence and ministry.

The thing is *to be* in that position; not merely to *say* we are in it, to boast of being in it, but *really* to be in it. We may well apply here the pointed question of the blessed apostle, "What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man *say*" he is on divine ground, if he be not really there? Assuredly it profits nothing.

But let us not forget that although we are not in Acts ii., but in the second epistle to Timothy; although we are not in the refreshing scenes of Pentecost, but in the "perilous times" of "the last days," yet the Lord is with those "who call on Him out of a pure heart," and His presence is all we want. Let us only trust Him, use Him, lean upon Him. Let us see to it that we are in a position in which we can count on His presence—a position of entire separation from all that He judges to be "iniquity"—from the "dishonorable vessels" in "the great house," and from all those who, having a form of godliness, deny the power thereof.

These, we may rest assured, are the absolutely essential conditions on which the divine Presence can be realized by any company of Christians. We may come together, and form ourselves into an assembly; we may profess to be on divine ground; we may call ourselves the assembly of God; we may appropriate to ourselves all those passages of Scripture which only apply to those who are really gathered by the Holy Ghost in the name of Jesus; but if the essential conditions are not there; if we are not "calling on the Lord out of a pure heart"; if we are mixed up with "iniquity"; if we are associated with "dishonorable vessels"; if we are walking hand in hand with lifeless professors who deny in practice the power of godliness—what then? Can we expect to realize the Lord's presence? As well might Israel have expected it with Achan in the camp. It cannot be. In order to reach divine results, there must be divine conditions. To look for the former without the latter is vanity, folly, and wicked presumption.

Let not the reader mistake our meaning. We are not now treating, or even touching, the great question of the soul's salvation. This, precious and important as it is to all whom it may concern, is not at all our subject in this series of papers on "Jericho and Achor." We are dealing with the solemn and weighty question of the privilege and responsibility of those who profess to be the Lord's people, gathered to His name; and we are specially anxious to impress upon the mind of the reader that, notwithstanding the hopeless ruin of the professing Church, its utter failure in its responsibility to Christ as His witness and light-bearer in the world, yet it is the happy privilege of "two or three" to be gathered in His name, apart from all the evil and error around, owning our

common sin and failure, feeling our weakness, and looking to Him to be with us and bless us according to the unchangeable love of His heart.

Now, to those thus gathered, there is no limit whatever to the measure of blessing which our ever gracious and faithful Lord can bestow. "He has the seven spirits of God, and the seven stars"—the fulness of spiritual power, ministerial gift and authority for His Church. Such is His style and title in addressing the church at Sardis, which, we believe, prophetically sets before us the history of Protestantism.

It is not said, as in the address to Ephesus, that He "holds the seven stars in His right hand." There is a grave difference as to this; and it is our bounden duty to recognize both the difference and the cause. When the Church began, on the day of Pentecost, and during the days of the apostles, Christ, the Head, not only *possessed* all spiritual gift, power and authority for His Church, but was owned as *the actual administrator* thereof. He held the stars in His right hand. There was no such thing known or thought of as human authority in the assembly of God. Christ was owned as Head and Lord. He had received the gifts, and He dispensed them according to His sovereign will.

Thus it should ever be. But, alas, man has intruded upon the hallowed sphere of Christ's authority. He presumes to meddle in the appointment of ministry in the Church of God. Without so much as a single atom of divine authority, without any ability whatsoever to impart the necessary gift for ministry, he nevertheless takes upon himself the solemn responsibility of calling, appointing, or ordaining to the ministry in the Church of God. As well might the writer of these lines undertake to appoint a man as an admiral in Her Majesty's fleet, or a general in her army, as for any man, or body of men, to appoint a man to minister in the Church of God. It is a daring usurpation of divine authority. None can impart ministerial gift, and none can appoint to any branch of the ministry but Christ, the Church's Head and Lord; and all who undertake to do so will have to account to Him for so doing.

It may be that many who thus act, and many more who sanction or are identified with such acting, are not aware of what they are doing; and our God is gracious and merciful in bearing with our feebleness and ignorance. All this is blessedly true; but as to the principle of human authority in the Church of God, it is utterly false, and should be rejected with holy decision by every one who loves, reverences and adores the great Head of the Church and Lord of the Assembly, who, blessed be His name, still *has* the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars. He has them now just as positively as in apostolic times; and all who take their true place, the place of self-judgment and humiliation; all who truly own our common sin and failure, our departure from first love, first principles; all who really, in true humility of mind, look to Christ alone for all they want; all who, in real earnestness of heart and godly sincerity, bow to His word and confess His name—all such will assuredly prove the reality of His presence; they will find Him amply sufficient for all their need. They can count on Him for the supply of all ministerial gift, and for the maintenance of all godly order in their public reunions.

True, they will feel—must feel—that they are not in the days of Acts ii., but in the days of 2 Timothy. Yet Christ is sufficient for these, as He was for those. The difficulties are great, but His resources are infinite. It were folly to deny that there are difficulties; but it is sinful unbelief to question the all-sufficiency of our ever-gracious and faithful Lord. He has promised to be with His people right on to the end. But He cannot sanction hollow pretension, or proud assumption. He looks for reality, for truth in the inward parts. He will have us in our right place, owning our true condition. There He can meet us according to His infinite fulness, and according to the eternal stability of that grace which reigns through righteousness unto eternal life.

But oh, let us never forget that our God delights in uprightness of heart and integrity of purpose. He will never fail a trusting heart; but He must be trusted really. It will not do to speak of trusting Him while in reality we are leaning on our own appliances and arrangements. Here is precisely where we so sadly fail. We do not leave room for Him to act in our midst. We do not leave the platform clear for Him. Thus we are robbed, and that to an extent of which we have little idea, of the blessed manifestation of His presence and grace in our assemblies. His Spirit is quenched and hindered, and we are left to feel our barrenness and poverty, when we might be rejoicing in the fulness of His love and in the power of His ministry. It is utterly impossible that He can ever fail those who, owning the truth of the condition, earnestly look to Him. He cannot deny Himself; and He can never say to His people that they have reckoned too largely on Him.

It is not that we are to look for any special display of power in our midst, anything that might attract public attention, or make a noise in the world. There are no tongues, no gifts of healing, no miracles, no extraordinary manifestations of angelic action on our behalf. Neither are we to look for anything similar to the case of Ananias and Sapphira—the sudden and awful execution of divine judgment, striking terror into the hearts of all, both inside and outside the assembly.

Such things are not to be looked for now. They would not comport with the present condition of things in the Church of God. No doubt our Lord Christ has all power in heaven and on earth, and He could display that power now just as He did in Pentecostal times, if it so pleased Him. But He does not so act, and we can readily understand the reason. It is our place to walk softly, humbly, tenderly. We have sinned, and failed, and departed from the holy authority of the word of God. We must ever bear this in mind, and be content with a very low and retired place. It would ill become us to seek a name or a position in the earth. We cannot possibly be too little in our own eyes.

But at the same time we can, if in our right place, and in a right spirit, fully count on the presence of Jesus with us; and we may rest assured that where He is—where His most gracious presence is felt—there we may look for the most precious results, both in the way of binding our hearts together in true brotherly love, in causing us to sit loose to all earthly possessions and earthly ties, in leading us forth in grace and kindness toward all men, and also in putting away from among us all who would defile the assembly by unsound doctrine or unholy morals.

P. S.—It is of the utmost importance for the Christian reader to bear in mind that, whatever be the condition of the professing Church, it is his privilege to enjoy as high communion and to tread as high a path of individual devotedness as ever was known in the very brightest days of the Church's history. We must never draw a plea from the condition of things around us for lowering the standard of individual holiness and devotedness. *There is no excuse for continuing a single hour in connection with anything that will not stand the test of Holy Scripture.*

True, we feel the condition of things—cannot but feel it: would we felt it more! But it is one thing to feel it, and go through it with Christ, and another thing to sink under it and go on with the evil, or give up in despair.

May the Lord, in His infinite grace, produce in the hearts of all His people a more profound and influential sense of their privileges and responsibilities, both individually and collectively, that thus there may be a truer and brighter testimony for His name, and a devoted band of worshipers, workers and witnesses, gathered out to wait for His coming!

What raised the wondrous thought?
Or who did it suggest?
"That we, the Church, to glory brought,
Should WITH the Son be blest."

O God, the thought was Thine!
(Thine only it could be,)
Fruit of the wisdom, love divine,
Peculiar unto Thee.

For, sure, no other mind,
For thoughts so bold, so free,
Greatness or strength, could ever find;
Thine only it could be.

The motives, too, Thine own,
The plan, the counsel, Thine!—
Made for Thy Son, bone of His bone
In glory bright to shine.

O God, with great delight
Thy wondrous thought we see,
Upon *His* throne, in glory bright,
The bride of Christ shall be.

Sealed with the Holy Ghost,
We triumph in that love,
Thy wondrous thought has made our boast,
"Glory WITH Christ above."

THE THREE APPEARINGS.

(Heb. ix. 24-28.)

"For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, *now to appear* in the presence of God for us: nor yet that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others; for then must He often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the ages *hath He appeared* to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. And as it is appointed unto

men once to die, but after this the judgment: so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for Him *shall He appear* the second time apart from sin unto salvation." [2]

The foregoing passage sets before us three great facts in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ. It speaks of what we may venture to call three distinct appearings, namely, an appearing in the past; an appearing in the present; and an appearing in the future. He *hath* appeared in this world to do a certain work; He *doth* appear in heaven to carry on a certain ministry; and He *shall* appear in glory. The first is Atonement; the second is Advocacy; the third is the Advent. And first, then, let us dwell for a few moments on

THE ATONEMENT,

which is here presented in its two grand aspects, first, Godward; and secondly, usward. The apostle declares that Christ hath appeared "to put away *sin*;" and also "to bear the sins of many." This is a distinction of the utmost importance, and one not sufficiently understood or attended to, Christ has put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. He has glorified God in reference to the question of sin in its very broadest aspect. This He has done altogether irrespective of the question of persons or the forgiveness of the *sins* of individuals. Even though every soul, from the days of Adam down to the very last generation, were to reject the proffered mercy of God, yet would it hold good that the atoning death of Christ had put away sin—had destroyed the power of Satan—had perfectly glorified God, and laid the deep and solid foundation on which all the divine counsels and purposes can rest for ever.

It is to this fact that the Baptist refers in these memorable words, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the *sin* of the world" (John i. 29). The Lamb of God has wrought a work in virtue of which every trace of sin shall be obliterated from the creation of God. He has perfectly vindicated God in the very midst of a scene in which He had been so grossly dishonored, in which His character had been traduced and His majesty insulted. He came to do this at all cost, even at the sacrifice of Himself. He sacrificed Himself in order to maintain, in view of heaven, earth and hell, the glory of God. He has wrought a work by the which God is infinitely more glorified than if sin had not entered at all. God shall reap a richer harvest by far in the fields of redemption than ever He could have reaped in the fields of an unfallen creation.

It is well that the reader should deeply ponder this glorious aspect of the atoning death of Christ. We are apt to think that the very highest view we can take of the cross is that which involves the question of our forgiveness and salvation. This is a grave mistake. That question is divinely settled, as we shall seek to show; for the less is always included in the greater. But let us remember that our side of the atonement is the less, God's side of it the greater. It was infinitely more important that God should be glorified than that we should be saved. Both ends have been gained, blessed be God, and gained by one and the same work, the precious atonement of Christ; but we must never forget that the glory of God is of far greater moment than the salvation of men; and further, that we never can have so clear a sense of the latter as when we see it flowing from the former. It is when we see that God has been perfectly and for ever glorified in the death of Christ, that we can really enter into the divine perfectness of our salvation. In point of fact, both are so intimately bound up together that they cannot be separated; but still God's part in the Cross of Christ must ever get its own proper preeminence. The glory of God was ever uppermost in the devoted heart of the Lord Jesus Christ. For this He lived, for this He died. He came into this world for the express purpose of glorifying God, and from this great and holy object He never swerved a moment from the manger to the cross. True it is—blessedly true—that in carrying out this object He has perfectly met our case; but the divine glory ruled Him in life and in death.

Now it is on the ground of atonement, looked at in this its higher aspect, that God has been dealing with the world in patient grace, mercy and forbearance for well nigh six thousand years. He sends His rain and His sunbeams upon the evil and upon the good, upon the just and the unjust. It is in virtue of the atonement of Christ—though despised and rejected—that the infidel and the atheist live, and enjoy God's daily mercies; yea, the very breath that they spend in opposing the revelation and denying the existence of God they owe to Him in whom they live, move and have their being. We speak not here, by any means, of the forgiveness of *sins*, or of the soul's salvation. This is another question altogether, and to it we shall refer presently. But, looking at man in reference to his life in this world, and looking at the world in which he lives, it is the Cross which forms the basis of God's merciful dealing with both the one and the other.

Furthermore, it is on the ground of the atonement of Christ, in this same aspect of it, that the evangelist can go forth "into *all the world*, and preach glad tidings to *every creature*." He can declare the blessed truth that God has been glorified as to sin—His claims satisfied—His majesty vindicated—His law magnified—His attributes harmonized. He can proclaim the precious message that God can now be just and yet the justifier of any poor ungodly sinner that believes in Jesus. There is no hindrance, no barrier of any kind whatsoever. The preacher of the gospel is not to be cramped by any dogmas of theology. He has to do with the large, loving heart of God, which, in virtue of atonement, can flow forth to every creature beneath the canopy of heaven. He can say to each and to all—and say it without reserve—"COME!" Nay, more, he is bound to "*beseech*" them to come. "*We pray* you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." Such is the proper language of the evangelist, the herald of the cross, the ambassador of Christ. He knows no less a range than the wide, wide world; and he is called to drop his message into the ear of every creature under heaven.

And why? Because "Christ hath put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself." He has, by His most precious death, changed completely the ground of God's dealings with man and with the world, so that, instead of having to deal with them on the ground of sin, He can deal on the ground of atonement.

Finally, it is in virtue of the atonement, in this broad and lofty aspect, that every vestige of sin, and every trace of the serpent shall be obliterated from the wide universe of God. Then shall be seen the full force of that passage above referred to, "The Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."

Thus much as to what we may call the primary aspect of the atoning death of Christ—an aspect which cannot be too thoughtfully studied. A clear understanding of this weighty point would tend to remove a great deal of difficulty and misunderstanding in reference to the full and free preaching of the gospel. Many of the Lord's honored servants find themselves hindered in the presentation of the glad tidings of salvation, simply because they do not see this wide aspect of the atonement. They confine the death of Christ merely to its bearing upon the sins of God's elect; and they therefore deem it wrong to preach the gospel to all, or to invite, yea to beseech and entreat, all to come.

Now, that Christ did die for the elect, Scripture distinctly teaches in manifold places. He died for the elect nation of Israel, and for the elect Church of God—the bride of Christ. But Scripture teaches more than this. It declares that "He died for *all*" (2 Cor. v. 14); that "He tasted death for *every man*" (Heb. ii. 9). There is no need whatever for seeking to avoid the plain force and meaning of these and kindred statements of inspiration. And further, we believe it to be quite wrong to add our own words to God's words in order to reconcile them with any particular system of doctrine. When Scripture affirms that Christ died for all, we have no right to add the words, "the elect." And when Scripture states that Christ "tasted death for every man," we have no right to say, "every elect man." It is our place to take God's word as it stands, and reverently bow to its authoritative teaching in all things. We can no more systematize God's word than we can systematize God Himself. His word, His heart and His nature, are quite too deep and comprehensive to be included within the limits of the very broadest and best constructed human system of theology that was ever framed. We shall, ever and anon, be discovering passages of Scripture which will not fall in with our system. We must remember that God is love, and this love will tell itself out to all without limit. True, God has His counsels, His purposes and His decrees; but it is not these He presents to the poor lost sinner. He will instruct and interest His saints about such things; but to the guilty, heavy-laden sinner, He presents His love, His grace, His mercy, His readiness to save, to pardon and to bless.

And let it be well remembered that the sinner's responsibility flows out of what is *revealed*, and not out of what is *secret*. God's decrees are secret; His nature, His character, Himself is revealed. The sinner will not be judged for rejecting what he had no means of knowing. "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil" (John iii. 19).

We are not writing a theological treatise; but we do feel it to be a matter of the gravest moment to press upon the reader that his responsibility, as a sinner, is based upon the fact that the aspect of the salvation of God, and of the atonement of Christ, is most distinctly and decidedly "unto all," and not merely to a certain number of the human family. The glorious message is sent forth into all the world. Every one who hears it is invited to come. This is grounded upon the fact that Christ has put away sin—that the blood of atonement has been carried into the presence of God—that the barrier which sin presented has been flung down and abolished, and now the mighty tide of divine love can flow freely forth to the very vilest of the sons of men.

Such is the message; and when any one through grace believes it he can be further told that not only has Christ put away *sin*, but that also He has borne his *sins*—the actual sins of all His people—of all who believe in His name. The evangelist can stand up in the midst of assembled thousands, and declare that Christ has put away sin—that God is satisfied—that the way is open for all; and he can whisper the same in the ear of each and every sinner under heaven. Then, when any one has bowed down to this testimony—when the repentant, broken-hearted, self-judged sinner receives the blessed record—he can be further taught that his *sins* were all laid on Jesus, all borne and for ever put away by Him when He died on the cross.

This is the plain doctrine of Hebrews ix. 26, 28; and we have a striking type of it in the two goats of Leviticus xvi. If the reader will just turn to the passage he will find there, first, the *slain* goat; and secondly, the *scape*-goat. The blood of the slain goat was brought into the sanctuary and sprinkled there. This was a type of Christ putting away *sin*. Then the high priest, on behalf of the congregation, confessed all their *sins* upon the head of the scape-goat, and they were borne away into a land not inhabited. This was a type of Christ bearing the sins of His people. The two goats, taken together, give us a full view of the atonement of Christ, which, like the righteousness of God in Romans iii., is "unto all, and upon all them that believe."

All this is most simple. It removes many difficulties out of the way of the earnest seeker after peace. These difficulties arise in many cases from the conflicting dogmas of theological systems, and have no foundation whatever in Holy Scripture. There, all is as plain and as clear as God can make it. Each one who hears the message of God's free love is bound, not to say invited, to receive it; and judgment will, most assuredly, fall upon each and all who refuse or neglect the proffered mercy. It is utterly impossible for any one who has ever heard the gospel, or ever had the New Testament in his hand, to get rid of the awful responsibility that rests upon him to

accept God's salvation. Not a single soul will have to say, I could not believe, because I was not one of the elect, and did not get power to believe. No one will ever dare to say or even to think this. If any could take such ground, then where were the force or the meaning of the following burning words?—"The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with the angels of His power, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thess. i. 7, 8). Will any one ever be punished for not obeying the gospel if he is not responsible to yield that obedience? Most assuredly not. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

But does God send His gospel to people merely to place them under responsibility and increase their guilt? Far be the monstrous thought! He sends His gospel to the lost sinner in order that he may be *saved*, for God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. All, therefore, who perish shall have none but themselves to blame.

It is of the very last importance that the reader should be established in the knowledge and practical sense of what the atonement of Christ has accomplished for all who simply trust in Him. It is, we need hardly say, the only basis of peace. He has put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself; and He has borne our sins in His own body on the tree. It is, therefore, impossible that any question as to sin or guilt can ever arise. All has been "once and for ever" settled by the atoning death of the Lamb of God. True it is—alas, how true!—we all have sin in us; and we have, daily and hourly, to judge ourselves and judge our ways. It will ever hold good of us, so long as we are in a body of sin and death, that "in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing." But then nothing can ever touch the question of our soul's perfect and eternal acceptance. The conscience of the believer is as completely purged from every soil and stain as will be the whole creation by-and-by. If it were not so, Christ could not be where He now is. He has entered into the presence of God, there to appear for us. This leads us in the second place to consider.

THE ADVOCACY.

Very many souls are apt to confound two things which, though inseparably connected, are perfectly distinct, namely, advocacy and atonement. Not seeing the divine completeness of the atonement, they are in a certain way looking to the advocacy to do for them what the atonement has done. We must remember that though as to our standing we are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, yet as to the actual fact of our condition we are in the body. We are in spirit and by faith seated in heavenly places in Christ; but yet we are actually in the wilderness, subject to all sorts of infirmities, liable to fail and err in a thousand ways.

Now it is to meet our present actual state and wants that the advocacy, or priesthood, of Christ is designed. God be praised for the blessed provision! As those who are in the body passing through the wilderness, we need a great High Priest to maintain the link of communion, or to restore it when broken. Such a One we have, ever living to make intercession for us; nor could we get on for a single moment without Him. The work of atonement is never repeated; the work of the Advocate is never interrupted. When once the blood of Christ is applied to the soul by the power of the Holy Ghost, the application is never repeated. To think of a repetition is to deny its efficacy and to reduce it to the level of the blood of bulls and goats. No doubt people do not see this, and most assuredly they do not mean it; but such is the real tendency of the thought of a fresh application of the blood of sprinkling. It may be that persons who speak in this way really mean to put honor upon the blood of Christ, and to give expression to their own felt unworthiness; but, in truth, the best way to put honor upon the blood of Christ is to rejoice in what it has done for our souls; and the best way to set forth our own unworthiness is to feel and remember that we were so vile that nothing but the death of Christ could avail to meet our case. So vile were we that nothing but His blood could cleanse us. So precious is His blood that not a trace of our guilt remains. "The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth us from all sin."

Thus it stands in reference to the very feeblest child of God whose eye scans these lines. "All sins forgiven." Not a trace of guilt remains. Jesus is in the presence of God for us. He is there as a High Priest before God—as an Advocate with the Father. He has by His atoning death rent the veil—put away sin—brought us nigh to God in all the credit and virtue of His sacrifice, and now He lives to maintain us by His advocacy in the enjoyment of the place and privileges into which His blood has introduced us.

Hence the apostle says, "If any man sin, we have"—what? The blood? Nay, but "an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." The blood has done its work, and is ever before God according to its full value in His sight. Its efficacy is ever the same. But we have sinned; it may be only in thought; but even that thought is quite enough to interrupt our communion. Here is where advocacy comes in. If it were not that Jesus Christ is ever acting for us in the sanctuary above, our faith would most assuredly fail in moments in the which we have in any measure yielded to the voice of our sinful nature. Thus it was with Peter in that terrible hour of his temptation and fall: "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted (or restored), strengthen thy brethren" (Luke xxii. 21, 32).

Let the reader note this. "I have prayed for thee, that"—What? Was it that he might not fail? Nay, but that, having failed, his faith might not give way. Had Christ not prayed for his poor, feeble servant, he would have gone from bad to worse, and from worse to worst. But the intercession of Christ procured for Peter the grace of true repentance, self-judgment and bitter sorrow for his

sin, and finally complete restoration of his heart and conscience, so that the current of his communion—interrupted by sin, but restored by advocacy—might flow on as before.

Thus it is with us when, through lack of that holy vigilance which we should ever exercise, we commit sin: Jesus goes to the Father for us. He prays for us; and it is through the efficacy of His priestly intercession that we are convicted and brought to self-judgment, confession, and restoration. All is founded on the advocacy, and the advocacy is founded on the atonement.

And here it may be well to assert, in the clearest and strongest manner possible, that it is the sweet privilege of every believer not to commit sin. There is no necessity whatever why he should. "My little children," says the apostle, "these things write I unto you, that ye sin not." This is a most precious truth for every lover of holiness. *We need not sin*. Let us remember this. "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit [or, *practice*] sin; for His seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God" (1 John iii. 9).

This is the divine idea of a Christian. Alas, we do not always realize it! but that does not, and cannot, touch the precious truth. The divine nature, the new man, the life of Christ in the believer, cannot possibly sin, and it is the privilege of every believer so to walk as that nothing but the life of Christ may be seen. The Holy Ghost dwells in the believer on the ground of redemption, in order to give effect to the desires of the new nature, so that the flesh may be as though it did not exist, and nothing but Christ be seen in the believer's life.

It is of the utmost importance that this divine idea of Christian life should be seized and maintained. People sometimes ask the question, Is it possible for a Christian to live without committing sin? We reply in the language of the inspired apostle, "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not" (1 John ii. 1). And again, quoting the language of another inspired apostle, "How shall we, that are dead to sin, *live* any longer therein?" (Rom. vi. 2.) The Christian is viewed by God as "dead to sin"; and hence, if he yields to it he is practically denying his standing in a risen Christ. Alas, alas, we do sin, and hence the apostle adds, "If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the whole world."

This gives wonderful completeness to the work on which our souls repose. Such is the perfect efficacy of the atonement of Christ that we have one Advocate with us in order that we may not sin, and another Advocate with the Father if we do sin. The word rendered "Comforter" in John xiv. 16 is rendered "advocate" in 1 John iii. 1. We have one divine Person caring for us here, and we have another divine Person caring for us in heaven, and all this on the ground of the atoning death of Christ.

Will it be said that in writing thus we furnish a license for committing sin? God forbid! We have already declared, and would insist upon, the blessed possibility of living in such unbroken communion with God—of walking so in the Spirit—of being so filled and occupied with Christ—as that the flesh, or the old nature, may not appear. This we know is not always the case. "In many things we all offend," as James tells us. But no right-minded person, no lover of holiness, no spiritual Christian, could have any sympathy with those who say we *must* commit sin. Thank God, it is not so. But what a mercy it is, beloved Christian reader, to know that when we do fail there is One at the right hand of God to restore the broken link of communion! This He does by producing in our souls, by His Spirit who dwells in us—that "other Advocate"—the sense of failure, and leading us into self-judgment and true confession of the wrong, whatever it be.

We say "*true* confession," for it must be this if it be the fruit of the Spirit's work in the heart. It is not lightly and flippantly saying we have sinned, and then as lightly and flippantly sinning again. This is most sorrowful and most dangerous. We know nothing more hardening and demoralizing than this sort of thing. It is sure to lead to the most disastrous consequences. We have known cases of persons living in sin and satisfying themselves by a mere lip confession of their sin, and then going and committing the sin again and again; and this has gone on for months and years, until God in His faithfulness caused the whole thing to come out openly before others.

All this is most dreadful. It is Satan's way of hardening and deceiving the heart. Oh that we may watch against it, and ever keep a tender conscience! We may rest assured that when a true-hearted child of God is betrayed into sin the Holy Ghost will produce in him such a sense of it—will lead him into such intense self-loathing, such an abhorrence of the evil, such thorough self-judgment in the presence of God—as that he cannot lightly go and commit the sin again. This we may learn from the words of the apostle when he says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and"—mark this weighty clause—"to *cleanse us from all unrighteousness*." Here we have the precious fruit of the double advocacy. It is all presented in its fulness in this part of the first epistle of John. If any man sin, the blessed Paraclete on high intercedes with the Father, pleads the full merits of His atoning work, prays for the erring one on the ground of His having borne the judgment of that very sin. Then the other Paraclete acts in the conscience, produces repentance and confession, and brings the soul back into the light in the sweet sense that the sin is forgiven, the unrighteousness cleansed, and the communion perfectly restored. "He restoreth my soul: *He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness* for His name's sake" (Ps. xxiii. 3).

We trust the reader will be enabled to understand this great fundamental truth. Many, we are aware, find it difficult to reconcile the idea of intercession with the truth of a perfect atonement. If, say they, the atonement is perfect, what need is there of intercession? If the believer is made as white as snow by the blood of Christ—so white that the Spirit of God can dwell in his heart—

then what does he want of a priest? If by one offering Christ has perfected for ever all them that are sanctified, then what need have these perfected and sanctified ones of an advocate? Surely we must either admit the thought of an imperfect atonement or deny the need of advocacy?

Such is the reasoning of the human mind, but such is not the faith of Christians. Scripture does most surely teach us that the believer is washed as white as snow; that he is accepted in the Beloved—complete in Christ—perfectly forgiven and perfectly justified through the death and resurrection of Christ; that he can never come into judgment, but is passed from death unto life; that he is not in the flesh, but in the Spirit—not in the old creation, but in the new—not a member of the first Adam, but of the last; that he is dead to sin, dead to the world, dead to the law, because Christ has died, and the believer has died in Him. All this is largely unfolded and constantly insisted upon by the inspired writers. Scores of passages might easily be quoted in proof, were it needful.

But then there is another aspect of the Christian which must be taken into account. He is not in the flesh as to the ground of his standing, but he is in the body as to the fact of his condition. He is in Christ as to his standing, but he is also in the world as to the fact of his existence. He is surrounded by all sorts of temptations and difficulties, and he is in himself a poor feeble creature full of infirmities, not sufficient even to think anything as of himself. Nor is this all. Each true Christian is ever ready to acknowledge that in him, that is, in his flesh, there dwelleth no good thing. He is saved, thank God, and all is eternally settled; but then he has, *as a saved one*, to get through the wilderness; he has to labor to enter into God's rest, and here it is that priesthood comes in. The object of priesthood is not to complete the work of atonement, inasmuch as that work is as perfect as the One who accomplished it. But we have to be carried through the wilderness and brought into the rest that remains for the people of God, and for this end we have a great High Priest who is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God. His sympathy and succor are ours, and we could not get on for one moment without them. He ever liveth to make intercession for us, and by His ministry in the heavenly sanctuary He sustains us day by day in the full credit and value of His atoning work. He lifts us up when we fall, restores us when we wander, repairs the link of communion when snapped by our carelessness. In a word, He appears in the presence of God for us, and there carries on an uninterrupted service on our behalf, in virtue of which we are maintained in the integrity of the relationship into which His atoning death has introduced us.

Thus much as to the atonement and advocacy. It only remains for us to treat of the advent. We wish specially to remind the reader that in treating of the death of Christ we have left wholly untouched one grand point therein, namely, our death in Him.^[3] This we may, if God permit, go into on another occasion. It is immensely important as the power of deliverance from indwelling sin as well as from this present evil world and from the law. There are many who merely look to the death of Christ for pardon and justification, but they do not see the precious and emancipating truth of their having died in Him and their deliverance in consequence from the power of sin in them. This latter is the secret of victory over self and the world, and of deliverance from every form of legality and mere fleshly pietism.

Thus we have glanced at two of the weighty subjects presented to us in the closing verses of Heb. ix., namely, first, the precious atoning death of our Lord Jesus Christ in its two aspects; and secondly, His all-prevailing advocacy at God's right hand for us. It only remains for us to consider in the third place

HIS ADVENT,

which is here presented to us in immediate connection with those great foundation truths which have already engaged our attention, and which, moreover, are held and prized by all true Christians. Is it true that Christ hath appeared in this world to put away *sin* by the sacrifice of Himself? and to bear the *sins* of the many who through grace put their trust in Him? Is it true that He has passed into the heavens and taken His seat on the throne of God, there to appear for us? Yes, blessed be God, these are grand, vital and fundamental verities of the Christian faith. Well, then, it is equally true that He shall appear again, apart from the question of sin, unto salvation. "As it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time apart from sin unto salvation."

Here, then, we have the matter most definitely stated. As truly as Christ hath appeared on this earth—as truly as He lay in the manger of Bethlehem—was baptized in the waters of Jordan—was anointed with the Holy Ghost—was tempted of the devil in the wilderness—went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil—groaned, and wept, and prayed in Gethsemane—hung upon Calvary's accursed tree, and died, the Just for the unjust—was laid in the dark, silent tomb—rose victorious on the third day—ascended into the heavens, there to appear in the presence of God for His people—*so* truly shall He appear ere long in the clouds of heaven to receive His people to Himself. If we refuse one we must refuse all. If we question one we must question all. If we are unsettled as to one we must be unsettled as to all, inasmuch as all rest upon precisely the same basis, namely, the Holy Scriptures. How do I know that Jesus *hath* appeared? Because Scripture tells me so. How do I know that He *doth* appear? Because Scripture tells me so. How do I know that He *shall* appear? Because Scripture tells me so.

In a word, then, the doctrine of the atonement, the doctrine of the advocacy, and the doctrine of

the advent all rest on one and the same irrefragible foundation, namely, the simple declaration of the word of God, so that if we receive one we must receive all.

How is it then that while the Church of God in all ages has held and prized the doctrines of atonement and advocacy, she has practically lost sight of the doctrine of the advent? How comes it to pass that while the first two are regarded as essential, the last is deemed non-essential? Nay, we may go further and say, how is it that while a man who does not hold the first two is regarded as a heretic, and justly so, yet the man who holds the last is by many regarded as hardly sound in the faith or bringing in strange doctrine?

What answer can we give to these questions? Alas! alas! the Church has ceased to look for her Lord. Atonement and advocacy are held because they concern us; but the advent has been virtually let slip, although it so deeply concerns Him. It is due to the One who suffered and died on this earth that He should reign; to the One who wore a crown of thorns that He should wear a crown of glory; to the One who humbled Himself to the very dust of death that He should be exalted and that every knee should yet bow before Him.

Most surely this is so; and the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ will see to it and bring it to pass in His own appointed time. "Sit Thou at My right hand, until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool" (Ps. cx; Heb. i). The moment is rapidly approaching when that blessed One who is now hidden from the eyes of men shall appear in glory. Every eye shall see Him. As surely as He hung upon the cross and is now seated on the throne, so surely shall He appear in glory.

Reader, seeing these things are so, art thou among the number of "those that look for Him?" This is a solemn question. There are those who look for Him and there are those who do not. Now it is to the former that He shall appear unto salvation. He will come and receive His people unto Himself, that where He is, there they may be also (John xiv). These are His own loving words, spoken at the moment of His departure for the solace and comfort of His sorrowing disciples. He counted on their being troubled at the thought of His leaving them, and He seeks to comfort them by the assurance of His coming back. He does not say, Let not your hearts be troubled, for you shall soon follow Me. No; but "I will come again."

This is the proper hope of the Christian. Christ is coming. Are we ready? Are we looking for Him? Do we miss Him? Do we mourn His absence? It is impossible that we can be in the true attitude of waiting for Him if we do not feel His absence. He is coming. He may be here to-night. Ere another sun arises the voice of the archangel and the blast of the trumpet may be heard in the air. And what then? Why then the sleeping saints—all who have departed in the faith of Christ—all the redeemed of the Lord whose ashes repose in the graveyards and cemeteries around us or in the mighty depths of the ocean—all these shall rise. The living saints shall be changed in a moment, and all shall ascend up to meet the Lord in the air (1 Cor. xv. 51-54; 1 Thess. iv. 13-v. 11).

But what of the unconverted—the unbelieving—the unrepentant—the unprepared? What of all such? Ah! this is a question of awful solemnity. It makes the heart sink to reflect upon the case of those who are still in their sins—of those who have turned a deaf ear to all the entreaties and all the warnings which God in His long-suffering mercy has sent to them from week to week and year to year—of those who have sat under the sound of the gospel from their earliest days, and who have become, as we say, gospel-hardened. How dreadful will be the condition of all such when the Lord comes to receive His own! They shall be left behind to fall under the deep and dark delusion which God will assuredly send upon all who have heard and rejected the gospel. And what then? What is to follow this deep and dark delusion? The deeper and darker damnation of the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone.

Oh! shall we not sound a note of alarm in the ears of our fellow-sinners? Shall we not more earnestly and solemnly warn them to flee from the wrath to come? Shall we not seek by word and deed—by the double testimony of the lips and the life—to set before them the weighty fact that "the Lord is at hand"? May we feel it more deeply, and then we shall exhibit it more faithfully. There is immense moral power in the truth of the Lord's coming if it be really held in the heart and not merely in the head. If Christians only lived in the habitual expectation of the advent it would tell amazingly upon the unconverted around them.

May the Holy Ghost revive in the hearts of all God's people the blessed hope of their Lord's return, that they may be as men that wait for their Lord, that when He cometh and knocketh they may open unto Him immediately!

"THE TWO MUSTS."

In our Lord's discourse with Nicodemus He twice makes use of the word "must"—a word of immense depth and moral power in both cases. Let us ponder it for a few moments; for, though but a word of one syllable, it contains a volume of most precious evangelical truth in whichever light we view it.

I. And first, then, we read, "Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again." Here we

have the total setting aside of man in his very best estate. If I must be born again, if I must have a new life, a new nature, then it matters not in the smallest degree what I can or cannot boast of. Man, as born of a woman, enters this world with the image of his fallen parent stamped upon him. Man, as he came from the hand of his Creator, was made in the "image of God." Man, as he issues from the womb of his mother, bears the image and likeness of a fallen creature. Hence the force of our Lord's expression, "Ye must be born again." It is not said, Ye *must* mend, ye must try and be better, ye must alter your mode of living, ye must turn over a new leaf. Had it been thus, Nicodemus would never have asked, "How can these things be?" A man of the Pharisees would have understood any or all of these things. A change of conduct, a change of character, any moral reform, any self-improvement, is perfectly intelligible to a Pharisee of every age; but to be told "Ye *must* be *born* again" can only be understood by one who has reached the end of himself and his doings; who has been brought to see that in him, that is in his flesh, dwelleth no good thing; who sees himself as a thorough bankrupt without a certificate, who can never again set up on his own account. He must get a new life to which the verdict of bankruptcy cannot apply, and he must trade in the wealth of another, on which creditors have no possible claim.

There is immense power in this little word "*must*." It bears upon all alike. It speaks to the drunkard, and says, "You must be born again." It addresses the most rigid teetotaler, and says, "You must be born again." It speaks to every class, to every condition, to every grade and shade of character, to man in every rank and every clime, to every creed and every denomination, in its own clear, emphatic, sweeping style, and says, "You *must* be born again." It bears down with far more weight upon the conscience than any appeal that could be made on the ground of moral conduct. It does not interfere in the least with the question of moral reform, in any one of its many phases. It allows as broad a margin as any philanthropist or moral reformer may desire. It does not disturb the various distinctions which society, public opinion, law or equity has established. It leaves all these things perfectly untouched, but it raises its clear and commanding voice above them all, and says to the sinner—to man as born of a woman—to the worst and to the best of men, "You *must* be born again." It demands not reformation, but regeneration; not amendment, but a new life.

II. What then, it may be asked, are we to do? Whither are we to turn? How are we to get this new life? Our Lord's second "must" furnishes the reply. "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so *must* the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever *believeth* in Him should not perish, but have eternal life." This makes all plain. A second Man has entered the scene. There are two *men* and two *musters*. As to the first man, he must be born again, and as to the second Man, He must be lifted up. In a word, the Cross is the grand solution of the difficulty, the divine answer to the "How?" Am I completely struck down by the first "must"? Am I overwhelmed by the insuperable difficulty which it proposes to me? Am I on the very verge of despair as I contemplate the apparent impossibility of what, nevertheless, *must* be? Oh then, with what power does the second "must" fall on my heart! "The Son of man must be lifted up." Why must He? Because I must have new life, and this life is in the Son, but it could only be mine through His death. The death of the second Man is the only ground of life to the first—life to *me*. One look at Christ, is lifted up for me, is life eternal. The soul that simply believes on the Son of God, as dead and risen, is "born of water and of the Spirit;" he *hath* everlasting life—he *is* passed from death unto life, from the old creation into the new, from the first man to the Second, from guilt to righteousness, from condemnation to favor, from darkness to light, from Satan to God. May God the Spirit unfold to the reader's heart the beauty and power, the depth, the comprehensiveness, and moral glory of the two "musters."

"Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; that being justified by His grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life" (Titus 3: 5-7).

THE THRONE AND THE ALTAR.

(Isa. vi. 1-8).

In this sublime passage of Scripture we notice two prominent objects, namely, the throne and the altar; and, moreover, we perceive the action of these two objects upon the soul of the prophet. The entire scene is full of interest and instruction. May we gaze upon it aright!

"In the year that king Uzziah died, I saw also the Lord sitting upon a *throne*, *high* and *lifted up*, and His train filled the temple." This was a solemn and soul-subduing sight. It is ever a serious matter for a sinner to find himself standing before the throne of God with the unanswered claims of that throne bearing down upon his conscience. Isaiah found it to be so. The light of the throne revealed to him his true condition. And what was that light? It was the moral glory of Christ, as

we read in the Gospel of John, "These things said Esaias, when he saw His glory, and spake of Him" (Chap. xii. 41). Christ is the perfect standard by which every one must be measured. It matters not what I may think of myself, nor yet what others may think about me: the question is, What am I as viewed in the presence of Christ? The law may tell me what I ought to be; conscience may tell me I am not that; but it is only when the bright beams of Christ's moral glory pour themselves around me that I am enabled to form a just estimate of what I am. Then it is that the hidden chambers of my heart are laid open, the secret springs of action are revealed, the real condition is laid bare.

