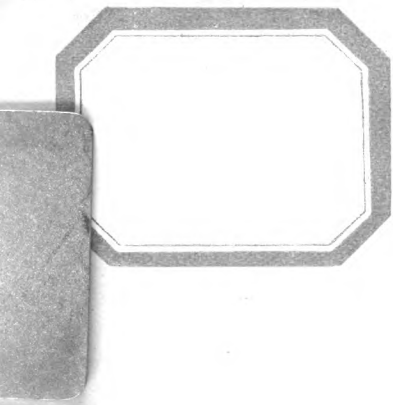


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BETHEL AND PENUEL.

MEMORIAL PULPIT. VOL. II. THIRD EDITION.

BY

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PREFACE.

THIS book contains the remaining half of a single year's home-work in the Memorial Church. It has been, like the one that preceded it, for a long time out of print. In issuing new editions of both, I add this mere note of preface in order to renew for all the people the good wishes with which I first gave the volumes to the press.

CHAS. S. ROBINSON.

NEW YORK, September, 1884.

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Bethel:

A PICTURE AND ITS LESSON.

"And Jacob went out from Beersheba, and went toward Haran."

Gen. 28 : 10.

ABOUT twelve miles north of Jerusalem, on the right-hand side of the road to Shechem, there is a little spot, three or four acres in extent, covered with rubbish and ruins. As long ago as when Jerome was working at the Latin Vulgate, in the crypt of the old church at Bethlehem, travelers and pilgrims used to pass up that way; and he has recorded that there was then visible something like an ancient sanctuary upon the summit of the hill—that remembered hill, upon which Lot and Abram met when they had decided to separate in their choice of territory. Even to this day the springs, which gave water to maidens coming with their pitchers in those far remote ages, send forth their refreshing streams perennial and pure; but every vestige of human occupation has vanished for this many a year. Bethel lives only in history; geography repudiates it from the map.

Bethel—"house of God"—has become really what it was in derision so frequently nick-named in its later and wickeder years, Beth-aven—"house of nothing." And the counsel of prophetic warning, which the herdsman Amos had been inspired to utter twenty-five centuries ago, bears upon this desolate hamlet with all pressure of truthfulness and accurate fulfilment now: "Seek not Bethel, nor enter into Gilgal, and

pass not to Beersheba; for Gilgal shall surely go into captivity, and Bethel shall come to naught."

There is one part of this city's history, however, which is honorable—the earliest of all. It received its name under peculiar circumstances. A young man, running away from home, called it by a name of his own choosing, to commemorate an incident in his flight. The story of its beginning is related in a half dozen verses of the Bible. Thus it starts:

"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." Three times over so-called, "that place" was Bethel.

The best artists have put forth, as one of the principles of their profession, that the most perfect painting must be that which most clearly teaches the greatest amount of truth. It is fair, then, for us to submit this artistic tableau of Scripture to the usual analysis.

Let us look at the Picture first, and afterwards at its Lesson.

I. The PICTURE PRESENTED is that of an oriental traveler coming up from below Hebron toward the north, and on his way into Mesopotamia. He has only just begun his journey, having traversed less than fifty miles; and he has more than four hundred miles to go yet.

I am quite aware of the distinction drawn between God's way of looking upon human life and man's: man looketh upon the outside, but God looketh upon the heart. Nevertheless, you will not comprehend this historic traveler unless you look upon *both* now. You must take his experience and his circumstances into consideration before you can measure him.

1. He is a *solitary* man. Look closely, and you will observe that no companion attends him, no servant, no retinue. A

little wallet hangs over his shoulder, a staff is in his hand ; a tight girdle seems to be drawn around his loins.

You cannot help instituting a contrast here, now that you know who it is. You remember the great pomp with which this man's father had obtained his mother to wife. How unlike is this lonely journey to Eliezer's proud mission over exactly the same road! The slave of Abraham had a finer show to make than this grandson now has. Touchingly does he in after years allude to his desolation and poverty: "With my staff I passed over this Jordan." He seems very desolate. He had had no training for hardship like this. He had been pampered at home. He was a mother's baby up to the very night he ran away ; and yet he was no longer a child, he had reached the age of seventy-seven years. Now his father's house was shut to him. By subtlety a parental blessing had been obtained ; but as yet the temporal profits, to say the least, were quite meagre. He had neither mule, nor attendant, nor camel, nor dog. He had parted from his best friend—and worst—Rebekah he was never to see again.

2. He is a *guilty* man. This accounts for his starting out so inexplicably unhonored. Isaac could have afforded to take care of him becomingly. He would never have suffered his son and recognized heir to begin so formidable a journey, amid such multiplied perils, without some sort of escort, if he had been aware of his stealthy departure from under the home-roof.

Jacob had wilily deprived Esau of his birthright. It needed lying and fraud to accomplish this ; but he had scrupled at nothing. He had committed a mean deceit to outwit his brother ; he had falsified the truth openly in order to prevail over his old blind father ; and then, in smooth-faced villainy, he had knelt at the feet of the same outraged parent, and received the invoked blessing with a hardihood which, under the circumstances, appears almost like blasphemy against God. It is likely his meditations must have been far from

pleasant. From the actual summit of hope he was now precipitated into an abyss of uncertainty and alarm. His heart was sad; his mood was pensive. His step was not elastic; his eye was not full of light. Guilt was heavier than his wallet; sin pierced his hand more than his staff did.

3. He is an *injured* man. It is instinctive with us all to believe that Jacob was more sinned against than sinning. To much of his early wrong-doing he was put up. A character, never over-strong at the best, was overborne by one which was stronger.

There is an ancient proverb which has in it much wisdom: "A child may have more of his mother than her blessing." Jacob had Isaac's blessing, and enjoyed Rebekah's advice; and it was just this last which hurt him, and put him to bed on the stones at Bethel. Her injudicious partiality brought upon him his temptation. In the domestic drama of deceit she played Jezebel to his Ahab. She knew the exact cast to make. Her part became her, and showed her unusual gifts in that direction. But she had her hands full to get this son of hers through his drill any way. And this midnight departure was what it came to.

4. He is a *fugitive* man. Around him are all the causes of consternation, which one in fear would imagine or realize. Jacob's apprehensions of violence from Esau before long become a moulding power in his character. He is consciously a run-away.

From this time on in the history this patriarch assumes a sort of malicious cunning that only outcasts and outlaws cultivate. Somebody says of him as truly as shrewdly, that "he had, like a maltreated animal, the fear of man habitually before his eyes." He cringes one moment, and dodges the next; deprecating the blow he invites, expects, and gets. We see he has lost all confidence in his fellow-beings, because he means now to play upon them. Thus vice punishes the vicious. Thus the general order of things works out that sin-

fulness shall be itself one of the retributions of sin. Jacob spent some of the best years of his life continually fleeing from something—quite unnecessarily. He fled when no man pursued. And his mind was harassed and disturbed with all those conflicting emotions which belong to an insecure, uneasy, and precarious lot.

5. He is a *wearry* man. The way is long ; the sun is hot ; the path is terribly stony ; the road runs seriously up-hill from Beersheba to Bethel.

The word "road" occurs but once in our English Bibles ; and then it means a raid or inroad. There are no roads in Palestine ; there never were good roads even in those early days before Solomon's time. That ridge has been called by eastern travelers the very backbone of the mountains. They have told us of the wide sheets of bare rock which strew the white slopes of the hill, among which isolated fragments stand up raggedly, as if heaved by convulsion. Jacob seems to have arrived late. The pressure on his mind rendered his body susceptible of fatigue more easily. And when he discovers he can go no farther, he chooses the nearest and most hospitable ledge he sees, falling without any hesitation on the bleak ground.

There he lies. Now look at him. For this is our Picture. Mark these—the nameless spot, the shelterless couch, the comfortless pillow, the restless slumber.

A nameless spot—for you must observe how carefully the phraseology discriminates between the "place" and the "city." The inhabited town, near by, was called Luz before ; but he found the gates closed, or else he was afraid to enter. At any rate, he lay down out in the open air and away from all habitations of men, a stranger in a strange land.

A shelterless couch—for these rocky hillsides of Palestine are not anywhere wooded. The canopy stretched over this fugitive's head was very far way, and colored blue. He might have looked up and murmured aloud, in some such words as

those of Eliphaz, which, although we find them in the oldest book in the Bible, were not penned till two hundred years after that night: "Is not God in the height of heaven? and behold the height of the stars, how high they are! and thou sayest, How doth God know? can he judge through the dark cloud?"

A comfortless pillow—you can judge for yourself some time, for the old rough rocks lie there still. You will see how ragged the region is, if you ever journey that way. Most likely, however, this man had the usual turban-cloth folded thick around his fez cap; if so, the hardship is less than it looks. That is the way men sleep in the East now, when they cannot do any better; but nobody commends it.

A restless slumber—for while he sleeps his heart waketh. Angels were in preparation for a scene in a few hours. He knew nothing of it—any more than Simon Peter knew about his visitants coming, or than Hagar did. A great world of invisible forms is quite in contact with this planet. It disclosed itself before morning to that drowsy man. It is not needful that we study his vision on this occasion. That will come in its place. Our end will be attained if you can simply see this picture with clearness. Jacob was a "plain man"; so the Scripture admits. Surely he had a plain reception and plain accommodations in the "certain place" near that old city of Luz.

II. Now, in the second place, what is the LESSON LEARNED? Paint the entire scene; try to make it vivid and real, as you used to make it in those days when the imagery of the Bible was all alive to you.

On the sward you discover the fugitive Jacob, uneasily pil-
lowed upon the rock—hillside underneath, sky overhead. Nothing comes between the stones and the stars but this extended form of a breathing being, who is only one atom in a universe. The feeble glimmer of the evening falls down upon his upturned face. His eyes are closed, his hands are folded.

And from his pale forehead, all the immense way clear up to the far throne of the God who made him, not a thing intervenes. Right through all infinite space, if he opened his eyes suddenly, his unhindered vision might be perfect even into the awful presence of Jehovah on the white seat of judgment—but for one bar. There was then, as now, drawn across a veil, before that which mortals may not see and live.

The general incidents of this story are familiar to all Scripture readers; for the tale is not only old in fact, but old in our experience likewise. It was one of the earliest our childish ears ever heard. That journey of Jacob, fleeing from his father's house, has made upon our minds a deeper and more permanent impression because of the appeal, vague and magnificent, it addresses to an undisciplined imagination with its weird and spectral vision of the ladder unrolled.

And yet I am sure it would be a mistake to attribute the entire power it possesses to the mere easy susceptibility of our feelings, or even the florid conceptions of those childish days. For it is a question worth an answer, whether, after all, it does not address our intellect as much as our imagination, and move us now more than ever. We find ourselves passing from the literal history, searching for instruction of profounder thought, now that we study the inspired record in the maturity of our understanding.

Let us seek the lessons which lie before us, therefore, not as mere artistic presentations, but as positive helps in spiritual life and duty.

1. Learn, first, that in this world *wicked success is real failure.*

Thus far Rebekah had had her own way—a shrewd woman, ambitious for her favorite, steady and inventive. That rather miserable piece of business about the venison worked well, and Isaac blessed Jacob's smooth hands. So when this remarkable mother had laid out one plan which led her son into sin, she ventured to lay out another to lead him into security;

but that led him into sin also. There is no security after sin save in repenting of it. Crime in Beersheba is crime in Padan-aram. Thus it came about that his ingenious adviser sent him around the longest way. This mighty journey reminds you in an instant of Jonah's method of getting to Nineveh around by Tarshish, under the sea instead of on it, in a whale instead of a decent ship. It is of no use to break one of God's laws, and run. It took a thousand miles of travel, and twenty years of time, and of registers of painful experience any number you please, before Jacob so far recovered from the injurious advice of his mother as to be back again on the vantage-ground where he stood when he so prosperously started out for his private venture towards Padan-aram. Success sometimes is simply a rogue's ruin.

2. Learn again, that in this world *God pays in kind, but blesses sovereignly.*

That is to say, retribution is often like crime; but grace is a surprise. Two things must be put alongside in all this story. Rebekah knew before the birth of her two sons that the elder should serve the younger. She remembered that Esau had sold his birthright, and Jacob had bought it. And she perceived that through his imbecility Isaac was going to bless Esau after all. That would fly in the face of Providence, and moreover would upset Jacob. So she put forth her hand, like another Uzzah, to steady the ark. And the result is instructive. Everything she did with subtlety ended in hindrance. Down upon her head came sorrow after sorrow; and just so down upon Jacob's. But as she betrayed her husband, so her punishment came from traitorous wives, until she cried she was weary of life. And as Jacob deceived his father, so deceit followed him as a swift avenger, and his wicked sons brought his gray hairs to suffering and shame. And meantime, altogether unhelped, the all-wise God took his own plans forward in his own way—convulsed Jacob's entire being with an awful conversion, revolutionized him into a new man, and

then crowned him sovereignly with the birthright which he did not deserve.

3. Learn yet a third lesson: *turning over a new leaf does not always show a fresh page.*

When a young man goes away from home, it makes a mighty difference what path he takes. And when new associations are forming, it matters much what they may be. You rejoice with me that Jacob has finally got away from so much temptation. He shows poorly there, a mere weakling in the hands of his mother. He has now a new chance to be something. We look pitifully upon his restless face, as he lies out under the stars. He turns over a new leaf to-morrow—alas, he does not show a fresh page! When he began to deceive, Rebekah seems to have been in mortal fear lest he should break down in just a little lie. He was so dull a pupil, he was so timid a villain, he was so stupid a cheat. Well, he got over that bravely. We hear a good deal about him afterwards. He learned to trick everybody, and showed he had been to school. It is quite natural for wicked men, this progress in evil. "Wherefore their way shall be unto them as slippery ways in the darkness; they shall be driven on and fall therein." All along the way in this life we find young men starting out with fine promises of reform. A new leaf turned over—ah me, how discouraging seems the whole book to be! It does no good to take up a journey from Beersheba to Padan-aram, when one means to do the same thing right along. God demands a change in the heart, not in the habit; not so much in the record and show of the life, as in the life itself.

