



A
Heartening
Word

William R.
Patterson

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A heartening word for Mr.
Fearing

A HEARTENING WORD

FOR

MR. FEARING.

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FOR

MR. FEARING

Or, Cheer for Doubting Pilgrims

BY THE

REV. WILLIAM P. PATTERSON

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INTRODUCTION.

THOSE who are familiar with Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* will readily recall the Mr. Fearing whose character is so minutely described therein. He is represented as a man "of choice spirit," who "had the root of the matter" in him, and who was always "very tender of sin." He felt that he must needs reach the Celestial Country; that he should die if he came not to it; and yet he also felt that if ever he did get there, it would be almost too good to be true. He never could be quite sure that he was actually in the way thereto. He was always afraid that he should come short of whither he had a desire to go. Difficulties, lions, or Vanity Fair, he feared not at all; it was only sin, death, and hell that were to him a terror, and for the reason that he had some doubts as to his personal interest in the Celestial Country,—his fear was that he might not be accepted at last.

He "lay roaring at the Slough of Despond for about a month," and for all he saw several of his fellow pilgrims go over before him,

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he could not muster up sufficient courage himself to venture ; nor would he turn back. However, one bright morning, when the sunshine was filling every heart with gladness and peace, in some way unaccountable to himself, he passed over ; yet could he scarce believe he was really across. Through manifold fears and perplexities, and in much distress of mind and heart, yet with the way made singularly passable before him, he finally was enabled to reach the Celestial City and to enter into its rest and peace and joy.

It has occurred to the writer that the Mr. Fearing of the *Pilgrim's Progress* is representative of not a few professing Christians. Of choice spirit, and sincerely longing to be constant and loyal followers of Christ, they yet fail, strangely enough, to realize as they might and should that the gift of God, "the ageless life," is a *present possession*, and has promise of still greater and better things to come. Assurance of hope and perseverance to the end seem good enough to talk about theologically, but of little practical value in the religious experience.

What Christian minister cannot testify to the greater or less prevalence, in his own pastoral experience, of the questionings and uncertainties that caused so much needless distress to the Mr. Fearing of the allegory ?

The object of the writer is to show, briefly

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and plainly, the divine warrant for the very fullest and most joyful confidence in the absolute certainty of personal salvation; and if what follows in these pages shall be used in fortifying the hearts of even a few timid and joyless ones, and in helping them to see that there is the very strongest reason for the most cheerful acceptance of the precious gift of the "ageless life," and no reason at all for the least misgiving regarding its reality and blessed outcome, the praise shall be to Him to whom rightly belong all praise and honor and power and glory.

THE MANSE,
Central Presbyterian Church,
Downingtown, Pa.
8th August, 1897.

I.

THE COVENANT OF REDEMPTION.

A MOST important truth to bear in mind, if one would always have assurance of hope as an encouraging fact of priceless value in the religious experience, is that, when our Lord himself affirms that not one of those to whom he gives eternal life can ever perish, such impossibility arises, not from anything in the believer himself, but simply from God's *immutability of purpose and promise*.

For confirmation of this, look at the covenant of redemption. In all the word of God there is but one dominant idea,—human salvation by a divine Redeemer. Herein is the sum-total of God's thoughts. And the apostle Paul, viewing with that splendid intellect of his the exalted character of the Lord Jesus Christ, and all that he had suffered for man, very appropriately terms the salvation thus purchased, "the great salvation." In providing so great salvation each Person in the Godhead had a distinctive share.

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I.

Note the Father's share. Human redemption is not of the nature of an afterthought with God. It was not first devised and revealed after man had fallen from the estate wherein he was created. Salvation, we are told, is from all eternity (Eph. iii. 11). Before God entered upon the stupendous work of the material creation, he thought of man, saw him created in perfect knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, saw him yield to the tempter and fall, and, thus thinking of and seeing the human creation and the human defection, he thought also of, and determined upon, human redemption.

“Eternal election, profoundly considered, requires eternal atonement for its support. Both are eternal, as all divine realities are eternal.” In his first epistle, Peter speaks to us of the Lamb foreknown before the foundation of the world, but manifested at the end of the times,—eternal reality becoming temporal fact; and, in his high-priestly prayer, our Lord himself carries us back into eternity where we behold “the redeeming relationship between the Father and the Son. Even on Calvary, as temporal actuality, the Lamb slain is only a figure of speech, and, of course, it can be no more than a figure of speech as eternal reality in the bosom of God. But whether in time or in

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eternity, whether on Calvary or in the bosom of God, the figure must stand for something. For us the meaning is and must be, that not election only, but the atonement also is eternal. And so the relationship of God to moral evil stands forth as an eternal relationship."

Man might rebel and reject God, but God would open the way for him to return to his former devotion and love. The beginning of time was indeed the first revelation of what had been passing in the mind of the Creator, —that is to say, when the first man turned his back upon God, thus cutting himself off from the benefits of sonship with God, he was not smitten as he deserved to be, but was allowed to live, and that being allowed to live was for him the inauguration of divine grace in Jesus Christ.

Yet see how, with the introduction of human sinfulness into the world, the human race easily and rapidly degenerated. So swiftly and so positively did men descend to whatever was unclean and repulsive that God was obliged to adopt the most effective measures for the cleansing of the filth that had been accumulating. One might well suppose that with such a visitation as the flood a most wholesome lesson would have been learned; but what is the fact? The sad history is before us: man ceased not sin-

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ning! With the new growth of the race there was a proportionate development in wickedness. Kingdom after kingdom rose and fell ; upon the hearts of the rulers of the earth was felt a mighty power—the power of Him who turns the hearts of all men as he pleases. He went down into Egypt and with a strong hand brought forth his chosen, keeping them company through all their wilderness journey, as Guide and Protector, until he had them safely placed in the land prepared for their habitation. Even then he did not forsake them : with them and their rulers he was ever present, guiding them lovingly even into the land of their oppressors, his very mercy smiting them when needful, and binding them up ; multiplying judgments and blessings for the best results, and fencing them in so that in the course of time a remnant was preserved for their return to their native land.

Only God could then see that the oppression of the conqueror was none other than the tender love of the Most High ; and that the captivity of the chosen people meant mercy. Such a method of procedure was in reality the divine inbringing of salvation.

With the further passage of time came also the passing away of Babylon and its glory, the culmination of proud, philosophical Athens, the universal sway of Rome and her thunder-

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ing legions. Many a fierce battle was then fought, and many a field dyed with blood, but to whom did it ever occur to recognize in such events the unfolding of the purpose of grace? Linked indissolubly together by salvation were all the events of that period of the world's history. And not until the darkness had become thick darkness, and the wickedness of man had become wellnigh universal, and formalism had grown to be the rule with but few exceptions, did God deem it wise to shed abroad the true light, to dissipate the gloom, and to expose and condemn the formalism. In the fullness of the times God was manifest in the flesh, Jesus was born, the true light, indeed, that lighteth every man that cometh into the world.