But perhaps my reader may ask, What do you mean by the moral glory of Christ? I mean the light which shone forth from Him in all His ways when He was down here in this dark world. It was this light that detected *man*, that disclosed what he was, that brought to light *all* that was in him. It was impossible for any one to escape the action of that light. It was a perfect blaze of divine purity, in view of which the seraphim could only cry out, "Holy, holy, holy!"

Need we marvel then if when Isaiah saw himself in the light of that glory he cried out, "Woe is me! for I am undone"? Nay; this was the proper utterance of one whose heart had been penetrated to its very centre by a light which makes all things perfectly manifest.

We have no reason to suppose that Isaiah was in any respect worse than his neighbors. We are not told that the catalogue of his sins was heavier or darker than that of thousands around him. He may have been to all human appearance just like others. But ah! my reader, only remember, I pray you, where the prophet stood when he exclaimed, "Woe is me!" It was not at the foot of the burning mount when "the ministration of death and condemnation" was given forth amid thunderings and lightnings, blackness, darkness and tempest. It was not there he stood, though even there a Moses had to say, "I exceedingly fear and quake"; but it was in the presence of the glory of Christ, the Lord God of Israel, that our prophet stood when he saw himself to be "unclean" and "undone." Such was his condition when seen in the light which reveals men and things just as they are.

"*I am undone.*" He does not say, "Woe is me! I am not what I ought to be." No; he saw deeper than this. He stood revealed in the power of a light which reaches to the most profound depths of the soul and discloses "the thoughts and intents of the heart." Isaiah had never before seen himself in such a light—measured himself by such a rule—weighed himself in such a balance. He now saw himself standing in the presence of Jehovah's throne without any ability whatever to meet the claims of that throne. He "saw Jehovah sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up." He saw himself a helpless, ruined, guilty sinner at an immeasurable distance from that throne and from the blessed One who sat thereon. He heard the cry of the seraphim, "Holy, holy, holy"; and the only response which he could send back from the depths of a broken heart was, "Unclean, unclean, unclean." He beheld a gulf of guilt and uncleanness separating him from Jehovah which no effort of his could ever bridge. Thus it was with him in that solemn moment when he gave forth that cry of a truly convicted soul, "Woe is me!" He was wholly engrossed with one thought, namely, *his own utter ruin*. He felt himself *a lost man*. He thought not of comparing himself with others, nor of seeking out some fellow-sinner worse than he. Ah, no! a divinely-convicted soul never thinks of such things. There is one grand, all-pervading idea, and that idea is embodied in the words, "I am undone."

And be it carefully noted by the reader that the prophet when under the convicting light of the throne is not occupied with what he had done or left undone. The question before his soul was not as to the evil he had done or the good he had left undone. No; it was something far deeper than this. In a word, he was occupied not with his *acts* but with his *condition*. He says, "*I am*" what? Defective in many things? Far behind in my duty? Deplorably short of what I ought to be? No. These and such-like confessions could never embody the experience of a heart on which the bright beams of Jehovah's throne had fallen in convicting power. True it is "we have done that which we ought not to have done, and left undone that which we ought to have done." But all this is merely the fruit of a nature which is radically corrupt, and when divine light breaks in upon us it will always lead us to the *root*. It will not merely conduct us from leaf to leaf or from branch to branch, but passing down along the trunk it will lay bare the hidden roots of that nature which we inherit by birth from our first parents, and cause us to see that the whole thing is irremediably ruined. Then it is we are constrained to cry out, "Woe is me!" Not because my *conduct* has been defective, but my nature is undone.

Thus it was that Isaiah stood before Jehovah's throne. And oh, what a place for a sinner to stand in! There are no excuses there—no palliating circumstances there—no qualifying clauses there—no blaming of men or things there. There is but one object seen there—seen in its guilt, its wretchedness and its ruin, and that object is SELF, and as to that object the tale is easily told. It is all summed up in that most solemn, weighty, suggestive word, "UNDONE." Yes; self is undone. That is all that can be said about it. Do what you will with it, and you cannot make it out to be aught but a hopeless, undone thing; and the more speedily and thoroughly this is understood the better.

Many take a long time to learn this foundation truth. They have not, as it were, stood in the full blaze of the throne, and as a consequence they have not been led to cry out with sufficient depth, emphasis or intensity, "I am undone!" It is the glory that shines from the throne which evokes the cry from the very depths of the soul. All who have ever stood before that throne have given utterance to the same confession, and it will ever be found that just in proportion to our experience of the *light* of the *throne* will be our experience of the *grace* of the *altar*. The two

things invariably go together. In this day of *grace* the throne and the altar are connected. In the day of *judgment* "the great white throne" will be seen without any altar. There will be no grace then. The *ruin* will then be seen without the *remedy*, and as for the *result*, it will be eternal perdition. Awful reality! O reader, beware of having to meet the light of the throne without the provision of the altar!

This conducts us, naturally, to the second object in the interesting scene before us, namely, *the altar*. The very moment Isaiah gave utterance to the deep conviction of what he was, he was introduced to the divine provisions of God's altar. "Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: and he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged."

Here, then, we have the rich provisions of Jehovah's altar, which, be it well remembered, is seen in immediate connection with Jehovah's throne. The two things are intimately connected in the history and experience of every convicted and converted soul. The guilt which the throne detects, the altar removes. If in the light of the throne one object is seen, namely, ruined, guilty, undone self; then, in the light of the altar, one object is seen, namely, a full, precious, all-sufficient Christ. The remedy reaches to the full extent of the ruin, and the same light that reveals the one reveals the other likewise. This gives settled repose to the conscience. God Himself has provided a remedy for all the ruin which the light of His throne has revealed. "This *hath touched* thy lips; and thine iniquity *is* taken away, and thy sin purged." Isaiah was brought into personal contact with the sacrifice, and the immediate result was the perfect removal of *all* his iniquity—the perfect purgation of *all* his sin.

Not a single spot remained. He could now stand in the light of that throne which had just detected and exposed his uncleanness, and know assuredly by that self-same light that not a speck of uncleanness remained. The very same light which manifested his sin, made manifest also the purging efficacy of the blood.

Such, then, is the precious and beautiful connection between the throne and the altar—a connection which may be easily traced through the inspired volume from Genesis to Revelation, and through the history of God's redeemed from Adam down to the present moment. All who have been really brought to Jesus have experienced the convicting light of the throne and the peace-giving virtues of the altar. All have been made to feel their ruin and cry out, "I am undone!" and all have been brought into personal contact with the sacrifice, and had their sin purged.

God's work is perfect. He convicts perfectly, and He purges perfectly. There is nothing superficial when He carries on His mighty work. The arrow of conviction penetrates to the very centre of the soul, only to be followed by the divine application of that blood which leaves not a stain upon the conscience; and the more deeply we are penetrated by the arrow, the deeper and more settled is our experience of the power of the blood. It is well to be thoroughly searched at the first—well to let the chambers of the heart be fully thrown open to the convicting action of the throne, for then we are sure to get a bolder grasp of that precious atoning blood that speaks peace to every believing heart.

And, my reader, let me ask you to pause here for a moment and mark the peculiar *style* of the divine action in the case of the prophet.

We all know how much depends upon the way in which a thing is done. A person may do me a favor, but he may do it in such a style as to do away with all the good of it.

Now in the scene before us we not only see a marvellous favor conferred, but conferred after such a fashion as to let us into the very secrets of the bosom of God. The divine remedy was not only applied to Isaiah's felt ruin, but applied in such a way as to let him know assuredly that the whole heart of God was in the application. "Then *flew* one of the seraphims unto me." The rapidity of the movement speaks volumes. It tells us distinctly of heaven's intense desire to tranquillize the convicted conscience, bind up the broken heart and heal the wounded spirit. The energy of divine love gave swiftness to the seraphic messenger as he winged his way down from Jehovah's throne to where a convicted sinner stood confessing himself "undone." What a scene! One of those very seraphims that with veiled face stood above Jehovah's throne crying, "Holy, holy, holy," passes from that throne to the altar, and from the altar away down to the deep depths of a convicted sinner's heart, there to apply the balmy virtues of a divine sacrifice. No sooner had the arrow from the throne wounded the heart than the seraph from the altar "flew" to heal the wound. No sooner had the throne poured forth its flood of living light to reveal to the prophet the blackness of his guilt than a tide of love rolled down upon him from the altar and bore away upon its bosom every trace of that guilt. Such is the style—such the manner of the love of God to sinners! Who would not trust Him?

Beloved reader, whosoever you are, in earnest desire for the welfare of your immortal soul, permit me to ask you if you have experienced the action of the throne and the altar? Have you ever retired from all that false light which the enemy of your precious soul would fling around you in order to prevent your getting a true insight into your total ruin? Have you ever stood where Isaiah found himself when he cried out, "Woe is me! for I am undone"? Have you ever been brought to own from your heart, "I have sinned"? (Job xxxiii.) If so, it is your privilege to enter this moment into the rich enjoyment of all that Christ has done for you on the cross.

You do not need to see any vision. You do not require to see a throne, an altar, a flying seraph.

You have the word of God to assure you "Christ suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God" (1 Pet. iii. 18). That same word also assures you that "all that believe *are* justified from *all* things" (Acts xiii. 39).

And is not this far better than many visions or many seraphim? Isaiah believed that his "iniquity was taken away, and his sin purged," when the angelic messenger told him so. And should you not believe that Jesus died for you when the word of God tells you so?

But perhaps you say, "How can I know that Jesus died for *me*?" I reply, In the way that any one may know it—simply by the word of God. There is no other way of knowing it. But you still object, "I do not see my name in the word of God." No; and even though your name were mentioned this would in no wise satisfy you, inasmuch as there might be hundreds bearing your name. But you see your state, your character, your condition. You see your photograph flung, with divine precision, upon the page of inspiration by the action of that light which makes all things manifest.

Do you not own yourself to be a sinner?—a deep-dyed and ruined sinner? If so the death of Christ applies itself as perfectly to you as the "live coal" did to Isaiah when the seraph declared to him, "This hath touched thy lips." The word is, "If any say I have sinned,"—What then? He will send him to hell? No; but "he will deliver him." The very moment you take your true place, and cry out, "Undone!" all that Christ has done, and all that He is becomes yours—yours now—yours for ever. You need not make any effort to improve your condition. Do what you will, and you cannot make yourself anything but undone. A single effort at improvement is but the evidence that you know not yet how bad, how *incurably* bad you are. You are "undone," and, as such, you have to stand still and see the salvation of God—a salvation the foundation of which was wrought out through the cross of Christ—a salvation which the Holy Ghost reveals on the authority of that Word which is settled for ever in heaven, and which God "has exalted according to all His name." May the blessed Spirit lead you *now* to put your trust in the name of Jesus, that so, ere you lay down this paper, you may know that your "iniquity *is* taken away, and your sin purged"! Then you will be able to follow me while, in a few closing words, I seek to unfold the practical result of all that has been engaging our attention.

We have seen the complete *ruin* of the sinner; we have seen the complete *remedy* in Christ; let us now look at the *result*, as exhibited in whole-hearted consecration to the service of God. Isaiah had nothing to do for salvation, but he had plenty to do for his Saviour. He had nothing to do to get his sins purged, but plenty to do for the One who had purged them. Now he gave the willing, ready expression of obedience to God when, on hearing that a messenger was needed, he answered, "Here am I; send me." This puts works in their proper place. The order is absolutely perfect. No one can do good works until he has experienced, in some degree, the action of the "throne" and the "altar." The light of the former must shew him what he is, and the provisions of the latter must shew him what Christ is ere he can say, "Here am I; send me."

This is a settled, universal truth, established in every section of inspiration, and illustrated in the biography of the saints of God and of the servants of Christ in every age, in every condition. All have been brought to see their *ruin* in the light of the throne, to see the *remedy* in the provisions of the altar ere they could exhibit the *result* in a life of practical devotedness. All this is from God the Father, through God the Son, by God the Holy Ghost—to whom be all the glory, world without end! Amen and Amen!

LEGALITY AND LEVITY

Feeling, as we trust we do, in some little measure our responsibility to the souls of our readers, as well as to the truth of God, we desire to offer a brief but pointed word of warning against two opposite evils which we can plainly see working among Christians at the present moment. These are legality on the one hand, and levity on the other.

As to the first of these evils, we have sought in many of our former papers to deliver precious souls out of a legal state, as being, at once, dishonoring to God and utterly subversive of their own peace and liberty. We have endeavored to set forth the free grace of God, the value of the blood of Christ, the standing of the believer before God in perfect righteousness and acceptance in Christ. These precious truths, when applied to the heart in the power of the Holy Ghost, must deliver it from all legal influences.

But then it frequently happens that persons, when apparently delivered from legality, run into the opposite evil of levity. This may arise from the fact that the doctrines of grace are only taken up intellectually, instead of being wrought into the soul by the power of the Spirit of God. A great amount of evangelical truth may be taken up in a very light way, in cases where there has been no deep work of conscience, no real breaking down of nature, no thorough subjugation of the flesh in the presence of God. When this is the case there is sure to be levity of spirit in some form or another. There will be a very wide margin allowed for worldliness of various kinds—a liberty given to nature wholly incompatible with practical Christianity. In addition to these things, there will be exhibited a very deplorable want of conscience in the practical details of daily life—duties neglected, work badly done, engagements not faithfully observed, sacred obligations trifled with,

debts contracted, extravagant habits indulged. All these things we place under the head of levity, and they are, alas! too common amongst the very highest professors of what is termed evangelical truth.

Now we deeply deplore this, and would desire to have our own souls, as well as the souls of all our Christian readers, really exercised before God about it. We fear there is a great deal of hollow profession amongst us, a great want of earnestness, truthfulness and reality in our ways. We are not sufficiently permeated by the spirit of genuine Christianity, or governed in all things by the word of God. We do not give sufficient attention to "the girdle of truth," or "the breastplate of righteousness." In this way the soul gets into a very bad state indeed; conscience does not act. The moral sensibilities become blunted. The claims of truth are not duly responded to. Positive evil is trifled with. Moral relaxation is allowed. So far from there being the *constraining* power of the love of Christ, leading forth in the activities of goodness, there is not even the *restraining* power of the fear of God keeping back from the activities of evil.

We appeal solemnly to the consciences of our readers as to these things. The present is a deeply solemn time for Christians. There is a demand for earnest, deep-toned devotedness to Christ, but this cannot possibly exist where the common claims of practical righteousness are neglected. We must ever remember that the self-same grace which effectually delivers the soul from legality is the only safeguard against all levity. We have done very little for a man, if anything at all, if we bring him out of a legal state into a light, easy-going, careless, unconscientious condition of heart. And yet we have frequently marked the history of souls, and noticed this sad fact respecting them, that when they were delivered out of darkness and bondage they became far less tender and sensitive. The flesh is ever ready to turn the grace of God into lasciviousness, and therefore it must be subdued.

It needs that the power of the Cross be applied to all that is of the flesh. We want to mingle the "bitter herbs" with our paschal feast. In other words, we want those deep spiritual exercises which result from positive entrance into the power of the sufferings of Christ. We need to meditate more profoundly upon the death of Christ—His death as a victim under the hand of God, His death as a martyr under the hand of man.

This, beloved reader, is at once the cure for legality and levity. The Cross, in its double aspect, delivers from both. Christ "gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father" (Gal. i. 4). By the Cross the believer is as completely delivered from this present evil world as he is forgiven his sins. He is not saved in order that he may enjoy the world, but that he may get done with it entirely. We know few things more dangerous for the soul than the combination of evangelical truth with worldliness, ease and self-indulgence—the adoption of a certain phraseology of truth where the conscience is not in the presence of God—a merely intellectual apprehension of *standing* without any earnest dealing with the practical *state*—clearness in doctrine as to title, without any conscientious reference to the moral condition.

We trust our reader will suffer the word of exhortation. We should deem ourselves deficient in faithfulness were we to withhold it. True, it is not an agreeable task to call attention to practical evils—to urge the solemn duty of self-judgment—to press upon the conscience the claims of practical godliness. It were far more grateful to the heart to unfold abstract truth, to dwell upon free grace and what it has done for us, to expatiate upon the moral glories of the inspired volume, in a word, to dwell upon the privileges which are ours in Christ. But there are times when the true, practical condition of things among Christians weighs heavily upon the heart and rouses the soul to make an urgent appeal to conscience in reference to matters of walk and conduct; and we believe the present to be such a time. The devil is ever busy, and on the alert. The Lord has granted much light upon His word for some years past. The gospel has been brought out with peculiar clearness and power. Thousands have been delivered from a legal state; and now the enemy is seeking to hinder the testimony by leading souls into a light, careless, carnal condition—leading them to neglect the wholesome and indispensable exercise of self-judgment. It is the deep sense of this that has suggested a word of warning on "*Legality and Levity*."

"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" (Titus ii. 11-14).

The veil is rent:—our souls draw near
Unto a throne of grace;
The merits of the Lord appear,
They fill the holy place.

His precious blood has spoken there,
Before and on the throne:
And His own wounds in heaven declare,
Th' atoning work is done.

'Tis finished!—here our souls have rest,
His work can never fail:
By Him, our Sacrifice and Priest,
We pass within the veil.

Within the holiest of all,
Cleansed by His precious blood,
Before the throne we prostrate fall,
And worship Thee, O God!

Boldly the heart and voice we raise,
His blood, His name, our plea:
Assured our prayers and songs of praise
Ascend, by Christ, to Thee.

A RISEN SAVIOUR'S CHALLENGE

(Luke xxiv.)

The period during which our blessed Lord lay in the tomb must needs have proved a dark and bewildering moment to many of those who looked for redemption in Israel. It would demand a calm, clear and vigorous faith to raise the heart above the heavy clouds which gathered just then upon the horizon of God's people, and it does not appear that many possessed such a faith at that trying moment.

We may doubtless look upon the two disciples who travelled together to Emmaus as illustrating the condition of many, if not all, the beloved saints of God during the three days and three nights that our beloved Lord lay in the heart of the earth. They were thoroughly bewildered and at their wits' end. "They talked together of all these things which had happened. And it came to pass that, while they communed together and reasoned, Jesus Himself drew near, and went with them. But their eyes were holden that they should not know Him."

Their minds were full of surrounding circumstances. All hope seemed gone. Their fondly cherished expectations were blasted, apparently. The whole scene was overcast by the dark shadow of death, and their poor hearts were sad.

But mark how the risen Saviour's challenge falls upon their drooping spirits! "And He said unto them, What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another, as ye walk, and are sad?"

Surely this was a reasonable and weighty question for those dear disciples—a question eminently calculated to recall them, as we say, to their senses. It was precisely what they wanted at the moment, occupied as they were with circumstances instead of resting in the eternal and immutable truth of God. Scripture was clear and plain enough had they only hearkened to its voice. But instead of listening only to the distinct testimony of the eternal Spirit in the Word they had allowed their minds to get thoroughly down under the action and influences of outward circumstances. Instead of standing with firm foot on the everlasting rock of divine revelation, they were struggling amid the billows of life's stormy ocean. In a word, they had for a moment fallen under the power of death so far as their minds were concerned, and no marvel if their hearts were sad and their communications gloomy.

And, beloved reader, does it not sometimes happen that you and I in like manner get down under the power of things seen and temporal, instead of living by faith in the light of things unseen and eternal? Yes, even we who profess to know and believe in a risen Saviour—who believe that we are dead and risen with Him—who have the Holy Ghost dwelling in us, do not we at times sink and cower? And do we not at such moments stand in need of a risen Saviour's challenge? Has not that precious, loving Saviour oftentimes occasion to put the question to our hearts, "What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another?" Does it not often happen that when we come together or when we walk by the way our "communications" are anything but what they ought to be? It may be gloomily moping together over the depressing circumstances which surround us—the weather—the prospects of the country—the state of trade—our poor health—the

difficulty of making both ends meet—anything and everything, in short, but the right thing.

Yes, and so occupied do we become with such things that our spiritual eyes are holden, and we do not take knowledge of the blessed One who in His tender faithful love is at our side, and He has to challenge our vagrant hearts with His pointed and powerful question, "What manner of communications are these that ye have?"

Let us think of this. It really demands our consideration. We are all far too apt to allow our minds to fall under the power and pressure of circumstances, instead of living in the power of faith. We get occupied with our surroundings instead of dwelling upon "things above"—those bright and blessed realities which are ours in Christ.

And what is the result? Do we better our circumstances, or brighten our prospects by gloomily moping over them? Not in the smallest degree. What then? We simply make ourselves miserable and our communications depressing; and, worst of all, we bring dishonor on the cause of Christ.

Christians forget how much is involved in their temper, manner, look and deportment in daily life. We forget that the Lord's glory is intimately bound up with our daily deportments. We all know that, in social life, we judge of the character of the head of a household by what we see of his children and servants. If we observed the children looking miserable and downcast, we should be disposed to pronounce their father morose, severe and arbitrary. If we see the servants crushed and overwrought, we consider the master hard-hearted and grinding. In short, as a rule, you can form a tolerably fair estimate of the head of a house by the tone, spirit, style and manner of the members of his household.

How earnestly, then, should we seek, as members of the household of *God*, to give a right impression of what He is by our temper, spirit, style and manner! If men of the world—those with whom we come in contact from day to day in the practical details of life—if they see us looking sour, morose, downcast—if they hear us giving utterance to doleful complaints about this, that and the other—if they see us occupied about our own things—grasping, griping and driving as hard bargains as others—if they see us grinding our servants with heavy work, low wages and poor fare—what estimate can they form of Him whom we call our Father and our Master in heaven?

Christian reader, let us not despise and turn away from such homely words. Depend upon it there is need of such in this day of much profession. There is a vast amount of intellectual traffic in truth which leaves the conscience unreached, the heart untouched, the life unaffected. We know we are dead and risen; but when anything occurs to touch *us*, either in our persons, in our relations, or in our interests, we speedily shew how little power that precious truth has upon us.

May the Lord give us grace to apply our hearts very seriously and earnestly to these things, so that there may be, in our daily course, a more faithful exhibition of a genuine Christianity—such an exhibition as shall glorify our own most gracious God and Father, and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ—and such, too, as shall afford to those who come in contact with us a fair specimen of what pure religion really is in its action upon the entire course and character.

May we all realize more a risen Saviour's presence, and find therein a triumphant answer to all the dark suggestions of the enemy, the depressing reasonings of our own hearts, and the deadening influence of surrounding circumstances. God, in His infinite mercy, grant it, for Jesus' sake.

It is impossible to read this charming section of inspiration (Luke xxiv.) and not be struck with what we may venture to call the rallying power of a risen Saviour's voice and presence. We see the dear disciples scattered hither and thither in doubt and perplexity, fear and despondency—some running to the sepulchre; some coming from it; some going to Emmaus, and some crowded together at Jerusalem, in various states and conditions.

But the voice and realized presence of Jesus rallied, reassured and encouraged them all, and brought all together around His own blessed Person in worship, love and praise. There was an indescribable power in His presence to meet every condition of heart and mind. Thus it was; thus it is; thus it ever must be, blessed and praised be His precious name! There is power in the presence of a risen Saviour to solve our difficulties, remove our perplexities, calm our fears, ease our burdens, dry our tears, meet our every need, tranquillize our minds and satisfy every craving of our hearts.

"Jesus! Thou art enough,
The mind and heart to fill;
Thy life—to calm the anxious soul
Thy love—its fear dispel."

The two disciples going to Emmaus proved something of this, if we are to judge from their own glowing words to one another. "Did not our heart burn within us, while He talked with us by the way, and while He opened to us the Scriptures?" Yes, here lay the deep and precious secret: "*He* talked with us"—and "*He* opened to us the Scriptures!" What seraphic moments! what high communion! what loving ministry! A risen Saviour rallying their hearts by His marvellous words and mighty exposition of the Scriptures.

What was the effect—what the necessary result? The two travellers instantly returned to Jerusalem to seek their brethren. It could not be otherwise. If we lose sight of a risen Saviour we

are sure to get away from our brethren, sure to get occupied with our own things; to pursue our own way—to get into coldness, deadness, darkness and selfishness. But, on the other hand, the moment we get really into the presence of Christ, when we hear His voice and feel the sweetness and power of His love, when our hearts are brought under the mighty moral influence of His most precious loving ministry, then we are led out in true affection and interest after all our brethren and in earnest desire to find our place in their midst in order that we may communicate to them the deep joy that is filling our own souls. We may lay it down as a fixed principle—a spiritual axiom—that it is utterly impossible to breathe the atmosphere of a risen Saviour's presence and remain in an isolated, independent or fragmentary condition. The necessary effect of His dear presence is to melt the heart and cause it to flow out in streams of tender affection toward all that belong to Him.

But let us pursue our chapter.

"And they rose up the same hour" of the night—thus proving they had but little business at Emmaus, or how paramount was the blessed object now before them, "and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven gathered together, and them that were with them, saying, The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon. And they told what things were done in the way, and how He was known of them in breaking of bread. And as they thus spake, Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit."

They, too, needed a risen Saviour's challenge to bring them to their senses—to calm their fears and raise their drooping spirits. They needed to realize the power of His presence as the risen One. They had just declared to their two brethren from Emmaus that "The Lord is risen indeed;" but yet when their risen Lord appeared to them they did not know Him, and He had to challenge their hearts with His stirring words, "Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself: handle Me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see Me have. And when He had thus spoken, He shewed them His hands and His feet. And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, He said unto them, Have ye here any meat? And they gave Him a piece of a broiled fish, and of an honeycomb. And He took it, and did eat before them."

What tender love! What gracious condescension to their weakness and need! What compassionate entrance into all their feelings, spite of their folly and unbelief! Gracious Saviour! Who would not love Thee? Who would not trust Thee? May the whole heart be absorbed with Thee! May the whole life be cordially devoted to Thy blessed service! May Thy cause command all our energies! May all we have and all we love be laid on Thine altar as a reasonable service! May the eternal Spirit work in us for the accomplishment of these grand and longed-for objects!

But ere closing this brief article there is one point of special interest and value to which we must call the attention of the Christian reader, and that is, the way in which the risen Saviour puts honor upon the written Word. He rebuked the two travellers for their slowness of heart to believe the Scriptures. "And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself."

So also in His interview with the eleven and the rest at Jerusalem. No sooner had He satisfied them as to His identity than He sought to conduct their souls to the same divine authority—the Holy Scriptures. "And He said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, *which were written* in the law of Moses, and in the Prophets, and in the Psalms, concerning Me. Then opened He their understanding, that they might understand *the Scriptures*, and said unto them, *Thus it is written*, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem."

All this is of the deepest possible importance at the present moment. We feel persuaded that professing Christians everywhere need to have their hearts stirred up in reference to the paramount claims of the word of God, its absolute authority over the conscience, its formative power, its complete sway over the entire course, character and conduct.

It is to be feared, greatly feared, that Holy Scripture is fast losing its divine place in the hearts of those who profess to take it as the divine rule of faith and morals. We have often heard that watchword sounded in our ears, "The Bible, and the Bible alone, is the religion of Protestants." Alas! alas! if this motto were ever really true we fear that its truth at this moment is more than questionable. Very few, comparatively, even of those who occupy the very highest platform of profession seem to admit, and still fewer actually acknowledge practically, that *in all things*—whether of faith or morals—in all the practical details of life, in the Church, in the family, in the business and in our private walk from day to day—we are to be governed absolutely by that commanding, that mighty, that morally glorious sentence, "It is written"—a sentence enhanced exceedingly in value and heightened in its moral glory by the telling fact that it was used thrice by our adorable Lord at the opening of His public career, in His conflict with the adversary, and sounded in the ears of His loved ones just as He was about to ascend into the heavens.

Yes, dearly beloved Christian reader, "It is written" was a favorite sentence with our divine Master and Lord. He ever obeyed the Word. He yielded a hearty and unqualified submission to its holy authority in all things. He lived on it and by it from first to last. He walked according to it and never acted without it. He did not reason or question, imply or infer, He did not add or diminish or qualify in any one way—*He obeyed*. Yes; He, the eternal Son of the Father—Himself

God over all blessed for ever—having become a man, lived on the Holy Scriptures and walked by their rule continually. He made them the food of His soul, the material and the basis of His marvellous ministry—the divine authority of His perfect path.

In all this He was our great Exemplar. Oh, may we follow His blessed footsteps! May we bring ourselves, our ways, our habits, our associations, our surroundings, to the test of Holy Scripture, and reject with whole-hearted decision everything, no matter what or by whom propounded, that will not bear that searching light.

We are most thoroughly persuaded that in hundreds of thousands of cases the first grand point to be gained is to recall the heart to that delightful attitude in which the word of God is *fully* owned and submitted to as an absolute authority. It is positively labor lost to be arguing and disputing with a man who does not give Scripture the self-same place that our Lord Jesus Christ gave it. And when a man does this there is no need of argument. What is really needed is to make the word of God the basis of our individual peace and the authority of our individual path. May we all do so!

O come, Thou stricken Lamb of God!
Who shed'st for us Thine own life-blood,
And teach us all Thy love—then pain
Were sweet and life or death were gain.

Take Thou our hearts, and let them be
For ever closed to all but Thee;
Thy willing servants, let us wear
The seal of love for ever there.

How blest are they who still abide
Close shelter'd by Thy watchful side;
Who life and strength from Thee receive,
And with Thee move, and in Thee live.

Ah, Lord! enlarge our scanty thought,
To know the wonders Thou hast wrought;
Unloose our stammering tongues to tell
Thy love, immense, unsearchable.

First-born of many brethren, Thou!
To whom both heaven and earth must bow;
Heirs of Thy shame and of Thy throne;
We bear Thy cross, and seek Thy crown.

THE REMNANT

PAST AND PRESENT

It is at once interesting, instructive and encouraging to trace through Scripture the history of what is called "The Remnant." We may remark at the outset that the fact of there being a remnant proves the failure of the ostensible witness or professing body, whether Jewish or Christian. If all were faithful there would, of course, be no moral ground for a remnant, nothing to distinguish a few from the general body of professors. The remnant, at any time, will be found to consist of those who feel and own the common failure and ruin, and count on God, and cleave to His Word. These are the great characteristic marks of the remnant in every age. We have failed, but God is faithful, and His mercy is from everlasting to everlasting.

Now in tracing the history of the remnant in Old Testament times we find that the lower down we go in the nation's history, the richer the display of divine grace; and, further, the deeper the moral gloom, the brighter the flashes of individual faith. This is fraught with the most blessed encouragement for every true-hearted child of God and servant of Christ who feels and owns the ruin of the whole professing Church. It is cheering beyond expression for every faithful soul to be assured that, however the Church has failed, it is the privilege of the individual believer to enjoy as full and precious fellowship with God, and pursue as true a path of discipleship as ever was known in the brightest days of the Church's history. Let us turn to Scripture for illustration.

In 2 Chronicles xxx. we have a refreshing and encouraging record of a passover kept in the reign of Hezekiah, when the visible unity of the nation was broken up; and failure and ruin had come in. We do not attempt to quote the whole passage, much as we should like to do so, for it is most

precious and soul-stirring. We merely give the closing lines as bearing upon our thesis. "So there was great joy in Jerusalem: *for since the time of Solomon the son of David king of Israel there was not the like in Jerusalem.*" Here then we have a lovely illustration of the grace of God meeting those of His people who owned their failure and sin and took their true place in His presence. Hezekiah and those with him were fully convinced of their low condition, and hence they did not presume to keep the passover in the first month. They availed themselves of the provision of grace, as recorded in Numbers ix., and kept the feast in the second month. "For a multitude of the people ... had not cleansed themselves, yet did they eat the passover otherwise than it was written. But Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, The good Lord pardon *every one that prepareth his heart to seek God*, the Lord God of his fathers, though ... not according to the purification of the sanctuary. And the Lord harkened to Hezekiah, and healed the people" (Chap. xxx. 18-20).

Here we see divine grace meeting, as it ever does, those who truly confess their failure and weakness. There was no assumption or pretension, no hardness or indifference, no attempt to hide their true condition, no setting up to be all right; no, they took their true place, and cast themselves on that exhaustless grace which never fails to meet a contrite heart.

What was the result? "The children of Israel that were present at Jerusalem kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days *with great gladness*: and the Levites and the priests praised the Lord day by day, singing with loud instruments unto the Lord. And Hezekiah spake comfortably [to the heart] unto all the Levites that taught the good knowledge of the Lord: and they did eat throughout the feast seven days, offering peace offerings, and making confession to the Lord God of their fathers. And the whole assembly took counsel to keep other seven days: and they kept other seven days with gladness" (Chap. xxx. 21-23).

Now we may rest assured that all this was most grateful to the heart of Jehovah, God of Israel. True there was weakness, failure, short-coming. Things were not externally what they were in Solomon's day. Doubtless many may have looked upon Hezekiah's acting as presumptuous in convening such an assembly under the circumstances. Indeed, we are told that his touching and beautiful invitation was mocked and laughed to scorn throughout Ephraim, Manasseh and Zebulun. Thus it is, alas! too often. The actings of faith are not understood, because the precious grace of God is not understood. But "divers of Asher and Manasseh and Zebulun *humbled themselves*, and came to Jerusalem," and they were richly rewarded by coming in for a feast of fat things such as had not been celebrated since the days of Solomon. There is no limit to the blessing which grace has in store for the broken and contrite heart. If all Israel had responded to Hezekiah's touching appeal, they would have shared in the blessing; but they were *unbroken*, and therefore *unblessed*! Let us all remember this; we may rest assured it has a voice and a needed lesson for us. May we hear and learn!

We shall now pass on to the reign of the pious and devoted king Josiah, when the nation was on the very eve of dissolution. Here we have a very striking and beautiful illustration of our thesis. We do not attempt to go into details, having done so elsewhere.^[4]

We shall merely quote the few closing lines. "And the children of Israel that were present kept the passover at that time, and the feast of unleavened bread seven days. *And there was no passover like to that kept in Israel from the days of Samuel the prophet; neither did all the kings of Israel keep such a passover as Josiah kept*, and the priests, and the Levites, and all Judah and Israel that were present, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. In the eighteenth year of the reign of Josiah was this passover kept" (2 Chron. xxxv. 17-19).

What a very remarkable testimony! In Hezekiah's passover we are carried back to the brilliant reign of Solomon; but here we have something brighter still. And if it be asked what it was that threw such a halo of glory around Josiah's passover, we believe it was the fact of its being the fruit of holy and reverent obedience to the word of God in the midst of abounding ruin and corruption, error and confusion. The activities of faith in an obedient and devoted heart were thrown into relief by the dark background of the nation's condition.

All this is full of encouragement and comfort for every true lover of Christ. Many might have thought it very presumptuous of Josiah to pursue such a course at such a moment and under such circumstances; but it was the very reverse of presumption, as we may gather from the blessed message sent to him from the Lord by the mouth of Huldah, the prophetess: "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel concerning the words which thou hast heard; *Because thy heart was tender, and thou didst humble thyself before God*, when thou heardest His words against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, and humbledst thyself before Me, and didst rend thy clothes, and weep before Me; I have even heard thee also, saith the Lord" (Chap. xxxiv. 26, 27).

Here we have the moral basis of Josiah's remarkable career; and most assuredly there was nothing savoring of presumption therein. A contrite heart, weeping eyes and rent garments are not the accompaniments of presumption or self-confidence. No; they are the precious results of the word of God acting on the heart and conscience and leading to a course of deep-toned personal devotedness, most cheering and edifying to contemplate. Oh, that there were more of it amongst us! Truly the heart longs for it. May the word of God so tell upon our whole moral being that instead of yielding to the condition of things around us we may live above it and pass through it as witnesses to the eternal reality of the truth of God and the imperishable virtues of the name of Jesus.

But we must pass on from the interesting history of Josiah, and present to the reader some

further illustrations of our theme. Hardly had that beloved servant of God passed off the scene when every trace of his blessed work was swept away, and the heavy tide of judgment, long held back in the long-suffering mercy of God, rolled over the land. Jerusalem was laid in ruins, its temple burnt to the ground, and all the people who escaped were carried captive to Babylon, there to hang their harps on the willows and weep over the faded light of other days.

But, blessed forever be the God of all grace, He never leaves Himself without a witness; and hence, during the long and dreary period of Babylonish captivity, we find some most striking and beautiful proofs of the statement that the greater the ruin the richer the grace, and the deeper the gloom the brighter the flashes of individual faith. There was then, as there ever is, "a remnant according to the election of grace"—a little band of devoted men who loved the Lord and were true to His word amid the pollutions and abominations of Babylon, and who were prepared to face the fiery furnace and the lions' den for the truth of God.

The opening chapters of the book of Daniel furnish some magnificent results of individual faith and devotedness. Look, for example, at chap. ii. 46. Where in the history of the nation of Israel have we aught more striking than what is here recorded? Earth's greatest monarch humbled before a captive exile and giving forth this wonderful testimony: "The king answered unto Daniel, and said, Of a truth it is, that your God is a God of gods, and a Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, seeing thou couldst reveal this secret."

But where did Daniel get the power to reveal the king's secret? Verses 17 and 18 supply the lovely answer: "Then Daniel went to his house, and made the thing known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions: that they would desire mercies of the God of heaven concerning this secret." Here we have a prayer-meeting in Babylon. These dear men were of one heart and one mind. They were one in their purpose to refuse the king's meat and wine. They were resolved, by the grace of God, to tread the holy path of separation, though captive exiles in Babylon; and they got together for prayer, and received an abundant answer.

Can aught be finer than this? What an encouragement to the Lord's beloved people in darkest days to hold fast Christ's word, and not deny His precious name! Is it not most refreshing and edifying to find amid the dark days of Babylonish captivity a few true-hearted men treading in holy fellowship the path of separation and dependence? They stood for God in the king's palace, and God was with them in the furnace and in the lions' den, and conferred upon them the high privilege of standing before the world as the servants of the Most High God. They refused the king's meat; they would not worship the king's image; they kept God's word and confessed His name utterly regardless of consequences. They did not say, "We must go with the times; we must do as others do; there is no need to make ourselves singular; we must outwardly conform to the public worship, the religion of the State, and hold our own private opinions all the same; we are not called to withstand the faith of the nation; being in Babylon, we must conform to Babylon's religion."

Thank God, Daniel and his beloved companions did not adopt this contemptible, time-serving policy. No! and what is more, they did not draw a plea, from the complete wreck of Israel's national polity, for lowering the standard of individual faithfulness. They felt—could not but feel, the ruin. They confessed their sin, and the sin of the nation; they felt that, so far as they were concerned, sackcloth and ashes became them; they would bow down their whole moral being beneath that solemn word, "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself." All this was, alas, too true; but that was no reason why they should defile themselves with the king's meat, worship the king's image, or give up the worship of the one true and living God. Ah, *God* was before their eyes, and Him they served and obeyed.

All this is full of the most precious teaching for all the Lord's people at the present moment. There are two special evils which we have to guard against. We must beware of ecclesiastical pretension or boasting in mere Church position, without an exercised conscience and the holy fear of God. This is a terrible evil, against which every beloved child of God should most sedulously watch. We must never forget that the professing Church is a hopeless wreck, and that any human effort to restore it is a delusion. We are not called, and hence not qualified, to restore it. The Holy Ghost is nevertheless forming the body of Christ, and hastening its completion for the Lord's return.

But, on the other hand, we are not to draw a plea from the ruin of the Church for laxity as to truth, or sluggishness in our personal walk. We are in great danger of this. There is no reason whatever why any child of God, or servant of Christ, should do or sanction what is wrong, or continue for an hour in association with aught that has not for its authority, "Thus saith the Lord." "Let *every one* that nameth the name of the Lord *depart* from iniquity." And what then? Stand alone? Do nothing? Not so, thanks and praise to our ever-gracious God! But "follow righteousness, faith, love, peace, *with them* that call on the Lord out of a pure heart"—a heart true to Christ and His interests.

But we must pursue our subject, and ask the reader to turn to Neh. viii. We have been looking at the remnant before the captivity and during the captivity; and now we are called to look at them after the captivity; brought back, by the rich mercy of God, into their own beloved land. We shall not attempt to go into details, but just take one weighty fact in illustration of our special thesis—a fact of immense importance for the whole Church of God at the present moment. We shall quote a few verses of this lovely scripture: "So they read in *the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading....* And on the second day were gathered together the chief of the fathers of all the people, the priests, and the Levites, unto Ezra

the scribe, even *to understand the words of the law*. And they found written in the law which the Lord had commanded by Moses, that the children of Israel should dwell in booths in the feast of the seventh month.... And all the congregation of them that were come again out of the captivity made booths, and sat under the booths: for *since the days of Joshua the son of Nun* unto that day had not the children of Israel done so. And there was very great gladness. Also day by day, from the first day unto the last day, he read in the book of the law of God. And they kept the feast seven days; and on the eighth day was a solemn assembly, according unto the manner."