4. Learn, in the fourth place, that *sometimes unhappiness is our chief felicity.*

It is fair to say we have no respect for Jacob lying out there under the sky at Bethel. He seems very much like a Bedouin of modern times. He will cheat, and swear, and pray, all alike for a price. One would despair of making a patriarch out of him. But he has one good, valuable characteristic; he

cannot sleep soundly when the angels of covenant grace are coming for him. Surely that poor man needs help, must have help. But he does not think so. He considers himself quite the master of the situation. I have called him an atom in the universe; very well, any other atom might fall upon him and crush him. Surely God can help him, and will help him. But what a gulf is that between them! How inexpressibly distant is the stone pillow from the pearl gate! Who can reckon the miles between Old Luz and New Jerusalem! How unbridged is the chasm, how impassable the track! You say Jacob is guilty, and ought to cry for mercy. What if he did? Could a prayer be even so much as heard across that infinite space? You claim he should be sorry for his sins. But he was not; and if he had been, what then? Could a tear, glistening in the glimmer of the starlight, be seen, if Jacob should suddenly grow penitent?

He lies there a hard, wicked man; but when his will falls asleep, and drops hold of the curb, his better nature breaks loose, and agitates him. The Jews in central Europe are accustomed to fable that every night the soul leaves the body in order to give in heaven an account of the manner in which the day has been spent; and that during its absence an evil spirit takes its place. Their first act, therefore, on awaking, is to give thanks for its restoration. Now reverse this story. Conceive that Jacob's soul has left his body to go and report elsewhere than in heaven; and see some signs that his sleeplessness, over which he groans petulantly, might well give him the reason for gratitude. You may imagine this a very insignificant incident in the story; but I solemnly press it upon you, that it was a grand thing for this fugitive that he was restless while the ladder of love was unfolding over him.

It has been noticed that idiots are agonized by the strains of music they chance to hear, and will fly from the infliction at first, almost frantically, as if in pain. The harmony of sweet sounds gives them distress beyond endurance. And yet

it is found that they can be moulded and calmed and tamed under the persistent notes of a flute. What is this but one of the strange mute laws of nature, which show it is the soul's habit to be restless under ruin? Put any perfection of order near it, and the poor wreck is worried with indistinct half-memories of what once was its own. Yet persist in the annoying endeavor, and that which confuses will gather the disturbed elements into harmony again. Its harassment and its help are one and the same.

Jacob felt the atonement when he could not see it. A tender conscience, a deep sensibility, a devout reverence, an easy conviction of sin, a passionate longing for a more substantial life, are as precious as fine gold to any man. They may distress him, but they will prompt him. They will disturb his slumber, but the dream he will have is far more valuable than the quiet. "Consume us here," said Augustine, "cut us to pieces here, only spare us in eternity!"

5. Learn, finally, that *retribution is lifted only by redemption.*

I use technical terms, for I desire to press New Testament meaning into this Old Testament story. Nor have I any recourse. The key to this entire chapter is found in that declaration of our divine Lord: "Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

God's mercy gave Jacob a chance at becoming a new man that night. It would have saved him Penuel and a forty years' wreck had he accepted it. Redemption would have warded off retribution. He might have beckoned an ascending angel to his side, and sent by him a prayer up the ladder; and then an angel descending along the shining rounds would have instantly brought him a message of pardon.

Surely any man can show some sign of a truly penitent heart. We may not have David's "rivers of waters" to pour from our eyes, nor even Jeremiah's wish that his head was a fountain; nor may we even, like Peter, go out and weep bit-

terly. But we can be sorry we do not sorrow. We can lament we do not shed tears, we can mourn we are not ashamed. We can turn in our sleep, like Jacob. We can be dissatisfied with ruinous repose, and utter some sobs of penitence, and some sighs of compunction, that shall show we desire a better life.

It comes to nothing to resolve and re-resolve, and then remain the same man. A thorough surrender to Jesus Christ, one that renders the soul a new creation, is alone of value.

“And lacking this, no man hath health ;
And lacking this, no man hath wealth ;
For land is trash, and gold is dross,
Success is failure, gain is loss,
Unless there lives in the human soul,
As hither and thither its passions roll,
Tossed on the waves of this mortal sea,
A hope, and a trust, and a will, and a faith,
That is stronger than life, and is stronger than death,
And equal to eternity !”

NEARER TO THEE.

NEARER, my God, to thee,
Nearer to thee !
Ev'n though it be a cross
That raiseth me !
Still all my song shall be,
Nearer, my God, to thee,
Nearer to thee !

Though like the wanderer,
The sun gone down,
Darkness be over me,
My rest a stone,
Yet in my dreams I'd be
Nearer, my God, to thee,
Nearer to thee !

There let the way appear,
Steps unto heaven ;
All that thou sendest me,
In mercy given ;
Angels to beckon me
Nearer, my God, to thee,
Nearer to thee !

Then, with my waking thoughts
Bright with thy praise,
Out of my stony griefs
Bethel I'll raise ;
So by my woes to be
Nearer, my God, to thee,
Nearer to thee !

Or if, on joyful wing
Cleaving the sky,
Sun, moon and stars forgot,
Upward I fly,
Still all my song shall be,
Nearer, my God, to thee,
Nearer to thee.

Bethel:

A MAN ASLEEP.

"And he took of the stones of the place, and put them for his pillows, and lay down in that place to sleep."—Gen. 28: 11.

HAS it ever fallen across your fancy or your need to investigate the simple, natural phenomenon of sleep? It is the most interesting and most perplexing of all our physical and metaphysical mysteries. Many a mother bends lovingly over her infant in the cradle, and wonders what it means—this harmless and painless lapsing of all life into unbroken tranquillity. These little hands, now so quiet, alas, what weary moments it took to hush them! How unutterably busy they seem to be most of the time; how beautiful and still they are now! These limbs, composed in attitudes of such unconscious grace on the long pillow, how hard it generally is to keep them in polite order during wakeful hours! And then, how indescribably solemn it seems to think how far the child is now beyond our reach. Who is it that has taken the soul in charge? It is related in ecclesiastical history that the parents of Origen used to uncover his breast as he slumbered, and print their kisses over his heart; for they said, "This is a temple of the Holy Ghost!"

When a man lies asleep, the spectacle is even more suggestive. Think of great Cæsar on his couch, his vigilant eyes closed, his voice of command silent, his brain unworking and still! Think of Alexander in the moonlit night, the

white light forcing itself through his tent—looking exactly as he finally looked when he lay in his glass coffin, dead!

Imagine how David felt when he saw Saul entering the cave where he lay hid with his men, and lying down unsuspectingly before him. The sight was too tempting; he dared not let his outlaw soldiers contemplate it; he instantly withdrew them. The king knew his exposure well afterwards, and might fitly have wept (as he did) when he received the skirt David cut off.

Think of Sisera “fast asleep and weary,” defenceless before female patriotism and rough wile. What sort of notion had he of what killed him when Jael drove the tent-pin suddenly through his temples, and pinned him to the ground? It does seem humiliating for a grown man to have to give up so into helplessness every night at sun-down, and surrender actually at discretion to the king of slumber.

And yet, I am persuaded, no person ever appears at better advantage than when he is just thus, in the most defenceless condition possible. If I wanted to disarm ill-feeling, if I hoped to awake charity, if I desired to effect reconciliation, I would show to any man his enemy asleep. I would expect more considerateness, when I could point to the breathing form so tranquil on the couch, and say: “He is a human being like yourself; even Elias was subject to like passions as we are; judge this man fairly; be as kind and forbearing as you can; and hope, when you sleep the last sleep, that all your fellows will stand by as pitifully as you do now, and say how much good there was in you, and hush their voices about the evil.”

Precisely with this purpose do I now lead you back to that hill-side at Bethel. I want you to see Jacob at his best as well as his worst. One great reason may be surmised why God “giveth his beloved sleep,” if it should turn out true that it makes us judge them more extenuatingly.

You will lose all the force of the lesson it is fitting we

should learn here, if you leave this story to discharge its meaning entirely upon the history and experience of this one slumbering patriarch. So you must behold him hereafter as a suggestion and specimen. Jacob is the type Israelite, the type Man, the type Christian, for all ages.

I.—He is the type ISRAELITE of his lineage.

We have learned, during long years of tumultuous history, to attach a distinctive and peculiar meaning to the name of *Jew*. There are great and honorable exceptions; but the application is wide, and the general significance (it must be confessed) is not lofty nor ennobling. The characteristics may be easily enumerated.

On the one side, we find the indomitable resolution; the patient fortitude; the industrious thrift; the fidelity to friends; the steadfast adherence to what is believed to be doctrinal truth; the burning zeal of energy; the unretaliating endurance of violent wrong; the unwavering faith; the beautiful hope, which shines unquenched through the years of humiliation, exclusion, and defeat; and the grand reverence for a past, of which (it is freely admitted) they have no reason to be ever ashamed. This it is which has made them worthy of the glowing panegyric: "A nation that living, shall die, and dying, shall live; trampled by all, shall trample on all; bleeding from a thousand wounds, shall be unhurt; beggared, shall wield the wealth of kingdoms; without a name, shall sway the councils of kings; without a city, shall inhabit in all lands; scattered like the dust, shall be bound together like the rock; perishing by the chain, by fire, by famine, shall be imperishable, unnumbered, glorious, as the stars of heaven!"

On the other side, we find the wonderful and unscrupulous shrewdness, the sharp cunning, the relentless avarice, the low craft, the penurious parsimony, the alertness to over-reach, the Shylock severity to the bond, the amazing resources in concealing duplicity and covering tracks behind it. It is just now passing around among literary people as a question to be

answered with some gravity, whether the English language is to be considered as having been permanently enriched by the introduction into our authorized dictionaries of the verb—"to *jew*;" which the lexicographer has somewhat plainly defined—"to cheat or defraud, to swindle."

Oh, mysterious nation is this! Mixed and confused, such a people and such attributes! Matchless in the past, enviable in the future! It becomes us to be silent. "If thou wert cut out of the olive-tree, which is wild by nature, and wert grafted, contrary to nature, into a good olive-tree, how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive-tree?"

From this night, Jacob becomes the pattern *Jew*. All that is good or bad in his descendants has its natural beginning in him. He had not yet received the name of Israel, but he was an Israelite nevertheless. As you look at him lying there on his stone pillow, however, it would be palpably out of place for any one to quote our Lord's remark, made long years after this, concerning Nathanael: "Behold an Israelite, indeed, in whom is no guile!"

The instruction under this head is to be found just here. Sometimes we say men are made by circumstances. This is true; and the rest of the truth is, that sometimes men make circumstances. Jacob was a product. With a poor start, circumstances became very influential in finishing him. Rebekah was a circumstance. Esau was another of them. And he became a circumstance to Laban, when he reached Padanaram. Men and women make men and women more than mere events or accidents do. And under God's providence, the classic apothegm is true: "*Quisque suæ fortunæ faber*"—every one is the architect of his own fortune. More unutterable meanness never was felt, or professed or exhibited, than when a man of Jacob's age gives as his excuse for wickedness, that circumstances made him different in moral force and purpose from others. Look at that runaway on the hill-side now, the lad-

der unrolled over him, and tell me in candor, whether it was necessary for him to set out upon that wretched forty years of sin! "Alas," says the Spanish proverb, "if folly were a pain, there would be shrieking all over the world!"

II.—Jacob is the type MAN of his race.

You have been thinking how far away he was from heaven; but not one degree farther off than you or I. When sin entered the heart of humanity, the entire race was cut loose from the favor of God. The breach has not yet been healed in all these years.

"Heaven and earth then stood asunder;
A dreary sea now rolls between;
Though neither heat, nor frost, nor thunder,
Can wholly do away, I ween,
The marks of that which once hath been."

The whole world is pervaded with one solemn sense of loss and degradation. This is as universal as the common humanity we wear. And yet not one of us submits to the separation tamely. Not one of us is wont to look upon the lot as irreparable. Even the old heathen felt that they belonged nearer God. The apostle Paul found a statement all prepared for his quotation when on Mars' Hill. He needed no more than to send through it the breath of his own inspiration to give it a place in the Bible: "Certain, also, of your own poets have said, 'for we are also his offspring.'" They called God their Father; but then, how indisputably far away they felt—and were—from the parental hand!

A sense of real spiritual want never gives a man any help, it only renders him restless; worse than any stone pillow it is for that. Down we are; and it is no comfort at all to be reminded constantly that we have fallen down. We have lost much; but it does not bring any remedy to be unceasingly told what it is that we miss. Would it not be better then, if a generous mercy on high would simply suffer us to slumber on in nerveless, painless, quiet; is there any propriety in stir-

ring us up with convulsing anxieties, regrets, and apprehensions ; are we any the cleaner in the sight of a pure God, by being tormented before our time ?

Such talk is not only very heterodox according to the schools, but (what will strike more impressively, perhaps,) is absolutely unphilosophical and silly in itself. This prevailing pressure on the soul is valuable, in that it sets us on in the way to seek help with greater vigor in the exigency. It was left in the human heart even after the wreck of Paradise, so as to form part of the education for a coming Saviour ; a reminder of the pure past to become a promise of a purer future. The heathen without the Bible tell us of Pandora's box with hope in the bottom ; the Rabbis with the Bible tell us that Eve, when she was driven out of Eden, took the last chance she had, and privately plucked one sweet living flower, concealing it in her garment. All these vague yearnings of human nature after God show what it once was, and are the pledge of what it may yet, through redemption, become.

Better—better for us—is this home-sickness, this wistful longing after the good, the beautiful, and the true ; aye, better even these awful monitions of unappeased conscience, these moanings and roarings of the unseen, unreached ocean of wrath—than the sleep that slays the soul, and the torpor that damns it !

So, as I said, Jacob lying out there in the midnight is the type of us all. For the bright ladder of redemption is in the air over his head, and he turns himself restlessly upon the stones. The world, like some prodigal son disinherited and ashamed, covers its face in acknowledgment of disgrace. It admits it has been cursed and discarded. It has no rightful place in its Father's house.