II.

Notice, moreover, the Son's share in this covenant of redemption. We are more or less familiar with his earthly life—how despised and rejected, of men, he was! Just what he endured in the way of grief and humiliation and trial we can never fully understand. And only he could give himself to the work of redemption by way of suffering and death. Not even the highest angel might have the prospect of laying aside the glory of the heavenly world to tabernacle for a season in the flesh to raise men from sin

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and death to life and peace and joy. Only the equal of the Father, the well-beloved, could veil himself in humanity's form and submit to unspeakable degradation in order that the divine will might be accomplished to its utmost requirement. How even the human nature of our blessed Lord shrank from this humiliation we may know by recalling the agony in the garden, and that most pathetic utterance, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt."

His life of solitude, of three-and-thirty years—alone even among his disciples, none of whom could properly sympathize with him, none of whom could share his feelings, or enter deeply into his thoughts—was longer, deeper, fuller, by reason of its very intensity, than that of all the patriarchs, than that of all men. *He lived it for the one purpose of effecting our redemption.*

III.

Think, too, of the Spirit's share in this covenant of redemption. The presence of the Holy Spirit in the world, and his gracious ministry in behalf of men, enhance the glory of this divine plan. It is utterly impossible for one, in the spirit of prayer, to read unmoved the story of our Lord's life. We trace that life, in wonder and awe, from its begin-

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ning in the manger-cradle to its ending upon the cross. But the fact is that the life of the Spirit, the Holy One in an unholy world, when rightly and reverently viewed, must seem far more pathetic and more to be wondered at. What patience! What forbearance with human folly! What long-suffering with human guilt! What struggling with you and me! And for what? *Simply that Christ may be magnified!* What resistings and quenchings of his earnest and loving entreaties by your spirit and mine! Sensitive, full of zeal as was Christ himself, yet infinitely enduring! Why does he remain? Why does he not give up the world to vengeance long and mercifully delayed? Only because he is here, obedient to the divine will, to accomplish this great redemption. *He also will perfect the great salvation.*

We see, then, that the good work of human redemption is so vast and important as to have engaged the eternal attention of the adorable Trinity: the Father sustaining the rights of Godhead in the appointment of the method of redemption; the Son, as Mediator, procuring it by his incarnation, obedience, and death; and the Holy Spirit applying and making effectual every benefit in the heart of the true believer.

And in view of all this the question is per-

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minent: Would God the Father have devised such a wonderful plan of redemption; would the Son have been willing to offer his life a ransom for many; would the Holy Spirit consent so long to abide in the world, were it possible that the good work, although begun, should fail of completion—were it possible, in other words, that the subjects of redeeming grace should perish eternally? What wonder, then, that such an one as the gifted Paul should exult, “I *know* whom I have believed”?

II.

THE WITNESS OF THE WRITTEN WORD.

I.

NOT only in the covenant of redemption, to which reference has been made, are we privileged to ground our assurance of hope, but also in the explicit declarations of the Scriptures themselves, to a few passages of which the attention of the reader is now invited. What mean, for example, those ancient words, "Yet shall the righteous hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall wax stronger and stronger"? Job xvii. 9. Suppose the faith of God's people is at times shaken by the permission of what may seem unmerited sufferings. Still they may know that God shall overrule them to the perfecting of their faith, that from the most opposing forces they shall draw not a little of inspiration and strength for maintaining a more earnest continuance in their good way. "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord: and he delighteth in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the Lord upholdeth

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him with his hand." Ps. xxxvii. 23, 24. Of David, whom we may regard as the representative of the true believer, the Lord speaks, "If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; if they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless, my lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips." Ps. lxxxix. 30-34. In the book of Proverbs, where the morning sun, in its increasing radiance, is used as a symbol, it is said of the just that their "path is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." Prov. iv. 18. Going from strength to strength, from glory to glory, the believer finally reaches his meridian splendor, shining forth as the sun in the kingdom of his Father.

Then recall those wonderful words addressed of old by the Lord to his people, whereby he greatly comforted and assured them in view of their future,—words just as applicable to-day to every believer: "For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath

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mercy on thee." Is. liv. 10. In the prophecy of Jeremiah we find God comparing himself to a faithful and ever-watchful preceptor, following his pupils everywhere, to direct words and gestures, promising those whom he shall gather out of all lands that "They shall be my people, and I will be their God: and I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me forever, for the good of them, and of their children after them: and I will make an *everlasting covenant* with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me." Jer. xxxii. 38-40.

Then finally, we have the words, bearing directly upon this point, of him who was and is the Truth: "This is the will of him 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. Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life."

If then, the divine promise is so full and so free, regarding the salvation of the believer, is it not to be expected that the divine power will be used to make it sure? The apostle Peter, speaking of believers, says of them, that they "are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." And our blessed

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Lord says of his people, "I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand." John x. 28, 29. Paul, writing to the Romans, declares that "All things work together"—how? Simply through the divine efficiency. For what? For good to them that love God; to them that are called according to his purpose. "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified." It is a chain which never can be broken. What irresistible argument! What invincible logic! "Your hope and mine, fellow Christian, is not in our own power of perseverance, but in God's preserving care of us. We shall be saved, not because we cling with despairing strength to the rocky cross around which surge the angry billows, but because the mighty arm of God is round about us, and therefore the waves dash against us in vain."

Be not afraid therefore! The power of God in electing, calling, justifying, sanctifying, glorifying the individual soul! Think of it, O believer! It has respect to each and

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every moment of the earthly life. It extends to any and all needs and duties. It is fully equal to every emergency; is sufficient for the bitterest temptation, the heaviest weight of sorrow or want. You and I, no matter how beset we may be with weakness, or weariness, or personal demerit, need not go a single moment destitute of the rich comfort and support of the everlasting arms. Can we but realize our entire dependence upon Him who faileth never, neither groweth weary; can we but commit ourselves unreservedly to him, and suffer ourselves to be grasped by the Hand which keeps even the material world secure and fixed against the last day, we shall find ourselves upborne and maintained in a straight path; we shall grow daily,—shall, at last, become perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

II.

But, further, we may not overlook the *significance of the believer's union to Christ, and Christ's intercessory work* in the believer's behalf. Said the Master to his disciples on one occasion, "I am the vine, ye are the branches: . . . without me ye can do nothing." And elsewhere the believer is called a member of that body whose head is Christ. How intimate, how vital, therefore, is the relation existing between Christ and his

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people ! Fully appreciating the value of such relation, the apostle Paul declares, "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." In a word, the life of the Christian believer is *certain* and *cannot fail*, because it is derived from and sustained by the life of Christ. Therefore said Christ, "Because *I* live, *ye* shall live *also*." Not simply to uphold them in being does Christ live: if he meant to indicate nothing further in this solemn affirmation, it is extremely difficult to see wherein his disciples differ from wicked men and devils, for it is by the divine sufferance alone that even they continue to be.