This is very striking. Here we find a feeble remnant gathered round the word of God, holding a reading-meeting, and getting to understand the truth and feel its power on the heart and conscience. And what was the result? Nothing less than the celebration of the feast of tabernacles, which had never been kept since the days of Joshua the son of Nun. Throughout the days of the judges, the days of Samuel the prophet, the days of the kings—even the brilliant days of David and Solomon—the feast of tabernacles had never been celebrated. It was reserved for a feeble company of returned exiles to keep, amid the ruins of Jerusalem, this precious and beautiful festival—the type of Israel's glorious future.

Was this presumption? Nay, it was simple obedience to the word of God. It was written in the book—written for them; they acted upon it. "And there was very great gladness." There was no pretension, no setting up to be anything, no boasting, no attempt to hide their true condition; they were a poor, feeble, despised remnant, taking their true place, broken and contrite, confessing their failure, deeply conscious that it was not with them as it was in the days of Solomon, David, and Joshua. But they heard the word of God—heard and understood—bowed to its holy authority—kept the feast. "And there was very great gladness." This surely is another striking and beautiful illustration of our theme, that the greater the ruin, the richer the grace; and the deeper the gloom, the brighter the flashes of individual faith. At all times, and in all places, the contrite and confiding heart is met by unqualified, unbounded grace.

We shall now turn, for a moment, to the last page of Old Testament Scripture—the prophecy of Malachi. Many years have rolled by since the bright days of Ezra and Nehemiah, and we have here a most sorrowful picture of Israel's condition. Alas, alas! "the down grade" has been rapidly trodden. It is the same sad story—"O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself!" Let us quote a few sentences:

"Ye offer polluted bread upon Mine altar; and ye say, Wherein have we polluted Thee? In that ye say the table of the Lord is contemptible.... Who is there even among you that would shut the doors for naught? neither do ye kindle fire on Mine altar for naught. I have no pleasure in you, saith the Lord of hosts, neither will I accept an offering at your hand.... Ye say, The table of the Lord is polluted; and the fruit thereof, even His meat, is contemptible. Ye said also, Behold, what a weariness is it! and ye have snuffed at it, saith the Lord of hosts; and ye brought that which was torn, and the lame, and the sick; thus ye brought an offering: should I accept this of your hand? saith the Lord" (chap. i. 7, 10, 12, 13; see also chap. iii. 5-9).

What a deplorable condition of things! It is simply heart-breaking to contemplate. The public worship of God brought into utter contempt; the ministers of religion working only for hire; venality and corruption in connection with the holy service of God; every form of moral pravity practiced amongst the people. In short, it was a scene of deep moral gloom, depressing beyond expression to all who cared for the Lord's interests.

And yet, even in the midst of this terrible scene, we have a most touching and exquisite illustration of our thesis. As ever, there is a remnant—a beloved company who honored and loved the Lord, and found in Him their centre, their object, their delight. "Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another; and the Lord harkened, and heard, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon His name. And they shall be Mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels [my special treasure]; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him."

How lovely is all this! What a contrast to the general condition of things! We may range through the entire history of the nation, and find nothing like this. Where do we read of "a book of remembrance written before the Lord"? Nowhere; not even amidst the brilliant victories of Joshua and David, or the splendors of Solomon. It may be said there was no need. That is not the point. What we have to ponder is the striking fact that the words and ways of this feeble remnant, in the very midst of abounding wickedness, were so refreshing to the heart of God that He had a book of remembrance written about them. We may safely assert that the communings of these beloved ones were more grateful to the heart of God than the singers and trumpeters in Solomon's day. "They spake often one to another." "They feared the Lord, and thought upon His name." There was individual devotedness, personal attachment; they loved the Lord; and this drew them together.

Nothing can be more lovely. Would there were more of it in our midst! Those dear people were not doing anything very great or showy in man's view; but ah, they loved the Lord, they thought of Him, and their common attachment to Him drew them together to speak of Him; and this gave a charm to their reunions which gratified and refreshed the heart of God! It stood out in bright and beautiful relief from the dark background of hirelingism and heartless routine with which they were surrounded. They were not bound together by certain views or opinions which they held in common, though doubtless they had their views and opinions; neither were they held together by ritualistic services or ceremonial observances; no, they had something far better and higher than any of these things; they were drawn and knit together by deep-toned personal

devotedness to the Lord, and this was agreeable to His heart. He was weary with the whole system of ritualism, but refreshed by the genuine devotedness of a few precious souls who got together as often as they could to speak one to another, and to encourage one another in the Lord.

Would that there were more of this amongst us! We long for it, and we may just own to the reader that our one earnest desire in writing this paper is to promote it. We greatly dread the withering, paralyzing influence of mere formalism or religious routine—getting into a groove, and going on day after day, week after week, year after year, in a poor, cold, formal manner, most offensive to the loving heart of our adorable Lord and Saviour, who desires to be surrounded by a company of whole-hearted, devoted followers, true to His name, true to His word, true to one another for His sake, seeking to serve Him in every right way, while ardently looking out for His blessed appearing. May the Spirit of God work mightily in the hearts of all His people, healing, restoring, reviving and maintaining a faithful company to welcome the heavenly Bridegroom! Let us cry to our gracious God day and night for this.

I might here close this paper, were it not that I am anxious to present the reader with two or three illustrations drawn from the precious pages of the New Testament. In the opening of Luke's Gospel we have a lovely picture of a remnant in the midst of a hollow, heartless profession. We listen to the spiritual heart-utterances of Mary, Elizabeth, Zacharias, and Simeon. We read of Anna the prophetess, who spoke of Jesus to all who looked for redemption in Jerusalem. I remember hearing my beloved and revered old friend J. N. D. say in reference to Anna, "I am sure I do not know how she managed to get at them at all, but she did." Yes, she did, because she loved the Lord and loved His dear people, and delighted to find them out and speak of Him. It is just our beloved remnant in Malachi over again. Nothing can be more lovely or refreshing. It was the exquisite and fragrant fruit of deep-toned love to the Lord in contrast with the wearisome forms of dead religiousness.

We shall now pass on to the epistle of Jude. Here we find apostate Christendom in all its appalling forms of wickedness, just as in Malachi we had apostate Judaism. But our object just now is not apostate Christendom, but the Christian remnant. Thanks and praise to our gracious God, there is always a remnant marked off from the mass of corrupt profession, and characterized by genuine attachment to Christ, to His interests, and to every member of His beloved body.

It is to this remnant that the inspired apostle addresses his solemn and weighty epistle. It is not to any special assembly, but "To them that are *sanctified* by God the Father, and *preserved* in Jesus Christ, *called: mercy* unto you, and *peace*, and *love*, be multiplied."

Blessed position! Precious portion! "Separated," "preserved," "called,"—this is the position. "Mercy," "peace," "love,"—this is the portion. And all this made sure to every true-hearted child of God on the face of the earth ere a single word is written about the overwhelming tide of apostasy which was so soon to roll over the whole professing Church.

We repeat, and would emphasise the expression, "to every true-hearted child of God." As in Israel of old, so in the professing Church, the remnant will be found to consist of those who are true to Christ, hold fast His word in the face of everything, are devoted to His precious interests, and who love His appearing. In a word, it must be a living reality, and not mere church-membership or nominal fellowship here or there, with this or that. Moreover it is not assuming to be, but really being, of the remnant—not the name, but the spiritual power; so the apostle says, "I will know, not the speech, ... but the power." A weighty word for us all.

And now let us turn for a few moments to the precious words of exhortation addressed to the Christian remnant. May the Spirit clothe them with power to our souls!

"But, beloved, remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ." They are directed to the Holy Scriptures, and to these alone. It is not to human tradition of any kind; not to the Fathers; not to the decrees of general councils; not to the commandments and doctrines of men; not to any of these, or all put together, which can only bewilder, perplex, and mislead; but to the pure and precious word of God, that perfect revelation which in His infinite goodness He has put into our hands, and which can make a little child "wise unto salvation" and make a man "*perfect*, thoroughly furnished unto *all good works*" (2 Tim. iii.).

The Lord be praised for this unspeakable favor! No human language can set forth the importance of having a divinely settled authority for our path. All we want is to be absolutely and completely governed by it, to have it hidden in our hearts, acting on our consciences, forming our character, governing our conduct *in everything*. To give the word of God this place is one of the marked characteristics of the Christian remnant. It is not the worthless, baseless formulary, "The Bible, and the Bible only, is the religion of Protestants." Protestantism is not the Church of God, it is not the Christian remnant. The Reformation was the result of a blessed work of the Spirit of God; but Protestantism, in all its denominational branches, is what man has made of it. In it human organization has displaced the living work of the Spirit, and the form of godliness has displaced the power of individual faith. No mere *ism*, call it what you please, can ever be regarded as the Church of God or the Christian remnant. It is of the very utmost moral importance to see this. The professing Church has utterly failed, its corporate unity is hopelessly gone, just as we see in the history of Israel. But the Christian remnant is made up of all those who truly feel and own the ruin, who are governed by the Word and led by the Spirit, in separation from what is contrary to that Word, to wait for their Lord.

Let us see how all this comes out in Jude's address to the remnant. "But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life."

Here then we have a lovely view of the true Christian remnant and their occupation among themselves. Nothing can be more beautiful. We may be asked, to whom does this charming passage apply? We answer, to those—whoever and wherever they are—addressed in the first verse of the epistle: "To them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called." Nothing can be more simple or more blessed. It is perfectly obvious that these words do not and cannot apply to mere professors; neither can they apply to any ecclesiastical body under the sun. In a word, they apply to the living members of the body of Christ. All such should be found together building up themselves on their most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keeping themselves in the love of God and looking out for their Lord.

This is the Christian remnant, just as in Malachi iii. we have the Jewish remnant. Nothing can be more lovely. It is the position in which all true Christians should be found. There is no pretension to setting themselves up to be anything, no attempt to ignore the sad and solemn fact of the utter ruin of the professing Church. It is a Christian remnant in the midst of Christendom's ruins, true to the Person of Christ, true to His word; knit together in true Christian love—not the love of sect, party, clique, or coterie, but love in the Spirit, love to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity; love expressing itself in true devotedness to Christ and His precious interests; and loving ministry to all who belong to Him and seek to reflect Him in all their ways. It is not resting in mere position, regardless of condition—a terrible snare of the devil—but a healthy union of the two in a life characterized by sound principle and gracious practice; the kingdom of God established in the heart and developing itself in the whole practical career.

Such then is the position, the condition, the practice of the true Christian remnant; and we may rest assured that, where these things are realized and carried out, there will be as rich enjoyment of Christ, as full communion with God, and as bright a testimony to the glorious truth of New Testament Christianity as ever was known in the brightest days of the Church's history. In a word, there will be that which will glorify the name of God, gratify the heart of Christ, and tell with living power on the hearts and consciences of men. May God, in His infinite goodness, give us to see these bright realities in this dark and evil day—a fresh illustration of the soul-stirring fact that the greater the ruin, the richer the grace; the deeper the gloom, the brighter the flashes of individual faith.

Before closing this paper, we shall ask the reader to look for a moment at the address to the fourth of the seven churches, as given in the second chapter of Revelation. The church of Thyatira gives us the history of the Church during those long, dreary centuries of the Middle Ages, when gross darkness covered the earth, when popery—that darkest moral blot—prevailed in the well-known character of Jezebel.

In the address to this assembly we find a marked change, indicated by three plain facts—namely: first, a remnant is for the first time addressed: secondly, the Lord's coming is for the first time introduced; and, thirdly, the hearing ear is no longer looked for in the assembly at large, but in the *overcomer*. Now these facts prove beyond all question that in Thyatira all hope of corporate restoration is abandoned. "I gave her space to repent, ... and she repented not." The case is hopeless as regards the professing body. But here the remnant is singled out and cheered—not with the hope of a converted world or a restored Church, but with the bright and blessed hope of the Lord's coming as the bright and morning star. "But unto you I say, the remnant^[5] in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine [διδοαγήν, the same root as διδάσκειν, what Jezebel was doing], and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden. But that which ye have hold fast *till I come*."

Here then we have a deeply interesting view of the Christian remnant. It is not the Church restored, but a distinct company clear of Jezebel's teaching and Satan's depths, and going on to the end. It is of the utmost importance that the reader should be clear in reference to the fact that the last four churches run on synchronously to the end. It simplifies the whole subject immensely, and gives us a very definite, practical view of the Christian remnant. There is no mention of a remnant until we get to Thyatira. Then all hope of corporate restoration is given up. This simple fact overturns the church of Rome from its very foundations. It is presented to us as an apostate and idolatrous system, threatened with the judgment of God: and a remnant are addressed who have nothing to do with her. So much for the boasted, universal, infallible church of Rome.

But what of Sardis? Is this the Church restored? Nothing of the kind. "Thou hast a *name* that thou livest, and *art dead*." This is not a restored or reformed Church, but *threatened* with Christ's coming *as a thief*, instead of being cheered with "the bright and morning star." In a word, it is Protestantism with "a name," but the works "not perfect before God." And what then? The Christian remnant. "A few *names* even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and *they* [He does not say *thou*] shall walk with Me in white: for they are worthy." We have here a vivid and most striking contrast between dead, cold, nominal profession and a few true-hearted, earnest lovers of Christ—between form and power, death and life.

In the last two assemblies we have the contrast continued, enlarged, and enforced. Philadelphia gives us a most precious picture of a company of true Christians, humble, lowly, feeble, but true to Christ; holding fast His word, and not denying His name—Christ and His word treasured in the

heart and confessed in the life—a living reality, not a lifeless form. The moral beauty of this is excellent. The very contemplation of it is refreshing and edifying indeed. In short, it is Christ reproduced by the Holy Ghost in a beloved remnant. There is no pretension to be anything, no assumption of great things. Christ is all: His word, His name, how precious! We seem to have gathered up and concentrated here the lovely moral traits of the various remnants that have come under our notice, brought out in full blow and yielding a fragrant perfume.

Now all this is most grateful to the heart of Christ. It is not a question of great service rendered, mighty works performed, anything striking or splendid in the eyes of men. No; it is something far more precious to the Lord, namely, the deep, calm, thorough appreciation of Himself and His precious word. This is far more to Him than the most showy services and costly sacrifices. What He looks for is a place in the heart. Without this all is worthless. But the very feeblest breathing of the heart's affections after Himself is most precious. Let us harken to our adorable Lord as He pours out His loving heart to this dear Philadelphian company—this true Christian remnant. "These things saith He that is holy, He that is true, He that hath the key of David, He that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth; I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept *My word*, and hast not denied *My name*. Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan"—those who take their stand on the boasted ground of traditionary religion—"which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that *I have loved thee*"—precious, blessed fact, the basis and guarantee of all, for time and eternity!—"Because thou hast kept the word of *My patience* [not *My power*], I will also keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth" (τοὺς κατοικοῦντας, those finding their home on the earth, in contrast to those whose citizenship is in heaven).

The Lord Christ most graciously pledges Himself to keep His beloved assembly from the terrible hour of trial that is coming upon this whole scene. He will have His heavenly people with Himself in their heavenly home ere a single seal is opened, a trumpet sounded, or a vial poured out. All praise to His name for this bright, blessed, tranquilizing, joyful hope! May we live in the power of it while we wait for the full fruition!

But we must quote the remainder of this most exquisite address, so full of comfort and consolation. "Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown. Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of *My God*, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of *My God*, and the name of the city of *My God*, new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from *My God*: and *My new name*."

Nothing can exceed the grace that shines in all this. Jehovah spoke gracious words to His beloved remnant in the days of Malachi. "*They shall be Mine*, ... in that day when I make up *My jewels*; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth Him not. For, behold, the day cometh that shall burn as an oven; and all *the proud*, yea, and all that *do wickedly*, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. But unto you that"—what? That have done great things, made great sacrifices, made a great profession, had a great name? No; but—"fear *My name* shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in His wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall. And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith the Lord of hosts" (Mal. iii. 17-iv. 3).

There are points of similarity and points of contrast in the Jewish and Christian remnants which we cannot go into just now, inasmuch as our object in referring to both is to illustrate our special theme, namely, that in darkest days we find a devoted remnant dear to the heart of God, the heart of Christ, and who are addressed in the most tender and endearing terms, comforted by the most precious assurances, and cheered by the brightest hopes. This we believe to be the special subject laid upon the heart to present to the whole Church of God, for the purpose of encouraging every member of the beloved body of Christ on the face of the earth to stand apart from all that is contrary to His mind as revealed in His word, and to be found in the position, attitude and spirit of the true Christian remnant, waiting for the coming of our beloved Lord.

I shall merely refer to one point which marks the distinction between the two remnants in the clearest way. It is this: the Jewish remnant is cheered by the hope of the Sun of righteousness; whereas to the Christian remnant is granted the far higher, brighter and sweeter privilege of looking out for the bright and morning Star. A little child can understand the difference between these two things. The morning star appears in the heavens long before the sun rises; and in like manner the Church will meet her Lord as "the bright and morning Star" before the beams of the Sun of righteousness fall in healing power on the God-fearing remnant of Israel.

And now a word, in conclusion, as to Laodicea. Nothing can be more vivid or striking than the contrast between it and Philadelphia in every respect. We have here the last phase of the professing Christian body. It is just about to be spewed out as something insufferably nauseous to Christ. It is not a question of gross immorality. It may to man's eye present a very respectable appearance; but to the heart of Christ its condition is most repulsive. It is characterized by lukewarmness and indifference. "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of My mouth."

How awfully solemn to find the professing Church in such a condition! And to think how soon we pass from the attractions of Philadelphia—so grateful to the heart of Christ, so refreshing to His spirit—to the withering atmosphere of Laodicea, where there is not a single redeeming feature! We have heartless indifference as to Christ and His interests, combined with the most deplorable self-gratulation. "Thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and *have need of nothing*; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of Me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see."

How solemn is all this! People boasting of their riches, and of their having need of nothing, and Christ outside. They have lost the sense of divine righteousness, symbolized by "gold," and practical human righteousness, as symbolized by "white raiment," and yet full of themselves and their doings—the very reverse of the dear Philadelphian company. There, He reproves nothing; here, He commends nothing. There, Christ is all; here, He is actually outside, and the Church is all. In a word, it is perfectly appalling to contemplate. We are just at the close. We have got to the last solemn phase of the Church as God's witness on the earth.

Yet even here, in the face of this most deplorable condition of things, the infinite grace and changeless love of the heart of Christ shine out in all their undimmed lustre. He is outside; this tells what the Church is. But He is knocking, calling, waiting: this tells what He is, eternal and universal homage to His name! "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent." The gold, the white raiment and the eyesalve are offered. Love has various offices to discharge, various characters in which to clothe itself; but it is the same love still—"the same yesterday, and to-day, and forever," even though it has to "rebuke and chasten." Here His attitude and His action speak volumes, both as to the Church and as to Himself. "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: *if any man* hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to *him*, and will sup with him, and *he with Me*."^[6]

In the church of Sardis the remnant is spoken of as "a few names"; in Laodicea there is an "if" as to one; but even if there be a single hearing ear, if there be one to open the door, that one is assured of the high privilege, the immense favor, of supping with Christ—of having that precious one as Guest and Host. "I with him, and he with Me." When the corporate witness has reached the very lowest point, individual faithfulness is rewarded with intimate fellowship with the heart of Christ. Such is the infinite and everlasting love of our beloved Saviour and Lord. Oh, who would not trust Him and praise Him and love Him and serve Him?

And now, beloved Christian reader, I would earnestly and affectionately entreat you to join in petition to our ever-gracious God to stir up the hearts of His beloved people all over the world to seek a more pronounced, whole-hearted, devoted discipleship; to turn away from everything contrary to His word; to be true to His word and to His name in this dark and evil day; and thus realize the truth, which has passed before us in this paper, that *the greater the ruin, the richer the grace; the deeper the gloom, the brighter the outshining of individual faith*.

P. S.—I feel I must not let this paper go forth without adding a word on the immense importance of keeping up a full, clear, earnest gospel testimony. "Do the work of an evangelist" is a charge given by the beloved apostle from his prison at Rome to his dear son Timothy, in view of the total ruin of the professing Church; and truly the circumstances under which these words were penned impart a touching interest to them. Come what may, Timothy was to continue to announce the glad tidings of God's salvation. He might be tempted to give up in despair, and say, "All is going to pieces, people will not listen to the gospel!"—"will not endure sound doctrine."

Faith says, "No; we must never give up. God's gospel must be preached to every creature under heaven. And even though men reject it, God is glorified and His heart is refreshed by the precious message of His love being told out in the ears of perishing sinners." We would encourage the heart of every beloved evangelist on the face of the earth by reminding him that however the Church has failed as God's witness to the world, yet the precious gospel tells out what He is to every poor, broken-hearted, bankrupt sinner who will only trust Him. The thought of this has cheered us during forty-eight years of evangelistic work, when the condition of the Church was heart-breaking to contemplate.

And in speaking of the work of an evangelist, we must not confine it to public halls and rooms, which, of course, demand a distinct gift from the Head of the Church. We believe it is the sweet privilege of every child of God to be in a condition of soul to tell the glad tidings to individual

souls in private life; and we must confess we long to see more of this. It matters not what our position in life or sphere of action may be, we should earnestly and prayerfully seek the salvation of those with whom we come in contact. If we fail in this, we are not in communion with the heart of God and the mind of Christ. In the Gospels and Acts we see a great deal of this lovely individual work. "Philip findeth Nathanael." "Andrew first findeth his own brother Simon."

We want more of this earnest, beautiful, personal work in private. It is refreshing to the heart of God. We are apt to get into a groove and rest satisfied with asking people to come to public halls and rooms—all right and good in its place, and most important. We would not pen a line to detract from the value of this service; but at the same time we cannot help feeling our sad deficiency in loving, personal dealing with souls. But this requires nearness to God in our inward life; which may well cause serious searching of our hearts before God, for it is the root of our deficiency.

May the gracious Lord stir up the hearts of all His beloved people to a more lively interest in the blessed work of evangelization, at home and abroad, in public and in private!

LIFE AND TIMES OF

DAVID

By C. H. M.

INTRODUCTION

The steps which led to the setting up of a king in Israel are easily traced, and easily accounted for, by all who have studied with any attention the humbling history of the human heart, either as presented in themselves or in others.

In the opening chapters of 1 Samuel we are furnished with a most instructive and solemn picture of Israel's condition. The house of Elkanah is taken up by the sacred penman as a striking illustration of Israel after the flesh, and Israel after the Spirit. "He had two wives; the name of the one was Hannah, and the name of the other Peninnah; and Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children."

Thus we have in the domestic circle of this Ephrathite the early scenes of Sarah and Hagar enacted over again. Hannah was the barren woman,—and she was made to feel it deeply, for "her adversary also provoked her sore, for to make her fret, because the Lord had shut up her womb."

The barren woman is in Scripture the type of nature's ruined and helpless condition. There is no ability to do anything for God—no power to bring forth any fruit to Him; all is death and barrenness. Such is the real condition of every child of Adam. He can neither do anything for God nor for himself, as regards his eternal destiny. He is emphatically "without strength"; he is "a dry tree," "a heath in the desert." Such is the lesson taught us by the barren woman.

However, the Lord caused his grace to abound over all Hannah's weakness and need, and put a song of praise into her mouth. He enabled her to say, "My horn is exalted in the Lord; my mouth is enlarged over mine enemies; because I rejoice in Thy salvation." It is the Lord's special province to make the barren woman rejoice. He alone can say, "Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing, and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child; for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, saith the Lord" (Isa. liv. 1).

Hannah realized this, and widowed Israel will ere long realize it also, "for her Maker is her husband; the Lord of Hosts is His name; and her Redeemer the Holy One of Israel." The beautiful song of Hannah is the soul's thankful acknowledgment of God's actings in reference to Israel. "The Lord killeth, and maketh alive: He bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up. The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich: He bringeth low, and lifteth up. He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory." All this will be most fully exemplified in Israel in the latter day; and it is now exemplified in the person of every one who through grace is raised from his ruined condition in nature to blessedness and peace in Christ.

The birth of Samuel filled up a great blank, not only in the heart of Hannah, but doubtless in the heart of every faithful Israelite who sighed for the true interests of the Lord's house and the purity of the Lord's offering, both of which were alike disregarded and trampled upon by the unholy sons of Eli. In Hannah's desire for "*a man-child*," we perceive not merely the development of the heart of a *mother*, but that of an *Israelite*. She had, no doubt, beheld and mourned over the ruin of everything connected with the temple of the Lord. The dimmed eye of Eli—the vile actings

of Hophni and Phinehas—the fading lamp—the desecrated temple—the despised sacrifice—all conspired to tell Hannah that there was a real want, which want could alone be supplied by the precious gift of a man-child from the Lord. Hence she says to her husband, "I will not go up until the child be weaned, and then I will bring him, *that he may appear before the Lord, and there abide forever.*" "Abide forever!" Nothing short of this could satisfy the longing soul of Hannah. It was not the mere matter of wiping away her own reproach that rendered Samuel so precious in her eyes. No! she longed to see "a faithful priest" standing before the Lord; and by faith her eye rested on one who was to abide there forever. Precious, elevating faith—that holy principle which lifts the soul above the depressing influence of things seen and temporal, into the light of things unseen and eternal!

In chapter iii. we have the prediction of the terrible downfall of Eli's house. "And it came to pass at that time, when Eli was laid down in his place, *and his eyes began to wax dim, that he could not see;* and ere the lamp of God went out in the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was, and Samuel was laid down to sleep; *that the Lord called Samuel.*" This was very expressive—solemnly expressive. Eli's eyes "dim," and the Lord's call to Samuel: in other words, Eli's house is passing away, and the faithful priest is about to enter upon the scene. Samuel runs to Eli, but, alas, all the latter could say was, "*Lie down again.*" He had no message for the child. Hoary and dim, he could spend his time in sleep and darkness, while the Lord's voice was sounding so very near him. Solemn, most solemn warning! Eli was a priest of the Lord, but he failed to walk watchfully, failed to order his house according to the testimonies of God, failed to restrain his sons; hence we see the sad end to which he came. "And the Lord said to Samuel, Behold, I will do a thing in Israel at which both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle. In that day I will perform against Eli all things which I have spoken concerning his house: when I begin, I will also make an end. For I have told him that I will judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not" (1 Sam. iii. 11-13).

"Whatsoever a man soweth," says the apostle, "that shall he also reap." How true is this in the history of every child of Adam!—how peculiarly true in the history of every child of God! According to our sowing shall be our reaping. So Eli was made to feel; and so shall the writer and the reader of this. There is much more of solemn, practical reality in this divine statement than many are apt to imagine. If we indulge in a wrong current of thought, if we adopt a wrong habit of conversation, if we pursue a wrong line of acting, we must inevitably reap the fruits of it sooner or later.^[7] May this reflection lead us to more holy watchfulness in our ways; may we be more careful to "sow to the Spirit," that so, of the Spirit, we may "reap life everlasting"!

In chapter iv. a humiliating picture of Israel's condition in connection with the declining house of Eli is presented. "Now Israel went out against the Philistines to battle, and pitched beside Ebenezer: and the Philistines pitched in Aphek. And the Philistines put themselves in array against Israel: and when they joined battle, Israel was smitten before the Philistines: and they slew of the army in the field about four thousand men." Here Israel was being made to realize the curse of a broken law. See Deut. xxviii. 25. They could not stand before their enemies, being weak and powerless by reason of their disobedience.

And observe the nature and ground of their confidence, in this their time of need and pressure: "And when the people were come into the camp, the elders of Israel said, Wherefore hath the Lord smitten us to-day before the Philistines? Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of Shiloh unto us, that, when it cometh among us, it may save us out of the hand of our enemies." Alas, what a miserable ground of confidence! Not a word about *the Lord Himself*. They thought not of *Him* as the source of their strength; they made not *Him* their shield and buckler. No! they trusted in the ark; they vainly imagined that it could save them. How vain! How could *it* avail them aught when unaccompanied by the presence of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel? Impossible! But He was no longer there; He had been grieved away by their unconfessed and unjudged sin; nor could any symbol or ordinance ever supply His place.

However, Israel vainly imagined that the ark would do all for them; and great was their joy, though not well founded, when it made its appearance among them, accompanied, not by Jehovah, but by the wicked priests Hophni and Phinehas. "And when the ark of the covenant of the Lord came into the camp, all Israel shouted with a great shout, so that the earth rang again." All this was very imposing; but, ah, it was hollow; their triumph was as baseless as it was unbecoming; they ought to have known themselves much better than to make such an empty display. Their shout of triumph harmonized badly with their low moral condition in the sight of God; and yet it will ever be found that those who know least of themselves set up the highest pretensions, and assume the highest position. The Pharisee in the Gospel looked down with an air of proud indifference on the self-abased publican; he imagined himself very high up and the publican very low down in the scale; yet how different were God's thoughts about the two! Thus it is the broken and contrite heart will ever be the dwelling-place of God, who, blessed be His name, knows how to lift up and comfort every such heart as none else can do. Such is His peculiar work—the work in which He delights.

But the men of this world will always attach importance to high pretensions. They like them, and, generally speaking, give a high place in their thoughts to those who assume to be somewhat; while, on the other hand, they will seek to put the really self-abased man still lower. Thus, in the instructive scene before us in this chapter, the Philistines attached no small importance to the shout of the men of Israel. It was like themselves, and therefore they could apprehend and appreciate it. "And when the Philistines heard the noise of the shout, they said, What meaneth the noise of this great shout in the camp of the Hebrews? And they understood that the ark of the

Lord was come into the camp. And the Philistines were afraid; for they said, God is come into the camp," etc. They naturally supposed that the shout of triumph was based on a reality: they saw not what was beneath the surface; they understood not the meaning of a defiled priesthood, a despised sacrifice, a desecrated temple. They beheld the outward symbol, and imagined that power accompanied it; hence their fear. How little did they know that their fear and Israel's triumph were alike groundless. "Be strong," said they, "and quit yourselves like men, O ye Philistines, that ye be not servants to the Hebrews, as they have been to you: quit yourselves like men, and fight." Here was the resource of the Philistines—"quit yourselves *like men*." Israel could not do this. If prevented by sin from bringing the resources of God to bear upon their circumstances, they were weaker than other men; Israel's only hope was in God; and if God were not there, if it were a mere conflict between man and man, an Israelite was no match for a Philistine. The truth of this was most fully established on the occasion to which we are referring. "The Philistines fought, and Israel was smitten." How else could it be? Israel could but be smitten and fly when their shield and buckler, even God Himself, was not in their midst. They were smitten; the glory departed from them; the ark was taken; they were shorn of their strength; their shout of triumph was exchanged for the piercing cry of sorrow; their portion was defeat and shame; and the aged Eli, whom we may regard as the representative of the existing system of things, fell with that system, and was buried in its ruins.

Chapters v. and vi. embrace the period during which "Ichabod" was written upon the nation of Israel. During this time God ceased to act publicly for Israel, and the ark of His presence was carried about from city to city of the uncircumcised Philistines. This period is full of instruction. The ark of God among strangers, and Israel for the time being set aside, are circumstances which cannot fail to interest the mind and fix the attention of the intelligent and thoughtful student of Scripture.

"And the Philistines took the ark of God, and brought it from Eben-ezer to Ashdod. When the Philistines took the ark of God, they brought it into the house of Dagon, and set it by Dagon." Here we are presented with the sad and humiliating result of Israel's unfaithfulness. With what a careless hand and faithless heart had they kept the ark of God when it could ever be brought to find a lodging-place in the temple of Dagon! How deeply Israel had failed! They had let go everything; they had given up that which was most sacred, to be profaned and blasphemed by the uncircumcised.

And now the ark of Jehovah, which belonged to the holiest of all, is placed by the Philistines in the house of their god. The shadow of Dagon was to be substituted for the wings of the cherubim and the beams of the divine glory. Such were the thoughts of the lords of the Philistines; but not so God's thoughts. Israel, on the one hand, had failed in defending the ark; they had failed to recognize the great truth that it should ever have been connected with the presence of God among them. On the other hand, the lords of the Philistines might presume to insult the sacred symbol of the divine presence by impiously associating it with Dagon their god. In a word, the Israelites might prove faithless, and the Philistines profane, but the God of Israel must ever be true to Himself, ever true to His own holiness, and Dagon must fall prostrate before the ark of His presence. "And when they of Ashdod arose early on the morrow, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the earth before the ark of the Lord. And they took Dagon, and set him in his place again. And when they arose early on the morrow morning, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the ground before the ark of the Lord; and the head of Dagon and both the palms of his hands were cut off upon the threshold: only the stump of Dagon was left to him" (chap. v. 3, 4).

We can hardly conceive a more humiliating condition of things at this crisis in Israel's history. They beheld the ark snatched from their midst; they had proved themselves unfit and unable to occupy the place of God's witnesses in the view of the nations around them; and as to the grounds of triumph by the enemies of the truth, it was enough to say, "The ark is in the house of Dagon." This was truly terrible, when looked at from one point of view; but oh, how ineffably glorious when looked at from another! Israel had failed, and had let go everything that was sacred and precious; they had allowed the enemy to lay their honor in the dust, and trample on their glory; yet God was above all, beyond all; He remained sovereign over all. Here was the deep source of consolation to every faithful heart. If Israel would not act in defence of God's truth, He must act Himself; and so He did. The lords of the Philistines had vanquished Israel; but the gods of the Philistines must fall prostrate before that ark which of old had driven back the waters of Jordan. Here was divine triumph. In the darkness and solitude of the house of Dagon—where there was no eye to see, no ear to hear—the God of Israel was acting in defence of those great principles of truth which His Israel had so failed to maintain. Dagon fell, and in his fall proclaimed the honor of the God of Israel. The darkness of the moment only afforded an opportunity for the divine glory to shine out with brilliancy. The scene was so thoroughly emptied of the creature that the Creator could show Himself in His own proper character. "Man's extremity was God's opportunity." His failure made room for the divine faithfulness. The Philistines had proved stronger than Israel; but Jehovah was stronger than Dagon.

Now all this is replete with instruction and encouragement at a time like the present, when the people of God are so sadly declining from that deep tone of devotedness and separation which ought to characterize them. We should bless the Lord for the full assurance of His faithfulness—"He cannot deny Himself"; "The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, the Lord knoweth them that are His, and let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity." Hence, in darkest times He will maintain His truth and raise up a witness for Himself,

even though it should be in the house of Dagon. Christians may depart from God's principles, but the principles remain the same: their purity, their power, their heavenly virtue, are in no wise affected by the fickleness and inconsistency of faithless professors, and in the end truth will triumph.

However, the effort of the Philistines to keep the ark of God among them proved a complete failure. They could not make Dagon and Jehovah dwell together—how blasphemous the attempt! "What concord hath Christ with Belial?" None! The standard of God can never be lowered so as to accommodate itself to the principles which govern the men of this world; and the attempt to hold Christ with one hand and the world with the other must issue in shame and confusion of face. Yet how many are making that effort! How many are there who seem to make it the great question, how much of the world they can retain without sacrificing the name and privileges of Christians! This is a deadly evil, a fearful snare of Satan, and it may with strict propriety be denominated the most refined selfishness. It is bad enough for men to walk in the lawlessness and corruption of their own hearts; but to connect evil with the holy name of Christ is the climax of guilt. "Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, ... Behold, ye trust in lying words, that cannot profit. Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom ye know not, and come and stand before Me in this house, which is called by My name, and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations?" (Jer. 7:3, 8-10). Again, we read, as one of the special characteristics of the last days, that men shall have "a form of godliness, but deny the power thereof." The *form* suits the worldly heart, because it serves to keep the conscience at ease, while the heart enjoys the world in all its attractiveness. What a delusion! How needful the apostolic admonition, "*From such turn away!*" Satan's masterpiece is the amalgamation of things apparently Christian with things decidedly unholy. He deceives more effectually by this scheme than any other, and we need more spiritual perception to detect it in consequence. The Lord grant us this, for He knows how much we need it.

Chapter vii. Passing over much that is valuable in chapters v. and vi., we must dwell a little upon Israel's happy restoration, in connection with the ministry of "the faithful priest."

Israel had been allowed to mourn for many a day the absence of the ark; their spirits drooped under the withering influence of idolatry; and at length their affections began to go out after the Lord. But in this revival we learn how deeply they had been sunk in death. This is always the case. When Jacob of old was called upon to go up to Bethel from amid the defilement of Shechem, he had but little idea of how he and his family had become entangled in the meshes of idolatry. But the call to "*go up to Bethel!*" roused his dormant energies, quickened his conscience, and sharpened his moral perception. Hence he says to his household, "Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments." The very idea of Bethel, where God had appeared to him, exerted a reviving influence on the soul of Jacob; and he being revived himself was enabled to lead others also in fresh power.

Thus it is with Jacob's seed in this chapter. "And Samuel spake unto all the house of Israel, saying, If ye do return unto the Lord with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and *prepare your hearts unto the Lord*, and serve Him *only*; and He will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines." We observe here what a downward course Israel had been pursuing in connection with the house of Eli. The first step in evil is to place confidence in a form apart from God; apart too from those principles which make the form valuable. The next step is to set up an idol. Hence we find Israel saying of the ark, "That *it* may save us." But now the word of the prophet is, "Put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you."

Reader, is there not a solemn admonition in all this for the professing Church? Truly there is. The present is preeminently a day of form without power. The spirit of cold and uninfluential formalism is moving upon the face of Christendom's troubled waters, and soon all will settle down in the deathlike calm of false profession, which will be broken in upon only by "the shout of the archangel and the trump of God."

However, the attitude assumed by Israel in the 7th chapter forms a perfect contrast to the scene in the 4th chapter: "And Samuel said, Gather all Israel to Mizpeh, and I will pray for you unto the Lord. And they gathered together to Mizpeh, and drew water, and poured it out before the Lord" (an expression of their weak, helpless condition), "and fasted on that day, and said there, We have sinned against the Lord." This was real work, and we can say, *God is here now*. There is no confidence in a mere symbol or lifeless form; there is no empty pretension or vain assumption, no shout or baseless vaunting; all is deep and solemn reality. The earnest cry, the water poured out, the fast, the confession—all tell out the mighty change which had taken place in Israel's moral condition. They now betake themselves to the faithful priest, and through him to the Lord Himself. They speak not now of fetching the ark. No; their word is, "Cease not to cry unto the Lord our God for us, that HE will save us out of the hand of the Philistines. And Samuel took a sucking-lamb, and offered it for a burnt-offering wholly unto the Lord; and Samuel cried unto the Lord for Israel; and the Lord heard him." Here was the source of Israel's power. The sucking-lamb—God's gracious providing in tender remembrance of their need—gave a new aspect to their circumstances; it was the turning-point in their history on this occasion.

And observe, the Philistines seem to have been in total ignorance of all that was going on between Jehovah and Israel. They doubtless imagined that, inasmuch as they heard no shout of triumph, the Israelites were, if possible, in a more impoverished condition than before. They do not make the earth to ring again, as in chap. iv.; but ah, there was a silent work going on which a

Philistine's eye could not see, nor a Philistine's heart appreciate! What could a Philistine know about the penitential cry, the water poured out, or the sucking-lamb offered up? Nothing. The men of this world can only take cognizance of that which lies on the surface. The outward show, the pomp and glare, the assumption of strength and greatness in the flesh, are well understood by the world; but they know nothing of the reality of a soul exercised before God. And yet this latter is what the Christian should most earnestly seek after. An exercised soul is most precious in the sight of God; He can dwell with such at all times. Let us not assume to be anything, but simply take our proper place in the sight of God, and He will surely be our spring of power and energy, according to the measure of our need.

"And as Samuel was offering up the burnt-offering, the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel: but the Lord thundered with a great thunder on that day upon the Philistines, and discomfited them, and they were smitten before Israel." Such were the happy results of simple dependence upon the God of the armies of Israel: it was somewhat like the glorious display of Jehovah's power on the shores of the Red Sea. "The Lord is a man of war" when His people need Him, and their faith can count on Him as their present help in time of need. Whenever Israel truly turned to Jehovah, He was ever ready to appear in their behalf; but the glory must be *all* His own. Israel's shout of empty triumph must be hushed, in order that the voice of Jehovah may be distinctly heard. And how blessed to be silent, and let Jehovah speak! What power in His voice to bring peace to His people, and to strike terror into the hearts of His enemies! "Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify Thy name?"