But it will not keep away. It will not accept any name but His. It finds a kind of joy in saying it belongs to Him still. It is groping after Him daily, if haply it may find Him. And hence there are times when poor humanity drops its

wearied head down upon stone pillows, for it has no other ; but there it remains with upturned countenance, beseechingly appealing to heaven, ready to be recognized whenever the Infinite Eye looks down.

And the lesson here is just as simple as the other. Let a man know himself. Let him understand, first and last and once for all, that *what he wants is God*. Not fame—not wealth—not friends—not country—not home—yes, in a sense all of these, but over and above any one of them, he is soul-hungry and soul-thirsty after God. And he will never be at peace till he rests in God, the centre of all hope and joy.

. III.—Jacob is the type CHRISTIAN of the church.

I choose the words, for I wish to identify believers under the old dispensation with those under the new. There is but one Redeemer, and there is only one family of the redeemed. The church is one in all ages, one in spirit, one also in faith. Those ancient saints looked forward to Christ ; we look back ; they were about as near as we are. I find on my calendar 1872 *Anno Domini*. I find in my reference Bible, alongside of Abraham's offering Isaac, 1872 *Before Christ*. He discovered the ram in the thicket, so topographers say, on the exact spot where the foot of the cross of Jesus was planted. Our Lord once constructed an argument upon the mere use of a present-tense in grammar, when he said : " Before Abraham was, *I am*." Thus he identified himself with the I AM whose name was revealed to Moses. This was the reason why the Jews took up stones to stone him.

Jacob was the type Christian for all ages. Shun his wrong, follow his right ; but just see in him yourself and us all. You will note these three particulars—the choice made of him by God's sovereignty, the conflict wrought in him by God's Spirit, the hope held out before him by God's grace.

1. *He was chosen even before he was born.*

Discussion frequently confuses, but Scripture is always in order. Some people dislike the ninth chapter of Romans

This is one of the verses : "For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of him that calleth, it was said unto Rebekah, The elder shall serve the younger ; as it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." This seems mysterious, for everybody who reads the story likes Esau the best of the two.

But so far from shirking any difficulty, or evading any issue, the inspired men use this historic example, putting it forward for an explanation why God chooses anybody. Thus reasons Malachi : "I have loved you saith the Lord. Yet ye say, Wherein hast thou loved us? Was not Esau Jacob's brother? saith the Lord ; yet I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau, and laid his mountains and his heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness."

How amazing the thought that this man, lying with his head on the stones, is the choice child of the stock, the head of the sacred line, the hope of the Church, the progenitor of the Redeemer—in a word, he is *Israel* himself, as yet unnamed and unconverted. God has foreknown him, has predestinated him ; he is going to call him to-night ; and by-and-by he will justify him, and eventually he will glorify him.

2. *He is now in the thick of the conflict between nature and grace.*

Cunning and craft are not Christian virtues. One may insinuate himself into his father's blessing ; one may take advantage of a brother's hunger, and purchase a birth-right with red pottage ; and yet not shine with any remarkable resemblance to Jesus. These are not Jacob's best points. Indeed, best points are what you will not find just now by any analysis of his character. Battles are not fought in palaces. When you want to know who is king, it is after the fight is ended that you must go to the throne-room. When Saul was after David, it looked very much as if David had the worst of it ; but in proper time David wore the crown, and Saul's sons were hanged.

In most cases we have to wait a while before we can decide as to the results in these spiritual campaigns. Now as to this man Jacob, you are about thirty years too early to judge him fairly. He is too shrewd for a convert. ' He is more afraid of Esau than he is of God. He likes Rebekah's plots more than Isaac's prayers. He does not make a good show at all just at present. But still there is that in him which will bear fruit by-and-by.

For you see God's Spirit has a hold upon him. In twenty years after this you will find him at the brook Jabbok, torn with an awful experience that lames him and lifts him. He is only plain Jacob—"a supplanter"—now; then he will wrestle with the Angel of the Covenant, and be re-named "a princely prevailer with God." And ten years after that, he will be back here at Bethel once more. You will find him building an altar out of his "pillows." He will lay Deborah close by in an honored grave under one of these rare oaks, and will shed honest tears over the death of a good woman; for the spot will be named Allon-bachuth, "the oak of weeping." He will be a better man then. You will think a great deal more of him. Perhaps you will give him heartfelt sympathy; for he will bury Rachel a little further down towards his old home. Those thirty years will have wrought a wonderful change in him. His experience is not very clear now; then he will have become a gentle, humble, good man. God's Spirit will have conquered.

3. *He will eventually be saved in the kingdom of heaven.*

And that is the best we can say of him. It is the best that can be said of any young man, going forth on the world. Jacob will work out his own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in him both to will and to do of His good pleasure. Out of all the vicissitudes of a stormy life, he will ultimately educe rest, and peace, and glory. For this fugitive is to have the Christian hope in his heart.

He will deceive Laban, and be cheated by him. He has

wounded his old father ; his sons will wound him cruelly when he has become old. Rachel, whom he is to love most, will never see Rebekah, who most loved him. He is poor as man can be now, and live ; he will grow rich beyond reckoning soon. A lot, that startles with its many versatilities, will cast upon him wild experience of every sort ; but through it all he will wind his sinuous way. Led by the hand of Divine Providence, he will traverse the land, and eventually reach the Canaan it symbols, a redeemed believer, washed from his sins in the blood of the one Atonement.

He will suffer, however, suffer terribly, before he reaches his rest. He deserves to suffer, as a kind of earthly retribution ; for he is guilty as any son or brother can well be. He has brought all his pains on himself ; he will bring yet worse. "Not in the sky," says the Buddhist adage, "not in the midst of the sea, not if we enter into the clefts of the mountains, is there known a spot in the whole world, where a man might be freed from the penalty of an evil deed."

But none of Jacob's sufferings will be of any help to him on the grand question. Not Jacob's suffering, but Jesus', are accepted at the bar of Divine justice. If he had gone up the ladder sooner, he would have lived a higher life. Jacob will have to take another's garment for his robe of righteousness. And all he can say at the last, will be what one of his own children said to him on one mournful occasion when he was suffering the most ; all he can say as he comes before the throne of his Father is this, "Know now whether this be *THY SON'S* coat or no ?"

So much then for our story. We are looking upon this sleeping man, however, not so much for his sake, as for our own. Let us search for something to think about as we separate. Three fine texts of scripture are illustrated at once. They will suggest our lessons if we repeat them in turn.

1. This is one of them : "There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."

That means there is no salvation for any one out of Christ. If you could make an exception, it would be, of course, in favor of so important an individual as this patriarch Jacob; for did not the Almighty say over and over again, he was the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob? What a line of respectable people this young man belonged to! But he needed an atonement.

Hannah More once wrote to John Newton, reporting some religious work she had been trying to do: "In some of the most profligate places we have had most success; and where we chiefly fail is with your *pretty good kind of people*, who do not see how they need to be made any better."

For any man, it is the recognition of Jesus' robe of righteousness before the bar of Justice, which makes his hope in all the conflict. No matter what orderly garments the guests wear when they enter the feast-chamber, what the master of the house sees is the wedding-garment he has furnished. And that "friend" who came in without it, will go out speechless. Oh, it is just this which renders life endurable, the serene hope at the end! To lie out on the rockiest hill-side is nothing, if over us the vision of the unrolled ladder of grace is in the air. No matter what the confusions of the fight may be, if only at the last we may stand redeemed and saved.

2. Our next text is this: "Why should ye be stricken any more?"

Do not make any mistake. Jacob's way of coming at this blessing is not commended. He lost time. He never reached his rest till after his awful wrestling. It is a terribly long and hard way to Penuel around by Padan-aram. Why should any one covet fruitless suffering by delay of surrender? Better acquaint thyself quickly with God, and be at peace now. You lose nothing, and may save much. The spot whereon thou standest is as holy ground as that at Bethel or Penuel either. God stands ready to help.

We were very much touched by that picture in a church at

Naples, a converted building, once dedicated to Diana of the Ephesians. It represents a statue of Vice ; a young man, athletic and sinewy, strains to disentangle his limbs from a rope net ; an angel is busily giving him aid ; and underneath is scrolled the motto from Nahum's prophecy—" For now will I break his yoke from off thee, and will burst thy bonds in sunder." How affecting it seems to think of Divine interposition, supplementing human weakness ! Oh, why presume on God's forbearance ! " Why should ye be stricken any more ? "

3. Hear this other text now : " God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spoke in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son."

If one were to preach a score of sermons upon this vision of Jacob, it would seem as if he ought to quote Jesus' words to the Jew Nathanael in every one of them. For the explanation of its entire meaning is found in that New Testament passage—" And he saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man." What this dreaming fugitive saw only in symbol, we may see in fact. Christ is here ; blessing comes down the ladder, when prayer goes up after it.

Since the night when Jacob lay out on the stones at the city of Luz, three thousand five hundred years have passed, and must not go for nothing. Indeed, the Bethel angels have been singing on Bethlehem heights ! God has himself come down in human form. What more can he do for you than now he has done ? He says, " Come unto me, and I will give you rest." He cannot do more ; for when he made you a free agent, he decided he would force no man into heaven against his will. You must take the next step for yourself, and the Spirit helps even in that. There is no other way.

" Though Christ a thousand thousand times
 In Bethlehem be born,
 If yet he be not born in thee,
 Thy soul is still forlorn."

ANGELS OF JESUS.

HARK! hark, my soul; angelic songs are swelling
O'er earth's green fields, and ocean's wave-beat shore:
How sweet the truth those blessed strains are telling
Of that new life where sin shall be no more.
Angels of JESUS, Angels of light,
Singing to welcome the pilgrims of the night.

Onward we go, for still we hear them singing,
"Come, weary souls, for JESUS bids you come:"
And, through the dark its echoes sweetly ringing,
The music of the Gospel leads us home.
Angels of JESUS, Angels of light,
Singing to welcome the pilgrims of the night.

Far, far away, like bells at evening pealing,
The voice of JESUS sounds o'er land and sea,
And laden souls by thousands meekly stealing,
Kind Shepherd, turn their weary steps to thee.
Angels of JESUS, Angels of light,
Singing to welcome the pilgrims of the night.

Rest comes at length, though life be long and dreary,
The day must dawn, and darksome night be past;
Faith's journey ends in welcome to the weary,
And heaven, the heart's true home, will come at last.
Angels of JESUS, Angels of light,
Singing to welcome the pilgrims of the night.

Angels, sing on! your faithful watches keeping;
Sing us sweet fragments of the songs above;
Till morning joy shall end the night of weeping,
And life's long shadows break in cloudless love.
Angels of JESUS, Angels of light,
Singing to welcome the pilgrims of the night.

Bethel:

SPIRITUAL DREAMING.

"And he dreamed."—GEN. 28: 12.

IT is not well to dream. Sleep, to be healthful, ought to be sound. To have visions proves gluttony sometimes, and sometimes proves sin. A clogged digestion, or a sore conscience, will fill the night air full of strange sights. When a child is uneasy, we fear he is feverish; when a man is disturbed, we know he has something on his mind.

It has come to our recognition already, in the study of this story, that Jacob, lying out under the stars, is a type of our race. He undertook to rest with his head on a stone, just outside the gates of the city of Luz. But he *dreamed*. Never mind what he saw: the fact is enough. He was harassed with an unquiet heart; and from after events we find he was calmed only by the disclosure of God's nearness, and by the revelation of God's promise in redemption.

Upon that simple incident I fasten now for the lodgement of a thought which I am persuaded is of great moment to every soul. The proposition of it is this:

The entire human race is broken of its rest, by reason of its distance from God.

And I ask you to consider, first the Fact, and then its Bearing.

I.—Did you ever see the excitement produced in a rural village by an eclipse of the sun? Did you ever imagine how

the nations at large only repeated the spectacle you saw, as almost the whole community came forth just to stand tip-toe gazing into heaven? Away in the scientific tower the astronomer was turning his great telescope towards the retreating line of shadow. Here in the plain, the simple rustic was guarding his eye with a fragment of smoked glass. Excited throngs crowded the outlook of a hundred eminences. All with upturned and curious gaze were watching the slow reappearance of that orb which was the genial source of gladness to their hearts and homes.

There are certain instincts common to the race of man. Among them, that which is the strongest and most thoroughly human, is a religious sensibility and a spirit of devout inquiry. The great world is looking upward, patiently and yet painfully watching for the long eclipse to pass away from the sun of its hope. Each intelligent soul is on the wistful search for its own God.

This is the point I press. In the very centre of its confessed deterioration, mingled with all its confusions, the race has always held to the belief, partly tradition and partly hope, that it may one day come back into communion with God. The one fixed element of all history is this ceaseless labor to establish some kind of communication with Him who sits on the throne. There has never been a record made on the books of time of a great deed done, an epoch fixed, or an era begun, into which there has not needed to be entered some recognition of a religious striving after God. Even when men tried to be easy, and find tranquil repose under their weariness, nature has asserted herself in the sleep of the ages, and the soul has been troubled with dreams.

If you prefer to cling to the exact picture of the story, then let me say again, that this man Jacob cannot force himself to slumber so profoundly as not to dream. He is not at one with his Maker, by reason of guilt. And the moment the pressure of his will is withdrawn, his anxious heart will be off on the old quest.

1. The world has been broken of its rest by a little dream of *Legislation*.

Why is it that you find always, as civilization advances, a religious element in the laws of every land? Why does the State continually tend towards alliances with the Church? You know very well that wars have been fought more for religions and worships than for territories and titles. The philosophy is as shallow as it is proud, which will not recognize this fact. Men there are who deride it; who seriously propose to write a history of civilization, and yet leave out this as a motive, this pressure of a striving after peace with the Highest. They insist that a quantity, so evanescent and so variable, and at the same time so impossible to measure on their registers of calculation, is not to be suffered to enter at all into the computations of dignified philosophy. Concerning which suffer just two remarks, that anybody of moderate penetration might make.