And what a successful advocate the Christian has in his Lord and Redeemer ! There is, truly, a vast deal of meaning in those tender words addressed to Peter, on the very verge of his profane denial of his Lord, "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 who can read, unmoved, that grand, high-priestly prayer of our suffering Christ, "I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me ; for they are thine I pray not that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil

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Sanctify them through thy truth : thy word is truth. . . . Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word ; that they all may be one ; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us”?

What rare comfort and strength, then, may the true believer derive from such teaching, for his seasons of spiritual darkness and discouragement as they may occur in his earthly pilgrimage! For, unhappily, such seasons do come even to the most consistent Christian disciple. For physical reasons he may find himself at times overwhelmed with despondent conclusions or thoughts ; or, by reason of satanic craft, he may be overtaken with some fault, and accepting *mere feeling* as a sure indication of a state of grace, and not being conscious of any particularly warm feelings toward God, he may at once conclude that he is no longer God’s child. Yet, even so overcome, he can recall the time when he *did seek* and *find* the Lord, when he actually held sweet fellowship with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. He is now walking in darkness ; his way seems totally obscure. What shall he do? He may still know, if he will, that, though his *feelings* have suffered change and though he may not now be conscious of the influence of divine love within his heart, *the love of God in*

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Christ has not changed a particle—not even for a moment. Having loved his own which were in the world he will love them to the end. The believer *is* of the number of God's chosen ones because of his once having come to Christ, accepting him by faith as his personal Saviour. "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." "This is the triumphant reply which he can make to Satan when he would tempt him to despair, the rejoinder he can make to his own accusing conscience. With the assurance that no one can lay anything to the charge of God's elect, he can hurl defiance at hell and devils and all his accusers. God has justified him, and he who alone has the right to condemn him has died for him, and is at the right hand of God making present intercession for him."

III.

OUR CALLING AND ELECTION.

HOW reassuring to the anxious heart are the very words of Him who spake as never man spake, and who said of himself, "I am the Truth!" Notice, for instance, the deep significance of such words as these: "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out;" "This is the Father's will . . . , that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing;" "And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand;" "Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am."

These, and similar utterances of the great Teacher, bring into clear view the precious fact of the *divine choice of souls*—a truth which even the angels delight to ponder. No doubt, to us who are finite in our capabilities,

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who can see barely a step in advance, who can understand but to a limited degree, this very act of God in making choice of souls, and in giving them to Christ as his inheritance, is involved in deepest mystery. And we may, with intensest concern, ask, Why were not *all* men given to Christ? yet we shall find our question impossible of solution from a merely human standpoint. Can *finite man* hope to fathom the deep and hidden things of *God*? Is it not rather his part, as that of the docile child, to trust the wisdom of the Father, and to conclude cheerfully that whatever *God* does is right, because it is *God who does it*?

When we look closely and unsparingly at ourselves and see just how unworthy we are, and how useless at times, how impatient and unspiritual, and then reflect seriously upon the wonderful nature of that love which has been revealed in Jesus Christ,—how forbearing and long-suffering it is where weak, imperfect, sinful human beings are concerned,—we are overwhelmed, and we do not marvel that Mr. Fearing, in the allegory, should so often feel, “It is almost too good to be true.”

Observe, in this connection, that Scripture teaches us, in a way that even the little child can understand, that God chooses men and gives them to Christ *as individuals*—divine

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love is so specific—they are not saved in the mass, but singly; that being so given to Christ, *their number is a definite number*—yet so vast that no man can count them—all their names being written in the Lamb's book of life, as in a census of the population; that they were given to Christ *before the foundation of the world*—chosen in him from the beginning; that Christ is their Redeemer *because of a definite agreement* between himself and the Father, whereby he allowed himself to be wickedly nailed to the cross, laying down his own life, thus, for his people.

Memory recalls an incident which occurred in the class-room of the beloved Dr. Charles Hodge in our seminary days at Princeton. The class, at the time, was engaged in the study of the subject of election, and, in the recitation, a member put this question to the professor, who was always ready, if he could, to meet and satisfy every difficulty: "Suppose, Doctor, I am the pastor of a church, and there comes to me an honest and anxious inquirer who, in our conversation, with evident sincerity, desires to know how he is to determine whether or not he is one of the elect, what answer, if any, can I truthfully give?" With that look of rare tenderness and solicitude which every pupil of Dr. Hodge can easily recall, and in tones which

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none can ever forget who have heard them, the reply came: "My young brother, there is only one answer that can meet such an inquiry, and it is given in the very words of the Master himself: 'He that believeth on me hath everlasting life.'" It is enough. Nothing more is possible.

Would we, indeed, know beyond all peradventure that *our own* names are written in the book of life? then let us determine, first of all, *whether or not we have come to Christ*; for he himself declares, for our guidance in this judgment, "All that the Father giveth me *shall come* to me; and him that *cometh to me* I will in no wise cast out." Have we come to Christ? Are we conscious of having our affections and will-power changed to the Christlike and the heavenly? If we can truthfully and humbly affirm that we have come to Christ, and are endeavoring by grace to excel in whatever achievements are predicated of those who are divinely revealed as belonging to Christ, we surely need not doubt our calling and election. As the good bishop Leighton puts it, "He that loves may be sure that he was loved first, and he that chooses God for his delight and portion may conclude confidently that God hath chosen him to be one of those that shall enjoy him and be happy with him forever; for that our love and electing of

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him is but the return of the beams of his love shining upon us."

By the sacrifice of his own precious life, the Lord Jesus secured for his people untold spiritual wealth, and an eternal weight of glory. It is all of grace! free grace! Eternal life is God's *gift* through Jesus Christ. And the gift is meant for all who will receive it. The thirsty, and those who have no money, may come and buy wine and milk without money and without price. Whosoever will, may take of the water of life freely. It cannot be bought.

"What shall I bring to thee, O Lord?
Of what make offering?
What does my life, so poor, afford
That I to thee may bring?"

"No myrrh, nor frankincense, nor gold,
Can I as gift present,
Like those, the wise men, who of old
With joy o'er Jesus bent.

"No alabaster box have I,
Of precious ointment sweet,
To pour before thee, while I lie
In worship at thy feet."

No! Man must come to God confessing—

"I am trusting thee, Lord Jesus,
Trusting only thee!
Trusting thee for full salvation,
Great and free.

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“ I am trusting thee for pardon ;
At thy feet I bow ;
For thy grace and tender mercy
Trusting now.

“ I am trusting thee for cleansing
In the crimson flood ;
Trusting thee to make me holy
By thy blood.

“ I am trusting thee to guide me ;
Thou alone shalt lead,
Every day and hour supplying
All my need.

“ I am trusting thee for power ;
Thine can never fail ;
Words which thou thyself shalt give me
Must prevail.

“ I am trusting thee, Lord Jesus ;
Never let me fall !
I am trusting thee for ever
And for all.”

IV.