Chapter viii. In this chapter we have a very marked step towards the setting up of a king in Israel. "And it came to pass, when Samuel was old, that he made his sons judges over Israel.... And his sons walked not in his ways, but turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted judgment." Sad picture! How like man in every age! Man corrupts himself and all committed to him at the first opportunity. Moses and Joshua foresaw Israel's turning away after their departure (Deut. 31:29; Josh. 23:15, 16); and Paul could say to the Ephesian elders: "I know that after my departure shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock." So here; Israel no sooner recovers from the effects of the immorality of Eli's sons than they are made to feel the direful effects of the avarice of Samuel's sons, and thus are they hurried along the path which ended in the rejection of Jehovah and the setting up of Saul. "When Samuel was old, *he made* his sons judges." But this was a very different thing indeed from God's appointment. The faithfulness of Samuel was no guarantee for his sons; just as we find in the boasted theory of apostolic succession. What kind of successors have we seen? How far have they resembled their predecessors? Paul could say, "I have coveted no man's silver or gold": can the so-called successors say so? Samuel could say, "Behold, here I am: witness against me before the Lord, and before His anointed: whose ox have I taken? or whose ass have I taken? or whom have I defrauded? whom have I oppressed? or of whose hand have I received any bribe to blind mine eyes therewith?" But alas, Samuel's sons and successors could not say this! To them "filthy lucre" was the leading spring of action.

Now we find in this chapter that Israel makes this evil of Samuel's sons the ostensible reason for asking a king. "Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us *like all the nations*." Fearful declension! Israel satisfied to come down to the level of the nations around! and all because Samuel was old and his sons covetous. The Lord is shut out. Had they looked up to Him, they would have had no reason for seeking to put themselves under the guardianship of a poor mortal like themselves. But ah, the Lord's ability to guide and keep them was little thought of in all this scene! They cannot see beyond Samuel and his sons: if no help can be found from them, they must at once step down from their high elevation of having Jehovah as their King and make to themselves a human head like the nations around them. The attitude of faith and dependence on God cannot be maintained by the natural man. *Outwardly* God had been owned as their King; but now it is not so: a king must now be their recognized head. We shall soon see the sad result of all this.

Chapters ix.-xiii. These chapters furnish us with the character of Saul, together with his anointing and the opening of his rule. I shall not dwell upon it in this Introduction, being merely desirous to call the reader's attention to the steps which led to the setting up of a king in Israel.

Saul was emphatically the man after Israel's heart: he had all that the flesh could desire—"a choice young man, and a goodly; and there was not among the children of Israel a goodlier person than he: from his shoulders and upward he was higher than any of the people." This was all very imposing to those who could only look upon the outward appearance; but what lay beneath this attractive exterior! Saul's whole course is marked with selfishness and pride, under the cloak of humility. True, the Spirit came upon him as one set apart to be an office-bearer among the people of God;^[8] but he was throughout a self-seeker, and he only used the name of God for his own ends, and the things of God as a pedestal on which to set forth his own glory. The scene at Gilgal is truly characteristic, and develops much of Saul's principle of action. Impatient to wait for God's time, he "forces himself," and offers a burnt-offering, and has to hear from the lips of Samuel these solemn words: "Thou hast done foolishly; thou hast not kept the commandment of the Lord thy God which He commanded thee: for now would the Lord have established thy kingdom upon Israel for ever. But now thy kingdom shall not continue: the Lord hath sought Him a man after His own heart, and the Lord hath commanded him to be captain over His people, because thou hast not kept that which the Lord commanded thee." This is just the sum of the matter, so far as Saul is concerned. "Thou hast done foolishly; thou hast not kept the commandment of the Lord; thy kingdom shall not continue." Solemn verities! Saul, the man

after man's heart, is set aside, to make room for the man after God's heart. The children of Israel had abundant opportunity of testing the character of the man whom they had chosen to lead them forth, and fight their battles.^[9] The reed on which they had so earnestly desired to lean had broken, and was about to pierce their hand. Man's king, alas, what was he? Set him in an emergency, and how does he carry himself? Bustling self-importance marks all his actings. No dignity, no holy confidence in God, no acting on the broad principles of truth. Self, self, and that, too, in the most solemn scenes, and while apparently acting for God and His people. Such was man's king.

Chapter. xiv. This beautiful chapter furnishes a striking contrast between the efficacy of Israel's expedient, and that of the *old principle* of simple faith in God. Saul sits beneath a pomegranate tree, in display of empty pomp without any real power; while Jonathan, acting in the spirit of faith, is made the happy instrument of working salvation for Israel. Israel, in unbelief, had asked for a king to fight their battles, and doubtless they imagined that, when blessed with a king, no enemy could stand before them: but was it so? One word in chap. xiii. gives the reply: "All the people followed him *trembling*." What a change! How different from the mighty host who, of old, had followed Joshua into the strongholds of Canaan! And yet they now had their longed-for king before them; but, God was not there, and hence their trembling. Let man have the fairest, the most imposing ordinance, without the sense of God's presence, and he is weakness itself. Let him have the presence of God in power, and nothing can resist him. Moses had, of old, done wonders with a simple rod in his hand; but now, Israel, with the man after their own heart full in their view, could do nought but tremble before their enemies. "All the people followed him trembling." How truly humiliating! "Nay; but we will have a king over us; ... that our king may judge us, and *go out before us and fight our battles*." Truly "it is better to trust in the Lord, than to put confidence in princes." Jonathan proved this, most blessedly. He goes up against the Philistines in the power of that word, "There is no restraint with the Lord to save by many or by few." It was "the Lord" who filled his soul, and having Him, "many or few" made no difference. Faith does not reckon on circumstances, but on God.

And mark the change upon Israel the moment that faith begins to act amongst them. The trembling was transferred from Israel to the Philistines; "and there was a trembling in the host, in the field, and among all the people; the garrison and the spoilers, they also trembled; and the earth quaked; so it was a very great trembling." Israel's star was now decidedly in the ascendant, simply because Israel was acting upon the principle of faith. Jonathan looked not to his father Saul for deliverance, but to Jehovah; he knew that He was a man of war, and on Him he leaned for the deliverance of Israel in the day of trouble. Blessed dependence! None like it. Human ordinances perish—human resources vanish away; but "they that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever." "It was a very great trembling," for God was putting His terror into their hearts, and filling Israel with joy and triumph. Jonathan's faith was owned of God in the establishment of those who had previously fled from the field of conflict into the mountains. Thus it is ever; one can never walk in the power of faith without giving an impetus to others; and, on the other hand, one coward heart is sufficient to deter a great many. Moreover, unbelief always drives one from the field of service or conflict, while faith, as surely, leads one into it.

But what of Saul in all this? How did he co-operate with the man of faith? He was perfectly incapable of any such acting. He sat under the pomegranate tree, unable to inspire courage into the hearts of those who had chosen him to be their captain; and when he did venture to move, or rather to bustle forth, he could do nought but hinder the precious results of faith by his rashness and folly. But we must hasten on to the close of these introductory remarks.

Chapter xv. presents us with the final testing and setting aside of man's king. "GO, SMITE AMALEK." This is the test which really made manifest the moral condition of Saul's heart. Had he been right before God, he would have executed God's judgment upon Amalek. But the issue proved that Saul had too much in common with Amalek to carry out the divine will in his destruction. What had Amalek done? "Thus saith the Lord of hosts, I remember that which Amalek did to Israel, how he laid wait for him in the way, when he came up from Egypt." In a word, Amalek stands before the spiritual mind as the first great obstacle to the progress of the redeemed from Egypt to Canaan; and we know what it is which fills a similar place in reference to those who now set out to follow the Lord Jesus.

Now, Saul had been just showing himself as a most decided obstacle in the way of the man of faith; indeed, his entire course was one of hostility to the principles of God. How, then, could he destroy Amalek? Impossible. "He spared Agag." Just so. Saul and Agag suited each other but too well, nor had he power to execute the judgment of God on this great enemy of His people. And mark the ignorance and self-complacency of this unhappy man. "And Samuel came to Saul; and Saul said unto him, Blessed be thou of the Lord: *I have performed the commandment of the Lord*." Performed the commandment of the Lord, while Agag, king of the Amalekites, was yet alive! Oh, to what lengths of vain delusion will one go when not walking uprightly before God! "What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in my ears?" Solemn, heart-searching inquiry! In vain is recourse had to the plausible matter of "*sacrifice unto the Lord*." Miserable resource for disobedient hearts! As if the Lord would accept a sacrifice from one walking in positive rebellion against His commandment. How many since Saul's day have sought to cover a disobedient spirit with the plausible mantle of "*sacrifice unto the Lord*." Samuel's answer to Saul is of universal application, viz.: "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of

rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry." The Lord seeks not offerings, but obedience: the subject heart and acquiescent spirit will glorify Him more than the cattle upon a thousand hills.

How important to have this great principle pressed home upon the conscience, when so many are cloaking all sorts of disobedience with the word, Sacrifice, sacrifice! "*To obey is better than sacrifice.*" It is far better to have the will in subjection to God than to load His altar with the costliest sacrifices. When the will is in subjection, everything else will take its due place; but for one whose will is in rebellion against God to talk of sacrificing to Him is nothing but deadly delusion. God looks not at the amount of the sacrifice, but at the spirit from which it springs. Moreover, it will be found that all who, in Saul's spirit, speak of sacrificing unto the Lord, have concealed beneath some selfish object—some Agag or other—the best of the sheep—or something attractive to the flesh, which is more influential than the service or worship of the blessed God.

May all who read these pages seek to know the real blessedness of a will entirely subject to God, for in it will be found that blessed rest which the meek and lowly Jesus promised to all who were heavy laden—the rest which He Himself found in being able to say, "I thank Thee, O Father, ... *for so it seemed good in Thy sight.*" God had desired Saul to destroy Amalek, but his heart desired to spare something which to *him*, at least, seemed good and desirable; he was ready to carry out the will of God in reference to all that was "*vile and refuse*" but he thought he might make some exceptions, as if the line of distinction between that which was "refuse" and that which was "good" was to be drawn by his judgment, and not by the unerring judgment of Him who looked at Amalek from a true point of view, and saw in Agag one who, with all his delicacy, would resist Israel as strongly as ever, and this was His ground of controversy with Amalek, which Saul was unable to understand or appreciate.

The close of this chapter shows us, but too plainly, the current in which Saul's thoughts and desires were flowing. He had just heard the solemn appeal of Samuel, and the denunciations of God against him, concluded with these solemn words, "The Lord hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee this day, and hath given it to a neighbor of thine, that is better than thou." These stunning words had just fallen upon his ear; yet so full was he of self, that he could say, "*Honor me now, I pray thee, before the elders of my people, and before Israel.*" This was Saul. "*The people,*" said he, "spared what should have been destroyed;"—it was their fault, but "*honor me.*" Alas, what vanity! A heart steeped in iniquity seeking honor from his fellow-worms. Rejected of God as an office-bearer, he clings to the thought of human honor. It seems that, provided he could maintain his place in the estimation of his people, he cared but little what God thought of him. But he was rejected of God, and the kingdom torn from him; nor did it avail him much that Samuel turned again, and stood by, while Saul went through the form of worshiping the Lord, in order that he might not forfeit his place and influence amongst his people.

"Then said Samuel, Bring hither to me Agag, the king of the Amalekites; and Agag came unto him delicately. And Agag said, Surely the bitterness of death is past. And Samuel said, As thy sword hath made women childless, so shall thy mother be childless, among women. *And Samuel hewed Agag in pieces before the Lord in Gilgal.*" Agag's delicacy could not deceive one who was taught of God. How remarkable to find him hewing Agag in pieces *at Gilgal!* Gilgal was the place where the reproach of Egypt was rolled away from Israel;^[10] and, in tracing their history, we find it associated with much power over evil. Here it was, then, that this Amalekite came to his end by the hand of righteous Samuel. This is most instructive. When the soul is blessed with the realization of its full deliverance from Egypt, by the power of death and resurrection, it is in the best position for obtaining victory over evil. Had Saul known anything of the spirit and principle of Gilgal, he would not have spared Agag. He was ready enough to go thither to "renew the kingdom," but by no means so to crush and set aside all that savored of the flesh. But Samuel, acting in the energy of the Spirit of God, dealt with Agag according to the principles of truth; for it is written, "The Lord hath sworn that the Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation." *The king of Israel ought to have known this.*

CHAPTER I

DAVID ANOINTED

We now come to our theme—our rich and varied theme—the life and times of David, king of Israel.

In looking through Scripture, we observe how wonderfully the blessed God has ever brought good out of evil. It was Israel's sin to reject their King, Jehovah, and seek to set up a man over them; and in that man, who first wielded the sceptre over them, they had learnt how vain was the help of man. The Lord was now about to bring blessing to His people out of all their evil and folly.

Saul had been set aside, in the government of God; he had been weighed in the balance, and found wanting; his kingdom was to pass away from under his hand, and a man after God's own heart was about to be set upon the throne, to the glory of God, and the blessing of His people. "And the Lord said unto Samuel, How long wilt thou mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him

from reigning over Israel?" These words let us into the secret of Samuel's sorrow in reference to Saul, during the long period of his separation from him. In the last verse of chap. xv. we read, "And Samuel came no more to see Saul until the day of his death; nevertheless Samuel mourned for Saul." This was natural. There was much that was affecting—deeply affecting to the heart in the melancholy fall of this unhappy man. He had once elicited from Israel the shout of "God save the king." Many an eye, full of enthusiasm, had doubtless rested upon "the choice young man and the goodly," and now all this was gone; Saul was rejected, and Samuel felt constrained to take a position of entire separation from him as one whom God had set aside. This was the second office-bearer whom it had been Samuel's lot to see stripped of his robes of office; he had been the bearer of heavy tidings to Eli, at the opening of his career; and now, at the close of it, he was called upon to deliver, in the ear of Saul, the announcement of the judgment of heaven against his course. However, Samuel was called to enter into the thoughts of God in reference to Saul. "How long wilt *thou* mourn for Saul, seeing *I* have rejected him?" Communion with God will ever lead us to acquiesce in His ways. Sentimentalism may weep over fallen greatness, but faith grasps the great truth that God's unerring counsel shall stand, and He will do all His pleasure. Faith could not shed a tear over Agag, when hewed in pieces before the Lord, neither would it continue over a rejected Saul, because it ever flows in harmony with God, in His ways. But there is a wide difference between nature and faith; while the former sits down to weep, the latter arises and fills the horn with oil.

It is well to ponder this contrast. We are all too apt to be carried away by mere sentiment, which is often truly dangerous. Indeed, inasmuch as it is of nature, it must flow in a current different from the thoughts of the Spirit of God. Now, the most effectual remedy against the working of mere sentiment is a strong, deep, thorough, abiding conviction of the reality of the purpose of God. In the view of this, sentimentality withers and dies, while, on the other hand, faith lives and flourishes in the atmosphere of the purpose of God. This is impressively taught in the first verse of chap. xvi.—"How long wilt thou mourn?... Fill thy horn with oil, and go: I will send thee to Jesse the Bethlehemite: for I have provided Me a king among his sons."

Yes; human sorrow must flow on until the heart finds repose in the rich resources of the blessed God. The varied blanks which human events leave in the heart can only be filled up by the power of faith in the precious word, "*I have provided.*" This really settles everything. This dries the tear, alleviates the sorrow, fills the blank. The moment the spirit rests in the provision of God's love, there is a period put to all repinings. May we all know the power and varied application of this truth; may we know what it is to have our tears dried up, and our horn filled by the conviction of our Father's wise and merciful provision. This is a rare blessing; it is difficult to get completely above the region of human thought and feeling. Even a Samuel is found replying to the divine command, and manifesting a slowness to run in the way of simple obedience. The Lord said, "*Go;*" but Samuel said, "*How can I go?*" Strange inquiry! yet how fully it develops the moral condition of the human heart. Samuel had been mourning for Saul, and now, when told to go and anoint one to fill his place, his reply is, "How can I?" Now we may be quite sure that faith never says this. There is no such word as "how" in the vocabulary of faith. No; the divine command no sooner marks out the path, than faith takes it up in willing obedience, not counting the difficulties.

However, the Lord, in tender mercy, meets His servant in his difficulty. "And the Lord said, Take a heifer with thee, and say, I am come to sacrifice to the Lord." Thus with a full horn and a sacrifice he sets off to the city of David, where an obscure and unthought-of youth tended a few sheep in the wilderness.

Amongst the sons of Jesse, there would seem to have been some very fair specimens of nature—some whom Samuel, if left to the exercise of his own judgment, would have fixed upon to succeed to the crown of Israel. "And it came to pass when they were come, that he looked upon Eliab, and said, Surely the Lord's anointed is before Him." But it was not so. Natural attraction had nothing to do with the Lord's election. He looks beneath the gilded surface of men and things, and judges according to His own unerring principles. We learn something of Eliab's haughty and self-sufficient spirit in chap. xvii. But the Lord puts no confidence in the legs of a man, and thus Eliab was not His chosen vessel. It is very remarkable to find Samuel so much and so often astray in this chapter. His mourning for Saul, his hesitation to go and anoint David, his mistake about Eliab, all shows how much astray he was as to the ways of God. How solemn is the Lord's word, "Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart." This is the great difference; "*the outward appearance,*" and "*the heart.*" Even Samuel was well-nigh snared by the former, had not the Lord graciously interfered to teach him the value of the latter. "Look not on his countenance." Memorable words! "Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. And he said, Neither hath the Lord chosen this. Then Jesse made Shammah to pass by. And he said, Neither hath the Lord chosen this. Again, Jesse made *seven of his sons* to pass before Samuel. And Samuel said unto Jesse, The Lord hath not chosen these." Thus the perfection, as it were, of nature passed before the prophet, but all in vain; nature could produce nought for God or His people. And, what is still more remarkable, Jesse thought not of David in all this! The ruddy youth was in the solitude of the wilderness, with the sheep, and came not into mind in this review of nature's offspring. But, ah the eye of Jehovah was resting upon this despised youth, and beholding in him the one who was to stand in the line through which, according to the flesh, Christ should come, to occupy the throne of David, and rule over the house of Israel for ever. Truly "God seeth not as man seeth," for He "hath chosen the foolish things of the world, to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world, to confound things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are

despised, hath God chosen—yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are; that no flesh should glory in His presence" (1 Cor. i. 27-29). If Eliab, or Shammah, or Abinadab, or any one of the "seven sons" of Jesse had had the anointing oil poured upon his head, flesh might have gloried in the presence of God; but the moment David—the forgotten David—appears on the scene, we recognize in him one who would give all the glory to Him who was about to put the sceptre into his hand. In a word, David stands before us as the marked type of the Lord Jesus, who, when He appeared amongst men, was despised, overlooked, and forgotten. And I may just add here, that we shall find, in ranging through David's instructive history, how strikingly he shadowed forth the true beloved of God.

"And Samuel said unto Jesse, Are here all thy children? And he said, There remaineth yet the youngest, and, behold, he keepeth the sheep. And Samuel said unto Jesse, Send and fetch him: for we will not sit down till he come hither. And he sent, and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to. And the Lord said, Arise, anoint him: FOR THIS IS HE." "There remaineth yet the youngest." Surely he could not be the elect one, thought Jesse. Man cannot understand the ways of God. The very instrument which God is about to make use of is overlooked or despised by man. "Arise, anoint him: for this is he," is God's perfect reply to the thoughts of Jesse and Samuel.

And how happy it is to note David's occupation. "Behold, he keepeth the sheep." This was afterwards referred to by the Lord, when He said to David, "I took thee from the sheep-cote, from following the sheep, to be ruler over My people, over Israel." Nothing can more sweetly illustrate God's thoughts of the kingly office than the work of a shepherd. Indeed, when it is not executed in the spirit of a shepherd, it fails of its end. King David fully entered into this, as may be seen in those touching words, "*These sheep*, what have they done?"

The people were the Lord's sheep, and he, as the Lord's shepherd, kept them on the mountains of Israel, just as he had kept his father's sheep in the retirement of Bethlehem. He did not alter his character when he came from the sheep-cote to the throne, and exchanged the crook for the sceptre. No; he was the shepherd still, and he felt himself responsible to protect the Lord's flock from the lions and bears which ever prowled around the fold. The prophetic allusion to the true David is touching and beautiful. "Therefore will I 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). Our Lord in John x. presents Himself as the faithful and good Shepherd who loves and cares for His sheep; and, doubtless, in John vi., He had more or less reference to His shepherd character. "And this is the Father's will which hath sent Me, that of all which He hath given Me, I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day." This is a great principle of truth. Independent of His own personal love for the sheep—so wonderfully attested in life and in death—the Lord Jesus, in the above memorable passage, presents Himself as one responsible—voluntarily so, no doubt—to the Father, to keep every member of the loved and valued flock through all the vicissitudes of this life, and present them in resurrection-glory, at the last day. Such is the Shepherd to whom a Father's hand has committed us; and, oh, how has He provided for us for time and eternity, by placing us in such hands—the hands of an ever-living, ever-loving, all-powerful Shepherd, whose love many waters cannot quench; whose power no enemy can countervail; who holds in His hand the keys of death and hell, and who has established His claim to the guardianship of the flock, by laying down His life for it. Truly we may say, "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want." How can we want while Jesus feeds us? Impossible. Our foolish hearts may often desire to feed on noxious pasture, and our Shepherd may have to prove His gracious care by denying us the use of such, but one thing is certain, that those whom Jesus feeds shall not want any *good* thing.

There is something in the shepherd character which would seem to be much in harmony with the divine mind, inasmuch as we find the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, all acting in that character. The 23d psalm may be primarily viewed as the experience of Christ delighting in the assurance of His Father's shepherd-care. Then, in John x., we find the Son presented as the good Shepherd. Lastly, in Acts xx. and 1 Pet. v., we find the Holy Ghost acting in that blessed capacity, by raising up and gifting for the work the subordinate shepherds. It is edifying to mark this. It is like our God to present Himself in the most endearing relationship, and that most calculated to win our confidence and draw out our affections. Blessed be His name forever! His ways are all perfect; there is none like Him.

I would just direct the reader's attention to the contrast between the circumstances in which Samuel found David, and those in which he found Saul. He will remember that Saul was in pursuit of his father's asses, when he came in contact with Samuel. I do not interpret this fact, I merely refer to it. I believe it is expressive, in the way of evil, just as David's occupation, in the sheep-cote, was expressive of his future career, as the shepherd of Israel.^[11] When we see David tending his father's sheep in the wilderness, overlooked, or thought little of in the circle of his brethren, we are led to look for something corresponding in his after-course; nor are we disappointed. Just so, when we see Saul in search of his father's asses, we are led to look for something corresponding in his character and habits afterwards. Trifling circumstances often teach a great deal. David's affectionate and tender solicitude for the Lord's flock and forgetfulness of self, may all be traced in the circumstances in which he is introduced to our notice; and, on the other hand, Saul's ambitious, self-seeking spirit may be traced in the object of his pursuit when he came in contact with Samuel. However, I simply leave the suggestion with

the reader to use as the Lord may lead him, only reminding him that nothing can be insignificant which the Spirit has recorded concerning men who appear throughout in such marked contrast, and who each, in his way, occupied such an important place in the history of the people of God.

One can only say, Blessed be the grace which took up one to be ruler over His people, who manifested those traits of character which were most blessedly adapted to his work. "Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren: and the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward." Thus, then, David is fully before us as the Lord's anointed, and we have now to trace him in all his wanderings and vicissitudes, while rejected of man, and waiting for the kingdom.

CHAPTER II

THE VALLEY OF ELAH

No sooner had the anointing oil of the Lord been poured upon David, than he was called forth from his retirement to stand before king Saul, now forsaken of God, and troubled with an evil spirit. This unhappy man needed the soothing notes of David's harp to dispel the horrid influence of that spirit which now haunted him from day to day. Wretched man! sad monument of the results of a self-seeking course!

David, however, did not hesitate to take his place as *a servant*, even in the house of one who was afterwards to prove his most bitter enemy. It was quite the same to him where he served or what he did; he would protect his father's flocks from lions and bears, or dispel an evil spirit from Saul. In fact, from the moment David's history opens, he is seen as a servant, ready for every kind of work, and the valley of Elah furnishes a most striking manifestation of his servant character.

Saul would seem to have had little idea of who it was that stood before him, and whose music refreshed his troubled spirit; he knew not that he had in his presence the future king of Israel. "He loved him greatly; and he became his armor-bearer." The selfish Saul would gladly use the services of David in his need, though ready to shed his blood when he understood who and what he was.

But let us turn our thoughts to the deeply interesting scenes in the valley of Elah.

"Now the Philistines gathered together their armies to battle." Here now we come to something calculated to bring out the true character and worth of Saul and David, the man of form and the man of power. It is trial that brings out the reality of a man's resources. Saul had already been proved, for "all the people had followed him trembling," nor was he likely to prove a more soul-stirring leader on this occasion. A man forsaken of God, and plagued by an evil spirit, was but little adapted to lead on an army to battle, and still less to meet, single-handed, the powerful giant of Gath.

The struggle in the valley of Elah was rendered exceedingly peculiar by the challenge, on the part of Goliath, to decide the matter by single combat; it was the very method in which an *individual* might be signalized. It was not, as in ordinary cases, army against army, but it was a question of who, throughout all the host of Israel, would venture to stand before the terrific uncircumcised foe. In fact, it is plain that the blessed God was about to make manifest again to Israel that, as a people, they were utterly powerless, and that their only deliverance, as of old, was the arm of Jehovah, who was still ready to act in His wondrous character of "a man of war," whenever faith addressed Him as such.

For forty successive days did the Philistine draw near and present himself in the view of the unhappy Saul and his awe-struck army. And observe his bitter taunt—"Am not I a Philistine, and *ye servants to Saul!*" Alas! it was but too true; they had come down from their high elevation as servants to Jehovah to become mere servants to Saul. Samuel had forewarned them of all this—he had told them that they would become footmen, bakers, cooks, and confectioners to their self-chosen master; and all this, as their choice, instead of having the Lord God of Israel as their sole master and King. Nothing will teach man, however, save bitter experience; and the cutting taunts of Goliath would, no doubt, teach Israel afresh the real nature of their condition under the crushing rule of the Philistines. "Choose you a *man* for you, and let him come down to me," said the giant. How little did he know who was about to be his antagonist. He, in all his boasted fleshly strength, vainly imagined that no Israelite could stand before him.

And here we may inquire, what of Jonathan in all this scene? He who had acted in such simple faith and energy in chap. xiv., why was he not now ready to go forth against this champion? I doubt not if we look particularly at his actings, we shall find that his faith was not of that simple, independent character which would carry a man through all kinds of difficulties. The defect in his faith appears in the words, "*If* they say thus," etc. Faith never says "if:" it has to do only with God. When Jonathan said "There is no restraint to the Lord," he uttered a fine principle of truth, and one which should have carried him on without an "if." Had Jonathan's soul been reposing simply in the ability of *God*, he would not have sought for a sign. True, the Lord graciously gave him the sign, just as He had given one to Gideon before, for He ever meets His servants in all their needs.

However, Jonathan does not make his appearance in the valley of Elah; he had, it seems, done his work, and acted according to his measure; but, in the scene now before us, there was a demand for something far deeper than anything Jonathan had known.

But the Lord was secretly preparing an instrument for this new and more difficult work. And, my reader, may we not say it is ever thus that the blessed God acts? He trains in secret those whom He is about to use in public. He makes His servants acquainted with Himself in the secret solemnity of His sanctuary, and causes His greatness to pass in review before them, that thus they may be able to look with a steady gaze at the difficulties of their path. Thus it was with David. He had been alone with God while keeping the sheep in the wilderness; his soul had become filled with the thought of God's power; and now he makes his appearance in the valley of Elah, in all the simplicity and self-renouncing dignity of a man of faith. The emptiness of man had been fully proved by the forty days of Goliath's haughty boasting. Saul could avail nothing; Jesse's three eldest sons could avail nothing; yea, even Jonathan could avail nothing; all was lost, or seemed to be, when the stripling David entered the scene, clothed in the strength of Him who was about to lay in the dust the pomp and glory of the proud Philistine. The words of Goliath were reported to David, and in them he at once recognized a blasphemous defiance of the living God. "Who," said he, "is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of *the living God*?" David's faith recognized in the trembling host before him the army of the living God, and he at once made it a question between Jehovah and the Philistine.

This is most instructive: for no change of circumstances can ever rob the people of God of their dignity in the eye of faith. They may be brought low in the view of man, as in Israel's case on the present occasion, but faith ever recognizes what God has imparted; and hence David, as he beheld his poor brethren fainting in the view of their terrible enemy, was enabled to acknowledge those with whom the living God had identified Himself, and who ought not, therefore, to be defied by an uncircumcised Philistine. When faith is in exercise, it brings the soul into direct connection with the grace and faithfulness of God and His purposes toward His people. True, Israel had brought all this sorrow and humiliation upon themselves by their unfaithfulness; it was not of the Lord that they should quail in the presence of an enemy; it was the fruit of their own doing, and faith would ever apprehend and acknowledge this. Still, the question is, "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine?" This is the inquiry of faith. It was not the army of *Saul* that the man of faith beheld. No; it was the army of the *living God*—an army under the command of the same Captain that had led His hosts through the Red Sea, through the terrible wilderness, and through Jordan. Nothing less, nothing lower than this, was in the eye of faith.

But then, how little are the judgment and the actings of faith understood or valued when things get low amongst the people of God! This is very apparent on every page of Israel's history, and, we may say, on every page of the Church's history also. The path of simple, childlike faith is far removed from human sight; and if the Lord's people sink into a low, carnal state, they can never understand the principle of power in the soul of one really acting by faith. He will be misunderstood in various ways, and have wrong motives attributed to him; he will be accused of setting himself up, or acting wilfully, independently. All these things must be expected by one who stands in the breach, at a time when things are low. Through lack of faith in the majority, a man is left alone, and then, when he is led to act for God, he will be misinterpreted.

Thus it was in David's case. Not only was he left alone in the time of difficulty, but he had to endure the taunt of the flesh, administered by Eliab, his eldest brother. "And Eliab his eldest brother heard when he spake unto the men; and Eliab's anger was kindled against David, and he said, Why camest thou down hither? and with whom hast thou left those few sheep in the wilderness? *I know thy pride, and the naughtiness of thy heart*; for thou art come down that thou mightest see the battle." (Chap. xvii. 28.) This was the judgment of Eliab, in reference to the actings of David. "And David said, What have I now done? Is there not a cause?" David was borne onward by an energy quite unknown to Eliab, nor was he careful to enter upon a defence of his course to his haughty brother. Why had not Eliab acted himself for the defence of his brethren? Why had not Abinadab or Shammah acted? Because they were faithless; simply this. Not only had those three men remained powerless, but the whole congregation had remained terror-stricken in the presence of the enemy, and now, when one appeared in their midst whom God was about to use marvellously, not one could understand him.

"And David said to Saul, Let no man's heart fail because of him; thy servant will go and fight with this Philistine." Precious faith! no difficulty deters it—nothing stands in its way. What was the Philistine to David? Nothing. His tremendous height, his formidable armor, were mere circumstances; *and faith never looks at circumstances, but looks straight to God*. Had not David's soul been buoyed up by faith, he could not have uttered the words, "Thy servant will go;" for, harken to the words of him who ought to have been the first to face Israel's dreadful enemy: "And Saul said to David, Thou art not able to go against this Philistine." What language for the king of Israel! What a contrast between the man of office and the man of power! Surely Saul ought to have gone forth in the defence of the flock which had been intrusted to his care; but, ah! Saul cared not for Israel, unless so far as Israel was connected with himself, and hence his exposing his person on their behalf never, we may safely say, entered his selfish heart; and not only was he unable and unwilling to act himself, but would fain clog the energies of one who, even now, was putting forth the precious fruits of that divine principle implanted within him, and which was about to prove him so fit for the high office which the purpose of God had assigned to him, and to which His anointing oil had dedicated him.

"*Thou art not able.*" True, but Jehovah was; and David was leaning simply upon the strength of

His arm. His faith laid hold of the ability of Him who had appeared to Joshua beneath the walls of Jericho, with a sword drawn in His hand, as "Captain of the host of the Lord." David felt that Israel had not ceased to be the Lord's host, though so far sunk from what they were in Joshua's day. No; they were still the army of the Lord, and the battle was just as much the Lord's battle as when the sun and the moon were arrested in their course in order that Joshua might execute the judgment of God upon the Canaanites. Simple faith in God sustained the spirit of David, though Eliab might accuse him of pride, and Saul might talk of his want of ability.

My reader, there is nothing that can possibly give such energy and persevering power as the consciousness of acting *for God*, and that God is acting *with us*. This removes every obstacle; it lifts the soul above all human influence, and brings it into the very region of power omnipotent. Let us only be fully assured that we *are* on the Lord's side, and that His hand is acting with us, and nothing can drive us from the path of service and testimony—conduct us whither it may. "I can do all things," said the apostle, "through Christ which strengtheneth me." And again, "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." The very weakest saint can do all things through Christ. But if man's eye rests on this weak saint, it seems like presumption to talk of "doing all things."

Thus, when Saul looked upon David, and compared him with Goliath, he judged rightly when he said, "Thou art not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him: for thou art but a youth, and he a man of war from his youth." It was a comparison of flesh with flesh, and, as such, it was quite correct. To compare a stripling with a giant would leave little room for hesitation as to the issue of the conflict; but he ought to have compared the strength of Goliath with that of the God of the armies of Israel. This was what David did. "And David said unto Saul, Thy servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock: and I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth: and when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him. Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear: and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God." This was the argument of faith. The hand that had delivered from one difficulty would deliver from another. There is no "if" in all this. David did not wait for a sign; he simply said, "*Thy servant will go.*" David had felt the power of God's presence with him in secret before he came forth to present himself in public as the servant of God and of Israel. As another has remarked, David had not boasted of his triumph over the lion and the bear; no one seemed to have heard of it before; nor would he probably have spoken of it, had it not been for the purpose of showing what a solid ground of confidence he had in reference to the great work on which he was about to enter. He would fain show that it was not in his own strength he was going forth. So was it in the matter of Paul's rapture to the third heaven: for fourteen years had that circumstance remained buried as a secret with the apostle, nor would he have divulged it, had not the carnal reasonings of the Corinthians compelled him to do so.

Now, both these cases are full of practical instruction for us. With the majority of us, alas, there is too great a readiness to talk of our doings, or, at least, to think much of them. The flesh is prone to glory in anything that might exalt *self*; and if the Lord, despite of the evil in us, has accomplished any little service by our instrumentality, how speedily is it communicated in a spirit of pride and self-complacency. It is all right to speak of the Lord's grace, and to have our hearts filled with thankful adoration because of it; but this is very different from boasting of things connected with self.

David, however, kept the secret of his triumph over the lion and the bear concealed in his own bosom, and did not bring it forth until the fitting occasion; nor does he, even then, speak of himself as having achieved aught, but he simply says, "*The Lord that delivered me* out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, He will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine." Precious, self-renouncing faith!—faith that counts on God for everything, and trusts the flesh in nothing—faith which brings God into every difficulty, and leads us, with deepest thankfulness, to hide self, and give Him all the glory.

But it frequently needs much spirituality to detect the vast difference between the language of faith and the language of mere commonplace and formal religiousness. Saul assumed the garb and phraseology of religiousness; we have already seen much of this in his history, and we see it in his interview with David. Mere *religiousness* and *faith* here are seen in marked contrast. When David had made the clear and unequivocal statement of faith in the presence and power of Jehovah, Saul added, "*Go, and the Lord be with thee.*" But, ah, how little did he know what was involved in having the Lord with him. He *seemed* to trust the Lord, but *in reality* he trusted his armor. Had he understood what he said, why think of putting on armor? "The Lord be with thee" was in Saul's mouth a mere commonplace: it really meant nothing, for he had no idea of David's going *simply* with the Lord.

It is well to dwell upon, and distinctly point out, the evil of this—the evil of using words which, so far as we are concerned, mean nothing, but which involve a trifling with the Lord's name and truth. How often do we speak of trusting the Lord, when, in reality, we are leaning on some circumstance, or set of circumstances. How often do we speak of living by the day, in simple dependence upon God, when, if we judged the positive condition of our souls before God, we should find that we were looking to some human or earthly source of supply. This is a sad evil, and should be most carefully watched against. It was just what Saul exhibited, when, having made use of the apparently devout expression, "The Lord be with thee," he proceeded to "arm David with his armor, and he put a helmet of brass upon his head; also he armed him with a coat of mail." He had no other idea but that David was to fight in the usual way. No doubt, it was

professedly in the name of the Lord: but he thought David *ought to use means*. But it happens that we frequently speak of using means and really shut out God; we profess to use means in dependence upon God, and, in reality, use the mere name of God in dependence upon the means. This is virtually, and according to the judgment of faith, to make a God of our means. Whether had Saul more confidence, in the Lord or in the armor? In the armor, no doubt; and so with all who do not truly walk by faith; it is the *means* they lean upon, and not upon God.

My reader will, doubtless, perceive how strikingly all this bears upon the title of this little book, viz., "The Life of Faith." We can hardly dwell upon any point in our subject more important than that suggested by the interesting scene on which we are immediately dwelling. The man of means, and the man of faith, are really before us; and we can at once perceive how far the latter proceeds in the use of means. Means are to be used, no doubt, but only such means as are perfectly consistent with the full and blessed action of faith, and also with the untarnished glory of the God of all power and grace. Now David felt that Saul's armor and coat of mail were not such means, and he, therefore, refused them. Had he gone with them, the victory would not have been so manifestly the Lord's. But David had professed his faith in the Lord's deliverance, and not in human armor. True, means will be used; but let us take care that our means do not shut out God.^[12]

"And David girded his sword upon his armor, and he assayed to go; for he had not proved it. And David said unto Saul, I cannot go with these; for I have not proved them. And David put them off him." Happy deliverance from the trammels of human policy! It has been observed, and most truly so, that David's trial was not when he met the giant, in actual conflict, but when he was tempted to use Saul's armor. Had the enemy succeeded in inducing him to go with that, all was gone; but, through grace, he rejected it, and thus left himself entirely in the Lord's hands, and we know what security he found there. This is faith. It leaves itself in God's hand.^[13]

And, my reader, may we not apply this with much profit to the case of a poor helpless sinner in reference to the forgiveness of his sins? I believe we may. Satan will tempt such an one to seek some addition to the finished work of Christ—something that will detract from the glory of the Son of God as the *only* Saviour of sinners. Now to such I would say, It matters not *what* you add to the work of Christ,—you make it of no avail. If it might be permitted to add anything, surely circumcision would have been admitted, as being an ordinance of divine institution; yet the apostle says, "Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace." (Gal. v. 2-4) In a word, then, we must have Christ *alone*; we want no more, we can do with no less. If our works are to be put in with Christ's, then He is not sufficient. We dishonor the sufficiency of His atonement if we seek to connect aught of our own with it, just as David would have dishonored the Lord by going forth to meet the Philistine champion in Saul's armor. Doubtless many a so-called prudent man would have condemned what seemed to him to be the rashness and fool-hardiness of the stripling; indeed, the more practised a man was in human warfare, the more likely would he have been to condemn the course adopted by the man of faith. But what of that? David knew in whom he had believed; he knew it was not rashness that was leading him on, but simple faith in God's willingness and ability to meet him in his need. Few, perhaps, in Saul's army knew the weakness of David as realized by himself in that trying moment. Though all eyes were fastened upon him as one having much self-confidence, yet we know what it was that buoyed up his heart, and gave firmness to his step as he went forth to meet the terrible foe. We know that the power of God was there just as manifestly as when the waters of the sea were divided to make a way for the ransomed to pass over; and when faith brings the power of God into action, nothing can stand in the way.

Verse 40 shows us David's armor. "And he took his staff in his hand, and chose him five smooth stones out of the brook, and put them in a shepherd's bag which he had, even in a scrip; and his sling was in his hand: and he drew near to the Philistine." So, we see, David did use means; but what means! What contempt does David cast upon the ponderous armor of his enemy! How his sling must have contrasted with Goliath's spear like a weaver's beam! In fact, David could not have inflicted a deeper wound upon the Philistine's pride than by coming against him with such weapons. Goliath felt this. "Am I a dog?" said he. It mattered not, in the judgment of faith, what he was, dog or giant; he was an enemy of the people of God, and David was meeting him with the weapons of faith. "Then said David to the Philistine, Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied. This day will the Lord deliver thee into my hand ... that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. And all this assembly shall know that *the Lord saveth not with sword and spear*: for the battle is the Lord's, and He will give you into our hands."^[14] Here we have the true object of the man of faith, viz., that Israel and all the earth might have a glorious testimony to the power and presence of God in the midst of His people. If David had used Saul's armor it would not have been known that the Lord saved not by sword and spear—his warfare would just seem like any other; but the sling and the stone while giving little prominence to him that used it, gave the glory to Him from whom the victory came.^[15]

Faith ever honors God, and God ever honors faith. David, as has been already remarked, put himself into the hands of God, and the happy result of so doing was victory—full, glorious victory. "David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and with a stone, and smote the Philistine, and slew him; *but there was no sword in the hand of David*." Magnificent triumph! Precious fruit of simple faith in God! How should it encourage the heart to cast away from it every carnal

confidence, and to cling to the only true source of power. David was made the happy instrument of delivering his brethren from the galling and terrifying threats of the uncircumcised Philistine; he had come into their midst, from the retirement of a shepherd's life, unknown and despised, though the anointed king of Israel; he had gone forth single-handed to meet the enemy of the congregation; he had laid him prostrate, and made a show of him openly; and all this, be it remembered, as *the servant* of God, and the servant of Israel, and in the energy of a faith which circumstances could not shake. It was a wondrous deliverance, gained by a single blow—no manoeuvring of armies—no skill of generals—no prowess of soldiers. No; a stone from the brook, slung by a shepherd's hand, settled the whole matter. It was the victory of faith.