One remark is this: it seems a little singular, not to say somewhat coarse and materialistic, that great men refuse to invite into consideration any force in society, unless they can settle first of how much horse-power, mechanically, it is.

The other remark is this: this thing will come in, any way, without asking. A world, which knows itself to be in darkness, and yet will not abide there if it can help it—a world which has no sun and no stars—will be sure to make some strange illumination of its own.

You see each winter night those spectral lances of the northern aurora piercing the horizon. And there are curious and mysterious glimmerings in the moral and spiritual world, shining in the enactments, and in the customs and manners that are as fixed as enactments, which the impatient soul of poor humanity thrusts up into notice, not a little analogous to these.

Now a wise and generous science should recognize, should investigate, and should not deride them. And this, all the more because they are so tremulous and novel. True history

is bound to inquire into them with greater zeal when it finds they are signs of distress. If they are unnoticed in the past, then nobody knows why certain eras and ages glistened so in surrounding gloom. If they are unnoticed in the present, if they are passed by in haughty disdain, these faint outward yearnings of the human heart after God, they will occasionally assert themselves into perils. Just as those slender lines of magnetic fire in the Borealis will not only burn balefully upon the countenance, but will force themselves to be felt in varying the needles of thousands who despise them, and turning the courses of common-place commerce into shoals and breakers. For there is no truth more settled in this universe, than that the mightiest impulsions, natural and moral, are ever the most inappreciable and even the most silent.

2. The world has been broken of its rest, also, by a little dream of *Priestcraft*.

You are surely aware by this time that the nations are everywhere immolating each other, as well as putting all sorts of living animals to the knife. Classes of men, dressed oddly, reared in secret, clothed with singular authority, rule the people with rods of iron. The people like it. It is a little difficult to settle in some quarters, whether a crosier or a sceptre is the best sign of a real monarch—I mean the one who does the governing. It is the old, old story over again, only the forms change.

What was *Astrology*? Those ancient devotees who practised it searched sedulously for the exact position of the stars, when any important undertaking was to be commenced. Moreover, they carefully calculated the horoscope (so they called it) of their children. Some little remnant of that figures still in our almanacs. To be born under certain stars, was dreadfully unfortunate. To have the shining of the right constellations over one's natal day, was the best benediction of God.

But why consult the *stars*—you ask. Because they were high overhead. They were the only thing between Jacob's upturned face and heaven itself. They were nearer God.

They rolled in their orbits next to the very sapphire floor underneath the divine throne. They might well be conjectured to know something of God's will. They would hear Him speak. His thunders reverberated among them, and humanity desired to open a parley in its war with its Maker ; and the most it could do was to listen to the white-robed soothsayers, who talked with the glittering worlds nearest to Him. That was priestcraft.

What was *Haruspicy*? On the eve of battle, the Roman soldiers shot birds with their arrows, and brought their bodies, still palpitating with life, to the commissioned priests, who proceeded sedately to search their entrails, with many an incantation, and amid the smoke of much burning gum and scented resin on the incense-altar, in order to detect signs, known only to the illuminated and the expert, by which to settle difficult questions as to precarious results.

Why examine the *birds*—you ask again. All priestcraft, of course ; but then the most bewildered men will often have some reason in their madness. The birds flew very high. Twilight birds especially flit with supernatural mystery through the skies. They seem very much like angels, to those who never see angels. The name Dante applies to angels is "Birds of God." These winged creatures go up next the stars, perhaps next heaven ; they may overhear God in counsel. It was a conceivable thing even that Deity should hide His word in their hearts. And men wanted to hear from God. Unfortunately the space was unbridged, and no human being could fly.

3. The world has been broken of its rest, likewise, by a little dream of *Atonement*.

There was something deeper in the human heart than mere curiosity, or it would never have endured a fixed priesthood during so many and so cruel disappointments as it had to meet. Sometimes the oracles were discovered to have lied outright. A battle would go wrong even when the bird's heart was just right, and all the other inner organs in the

proper places. A voyage would be unprospered, even when every star had reached the exact ascension. Men would have said a million times—These omens are a cheat! But then back on themselves they fell helplessly, and the old pain began to ache worse than ever.

What old pain? That of unrelieved sin, I answer. *Guilt* is the one excruciating anguish of the human heart. And then there was nothing more to do, except to make every effort to placate God. An offended deity must be propitiated with sight and scent of blood. The most fiendish ingenuity of the human intellect has been exercised in the invention of new forms of ritual service at sacrificial altars. Fire burns, water drowns, and earth buries, numberless and unwilling victims to the irate god of the hour.

All priestcraft—you say; all priestcraft—any one might want to continue to say. But wait a moment; this will not do. Such things are beyond priestcraft. The world has taken its case into its own hands. No man will thrust coals into his forehead, to satisfy a seer. No woman will hurl her child into the Ganges, because a soothsayer beats a drum. You will fall far short of any adequate conception of these bloody purposes of men, if you can go no further than to assert that they are grounded in ignorance and tyranny, superstition, and force of caste. For there remains the fact that the priests themselves observed the awful rites they ordained, and the tyrants obey the fierce requisitions they enact. And still after that, there will meet you the unanswered question, Who made the priests at first, and who originated the castes, and who enthroned the tyrants?

No, no! the troubled heart of guilty man himself bound up and fastened on the burden he is bearing. It is trying, under the weight of these multiplied severities of sacrifice, to forget another burden which is heavier, its separation from God. It suggests atonement. It is endeavoring to show the deity that its will is now bended to his.

For look at the word *sacrifice*. What does it mean? Is

not the idea primarily that of self-denial and self-infliction of pain? The very essence of the thing is found in the subjection of *self* to the Divine Being to whom the offering is brought.

More readily, perhaps, the illustration will occur to you, taken from the early Jewish ritual. A sinner led up his victim to the Levite; it was slain, and he went his way relieved from the pressure upon his conscience. But how? Doubtless an unreflective person would say it was because he felt the poorer by a lamb or a pigeon, and could be tranquil under the satisfying consciousness of generosity, in having added a gift to the store of the temple. But this is feeble explanation. It did not add to the store of the temple, or increase the riches of God. It was burnt up.

Sacrifice means more than pecuniary loss. The man saw that God had a right to demand something of him; when he met that demand, he surrendered his *will*. When the offender stood at the altar long enough to see the innocent blood flow, and the muscles writhe in the agony of death, he knew all this suffering was vicarious. In that mortal moment he felt there was vital connection between himself and the animal which was breathing its last. It died that he might live. In its immolation he himself had been slain. Thus in God's way, he supposed he bent to God's law. He acknowledged responsibility, professed allegiance, admitted guilt, and so took release from peril on the celestial terms.

This is the significance of all sacrifice among the nations, however rude and however intelligent. It is the way men and women have of showing that they are willing to make honest endeavor to meet the will of Deity offended, and so again to be *at one* with him. Some say this is the meaning of the word atonement. It is at-one-ment. Sure we are that it is no less an innate conviction than an inspired declaration, that "without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin."

4. The world has been broken of its rest by a little dream of *Reform*.

The earliest method of relief which any one would take, under the pressure of conscience, after discovering that legislation could not lift him out from the depth of divine displeasure, that priestcraft was only deluding him, and that sacrifice is not now acceptable, would most likely be this: he would attempt an immediate and effective reformation of himself. He would regulate his life and action, he would rein in his passions, he would renovate his entire character by a strenuous will. Thus he would straighten things.

For what is *wrong*? Look at the etymology of the word; it means that which is *wrung*. Something is twisted out of shape; something is warped out of proportion. Hence we call a straight line a *right* line. Hence the Bible has much to say about a "crooked generation," a "crooked serpent," and walking in "crooked ways."

So, naturally, the first effort of any penitent man, thoroughly in earnest, would be to take himself in hand, and warp back that which was twisted, putting the worst part of his broken and deformed nature into splinters.

By what means? Easy methods, of course, as being those nearest at hand. Manliness would be cultivated. Vicious indulgences would be cut off. Associates would be changed. Weakening appetites would be checked or eradicated. There would be no end to the strictness of regimen which might be supposed likely to accomplish so desirable an end.

"As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man." What one person would do, all would do as soon. So the world at large, communities by a sort of epidemic, have tried what has been called a general reformation of manners, many and many a time; and things have grown immensely moral.

The worst of this is, that men of feeling and thought become disgusted, when they become disheartened under the failure of such discipline, and rush back with a reaction as violent as it is stubborn. They say it is no use; and then it happens unto them according to the true proverb, "The dog

is turned to his own vomit again ; and, The sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire."

Thus, then, we force our way to quite sufficient proof of the proposition with which we set out. From its laws and its rituals, from its sacrifices and its reforms, we learn beyond a question that the entire human race is broken of its rest by reason of its distance from God.

II.—This is the Fact ; I should suppose you might be ready now to kindly study with me its Bearing. And to show you how sincerely we share with you in all that the theme involves, I propose to instance only two lessons ; one for the pulpit, one for the pews.

1. And for the pulpit first. It seems very sad to think that whatever the mistake any poor burdened sinner makes nowadays, he can easily find, if he journeys long enough, commissioned preachers to help him in his disheartening delusion. There are in high fame many, who have hearers to admire, and flatterers to bepraise them, who nevertheless do not seem to know how the gospel was framed to meet human need. You leave their accustomed ministrations, perhaps actually wishing you could believe what you hear them say ; but always you depart as you came, with a sighing sense of want in your heart. They do not in any sermon work out *your* problems. They are invariably driving at something which you cannot make out. They contend fiercely, at times, in a fine show of declamatory passion, with an adversary of some sort, a villain or a doctrine, a creed or a philosopher, a vice or a catechism. But they never go soberly down with you into the valley of Humiliation, where you daily have to meet your private Apollyon.

What do you go to hear them for? They would die out, if they had no audience. The questions you hear discussed are those of every-day morality, or of curious ethical and speculative casuistry. They will tell you your duties towards your fellow-men, and the rights you can justly be permitted to claim. They have much to say concerning the sweet amenities

of our common brotherhood, and the great humanities of society at large. They reason powerfully about honesty and manliness, and give now and then such hits that the hearers almost applaud. They denounce meanness and pride with all fitting violence ; and you think of a hundred men whom the charge fits.

But this is all. Meantime you were not conscious of having cheated anybody. You were singularly disposed to be charitable. You never felt less stuck-up. But what you wanted beyond anything else in the world, was to know how to be at peace with God, not with man. And at no point in all the showy discourses did they force you back upon your old question, and attempt to give you an answer. As to how your soul may become just in the sight of your Maker, they left you restless and unhelped.

Now all I have to say is this : If any preacher of so-called Christianity has no other gospel for his hearers than that which concerns their earthly relationships, he has no right to name himself, or the church he represents, after Christ. Jacob's restlessness, as he lay there and dreamed, was not because of what he had done to Esau, or was going to do to Laban ; his trouble lay in his relations to God. And he is no true gospel ministrant, who seeks to satisfy this guilty human soul with a "ladder set up upon the earth, and the top of it reaching"—to Beersheba, or Padan-aram. It must be the Son of Man in type. Christ died to save sinners. The ladder must reach "into heaven" itself.

2. But the main lesson bears on ourselves. It touches all classes of men, and comes in contact with every soul.

Can you not all see that the trouble is not with ministers, but with your own heart? It is not possible that a mere intellect to plan, and a mere will to execute, can put a man at peace with God. These restless, undefined yearnings of your nature, which agitate you hourly ; that sense of distance between you and your Maker ; that wild rush of reainless passion ; that awful anticipation of unrevealed destiny ; that

fearful looking-for of judgment, with no present disclosure and no future promise—these experiences will never lie down to rest with you. Unrefreshed and feverish, you may slumber like Jacob ; but like him also, you will turn and groan and sigh in your dream.

It seems now fairly impossible that any one can fail to see how little dignity, how little manliness, there is in the shame which many are known to feel, when told by a by-stander that they are concerned for their own salvation. Poor Simon Peter, out in the quadrangle by the fire of coals, was surprised no doubt, but was there any reason he should swear so, when the servant-girl ventured the remark he had been one of Jesus' friends? What is there for any man to become excited about, when he is addressed on this theme? How absurd for any one of you to fly into a passion with the question : Are you growing *serious*? There is a little volume you get very angry over, when you are invited to read it, from the mere title : "The Anxious Inquirer." But think a moment, on which side of this mighty question does the absurdity lie? *The whole world has been for a hundred ages an anxious inquirer.* The greatest minds of the human race are this very day, severely agitated concerning the salvation of the soul. Human nature cries out after God. You can repress your noblest yearnings by a violent effort in a wakeful hour, but you will talk in your sleep. You have to deny your own deepest life, when you refuse to be an anxious inquirer. Yet how you cringe and cower, how you wince and blush, and prevaricate, often at the mere word! And you call yourself an independent, you consider yourself a brave, man!

Let me show you your picture. You are on shipboard, we will imagine, and there is danger of the vessel's going down in an hour. The captain has surrendered to the elements ; there is no hope. In your quiet way, you have been making ready all you can for the awful plunge. You have been fortunate enough to secure a spar and a rope's end. You have never imagined otherwise than that that was the sensible thing

to do in the exigency. Just as you are lashing yourself soberly to the timber, you hear a loud laugh behind you. A reckless and drunken fellow-traveller has detected you at the work. He points you out with his finger. He sneers at you the question—*Are you getting serious?*

In utter confusion, your eyes down, a lie of explanation on your lips as to your happening to be in such an attitude, you drop the rope, and pitch the spar overboard. You begin yourself to laugh defiantly. You aver you never had a fear. You are not the man to be alarmed. You joke about old Neptune, and your quarters down in the wet waves. You jibe others that feel concerned, and you walk away all pride in your action—alas, alas, all tremor, all soreness, all pain in your heart! Tell me, tell me, who is the *coward* here?