THE IDEAL CHRISTIAN MANHOOD.

ONE of the most absorbing questions that presses for answer in the heart of the believer is this : Will I ever reach the ideal Christian manhood? For it is not in the nature of sincere Christian faith to be content with small attainments. Simply to be saved from sin and its dread consequences will hardly satisfy such faith.

The scriptural standard, we well know, is the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. How very far off it does look ! How impassable seems the distance intervening ! We see, here and there, many who have made rare progress, and who like polished and stately pillars are wellnigh ready to be removed to yonder heavenly temple, and to be placed in their appointed spheres. Then we look at ourselves—how imperfect we are ! how weak ! how deformed ! Surely, the present is only prophetic of future disappointment and failure ! We can never reach the standard ! We will never be other than the most ordinary blocks !

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Of course, it is eminently proper for us to have some ideal before our minds as an incentive in our daily struggles Godward. There is no true follower of Christ who has not such ideal,—it is his inspiration all his life through. Conscience—the bestowment of God in every soul—is ever careful to emphasize the necessity of personal goodness and well-doing, but until there is a divine revelation of the nature of goodness, both in character and conduct, it is impossible for man to be good or to do good. God himself must be manifest in the flesh in order to reveal the grand possibilities of human nature in their likeness to the divine nature. Happily for us, we have in the Redeemer of man the perfect manifestation of deity in humanity. The Son of the Most High, being God and man, comes to each of us as our Example without blemish; more than that, he pledges us his strength that we may attain the high ideal of character and conduct.

Scrutinize closely your own spiritual experience. Has he not already done much in and with you? And can he not and will he not accomplish yet more and more? Take an illustration or two. In what do you behold the greatest of the wonderful,—in the tiny seed which has been endowed with life and power of development and caused to root itself in the soil and to penetrate the

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earth as a little green blade, or in the stately oak which, giant-like, crowns some wind-swept hill, growing constantly stronger and more enduring? As we think of this mighty universe, of which our world is but an insignificant part; as we contemplate the unnumbered worlds revolving in space, each obedient to well-defined law, we are properly awed by the infinite power everywhere apparent and in full operation. And yet, that power which so fills us with the sense of the majestic and terrible is not nearly so formidable and inspiring as that which was needed to create the myriads of atoms of which the universe is composed. To make a single atom demanded more energy than to fashion and to guide a universe. To resurrect and energize a soul, dead in trespasses and sins, indicates a greater degree of wisdom and power, than to effect the complete development of the newborn heir of God in the way of righteousness.

As you look at the eagle, piercing the clouds in his upward flight, able with open eye to gaze upon the unveiled sun, it seems strange indeed that he should have been developed from the featherless and impotent birdling in the nest, perfectly dependent for protection and nourishment upon the mother bird. You hold in your hand an acorn: it is difficult, but not impossible, to realize that in

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it lies dormant the monarch of the forest ; yet you know full well, as you look upon the oak in its maturity, that such was its origin.

You gaze upon man, full-grown man, the crowning work of the divine creation, the lord of the material world, making the elements his messengers and the mighty deep his highway ; then you betake yourself to the cradle wherein lies the helpless babe, appealing so mutely yet so irresistibly to parental care and love, and you are strangely moved, if you reflect upon the matter at all, while you recognize these as the two intimately associated phases of the one human life. You go to Bethlehem, and, looking into the rude manger-cradle, you see the divine Babe, cherished and loved by his human mother, helpless and utterly dependent ; then, spanning a generation of time, you behold that same Babe, now grown to full manhood, perfect in his humanity as in his divinity, the Helper of the helpless, the Comforter of the sorrowing, the Saviour of the fallen. And from this all-sufficient Redeemer you look away to the imperfect Christian ! Oh, what infinite distance seems to separate the two ! And yet, what is it that you see but the extremes, so to speak, of the one identical spiritual life ? For it is a fact that the babe in Christ is to become the full-grown man in

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Christ! As the Redeemer lived and advanced from infancy to childhood, and thence to manhood, doing fully and well the work set before him by the Father, and was finally crowned with unending glory and honor, so each believer is likewise to live and grow, to do and to be rewarded.

Recall that the apostle Paul, writing to the Christians at Philippi, assured them that He who had begun a good work in them would perform it until the day of Jesus Christ; and that the apostle Peter says of Christians that, as lively stones, they are built up a spiritual house. Even now in the divine mind this spiritual house is planned in its minutest part: he who seeth the end from the beginning knows each and every living stone composing its walls. He has appointed each one his own place from all eternity—for the divine purpose in Christ Jesus is an eternal purpose.

Yet, observe, before this spiritual house is completed and its capstone is placed amidst shoutings of "Grace, grace unto it!" the work of discipline is to be carried forward until the image of the Redeemer is brightly reflected from the human heart; the soul must first be purified by the grace and Spirit of the Lord, and so a meetness for its ultimate destination be wrought within. The Christian disciple is to abide here a season—the time appointed in the divine purpose—

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that Christ may be magnified in the daily intercourse with men, that the doctrine of the Lord and Saviour may be adorned in all holy conversation, that the cause of truth and righteousness may be advanced.

In this gracious work of sanctification, within and without, sharp angles of character are to be rounded off, unseemly excrescences of conduct are to be chipped away, many roughnesses of temper are to be smoothed down, many flaws of mind and heart are to be chiseled out.

“ O blows that smite ! O hurts that pierce
This shrinking heart of mine !
What are ye but the Master's tools
Forming a work divine ?

“ O hope that crumbles to my feet,
O joy that mocks and flies,
What are ye but the clogs that bind
My spirit from the skies ?

“ Sculptor of souls, I lift to thee
Encumbered heart and hands ;
Spare not the chisel ; set me free,
However dear the bands.”

And the grand fact is, as both experience and observation attest, that each blow of the master Hand, so unerring in its aim, helps in the spiritual formation ; the various tools used, though frequently cutting deeply, produce some chiseled beauty ; every grating

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file of sorrow that rasps the delicate heart-fibers serves but to impart a more perfect luster, and to bring to view a diviner glory. Then begins the polishing process, and, in such process, beauties hitherto hidden are made to appear, and forthwith from the smooth surface are flung back the bright rays of the Sun of Righteousness. Then the hewn stone, no longer unsightly or deformed, but resplendent in its attractiveness, is ready for its place.

V.

OBEDIENT SERVICE.

NO words could more truthfully set forth the very close relationship of the individual believer to his Lord, than those addressed by the mother of Jesus to the servants at the marriage feast in Cana, "Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it." The relationship, in its highest and purest sense, is nothing more nor less than that of the servant to his master. The duty required is the immediate and unquestioning observance of the expressed will of the master. It is in fact that higher Christian life of which we read so much in the Pauline epistles, and which we find so constantly enjoined upon us in the practice and teachings of the Redeemer. A lofty summit it verily is, and reached only as one is willing, hand in hand with Christ, perseveringly to tread the rugged bypaths of the steep ascent; yet, the summit being reached, there is such privilege as the world knows nothing of,—the privilege of sitting with the Christ in the heavenly places, and of hearing him say, "My peace I give unto you: not as the world

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giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

Down upon the low level of indifferent living, God is regarded simply as the Supreme Being, the Creator and Sovereign of the universe,—a God afar off, to be feared and wondered at, to be approached in prayer, it is true, yet only with feelings of uncertainty; and his Son Jesus Christ to be esteemed chiefly for the salvation from death which he can bestow.