"And when the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they fled." How vain are those hopes which are based on the perishable resources of flesh, in its greatest apparent strength and energy! Who that saw the giant and the stripling about to engage in conflict, but would have trembled for the latter? Who would have thought that all the massy armor would come to nothing before a sling and a stone? Yet see the end. The champion of the Philistines fell, and with him all their fondly-cherished hopes. "And the men of Israel and of Judah arose, and shouted, and pursued the Philistines." Yes: they might well shout, for God was manifestly gone out before them, to deliver them from the power of their enemies. He had been working powerfully by the hand of one whom they knew not, nor recognized, as their anointed king, but whose moral grace might well attract every heart.

But amidst the many thousands who beheld the victory, we read of one whose soul was drawn forth in ardent affection for the victor. The most thoughtless must have been struck with admiration of the victory; and, no doubt, it affected individuals differently. At such times, in a certain sense, "the thoughts of many hearts are revealed." Some would envy, some would admire; some would rest in the victory; some in the instrument; some would have their hearts drawn up to "the God of the armies of Israel" who had again come amongst them with a drawn sword in His hand. But there was one devoted heart who was powerfully attracted to *the person* of the conqueror, and this was Jonathan. "And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking unto Saul, that *the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David*, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul" (Chap. xviii. 1.) No doubt Jonathan participated most fully in the joy of all in the triumph of David; but there was more than this in it; it was not merely the triumph, but the person of the triumphant one that drew out the deep and ardent affections of Jonathan's soul. Saul might selfishly seek to retain the valiant David about his person, not because of love for his person, but simply to magnify himself. Not so Jonathan; he *loved* David. David had removed a load from his spirit, and filled up a great blank in his heart. The challenge of the giant had, as it was each day repeated, developed the poverty of Israel. The eye might have ranged up and down the ranks in search of one able to meet the urgent need, but in vain. As the giant's vaunting words fell on their ears, "*all* the men of Israel, when they saw the man, fled from him, and were sore afraid." "All"; yes; all fled, when they heard his words, and saw his size. Terrible was the blank, therefore, left in the heart on this solemn occasion; and when a beloved one appeared to fill up that blank, what wonder that Jonathan's whole soul was drawn out in genuine affection for that one. And be it remembered, that it was David himself, and not his work only, that touched Jonathan's heart. He admired his victory surely, but his person more. It is well to note this, and trace its striking application to the true David.

That we are warranted in making such application will, surely, not be questioned. The whole scene, from first to last, is too remarkable to admit of a question. In Goliath we behold the power of the enemy by which he held the soul in grievous bondage. From this power there was no means of deliverance within human reach. The challenge might be repeated from day to day—but all in vain. From age to age might the solemn verdict be heard throughout the myriads of Adam's fallen posterity, "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment;" and the only response which man could yield was, like Israel's response in the valley of Elah, dismay—deep, deep dismay. "Through fear of death, all our lifetime subject to bondage." This was man's response. The need was felt—the void unfilled. The human heart yearned for something, and yearned in vain. The claims of justice could not be met—death and judgment frowned in the distance, and man could only tremble at the prospect. But, blessed be the God of all grace, a deliverer has appeared—One mighty to save, the Son of God, the true David, the Anointed King of Israel and of all the earth. He has met the need, filled up the blank, satisfied the yearnings of the heart. But how? where? when? By His death on Calvary, in that terrible hour when all creation was made to feel the solemn reality of what was being transacted. Yes, my reader, the cross was the field where the battle was fought, and the victory won. There it was that the strong man had all his armor taken from him, and his house spoiled. There, justice had its utmost claims fully satisfied; there, the handwriting of ordinances, which was against us, was nailed to the tree. There, too, the curse of a broken law was forever obliterated by the blood of the Lamb, and the needs of a guilty conscience satisfied by the same. "The precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot," settled everything for the believing soul. The poor trembling sinner may stand by and behold the conflict, and the glorious issue thereof, and behold all the power of the enemy laid low by one stroke of his glorious Deliverer, and feel the heavy burden rolled away from his struggling spirit. The tide of divine peace and joy may flow into his soul, and he may walk abroad in the full power of the emancipation purchased for him by the blood, and proclaimed to him in the gospel.

And shall not one thus delivered love *the Person* of the deliverer?—not merely the work, but the Person? Ah! how can it be otherwise? Who that has felt the real depth of his need, and groaned beneath the burden of his sins, can fail to love and adore that gracious One who has satisfied the

one and removed the other? The work of Jesus is infinitely precious; it meets the sinner's need, and introduces the soul into a position in which it can contemplate the person of Christ. In a word, then, the *work* of the Saviour is for the *sinner*; the *person* of the Saviour is for the saint: what He has *done*, is for the former; what He *is*, is for the latter.

But there may be a mere formal following of Christ while the heart is cold and remains unacquainted with His person. In the 6th chapter of John, we find a multitude of persons following the Lord Jesus merely on selfish grounds, and He is constrained to tell them so: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek Me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled." It was not for what He *was* they were seeking Him, but for mere carnal advantage; and hence, when He applies to their hearts the searching statement, "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, there is no life in you," we read, "Many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him." Now, eating His flesh, and drinking His blood, is, in other words, the soul finding its food, its satisfaction, in the offering of Himself in sacrifice for us. The whole gospel of John is a development of the personal glory of the Incarnate Word who is presented to us as "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." Yet the natural heart could not receive Him thus, and, therefore, "many went back, and walked no more with Him." The majority could not bear to have this truth pressed upon them. But harken to the testimony of one taught of God: "Peter answered and said, Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life; and we believe and are sure that Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Here we have the two things, viz.: what He *had* for them, what He *was* to them. He had eternal life to give, and He was the Son of the living God; by the former, the sinner is drawn to Him; by the latter, the saint is bound to Him. He not only meets all our necessities as sinners by His work, but also satisfies our affections and desires as saints by His person.

This train of thought has been suggested by the deeply interesting and touching interview between David and Jonathan, when the conflict was over. The many thousands of Israel had raised the shout of triumph, and pursued the Philistines to reap the fruits of victory, while Jonathan was delighting himself in the person of the victor. "And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him, and gave it to David, and his garments, even to his sword, and to his bow, and to his girdle." This was love, pure, simple, unaffected love—undivided occupation with an attractive object. Love strips itself for the sake of its object. David had forgotten himself and put his life in jeopardy for God and the congregation, and now Jonathan would forget himself for David.

Reader, let us remember that love to Jesus is the spring of true Christianity. Love to Jesus makes us strip ourselves; and, we may say, that to strip self to honor Jesus is the fairest fruit of the work of God in the soul.

"Talk they of morals? O Thou bleeding Lamb,
The great morality is love to Thee."

Very different were the feelings with which Saul regarded the person and work of David. He had not learnt to forget himself and rejoice to see the work done by another. It is the work of grace to be able to do this. We all naturally like to be or to do something—to be looked at and thought of. Thus it was with Saul; he was a self-important man, and was, therefore, little able to bear the songs of the maids of Israel: "Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands." Saul could not brook the idea of being second. He forgot how he had trembled at the voice of Goliath; though cowardly he would fain be counted brave and valiant. "And Saul eyed David from that day and forward." Terrible eye!—the eye of envy and bitter jealousy.

We shall have occasion to trace the development both of Jonathan's love and Saul's hatred, as we proceed in this work, and must now trace the man of faith through other scenes.

NOTE.—It requires a very simple heart and single eye to be able to rejoice as unfeignedly in the fruit of another's labors as in that of our own hands. Had the glory of God and the good of His people filled Saul's heart, he would not have spent a thought upon the question as to the numbers attributed to him or to David. Alas, he sought his own glory. This was the secret of his envy and jealousy. Oh, what sacred rest, what true elevation, what perfect quietness of spirit flows from self-renunciation, such self-renunciation as results from having the heart wholly occupied with Christ! When we are honestly seeking the promotion of Christ's glory we shall not be careful as to the instrument.

CHAPTER III

THE CAVE OF ADULLAM

From amid the brilliant lustre of the valley of Elah, David passed into very different scenes in the household of Saul, where envious looks and heartless attempts upon his life were the only returns for the soothing notes of his harp, and the valiant exploits of his sling and his sword. Saul owed his continuance on the throne, under God, to David, yet the javelin was Saul's return. But the Lord in His mercy kept His dear servant, amid all the intricacies of his extremely difficult

position. "David behaved himself wisely in all his ways; and the Lord was with him. Wherefore, when Saul saw that he behaved himself very wisely, he was afraid of him. But all Israel and Judah loved David, because he went out and came in before them."

Thus was David, while anointed king of Israel, called upon to endure the hatred and reproach of the ruling power, though loved by all who were enabled to trace his moral worth. It was impossible that Saul and David could continue to dwell together; being of totally opposite principles, a separation must necessarily take place. David knew that he was anointed king, but Saul occupied the throne, and he was quite content to wait on God, and in meekness abide His time. Till then, the Spirit of Christ led him in the path of an exile. His way to the throne lay through multiplied sorrows and difficulties. He, like his blessed Master and antitype, was called to suffering first, and glory afterwards. David would have served Saul to the end—he honored him as "the Lord's anointed." If the moving of his finger would have set him on the throne, he would not have taken advantage of it. Of this we have the fullest evidence in his having twice saved Saul's life, when, to all appearance, the Lord had put him in his power. David waited simply upon God. Here was his strength, his elevation—his entire dependence. He could say, "My soul wait thou *only* upon God, for my expectation is from Him." Hence we see that David was carried happily through all the snares and dangers of his path as a servant in the household and army of Saul. The Lord delivered him from every evil work, and preserved him unto that kingdom which He had prepared for him, and to which it was His purpose to raise him "after that he had suffered a while." David had, as it were, but just issued from the place of secret discipline and training, to appear in the battle-field, and, having accomplished his work there, he was called to take his place again on the throne, to learn some deeper lessons in the school of Christ.

The Lord's lessons are often painful and difficult, because of the waywardness or indolence of our hearts; but every fresh lesson learned, every fresh principle imbibed, only fits us the more for all that is yet before us. Yet it is blessed to be the disciples of Christ, and to yield ourselves to His gracious discipline and training. The end will unfold to us the blessedness of such a place. Nor need we wait for the end; even now, the soul finds it most happy to be subject, in all things, to the Master. "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. *Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.* For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light." (Matt. xi. 28-30.) There are, we may say, three rests spoken of in Scripture; *first*, the rest which, as sinners, we find in the accomplished work of Christ; *second*, the present rest, which, as saints, we find in being entirely subject to the will of God. This is opposed to *restlessness*. *Thirdly*, the rest that remains for the people of God.

Now, David knew much of the blessedness of the second of these rests, inasmuch as he was entirely subject to the counsel and will of God, in reference to the kingdom. He was prepared to wait for God's time, being assured that it was the best and wisest time. He could say,

"My times are in Thy hand;
Father, I wish them there."

How desirable this subjection! It saves us from much anxiety of heart and restlessness. When we walk in the habitual conviction that God is making "all things to work together for our good," the spirit is most wonderfully tranquillized. We shall never set about planning for ourselves if we believe that God is planning for us; we shall be satisfied to leave *all* to Him. But alas, how often is it otherwise with us. How often do we vainly imagine that we can manage matters better than the blessed God. We may not say so in so many words; yet we virtually feel and act as if it were so. The Lord grant unto us a more subdued and confiding spirit. The supremacy of the will of God over that of the creature will characterize the millennial age; but the saint is called *now* to let the will of God rule him in all things.

It was this subjection of spirit that led David to give way in the matter of the kingdom, and to take his place in the lonely cave of Adullam. He left Saul, and the kingdom, and his own destinies in the hands of God, assured that all would yet be well. And, oh, how happy was it for him to find himself outside the unhealthy atmosphere of Saul's house, and from under the jealous glance of Saul's eye! He could breathe more freely in the cave, however it might seem in man's view, than in the household of Saul. So will it ever be; the place of separation is the freest and the happiest. The Spirit of the Lord was departed from Saul, and this was faith's warrant for separation from his person, while, at the same time, there was the fullest subjection to his power as the king of Israel. The intelligent mind will have no difficulty in distinguishing between these two things. The separation and the subjection should both be complete.^[16]

But we must view Saul not only in a secular but also in a religious point of view; and it was in reference to the religious element in his personal character and official capacity, that there was the greatest need for distinct and decided separation. Saul had manifested throughout a desire to rule the conscience in religious matters; witness the scene in chap. xiv., where, as we have seen, spiritual energy was cramped and hindered by Saul's religious rule. Now, when such rule is set up, there is no alternative but separation. When form without power prevails, the solemn word of the Holy Ghost is, "From such turn away." Faith never stops to inquire, Whither shall I "turn"? We are told what to turn away *from*, and we may be sure that, when we have yielded obedience to this, we shall be left at no loss as to the rest.

However, we shall see this principle in a much clearer light when we regard David in a typical point of view. In reality, David was forced into the place of separation, and thus, as one rejected of man, and anointed of God, we see him a type of Christ in His present rejection. David was, in

principle, God's king, and as such experienced man's hostility, being driven into exile to avoid death. The cave of Adullam became the great gathering point for all who loved David and were wearied of the unrighteous rule of Saul. So long as David remained in the king's house, there was no call upon any one to separate; but the moment the rejected David took his place outside, no one could remain neutral; wherefore we read, "Every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, and every one that was discontented, gathered themselves unto him; and he became a captain over them: and there were with him about four hundred men." Here was, then, the line of distinction clearly marked. It was now David, or Saul. All who loved form, loved an empty name, a powerless office, continued to adhere to Saul; but all who were dissatisfied with these things, and loved the person of God's anointed king, flocked around him in the hold. The prophet, priest, and king were there,—the thoughts and sympathies of God were there, and though the company assembled there must have presented a strange appearance to the carnal and the worldly, yet it was a company gathered round the person of David, and linked with his destinies. It was composed of men whose very condition seems to have driven them to David, but who were now deriving character and distinction from their nearness and devotedness to the person of the beloved. Away from Saul, away from all that marked the day of his power they could enjoy the sweetness of unhindered fellowship with the person of him who, though now rejected, was ere long to ascend the throne and wield the sceptre, to the glory of God and the joy of His people.

Reader, you may clearly perceive in David and his despised company a precious sample of the true David, and those who prefer companionship with Him to all the joys, the honors, and emoluments of earth. Those who had cast in their lot with David—what had they to do with the interests of Saul? They had found a new object, a new centre, and communion with God's anointed. Nor was their place about the person of David dependent on, or connected with, what they had been. No; it mattered not what they had been; they were now the servants of David, and he was their captain. This gave them their character. They had cast in their lot with God's exile; their interest and his were identical. Happy company! Happy to escape from the rule and influence of Saul—still more happy to find themselves in companionship with God's anointed king. Their discontent, their distress, their debt, were all forgotten in their new circumstances. The grace of David was their present portion; the glory of David their future prospect. Just so should it be with Christians now. Through grace, and the gentle leadings of the Father, we have found our way to Jesus—the anointed and rejected Jesus—now hidden with God. No doubt, we all had our respective features of character in the days of our guilt and folly—some discontented, some in distress, all in heavy debt to God—miserable, ruined, guilty, void of everything which could recommend us to Christ: yet God has led us to the feet of His dear Son, where we have found pardon and peace through His precious blood: Jesus has removed our discontent, alleviated our distress, cancelled our debt, brought us near His beloved person. What return are we making for all this grace? Are we gathering, in ardent affection, round the Captain of our salvation? Are we weaned from the state of things under Saul? Are we living as those who are waiting for the day when our David shall mount the throne? Are our affections set upon things above? "If ye then be risen with Christ," says the apostle, "seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory." (Col. iii. 1-4.)

It is greatly to be feared that few really enter into the true nature and practical consequences of their position as associated with the crucified and risen Jesus—few really enter into the depth and meaning of our Lord's words, "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world;" or of the Spirit's word, "The Sanctifier and the sanctified are all of one." The measure of the saint's separation from the world is nothing less than Christ's; *i. e.*, the principle of it. Looked at practically, alas, it is quite another thing; but in principle there is no difference. It is of vast importance to enforce this principle. The actual standing, calling and hopes of the Church are so feebly apprehended. Yet the feeblest believer in Christ is, in God's view, as separate from all belonging to earth as Jesus. It is not a matter of attainment, but of our standing, through grace: not an object after which we must strive, but a point from which we must start. Many have been led astray by the idea that we must work up to a heavenly position by shaking off the things of earth. This is to begin at the wrong end. It is the same error, only in reference to another department of truth, as to assert that we must work up to a condition of justification, by mortifying the sins of the flesh. Now, we do not mortify self *in order to be* justified, but *because we are* justified; yea, dead and risen with Christ. In like manner, we do not put away things of earth in order to become heavenly, but because we are so. Abram's calling was to leave kindred and go to Canaan; *our* calling is a heavenly one (of which Canaan was a type), and in proportion as we enter into it we will be separate from earth. But to make our standing the result of conduct, instead of conduct the result of standing, is a grievous error. Ask a saint, really intelligent as to the heavenly calling, to give a reason for his standing apart from the present world: what will he reply? Will he tell you that he does so in order to become heavenly? Nay. Will he tell you that it is because the present world is under judgment? Nay. No doubt *it is* under judgment, but this is not the true ground of separation. What then? "We have died, and our life is hid with Christ in God."—"They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." "Holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling," etc. Here we have the grand reason for the saint's present separation from the world. It does not matter what the world is, be it good or bad; he is not *of* it, though *in* it, as the place of his daily toil, conflict, and discipline.

Christian! ponder well your heavenly calling—it is the only thing that will give full deliverance from the power and influence of worldliness. Men may seek *abstraction* from the world in various ways, but there is only one in which to attain *separation* from it. Again, men may seek to render

themselves *unearthly* in various ways; there is only one way in which we can become really *heavenly*. Abstraction is not separation; nor is unearthliness to be mistaken for heavenliness. The monastic system illustrates very fully the distinction between these things. A sincere monk is unearthly, in a certain sense, but by no means heavenly; he is unnatural, but by no means spiritual; he is abstracted from the world, but by no means separated from it.

The Christian's heavenly calling is in virtue of *what* Christ is, and *where* He is. The heart instructed by the Holy Ghost as to the meaning of Heb. ii. 11, finds the reason and power of his deliverance from the principles, habits, pursuits, feelings, and tendencies of this present age. The Lord Jesus has taken His place on high as Head of the body, the Church; and the Holy Ghost has come down to lead all the foreknown and predestinated members of Christ into living fellowship with the living Head, now rejected from earth, and hidden with God. Hence in the gospel, as preached by Paul, the remission of sins is inseparably connected with the heavenly calling, inasmuch as he preached the unity of the one body on earth with its Head in heaven. He preached justification, not merely as an abstract thing, but as the result of what the Church is, as one with Christ, who is now at the right hand of God, Head over all things to His Church, angels and principalities being made subject to Him. Paul preached remission of sins, no doubt, but he preached it all with the fulness, depth, power and energy which the doctrine of the Church imparts to it.

The epistle to the Ephesians teaches us not only that God can forgive sinners, but far more than this: it unfolds to us the wondrous truth that believers are members of the body of Christ; "for we," says the apostle, "are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones." Again, "But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ (by grace ye are saved); and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." Again, "Christ also loved the Church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word. That He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." These passages present far more than mere remission of sins. To be the bride of the Lamb is a very much higher, very much more glorious thing than only to have our sins forgiven.

"Yet 'tis not that we know the joy
Of cancell'd sin alone,
But, happier far, Thy saints are call'd
To share Thy glorious throne."

The blessed God has gone beyond all man's thoughts in His mode of dealing with the Church. He has called us, not only to walk here below in the full sense of His pardoning love, but also to know the love of Christ to His body, the Church, and the high and holy dignity of that Church, as seated in the heavenlies.

My reader may perhaps inquire what has the cave of Adullam to do with the Church's place in the heavens? It has to do with it only so far as it illustrates the present place of rejection into which Christ has entered, and which all must know who enjoy fellowship with Him. Of course, neither David nor his men knew anything about the heavenly calling as the Church now knows it. We may frequently discover in Old Testament scriptures, foreshadowings of the heavenly calling, in the character walk, and circumstances of certain prominent persons which are introduced to our notice; but the heavenly calling, properly speaking, was not known until the Lord Jesus took His seat on high, and the Holy Ghost came down to baptize believers, Jew and Gentile, into one body; then the heavenly calling was developed in all its power and fulness. This truth was peculiarly committed to Paul; it was an essential part of the mystery committed to him, and was embodied in these words, "Why persecutest thou *Me*?" Saul was persecuting the saints, and the Lord Jesus appeared to him in heavenly glory, and told him that these saints were part of Himself—His members on earth. Henceforth this became Paul's great thesis; in it was involved the oneness of the Church with Christ, and therefore the heavenly calling of the Church.

And let the reader observe, that all this was not merely an admission of the Gentile into the Jewish fold.^[17] No, it was taking both Jew and Gentile out of their circumstances in nature, and setting them down in new circumstances—new to both. The work of the Cross was needful to break down the middle wall of partition, and to make of twain one new man, *i. e.*, to make of Jew and Gentile a new heavenly man, separated from earth and its aims. The present place of Christ in the heavens is connected with His rejection by Israel, during what is called the Church period, and serves to bring out still more distinctly the heavenly character of the Church of God. She belongs to heaven, and is called to manifest on earth the living energy of the Holy Ghost who dwells in her.

Thus, as David's men were withdrawn from all connection with Saul's system by virtue of their association with him, so all those who are led by the Spirit to know their oneness with the rejected Jesus, must feel themselves dissociated from present things, by reason of that blessed oneness with Him.

Hence, if you ask a heavenly man why he does not mix himself up with the plans and pursuits of this age, his reply will be, Because Christ is at the right hand of God, and I am identified with Him. He has been cast out by this world and I take my place with Him, apart therefore from its objects and pursuits. All who understand the true nature of the heavenly calling will walk in separation from the world; but those who do not, will just take their portion here, and live as

others.

Many, alas, are satisfied with the mere knowledge of the forgiveness of sins, and never think of going further. They have passed through the Red Sea, it may be, but manifest no desire to cross the Jordan, and eat the old corn of the land of promise. Just as it was in the day of David's rejection; many, though Israelites, did not cast in their lot in rejection with him. It was one thing to be an Israelite; it was another thing to be with David in the hold. Even Jonathan was not there; he still adhered to the old system of things. Though loving David as his own soul, he lived and died in companionship with Saul. True, he ventured to speak *for* David, and sought his company when he could. He had stripped himself to clothe David; yet he did not cast in his lot *with* him. And, consequently, when the names and the deeds of David's worthies are heralded by the Holy Ghost, we look in vain for the name of the affectionate Jonathan; when the devoted companions of David's exile were mustering round his throne in the sunshine of his royal countenance, poor Jonathan was mingled with the dust, having ingloriously fallen, on Mount Gilboa, by the hands of the uncircumcised Philistines!

Oh that all who profess to love the Lord Jesus Christ may seek a more decided identification with Him in this the time of His rejection! The citizens have sent a message after Him, saying, "We will not have this man to reign over us;" and shall we go and associate ourselves with those citizens to forward their Christ-rejecting plans? God forbid. May our hearts be with Him where He is. May we know the hallowed fellowship of the cave of Adullam, where the Prophet, Priest, and King are to be found, embodied in the beloved person of Him who loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood. We cannot walk with Saul and David at the same time. We cannot hold Christ and the world—we must take our choice. The Lord grant us grace to reject the evil and choose the good, remembering the solemn words of the apostle: "This is a faithful saying; for if we be *dead with Him*, we shall also *live with Him*; if we *suffer*, we shall also *reign* with Him; if we deny Him, He also will deny us." This is the time of suffering, the time for enduring afflictions and hardness; we must wait for the time of rest and glory. David's men were called, by reason of their association with him, to undergo much toil and fatigue, but love made all light and easy to them; and their names and exploits were recorded and faithfully remembered when David was at rest in his kingdom. None were forgotten. The twenty-third chapter of 2nd. Samuel will furnish the reader with the precious catalogue, and will, no doubt, lead his mind onward to the time when the Lord Christ shall reward *His* faithful servants—those who from love to His person, and by the energy of His Spirit, have performed acts of service for Him in the time of His rejection. These acts may not be seen, known, or thought of by men; but Jesus knows them, and will publicly declare them from the throne of His glory. Who would ever have known the acts of David's worthies if the Holy Ghost had not recorded them? Who would have known of the three who drew water from the well of Bethlehem? Who would have known of the slaying of a lion in a pit, in the time of snow? Just so now: many a heart throbs with love to the person of the Saviour, unknown to all; and many a hand may be stretched forth in service to Him, unobserved by human eye. It is sweet to think it is so, specially in an age of cold formality like the present—sweet to think of those who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Some there are, alas, who are not only indifferent to His beloved Person, but who even go as far as to traduce Him—to rob Him of His dignity, and make Him little better than Elias, or one of the prophets. But, my reader, we shall not dwell upon these; we have, thank God, a happier theme, and we shall, with His help, pursue it. We shall think of those valued men who jeopardized their lives for the sake of their captain, and who, the instant he uttered his desire, were ready, at all cost, to gratify it. Love never pauses to calculate. It was quite sufficient for those worthies to know that David longed for a drink from the well of Bethlehem, and they procured it at any cost to themselves: "And these three mighty men brake through the host of the Philistines, and drew water out of the well of Bethlehem, that was by the gate, and took it and brought it to David: nevertheless he would not drink thereof, but poured it out unto the Lord."^[18] Lovely scene! Sweet sample of what the Church ought to be! Loving not her life unto the death for Christ's sake. Oh that the Holy Ghost may kindle within us a flame of ardent love to the person of Jesus—may He unfold to our souls more of the divine excellencies of His person, that we may know Him to be the fairest amongst ten thousand, and altogether lovely, and be able to say with a true worthy, "Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ." (Phil. iii. 8.)

CHAPTER IV

NABAL AND ABIGAIL.—I SAM. XXV.

It is interesting to observe, as we pass from stage to stage of David's history, how different individuals were affected toward his person, and the consequent position assumed in reference to him. It required energy of faith to discern, in the despised outcast, the future king of Israel. In this chapter we are presented with two striking examples of persons thus variously affected in reference to David's person and career.

"There was a man in Maon, whose possessions were in Carmel; and the man was very great, and he had three thousand sheep, and a thousand goats; and he was shearing his sheep in Carmel.

Now the name of the man was Nabal." This Nabal was an Israelite, and he appears in marked contrast with David, who, though anointed king of Israel, had not where to lay his head, but was a wanderer from mountain to mountain, and from cave to cave. Nabal was a selfish man, with no sympathy for David. If he had blessings, he had them for himself; if he was "great," he had no idea of sharing his greatness with any one else, and least of all with David and his companions.

"And David heard *in the wilderness* that Nabal did shear his sheep. And David sent out ten young men, and David said to the young men, Get you up to Carmel, and go to Nabal, and greet him in my name," &c. David was in the wilderness; this was his place. Nabal was surrounded by all the comforts of life. The former owed all his sorrows and privations to what he was; the latter owed all his possessions and enjoyments to what he was. Now, we generally find that where advantages are derived from religious distinction and profession, much selfishness exists. The profession of truth, if not connected with self-denial, will be connected with positive self-indulgence; and hence we may observe at the present day a determined spirit of worldliness connected with the very highest profession of truth. This is a grievous evil. The apostle was made to feel the anguish of it, even in his time. "Many," says he, "walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of *the cross of Christ*: whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, *who mind earthly things*." (Phil. iii. 18, 19.) Observe, they are the enemies of the *cross* of Christ. They do not throw off all semblance of Christianity; far from it. "Many *walk*." This expression shows a measure of profession. The persons here pictured would, doubtless, be much offended were any to refuse them the appellation of Christians; but then they do not want to take up the *cross*; they desire not practical identification with a crucified Christ; whatever amount of professed Christianity can be had apart from all self-denial is welcome to them, but not one jot beyond this. "Their God is their belly, and they mind earthly things." Ah, how many must plead guilty to the charge of minding earthly things! It is easy to make a profession of the religion of Christ, while Christ Himself is unknown, and the cross of Christ is hated. It is easy to take up the name of Jesus into the lips, and walk in self-indulgence and love of the world, which the human heart knows so well how to estimate. All this finds its full illustration in the person of the churlish Nabal, who having shut himself up in the midst of his luxuries and wealth, cared not for God's anointed, nor felt for him in the season of his painful exile and sojourn in the wilderness.

What was his reply to David's touching appeal? "Who is David? and who is the son of Jesse? there be many servants now-a-days that break away every man from his master. Shall I then take my bread, and my water, and my flesh that I have killed for my shearers, and give it unto men whom I know not whence they be?" Here was the secret of this worldly man's estrangement of heart; *he did not know him*; had he known him, it would have been a very different matter: but he neither knew who he was nor whence he was; he did not know that he was railing on the Lord's anointed, and casting from him, in his selfish folly, the privilege of ministering to the need of the future king of Israel.

The moral of all this is deeply instructive. It demands the clear vision of faith to enable any one to discern the true glory of Christ, and cleave to Him in the time of His rejection. It is one thing to be a Christian, as people say, and another thing to confess Christ before men. Indeed, one can hardly find anything more selfish than that condition of heart which would lead us to take all that Jesus has to give, and yield Him nothing in return. "Provided *I* am saved, all the rest is unessential." This is the secret thought of many a heart, and if thrown into a more honest form would be this, "If I am sure of salvation, it matters little about the glory of Christ." This was just Nabal's mode of acting; he reaped all the advantage he could from David; but the moment David put in his claim for sympathy and aid, his worldly spirit developed itself. "One of the young men told Abigail, Nabal's wife, saying, Behold, David sent messengers out of the wilderness, to salute our master; and he railed on them. But the men were very good unto us, and we were not hurt, neither missed we anything, as long as we were conversant with them when we were in the fields. They were a wall unto us both by night and by day, all the while we were with them keeping the sheep." This was all very well. Nabal could well understand the value of David's *protection*, though he cared not for David's *person*. So long as David's men were a wall to his possessions, he would tolerate them; but when they would become a burden, they were rejected and railed upon.

Now, as might be expected, Nabal's acting was directly contrary to Scripture, as his spirit was decidedly contrary to the spirit of its divine Author. It is written in the 15th chapter of Deuteronomy, "If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren, within any of thy gates, in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thy heart, nor shut thy hand from thy poor brother; but thou shalt open thy hand wide unto him, and shall surely lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he wanteth. Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart, saying, The seventh year, the year of release is at hand; and thine eye be evil against thy poor brother, and thou givest him nought; and he cry unto the Lord against thee, and it be sin unto thee." Precious grace! How like God. How unlike Nabal! Grace would keep the heart wide open to every object of need; whereas selfishness would close it against every applicant. Nabal ought to have obeyed the word, independently of his knowledge of David; but his selfishness was of too deep a character to allow of his obedience to the Lord's word, or his love to the Lord's anointed.

However, Nabal's selfishness led to very important results; it led, in David's case, to the exhibition of much that was calculated to humble him in the presence of God. He is here seen to come down from the high elevation which usually characterized him, through the grace of God.

No doubt, it was deeply trying to meet with such base ingratitude from one to whom he had been a wall of defence; it was galling, too, to be reproached on the very ground of those circumstances into which faithfulness had called him; to be accused of breaking away from his master at the very time that he was being hunted as a partridge through the mountains. All this was hard to bear, and, in the first ebullition of feeling, David gives expression to words which would not bear the examination of the sanctuary. "*Gird ye on every man his sword*," was not just the language which we should have expected from one who had hitherto walked in such a meek and gentle spirit. The scripture just quoted presents the resource of the poor brother, viz.: to "cry unto the Lord," not to draw his sword for revenge. Nabal's selfishness could never have been remedied by the sword of David, nor would faith ever have adopted such a course. We do not find David acting thus in reference to Saul; he left him entirely to God, and even when induced to cut off the skirt of his robe, his heart smote him. Why did he not act thus toward Nabal? Because he was not in communion; he was off his guard, and the enemy took advantage of him. Nature will ever lead us to vindicate ourselves, and resent every injury. The heart will secretly murmur, "He had no right to treat me thus; I really cannot bear it, nor do I think I ought to do so." This may be so, but the man of faith at once rises above all such things; he sees God in everything; the jealousy of Saul, the folly of Nabal, all is looked at as coming from the hand of God, and met in the secret of His holy presence. The instrument is nothing to faith; God is in all. This gives real power to move on through all sorts of circumstances. If we do not trace God in everything, we shall be constantly ensnared.

We shall have occasion, as we proceed with our subject, to trace this principle more fully, and shall now turn to another character introduced to our notice in this instructive chapter. This is Abigail, the wife of Nabal, "a woman of good understanding, and of a beautiful countenance." A noble testimony, surely, and one which shows that grace can manifest itself in the most untoward circumstances. The house of the churlish Nabal must have been a withering scene to one like Abigail; but she waited on God, and, as we shall see, was not disappointed.

The case of this remarkable woman is full of encouragement and instruction to all who may find themselves cramped and hindered by unavoidable connections and associations. To all such the history of Abigail simply says, Be patient, wait on God, do not suppose yourself void of all opportunity for testimony. The Lord may be much glorified by meek subjection, and will, assuredly, give relief and victory in the end. True, some may have to reproach themselves for having formed such connections, or entered into such associations; but even so, if the folly and evil are really felt, confessed, and judged before God, and the soul brought into an attitude of thorough subduedness, the end will be blessing and peace. In Abigail we see one who was actually used to correct no less a personage than David himself. It may be that her course, up to the time at which the sacred historian introduces her to our notice, had been marked by much that was painful and trying; indeed, it could hardly have been otherwise, associated with such an one as Nabal. Time, however, brought to light the grace that was in her. She had suffered in obscurity, and was now about to be raised to an unusually high elevation. Few had seen her patient service and testimony; but many beheld her exaltation. The burden which she had borne in secret was about to drop off before many witnesses. The preciousness of Abigail's service did not consist in her having saved Nabal from the sword of David, but in keeping David from drawing the sword at all.

"Now David had said, Surely in vain have I kept all that this fellow hath in the wilderness, so that nothing was missed of all that pertained unto him; and he hath requited me evil for good." This was terrible! And David was rashly taking himself out of the place of dependence—the only happy, the only holy place. Nor was it on behalf of the congregation of the Lord. No, it was to avenge himself on one who had treated him badly. Sad mistake! Happy was it for him, that there was an Abigail in the house of Nabal who was about to be used of God to keep him from answering a fool according to his folly. This was just what the enemy desired. Nabal's selfishness was used by Satan to ensnare David, and Abigail was the Lord's instrument to deliver him. It is well when the man of God can detect Satan's working; to be able so to do, he must be much in the presence of God, for there alone can he find light and spiritual power to enable him to cope with such a foe. When out of communion, the soul becomes distracted by looking at secondary causes, and subordinate agents, just as David was distracted by looking at Nabal. Had he paused to view the matter calmly before God, we should not have had such words as, "In vain have I kept all that this fellow hath in the wilderness;" he would have passed on, and left "this fellow" to himself. Faith imparts real dignity to the character, and superiority over the petty circumstances of this transient scene. Those who know themselves as pilgrims and strangers, will remember that the sorrows as well as the joys of this life are evanescent, and they will not be inordinately affected by either the one or the other. "Passing away," is written on everything; the man of faith must, therefore, look upwards and onward.

Now Abigail, by the grace of God, delivered David from the unhappy influence of the *present*, by leading his soul onward into the *future*: we learn this from her exquisite address to him. "And when Abigail saw David, she hastened, and lighted off the ass, and fell before David on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, and fell at his feet, and said, Upon me, my lord, upon me let this iniquity be; and let thine handmaid, I pray thee, speak in thine audience, and hear the words of thine handmaid. Let not my lord, I pray thee, regard this man of Belial, even Nabal; for as his name is, so is he; Nabal is his name, and folly is with him: but I thine handmaid saw not the young men of my lord, whom thou didst send. Now, therefore, my lord, as the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, seeing the Lord hath withholden thee from coming to shed blood, and from avenging thyself *with thine own hand*, now let thine enemies, and they that seek evil to my lord,

be as Nabal; ... for *the Lord wilt certainly make my lord a sure house; because my lord fighteth the battles of the Lord*, and evil hath not been found in thee all thy days. Yet a man is risen to pursue thee, and to seek thy soul; *but the soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of life with the Lord thy God*; and the souls of thine enemies, them shall He sling out, as out of the middle of a sling. And it shall come to pass, *when the Lord shall have done to my lord according to all the good that He hath spoken concerning thee, and shall have appointed thee ruler over Israel*, that this shall be no grief unto thee, nor offence of heart unto my lord, either that thou hast shed blood causeless, or that my lord hath avenged himself; but when the Lord shall have dealt well with my lord, then remember thine handmaid." We can hardly conceive anything more touching than this address; every point in it was calculated to touch the heart. She presents to him the evil of seeking to avenge himself; the weakness and folly of the object of his revenge,—she reminds him of his proper occupation, viz., "fighting *the Lord's battles*." This must have brought home to his heart the humiliating circumstances in which Abigail met him, even rushing on to fight *his own battle*.

However, the reader will perceive that the leading point in this address is the special reference to the future. "The Lord *will* certainly make my lord a sure house." "The soul of my lord *shall* be bound in the bundle of life with the Lord thy God." "When the Lord *shall* have done to my lord," etc.; "and *shall* have appointed thee ruler over Israel." All these allusions to David's future blessing and glory were eminently calculated to withdraw his heart from his present grievance. The sure house, the bundle of life, and the kingdom, were far better than Nabal's flocks and herds; and in the view of these glories, David could well afford to leave him to his portion, and his portion to him. To the heir of a kingdom, a few sheep could have but little attraction; and one who knew that he had the anointing oil of the Lord upon his head might easily bear to be called a runaway servant. All these things Abigail knew—knew as matters of faith. She knew David, and knew his high destinies. By faith she recognized in the despised outcast the future king of Israel. Nabal knew not David. He was a man of the world, swallowed up with present things. With him there was nothing more important, nothing more influential, than "*my bread, my flesh, my shearers*;" it was all self; there was no room for David or his claims. This might be expected from such an one; but surely it was not for David to go down from his elevation to grapple with a poor worldling about his perishable possessions. Ah, no; the kingdom should have filled his eye, and engaged his thoughts, and lifted his spirit above all lower influences. Look at the Master Himself, as He stood at the bar of a poor worm,—the creation of His own hand,—how did He conduct Himself? Did He call upon His little band of followers to gird on every man his sword? Did He say of the man who dared to sit as His judge, "In vain have I imparted unto this fellow all he is, and all he has?" No; He looked above and beyond Pilate, Herod, the chief priests, and scribes. He could say, "The cup which MY FATHER hath given ME, shall I not drink it?" This kept His spirit tranquil, while, at the same time, He could look forward into the future, and say, "HEREAFTER shall ye see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." Here was real power over present things. The millennial kingdom, with all its untold joys, with all its heights and depths of glory, glistened in the distance with everlasting light and brilliancy, and the eye of the Man of Sorrows rested upon it, in that dark hour when the scoffs and sneers, the taunts and reproaches of guilty sinners were falling upon His blessed person.

Dear Christian reader, this is our model; thus ought we to meet the trials and difficulties, the reproach, obloquy and desertion of this present time. We should view *all* in the light of "*hereafter*." "Our light affliction," says an eminent sufferer, "which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." Again, "But the God of all grace, who hath called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you." "O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not Christ to have *suffered* these things, and to enter into His *glory*?" Yes; suffering must come first and glory afterwards; and any one who, by his own hand, would seek to take off the edge of present suffering and reproach, proves that the kingdom is not filling the vision of his soul,—that *now* is more influential with him than "*hereafter*."