Oh, my dear imperiled friend, whoever you are that see these words of mine, I own to you I am an anxious inquirer yet. I am at times afraid my weak faith will fail me. Singularly enough, it is when I am most alarmed, I feel most confident. The best I can say—I who seem to be pressing you so courageously—is, that I am working out my own salvation with fear and trembling. I know a sanctuary where there is certainly one anxious inquirer every Lord's Day; and that is the man in the pulpit. And I tell you I am not alone in this sensibility: the whole world is awfully anxious, and ought to be so. And he is simply a coward at heart who in his pride refuses to own it.

Jesus Christ of Nazareth, crucified and raised from the dead, is the stone which has become the head of the corner. "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." What other one is needed, when this is so sure and so free?

"IN CHRIST."

THE Son of God, in mighty love,
Came down to Bethlehem for me,
Forsook his throne of light above,
An infant upon earth to be.

In love, the Father's sinless child
Sojourned at Nazareth for me ;
With sinners dwelt the Undeiled,
The Holy One in Galilee.

Jesus whom angel hosts adore,
Became a man of griefs for me :
In love, though rich, becoming poor,
That I, through him, enriched might be.

Though Lord of all above, below,
He went to Olivet for me ;
He drank my cup of wrath and woe,
And bled in dark Gethsemane.

The ever-blessed Son of God
Went up to Calvary for me :
There paid my debt, there bore my load
In his own body on the tree.

Jesus, whose dwelling is the skies,
Went down into the grave for me ;
There overcame my enemies,
There won the glorious victory.

'Tis finished all : the veil is rent,
The welcome sure, the access free ;
Now then, we leave our banishment,
O Father, to return to thee !

Bethel:

THE LADDER OF DOCTRINE.

"And behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven."—GEN. 28: 12.

YEARS ago it came in my way to examine the objections made to this familiar story, on the ground of a want of dignity in the image employed. I could not force myself then to be impressed in any great degree with the extreme fastidiousness of some expositors, who seemed to be so offended because Jacob's vision was of no more elevated character. A ladder, they said, was commonplace. The translation must be inaccurate or infelicitous. They would have it that what this young man saw was a succession of tremendous mountains, a flight of rocky hills, like a giant's staircase, along and over which the angels floated with winged shoulders and feet.

The Septuagint word for the somewhat obscure Hebrew term is *climax*; and climax simply means a series of steps or of ladder-rungs. There is no violence done to the literal language in the rendering given in our excellent English version. Indeed, there is one fine declivity, cut into footholds, on the Mediterranean shore, called the Ladder of Tyre. We may be very willing that those who are not satisfied with so homely a figure should try to picture a beautiful column, or a series of clouds, thunder-rifted and torn, or even a magnificent chain of mountains rising in successive slopes far away into the firmament.

The "pyramid" theory, however, for one I do not like. I once saw quite a number of beings "ascending and descend-

ing" upon the courses of the Great Pyramid at Ghizeh. They did not resemble angels. I recalled Jacob's vision; but I did not think this to be any improvement. I was not struck at all with any sense of increase of dignity. Between the two, I prefer the ladder.

But it has fallen to my lot within a brief period to actually visit Bethel in the Land of the Bible. We came up from the Jordan, and the ancient site of Jericho, by a somewhat unusual path, near what must once have been Gilgal. The ride was most rugged and fatiguing. By the time we had attained the highest ground, not far from the Rock of Rimmon, we were almost exhausted. The sun beat upon our defenceless heads with a merciless severity as it shone over the mountains of Moab. And when at noon we reached the slope that looked straight down upon the spot where Jacob must have lain, near the old city of Luz, we had to pause by the way, and spread our carpet under an opportune copse of trees for an hour's repose and recuperation.

I remember now how instinctively I found a stone for my pillow. Everybody does it there. You have nothing else to keep your head up from the gravelly ground. And the thick muslin, like a turban, which we all wear to guard against sun-stroke, falls between the temples and the rock, breaking the sense of hardness. After our slight repast, we waited for the heat to mild a little. It would have been well to sleep; but how could any one close his eyes in slumber under such associations? All at once I started with an exclamation of surprise. I had grown drowsy perhaps, but through my hands I thought I saw the vision I was thinking of. All our company turned their eyes towards the spot.

There could be no mistaking it. A long beautiful valley lay right down before us, wonderfully green with the first verdure of spring. It stretched away for full three or four miles, rising in the grade all the time, until it faded into dimness and disappearance on the summit of a high hill. It was *terraced* with conspicuous stone all along the sides, so that it

rested, outlined and plain, between two lengths of rude masonry the entire distance. Across the slender tongue of land, *terraces*, at right angles to the others, had also been constructed, perhaps every forty rods or thereabouts. Thus the appearance was precisely that of a gigantic ladder or stone wall, one end close by us, distinct at our feet, the other almost touching the sky.

Here, then, was the faultless natural image, out of which Jacob's dream grew. We laid our heads back upon the "pillows," and in an instant the illusion was perfect. Away from us, from earth to heaven, that exquisite structure rose, on its background of beautiful green. Some such natural vision as this must have formed the first frame-work of the gorgeous spectacle which this patriarch saw, as the haze of the evening fell over his drowsy eyes. To this divine grace added the angels, the disclosure of God, and the words of promise.

The vision is generally mentioned by a single term ; and yet there was far more importance to be attached to everything else, rather than to the ladder. Over it was seen the form of Jehovah. Angels passed and repassed upon it. Indeed it was these other things which distinctly moved the mind of Jacob, for when he speaks he makes mention only of them. He calls no attention to the terrace, but he exclaims : " Surely, the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not ! This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven ! "

So solemn is such an expression of sentiment and feeling that we become convinced on the instant that this part of Jacob's history has more than usual of meaning and majesty. And perhaps it will tend to an orderly study if I announce two points here as coming before us in turn ; the prophetic significance of the scene, and its doctrinal reach.

I.—When we take into account all the circumstances of this vision, we shall become certain that the lesson of such a midnight spectacle could not have been exclusively personal

to Jacob—nor is it exhausted in any mere engagement of God's providential care—it must be interpreted as belonging to the kingdom of grace—and it is discharged of its full weight of meaning only when we admit it to be a fine high symbol of Jesus Christ.

1. *It could not have been exclusively personal to Jacob.* For there is found, as we have seen from our former studies, very little in the history or condition of this fugitive patriarch to commend him to divine favor. He expected nothing. He did not know Jehovah was there. And if only a mere encouragement was intended, the words spoken would have been quite sufficient without the shining sight that was seen. Jacob certainly could have been informed he would fall among friends in Laban's house, and eventually be rich enough to return to the region of rocks around Luz, without any disclosure of a ladder with angels upon it.

2. *Furthermore, the vision is not exhausted in any mere engagement of God's providential care.* For the entire force of the long prediction, which greets the ear of that hushed and wondering man, is found in the reiteration of the identical covenant made with his father and grandfather, Isaac and Abraham. It may be admitted freely that the symbol would not be by any means an unfitting figure of divine government in the world, this ladder reaching from heaven to earth, with its angels to become "ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them," who are the "heirs of salvation." But in these utterances of divine prediction there was included that one announcement as to which there could be no mistake; namely, that of the Messiah, a Redeemer of men, to be born of the line, in which Jacob himself hereafter was to be reckoned.

3. *Hence the vision must be interpreted as belonging to the kingdom of grace.* For in the correlate points of the story there will be found the nicest adjustment and response of need and supply. This fugitive son was the type of humanity distinct and forcibly separated from God. And such a

supernatural ladder, crossing the gulf, could be no more nor less than the answering type of a communication once more opened and established between man's desolation and the divine love. There is no recognizable connection between this exile's private experiences, and that beautiful vision of disclosed mercy, reaching out from celestial gladness into the regions of terrestrial want. We are persuaded on the instant, that as the obscure allusion in the address foretells Christ as the promised Seed, in whom all the families of the earth are to be blessed, so this clear spectacle of the terraced ladder was intended, in a supplementary form, to describe and illustrate Jesus as the one Mediator in the kingdom of grace.

4. *This vision, therefore, is discharged of its full weight of meaning only when we admit it to be a fine, high, symbol of Jesus Christ.* For he is the king of the kingdom, and the true Prince of Life. And just at this point, it is for our great help that we can recall the remarkable words of our Divine Lord in the New Testament. Conversing with Nathanael, he told him this: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man." The significance of an expression like this, in which Jesus of Nazareth identifies himself with this historic image, receives additional force from the fact that he was addressing a Jew of the strictest sort, an "Israelite indeed, in whom there was no guile." Nathanael must have been thoroughly familiar with this incident in the life of his celebrated progenitor. To him our Saviour avows himself as the anti-type of that splendid type in the vision near the city of Luz.

This ladder, therefore, is the Son of Man. And thus we reach in our disquisition what appears to have been the prophetic significance of the scene.

II.—Now, then, what is its Doctrinal Reach? It becomes us to inquire concerning its rhetorical appositeness, its artistic exactness and felicity, as a true image of the Redeemer.

The plan of redemption comes out in this symbol. God suffered men to enter again upon speaking terms with him through his only-begotten Son. Jesus Christ became the medium of grace and restoration. If, now, no mistake has been made in our inquiry thus far, the conclusion we have attained will be fairly corroborated from the disclosures presented of Jesus' person and work.

1. Begin with his *Person*. Surely no more felicitous image could have been presented. Christ's double nature is well shown. It would have been only a mockery to Jacob to disclose a ladder coming *almost* to this earth, yet falling short by a round or two, so as to be just out of reach. Then the angels could not have alighted, and no human foot could have risen. Nor would the case have been anywise better, if he had been made to see that his ladder reached *nearly* to heaven, not quite. For then the angels would have had as great need as he, and an uncrossed gulf would have been beyond them in the air.

Alas, if poor fallen man were to be disappointed of his hope in this way, in either direction, how cruel and malignant the purpose! "If only in this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable." We want a Redeemer, whose true divinity mounts to the very throne of our Maker; and yet whose true humanity is disclosed to us on the very earth where we stand.

Every wish is fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth. He is divine; "let all the angels of God worship him." He is human; let all men put their trust in him. "There is one God, and one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all."

2. As to the *Work* of Christ, furthermore, we may remark the same exquisite aptness of this figure in Jacob's vision. Examining it closely, we find that it teaches the sovereign assumption, the perfect completion, the evident display, and the free offer, of the plan of grace.

Christ's work was *sovereignly assumed*. Mark whence this

ladder comes—not from below, but from above. As in Eden, so now, God comes *seeking* his own. No intervention of this fugitive man is in the thing. He seems surprised, and at first frightened, by his dream. No hope could have been cherished by any lost soul in the universe that God would interpose to save it. The natural means of communication with heaven were cut off by the first sin of the race. There was not even one Bridge of Sighs between the palace and the prison. This ladder asserts, under the laws of Scriptural imagery, that the new revelation of deliverance from sin was none of man's making or choosing. It was let fall by an almighty hand. It became a fresh presentation in history. It commands confidence. God did it, and not we ourselves.

They used to remark in ribaldry of Doddridge's prayers, that they were characterized by "an intensely business-like aspect." I do not altogether see why we should reject the expression, if it helps us in force. This ladder of grace means business. It is plain, homely, commonplace, if you will; but its simple purpose is to save human souls. The advent of our Lord Jesus Christ was a conception of divine wisdom, thoroughly intelligent and practical; but purely sovereign, as unexpected as it was undeserved.

Again; Christ's work was *perfectly completed*. We remember that once at least the human race set themselves soberly at the task of opening a highway to heaven. The plains of Shinar afforded a good terminus, but the grade was confessedly difficult. The architects planned, and the builders laid, many a course of ponderous masonry up in the air. But they never touched the other side. The tower they erected and gave up, makes a very sorry picture beside this shining ladder. Babel is a very different word from Bethel. *Confusion* is not the *House of God*.

There is now a mass of ruins, so the missionaries tell us, which men suspect may have been this ancient Babel; this early pier of a bridge intended to cross the sky. But it serves only as the monument of a vast folly. No effort at redemp-

tion ever succeeded, which began on earth and undertook to work upwards. It was the fine characteristic of this ladder that it reached heaven and touched earth. It crossed the gulf. It rested, therefore, securely on both shores of that eternal sea, which rolls all round the world. And it is the fine characteristic of the redemption it symbolized, that it entirely meets the needs of our race. Jesus Christ's final words were, "It is *finished!*"

Once more; Christ's work was *evidently displayed*. We like this vision of the *angels* on the ladder of Jacob. They give what artists call "life" to the picture. It is a most conspicuous sight, this spectacle of the terraces or rounds moving with activity, and shining with resplendent wings, passing and repassing. For the "thing," which the scene symbolizes, "was not done in a corner." It makes one deeply imaginative, to go, as this story invites, and stand near old Luz. The air palpitates and quivers with the living messengers up and down the ladder.

But that is not the only place where earth is linked to heaven. The vision was seen there, and the covenant was repeated there. But Christ in person is everywhere, and the spectacle of God's love shines luminously through the universe, and the promise of pardon through grace vibrates on the willing atmosphere, wherever man breathes. "The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth and in thy heart." The splendid vision of redemption is gleaming before every eye. "God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory." He is dull and blind who clamors and complains he cannot find Jesus as the Lord of grace.

"The sky is as a temple's arch;
The blue and wavy air
Is glorious with the spirit-march
Of messengers of prayer!"

Still further; Christ's work is *freely offered*. That was

not Jacob's vision any more than it is ours. When Jesus was once talking to his disciples, he called himself the "God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." He declared, to the immeasurable scandal of the unbelieving Jews who stood by, that he was before Abraham; and when they sarcastically reminded him he was not yet fifty years old, he asserted that even Abraham saw his day afar off and was glad. Now I suppose we cannot ever know precisely how it was in those earliest times; we are not informed how God came down, or sent his messages, when Eden was in sinless bloom.

All we can discover, and this we feel with a pain unutterable, is that since then the earth has been driven away ineffably far, by the rebound of its awful curse. Now the distance is unspanned save at a single point. A structure of divine workmanship stretches clear across the abyss, from the cold stone, on which lies every penitent's head, to the very porch of the gate he longs most to enter. And as he looks up along the glittering rounds of the ladder, he sees at last the finest part of the vision—namely, Jehovah himself, kindly beckoning him from the throne!