But up in these loftier regions, where the sunlight is shed radiantly abroad in every direction, and where the air is so invigorating, God is not only the Supreme Being majestic in his holiness, but he is likewise the loving and faithful and sympathetic Friend of the trusting soul. More than that, he is the Father who, surpassing the tenderest of earthly parents, cherishes for his children a love which many waters cannot drown. And as the Son of God is viewed by a faith that grows clearer day by day, as the soul is thus drawn into more confidential relations to its Redeemer, the will of the Father is seen more and more unmistakably to be perfectly righteous in its requirements, and the obedience it wins to itself is glad and free,—not like that of the slave, constrained and halting. Hence, from experiencing a mere grateful sentiment toward God for all

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that he has done in the soul's behalf, the soul mounts upward to the regions of infinite peace and joy. And what loyal and joyous allegiance it is! Now does the believer know what the apostle means, when he speaks of grace *reigning* through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.

The *kingdom* of God has come into the heart with power, but not without struggle. The "one simple purpose of loyal, steadfast stewardship and service" comes not unasked, nor stays unurged. "Easy things are of little worth. The spontaneities are mostly bad; mere weeds and briars. Real goodness is as much an industry, as much a business, as any profession, trade, or pursuit, of men. Every morning early, and then again at nine o'clock, and then at twelve, and then at three, and then at five, the owner of the vineyard is in the market-place hiring his laborers. The early, lost hours are forgiven us; but when the bargain is once made, there is nothing for us but work till the great red sun goes burning down." Mr. Moody, once, in reply to a certain question, said, "I do not believe there is any man on the face of the earth that is happier than the man who is just carrying out the will of God, whatever it is; and I believe the most unhappy Christian is the man who is constantly going against the will of God."

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This life is not a game which may be played with a few successful moves, and then the prize be won. There is not a man, however skillful or prudent or far-seeing, who can determine, with perfect accuracy, the results of present action,—not even one hour hence. And there is no action, even the slightest, nor a word, that has not an eternal relationship. Words do not die, deeds never cease to exist—they live on and on, forever potent in their influences. Hence the need of a mind infinitely wise and good, to direct the finite being in the whole course of the earthly existence, that the divine glory may be advanced, and that the divine will may be completely realized. What cause for rejoicing there is in the knowledge that God in Christ is our sufficient Guide in all the affairs of life, influencing us aright in our judgments where human necessities are concerned, while helping us in our efforts to live for the glory of him who hath loved and redeemed us.

The prayer of Saul of Tarsus, as he was prostrated on the road to Damascus and there converted, was, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" To do! Observe, it is a prayer for divine guidance into service, a prayer of entire and heartfelt consecration, revealing the servant's willingness to do all the Master's pleasure, and his conviction that

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the Master had a just and undeniable claim to every talent, to every moment, and to appoint every sphere of toil and of suffering. It was indeed an epochal moment in the life of the gifted Tarsian to which he was now brought in the providence of God, and in which he was summoned to a larger, fuller and more abounding life.

May we not say that there are likewise "epochs in our lives when we see that the old way of living, however full of hope it may once have been, is not the way of life in which we must henceforth set our feet? The low ambitions of the past are seen to be shameful. Dreams of power and happiness, once so fair, have grown repulsive. Needs once embracing our estimate of the worth of life are felt no longer. Old hopes are now forgotten. New revelations of truth make wrong what once was right. Things once the end of life are seen to be but means. The cup of the past is full, and to give it more of life is waste. We are at the end of the old way, and to turn our steps backward, in the paths from which we are clearly called, is to outrage conscience and deny the living Christ. The Lord comes to us in some sudden flash of light; some proffered opportunity of larger service; some lifelong sorrow that comes to make the heart its home; some fruitful fellowship with a new friend, whose

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life reveals hitherto unseen possibilities in our humanity; some great vacancy left in the soul by a departed hope; . . . in some moment like one of these the Son of God comes to each of us, perhaps when we think not, bidding us arise and enter upon a diviner course of life." There is ever this thought for our encouragement in all such experiences, that whenever the Son of God comes to summon the soul to action, especially by way of the cross, *he invariably leads*. He himself came into the world for the sole purpose of doing the will of his Father to its utmost demand, and the mind of Christ, respecting this entire matter of obedience, is very manifest in his attitude in the garden of agony, and in his sublime utterance, "Not my will, but thine, be done." Hence the highest point in Christian experience to which the individual believer can ever hope to attain, is just to have the same mind that was in his divine Lord, and to walk even as he walked.

The one consolation that comes to our hearts in the recollection of these truths is that not one, sustaining this most intimate relation to Christ, need ever have any fear about what is to come. The way may seem dark and uninviting; the heart may be tempted to question the wisdom of any appointment, but *dread* there will not be, and

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cannot be, so long as there is the consciousness of the preserving care and power of Him who has called. Believers, we are told, are kept, or garrisoned, by the power of God through faith, and it is the peculiar province of faith, sustained by grace, to lead the soul through darkness unto the light.

What difference need it make to any of us, after all—if we are truly consecrated to our Master's purpose—whether we toil for him in the sunshine or in the darkness; whether our steps are set amidst pleasant places, or in the rugged paths of a sorrowful experience? Surely it is all one and the same thing to him who is constantly recognizing the divine presence. The chief anxiety is to do the work intrusted by the Master, and then, if the storm comes, if the way is all hedged about, it will be because thus the work is to be perfected.

The sad fact is that we too often forget that our Lord Christ "never pointed out a path of duty, or commanded a service, or disclosed a new career of life, that had not somewhere in it a Gethsemane and a Calvary." It is for him to say how we shall go, whether beneath cloudless skies, in ease and comfort, or amidst distress and pain and weariness. And if we have the confidence in his judgment to which it is entitled, we shall know what is meant by the peace pass-

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ing understanding, we shall appreciate the joy that is unspeakable and full of glory, we shall be assured that what he says is right, that all his appointments are good and true.

“Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it.” Do it to-day, and to-morrow, and still to-morrow. Be watchful ever; pray without ceasing; carry patiently the cross that daily may be laid in the pathway; sow the seed that is given you; wait upon the Lord in faith; walk with God with a new experience at each step of his sustaining and strengthening grace, “dictating no terms to him. At whatever cost accept the service offered you, high or low, far or near. Then burn to the socket.”