How we ought to bless our God for having opened to us such a vista of glory in the ages to come! How it enables us to tread, with a buoyant step, our rugged path through the wilderness! How it lifts us above the things which engross the children of this world!

"We're not of the world, which fadeth away,
We're not of the night, but children of day;
The chains that once bound us by Jesus are riven,
We're strangers on earth, and our home is in heaven."

May we prove the sacred reality of this more, as we pass along through "this vale of tears." Truly the heart would sink and the spirit faint, were we not sustained by hope—even the hope of glory, which, thank God, maketh not ashamed, for the Spirit is the earnest of it in our hearts.

In pursuing the narrative of David and Abigail a little further, we have a still more striking example of the vast difference between the child of nature and the child of faith. Abigail returned from her interview with David, and found Nabal "very drunken; wherefore she told him nothing, less or more, until the morning light. But it came to pass in the morning, when the wine was gone out of Nabal, and his wife had told him these things, that his heart died within him, and he became as a stone. And it came to pass, about ten days after, that the Lord smote Nabal, that he died." What a sad picture of a man of the world! Sunk in intoxication during the night, and when the morning dawned, struck with terror,—pierced by the arrow of death. How solemnly like the multitudes whom the enemy has succeeded, in every age, in alluring and intoxicating with the

perishing joys of a world which lies under the curse of God, and awaits the fire of His judgment. "They that sleep, sleep in the night, and they that be drunken are drunken in the night;" but, ah! the morning is at hand, when the wine (apt symbol of this world's joy) shall have altogether evaporated,—the feverish excitement in which Satan now involves the spirits of the men of this world shall have calmed down, and then comes the stern reality of an eternity of misery—unspeakable misery, in company with Satan and his angels. Nabal did not even meet David face to face; yet the very thought of his avenging sword filled his soul with deadly fear. How much more terrible will it be to meet the gaze of a despised and rejected Jesus! Then the Abigails and the Nabals will find their respective places; those who had known and loved the true David, and those who had not. God, in His mercy, grant that my reader may be amongst the happy number of the former.

I would only observe, further, that the interesting narrative of this chapter gives us a striking picture of the Church and the world, as a whole; the one united to the king, and associated with Him in His glory; the other plunged in irretrievable ruin. "Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness; looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent, that ye may be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless" (2 Pet. iii. 11-14).

Such are the soul-stirring, momentous facts presented to us throughout the book of God, in order to detach our hearts from present things, and bind them in genuine affection to those objects and prospects which stand connected with the person of the Son of God. Nor will aught else, save the deep and positive conviction of the reality of these things, produce such effects. We know the intoxicating power of this world's schemes and operations; we know how the human heart is borne away, as upon the surface of a rapid current, when such things are presented: schemes of improvement, commercial operations, political movements—aye, and popular religious movements too—all these things produce upon the human mind an effect similar to that produced by Nabal's wine, so that it is almost useless to announce the stern facts presented in the above solemn quotation. Still, they must be announced, must be reiterated, "and so much the more, as we see the day approaching." "The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night." "All these things shall be dissolved." "The heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burned up." Such is the prospect presented to all who, like Nabal, surcharged with "surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life," have rejected the claims and appeals of Jesus. The world is being prepared, with inconceivable rapidity, for the introduction of that one who, by the energy of Satan, will head up all its institutions, embody all its principles, concentrate all its energies. Let but the last elect one be gathered out, the last member be incorporated into the body of Christ by the quickening energy of the Holy Ghost, the last stone be set in its appointed place in the temple of God, and then shall the salt be removed, which now preserves the world from corruption; the barrier presented by the presence of the Holy Ghost in the Church shall be taken out of the way, and then comes forth "the lawless one" on the stage of this world, "whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of His mouth, and destroy with the brightness of His coming. Even him whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power, and signs, and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved."

Surely these things ought to check the career of the men of this world, and lead them, with solemnized minds, to "consider THEIR LATTER END." "The long-suffering of our Lord is salvation." Precious word! Most precious! But let it not be abused; let it not be mistaken for "*slackness*." The Lord waits to be gracious to *sinner*s, not to connive at *sin*.

However, as has been already observed, it is almost useless to speak to men about the *future* who are wholly engrossed with the *present*.

Blessed be God, there are some who have ears to hear the testimony about the kindness and grace of Jesus, as well as about His coming judgment. Thus it was with Abigail; she believed the truth about David, and acted accordingly; and all who believe the truth about Jesus will be found separating themselves diligently from this present world.

CHAPTER V

ZIKLAG

In dwelling upon a history such as that now before us, which manifestly presents much failure and infirmity, it is well for us to keep in memory what we ourselves are, lest we be found pointing out the lapses of others in a spirit of self-complacency. The divine penman has set before us, with unflinching fidelity, all the imperfections of those whose history He records. His object is to present God to the soul in all the fulness and variety of His resources, and in all His competency to meet the helpless sinner in his very deepest need. He has not written the history of angels, but

of men—men "of like passions with us;" and this is what makes Old Testament narratives so exceedingly instructive to us; we are presented with facts which speak to the heart; we are conducted through scenes and circumstances which unfold to us, with touching simplicity, the hidden springs of our nature, and also the hidden springs of grace. We learn that man is the same in every age; in Eden, in Canaan, in the Church, in millennial glory, he is proved to be made of the same humbling materials; but we learn also, for our joy and encouragement, that God is the same—"the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever"—"Patient, gracious, powerful, holy"—patient, to bear with our grievous and manifold provocations; gracious, to blot out our oft-repeated sins, and restore our wandering souls; powerful, to deliver us out of Satan's entangling snares, and from the energy of nature and the world; holy, to execute judgment in His house, and to chasten His sons, that they may be partakers of His holiness. Such is the God with whom we have to do; and we see the wondrous unfoldings of His character in the deeply-interesting sketches with which the Old Testament history abounds, and in none, perhaps, more than in that now before us. Few characters exhibit more variety of experience than David. He truly knew the depths and heights which mark the course of the man of faith. At one moment, we find him giving forth from his harp the most sublime strains; at another, pouring forth the sorrows of a defiled conscience and a wounded spirit. This variety of experience rendered David a fit subject for illustrating the varied grace of God. It is ever thus. The poor prodigal would never have known such high communion, had he not known the humiliating depths of the far country. The grace which decked him in the best robe would not have shone so brightly, had he not been clad in filthy rags. God's grace is magnified by man's ruin; and the more keenly the ruin is felt, the more highly the grace is valued. The elder brother never got a kid that he might make merry with his friends; and why? Because he imagined he had earned it. "Lo," says he, "these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment." Vain man! How could he expect the ring, the robe, or the fatted calf? Had he obtained them, they would have been but the trappings of self-righteousness, and not the ornaments with which grace decks the believing sinner.

Thus was it with Saul and David. Saul never knew his need as David knew it, nor have we any record of such flagrant sins in his case; at least, what man would pronounce flagrant. Saul was the outwardly moral and religious man, but, withal, a self-righteous man; hence we have such expressions as these, "I have performed the commandment of the Lord"—"Yea, I have obeyed the voice of the Lord, and have gone the way which the Lord sent me." How could this man value grace? Impossible. A heart unbroken, a conscience unconvinced, can never enter into the meaning of the term Grace. How different was it with David! He felt his sins, groaned under them, confessed them, judged them, in the presence of God whose grace had blotted them all out for ever. There is a great difference between a man ignorant of his sins and walking in self-complacency, and one deeply conscious of his sins, yet happy in the full forgiveness of them.

The above train of thought introduces us to the circumstances connected with David in Ziklag of the Philistines—circumstances which fully manifest human infirmity and divine grace and mercy.

"And David said *in his heart*, I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul; there is nothing better for me than that I should speedily escape into the land of the Philistines." This was David's second visit to the land of the Philistines. In chapter xxi. we read, "And David arose and fled that day for fear of Saul, and went to Achish the king of Gath." Here we find David really taking himself out of the hands of God, and putting himself into the hands of Achish. He leaves the place of dependence, and goes into the very midst of the enemies of God and of Israel. And, be it remarked, he has in his hand the very sword of the Philistine champion. Nor is it to act in his true character as the servant of God; this would have been happy indeed; but no; he goes to act the madman, in the presence of those before whom he had so recently acted as the champion of Israel. "The servants of Achish said unto him, Is not this David, the king of the land? Did they not sing one to another of him in dances, saying, Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands?" The Philistines recognized David's true character as "king of the land"—the slayer of ten thousands; they imagined that he could not possibly act otherwise than as their enemy. Little were they able to enter into the moral condition of his soul at that extraordinary stage of his history; little did they think that the slayer of Goliath had fled to them for protection from the hand of Saul. The world cannot understand the vicissitudes of the life of faith. Who that had seen David in the valley of Elah could ever suppose that he would so soon fear to avow with boldness the results of that faith with which God had endowed him? Who could have thought that with Goliath's sword in his hand he could tremble to avow himself the victor of Goliath? Yet so it was. "David laid up these words in his heart, and was sore afraid of Achish, the king of Gath. And he changed his behavior before them, and feigned himself mad in their hands, and scabbled on the doors of the gate, and let his spittle fall down upon his beard." Thus must it ever be when a saint deserts the path of simple dependence upon God and strangership in the world. The "behavior" must be "changed," the real character abandoned, and instead thereof a course is adopted which is marked by positive deceit before God and folly before the world. This is most sorrowful. A saint should always maintain his dignity—the dignity which flows from the consciousness of the presence of God. But the moment faith gives way, the power of testimony is gone, and the man of faith is despised as a "madman." When David "said in his heart, I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul," he forsook the only path of real power. Had he continued as a homeless wanderer through the mountains, he would never have presented such a melancholy picture in the view of the servants of Achish—he would never have been pronounced a madman. Achish would not have dared to call David by such a name in the valley of Elah! No, nor in the cave of Adullam; but, alas, David had put himself into the power of this stranger, and therefore he should either suffer for his past faithfulness, or give all up, and pretend to be a fool in their eyes. They rightly judged him to be the king of the land, but he, afraid of the consequences of maintaining such a high dignity,

denied his kingship, and became a fool. How frequently may we trace the working of this same evil in the walk of Christians! How frequently may we see a man who, by his past actings in the energy of the Spirit of God, has attained a very high position in the thoughts, not only of his brethren, but even of the children of this world, and yet, when such an one gets out of communion, he is really afraid to maintain his position; and, at the very moment when those without are looking only for an unbending and unqualified testimony against their ways, he changes his behavior, and instead of being esteemed and revered, he is actually despised. We should most carefully guard against this; it can only be effectually avoided by walking in the full and blessed consciousness of God's sufficiency. So long as we feel that God is sufficient for *all* our need, we are entirely independent of the world; if it be not thus with us, we shall just compromise the truth of God, and deny our real character as heavenly men.

How completely must David have lost the sense of God's sufficiency when he could say, "There is *nothing better* for me than that I should speedily escape into the land of the Philistines." Nothing better for a man of faith than to go back to the world for refuge! Strange confession! The confession of one who had allowed circumstances to come between his soul and God. When we slip off the narrow path of faith, we are liable to run into the wildest extremes; and nothing can more forcibly exhibit the contrast between one looking at God and one looking at circumstances, than David in the valley of Elah and David scrabbling on the doors of the Philistine king. The contrast is full of solemn instruction and warning. It is well calculated to teach us what we are, and how little the best of us can be depended upon. Ah! my dear Christian reader, what are we? Poor, failing, stumbling creatures; prone, at every turn in our path, to wander into error and evil—prone to forsake the Rock of Ages, and lean upon the broken reeds of the world—prone to forsake the fountain of living waters, and hew out for ourselves broken cisterns that can hold no water. Truly we have need, deep need, to walk humbly, watchfully, and prayerfully, before our God—deep need to utter David's own prayer, continually, "Uphold me according unto Thy word, that I may live; and let me not be ashamed of my hope. Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe; and I will have respect unto Thy statutes continually." We need to have our feet made as hinds' feet, so that we may walk on the high and slippery places through which our path lies. Nothing short of grace divine can enable us to pursue a course of steady devotedness: for, if left to ourselves, there is no extreme of evil into which we may not run. They alone are safe whom God keeps in the hollow of His hand. Truly happy is it for us to have to do with one who is able to bear with us in all our waywardness, and able also to restore and revive our souls when faint and withering under the influence of the atmosphere of evil around us. God forbid that we should make any other use of what we may term the Ziklag portion of David's history, save to apply it to our own hearts before God, and use it as a matter of solemn and soul-searching warning; for though it may be said that there is a wide difference between the standing and privileges of David and those of the Church of God now, yet, in every age and dispensation, nature is the same; and we seriously wrong our own souls if we fail to learn a wholesome lesson from the falls of one so high up in the school of Christ as David. Dispensations differ, no doubt, in their great leading features; but there is a wonderful analogy in God's principles of discipline at all times, let the standing of His people differ as it may.

In following David, in his further sojourn in the land of the Philistines, we only find fresh cause of humiliation. He obtains the grant of Ziklag, where he sojourns for sixteen months, during which period, though free from all fear with respect to Saul, he was at a distance from God and from Israel. It is, in one sense, a very easy matter to get out of a place of trial; but then we get out of a place of blessing also. It would have been much happier for David to have remained in a position which left him exposed to Saul, while, at the same time, he enjoyed the protection of the God of Israel, than to seek safety from the arm of the king of Gath. However, when the pressure of trial is upon us, the thought of relief is sweet, and we are in danger of seeking relief in our own way. The enemy always has a by-road open to the man of faith. He had an Egypt for Abraham, and a Ziklag for David; and now he has the world, in all its varied forms, for us. "And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned." It is the opportunity to return that proves the genuine fixedness of purpose to go forward. The Lord leaves His people free, in order that they may "declare *plainly* that they seek a country." This is what glorifies God. It would avail nothing if we were to be compelled, as with bit and bridle, to go from earth to heaven; but when, through grace, we voluntarily abandon the things of earth to seek those things which are above, this is to the glory of God, because it demonstrates that what He has to give is far more attractive than this present world.^[19]

David, however, accepted Ziklag, and instead of remaining as a homeless stranger in the cave of Adullam, he becomes a citizen in the land of the Philistines. Nor does he now act the madman, as before: no; he now acts the part of a positive deceiver. He wages war on the Geshurites and Gezrites, and tells a lie about it, lest he should again lose his self-chosen place of protection. Yea, so far does he proceed in his unhappy course, that when Achish proposes to him to act as ally to the Philistines, his answer is, "Surely thou shalt know what thy servant can do.... And Achish said to David, Therefore will I make thee keeper of my head for ever.... Now the Philistines gathered together all their armies to Aphek; and the Israelites pitched by a fountain which is in Jezreel. And the lords of the Philistines passed on by hundreds and by thousands; *but David and his men passed on in the rearward with Achish.*" Here, then, we have a strange anomaly—a king of Israel about to be made keeper of the head of a Philistine, and about to draw the sword against the armies of the living God. Was ever anything like this? The slayer of Goliath, servant to a Philistine! Who could have looked for such a thing? Truly difficult is it for us to determine where all this would have ended, had David been left to the full results of his false position. But this

could not be. God was graciously watching His poor wanderer, and had rich and manifold mercies in store for him, as well as some humbling lessons and painful exercises of soul.

The very lords of the Philistines were the instruments made use of by the Lord to deliver David from his strange position. They, judging from his past ways, could not be induced to trust him as an ally. "Is not this David, and how can we confide in him?" A Philistine could never rely upon a Hebrew for co-operation against Hebrews. In a word, the men of this world can never place full confidence in one who has once been decided for the truth of God. A saint who has got out of communion and gone back to the world, though he may go to a great length, will never be regarded or confided in as one of themselves; he will be suspected, just as David was by the Philistines. "Make this fellow return, that he may go again to his place which thou hast appointed him, and let him not go down with us to battle, lest in the battle he be an adversary to us." They could give him a certain place amongst them, but when it became a question of war between them and Israel, they would not acknowledge him. And they were wise; for let David *assume* what character he might, he could be *really* nought else save an enemy to the Philistines. He might *feign* himself to be mad; he might *pretend* to make war upon the south of Judah; but when matters came to a positive issue, David could only act consistently with his true character, as the slayer of ten thousands of Philistines. The fact is, from first to last David was misunderstood; the Philistines did not know what it was that had sent him into their midst. There was far more in the apparent madman than they could fathom. They thought that he desired to be reconciled to his master, Saul, little imagining that they had before them one who was so soon to lay his hand upon the sceptre of Israel, and to make them feel the weight of his power.

However, the Lord would not allow David to appear in the field against Israel. He sent him back, or rather He led him aside, in order that He might deal with him in secret about his course. "So David and his men rose up early to depart in the morning, to return into the land of the Philistines.... And it came to pass, when David and his men were come to Ziklag, on the third day, that the Amalekites had invaded the south, and Ziklag, and smitten Ziklag, and burned it with fire; and had taken the women captives that were therein; they slew not any, either great or small, but carried them away, and went on their way." David is here made to feel the bitter result of his having sought to Achish for help in the day of his need. He had taken up his position amongst the uncircumcised, and must, therefore, be made a partaker of their wretchedness. Had he remained amongst the mountains of Judah, he would have escaped all this sorrow; his God would have been a wall of fire round about him. But he had fled to Ziklag to escape Saul; and then, as it were, at the very moment when Saul was falling on Mount Gilboa, David was weeping over the ruins of Ziklag. Surely it was not thus we should have expected to find David. "Then David and the people that were with him lifted up their voice and wept, until they had no more power to weep.... And David was greatly distressed, for the people spake of stoning him." In all this God was dealing with His dear child, not to crush him, but to bring him to a right sense of the course he had been pursuing amongst the Philistines. Surely when David beheld the smouldering ashes of Ziklag, and felt himself deprived of his wives, children, and all, he had a practical lesson as to the evil and sorrow of taking anything from the world. We can hardly picture to ourselves a condition more painful than that in which David found himself on his return to Ziklag. He had been, for a year and four months, pursuing a course which must have left him with an uneasy conscience toward God; he was cast off by those on whose protection he had thrown himself; his place of refuge was burned; his wives and property were gone; and lastly, his companions, those who had followed him in all his wanderings, were threatening to stone him.

Thus was David sunk to the very lowest ebb, in every point of view; all creature-streams were dried up; and not only so, but the enemy might effectually ply his fiery darts at such a moment—conscience might work, and memory call up the scenes of the past: his abandoning the place of dependence; his flight to Achish; his change of behavior; his acting the madman; his telling a lie; his volunteering to fight against Israel, as the servant of the Philistines: all these things must have augmented, in no small degree, his anguish of soul. But David was a man of faith after all, and, notwithstanding all, *he knew the Lord*, and His "boundless stores of grace." This was his joy and comfort in this exceedingly dark moment of his career. Had he not been able to roll his heavy burden over upon infinite grace, he must have given up in utter despair. He had never before been so tested. He had met the lion and the bear in the wilderness; he had met the giant of Gath in the valley of Elah; but he had never met such an overwhelming array of circumstances before. Yet God was sufficient, and David knew this. Hence we read, "*David encouraged himself in the Lord his God.*" Happy, well-founded encouragement! Happy the soul that knows it! Happy he who could rise from the very deepest depths of human misery, up to God, and His never-failing resources! Faith knows God to be fully equal to all human need, human weakness, human failure, human sin. God is above all, beyond all, beneath all; and the heart that apprehends Him is lifted above all the trials and difficulties of the way.

There is no condition in which the Christian can find himself in which he may not count upon God. Is he crushed beneath the pressure of trial from external circumstances? Let him bring God's omnipotent power to bear upon these things. Is the heart oppressed by the burden of personal infirmity?—truly a heavy burden! Let him draw upon the exhaustless springs of Divine compassion and mercy. Is the soul filled with horror, by the sense of sin and guilt? Let him have recourse to the boundless grace of God, and the infinitely-precious blood of Christ. In a word, whatever be the burden, the trial, the sorrow, or the need, God is more than equal to all, and it is the province of faith to use Him. "David encouraged himself in the Lord his God" when everything around was dark and depressing. My reader, may we know the true blessedness of this. To have to do with God is rest to the soul, and happiness and power. To disentangle our hearts from self

and the things which surround us, and rise upward into the holy calmness of the Divine presence, imparts comfort and consolation beyond what one can utter. Satan's object is ever to hinder this. He would fain lead us to make present things the boundary of our soul's horizon; he would seek to surround us with a thick, dark, impenetrable cloud, so that we might not recognize our Father's countenance, and our Father's hand in our circumstances.

But faith pierces the cloud, and gets upward to God; it looks not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are unseen: it endures, as seeing Him who is invisible; it can say to God,

"In darkest shades, if Thou appear,
My dawning is begun;
Thou art my soul's bright morning star,
And Thou my rising sun."

Truly David's return to Ziklag was a dark hour—one of his darkest; yet God appeared, and his dawning began. God appeared for his relief and restoration; He graciously removed the weight from his spirit; He burst the fetters, and let the prisoner go free. Such is the manner of God. He permits His children to taste the bitter fruit of their own ways, in order that they may return to Him, and realize they can only be truly happy in His gracious and holy presence. Ziklag may shelter for a time, but it will perish; and even while it lasts, must be purchased by the sacrifice of a good conscience toward God, and toward His people. A heavy price, surely, for a temporary relief from pressure! How much better to endure the pressure for a time!

But, blessed be our God, "all things work together for good to them that love Him." The death of the Philistine champion, and the sixteen months' sojourn in Ziklag; the cave of Adullam, and the house of Achish—all worked for David's good. The Lord makes the very failure of His children to yield them blessing, inasmuch as it leads them to seek more prayerful vigilance of spirit, and a closer walk with Him. If our stumbles teach us to lean more implicitly upon God, we shall still thank Him, however much we may have to be humbled at the remembrance of them. Humbling as David's Ziklag experience must have been to him, we may be sure he would not have been without it. It taught him more of the deep reality of God's grace and faithfulness; it enabled him to see, that when brought down to the very bottom of human things, he could find God there in all the fulness of His grace. This was a valuable lesson, and it will be our place to learn from it also. Are we able to lean on the Lord amid the ruin around us? Is He beyond every one and everything to our souls? Can we encourage ourselves in Him when all without and within seems directly against us? Is His name dear to us in this day of faithlessness and cold formality? Are we prepared to pursue the rest of our course through the desert in solitariness and desertion, if such should be needful? It may be, we have learnt to cease looking, in any way, to the children of this world; but are we prepared to lose the approval and confidence of our brethren? David's companions spake of stoning him; but the Lord was more to him than all; the Lord was "*his refuge*;" do we know the power and comfort of this? The Lord grant that we may know it more.

Before closing this chapter, I would call the reader's attention to the instructive scene between David and the young man who was servant to the Amalekite. I do not say that we are to regard it as a positive type; but we are certainly warranted in looking at it as a very striking illustration. An illustration of what? Let us see.

In order to appreciate the teaching of the Spirit in this scripture (chap. xxx. 11-16) we must bear in mind the difference between Egypt and Amalek; the former is associated with Israel in the blessing of the latter day, "In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, even a blessing in the midst of the land; whom the Lord of hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed be Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel Mine inheritance." Amalek, on the contrary, is thus spoken of, "The Lord hath sworn that the Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation." An Egyptian, therefore, and an Amalekite stood in a very different relationship to Israel.

Now this young man was an Egyptian, servant to an Amalekite, and his master left him because he had fallen sick. This was the treatment he had received from his Amalekite master; he had abandoned him in the hour of his need, because he was no longer able to be of service to him. But his very ruin and wretchedness threw him upon the sympathies of David, who refreshed him and revived his spirit. He found him faint and weak from the effects of his former service, and having restored his spirit he inquired, "Canst thou bring me down to this company?" He here puts in his claim upon the service and devotedness of one who owed him everything under God; but the young man, though fully restored, was unable to act with David until possessed of the full assurance of *life* and *liberty*. "Swear unto me by God," said he, "that thou wilt neither kill me, nor deliver me into the hands of my master, and I will bring you down to this company." He could not serve David until fully assured of deliverance from the power of his old master.

All this is very striking as an illustration of the apostle's teaching in Romans vi. The believer needs to know his entire emancipation from the dominion of his old master, the flesh, before ever he can, with confidence, apply himself to the service of Christ. We have felt the bitterness of serving the flesh; as the apostle says, "What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death." It is impossible to walk in peace and liberty of heart until we know where death and resurrection have placed us. Until we know and believe that sin has no dominion over us, we must, of necessity, be occupied about ourselves, for we shall be constantly discovering the working of indwelling corruption, and thus be filled with apprehension of being delivered over into the hands of our former oppressor. We may be very clear as to the theory of justification by faith; we may understand what it is to rest in the

accomplished work of Christ in reference to sins that are past, and yet be so troubled about indwelling sin as to be quite hindered in our service to Christ and His Church. The gospel of the grace of God, when entered into in its divine fulness, sets the soul at rest, not only as to the past, but also the present and the future. The Lord forgives ALL our sins, not *some* of them; and not only does He forgive sins, but also delivers from the power of sin, as we read in Romans vi.,—"Sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace." This is a truly precious truth for those who are daily harassed with the seeds of evil within. Though sin *dwells*, it shall not *reign*. And how is this deliverance accomplished! By death and resurrection. "He that has died is justified from sin" (R. V.). What claim has sin upon a dead man? None! Well, then, God looks upon the believer as dead—dead with Christ, and risen again; and his power to deny the working of sin consists in his reckoning himself to be what God tells him he is. Thus, as David's oath set the young man's mind at rest, and enabled him to act with him against the Amalekites, so the word of Christ banishes fear and hesitation from the heart of the believer, and enables him, through the Spirit, to act against his former master—the flesh. Grace assures us that all our interests, for time and eternity, have been most fully provided for in the death and resurrection of Christ, and gives us to see that our only business now is to live to the praise of Him who died for us, and rose again.

"Shall we continue in sin?" Could the young man in this scripture have gone back again to his Amalekite master? Impossible. What fruit had he from his former service? Ruin and desertion. And what fruit had we? Death. The wages of sin is death. The world, the flesh, and the devil, can only lead us down to hell. Serve them how we may, death and destruction must be the end. Men may not see this; they may not wish to see it; yet it is not the less true. "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." This is the appointment.

But Christ has borne all for the believer; death and judgment have passed away, and nothing remains but for the believer to accompany, in liberty and joy of heart, the true David against his enemies. Christ has done all for us, that we might act for Him in this the time of His rejection. He has suffered for us without the gate, and now calls upon us to go forth to Him, bearing his reproach. The believer does not act in order to get life, but because he has it. He starts on his Christian career with the full assurance of pardon and acceptance in the Beloved. Perfect justification is his starting-post, and glory the goal. "Whom He justified, them He also glorified." It is well to be exceedingly simple in our apprehension of this great truth. Some imagine that we can never know that our sins are forgiven while here. Now, if we cannot know that our sins are forgiven, we cannot know that God's word is true, and Christ's work perfect. Will any one maintain this? If not, both rest on the same basis. The forgiveness of sins and the truth of God's word are linked together in the precious gospel of Christ. Doubt the forgiveness of sins, and you call in question the truth of Christ's words, "IT IS FINISHED"—words uttered under the most solemn circumstances.

Yet we know how hard it is for the heart to repose with unquestioning simplicity on the truth of God, in reference to the perfect remission of sins through the blood of Christ. Our thoughts are too shallow and contracted to take in all the effulgence of divine grace. We are too full of legalism, too full of self. We vainly think that we must add something to what Christ has done, whether that something be in the shape of works, feelings, or experiences. All this must be set aside. Christ *alone* is the great foundation, the eternal rock, the tower of salvation. To add even circumcision would be to make Christ of none effect, to fall from grace, and to make ourselves debtors to keep the whole law, and thus to expose ourselves to curse and wrath. "As many as are of the works of the law are under the curse."

May we cling to Christ, with a deeper sense of our own vileness and His perfectness. May we wrap ourselves up, as it were, in Him, while passing on through this cold and faithless world.

CHAPTER VI

THE RETURN OF THE ARK

2 Sam. vi. and 1 Chron. xiii.

We are now called to follow David from the scenes of his exile to those of his government. Saul has passed off the stage of history, having met death by the hand of an Amalekite—one of that very nation which he had disobediently spared. Solemn warning! Jonathan, too, had fallen in company with his father, Saul, on Mount Gilboa, and David had given utterance to his sublime lament over both. David had ever carried himself towards Saul with the fullest sense of his being the Lord's anointed; nor did he manifest anything bordering upon a spirit of exultation when informed of his death; on the contrary, he wept over him, and called on others to do the same. Neither do we find anything like unbecoming haste to ascend the throne left vacant for him; he waited upon the Lord about it. "David inquired of the Lord, saying, Shall I go up into any of the cities of Judah? And the Lord said unto him, Go up. And David said, Whither shall I go up? And He said, Unto Hebron."^[20] This was real dependence. Nature would have been eager to rush into the place of honor; but David waited on the Lord, and only moved as directed of Him. It was this

confidence in and dependence upon God—delighting himself in Jehovah—that forms the peculiar loveliness of David's character, "the man after God's own heart." Happy would it have been for him had he continued thus to move on in child-like dependence.

But, alas; we have to trace far more of nature in David during the period of his elevation than during the period of His rejection. A time of peace and prosperity tends to develop and bring to maturity many seeds of evil which might be nipped and blighted by the keen blast of adversity. David found the kingdom more thorny and dangerous than the wilderness.

After his accession to the throne over all Israel, David's lovely desire, to have the ark of the Lord near himself in the city of Jerusalem, is followed by a great error. His desire was most commendable; the only question was, how was it to be done? The word of God was exceedingly plain and distinct in reference to this important matter; it pointed out a very simple and definite way of carrying the ark of the Lord of Hosts, even upon the shoulders of living men, who had been taken up and set aside for that purpose. (See Numb. iii. and viii.) When the Philistines sent the ark of Jehovah back to its own land and people, they knew nothing of this, and therefore devised a way of their own, which, as might be expected, was directly opposed to God's way, for "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." Therefore, though the plan adopted by the Philistines was very decent and orderly, as men would say, yet it was not of God. The ministers of the house of Dagon were poorly qualified to arrange the order of the divine service. They thought a wooden cart would do as well as anything else; it might have answered for the service of Dagon, and they knew no difference. They had once trembled at the sight of the ark, but, through the unfaithfulness of Israel, it had lost its solemnity in their eyes; and though it had been most solemnly and impressively vindicated in their view by the destruction of their god, they understood not its deep significancy, they knew not its wondrous contents; it was quite beyond them, and therefore they could devise nothing better than a mere lifeless ordinance for conveying it to its place.

But David ought to have known God's thoughts, and have acted upon them at the first; he should not have followed the thoughts and traditions of men in the service of God; he should have drawn his directions from the lucid lines of the book of the law. It is a terrible thing when the children of the kingdom form themselves after the model of the men of the world, and tread in their footsteps. They never can do so without serious damage to their own souls, and at the sacrifice of God's truth and testimony. The Philistines might construct a cart to carry the ark, and nothing whatever occur to show them the error of so doing; but God would not allow David so to act. And so now; the men of this world may put forth their canons, enact their laws, and decree their ceremonies in religion; but shall the children of God come down from their high position and privileges, as those who are guided by the Holy Ghost and the blessed word of God, and suffer themselves to be guided and influenced by such things? They may do so, but they shall assuredly suffer loss.

David was made to learn his mistake by bitter experience, for "when they came unto the threshing-floor of Chidon, Uzza put forth his hand to hold the ark; for the oxen stumbled." The weakness and inconsistency of the whole thing was here manifested. The Levites, the ministers of God, had borne the ark from Horeb to Jordan, and yet we have no record of any stumble. The shoulders of His servants was God's way; but the cart and oxen were man's way. And who would have thought that an Israelite would have deposited the ark of the God of Israel upon a wooden cart, to be drawn by oxen? Yet such is ever the sad effect of departing from the written Word to follow human traditions. "The oxen stumbled." The arrangement was "weak and beggarly," in the judgment of the Holy Ghost; and the Lord was only making this fully manifest. The ark should never have been in such a dishonoring position; oxen should never have been the bearers of such a burden.

"And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzza, and He smote him, because he put his hand to the ark; and there he died before God." Truly, "judgment must begin at the house of God." The Lord judged David for doing what the Philistines had done without notice. The nearer a man is to God, the more solemnly and speedily will he be judged for any evil. This need not afford any encouragement to the worldling, for, as the apostle says, "If judgment first begin at us, what shall the end be of those that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" If God judges His people, what shall become of the poor worldling! Though the Philistines escaped the judgment of God in the matter of the cart, they had to meet it in another way. God deals with all according to His own holy principles, and the breach upon Uzza was designed to restore David to a right apprehension of the mind of God in reference to the ark of His presence.

Yet it did not seem, at first, to produce the proper effect. "David was displeased because the Lord had made a breach upon Uzza: wherefore the name of the place is called Perez Uzza to this day. And David was afraid of God that day, saying, How shall I bring the ark of God home to me?" There is much deep instruction in this. David was doing a right thing in a wrong way, and when God executed judgment upon his way of acting, he despaired of doing the thing at all. This is a very common error. We enter upon some right course of acting in a wrong way, or in a wrong spirit, which God cannot own; and then our spirit, or method of acting, is confounded with the service in which we were engaged. But we must ever distinguish between *what* men do, and *how* they do it. It was right for David to bring up the ark; it was wrong to put it on an ox-cart. The Lord approved the former, but disapproved and judged the latter. God will never suffer His children to persist in carrying on His work upon wrong principles. They may go on for a time with

much apparent success, as "David and all Israel played before God with all their might, and with singing, and with harps, and with psalteries, and with timbrels, and with cymbals, and with trumpets." This was very imposing. It would have been a difficult matter for any one to raise an objection to the course of David in this proceeding. The king and all his captains were engaged in it; and the burst of music would have drowned any objection. But, ah, how soon was all this exultation checked! "The oxen stumbled;"—"Uzza put forth his hand," vainly imagining that God would suffer the ark of His presence to fall to the ground. He who had maintained the dignity of that ark, even in the dark solitude of the house of Dagon, would surely preserve it from dishonor amid the mistakes and confusion of His people. It was a solemn thing to come near the ark of God—a solemn thing to approach that which was the special symbol of the Divine presence in the midst of His congregation. It is a solemn thing to be the bearer of the name of Jesus, and the depositaries of the truth connected with His holy person. We should all feel this solemnity more deeply than we do. We are too apt to regard it as a light thing to put our hand to the ark; but it is not; and those who attempt it will suffer for their error.

But, it may be asked, has anything been entrusted to the care and keeping of the Church answering to the ark? Yes; the person of the Son of God answers to the ark of old. His divine and human nature answers to the gold and shittim wood of the ark. The *materials* of the ark typified His *person* as the God-man; while the *purposes* of the ark and mercy-seat typified His *work*, whether in life or in death. The ark enclosed the tables of testimony; and the Son of God could say, in connection with the body prepared of God for Him, "Thy law is within My heart." (See psalm xl.) Again, the mercy-seat spoke of peace and pardon, of mercy rejoicing against judgment, where the poor sinner meets God in peace; as the apostle says, "He (Christ) is a mercy-seat for our sins." And again, "Whom God hath set forth to be a mercy-seat." (The word used in Rom. iii is precisely the same as that used in Exodus xxv., viz., *hilasteerion*—propitiatory).

Thus we perceive what a marked type the ark of the covenant was of Him who magnified the law and made it honorable—even Jesus the Son of God, whose glorious person should be the special object of the saints' reverent and affectionate guardianship. And, just as Israel's moral power was ever connected with the right acknowledgment and preservation of the ark amongst them, so the Church's power will be found connected with her due maintenance of the doctrine, the great and all-important doctrine, of the Son. It is in vain that we exult in the work of our hands, and boast ourselves in our knowledge, our testimony, our assemblies, our gifts, our ministry, our anything: if we are not maintaining the honor of the Son, we are really worthless—we are merely walking in the sparks of our own kindling—sparks which shall be speedily extinguished, when the Lord is obliged, in very faithfulness, to come in and make a breach upon us. "David was displeased" at the breach. It was a grievous check to all the joy and gladness of the occasion; but it was needful. A faithful eye detected the wrong moral condition of soul which was betrayed by the wooden cart; and the breach upon Uzza was designed as a corrective; and it proved an effectual one.

"David brought not the ark of God home to himself to the city of David, but carried it aside into the house of Obed-edom, the Gittite." This was David's loss; he forfeited much blessing and privilege by thus stopping short, for the ark of God could do nought but bless all who were rightly connected with it, though it was judgment to be connected with it otherwise, as in the men of Bethshemesh, and Uzza. It was a happy time for Obed-edom while the ark was in his house, for "the Lord blessed his house and all that he had." All the time that David was "*afraid*" and without the ark, Obed-edom was "*blessed*" with the ark. True, things might not just look so cheering; the blessing, instead of being diffused through the whole nation, as it would have been had all been right, was confined to the immediate circle of him who had the ark in his house. Still the blessing, though contracted, was as real and positive, as pure and truthful, as if the whole nation had been enjoying it. It could not be otherwise, inasmuch as it was the result of the presence of the ark. God will ever be true to His own principles, and will ever make those happy who walk in obedience; and as He blessed Obed-edom during the three months that the ark was in his house, though even king David was "afraid," so will He now bless those who seek to meet in truth and simplicity, in the name of Jesus. "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I." This is the great charter of our meeting. Where the presence of Christ is, there must be blessing. Weakness there may be, no doubt, and paucity, but still blessing and comfort, because Jesus is there; and the more we feel our own weakness, emptiness, and nothingness, the more will His presence be prized and loved.

Christians should seek to know more of the presence of Christ in their meetings. We do not want sermons, power of eloquence, human intellect, or anything that merely comes from man; we want the presence of Jesus, without which all is cold, barren, and lifeless. But, oh the sweetness of realizing the presence of the Master! Who can give expression to the preciousness known by those on whom the dew of the divine blessing falls? Blessed be God that any know it! Blessed be God that in this day, when the sad effects of human tradition are but too apparent in the Church, there is such a thing as the house of Obed-edom the Gittite, where the presence of the ark, and the consequent blessing of God, can be known and enjoyed! Let us prize this more and more, while shadowy and unsatisfying forms and ceremonies prevail around us.

We shall now dwell, for a little, upon God's gracious method of restoring the soul of His servant David. The life of faith^[21] is little more than a series of falls and restorations, errors and corrections; displaying, on the one hand, the sad weakness of man, and on the other, the grace and power of God. This is abundantly exemplified in David.

There is a considerable difference in the way in which the return of the ark is recorded in Samuel and in Chronicles; in the one we have the simple statement of the facts; in the other, we have the

moral training through which the soul of David passed during the time that he was afraid of God, or, in other words, during the time that he was laboring under the effects of his own mistake. In Samuel we read, "And it was told king David, saying, The Lord hath blessed the house of Obed-edom, and all that pertaineth unto him, because of the ark of God. So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom, into the city of David with gladness." David learnt that so far from standing aloof from the ark through fear, it was really his privilege and blessing to be near it. In 1 Chronicles xiv., we find David in conflict with the Philistines, and obtaining victory over them. "David inquired of God, saying, Shall I go up against the Philistines? and wilt Thou deliver them into my hand? And the Lord said unto him, Go up; for I will deliver them into thy hand. So they came up to Baal-perazim; and David smote them there. Then David said, God hath broken in upon mine enemies by my hand, like the breaking forth of waters: therefore they called the name of that place Baal-perazim (*i. e.*, a place of breaches)." There is a very great difference between "a breach" and "a place of breaches." God had made a breach upon Israel because of their error in reference to the ark; but as to the Philistines, it was not merely a breach made upon them, they were altogether in a place of breaches; and David might have learnt what a poor example he had followed when he, like them, made the cart to carry the ark. And he did learn his mistake, for in chapter xv. we read, "And David made him houses in the city of David, and prepared a place for the ark of God, and pitched for it a tent. Then David said, None ought to carry the ark of God but the Levites; for them hath the Lord chosen to carry the ark of God, and to minister unto Him for ever." And again, addressing the chief of the fathers of the Levites, he says, "Sanctify yourselves, both ye and your brethren, that ye may bring up the ark of the Lord God of Israel unto the place that I have prepared for it. For *because ye did it not at the first*, the Lord our God made a breach upon us, for that we sought Him not *after the due order*."