When the inspired man, who wrote this history, seemed to be in the very presence of the scene he described, his sense of wonder was oppressive and overpowering. It crowds his language, renders it tautological and explosive. He introduces three "*Beholds*" into his one sentence. He says—"Behold! a ladder!" Then he adds—"Behold! the angels!" And he appears subdued and hushed, as he continues—"Behold! the *Lord* stood above it!"

We are accustomed to ask, when we are in doubt as to the trustworthiness of any responsible enterprise, who stands behind it? When the human soul contemplates a plan of redemption, on which its eternal future hangs, it is becoming that it should be inquisitive, and sternly in earnest. And the gospel will bear all this scrutiny. The infinite truth and glory of the Godhead are concerned in it. Look at that ladder again:—"And behold, the *Lord* stood above it!"

All the work of Jesus Christ is authorized, accepted, and indorsed. God stands behind it. Hence the Redeemer said plainly, "I and my Father are one." He came to this world voluntarily to suffer and die. He made an atonement. He claims penitence. He asks for faith. That is all.

"Oh, how unlike the complex works of man,
Heaven's easy, artless, unincumbered plan!
No meretricious graces to beguile,
No clustering ornaments to clog the pile;
From ostentation, as from weakness, free,
It stands, like the cerulean arch we see,
Majestic in its own simplicity!
Inscribed above the portals, from afar,
Conspicuous as the brightness of a star,
Legible only by the light they give,
Stand the soul-quickenng words, **Believe and Live!**"

SANDALPHON.

HAVE you read in the Talmud of old,
 In the legends the Rabbins have told
 Of the limitless realms of the air,—
Have you read it,—the marvelous story
Of Sandalphon, the Angel of Glory,
 Sandalphon, the Angel of Prayer?

How, erect, at the outermost gates
 Of the City Celestial he waits,
 With his feet on the ladder of light,
That crowded with angels unnumbered,
By Jacob was seen, as he slumbered
 Alone in the desert at night?

There serene in the rapturous throng,
 Unmoved by the rush of the song,
 With eyes unimpassioned and slow,
Among the dead angels, the deathless
Sandalphon stands listening breathless
 To sounds that ascend from below.

And he gathers the prayers as he stands,
 And they change into flowers in his hands,
 Into garlands of purple and red;
And beneath the great arch of the portal,
Through the streets of the City Immortal
 Is wafted the fragrance they shed.

It is but a legend I know,—
 A fable, a phantom, a show,
 Of the ancient Rabbinical lore;
Yet the old mediæval tradition,
The beautiful, strange superstition,
 But haunts me, and holds me the more.

When I look from my window at night,
 And the welkin above is all white,
 All throbbing and panting with stars,
Among them majestic is standing
Sandalphon the Angel, expanding
 His pinions in nebulous bars.

And the legend, I feel, is a part
 Of the hunger and thirst of the heart,
 The frenzy and fire of the brain,
That grasps at the fruitage forbidden,
The golden pomegranates of Eden,
 To quiet its fever and pain.

Bethel:

THE LADDER OF LIFE.

"And he dreamed, and behold, a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven."—GEN. 28 : 12.

IT is not worth our while now even to rehearse what we have already gained from our studies of the doctrines taught this fugitive patriarch in his remarkable vision. The Person and Work of the Redeemer were there disclosed and described. But in these later times we all understand that Jesus was not only a Propitiation but a Pattern. He came to set before man a model of holy living, as well as to make sacrifice for sin.

Hence the gospel is always intensely practical. Every item of truth is intended to be immediately wrought into an item of life.

The moment Jacob's ladder taught Christ, it urged duty. So it becomes interesting for us to contemplate that shining spectacle under a fresh presentation, searching out the simple similitudes it suggests concerning the new life.

I.—Start here: *Reconciliation is now offered in good faith to every individual of the human race.*

There can be no possible mistake about this symbol. The ladder set out to be an instrument of communication between heaven and earth. It revealed the intention of the Creator, that man should be once more restored to the divine companionship. Jacob, lonely, out under the stars, is suddenly reached by it, and all the air is wavy with the rustle of celestial wings. If he is lonely now any longer, it most

be because of the sullen determination of a wilful reserve, which will have nothing to do with God or his angels.

But this vision was not for Jacob alone. Follow the history of our race down eleven hundred years further, and you find the prophet Hosea proclaiming his own right and title to the same blessing, under the same image. Rehearsing this entire passage in the confused biography of Jacob, he says Jehovah "found him in Bethel, and there *He spake with us*, even the Lord God of Hosts." These patriarchs received their glowing promises not in their own exclusive right; they were representatives of the race.

Hence the ladder teaches in symbol exactly what Jesus Christ taught in his sermons. He said he came to *seek* as well as to *save*. "As the sun can be seen only by its own shining, so God can be seen only by his own revelation." And no one can look at this vision, or listen to Jesus Christ, without being forever convinced that God takes no pleasure in the wicked, but would rather the wicked should turn unto him and live. "Whosoever will, let him come."

II.—Then comes a second lesson. We see *the necessity of an instant and determinate decision in our dealing with the offers of grace*.

We are becoming too familiar with the great appeals of the gospel. It is fairly discouraging to a preacher to know he has nothing to press but the old arguments, to which men are in some measure hardened. You will remember how weary and sad were the words of John Foster as he talked of neglected truths—"truths of all others the most awful and mysterious, and, at the same time, of universal interest;" yet they are "considered *so* true as to lose all the power of truth and lie bed-ridden in the dormitory of the soul, side by side with the most despised and exploded errors." Only in this is found an explanation of the apathy of men, when so urged from on high. Infinite issues turn upon the moments as they fly; yet sinners delay, and hesitate and parley, as if time had no end, and God's patience no limit. And perhaps there is

no spectacle in this universe more amazing than the reposeful way in which people meet the gospel's appeals.

Now we cannot help feeling hurried, as we attempt to enter fully into the meaning of this vision of Jacob. A *dream* is a thing of evanescent splendor, no matter how bright. These angels seem excited, ascending and descending. And indeed, in its very nature and use, a *ladder* is the symbol of perilous emergency. It suggests the sudden supply of imminent need, as well as the hasty demand for its immediate employment. We use a ladder in moments of exigency and alarm. A ship, sinking, turns a ladder over the side to reach a life-boat. A house is burning, and the stalwart men plant a ladder against the wall for the rescue of inmates from the impending horror of fire. A ladder is a temporary thing ; it is an expedient ; it must be used now.

God's plan of redemption assumes necessity and demands haste. He has prepared an atonement for this poor lost race of doomed men. He asserts that it is let down to remedy a ruin. It is an expedient. This word *ladder* occurs only once in our English Bibles, and the Hebrew term it translates comes in only those evangelical passages of the Old Testament where Christ is prefigured. "*Cast ye up, cast ye up, prepare the way.*" That is, be in a hurry, haste with energy and zeal, put up some path by which souls may welcome their Redeemer, coming to save them. So again in the other familiar verse ; the verb employed is that of which *ladder* is the noun. "Go through, go through the gates ; prepare ye the way of the people ; *cast up, cast up* the highway, gather out the stones, lift up a standard for the people ; behold the Lord hath proclaimed unto the end of the world, Say ye to the daughter of Zion—Behold, thy salvation cometh !" This language intimates need, and exigent danger.

If there be one thing more than another clearly set before us in the ministry of Jesus Christ, it is that the gospel demands immediate acceptance. The ladder of grace will be removed by-and-bye, as all ladders are. Now the way is

open, and God waits. One slight line of help rises lightly, yet securely, away from this world soon to be set on fire; there it shines before every man. It rests at his feet, and it reaches to heaven. But he must go up it *now*.

III.—Furthermore, we see *how essential it is for every soul, thus addressed by the gospel offer, to measure alternatives.*

“It is a serious thing to die,” said the poet Schiller, “but a much more serious thing to live.” A whole parable in the Scripture has been devoted to the one admonition, that all men should “count the cost” of becoming the followers of Christ. But, singularly enough, very few persons seem to remember that the same parable labors with equal impressiveness to enforce the counsel that all men should “count the cost” also of *not* becoming the followers of Christ. It is certainly a wise thing for any one to ascertain, before he begins to erect a building, whether he has money to finish it. But why refuse the other lesson at the same moment? Is it not certainly a wise thing also for one to carefully consult whether, with ten thousand men, he is exactly able to cope with him who cometh against him with twenty thousand? It is a most serious thing to become a Christian; but is it not likewise a most serious thing *not* to become one?

To step upon this ladder, even the lowest round, cuts a man loose instantly from his old life. Christ was “separate from sinners,” and he who follows Christ is no longer of this world; his citizenship is in heaven. Once upon the ladder where the angels are, there is no return permitted save by *falling*. Christian career is upward. This was no mere tramway lying along the ground that Jacob saw that night at Bethel. It rose into the air. Each round grew loftier and loftier every line of the ladder’s length. Oh, the inexpressible aptness of such a symbol of the new life! In despite of all its utter homeliness, it has marvellous beauty. It is not possible to misunderstand its teaching.

The question whether a man will take fast hold of the Ladder of Life as God lets it down to him, is just the simple

question whether he will suffer his entire self to be refined, up-lifted, sun-lit, on the joyous way heavenward, into glory, and up to God. He has thereafter no earthly foothold. He must go on forever. If he even looks backward, he will grow dizzy and insecure. And that Christian will be the steadiest whose eye is ever on the heaven he is industriously nearing. The choice is definite between this world and the next. Nobody ever expects to live on a ladder; we are going somewhere, if we mount it; we are staying somewhere if we refuse. And when we settle our decision, the Lord Jehovah discloses his face in the distance; never before. Well said Martin Luther: "The Lord takes none up but the forsaken, makes none healthy but the sick, gives sight to none but the blind, brings none to life but the dead, sanctifies none but sinners, and bestows wisdom upon none but the foolish."

IV.—We see likewise, *what felicitous disposal this vision makes of the vexed question concerning the connection between faith and works.*

Think of a ladder in real use. Watch yonder fireman on his cautious way for the roof. See him now just at the uppermost rounds! Let him put but one step wrong, and how his falling feet will beat the air vainly for a standing again! It is no word to say, in this wild moment of disaster, that the ladder was not trustworthy. It was his hold on it that failed.

Ah, believe me! It will never do to stumble or relax one's grasp on the Ladder of Grace! No ladder whatsoever can save a man; it seems enough to know that a man can save himself on a ladder. Divine favor has opened the way; human fidelity is to walk in it. Oh, how utterly useless the ladder, if our perversity will not climb on it! And how utterly useless the painful endeavor to reach the heights empyrean without the ladder. God opens the way, men must enter it; and yet man will not be saved by the entering, but by God. God gives the ladder of grace, man must cling to it; and yet man will not be saved by the clinging, but by God's grace. Nor will he be saved by the grace, unless he clings. There

is a mysterious co-operation in this matter. We trust God, as if we had nothing to do ; we do all we can, as if we had nothing to trust. Our doing evidences our trust, and our trust makes our doing valuable.

To live a mere routine of duty is like one's climbing a ladder, not because he had anywhere to go, but because climbing seems salutary. It is not possible that God should have any regard to mere drill of this sort. In York Minster the old monks used to think duty could be done and merit massed by walking around the arches of the solemn cathedral in sedate procession. According to their accurate measurement, twelve rounds made one mile of marching virtue. There yet may be seen holes in a board at the great portal, supplied with pegs to check off their religion. One can hardly fail in those memorial precincts to remember and repeat the words of Christ : " Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven."

V.—Another lesson is suggested to us by this vision of Jacob. We see that *growth in grace is also growth in experience.*

This ladder rose away ; not all at once, as if a floating cloud or a whirlwind chariot had been offered to bear the indolent soul luxuriously into bliss, but round by round. And each of the rounds furnished a new off-look. The first act of the new life is that which finds the soul at its greatest distance from God ; the last is that which finds it, nearest. Duties, therefore, are conditions of joys. The higher up one is, the more he sees. The farther away from the earth he is, the less he knows of its shame, sorrow and sin. The closer he comes to heaven, the more he knows of its serene purity and peace.

Hence, if a believer's views are not clear, he can press forward, and afford to wait until he arrives where they will be. We need not expect to see all the way up, when we begin, we need to see only enough to know how to begin. Each

round makes the next round plainer. Even Goethe was wise enough in Christian love to say, "The duty that lies next to us makes all other duties easier." The way to deepen experience, is to heighten our advance. We are helped as we hasten. Descending angels bring us comfort and communion, ascending angels bear back with them our hopes, praises, and prayers. So there we stand on the wonderful ladder of new experience, just between the benediction and the sacrifice.

Most familiar to you are the exact words of our divine Redeemer, by which he teaches New Testament people what Jacob's ladder taught the Old: "If any man will do my will, he shall know of the doctrine." In mercy to us, the high truths of God have been arranged so that they shall arrive at the door of our minds, when we have skilled our spiritual muscles with experience and training. The round of faith, the round of repentance, the round of prayer—these are quite low down, close at the bottom of the ladder. The round of the Trinity, the round of decrees—these are certainly clear up out of the way to most of us, and will best be seen by-and-bye, under the sunshine of the throne. With each new thought, however, seized all along the way, one's experience keeps broadening, and enlivening. And he himself more and more presents a pattern of resemblance to his Master.

It is a worthy and noble ambition to grow in grace, and attain a ripe full experience. No man is safe, who can even for one sluggish moment be content with low piety and few joys. I remember to have read an affecting story of an artist, who had just completed what all the world called his masterpiece. Everybody congratulated him, everybody praised the painting. But he himself stood before it, saddened even to tears. And then one inquired the reason of his melancholy. "Ah," said he, "I am satisfied with my own work! It seems to me the most beautiful scene I ever saw in art. Hence I know I am failing in my powers. I have at last put all I can think or feel on canvas. I find no inadequacy in my brush or my pencil. I can do all that I can imagine. So

this proves I have reached my growth, and I might as well die !”