“And He hath said, How beautiful the feet!
The feet so weary, travel-stained and worn;
The feet that humbly, patiently have borne
The toilsome way, the pressure and the heat.

“With weary, human feet, he, day by day,
Once trod this earth to work his acts of love;
And every step is chronicled above
His servants take to follow in his way.”

VI.

THE PREVAILING INTERCESSION.

THERE is one incident in the gospel narrative that is rich in its suggestiveness, especially to such as are inclined to be weak or wavering in their faith—it is seen in our Lord's treatment of Peter in that last solemn yet tender interview he held with his disciples in the upper room of blessed memory. After the institution of the holy supper, and just before passing to the awful agony of the garden, the Master says, "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, strengthen thy brethren."

If we are taught any one particular lesson by such gracious treatment of the individual disciple, it is surely that, while the most ample care and love are the divine bestowment upon each of the entire band of the disciples, the same blessings are afforded, in a much more abundant measure, to those among the disciples who may have special need.

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Who could possibly know so well, as Jesus, how sore was Peter's need? and it was all the more deep and urgent because of the vehement boast of loyal attachment: others might desert the Master in his time of trial, but he, Peter, would be true and unfailing, come what might! None could appreciate, as did Jesus, the serious lack in Peter's character, and therefore the necessity of his being fortified against the attack of the tempter; none understood so fully the importance of a perfecting of Peter's faith, through the elimination of every selfish element, that he might become, in time, rock-like in his defense of the truth, and unyielding in his resistance of every form of error and unbelief. The night of trial was very close at hand, the time when the powers of darkness would mass themselves for the defeat of the Son of God. Fierce assaults were shortly to be made upon the chosen ones, and unless there was special grace for the one of their number the most easily tempted, sad and sorrowful would be the result. Hence, because Peter was really the weakest he needed the most strengthening; because he was so rash and impulsive he required to be restrained, to become more stable and trustworthy; and so in his behalf the Lord Christ besought the divine grace and blessing.

The constant remembrance of this char-

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acteristic of our divine Redeemer must ever tend greatly to our individual peace and joy. Not to the robust and sturdy disciple, whose caution and prudence may always be expected to guide clear of danger, does he come the most frequently with help and sympathy, but to the weak and discouraged one. He naturally has a more tender regard for the blind, and the halt, and the lame, in the household of faith, than for those of his disciples who are in the enjoyment of the full vigor of life and health ; who, fleetfooted, can go quickly on errands of mercy ; who, able-handed, can readily undertake and perform the most exacting duties of love and good will to men.

If it be true, as has been said, that prayer is the nerve that moves the muscle of Omnipotence, then we can easily understand what a train of forces the Redeemer started in motion for Peter's defense, as he addressed the throne of grace. If, as Christ told the Roman magistrate during his mock trial in the judgment hall, twelve legions of angels would instantly be at his command, did he but request such a bodyguard, certainly there would be vouchsafed to the weak disciple all that was needed to strengthen him and keep him from a sorrowful eclipse, did his Lord and Master only seek such a blessing in his behalf. And this is precisely what

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he did: he offered for him urgent supplications; he interceded with the Father to fortify and establish his impetuous disciple and friend, that he might not become the prey of the evil one.

Of the Redeemer it is just as true to-day as ever, that he is making intercession for us. Think of it, especially you who may have weak and wavering Christian faith: *Jesus prays for you!* Nay more: even *before you began to be, he knew you*, foreseeing your life, as you have thus far lived it in the world—all the temptations and trials to which you have been subjected, all the grief and sorrow through which you have been called to pass, all your anxiety and desire to live godly in this present world; and he provided for you whatever grace and wisdom you have been appropriating. If you have been making any progress in your spiritual career, if you are any better or wiser than in the past, it is because your Saviour has been invariably and with full sympathy interested in your development.

Then, too, *he knows all the future, as you must meet it*,—all the bitterness you shall experience, all the assaults that will yet be directed, for your overthrow, against your soul by the great adversary; he knows the measure of joy and peace it will be right for you to have, and he is even now providing

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for your safety, that you may be enabled to go forward and to increase in knowledge and true holiness.

You cannot fall: possibly you will hesitate, and even stumble, but you cannot forever break away from the divine grasp. For what did the Master say? "And I give to them eternal life; and they shall *never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.* My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and *no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand.*" No, you can never break away from the divine grasp! Even Peter was overtaken and stumbled. How grievous was that denial of his Lord! Straight from that upper room, wherein had been enacted the most solemn rite conceivable, a room fragrant with the tenderest memories, Peter went forth, forsaking him to whom he had vowed the most steadfast loyalty. Can it be that he forgot those words, "But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not"? Did he lose sight of the predicted possibility of his being overcome by the enemy, in the supreme hour of his Lord's unhappy trial? There is, however, this comfort, that Peter, while undergoing the terrible strain of that night in the judgment hall, *did not suffer a total extinguishment of faith*, and it was for *that especially* that the Master interceded. His confidence, for the time be-

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ing, it is true, did weaken, and he did fail, most miserably, to maintain his stand as a brave comforter and defender, to which he had voluntarily pledged himself; but as we behold his tearful repentance, produced by that wonderful look with which his Master regarded him, after his profane denial, we must feel, surely, that his feet were not yet swept ruthlessly from the abiding foundation. Through the gateway of humble penitence, sad and tearful, indeed, he was led back by the angel of mercy, to Him who can and does so freely forgive and restore.

Yes, you may stumble along, at times, in the path of life, but you can never perish; Satan may do his best to entice you, and you may, to some extent, lend an ear to his alluring voice, but your Lord will look at you likewise, when the right moment comes, and you too will be heartbroken and undone because of your weakness and sin. Yet he who, with only a look, breaks down, can also build up; he who wounds can also heal: he has prayed, is praying now for you, and when the darkness is passed and the storm is ceased, the sun will shine with undiminished radiance; after your denial, whatever form it has assumed, your devotion to Christ will be all the purer and more constant.

The trying ordeal, through which the weak believer may have to pass, may be regarded

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as a good preparation for future usefulness. The Master evidently intended to intimate as much when he said to Peter, "When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren,"—when thou shalt have passed through the sifting process, give thyself to the blessed work of helping others. Certainly he would come out of the conflict with new knowledge, he would know himself better, would be better able to estimate his own powers and limitations, and would in so far be more fit than ever to be a helper and guide to those about him. After that dread night when Satan so roughly used him, Peter's spiritual stature was not so great in his own eyes as when he so vehemently and so thoughtlessly affirmed his fidelity to his Lord—all the chaff in his composition had been forcibly sifted away; hence, as we behold him on the day when the Holy Spirit came so overpoweringly upon the assembled multitudes in Jerusalem, he seems a vastly different man—not only seems, but is different, being now under the supreme control of the divine Spirit, which explains his burning words, his irresistible eloquence, resulting in the conversion of thousands of immortal souls.