Thus had David learned by the "breach" upon Uzza. He was brought to see that to follow in the current of man's thoughts was contrary to "the due order." None can teach like God. When David was wrong, God made a breach upon him by His own hand. He would not allow the Philistines to do this: on the contrary, He allows David to see them in a place of breaches, and enables him to smite them—to break in upon them, like the breaking forth of waters. Thus God taught, and thus David learned, what was "the due order,"—thus he learned, as it were, to remove the ark from the new cart, and place it upon the shoulders of the Levites, whom the Lord had chosen to minister unto Him for ever,—thus he was taught to cast aside human traditions, and follow, in simplicity, the written word of God, in which there was not a word about a cart and oxen to carry the ark. "*None* ought to carry the ark of God but the Levites." This was very distinct. The entire mistake had risen from forgetfulness of the Word, and following the example of the uncircumcised, who had no capacity to understand the mind of God on any question, much less the solemn and important one of carrying the ark.

But in what a wonderfully gracious way did the Lord teach His servant! He taught him by victory over His enemies! Thus it is the Lord frequently leads His children into the apprehension of His mind, when they vainly seek to follow in the track of the men of this world. He shows them that they should not adopt such models. *The breach* taught David his mistake; *the place of breaches* taught him God's due order: by the former he learnt the folly of the cart and oxen; by the latter he learnt the value of the Levites, and the place which they held in the service of God. He would not allow His people to depart from His prescribed order with impunity. And the ark might have remained to the end in the house of Obed-edom, had David not learned to lay aside his own way of bringing it up, and take up God's way.

"So the priests and the Levites sanctified themselves to bring up the ark of the Lord God of Israel. And the children of the Levites bare the ark *upon their shoulders*, with the staves thereon, *as Moses commanded, according to the word of the Lord*." The Lord was glorified in all this, and He could therefore give real joy and gladness, strength and energy. There was no more stumbling of oxen—no more human effort to keep the ark from falling; the truth of God was dominant, and the power of God could act. There can be no real power where truth is sacrificed. There may be the appearance of it, the assumption of it, but no reality. How can there be? God is the source of power, but He cannot associate Himself with what is at variance with His truth. Hence, although "David and all Israel played before God with all their might," there was no divine power. God's order was shut out by the human arrangement, and all ended in confusion and sorrow. How different is it in chap. xv. There is real joy—real power. "It came to pass, when *God helped the Levites* that bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord, that they offered seven bullocks and seven rams. And David was clothed with a robe of fine linen, and all the Levites that bare the ark, and the singers, and Chenaniah the master of the song, with the singers." In a word, this was a scene with which God could consistently connect Himself. He did not help the oxen; He did not help Uzza; the oxen had not borne the ark, of old, through the waters of Jordan; neither had they borne it round the walls of Jericho. No; it was on the shoulders of the Levites that God had put it, and His order is the only happy one. It may not always commend itself to human judgment; yet it will ever have the stamp of Divine approval, and this is abundantly sufficient for every faithful heart. David was enabled to bear the sneer of contempt from Michal, the daughter of Saul, because HE WAS ACTING BEFORE THE LORD. Hear his fine reply to her reproach: "It was before the Lord, which chose me before thy father, and before all his house to appoint me ruler over the people of the Lord, over Israel; *therefore will I play before the Lord. And I will yet be more vile than thus, and will be base in mine own sight*." Precious determination! May it be ours, through grace. Base in our own eyes—happy in God. Humbled to the very dust in the sense of our own vileness—lifted up on high, in the sense of the grace and loving-kindness of our God.

The reader will remark that 1 Chronicles xvi. is just the development of the spirit breathed in the

above quotation. It is the hiding of self and the setting forth the character and ways of God. In short, it is a song of praise, which one has only to read to be refreshed thereby. I would only direct the reader's attention to the last verse, in which he will find the four great characteristics of the people of God fully set forth. "Save us, O God of our salvation, and gather us together, and deliver us from the heathen, that we may give thanks to Thy holy name, and glory in Thy praise." The Church of God is a *saved* company. Salvation is the basis of everything. We cannot answer to any of the other characteristics in this copious verse, until we know ourselves as saved by the grace of God, through the death and resurrection of Christ.

In the power of this salvation the Church is gathered by the energy of the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. The true effect of the Spirit's operation will be to lead into fellowship all who submit to His leading. His order is not isolation, but blessed association and unity in the truth. But if there be ignorance as to salvation, our gathering together will not be to the glory of God, but rather for the promotion of our own spiritual interests, as it is termed. Men frequently associate on religious grounds without the assurance of being perfectly saved by the precious blood of Christ. This is not the Spirit's mode of gathering, for He gathers to Christ on the glorious ground of what He has accomplished. Confessing Christ, as the Son of the living God, is the rock on which the Church is built. It is not agreement in religious views that constitutes church-fellowship, but the possession of a common life, in union with the Head in heaven.

Now, the more this divine unity is realized, the more will we enter into the next characteristic presented to us, viz., *separation*: "and deliver us from the heathen." The Church is called out of the world, though called to witness for Christ in it. All within the Church is to be under the government of the Holy Ghost; all outside alas, is morally under the lordship of Satan, the prince of this world.

Finally, we have the Spirit of a worshiping people: "That we may give thanks to Thy holy name." This follows from all that we have been looking at. Salvation, association, separation, and worship are all connected together. The Church, breathing the atmosphere of God's salvation, is led by the Spirit into holy and happy fellowship, and thus being separated unto the Lord Jesus, without the camp, presents the fruit of her lips to God, giving thanks to His name.

CHAPTER VII

DAVID'S HOUSE AND THE HOUSE OF GOD

2 Samuel vii. and 1 Chronicles xxix.

There is nothing in which the narrowness of the human heart is so manifested as in its apprehensions of divine grace. Legalism is that to which we are most prone, because it gives self a place, and makes it something. Now this is the very thing which God will not allow. "No flesh shall glory in His presence," is a decree which can never be reversed. God must be all, fill all, and give all.

When the psalmist inquired, "What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits?" the answer is "*I will take* the cup of salvation." The way to "render" to God is to "take" yet more largely from His bounteous hand. To be a thankful, unquestioning recipient of grace glorifies God far more than all we could render unto Him.

The gospel of God's grace comes to man as a ruined, guilty, helpless being. Hence God must be the great Actor in redemption. By His counsel alone it was planned; through His mercy alone it was accomplished in "the one offering of Jesus Christ once for all;" and by the Spirit's power alone is the sinner quickened into life and believes the glorious and peace-giving tidings of salvation.

Now, this stops man's mouth altogether as to his own righteousness. It excludes boasting, for we cannot boast of what we are but the unworthy recipients. How happy should all this make us! How happy it is to be the subjects of such grace—grace which blots out all our sins, sets the conscience at rest, and sanctifies all the affections of the heart! Blessed forever be the Fountain from which this saving grace flows to guilty sinners!

The 7th chapter of 2 Samuel is full of instruction as to the great principle of grace. The Lord had done much for His servant David; He had raised him from the depth of obscurity to an exceedingly high elevation, and David felt this, and was disposed to look around him and survey the precious mercies which, in rich profusion, strewed his path.

"And it came to pass, when the king sat in his house, and the Lord had given him rest round about from all his enemies, that the king said unto Nathan the prophet, See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwelleth within curtains." Observe, "David *sat in his house.*" He was surrounded by his own circumstances, and thought it needful to do something for God; but, again, he was in error as to his thoughts of building a house for Jehovah. The ark was within curtains, truly, because the time had not yet come for it to find a resting-place. God had ever

moved in the fullest sympathy with his people. When they were plunged in the furnace of Egyptian bondage, He was in the burning bush; when they were treading their long and dreary journey across the burning desert, His chariot traveled in company with them all the way. When they stood beneath the frowning walls of Jericho, He was there as a man of war, with a drawn sword in His hand, to act for, and in sympathy with, them. Thus, at all times, God and His Israel were together. While they toiled, He toiled, and until they could rest, He would not rest. But David desired to build a house, and find a resting-place for God, while there were both "enemies and evil occurrent."

This could not be. It was contrary to the thoughts and counsels of the God of Israel. "It came to pass *that night*, that the word of the Lord came unto Nathan, saying, Go and tell My servant David, Thus saith the Lord, Shalt thou build Me a house for Me to dwell in?—whereas I have not dwelt in any house since the time that I brought up the children of Israel out of Egypt, even to this day, but have walked in a tent and in a tabernacle." The Lord would not allow another sun to rise without correcting the error of His servant. He sets before him His own past actings toward Israel and toward himself; He reminds David that He had never sought a house or a rest for Himself, but had wandered up and down with His people in all their wanderings, and been afflicted in all their afflictions. "In all the places wherein *I have walked* with all the children of Israel, spake I a word with any of the tribes of Israel whom I commanded to feed My people Israel, saying, Why build ye not Me a house of cedar?"

What lovely, what soul-stirring grace breathes in these words! The blessed God came down to be a traveler with His traveling people. He would set His foot on the sand of the desert, because Israel was there; He caused His glory to dwell beneath a covering of badgers' skins, because His redeemed ones were in militant circumstances. Jehovah sought not a house of cedar; it was not for that He had come down to visit His people in the hour of their affliction in Egypt; He had come down to *give*, not to *take*; to dispense and minister to His people, not to exact from them. True, when the people had put themselves under a covenant of works, at Mount Horeb, God had to test them by a ministration which was characterized by the words "*do*" and "*give*;" but had they only walked in the power of God's original covenant with Abraham, they would never have heard such words uttered in connection with the terrific thunders of Mount Sinai. When God came down to redeem them out of the hand of Pharaoh, and out of the house of bondage; when He bore them on eagles' wings, and brought them unto Himself; when He made a way through the sea for His ransomed to pass over, and overwhelmed the hosts of Egypt in the depths; when He showered down manna from heaven, and caused the refreshing stream to gush from the rock; when He took His place in the pillar of fire by night, and the pillar of cloud by day, to guide them through the trackless desert; when He did all these things for them, and many more, surely it was not on the ground of anything they could *give* or *do*; but simply on the ground of His own everlasting love, and the covenant of grace made with Abraham. Yes, this was the ground of His acting toward them. What *they* did was to reject His grace; trample on His laws; despise His warnings; refuse His mercies; stone His prophets; crucify His Son; resist His Spirit! Such were their actings, from the beginning, the bitter fruits of which they are now reaping, and shall reap, until they are brought, humbly and thankfully, to bow to His covenant of grace.

By bringing all these past ways of God in review before David, the Lord taught David his mistake in seeking to build Him a house. "Shalt thou build Me a house? whereas, etc.... Now, therefore, so shalt thou say to My servant David, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, I took thee from the sheep-cote, from following the sheep, to be ruler over My people, over Israel: and I was with thee whithersoever thou wentest, and have cut off thine enemies out of thy sight, and have made thee a great name, like unto the name of the great that are in the earth. Moreover, I will appoint a place for My people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own, and move no more; neither shall the children of wickedness afflict them any more, as beforetime, and as since the time that I commanded judges to be over My people Israel, and have caused thee to rest from all thine enemies. Also the Lord telleth thee that He will make thee a house." David is here taught that his own history, like that of his people, was to be a history of grace from first to last. He is conducted, in thought, from the sheep-cote to the throne, and from the throne into the ages of the future, and sees the whole course marked by the actings of sovereign grace. Grace had taken him up; grace had set him on the throne; grace had subdued his enemies; grace was to bear him onward; grace was to build up his throne and his house to all generations. It was all grace.

David might justly feel that the Lord had done much for him: the house of cedar was a great thing for the shepherd of Bethlehem; but what was it when compared with the future? What was all that God had done, compared with what He would do? "When thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever." Thus we see, that it was not merely his own short span of forty years that was to be characterized by such actings of grace; his house too was spoken of "for a great while to come," even forever.

Reader, to whom, think you, are we directed in all these promises made to David? Are we to regard them as fully actualized in the reign of Solomon? Surely not. Glorious as was the reign of that monarch, it by no means corresponded to the bright picture presented to David. It was, in one sense, but a passing moment, during which a bright gleam of sunshine flashed across Israel's horizon; for hardly are we conducted to the lofty pinnacle on which Solomon was elevated, when the chilling words fall on the ear, "*But Solomon loved many strange women*," etc. Hardly has the

cup of exquisite delight been raised to the lips than it is dashed to the ground, and the disappointed heart cries out, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity and vexation of spirit."

The book of Ecclesiastes will tell us how far short the reign of Solomon came of actualizing the magnificent promises made to David in this 7th chapter of 2 Samuel. In that book we trace the yearnings of a heart that felt an aching void, and was ranging through creation's wide domain in search of a satisfying object, but ranged in vain. We must, therefore, look beyond the reign of Solomon to a greater than he, even to Him of whom the Spirit in Zacharias speaks, in that fine prophecy in Luke i.—"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for He hath visited and redeemed His people, and hath raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David; as He spake by the mouth of His holy prophets, which have been since the world began; that we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us; to perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember His holy covenant, the oath which He sware to our father Abraham." Again, in the angel's address to Mary, "Behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call His name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David; and He shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of His kingdom there shall be no end." Here the heart can repose without a single check. There is no doubt, no hesitation, no interruption, no exception. We feel that we have beneath our feet a solid rock, the Rock of Ages, and that we are not, like the writer of Ecclesiastes, constrained to lament the absence of an object capable of filling our hearts, and satisfying our desires; but rather, as some one has observed, like the bride in Canticles, to confess our entire lack of capacity to enjoy the glorious object presented to us, who is the "fairest among ten thousand, and altogether lovely."

"Of His kingdom there shall be no end." The foundations of His throne are laid in the deep recesses of eternity; the stamp of immortality is upon His sceptre, and of incorruptibility upon His crown. There shall be no Jeroboam then, to seize upon ten parts of the kingdom; it shall be one undivided whole forever, beneath the peaceful sway of Him who is "meek and lowly in heart."

Such are God's promises to the house of His servant David. Well might the astonished recipient of such mercies, when speaking of all that had been done for him, exclaim, "And this was yet a small thing in Thy sight, O Lord God." What was the past when compared with the future! *Grace* shone in the past, but *glory* glistened in the future. "The Lord will give grace and glory." Grace lays the foundation; glory garnishes the superstructure. This is true of all; it is true, in an eminent degree, of the Church, as we learn from the epistle to the Ephesians: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ; according as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love ... to the praise of the glory of His *grace*, wherein He hath made us accepted in the beloved ... that in the dispensation of the fulness of times ... we should be to the praise of His glory." And again, "But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ (by grace ye are saved), and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus: that in the ages to come, He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus."

Here we have grace and glory set forth most blessedly: grace securing, on immutable principles, the full forgiveness of sins through the precious blood of Christ, and full acceptance in His beloved Person; glory in the distance, gilding with its immortal beams the ages to come. Thus it is that the word of God addresses itself to two great principles in the soul of the believer, viz., faith and hope. Faith reposes upon the past; hope anticipates the future; faith leans upon God's work already accomplished; hope looks forward with earnest desire to His actings yet to be developed. This puts the Christian into a deeply interesting position; it shuts him up to God in everything. As to the past, he leans on the Cross; as to the present, he is sustained and comforted by Christ's priesthood and promises; and as to the future, he "rejoices in hope of the glory of God."

But let us inquire what was the effect produced upon David by all this burst of grace and glory on his spirit? One thing is certain, it effectually corrected his mistake in seeking, as another has said, to exchange the *sword* for the *trowel*. It made him really feel his own thorough littleness, and the greatness of God in His counsels and actings. "Then went king David in, and *sat* before the Lord, and he said, *Who am I*, O Lord God?" It is impossible to convey, in human language, the deep experience of David's soul, as expressed in his attitude and inquiry on this occasion. First, as to his attitude, "*he sat*." This gives us the idea of the most complete repose in God, without a single intervening cloud. There is no doubt, no suspicion, no hesitancy. God, as the almighty and gracious Actor, filled his soul's vision, and hence, to have entertained a doubt would be calling in question either God's willingness or ability to do all that He had said. How could he doubt? Impossible! The record of the past furnished too many substantial arguments in proof of both the will and ability of God to admit of a doubt on the subject.

And truly blessed it is thus to realize our place before the Lord—to allow the heart to dwell upon His wondrous ways of grace—to sit in His presence in the full, unclouded sense of His pardoning love. True, it is hard to understand why it should be so—why He should set His love on creatures such as we. Yet so it is; and we have only to believe and rejoice.

But observe his inquiry, "*Who am I?*" Here we have the hiding of self. David felt that God was all, and self nothing, when he sat before the Lord. He no longer speaks of his actings, his house of cedar, his plan of building a house, etc. No; he expatiates on the actings of God, and his own little

doings sink into their proper nothingness in his estimation. The Lord had said, "Shalt thou build Me a house?" And again, "The Lord telleth thee that He will make thee a house." In other words, the Lord taught David that He should be superior in everything, and that He could not, therefore, be anticipated in building a house. This might seem an easy lesson; but all who know anything of their own proud, self-righteous hearts, know that it was far otherwise. Abraham, David, Job, Paul, and Peter experienced the difficulty of hiding self and exalting God. This is, in fact, the most difficult lesson for a man to learn; for our whole being since the fall is set upon the very opposite, viz., the exaltation of self, and the setting aside of God.

It is needless to adduce any proofs of this; Scripture and experience alike demonstrate the fact that man seeks to be somewhat; and this cannot be attempted without setting aside the claims of God. Grace, however, reverses the matter, and makes man nothing, and God everything. "Is this the manner of man?" No, indeed, it is not the manner or law of man, but it is the manner of God. Man's manner is to set himself up, to rejoice in the works of his own hands, to walk in the sparks of his own kindling; God's manner, on the contrary, is to turn man away from himself, to teach him to look upon his own righteousness as filthy rags, to loathe and abhor himself, and repent in dust and ashes, and cling to Christ, as the shipwrecked mariner clings to the rock.

Thus was it with David when he sat before the Lord, and, losing sight of himself, allowed his soul to go out in holy adoration of God and His ways. This is true worship, and is the very reverse of human religiousness. The former is the acknowledgment of God by the energy of faith; the latter is the setting up of man in the spirit of legalism. No doubt, David would have appeared, to many, a more devoted man when seeking to build a house for the Lord than when sitting in His presence. In the one case, he was trying to do something; in the other, he was apparently doing nothing. Like the two sisters at Bethany, of whom one would seem, in the judgment of nature, to have been doing all the work, and the other to have been sitting idle. How different are God's thoughts! David sitting before the Lord was in a right position, rather than seeking to build.

It must, however, be observed, that while grace leads us away from our own actings, it does not hinder real acting for God. Far otherwise. It only hinders self-importance. It does not abolish service; it only puts it in its right place. Hence, when David learnt that he was not the man, nor his the time to lay aside the sword and take up the trowel, how readily did he acquiesce! How readily did he draw forth his sword from its scabbard, and take his place once more on the field of battle! How ready was he to be the militant servant to the end, and allow the curtain to drop upon him as builder! How ready was he to retire, and allow another to do the work!

In chapter viii. we find David smiting, slaying, taking, and thus earning for himself a still more extensive fame as a man of war, and proving how effectually he had learnt the Lord's lesson. Thus will it ever be with all who have learned in the school of God. It matters little what the character of service may be, whether building the house, or subduing the foes of the Lord. The true servant is ready for anything. David came forth from amid the holy repose of the Lord's house to fight the Lord's battles, in order that he might clear the ground for another to lay the foundation of that house, which his heart had so fondly desired to build. Thus David was the servant throughout. In the sheepfold, in the valley of Elah, in the house of Saul, on the throne of Israel, he maintained the character of a servant.

But we must pass to other scenes, in order to learn other and deeper principles in reference to David's connection with the house of God. He had to learn, in a remarkable manner, where the foundation of the Lord's house was to be laid. Let the reader turn to the 21st chapter of 1 Chronicles and read it. It is parallel with 2 Samuel xxiv., and furnishes the account of David's fall in numbering the people. He became proud of his hosts, or rather the Lord's hosts, which he would fain regard as his. He desired to count his resources, and, alas! he had to learn the emptiness thereof; the sword of the destroying angel mowed down seventy thousand of his boasted numbers, and brought home to his conscience, in terrible solemnity, his grievous sin in attempting to number the Lord's people. However, it had the effect of eliciting much of the sweet, self-renouncing grace that was in David. Hear his touching words, as he exposes his own bosom to the stroke of judgment: "And David said unto God, Is it not I that commanded the people to be numbered? even I it is that have sinned and done evil indeed; but as for these sheep, what have they done? Let Thy hand, I pray thee, O Lord my God, be on me, and on my father's house; but not on *Thy* people, that they should be plagued." This was precious grace. He learned to say, "Thy people," and was ready to stand between them and the foe.

But there was mercy in the midst of wrath. By the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite, the angel of judgment sheathed his sword. "Then the angel of the Lord commanded Gad to say to David, that David should go up, and set up an altar unto the Lord in the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite." Here, then, was the place where mercy triumphed, and caused her voice to be heard above the roar of judgment. Here the blood of the victim flowed, and here the foundation of the Lord's house was laid. "At that time, when David saw that the Lord had answered him in the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite, then he sacrificed there. For the tabernacle of the Lord, which Moses made in the wilderness, and the altar of the burnt-offering, were at that season in the high place at Gibeon: but David could not go before it to inquire of God: for he was afraid, because of the sword of the angel of the Lord. Then David said, This is the house of the Lord God, and this is the altar of the burnt-offering for Israel. And David commanded to gather together the strangers that were in the land of Israel: and he set masons to hew wrought stones to build the house of God." Blessed discovery! Thus impressively and solemnly, and effectually, was David taught the place where the Lord's house should be built, and its deep significance! The Lord knows how to lead His people, and to instruct them in the deep secrets of His mind. He taught

His servant David by the instrumentality of judgment first, and mercy afterwards, and thus led him to the place and its meaning where He would have His temple built. It was by his necessities he learnt about the temple to God, and he went forth to make preparation for it as one who had learnt God's character by his own deep failure.

"This is the house of the Lord God"—the place where mercy rejoiced against judgment—the place where the blood of the victim flowed—the place where David had his sin blotted out. This was very different from going to build on the ground of his dwelling in a house of cedar, as in 2 Samuel vii. Instead of saying, "Lo, I dwell in a house of cedar," he might say, "Lo, I am a poor, pardoned sinner." It is one thing to act on the ground of what *we* are; and quite another thing to act on the ground of what *God* is. The house of God must ever be the witness of His mercy, and this holds good whether we look at the temple of old or the Church now. Both show forth the triumph of mercy over judgment. At the cross we behold the stroke of justice falling upon the spotless Victim, and then the Holy Ghost came down to gather men around the person of Him who was raised from the dead. Just as David began to gather the hewed stones, and the materials for the joinings of the house, the moment the place of the foundation was settled. The Church is the temple of the living God, of which Christ is the chief corner stone. The materials for this building were all provided, and the place of its foundation purchased, in the season of Christ's trouble; for David represents Christ in His sufferings, as Solomon represents Him in His glory. David was the man of war; Solomon, the man of rest. David had to grapple with enemies; Solomon was able to say, "There is neither enemy nor evil occurrent." Thus do these two kings shadow forth Him who, by His cross and passion, made ample provision for the building of the temple which shall be manifested in divine order and perfectness in the day of His coming glory.

David proved, in the end, that though his *thoughts* as to the time of building the house needed to be corrected, his *affection* for the house itself was not the less fervent. He says, at the close, "Now I have prepared with all my might for the house of my God, the gold for things to be made of gold, and the silver for things of silver, and the brass for things of brass, the iron for things of iron, and wood for things of wood: onyx-stones, and stones to be set, glistening stones and of divers colors, and all manner of precious stones, and marble stones in abundance" (1 Chron. xxix. 2).^[22] Thus does grace put service into its proper place, and not only so, but imparts an energy to it which ill-timed service can never exhibit. David had learnt lessons when he sat in the Lord's presence, and when he stood on the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite, which wonderfully fitted him for making the needed preparations for the temple. He could now say, "I have prepared with *all my might*." And again, "Because I have set *my affection* to the house of my God, I have of my own proper good, of gold and silver, which I have given to the house of my God, *over and above* all that I have prepared for the holy house, even three thousand talents of gold," etc. His strength and affection were both devoted to a work which was to be brought to maturity by another.

Grace enables a man to hide himself and make God his object. When David's eye rested on the glittering pile which his devoted heart had raised, he was able to say, "Of *Thine own* have we given Thee." "Blessed be Thou, Lord God of Israel our father, for ever and ever. Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is Thine; Thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and Thou art exalted as head above all. Both riches and honor come of Thee, and Thou reignest over all; and in Thy hand is power and might, and in Thy hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all. Now, therefore, our God, we thank Thee, and praise Thy glorious name. But *who am I*, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for *all things come of Thee*, and of Thine own have we given Thee. For we are strangers before Thee, and sojourners, as were all our fathers; our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding. O Lord our God, all this store that we have prepared to build Thee a house for Thy holy name, cometh of Thy hand, and is all Thine own." "Who am I?" What a question! David was nothing, and God was all and in all. If ever he had entertained the thought that he could offer anything to God, he entertained it no longer. It was all the Lord's, and He, in His grace, had allowed them to offer it all. Man can never make God his debtor, though he is ever seeking to do so. The 50th Psalm, the 1st of Isaiah, and the 17th of Acts, all prove that the unceasing effort of man, whether Jew or Gentile, is to give something to God; but it is a vain effort. The reply to man, thus endeavoring to make God his debtor, is, "If I were hungry, I would not tell thee." God must be the giver, man the receiver. "Who," says the apostle, "hath *first* given to Him?" The Lord will graciously take from those who are taught to say, "Of Thine own have we given Thee," but eternity will declare God to be THE GREAT FIRST GIVER. Blessed that it should be so! Blessed for the poor, guilty, broken-hearted sinner, to recognize in God the giver of all—of life, pardon, peace, holiness, everlasting glory! Happy was it for David, as he drew near the end of his checkered career, to hide both himself and his offerings behind the rich abundance of divine grace! Happy for him to know, as he handed the plan of the temple to Solomon, his son, that it should ever be the monument of God's triumphant mercy! The house was, in due time, to rise in magnificence and splendor from its foundation; the effulgence of divine glory was yet to fill it from end to end; yet would it never be forgotten that it stood on that sacred spot where the devastating progress of judgment had been stayed by the hand of sovereign mercy, acting in connection with the blood of a spotless victim.

And, my reader, in passing from the temple of Solomon to that which in the latter day shall arise in the midst of God's beloved people, how fully may we trace the development of the same heavenly principles! Still more, when we pass from the earthly to the heavenly temple, may we behold the glorious triumph of mercy over every barrier; yea, rather, the glorious harmony effected between mercy and truth, righteousness and peace. From amid the brightness of

millennial glory, shall Israel below, and the Church above, look backward to the cross as the place where justice sheathed its sword, and the Hand of mercy began to erect that superstructure which shall shine, with everlasting light and glory, to the praise and honor of God, the blessed Giver of all.

CHAPTER VIII

THE CONSPIRACY

We are again called to follow David into the valley of humiliation—a deep valley indeed where grievous sin and its bitter fruits are fully seen. It is really wonderful to trace the checkered path of this remarkable man. No sooner has the hand of love restored his soul, and set his feet again upon the rock, than he is plunged into the depths of corruption. We have just seen his error in reference to the house of God graciously corrected, and we are now to behold him led captive in the chains of natural desire. Such, alas, is man—a poor, halting, stumbling creature, needing at every moment the fullest exercise of divine grace and forbearance.

The history of the most obscure believer will be found to exhibit, though on a smaller scale, all the roughnesses, inequalities, and inconsistencies observable in David's course. Indeed, it is this that renders the narrative of his life and times so peculiarly, so touchingly interesting to us.

Where is the heart that has not been assailed by the power of unbelief, like David when he fled for refuge to the king of Gath? or by mistaken notions in reference to the Lord's service, like David when he sought to build a house for God, before the time? or by emotions of self-complacency and pride, like David when he sought to number the people? or by the vile lustings of nature, like David in the matter of Uriah the Hittite? If there be such a heart, it will find but little interest in tracing the ways of David. But I trust my reader has not such a heart, for wherever there is a human heart there is also the susceptibility of all that I have been enumerating, and, therefore, the grace that could meet David must be precious to every heart that knows its own plague.

The section of our history on which we are now entering is an extensive one, embracing many important principles of Christian experience and divine dealing. The facts of the case are, doubtless, familiar to the reader; but it will be profitable to look closely at them. David's sin led to Absalom's conspiracy. "And it came to pass, after the year was expired, at the time when kings go forth to battle, that David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the children of Ammon, and besieged Rabbah. *But David tarried still at Jerusalem*" (2 Sam. xi. 1). David, instead of being out at the head of his army, exercising himself in the hardships and fatigues of war, was quietly reposing at home. This was giving the enemy a manifest advantage over him. The moment a man absents himself from his post of duty, or retires from the place of conflict, he renders himself weak. He has taken off the harness, and will, undoubtedly, be pierced by the arrow of the enemy. While at work for the Lord, be the work what it may, nature is kept under pressure; but when at ease, nature begins to work, and feel the action and influence of external things. We should seriously ponder this. Satan will ever find mischief for idle hearts, as well as idle hands. David was made to feel this. Had he been at Rabbah with his army, his eye would not have rested upon an object calculated to act upon the corrupt principle within; but the very act of tarrying at home afforded an opening for the enemy to come in upon him.

It is well to be ever on the watch, for we have a watchful enemy. "Be sober, be vigilant," says the apostle; "because your adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour." Satan watches his opportunity, and when he finds a soul unoccupied with his proper service, he will surely seek to involve him in evil. It is, therefore, safe and healthful to be diligently engaged in service—service flowing out of communion with God, for we are thus in an attitude of positive hostility to the enemy; but if we are not acting in hostility, he will use us as instruments for his own ends. When David failed in energy as the captain of the hosts of Israel, he became the slave of lust. Sad picture! Solemn, most solemn warning for our souls!

The believer is the subject either of the energy of the Spirit, or the energy of the flesh; if he fails in the former, the latter will most assuredly predominate, and then he becomes an easy prey to the enemy. Thus it was with David. "At the time when kings go forth to battle" he was at rest in his house, and Satan presented a bait which proved too much for his poor heart. He fell—grievously, shamefully fell! Nor was his fall now a mere mistake. No; he fell into a deep pit of moral evil, of vile corruption, and his fall utters the solemn admonition, "*Keep under the body.*" Nature must be judged, or we shall make shipwreck.

And mark the fearful lengths to which David was carried in the commission of evil. Having sacrificed his character to indulge nature, he endeavors to make Uriah a cloak to screen him from the public eye. His reputation must be maintained at all cost. He tries kindness, but in vain; he makes the wronged and dishonored Uriah drunk, but to no purpose; at last, he murders him by the sword of the children of Ammon. How dreadful! Did David really think that all was over when Uriah was out of the way? Did he forget that the eyes of the Lord were resting upon him in his evil course? It would seem that his conscience was hardened on this occasion, and not

susceptible of conviction as we should expect. Had it been so, he would assuredly have faltered and hesitated ere he added the sin of murder to that of adultery, he would have mourned under the sharp reproof of Uriah—only the sharper because perfectly unintentional—when he said, "The ark, and Israel, and Judah, abide in tents; and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are encamped in the open fields: shall I then go into my house?" etc. What a rebuke to David! The Lord and His people were in the open fields, conflicting with the uncircumcised foes of Israel, but David was at home enjoying the ease and indulging the desires of nature. Surely we may say, there was a time when David would not have been found reclining on his couch when the hosts of the Lord were warring with the enemy; there was a time when he would not have exposed a faithful servant to the assault of the enemy in order to save his own reputation. Such, however, is man—the best of men. When pride swells the heart, or lust dims the eye, who shall attempt to draw a limit to human depravity? Who shall define the fearful lengths to which even a David can go, when out of communion? Blessed for ever be the God of all grace, who has ever proved Himself equal to all the demands of His wayward children! Who but God could deal with even one saint for a single stage of his history? When we remember His perfect estimate of the odiousness of sin, His perfect grace toward the sinner must fill the soul with adoring gratitude!

The Lord must maintain His holiness, however He may deal with the sinner; and hence, in David's case, we find Him denouncing the most solemn judgment upon his house because of his sin. Nathan is sent to him in order to lead his conscience into the immediate presence of the holiness of God. This is the proper place for conscience to find itself. When not there, it will find various expedients, subterfuges, and various cloaks. David said, when told of the success of his diabolical scheme in reference to Uriah, "Thus shalt thou say to Joab, Let not this thing displease thee, for the sword devoureth one as well as another." Thus did he think to hush up the whole matter. He vainly imagined that, when Uriah was out of the way, all would be well. But, ah, there was an Eye that could penetrate through all this covering which David's insensibility has cast over his heart and conscience. "The sword devoureth one as well as another," no doubt, and war has its vicissitudes; but this would not satisfy the holiness of God. No; the whole matter must be exposed—the dreadful meshes of evil in which Satan had entangled the feet of his victim must all be disentangled, the holiness of God's house must be maintained at all cost, His name and truth fully vindicated, and His servant scourged in the view of the whole congregation—yea, "in the sight of the sun." It might seem, in man's judgment, to be wiser to hide from public view the chastisement of one who stood so high, but such is not God's mode; He will prove to every spectator that He has no fellowship with evil, by the judgment which He executes in the midst of His people. Nothing could avail to wipe off the stain which had been cast upon the truth of God but the public judgment of the transgressor. The men of the world may go on for the present, and sin with a high hand; but those who stand in association with the name of the Lord, must keep themselves pure, or else be judged.

However, David would seem to have been most wonderfully insensible in this whole transaction. Even when Nathan's touching parable had set before him the blackness of his conduct, he, though roused to indignation at the selfish conduct of the rich man, never took it to himself. "And David's anger was greatly kindled against the man; and he said to Nathan, As the Lord liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die." Thus did he pronounce judgment upon himself unconsciously; he felt not his own sin as yet; perhaps he would have proceeded to find out and punish the offender, had not the prophet's word proved to be the very arrow of the Almighty to pierce his obtuse conscience. "*Thou art the man.*" Tremendous discovery! The sin was traced to its source, and David stood as a conscience-smitten, broken-hearted sinner in the presence of God. There is no more effort to screen himself, or maintain his reputation. "*I have sinned against the Lord,*" is the acknowledgment which flows forth from his wounded spirit. His soul was subdued by the power of the truth, and the 51st psalm was his penitential utterance, as he lay prostrate in the dust, in the deep sense of his own personal vileness before the Lord. "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Thy loving-kindness; according to the multitude of Thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions." Here was David's well-known, oft-tried resource. He brings his heavy burden and lays it down beside the loving-kindness and tender mercy of God—the only place in which his harassed spirit could find repose. He felt his sin to be so heinous that nothing but the mercy of God could avail to blot it out. There, however, he found a "vast abyss" which could "swallow up" all his evil, and give him profound peace in the view of his own wretchedness.

Nor was it merely to be forgiven his sins that David desired; this he needed, no doubt, but he needed more; he needed to be inwardly cleansed from the defiling power of sin itself. "*Wash me thoroughly* from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin." The apostle says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, *and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*" To be cleansed from unrighteousness is more than to be forgiven our sins; and David desired the latter, as well as the former. Both are made to depend on the confession of our sins.

It is a much more difficult thing to confess our sin, than to ask for forgiveness. Really to confess before God the sin which we have committed, is a much more humbling thing than to ask for pardon in a general way. It is an easy thing to ask the Lord for pardon; but it is in vain unless we confess our sins; and then, observe, it is a matter of simple faith to know that sins are forgiven us. The word is, "If we *confess,*" etc.; David confessed his sin. "I acknowledge my transgressions; and my sin is ever before me. Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight; that Thou mightest be justified when Thou speakest, and be clear when Thou judgest." This was true conviction. There was no attempt at palliation; no laying blame on circumstances; no looking at individuals. It is simply "*I*" and "*Thee*;" I a sinner, and Thou the God of truth. "Let God

be true, and every man a liar." The secret of true restoration consists in taking our real place, as sinners, in the light of the truth of God. This is the apostle's teaching in the 3d of Romans. The truth of God is there set up as the great standard by which man's condition is to be tested. The effect of this is to bring the sinner down to the very bottom, as it were, of his moral and practical condition in the sight of God; it strips him of everything, and lays his inmost soul bare before a holiness which will not tolerate the least speck of sin in its presence. But when thus brought down into the dust of self-abasement and genuine confession, what do we find? We find God, in the solitariness and sovereignty of His grace, working out a perfect righteousness for the guilty and self-condemned sinner.

Here we find truth and grace presented to us in this most important section of inspiration. Truth breaks the heart, grace binds it up; that stops the mouth, this opens it; stops it, that it may no longer boast of human merit; opens it, that it may show forth the praise and honor of the God of all grace.

David traveled in spirit through the truth afterwards set forth in Rom. iii. He, too, was led down into the profound depths of his nature. "Behold," he says, "I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." Here he looks down to the very lowest point of depression. Man's original—*shapen in sin!* What good could ever flow from such a thing? Nothing! It is irrecoverable. And then observe the contrast: "Behold, Thou desirest truth in the inward parts." God demands truth. What could David do therefore but confess what he does? for that was the truth concerning himself. What could now meet the need of such a man? Nothing but the precious blood of Christ. "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." In other words, David throws himself as a helpless sinner into the arms of redeeming love. Happy resting-place! God alone can purge a sinner, and make him fit for His own presence. "Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which Thou hast broken may rejoice." God must do all—purge his conscience, open his ear again to the notes of joy and gladness, open his mouth to tell transgressors of His ways of love and mercy, create a clean heart within him, restore to him the joy of His salvation, uphold him by His free Spirit, deliver him from blood-guiltiness. In short, when Nathan's words fell with divine power upon David's heart, he cast the crushing weight of his burden upon infinite grace, (exercised through the precious blood of atonement) and thus was brought humbly to rejoice in a perfect settlement of the question which his sin had raised between his conscience and God. Grace gained a glorious triumph; and David retired from the field, scarred indeed, and sorely wounded, yet with a deepened experience of what God was, and what grace had done for his soul.

Still, David's sin produced its own bitter fruits in due time. This must ever be so. Grace does not set aside that solemn word of the apostle, "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." Grace may pardon the individual, but the results of sin will assuredly appear, even though the sinner may enjoy the deepest and sweetest experiences of divine love and restoring grace, while actually under the rod. We shall see this abundantly exemplified in David. He was, as we know, fully, blessedly, divinely pardoned, washed, and restored; nevertheless he had to harken to the solemn denunciation, "Now, therefore, the sword shall never depart from thy house; because thou hast despised Me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife." Observe, "Thou hast despised ME." David had sought to hide his sin from public view by putting Uriah out of the way, forgetting the all-seeing eye of Jehovah, and forgetting, too, the honor of His holy name. Had he remembered the Lord at the moment when nature was causing her voice to be heard within, he would not have fallen into the snare. The sense of God's presence is the great preservative from evil; but how often are we more influenced by the presence of our fellow-man than we are by the presence of God. "I have set the Lord always before me; because He is on my right hand, I shall not be moved." If we fail to realize God's presence as a preservative *against* evil, we shall be made to feel it as a judgment *because* of it.

"The sword shall never depart from thy house." Contrast this with the glorious promises made to David in chap. vii., and yet it is the same voice that falls on the ear in the denunciation and in the promise, though in a tone so awfully different: in the latter, grace; in the former, holiness is heard. "Because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child that is born unto thee shall surely die." The death of the child, however, was but the first sound of the tornado of judgment about to burst upon David's house. He might fast, pray, humble himself, and lie prostrate in the dust, but the child must die; judgment must take its course, the consuming fire burn up every particle of the material submitted to its action. The sword of man "devours one as well as another;" but the sword of God falls on the head of the *offender*. Things must be made manifest; the stream may flow for a time under ground, but sooner or later it will break out. We may go on for years in a course of secret evil, in the cultivation of some unholy principle, in the indulgence of some unholy lust, in the gratification of some unholy temper or feeling, but the smoldering flame must ultimately break forth, and show us the real character of our actings. This is a truly solemnizing reflection. We cannot hide things from God, nor cause *Him* to think that our wrong ways are all right. We may try to reason ourselves into such a thought; we may persuade our hearts by plausible arguments that such and such things are right, good, or lawful; but "God is not mocked: whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

Yet what grace shines out in this, as in every scene of David's remarkable career. Bathsheba becomes the mother of Solomon, who occupied the throne of Israel in its most glorious period, and who also stands in that privileged line through which, according to the flesh, Christ came! This is truly divine! It is altogether worthy of God. The darkest scene in David's life becomes,

under the hand of God, the means of richest blessings—divine grace is reflected on a dark background. Thus did the eater yield meat, and the strong, sweetness. We know how this principle characterizes all the ways of God with His people. He judges their evil, surely, but pardons their sin, and makes their very failures the channel through which, after humiliation and self-judgment, grace flows to them. Blessed forever be the God of all grace, who pardons our sins, restores our souls, bears with our many infirmities, and finally causes us to triumph through Him that loves us!