Oh, for more of this salutary dissatisfaction in spiritual life ! He is in peril who cannot honestly criticise himself. The ideal of true perfection ought to recede as we near it. Let no man dare to think himself so good, he cannot be better.

VI.—We learn, once more, that *responsibility begins the moment the first step of duty is disclosed to an intelligent man.*

“To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.” There is nothing in all the round of God’s discoveries of himself more singularly fascinating, as a matter of study, than the various methods he employs to arouse different men from the apathy and torpor of sin, and set them on in the new life. One chapter, the sixteenth in the Book of Acts, contains the account of two conversions, both real, and yet so utterly unlike that one can hardly credit the work to the same divine Spirit. The Philippian jailor is on the verge of suicide, and is fairly convulsed with an experience of terror almost like madness. Lydia is out in a tranquil prayer-meeting on the banks of a little river ; and so gentle is the new creation of her being and history, that Luke best describes it under the figure of a tent-curtain drawn aside that a guest might enter. “The Lord opened her heart that she attended unto those things which were spoken by Paul.”

In general, there is needed, and there is received, something of this hard dealing with the soul. For human perversity must be battled down. John Bunyan’s story is familiar to you all ; the world is well aware that Christian fleeing from the City of Destruction is only a feeble personification of those awful days, when the heavens were iron and the earth brass to him. The wrath of God hovered over him ; in his own intense language, he said that the Spirit shook him bodily over the bottomless pit. But oftentimes there is no such frightful discipline. In giving an account of his own earliest religious experience, the venerable Malan of Geneva

says, "The Lord Jesus awakened me, as a mother does her sleeping babe, *with a kiss.*" So delicate and gentle were the Saviour's dealings with his soul, that with a kind of infantile surprise he started from his slumber, looked up, and beheld the face of Divine Love bending over him ; and with the best speech his childish lips could order, he called him Father !

No matter how the Spirit of Divine Grace approaches any sinner ; from the moment that truth gleams out in the air he is responsible for his own salvation. There lies Jacob on the hill-side, the ladder disclosed above him. The least he can possibly say is, "The Lord is in this place surely, and I knew it not !" But *after he sees the vision, he does know it* ; and out of his knowledge grows duty at once. He may instantly close his eyelids with all wilful resolve to deny surrender ; he cannot shed his responsibility. He can never be the same man thereafter : his eyes have seen the Lord of glory !

When any man has learned the way of escape, has heard the glad news of God, it is not possible that he should ever be a heathen again. Shutting eyes does not darken day. And now if he is lost at the last, his epitaph is written : "Thou hast destroyed thyself." Yet so unremitting is the Divine Love, and so quick is the answer of the conscience, that he must force his way through unnumbered barriers of mercy still, before he can rush to ruin. There is a terrible truth in those three lines of Baxter :

" Hell is not had for naught ;
 Damnation's dearly bought,
 And with *great labor* sought !"

VII.—Our final lesson follows, as a matter of course. *It concerns personal acceptance of Jesus Christ as one's Saviour and Surety.*

How many Bethel scenes are there in almost every man's history ! How often to many a soul, lying out upon its lonely hill-side, turning heavenward its wistful eye, there has come this resplendent vision of the ladder of divine grace ! Oh, that the thoughts of our better moments would control our

lives ! For when the steps are so plainly outlined, when the alternative is so clearly made, when the issue is so evidently understood, the one, grand, searching, peerless, question is—*Are you going to begin?* Decision is needed ; oh, would delaying men only settle something ! *Here*, the miserable world, enticing only to ruin, balefully shining because so soon to be in flames. *Yonder*, the happy home of the blessed, with its tranquillity and its rest. And between them the ladder of the new life—that is all !

But it is no trifle even to go up the steep rounds. “The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.” Meanwhile men delay at the start, and waste their energies in silly conceits of success. Aelian tells us in classic story of a young Greek, who took up a famous philosopher into his chariot, and driving around the stadium at full speed, showed him that his nigh wheel had never deviated from a given line. The skill was indisputable ; and the athlete, in all the glow of honest worth, waited for his praise. He had his reward ; for the sedate sage remarked before all the throng, “You have demonstrated yourself the first race-course driver in the world ; and furthermore have proved you are fit for nothing higher !”

The soul of man is satisfied with nothing of all this folly it toils for. Its true rest is in God. When Jacob awoke, he exclaimed, “Surely, the Lord was in this place, and I knew it not !” Many a man has religious convictions, without understanding them. He misses their meaning, and then is in wonder. Just as a traveller sometimes inquires for a famous place, and finds he has passed it.

Know thyself. These inward monitions are from God. These wistful longings of your soul, these suffused sensibilities, these forebodings of fear, these restless desires—are divine invitations. The ladder of grace is out over you ; you cannot sleep. Come forth from your slumber. Make a good honest effort after peace. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.

THE LADDER OF ST. AUGUSTINE.

SAINT AUGUSTINE I well hast thou said,
That of our vices we can frame
A ladder, if we will but tread
Beneath our feet, each deed of shame.

All these must first be trampled down,
Beneath our feet, if we would gain,
In the bright fields of fair renown
The right of eminent domain.

We have not wings, we cannot fly,
But we have feet to scale and climb
By slow degrees, by more and more,
The cloudy summits of our time.

The mighty pyramids of stone,
That wedge-like cleave the desert airs,
When nearer seen, and better known,
Are but gigantic flights of stairs.

The distant mountains that uprear
Their solid bastions to the skies,
Are crossed by pathways that appear,
As we to higher levels rise.

The heights by great men reached and kept
Were not attained by sudden flight,
But they, while their companions slept,
Were toiling upward in the night.

Standing on what too long we bore,
With shoulders bent, and downcast eyes,
We may discern, unseen before,
A path to higher destinies.

Nor deem the irrevocable past,
As wholly wasted, wholly vain,
If rising on its wrecks at last,
To something greater we attain.

Bethel:

THE VISION OF GOD.

"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."—GEN. 28: 13, 14.

THEY say Moses wrote the Book of Genesis. We can hardly help wondering how he knew about things which happened hundreds of years before he was born. Who told him of this incident in the life of Jacob? Who described the matchless vision which the runaway saw, on perhaps the second night out, after his abrupt flight from home? How would he record exactly what Jacob said and did there all alone, when solemnly and sedately he awoke, and built his altar in the gray of the next morning?

Most Christian scholars answer these questions by saying that the Holy Ghost, in giving Moses inspiration, and in fitting him to write this ancient history, communicated the events to him by causing them to pass before his imagination like the scenes in a mental panorama. He seemed to see them in a moving picture, as if he had been bodily present.

If so, that must have been one of the most exquisite spectacles of all he had witnessed, since the grand six days of Creation closed their majestic train. Even now there appears to us a certain fine splendor to it, as the Ladder shines in the distance, the Voice breaks the silence, and Jacob rises from

his stone pillow, exclaiming, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not!"

I.—There is need, in the outset, of a careful analysis and exposition of these verses, in order that the instruction they contain may reach us in full force.

1. It is evident that God himself was the sum and substance, the centre and glory, of that entire vision. For the sake of showing the Lord who "stood above it," and for that alone, was that terrace-ladder, with passing and re-passing angels, uplifted. No man hath seen God at any time. We are not to understand that here, or anywhere else, was the Essence of the Godhead exhibited. Most likely what Jacob saw in his wonderful dream, was just what might have been afterwards seen in the temple; the Shechinah, or the ineffable Light which symbolized the Deity's presence. Lest there should be any mistake, however, the Almighty immediately announced himself by name.

He said, employing the exact words of the old covenant, "I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac." The expression, as rendered in the Chaldaic version, is yet more significant: "the Glory of Jehovah was established over it." This was the ineffable name understood to be always applied to the Messiah, the second Person in the Trinity. Hence the language, with a marvellous reach of meaning, joins right on to the assertion of Jesus Christ in the New Testament, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it, and was glad."

Put with this the promise which this voice repeats. Observe, its terms are precisely the same as those spoken to Jacob's grandfather more than a hundred years before: "The land whereon thou liest to thee will I give it, and to thy seed." Canaan should become his full possession. Then God reiterates those ancient engagements concerning the great power, the unlimited increase, and the wide dispersion, of the chosen people. "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." Such language cannot possibly be exhausted of its meaning by saying simply Jacob received a divine promise that he should ultimately return into what we now call Palestine, and safely reside there.

We find our explanation in the prediction annexed to the covenant : " And in thee, and in thy seed, shall all the families of the earth be blessed." Here is an obscure, and yet perceptible, allusion to the coming Redeemer, promised in the Garden of Eden ; that seed of the woman who was to bruise the head of the serpent. So the grand vision of Bethel is clearly unfolded to us as a revelation of the gospel by Jesus Christ, in as full measure, and to as great an extent, as Jacob could bear. The Almighty was disclosed in presence and purpose, in prediction and promise, as standing up over the ladder of grace for a fallen world.

2. Now it will interest us to turn in the other direction, and see the effect of this discovery upon Jacob. There can be no doubt that he is powerfully moved by his vision. He is aroused to the highest pitch it is possible for a character, as naturally feeble as his, to reach. This is a great occasion, and he is not a great man ; and we must not expect too much of him. You cannot register an extreme heat by a short thermometer.

But what this fugitive man can feel he feels. He seems absolutely arrested. He moves around as if he had been fairly impressed by the spirit of the spectacle. He is thoroughly awe-struck. He talks to himself. He acts like one swayed by a purpose outside of him. That dream gave his mind a shock. It broke up his apathy. One of the kings of France is said to have offered a reward for *a new sensation*. This was what Jacob now had. It had entered his very soul. He rose to meet it with as much gravity as he could command.

The first thing it did was to frighten him. " And he was afraid." Singular to notice, he does not *pray* a word. He

had lain down the night before on the hillside at Bethel in no mood for devotion. His imagination was preoccupied with Esau. Esau had told people he would kill Jacob, when Isaac was dead. That forced Jacob to wish his father would live some time yet, even though he had already made his will. But it had grown unsafe to stay at home. By-and-bye his mother had whispered he had better leave. And now he had journeyed fifty miles away, and was quite used up with his weary hours of travel. But he had still force enough to see, when that resplendent ladder blazed in the air, and that awful Voice shook the solitude, that there was another Face in the universe to be feared far more than the face of Esau.

The next effect seems to have been some sort of sense of guilt. He immediately bethought himself of his old sins. He vaguely feels the need of propitiation. He seems to be fumbling around for something. He erects a pillar, which does not turn out to be an altar. He pours oil on it, which is no sacrifice. He vows a vow, which is only an offer of a bargain. He promises to give the Lord one sheep out of ten, if the Lord would furnish the ten. He says he will begin to behave himself when he gets back ; and live a better life, provided the Lord will bring him back unhurt. So we see that his vision has awaked him into a half-spasm of repentance, which renders him scared and uneasy. That is about all. He feels *guilty*, and expects punishment.

This feeling within is chiefly remarkable for its being so entirely involuntary, and withal so instinctively prophetic of deserved judgment. Neither calamity nor suffering ; neither poverty, desertion, nor pain ; nothing, indeed, in all human life or experience, can produce the sense of guilt, except the personal consciousness of having done a wrong. It comes unannounced, however, inevitably whenever there has been occasion for it. No effort of will can keep it back. Immediately on the commission of any sin against God, the stern, but sublime, figure of Law advances directly out of the wilder-

ness, with girdle of leather, and raiment of camel's hair, preaching repentance, and uttering monitions of solemn warning while yet the axe lies unlifted at the root of the tree. Conscience responds on the instant, and Remorse begins to ply the scourge. And in the midst of the anguish there arises suddenly a species of inspiration, which is prospective and predictive. The sinner becomes always a seer. He is prophetic by instinct. He forebodes and foretells. He expects to be called to account before long for what he has done.

II.—It seems better to arrest the analysis of the history here, for the lessons of instruction are already crowding themselves on us.

1. We learn, first of all, that *the truest way to produce conviction of sin, is to make a disclosure of divine holiness.*

You will recall the words of Job, when the Lord had been speaking to him out of the whirlwind. "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.*" This seems a most illogical conclusion; but it is according to the ordering of grace and nature too. When Isaiah heard the seraphs in the temple saying, "Holy, holy, holy," instead of joining in with them, he exclaimed, "Woe is me, for I am undone; because *I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!*"

Here was Jacob, looking at a vision of unparalleled splendor and sublimity; enough to have almost made the stones he lay upon cry out. It filled even his cold heart with sensibility, and awaked him to some sort of contrition. It gave him a premonition of retribution.

It is easy to see, therefore, why ungodly and impenitent men dread to see God's face, and dread the more to hear him speak. Some people call the thunder God's voice. Suetonius, the Roman historian, tells us that Augustus Cæsar was so alarmed whenever a storm was over the sky, that he was wont to wrap a seal-skin around his body, as if he hoped

it would ward off all peril of lightning, and he would fly to some secret corner till the sun shone again. And Caligula, who deemed himself brave enough to sometimes threaten Jupiter, used to rush under a bed when he heard the summer heavens roar. Of such poor stuff are earthly heroes made !

“The wicked man travaileth with pain all his days ; a dreadful sound is in his ears : in prosperity the destroyer shall come upon him. Trouble and anguish shall make him afraid ; they shall prevail against him, as a king ready to the battle. For he stretcheth out his hand against God, and strengtheneth himself against the Almighty. He runneth upon him, even upon his neck, upon the thick bosses of his bucklers.”

There can be no other expectation, then, to such people, than that which is full of unwelcomeness and alarm. One, who has been all his life defying God, cannot help it, but that the most awful thought of all, which now and then the Bible forces in upon his unwilling notice, is this concerning God himself. One day they must look on Him whom they have pierced.

—“Our feelings and our thoughts,
Lead ever on, and rest not in the present,
As drops of rain fall into some dark well,
And from below comes a scarce audible sound,
So fall our thoughts into the dark Hereafter,
And their mysterious echo reaches us.”