What a blessed privilege it is that we can have the dross of our natures purged away, that we can have the objectionable features of pride and temper and self-love forever

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removed from us! And we should very often and very much desire such separating and cleansing process, should have in our hearts some such longing as Miss Havergal has so beautifully expressed in poetic verse,

“ O lead me, Lord, that I may lead
The wandering and the wavering feet ;
O feed me, Lord, that I may feed
Thy hungering ones with manna sweet.

“ O strengthen me, that while I stand
Firm on the Rock, and strong in thee,
I may stretch out a loving hand
To wrestlers with the troubled sea.

“ O teach me, Lord, that I may teach
The precious things thou dost impart ;
And wing my words, that they may reach
The hidden depths of many a heart.

“ O fill me with thy fullness, Lord,
Until my very heart and soul o'erflow,
In kindling thought and glowing word,
Thy love to tell, thy praise to show.”

And yet there are times, how many! when this can be accomplished more surely through the instrumentality of the scorching furnace of true and humble penitence: there indeed the dross is left behind, and only the solid gold of a godly character is brought to view. The fires are controlled by the divine Hand, the hand of him who knows so well how to purify and to bless. .

What need it matter, after all, if the expe-

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rience is that of affliction, or sorrow, or sickness, or pain,—the letting loose against the soul of all the artful devices of which Satan is so clearly the master—what need it matter, if only one can say, as the time of the pilgrimage to the Celestial Country shortens, “By the grace of God I am what I am”? Paul, by a most blessed experience, knew that the more fully he fellowshipped with Christ in the sufferings of the cross, the more completely he came under the power of the endless life, and therefore was the more perfectly qualified for his daily toil in the Master’s service. Hence, in so far as the Christian is comforted in his sorrow he is able to point other suffering and sorrowing ones to the God of all comfort and consolation; if he is tempted and delivered, and has his feet set in a straight path, if he receives daily strength according to daily need, he can go to those who are oppressed with the burdens and cares and difficulties of this life, to those who seem breaking beneath the weight of grave responsibilities, witnessing in His behalf who is able to guide and to uphold and to make faithful.

“ I would be joyful as my days go by,
Counting God’s mercies to me. He who bore
Life’s heaviest cross is mine evermore;
And I, who wait his coming, shall not I
On his sure word rely ?

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So, if sometimes the way be rough, and sleep
Be heavy for the grief he sends to me,
Or at my waking I would only weep,
Let me be mindful that these things must be,
To work his blessed will until he come
And take my hand and lead me
Safely home."

VII.

THE CELESTIAL COUNTRY.

THEY "build too low, who build beneath the skies."

The supreme moment in the life of God's beloved servant Paul was that in which he was about to achieve the greatest victory possible to man, the victory over death and the grave. The thought and hope of such glorious conquest had animated and sustained him through many years of suffering and toil, and now, in the divine ordering of events, he has come to the moment of the wondrous consummation. With manacled hand, in chill prison cell, on the eve of martyrdom, he pens, to his dearly beloved son in the faith, this significant message: I am already being poured out as a sacrificial offering, and my departing time is near; I have completed the glorious contest; I have gone over the whole course marked out for the race; I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give to me at that day.

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The very last charge to the youthful bishop, no wonder it is given in the most solemn form, to deepen, doubtless, his impression of the realities of the future world, and to lead him to believe that they should ever outweigh all the present. And how are such words like a veritable "prelude at heaven's gate to the immortal anthem to be sung within"! They are indeed, as has been suggested, "a death-pæan of matchless sublimity, as covering the retrospect and prospect of a Christ-like life, a life of loyal love to God and man." The apostle saw before him, "at a little distance, the doom of an unrighteous magistrate, and the sword of a bloodstained executioner; but he appealed to the sentence of a juster Judge, who would soon change the fetters of the criminal into the wealth of the conqueror; he looked beyond the transitory present; the tribunal of Nero faded from his sight, and the vista was closed by the judgment seat of Christ." Now the only remaining thing to be done is to die: but what is death to such an one as Paul?

When we try to estimate the grandeur of the change from the corruptible to the incorruptible, from the mortal to the immortal; as we think of the eternal blessedness already entered upon in the very moment of the change, we instinctively take upon our lips the words of Paul, with which he boldly

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challenges the seeming supremacy of man's last enemy—"O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? . . . Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ"—and we feel that not more completely nor more suitably could the believer's mastership over death be set forth.

The life of the Christian as lived in the world, in much weakness it may be, in weariness and pain oftentimes,—what is it but one of the grandeurs of God's providences? And his death, come how or when it may,—what is it but the very glory of those same providences? To our sight and thought death is only weakness; he makes it power. We, in the poverty of human apprehension, call it simply a departure out of this world; he in the wealth of his infinite comprehension, terms it a triumphant entrance into his kingdom.

You look upon the nest wherein the mother bird only a little while ago brought forth her young; whatever of life was there has gone, now nothing abides but a rejected nest and shattered shell. Restricting thought to these, you are inclined to say, What destruction is here! what disaster is this! But when turning from these you look upward into the bright and beautiful blue of the heavens; when you gaze outward upon the works of

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God's hand in nature, beholding the divine goodness and wisdom everywhere manifest, seeing in reality a world instinct with life and beauty, and vocal with praise, you at once recall your premature judgment, and say, This is not destruction, this is not disaster; this bursting of the shell is verily a relief, and is profitable; the life that was intended for something better and grander, after its period of partial development, has broken through its environs, and passed victoriously into a world unspeakably more glorious and more enduring.

It was a favorite thought of John Howe, whenever he reflected upon the decease of the believer, that it is but a translation out of a valley of death into a region of perfect and everlasting life—it is preëminently a birth into a world more lightsome, more pure, and more glorious.

Of that better land, into which the perfected soul is ushered with the rejoicings of ministering spirits, we are not left in utter ignorance. The Celestial City is not entirely hidden from our view. Taking our place by the side of the exiled disciple upon Patmos, we shall see it even as he saw it in apocalyptic vision: rich in its gates of pearl; its walls resplendent with the brilliancy of jasper, and sapphire, and emerald; its streets of pure gold, never “deformed by the thorns and

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weeds of a sin-bearing soil ;" its pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb ; its tree of life in the midst of the street and on either side of the river, yielding its fruit and its leaves for the healing of the nations ; its atmosphere pure and invigorating, and not once disturbed by the sighs of distress or pain. In the Celestial City is no more curse : but the throne of God and of the Lamb is in it ; and his servants serve him ; there they see his face ; there his name is in their foreheads ; there is no night there ; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun, for the Lord God giveth them light ; and he wipes away all tears from their eyes.