How must David have felt ever after, as his eye rested upon his Solomon, "*the man of rest*,"—his Jedidiah, "*the beloved of the Lord*!" He would remember his own humiliating fall; he would remember God's adorable grace. And, my beloved Christian reader, is it not just thus with ourselves? What is our history day by day, but a history of falls and restorations, of ups and downs? Nothing more; and thank God for the assurance that "Grace all the work shall crown, through everlasting days."

At the close of this 12th chapter, we find David again in conflict with the enemy—his proper place. "And David gathered all the people together, and went to Rabbah, and fought against it and took it.... And he brought forth the people that were therein, and put them under saws, and under harrows of iron, and under axes of iron, and made them pass through the brick-kiln; and thus did he to all the cities of the children of Ammon. So David and all the people returned to Jerusalem."

And now begins the heavy tale of David's woes, the fulfilment of the prophet's denunciation, that the sword should never depart from his house. Chapter xiii. records two of the most diabolical acts that ever stained a family circle. Amnon, the son of David, offers dishonor to the sister of Absalom, and Absalom murders Amnon, and then flees to Geshur, where he remains three years. David allows him to return, contrary to the positive command of the law. Even had he been but a manslayer, he should have remained in a city of refuge; but he was a murderer, and, with his murder upon him, he is received back again upon natural grounds—no confession, no judgment, no atonement. "The king kissed Absalom." Yes, the king kissed the murderer, instead of allowing the law of the God of Israel to take its course. What then? "It came to pass after this, that Absalom prepared chariots and horses, and fifty men to run before him." This was the next step. David's inordinate tenderness only paved the way for Absalom's open rebellion. Terrible warning! Deal tenderly with evil, and it will assuredly rise to a head, and crush you in the end. On the other hand, meet evil in the name of the Lord, and your victory is sure. Sport not with the serpent, but at once crush it beneath your foot. Plain, unflinching decision is, after all, the safest and happiest path. It may be trying at first, but the end is peaceful.

But observe how Absalom works. He begins by creating a want in the hearts of the men of Israel. "And Absalom rose up early, and stood beside the way of the gate: and it was so, that when any man that had a controversy came to the king for judgment, then Absalom called unto him, and said, Of what city art thou?... See thy matters are good and right; but *there is no man deputed of the king to hear thee*. Absalom said, moreover, Oh, that I were made judge in the land, that every man which hath any suit or cause might come unto me, and I would do him justice. And it was so that when any man came nigh to him to do him obeisance, he put forth his hand and kissed him.... So Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel." The enemy's way is first to create a want, to produce a blank, and then proceed to fill it up with something, or some one, of his own providing. Those whose hearts were fully satisfied with David had no room for Absalom.

This is a fine principle when applied to our hearts in reference to Christ. If we are filled with Him we have no room for aught beside. It is only when Satan succeeds in creating a want in our hearts that he introduces something of his own. When we are able in truth to say, "The Lord is my portion," we are safe from the influence of Satan's attractive baits. The Lord keep us in the happy and holy enjoyment of Himself, that so we may be able to say with one of old, "I try to lay up all my good things in Christ, and then a little of the creature goes a great way."

However, Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel. He came in by flatteries, and usurped David's place in their thoughts and affections. He was a comely person, well adapted to captivate the multitude. "In all Israel there was none to be so much praised as Absalom for his beauty: from the sole of his foot even to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him." But his beauty and his flattery had no effect upon *those who were near the person of David*. When the messenger came, saying, "The hearts of the men of Israel are after Absalom," it became manifest who were for David. "And David said unto all his servants that were with him at Jerusalem, Arise, and let us flee.... And the king's servants said unto the king, Behold, thy servants are ready to do whatsoever my lord the king shall appoint.... And the king went forth, and all the people after him, and tarried in a place that was far off. And all his servants passed on *beside him*, and all the Cherethites, and all the Pelethites, and all the Gittites, six hundred men which came after him from Gath, passed on before the king.... And all the country wept with a loud voice, and all the people passed over; the king also himself passed over the brook Kidron, and all the people passed over, toward the way of the wilderness." Thus were there many hearts who loved David too well to be drawn away by the ensnaring influence of Absalom. Those who had been with David in the days of his exile were near his beloved person in this day of his deep sorrow. "And David went up by the ascent of Mount Olivet, and wept as he went up, and had his head covered; and he went barefoot; and all the people that were with him covered every man his head, and they went up, weeping as they went up."

This is a deeply touching scene. David's grace shines out more during this conspiracy than at any

period of his life. And not only does David's grace appear in a striking point of view, but the genuine devotedness of his dear people also. When we behold a loving band of followers thronging round the weeping, the barefooted David, our hearts are far more deeply touched than when we see them thronging round his throne. We are more thoroughly convinced that his *person*, and not his office, was the centre of attraction. David had nothing to offer his followers now save fellowship in his rejection; yet was there a charm about him, to those who knew his person, that bound them to him at all times. They could weep with him, as well as conquer with him. Hear the language of a genuine lover of David: "And Ittai answered the king, and said, As the Lord liveth, and as my lord the king liveth, surely in what place my lord the king shall be, whether in death or life, even there also will thy servant be." Life or death; he would be in companionship with David.

In looking through these chapters, there is nothing that so strikes us as David's beautiful subjection of spirit. When Zadok would bring the ark in his weeping train, he says, "Carry back the ark of God into the city; if I shall find favor in the eyes of the Lord, He will bring me again, and show me both it, and His habitation; but if He thus say, I have no delight in thee, behold, here am I, let Him do to me as seemeth good unto Him."

When the insulting Benjamite, Shimei, came forth to curse and cast stones at him, and Abishai desired permission to take off his head, his answer is, "What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruiah? So let him curse, because the Lord hath said unto him, Curse David. Who shall then say, Wherefore hast thou done so?" In short, he meekly bows his head to the dispensation of God. He felt, no doubt, that he was only reaping the fruit of his sin, and he accepted it. He saw God in every circumstance, and owned Him with a subdued and reverent spirit. To him it was not Shimei, but the Lord. Abishai saw only the man, and desired to deal with him accordingly:—like Peter afterwards, when he sought to defend his beloved Master from the band of murderers sent to arrest Him. Both Peter and Abishai were living upon the surface, and looking at secondary causes. The Lord Jesus was living in the most profound subjection to the Father. "The cup which My Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it?" This gave Him power over anything. He looked beyond the instrument to God—beyond the cup to the hand which had filled it. It mattered not whether it were Judas, Herod, Caiaphas, or Pilate; He could say in all, "the cup which *My Father* hath given Me to drink."

Thus, too, was David, in his measure, lifted above subordinate agents. He looked right up to God, and with unshod feet, and covered head, he bowed before Him. "The Lord hath said unto him, Curse David." This was enough.

Now, there are, perhaps, few things in which we so much fail as in apprehending the presence of God, and His dealing with our souls in every circumstance of daily life. We are constantly ensnared by looking at secondary causes; we do not realize *God in everything*. Hence Satan gets the victory over us. Were we more alive to the fact that there is not an event which happens to us, from morning to night, in which the voice of God may not be heard, the hand of God seen, with what a holy atmosphere would it surround us! Men and things would then be received as so many agents and instruments in our Father's hand; so many ingredients in our Father's cup. Thus would our minds be solemnized, our spirits calmed, our hearts subdued. Then we shall not say with Abishai, "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? let me go over, I pray thee, and take off his head;"—nor shall we, with Peter, draw the sword of natural excitement. How far below their respective masters were both these affectionate though mistaken men! How must the sound of Peter's sword have grated on his Master's ear, and offended His spirit! And how must Abishai's words have grieved the meek and submitting David! Could David defend himself while God was dealing with his soul in a manner so solemn and impressive? Surely not. He dare not take himself out of the hands of the Lord. He was His, for life or death—as a king or an exile. Blessed subjection!

But, as has been already remarked, the record of this conspiracy not only exhibits David's subjection to God, but also the devotedness of David's friends to his person, whether mistaken or otherwise. His mighty men are seen thronging round him on his right hand and his left, and sharing with him the insults and execrations of Shimei. They had been with him in the hold, with him on the throne, with him in the field, and they are now with him in his humiliation.

Now Shobi and Barzillai come forth to minister to him and his men with princely liberality. In short, the thoughts of many hearts were revealed in the season of David's sorrow. It was manifest who loved David for his own sake; and, no doubt, he returned to his house and his throne with a fuller and deeper confidence in the genuine affection of those around him.

There is, however, one character introduced to our notice, upon which we must dwell for a little. I allude to Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan.

Hardly had David taken his seat on the throne, when he gave utterance to those memorably gracious words, "Is there yet any that is left of *the house of Saul*, that I may show *the kindness of God* unto him?" "The house of Saul!" "The kindness of God!" What words! Saul had been his most implacable enemy; yet, being now on the throne, the brilliancy of his position, and the fulness of divine grace, enabled him to sink in oblivion the acts of the past, and to manifest, not merely the kindness of David, but the kindness of God.

Now, the kindness of God is marked by this special characteristic, exercised toward His enemies. "If, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son," etc. Such was the kindness which David desired to show to a member of the house of Saul. "Now, when

Mephibosheth the son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, was come unto David, he fell on his face, and did reverence.... And David said unto him, Fear not, for I will surely show thee kindness, ... and thou shalt eat bread at my table continually. And he bowed himself, and said, What is thy servant, that thou shouldest look on such a dead dog as I am?" Here, then, is a lovely specimen of the kindness of God, and here, too, we are presented with the ground of Mephibosheth's devotedness to David. Though having no more claim upon him than an enemy, or a dead dog, yet is he taken up in grace, and set down at the king's table.

But Mephibosheth had a faithless servant, who, to promote his own ends, misrepresented him to the king. The opening verses of chapter xvi. will furnish the reader with an account of Ziba's actings. He pretends kindness to David, and blackens the character of Mephibosheth, in order to get possession of his lands. He takes advantage of his master's weakness of body to deceive and malign him. What a picture!

The truth, however, came to light, and the wronged one was fully vindicated. On David's return, when all the trouble was over, and Absalom perished from the scene, "Mephibosheth, the son of Saul, came down to meet the king, and had neither dressed his feet, nor trimmed his beard, nor washed his clothes, from the day the king departed until he came again in peace."

Such is the Spirit's testimony to this faithful man. While David was away, Mephibosheth was a mourner: true picture of what the saint ought to be now, during the period of his Master's absence. Fellowship with an absent Lord imparts a tone of thorough separation to the Christian character. The question is not at all what a Christian may, or may not do. No; an affectionate heart will suggest the true course to be adopted by all those who are looking for the king's return. What a truly divine spring of action does the absence of Jesus furnish! "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above." Ask the spiritual man, why does he abstain from things which he might enjoy? His answer is, *Jesus is absent*. This is the highest motive. We do not want the rules of a cold and barren formalism to regulate our ways; but we want a more fervent affection for the person of Christ, and a more lively desire for His speedy return. We, like Mephibosheth, have experienced the kindness of God—precious kindness! We have been taken up from the depths of our ruin, and set among the princes of God's people. Should we not, therefore, love our Master? should we not desire to see His face? should we not regulate our present conduct by constant reference to Him? Would that we were more like Mephibosheth. But we are all too well disposed to minister to our odious nature—too ready to walk in the unchecked enjoyment of the things of this life—its riches, its honors, its comforts, its refinements, its elegancies, and the more so because we imagine we can do all these things without forfeiting our title to the name and privileges of Christians. Vain, detestable selfishness! Selfishness, which shall be put to the blush in the day of Christ's appearing.

Had Ziba's account of Mephibosheth been true, how could the latter have replied to David when he said, "Wherefore wentest thou not with me, Mephibosheth?" But he was able to answer, "My lord, O king, my servant deceived me; for thy servant said, I will saddle me an ass, that I may ride thereon, and go to the king; because thy servant is lame. And he hath slandered thy servant unto my lord the king; but my lord the king is as an angel of God; do, therefore, what is good in thine eyes. For all of my father's house were but dead men before my lord the king; yet didst thou set thy servant among them that did eat at thine own table. What right, therefore, have I yet to cry any more unto the king?" Here was simple integrity of heart. Unaffected devotedness must develop itself. The contrast between Ziba and Mephibosheth is truly striking. The former was seeking for the inheritance; the latter only desired to be near the king. Hence, when David said, "Why speakest thou any more of thy matters? I have said, Thou and Ziba divide the land," Mephibosheth at once proved the direction in which his thoughts and desires were flowing; "Yea," said he, "*let him take all*, forasmuch as my lord the king is come again in peace unto his own house." His heart was engaged about David, not about the "matters." How could he stand on a footing with Ziba? How could he divide the land with such an one? Impossible! The king had returned; this was enough for him. To be near to him was better far than all the inheritance of the house of Saul. "Let him take *all*." Nearness to the person of the king so filled, so satisfied the heart of Mephibosheth, that he could, without any difficulty, give up all that for which Ziba had so diligently acted the deceiver and the slanderer.

Just so will it be with those who love the name and person of the Son of God. The prospect of His loved appearing will deaden their affections for the things of this world. With them it will not be a question of lawfulness or unlawfulness: such terms are far too cold for an affectionate heart. The very fact of their looking out for the morning, will, of necessity, turn their hearts away from all beside; just as gazing intently at any special object necessarily turns one away from everything else. If Christians realized more the power of our blessed hope, how they would walk above and apart from the world. The enemy is well aware of this, and hence he has labored hard to reduce this hope to the level of speculative doctrine—a peculiar tenet, possessing little or no practical power to attract the heart. That section of inspiration, too, which specially unfolds the events connected with the coming of Christ, he has succeeded in involving in almost total neglect. The book of Revelation has, until very recently, been regarded as a book of such profound and inextricable mystery, that few, if any, could approach it. And even since the attention of Christians has been more particularly directed to its study, he has introduced and built up such conflicting systems—has set forward such jarring interpretations, that simple minds are well-nigh scared away from a subject which seems, in their judgment, to be inseparably connected with mysticism and confusion.

Now there is just one grand remedy for all this evil, viz., *a genuine love of the appearing of Jesus*.

Those who are waiting for that will not dispute much about the mode of it. Indeed, we may set it down as a fixed principle, that in proportion as affection becomes dead, will the spirit of controversy prevail.

All this is very simply and very strikingly illustrated in the narrative of Mephibosheth. He felt that he owed everything to David; that he had been saved from ruin, and raised to dignity. Hence, when David's place was occupied by a usurper, Mephibosheth's whole appearance and manner proved that he had no sympathy with the existing state of things; he was estranged from it all, and only sighed for the return of him whose kindness had made him all he was. His interests, his destinies, his hopes, were all bound up with David, and nothing but his return could make him happy.

Oh, that it were thus with us, my beloved Christian reader! Would that we really entered more into our true character, as strangers and pilgrims, in the midst of a scene where Satan rules. The time is coming when our beloved King shall be brought back, amid the affectionate acclamations of His people, when the usurper shall be hurled from his throne, and every enemy crushed beneath the footstool of our glorious Immanuel. The Absaloms, the Ahithophels, the Shimeis, shall find their proper place; and, on the other hand, all who, like Mephibosheth, have mourned the absent David, shall have all the desires of their longing hearts abundantly satisfied. "How long, O Lord?" May this be our cry, as we eagerly look for the earliest sound of His chariot wheels. The way is long, rough, and painful; the night dark and depressing; but the word is, "Be patient, brethren." "He that shall come will come, and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith; but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him."

Into the further details of Absalom's conspiracy I do not now mean to enter. He met the end his deeds merited, though a father's heart might grieve and a father's tears flow for him. Moreover, his history may justly be viewed as a type of that great prophetic character, who, as Daniel informs us, "shall obtain the kingdom by flatteries." This, however, and many other points full of interest, I shall leave the reader to deduce from the sacred text for himself, praying the Lord to make the study of His own word refreshing and edifying, in this day of darkness and confusion. Never was there a time when Christians needed more to give themselves to the prayerful study of Scripture. Conflicting opinions and judgments, strange notions and baseless theories are abroad, and the simple mind knows not whither to turn. Blessed be God, His word is before us in all its lucid simplicity, and in it we have the eternal fountain of truth, the immutable standard by which everything must be judged; all, therefore, that we need is a mind fully subject to its teaching. "If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light."

CHAPTER IX

THE SONG AND LAST WORDS

The 22d chapter of 2 Samuel contains David's magnificent song, and is parallel with the 18th psalm. It is the utterance of the Spirit of Christ in David, connected with His triumph over death, through the mighty energy of the power of God. (Ephes. i. 19.) In it, as the inspired heading teaches us, David presents his praise to God for deliverance from the hand of all his enemies, and the hand of Saul particularly. He thankfully recounts the glorious actings of God on his behalf, yet in such language as at once leads us from David and all his conflicts, to that terrible conflict which raged around the grave of Jesus, when all the powers of darkness were ranged, in fierce array, against God. Tremendous was the scene! Never before, and never since, was such a battle fought, or such a victory gained, whether we look at the contending powers, or the consequences resulting. Heaven on the one side, and hell on the other. Such were the contending powers. And as to the consequences resulting, who shall recount them? The glory of God and of His Christ, in the first place; the salvation of the Church; the restoration and blessing of Israel's tribes; and the full deliverance of creation's wide domain from the lordship of Satan, the curse of God, and the thralldom of corruption. Such were some of the results. Fierce, therefore, was the struggle of the great enemy of God and man at the cross and at the grave of Christ; violent were the efforts of the strong man to prevent his armor from being taken, and his house from being spoiled, but all in vain; Jesus triumphed. "When the waves of death compassed me, the floods of ungodly men made me afraid; the sorrows of hell compassed me about; the snares of death prevented me; in my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried to my God: and He did hear my voice out of His temple, and my cry did enter into His ears." Here was apparent weakness, but real power. The apparently vanquished one became the victor. "Jesus was crucified in weakness, but He liveth by the power of God." Having shed His blood as the victim for sin, He left Himself in the hands of the Father, who, by the eternal Spirit, brought Him again from the dead. He resisted not, but suffered Himself to be trampled upon, and thus crushed the power of the enemy. Satan, by man's agency, nailed Him to the cross, laid Him in the grave, and set a seal upon Him, that He might not rise; but He came up out of the horrible pit, and out of the miry clay, "having spoiled principalities and powers." He went down into the very heart of the enemy's dominion, only that He might make a show of him openly.

From vers. 8-20, we have the interference of Jehovah on the part of His righteous servant, set

forth in language sublime and powerful beyond expression. The imagery used by the inspired Psalmist is of the most solemn and impressive character, "The earth shook and trembled; the fountains of heaven moved and shook, because He was wroth.... He bowed the heavens also, and came down; and darkness was under His feet. And He rode upon a cherub and did fly; and He was seen upon the wings of the wind. And He made darkness pavilions round about Him, dark waters and thick clouds of the skies.... The Lord thundered from heaven, and the Most High uttered His voice. And He sent out arrows, and scattered them; lightning, and discomfited them. And the channels of the sea appeared, the foundations of the world were discovered, at the rebuking of the Lord, at the blast of the breath of His nostrils. He sent from above, He took me; He drew me out of many waters." What language is here! Where shall we find anything to equal it? The wrath of the Omnipotent, the thunder of His power, the convulsion of creation's entire framework, the artillery of heaven—all these ideas, so glowingly set forward here, outstrip all human imagination. The grave of Christ was the centre round which the battle raged in all its fierceness, for there lay the Prince of life. Satan did his utmost; he brought all the power of hell to bear, all "the power of darkness," but he could not hold his captive, because all the claims of justice had been met. The Lord Jesus triumphed over Satan, death, and hell, in strict conformity with the claims of righteousness. This is the sinner's joy, the sinner's peace. It would avail nothing to be told that God over all, blessed for ever, had vanquished Satan, a creature of His own creation. But to be told that He, as man's representative, as the sinner's substitute, as the Church's surety, gained the victory, this, when believed, gives the soul ineffable peace; and this is just what the gospel tells us—this is the message which it conveys to the sinner's ear. The apostle tells us that "He (Christ) was delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification." Having taken upon Himself our sins, and gone down into the grave under the weight of them, resurrection was necessary as the divine proof of His accomplished work. The Holy Ghost, in the gospel, presents Him as risen, ascended, and seated at God's right hand in the heavens, and thus dispels from the believer's heart every doubt, every fear, every hesitation. "The Lord is risen indeed"; and His precious blood is new and living wine.

The great argument of the apostle in 1 Cor. xv. is based upon this subject. The forgiveness of sins is proved by the resurrection of Christ. "If Christ be not raised, ye are yet in your sins." And, as a consequence, if Christ be raised, ye are *not* in your sins. Hence resurrection and forgiveness stand or fall together. Recognize Christ risen, and you recognize sin forgiven. "But now," says the triumphant reasoner, "is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept." This settles all. The moment you take your eye off a risen Christ, you lose the full, deep, divine, peace-giving sense of the forgiveness of sins. The richest fund of experience—the widest range of intelligence will not do as a ground of confidence. Nothing, in short, but JESUS RISEN.

From vers. 21-25, we have the ground of Jehovah's interference on behalf of His servant. These verses prove that in this entire song we have a greater than David. David could not say, "The Lord rewarded me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands hath He recompensed me. For I have kept the ways of the Lord, and have not wickedly departed from my God. For all His judgments were before me; and as for His statutes, I did not depart from them. I was also upright before Him, and have kept myself from mine iniquity. Therefore the Lord hath recompensed me according to my righteousness; according to my cleanness in His eyesight." How different is this language from that of the 51st psalm, on which we have already dwelt. There it is, "Have mercy upon me, according to Thy loving kindness; according to the multitude of Thy tender mercies." This was suitable language for a fallen sinner, as David felt himself to be. He dare not speak of his righteousness, which was as filthy rags; and as to his recompense, he felt that the lake of fire was all that he could, in justice, claim, on the ground of what he was.

Hence, therefore, the language of our chapter is the language of Christ, who alone could use it. [23] He, blessed be His name, could speak of His righteousness, His uprightness, and the cleanness of His hands. And here we see the wondrous grace that shines in redemption. The righteous One took the place of the guilty. "He hath made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." Here is the sinner's resting-place. Here he beholds the spotless victim nailed to the accursed tree, *for him*; here he beholds a full redemption flowing from the perfect work of the Lamb of God; here, too, he may behold Jehovah interfering on behalf of his glorious and gracious representative, and, as a consequence, on his behalf; and that, moreover, on strictly righteous grounds. What deep peace this gives to the sin-burdened heart! Deep, ineffable, divine peace!

David's song closes with a fine allusion to the glories of the latter day, which imparts to it a character of completeness and enlarged compass particularly edifying. "Strangers shall submit themselves unto me." "I will give thanks unto Thee among the heathen," etc. Thus are we conducted along a wondrous path, commencing at the cross, and ending in the kingdom. The One who lay in the grave is to sit on the throne; the hand that was pierced with the nail shall wield the sceptre; and the brow that was dishonored with a crown of thorns shall be wreathed with a diadem of glory. And never will the top-stone be laid on the superstructure which redeeming love has begun to erect, until the crucified Jesus of Nazareth shall ascend the throne of David, and rule over the house of Jacob. Then shall the glories of redemption be truly celebrated in heaven and on earth, because the Redeemer shall be exalted and the redeemed rendered perfectly and eternally happy.

In David's last words, as in the history of other servants of God, we see how they all found in God their unfailing portion, and a sure refuge. Thus was it with him whose history we have been

dwelling upon. Through his whole career, David had learned that divine grace *alone* could meet his need; and, at the close, he gives full expression to this. Whether we look at his "song," or his "last words," the great prominent subject is one and the same, viz., the sufficiency of divine grace.

However, David's last words derive point and energy from the knowledge of God's requirements, in reference to the character of a ruler. "He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God." This is God's standard. Nothing less will do; and where amongst the ranks of human rulers shall we find any to come up to it? We may travel down the entire catalogue of those who have occupied the thrones of this world, and not find so much as one who could answer to the great characteristics set forth in the above comprehensive verse. He "must be just," and "rule in the fear of God."

Psalm lxxxii. furnishes us with the divine challenge of all those who have been set in places of authority. "God standeth in the congregation of the mighty; He judgeth among the gods." What does He find? Justice and the fear of His name? Ah! no; far from it. "How long will ye judge unjustly, and accept the persons of the wicked?" Such is man. "They know not, neither *will* they understand; they walk on in darkness; all the foundations of the earth are out of course." What, then is the resource in view of such a humiliating state of things? "Arise, O God, judge the earth; for Thou shalt inherit all nations." The Lord Jesus is here presented as the one alone competent to fill the throne according to the thoughts of God, and the 72nd psalm gives us a lovely sketch of what His government will be. "He shall judge Thy people with righteousness, and Thy poor with judgment." "He shall judge the poor of the people, He shall save the children of the needy, and shall break in pieces the oppressor." "He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass; as showers that water the earth." In short, the entire psalm must be read as a sample of the millennial kingdom of the Son of Man, and the reader will perceive how entirely David's last words harmonize with the spirit of it. "And He shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds; as the tender grass springeth out of the earth by clear shining after rain." Truly refreshing and soul-reviving is this! And how does the heart rejoice to turn away from the dark and dreary scene through which we are passing, to contemplate a morning without clouds. The "morning without a cloud" is not now. How could it be? How could a fallen race, a groaning world, enjoy a cloudless sky? Impossible, until the atoning efficacy of the Cross shall have been applied to all, and the whole creation shall have entered into its full repose beneath the shadow of Immanuel's wings. Bright and happy prospect!

But it has been remarked, that no human office-bearer ever came up to the divine standard, as set forth in David's last words. David himself felt this. "My house is not so with God." Such was his humble, soul-subduing sense of what he was. We have already seen how fully, how deeply, how unaffectedly, he entered into the vast distance between what he was *personally* and the divine requirement, when he exclaimed, "I was born in sin;" "Thou desirest truth in the inward parts." His experience was the same when he looked at himself *officially*. "My house is not so with God." Neither as a *man* nor as a *king* was he what he ought to be. And hence it was that grace was so precious to his heart. He looked into the mirror of God's perfect law, and saw therein his own deformity; he then turned round and looked at God's "covenant, ordered in *all* things and *sure*," and here he rested with unquestioning simplicity. Though David's house was not ordered in all things, yet God's covenant was, and David could therefore say, "This is all my salvation, and all my desire." He had learnt to look away from himself and his house straight to God, and His everlasting covenant of grace. And, we may say, that just as his apprehension of his own personal and official nothingness was deep and real, would his sense of what grace had done for him be deep and real also. The view of what God was had humbled him; the view of what God was had lifted him up. It was his joy, as he traveled to the end of all human things, to find his resting-place in the blessed covenant of his God, in which he found embodied, and eternally secured, all his salvation and all his desire.

How blessed it is, dear reader, to find thus our *all* in God! not merely to use Him as one who makes up our deficiency, but our all; to use Him as one who supersedes every one and everything in our estimation. This is what we want. God must be set above all, not merely in reference to the forgiveness of sins but also in reference to our every necessity. Many who trust God for salvation, nevertheless, fail much in the minute details of life; and yet God is glorified in being made the depositary of all our cares, and the bearer of all our burdens. There is nothing too small as not to be brought to Him, and nothing so small as not to be more than a match for our capacity, did we but enter into the sense of our nothingness.

But we find another element in this 23d chapter, an element, too, which might seem introduced rather abruptly: I allude to the record of David's mighty men. This has been already alluded to; but it is interesting to notice it in connection with God's covenant.

There were two things to cheer and comfort David's heart, viz., the faithfulness of God, and the devotedness of his servants.^[24] And, in looking at the close of Paul's course, we find that he had the same springs of comfort and encouragement. In the second epistle to Timothy, he glances at the condition of things around him; he sees the "great house," which assuredly was "not so with God" as He required it; he sees all that were in Asia turned away from him; he sees Hymeneus

and Philetus teaching false doctrine, and overturning the faith of some; he sees Alexander the coppersmith doing much mischief; he sees many with itching ears, heaping to themselves teachers, and turning away from the truth to fables; he sees the perilous times setting in with fearful rapidity: in a word, he sees the whole fabric, humanly speaking, going to pieces; but he, like David, rested in the assurance that "the foundation of God standeth sure," and he was also cheered by the individual devotedness of some who, like mighty men, through the grace of God were standing faithful amid the wreck. He remembered the faith of a Timothy, the love of an Onesiphorus; and, moreover, he was cheered by the fact that in darkest times there would be a company of faithful ones who would call on the Lord out of a pure heart. These latter he exhorts Timothy to follow, having purged himself from the dishonorable vessels of the great house.

Thus was it with David. He could count his worthies, and record their deeds. Though his own house was not what it ought to be, and though "the sons of Belial" were around him, yet he could speak of an Adino, a Dodo, and a Shammah, men who had hazarded their lives for him, and had signalized their names by deeds of prowess against the uncircumcised.

Thank God, He will never leave Himself without a witness; He will always have a people devoted to His cause in the world. Did we not know and believe this, at a time like the present our hearts might indeed sink within us. A few years have wrought a mighty change in the sphere of action of many Christians. Things are not as they once were amongst us, and we may with truth say, "Our house is not so with God." Many of us have, it may be, been disappointed; we looked for much, and, alas, it has come to little—oh, how little! We have found that we were just like others, or, if we differed in aught, it was in our making a higher profession, and, as a consequence, incurring higher responsibilities, and exhibiting greater inconsistencies. We thought we were somewhat, but we grievously erred, and are now learning our error. The Lord grant that we may learn it rightly, learn it thoroughly—in the dust, in His presence, that we may lift our heads proudly no more, but walk in the abiding sense of our own emptiness. The Lord's address to Laodicea must be remembered, and we may ponder it with profit.

If our past experience leads us to cling more simply to Jesus, we shall have reason to bless the Lord for it all; and, as it is, we cannot but feel it to be a special mercy to be delivered from every false ground of confidence. If we were seeking to build up a system, it is well to be delivered from its influence and to be brought to adhere simply to the Word and Spirit of God, which are the appointed companions of the Church's path through the wilderness.

Nor are we, either, void of the sweet encouragement to be derived from the devotedness of one or another here and there. There are many who are proving their affection for the person of Christ, and the high estimation in which they hold the doctrine of the Church. This is a great mercy. The enemy, though he has done much mischief, has it not all his own way. There are those who are ready to spend their strength and energy in the defence of the gospel. May the Lord add to their number,—may He also add to the vigor of their testimony; and, finally, may He make us increasingly thankful for His grace in having set before us, in His Word, the true position and path of His servants, and those principles which can alone sustain us in the midst of strife and confusion.

David had thought to do much in his day, and was sincere in the thought; but he had to learn that the will of God concerning him was that he should "serve his generation." We, too, must learn this—we must learn that a humble mind, a devoted heart, a tender conscience, an honest purpose, are far more precious in the sight of God than mere outward services, however showy and attractive. "To obey is better than sacrifice; and to harken than the fat of rams." Salutary words, these, for a day of religiousness, like the present, wherein divine principle is so loosely held.

The Lord keep us faithful to the end, so that whether like those who have gone before us, we fall asleep in Jesus, or be caught up to meet Him in the air, we "may be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless." Meanwhile, let us rejoice in the apostle's word to his son Timothy—"The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His;" and, "Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity."

FOOTNOTES:

[1] Entering the Sanctuary, Israel's high priest had over his forehead the plate of pure gold on which was engraved "*Holiness to the Lord*"; and on the breastplate, securely fastened upon his breast over the ephod, were engraved on twelve jewels the names of each tribe in Israel. So, in perfect love, our blessed Lord bears every one of His people upon His heart, maintaining at the same time God's holy character with His people. [Ed.]

[2] The English reader should be informed that the three words which are rendered in the above passage, "appear," are not the same in the original Greek; but our object is to deal with the facts set forth, rather than with the words employed.

[3] This has been touched upon in "Sin in the flesh, and sin on the conscience"—a short paper in *Miscel. Writings*, Vol. ii. [Ed.]

[4] See a paper entitled, "The Power and Authority of Holy Scripture, as Illustrated in the

Life and Times of Josiah." (15 cts.)

- [5] The word rendered "remnant" in the above passage is λουποῖς, and is from the same root as the word "remnant" in Romans xi. 5, which is λίμμα. Both are from λείπω, to leave.
- [6] Here it is not to the outside sinner, but to the professing Church the Lord makes this most solemn and weighty appeal. It is not Christ knocking at the door of the sinner's heart, (true as that is also), but at the door of those in the professing Church. How telling! how suggestive! Oh, may professing Christians ponder it!
- [7] The statement in the text, I need hardly say, does not by any means interfere with the eternal stability of divine grace and the perfect acceptance of the believer in all the acceptableness of Christ before God. This is a great foundation truth. Christ is the believer's life, and Christ is his righteousness—the ground of his peace with God. He may lose the enjoyment of it, but the thing itself God has established upon an indestructible basis, and before ever it can be touched the fact of Christ's resurrection must be called in question, for clearly He could not be where He is if the believer's peace were not perfectly settled. In order to have perfect peace, I must know my perfect justification: and in order to know my perfect justification, I must know, by faith in God's word, that Christ has made a perfect atonement. This is the divine order—perfect atonement as the ground of my perfect justification; and perfect justification as the ground of my perfect peace. God has joined those three together, and let not man's unbelieving heart put them asunder.

Hence, therefore, the statement in the text will not, I trust, be misunderstood or misapplied. The principle contained therein may be thus illustrated: If my child does wrong, he may injure himself and grieve and displease me; but he is my child all the while. The apostolic statement is as broad as possible—"Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." He does not say whether it is a converted or an unconverted man, and therefore the passage should have its full application. It could not possibly touch the question of pure and absolute grace.

- [8] My reader should accurately distinguish between the Holy Ghost coming *upon* people and the Holy Ghost dwelling and acting *in* them. The statement in 1 Sam. x. 6 may present a difficulty to some minds. "The Spirit of the Lord will come *upon* thee, and thou shalt prophesy with them, and shalt be turned into another man." This is not the Spirit producing the new birth, but merely fitting Saul to be an office-bearer. Were it regeneration, it would not merely be the Spirit coming *upon*, but acting *in*, a man. Saul the *office-bearer* and Saul the *man* are quite distinct, and this distinction must be maintained in reference to many of the characters both in the Old and New Testament Scriptures.
- [9] It is to be noted that Saul, though appointed by God's order to Samuel, is nevertheless the *people's* choice and acclaimed by them as such (1 Sam. x. 24)—God thus selecting for them the man after *their* heart.—[Ed.]
- [10] It was at Gilgal, upon their crossing Jordan, that Israel was circumcised after the forty years' uncircumcision in the wilderness; and to this place Joshua oft led them back after their victories. The meaning of this for us Christians is given in Phil. iii. 3—no self-confidence.—[Ed.]
- [11] "Yea, man is born as a wild ass's colt" says Job xi. 12, describing man's natural condition—wilful, unmanageable, unclean. Compare Exod. xiii. 13, and Hosea viii. 9. Saul and Israel were only too manifestly pictured in this unsuccessful search after his father's asses. David was the keeper of his father's sheep. [Ed.]
- [12] Faith, waiting on God, allows Him to use what means soever He pleases. It does not ask Him to bless *our* means, but lets Him use His own.
- [13] How often it happens that the child of God or the servant of Christ, harnessed with human devices for his work, finds himself burdened and hampered with these trammels to obedience and faith. Let them be but shaken off, through grace, and the soul cast upon God finds at once the joy and liberty for the service and energy of faith. [Ed.]
- [14] For the important distinction between the expressions, "Lord" and "God"—Jehovah and Elohim—see "Notes on the Book of Genesis," chap. ii.
- [15] It is interesting to observe David's address to Goliath. He does not say, "I come to thee *with a sling and a stone*." No; but, "in the name of the Lord of hosts." With him, it is not the means, but "the Lord of hosts" on which he fixes his eyes.
- [16] The New Testament teaches the Christian to be subject to the powers that be, but it *never* contemplates the idea of his being in the place of power. Hence, there are no directions for a Christian as a king or a magistrate, though there is ample guidance for a Christian as a husband, a father, a master, or a servant. This speaks volumes.
- [17] I would say a word here, on the opening verses of John x. The Lord Jesus presented Himself at the door of the Jewish fold, and having obtained entrance, called out His sheep that were therein, and then He says, "Other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they shall hear My voice; and there shall be one *flock*, and one Shepherd." It is strange that the translators should have rendered this "one fold," when the word fold (αὐλησαυλης) actually occurs in the same verse. Nor is the distinction unimportant. A fold is an enclosure for the separation and safety of the sheep; hence the word is properly applied to the Jewish economy. Now, however, it is no longer a fold—an earthly arrangement—a penning up of sheep here below. But the heavenly Shepherd has called forth His Jewish sheep from the earthly fold, and His Gentile sheep from the dark mountains of this wide world, and made them one flock, giving them freedom, and committed them into the Father's hand. Thus we see the difference

between the words "fold" and "flock."

- [18] There is something peculiarly touching and beautiful in the above scene, whether we contemplate the act of the three mighty men in procuring the water for David, or David's act in pouring it out to the Lord. It is evident that David discerned, in an act of such uncommon devotedness, a sacrifice which none but the Lord Himself was worthy to receive. The odor of such a sacrifice was far too fragrant for him to interrupt it in its ascent to the throne of the God of Israel. Wherefore he, very properly and gracefully, allows it to pass him by, in order that it might go up to the One who alone was worthy to receive it, or able to appreciate it. All this reminds us, forcibly, of that beautiful compendium of Christian devotedness set forth in Phil. ii. 17, 18: "Yea, and if I be poured out upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you all; for this cause do ye also joy and rejoice with me." In this passage, the apostle represents the Philippian saints in their character as priests, presenting a "sacrifice" and performing a priestly ministration to God; and such was the intensity of his self-forgetting devotedness, that he could rejoice in his being poured out as a drink offering upon their sacrifice, so that all might ascend, in fragrant odor, to God. The Philippians laid a sacrifice on God's altar, and the apostle was poured out upon it, and all went up to God as an odor of sweet smell. It mattered not who put the sacrifice on the altar, or who was poured out thereupon, providing that God received what was acceptable to Him. This, truly, is a divine model for Christian devotedness. Would that we had grace to form our ways according to it. There would, then, be far less of "*my* sayings," and "*my* doings," and "*my* goings."
- [19] "*He led them forth* by the right way, that *they might go* to a city of habitation" (Psa. cvii. 7). Grace not only leads forth from Egypt, but imparts the capacity and the desire to go to Canaan.
- [20] Hebron means *Communion*; it is in communion with Himself the Lord ever calls His servants in entering the field of service to which He calls and for which He prepares. [Ed.]
- [21] Not exactly the "life of *faith*," but the life of saints. The conflicts and trials so general in the people of God, while they testify to faith within, result from the flesh which, not having been kept under judgment, reasserts itself against the Spirit in the child of God. It is of this Gal. v. 16-25 speaks. Were the "walk in the Spirit" a constant thing with us, the lust and warrings of the flesh would be kept under—kept in the place of death, where God has assigned the flesh. The apostle could say as to himself, "Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh" (2 Cor. iv. 10). [Ed.]
- [22] In 2 Samuel xxiv. 24, we read, "So David bought the *threshing-floor* and the *oxen* for fifty shekels of silver." And in 1 Chron. xxi. 25, we read, "So David gave to Ornan *for the place six hundred shekels of gold by weight*." In Samuel, only the "threshing-floor and the oxen" for sacrifice at the time of the plague are mentioned; while in Chronicles "the place"—the whole temple hill—seems to be comprehended.
- [23] In a subordinate or partial way, we may say it also applies to David. Save that terrible fall, in the matter of Uriah, his life was an exemplary one—walking in the love and fear of God all his days. Though grossly and persistently wronged by Saul, never would David touch his life because he was the anointed of Jehovah. 1 Kings xv. 4, 5 and 2 Sam. xxiii. 1 give us a divine estimate of his life. [Ed.]
- [24] May not this review of David's worthies and companions in tribulation set forth, or at least remind us, of that time when our Lord shall review with us our path with Him down here? A similar thought seems to be brought before us in Romans xvi., in the apostle's salutations. [Ed.]

Transcriber's note:

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MISCELLANEOUS WRITINGS OF C. H. MACKINTOSH, VOL. VI ***

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