Is it to be wondered at that the apostle Paul, with his entrancing and unutterable views of the heavenly state, and animated by his intense devotion to his Lord, should have desired to depart and to be with Christ, which to him was far better ? No doubt, when immediately confronted by martyrdom, he was comforted greatly by the memory of his past life spent in the service of the Master. How he could exult, " I have fought the good fight, I have kept the faith !" Even so is it with the believer to-day who receives the summons to depart and to be with Christ. It is far better to go. It was, truly, an inestimable privilege to be permitted to spend

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and to be spent in doing God's will,—in ministering to the needy, in speaking words of cheer and comfort, in binding up the broken-hearted, and in encouraging the weak and desponding ones,—but now that the Master calls, now that it is the divine will to lay down the burden of life, it is far, far better to go; to go and be with him who is love, to be with him where there is no more sin, no more pain, no more death.

Think of the reward to which the believer hastens, in thus gladly responding to the divine summons! If there have been indeed years of activity and holy zeal in the service of the Redeemer, such activity and zeal are so closely inwrought with the very texture of his soul as to render a separation impossible. Nothing is forgotten, nothing is lost:

“ The look of sympathy, the gentle word,
Spoken so low that only angels heard;
The secret art of pure self-sacrifice,
Unseen by men, but marked by angels' eyes,—
These are not lost.

“ The sacred music of a tender strain,
Wrung from a poet's heart by grief and pain
And chanted timidly, with doubt and fear,
To busy crowds, who scarcely paused to hear,—
These are not lost.

“ The kindly plans devised for others' good,
So seldom guessed, so little understood;

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The quiet, steadfast love that strove to win
Some wanderer from the ways of sin,—
 These are not lost.

“ Not lost, O Lord! for in thy City bright
Our eyes shall see the past by clearer light,
And things long hidden from our gaze below
Thou wilt reveal; and we shall surely know
 These are not lost.”

Think, too, of the joyful reunions in the Celestial City. The social life upon earth is full of its sweet attractiveness in many instances, but it is not intended to be permanent, nor could we wish it to be so. Now and again, one and another drops out of the ranks, passing into the higher realm, into the more perfect life. Who can measure the joy and satisfaction with which souls, separated for a time, meet in the Father's house—*meet nevermore to part!* We think of them, in the ineffable brightness of the heavenly world, instantly and quickly recognizing each other's presence, and, with unbounded delight, holding fellowship respecting all that God has done for them. Hence we can fully appreciate the aptness of Charles Kingsley's remark when, speaking of the earthly bliss, he declares that it is “the sacrament of a higher union. Torn will be the thorn from every rose, and sweetened will be every nectar-cup to perfect security of blessedness in this life, to feel that

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there is more in store for us, that all expressions of love here are but dim shadows of a union which shall be perfect, if we will but work here so as to work out our salvation."

"What Mary's cottage at Bethany had been to the little company during the holy week, with its quiet rest after the daily turmoil of Jerusalem; what some humble house on the shore of Galilee was to St. John, with its associations of Salome; what the great temple was to the pious Jews, with its presence of the Eternal, that on the higher scale was heaven. Jesus availed himself of a wealth of tender recollections and placed heaven in the heart of humanity when he said, 'My Father's house.'

"Any view of the future may be fairly tried by this criterion—does it strengthen, gladden, inspire us in the present? Whenever this question is put, we turn to Jesus with his doctrine of continuity. Where the traditional forecast fails is in the absence of hope. It takes all purpose from our present effort, whose hard-won gains in service are to be flung away. It takes all opportunity from the future, which is to be a state of practical inertia. It is the depreciation of the market place, the workshop, the study; it is the vindication of a Trappist monastery. Where the forecast of Jesus tells is in the spirit of hope; it invests the most trivial or sordid

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details of this life with significance, changing them into the elementary exercises of a great science; it points to the future as the heights of life to which we are climbing out of this narrow valley. One of the most pathetic sights in this life is to see a dying man struggling to the last in his calling, putting another touch to his unfinished picture, adding another page to his half-written book. 'Art is long; life is short' comes to our mind, but how stands the case? If the monkish heaven be true, then this foolish mortal would better be done with art or letters, for they can have no place in the land to which he hasteth. If Jesus' heaven be true, then he is bound to gather the last penny of interest on his talents, and make himself fit for his new work. Jesus heartens his followers by an assurance that not one hour of labor, not one grain of attainment, not one honest effort on to the moment when the tools of earth drop from our hands, but will tell on the after life."

As we are permitted, so frequently, to look upon lives that are lived in all holy obedience to the divine will; that abound in loving and cheerful labors for the Master; that are so helpful and encouraging to the needy and to the tempted; whose quiet yet positive influence is felt beyond the bounds of the home circle; that are transformed into the image of the heavenly, the Christlike features grow-

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ing ever more distinct—we may see indisputable evidence of the spiritual presence of him who declared, “I will not leave you comfortless : I will come to you.” And then, when the earthly course is run, when the daily toil is done, when the appointed mission is fulfilled ; in that hour, when the soul draws nearer the bound of life where we lay our burdens down, it is the same Voice, the voice of the same blessed Saviour and Friend that says, “Be not afraid ; in my Father’s house are many mansions ; I have come to receive you unto myself.” And the faith of those who remain can see the glorified soul and the Redeemer holding closest fellowship in paradise, even as we look upon the enrapturing scene of the transfiguration of our Lord upon the mount.

Those whom we often think of and speak of as dead are, in reality, not dead, but are living with Jesus in heaven. Living with Jesus ! How, then, can we wish to call them back to our side, to enter again into their former associations with ourselves ? Would we, indeed, have them again to take up the dread battle with sin,—to suffer, once more, grief and pain ? The presence of the Redeemer is so glorious, and the blessedness of those who have gone to be with him is so beyond finite estimate, that instead of longing for the reunion in this world, we have the

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same ardent craving that Paul had, when he found himself in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better. We would gladly resign all things earthly to enter into the beatific state and to enjoy the glad mutual recognitions in glory. Yet we patiently abide here, knowing it is our Father's will; nevertheless we wait for the summons that shall usher us to our eternal rest.

Our varied experiences here are surely of such a character as naturally lead us to look with interest and hope to that house of the many mansions, to that better land where the inhabitants never say, "I am sick;" where death never obtrudes its unwelcome presence; and where sorrow never is permitted. If indeed we are the Lord's own, bound to him by a living faith, and by a hope that can never make ashamed, we can truly say of him:

"Thou art coming! We are waiting
With a hope that cannot fail,
Asking not the day or hour,
Anchored safe within the veil.

"Thou art coming! Thou art coming!
We shall meet thee on thy way;
Thou art coming! We shall see thee,
And be like thee on that day."

So the blessed work is carried on from

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step to step. Soon the purpose of God in the earthly life will be fully accomplished. Soon will be heard the glad summons "Come up higher," and right joyful will be the response. There, in the temple not made with hands, the soul is presented faultless before the presence of the divine glory with exceeding joy. With the sorrows of earth ended, its duties faithfully performed, its conflicts patiently endured, and its heat and burden heroically borne, the soul may now well be satisfied, having awaked in the likeness of God, and seeing him as he is. He looks upon the King in his beauty. He adores unceasingly the dear Redeemer who purchased him with his own precious blood.