2. Another lesson is this : we see *the uselessness of mere religious emotion, without establishment of principle.*

Jacob utterly missed the majesty of the moment which would have made his life. His after career could never have been what we now know it was, if he had fully appreciated those words of wonderful meaning, “I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.” He seemed reverent, and yet he did not give his heart to God. He was afraid, but not submissive. He was convicted, but not converted. He was moved, but not melted. He lifted a

monument, and then went on his way without lifting a prayer.

Such experiences come to nothing. Indeed how much of actual piety there was in Jacob's feeling, as he industriously builded his altar, we are not now in just the happiest relationship and mood towards him to pronounce. The truth is, we do not believe he has any principle. For a moment, it looks as if he was simply stunned with a vast surprise. If he had died just then, as the penitent thief did, we should have all said he went to heaven. As it was, he lived for some time afterwards, and went to Mesopotamia instead. So we can follow him up in our poor (but fair) worldly way of looking at things. And this fitly-named "Supplanter," shows wretchedly during all those outlaw days.

His little spasm of devout emotion on this eventful morning, must have been mixed in its character. It is so sudden, so evanescent, that it reminds you of the delight mingled with alarm, which the hero of the Arabian story felt when he rubbed his magic lamp by accident for the first time. As the Genius appeared, Aladdin was so confused that he could hardly compose himself between the consternation he had at seeing him, and a sort of acquisitive gladness to know he had come, and could be made to come again when he was wanted. In one supreme moment it was flashed on Jacob's mind what the birth-right he had stolen, and the blessing he had seduced, really meant. But he treated the sublime discovery, as many a man now treats the offer of gospel grace, with a mock show of ceremonious acquiescence, and even some small tears and promises. And if he had lived in New Testament times, perhaps he would have piously quoted Scripture in explanation: "Godliness is *profitable* unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come!"

3. Our final lesson is this : we see that *God really offers a chance of salvation to every man who will enter upon the new life.*

There could hardly have been a more uninviting, or a

more unpromising, case than this here presented in our text. Jacob is a type of those of whom the prophet said, "I am sought of them that asked not for me; I am found of them that sought me not." God sovereignly met him on the way, and offered him grace.

There is no wisdom in raising at such points as these, the questions of a merely technical theology. It is pitiful to see any school-man winding texts of Scripture around himself, and so intentionally marshalling them against each other, and forming them into hollow squares of belligerent array, that he can at last march forth to no attack at all, nor indeed even extricate his army from the embarrassing evolutions he has intricately contrived.

Says the good Cecil, "No man will preach the gospel so freely as the Scriptures preach it, unless he will submit to talk like an anti-nomian in the estimation of a great body of Christians. Nor will any man preach it so practically as the Scriptures unless he will submit to be called, by as large a body, an Arminian. Many think they have found a middle path, which is in fact neither one thing nor another, since it is not the incomprehensible, but grand, scheme of the Bible."

The gospel never professed to be logical according to the schools. It surely never set itself definitely at work to hinder any sinner's faith by a disclosure of the doctrine of election, or check his repentance by a dozen texts on inability, or discourage his prayer for pardon with a dogma as to the extent of the atonement. It does say, however, "Whosoever will, let him come and take of the water of life freely!"

God disclosed himself to Jacob unasked. He made it possible for that man to look up, see his face, and live forever. Jacob was at liberty to put off the real surrender of his heart. He did so. Then came forty miserable years to be repented of—forty years more, when he had quite enough of that sort of history already for any ordinary contrition.

As you bid this man good-bye for awhile, you must bear in mind he will be summoned before long to see the face of

“the Lord” again. Then he will think of this Vision, and the chance he had for better things.

God offers grace to every one, only he never constrains any one to accept it perforce. He discloses each heart by a disclosure of his own holiness. He gives intimation that those who will not look on his face now, will have to look on it hereafter; and then it will wear the expression of a different mood. The day cannot be far distant, when all the world will be standing before him. The secrets of each history will be revealed. It will be a sad hour to such as remember the Bethels they have passed. They will become acquainted with the immense value of those periods when they were aroused at the call of divine mercy. They will say:

“Yonder sits my slighted Saviour,
 With the marks of dying love!
 Oh, that I had sought his favor,
 When I felt his Spirit move—
 Golden moments,
 When I felt his Spirit move!”

For the sight of God, and the full revelation of his purpose will probe every hidden recess of one's being. And he—he alone—whose sins are washed away in the blood of the atonement, will abide the scrutiny.

For we must remember that a holy man has nothing to dread in such a moment as this. He has been praying for many a year to come under just such an examination. “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” He is sobered, but he is not frightened. When he has been proved utterly base, the robe of Jesus covers him most perfectly. When he is weak, he is strong. When he is cast down, there is lifting up. Hence he welcomes the prospect of complete subjection. He is positively too loyal to become afraid of his King!

Instead of shrinking back from the disclosed face of

Jenovah at the judgment, a truly regenerate man will only desire to see it plainer. For all earthly piety prepares him for that. Give to any honest child of God forty days interview with his Father, as Moses had in the mount, eye to eye, and he will be none the more abashed by it ; he will only long the more passionately for higher intercourse, and more absolute self-abnegation in order to closer companionship and clearer revelation. He knows his face will shine brightest when the whole law is clasped firmest in his arms. And he will surely cry out from his experience, which longs to see more, the more it has seen, " Show me, O Lord, thy glory ! " And for this he even now waits and yearns. It doth not yet appear to him what his own future shall be ; he only knows that when Christ shall appear, he shall be like Him, for he shall see Him as he is. Hence when he finds God at the judgment, he knows joyfully his Saviour is his judge.

" If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."

" And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, even Jesus Christ the righteous ; and he is the propitiation for our sins ; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world."

"JESUS ONLY."

THERE is life for a look at the Crucified One ;
 There is life at this moment for thee ;
 Then look, sinner—look unto him, and be saved—
 Unto him who was nailed to the tree.

It is not thy tears of repentance or prayers,
 But the blood that atones for the soul :
 On him, then, who shed it, believing at once,
 Thy weight of iniquities roll.

His anguish of soul on the cross hast thou seen ?
 His cry of distress hast thou heard ?
 Then why, if the terrors of wrath he endured,
 Should pardon to thee be deferred ?

We are healed by his stripes ;—wouldst thou add to the word ?
 And he is our righteousness made :
 The best robe of heaven he bids thee put on :
 Oh ! couldst thou be better arrayed ?

Then doubt not thy welcome, since God has declared,
 There remaineth no more to be done ;
 That once in the end of the world he appeared,
 And completed the work he begun.

But take, with rejoicing, from Jesus at once
 The life everlasting he gives :
 And know, with assurance, thou never canst die,
 Since Jesus, thy righteousness, lives.

There is life for a look at the Crucified One ;
 There is life at this moment for thee :
 Then look, sinner—look unto him and be saved,
 And know thyself spotless as he.

Bethel:

PURPOSE IN A PROMISE.

"For I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of."—GEN. 28 : 15.

WE are becoming measurably familiar with this incident in the history of Jacob. From the midst of that supernatural light, which shone above the summit of the ladder at Bethel, there came to him words of far-reaching promise. That there might be no possible reason for mistake, the Almighty announced to this wayward man that he was going to insure the fulfilment of what he had just engaged. He was going to take Jacob's career in hand, for he intended to retain a hold upon him. There was a purpose in the promise ; a purpose with a gracious gripe in it that would sway his life hereafter, and order it specifically to God's glory.

We sometimes talk about keeping promises ; here seems to be a promise that keeps also. *Teneo et teneor*. This story furnishes us an illustration of the fact that God may choose a man for his own purpose, and the man not appreciate it. He may endow him for a specific work, and the man not understand it. He may charge his life with a divine counsel, and the man not be conscious of it in anywise adequately. There may be danger that the whole thing be miserably lost ; if the man be left.

Indeed the man may imagine he sees the end, and yet be blind. He may move mysteriously around under the impulse of a scared surprise, and yet be in no measure bettered by it. He may be aroused into a mighty spasm of devout altar-

building, and yet lapse back to be the same crooked creature he was before.

Meantime God will do his own behest, as he said he would. He will urge forward his own plans, will employ the man he has chosen ; will prepare him unconsciously , will manipulate him at pleasure. When the time of need arrives, he will bring him out on the stage of action. And if even a frightful convulsion of the man's whole nature be necessary to fit him for use, he will send it to him with awful registers of discipline. Jacob eventually stood on a point of time, from which he could look back, and see this Bethel vision again. At last he understood that in that matchless *Promise*, he had received then, there had been folded a *Purpose* likewise. The promise had blessed him, the purpose had led him ever since, and mastered him all the way.

The thought, which I desire to offer for your meditation in this sermon, does not need to be borne up simply by the text that suggests it. The proposition, however, can be well stated under its illustration. If there be any advantage in putting such a thing into form, it might stand thus :—

Every true man's life is charged with a purpose of God, which will mould it and master it, so as that it may best work out his glory.

The divine word to each of us, who live under God's promise, is—" I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of." There is no hour of our existence in which the hand of infinite grace is not open over us. And in every engagement from God there is a plan for men. Yet withal we work perfectly freely. There cannot be a single Christian out of reach, no matter how insignificant he may seem to be. A purpose will be let down to him, with passing and repassing angels.

In casting your eye over that admirable compend of Scripture truth taught to the children in our churches, has it never occurred to you how solemnly it opens :—" Man's chief end is to glorify God, and enjoy him forever." How this

majestic and ineffably calm statement of doctrine seems to take a stand all at once far above the world, looking down thoughtfully upon its busy myriads! For every one of these thousands, hurrying and worrying, there is found a fixed recognition and an ordered place in the infinite counsels of God. He, who notes the fall of the sparrow, sees, numbers, and knows each human soul. He has intrusted it with a certain office and privilege. He has created it that it might glorify him. He has endowed that soul with existence that it might be guided into his all-wise purpose, and afterwards received to share with him his glory.

I.—Observe, then, carefully in the first place, that this being the chief end of man, there will always have to be some secondary and subordinate ends. These must be reckoned in ; for they all tend towards the main end, and indeed receive their entire value from their connection with that.

Hence you will see at once how varied, almost to infinity, will be the forms and conditions in which a positively true, great life may exist. It is quite possible that an entire existence may be devoted to the accomplishment of just one purpose in the counsel of God, the exact bearing of which we may for the time being be utterly unable to discover. And so the individual, a fine unconscious worker for his Master, may never know precisely how much he has actually wrought out by living. He may look over his personal history, with wonder and perplexity. His existence has passed, like the flight of a carrier-dove from one feudal castle to another. He knows he has beaten his way backwards and forwards, and really labored industriously and hard against many opposing winds. He has seemed to himself to be sent on altogether unnecessary errands for the few pitiful grains of wheat that waited for his hunger at the remembered window in the turret. But one who is wiser, his Lord who sent him forth, knows that all the time he has been unconsciously bearing under his heart the missive of communication, or the letter of love, that infinite power had bound to his wing. He imagines

his life has been a failure, for its toil was so commonplace. But no true man in this world ever failed, save in the mere knowledge of his divine errand.

II.—Observe, furthermore, that if there be so many subordinate purposes in the one purpose of God, there must of necessity be many instruments also.

There is a place for everybody in the counsel of God as well as in the glory that comes after it. There is a specific work fitted to every life that divine wisdom orders.

Hence every person, no matter what his endowments and characteristics may be, can afford to live a perfectly frank and honest life. Never has God said he would have one life even resemble another, much less be forced into its mould and pattern. He gives each biography an individual form and meaning of its own. So it needs to imitate nothing, assume nothing. It should put on no airs, it should ape no excellence. If God chooses a true life for great usefulness, you will never know it because of any absurd singularity, or any unusual manifestations whatsoever. Its beauty will lie in its evident sincerity, and its perfect contentment with its own lot. It will never be found repining because it is not as prospered or as embellished as many others. It will not always recognize even its own meek adornment. Moses was the very last man to discover how exquisitely his face shone when he came down from the summit of Mount Sinai.

All spiritual loveliness comes from naturalness of action and behavior. For real manhood, for noble womanhood, God has drawn positively no set pattern. It has been well said that "there are two words which each person should wear upon his seal-ring—Be yourself." Some of the most unnoticed, and apparently most insignificant, men in history have wrought out a large part of the world's most significant work. They did their duty assigned, never struggling after conspicuousness, or straining after effect. That duty was found afterwards to be linked in upon the great plan of God—his counsel in ruling the universe.

Hence, as might be expected, a higher use, a deeper meaning, is always evolving itself from what a true man or a true woman accomplishes. We do a little thing; but it proves to be more than it seemed at first to promise.

Thus all variety of life grows holy; for all tells upon the vast purpose with which it is connected. We have only to keep on patiently sending the shuttle of our simple toil flying through the warp for the season set us. The thread may be light and single, and the color somewhat unwelcome and strange: but we are going to know how it all needed to be woven in, when the intricate pattern issues from the loom, and shines in the weaver's hands.

III.—Observe, in the third place, that with a purpose so complicated as God's is, in order to introduce every man's life into it, it will be possible that in some cases more than half the years which any given person lives, will have to be spent just in rendering him ready to come in efficiently at the exact point when he is needed.

That person, who is to strike only one blow in welding the chain, which is to bind back the world to God, must be content to strengthen his muscles, and skill his aim, may-be, for years, before he can venture to offer aid in forging a link like this. It is a wonderful thing to work with God.

Paul was to be a leader in the magnificent work of bringing the Gentiles within reach of gospel grace. He did not lose the three unrecorded years he passed in Arabian wilds under divine tutelage of preparation for his sermons. Moses was eventually to be the law-giver of Israel; how perilous, then, to commit a life so important to the risks of a bulrush ark on the Nile! But that was part of his unexpected education. The ark was to the infant an audience-chamber of the palace; that was his first touch of Pharaoh. David was, in the sure arrangements of the foreseeing God, to become king of his chosen people; how careless, therefore, it was to set him up for a mere mark at which the mad Saul should fling javelins! But all that outlaw discipline was part of his

training for a royal career. Horrible old cave is that of Adullam, down at the end of the awful Kedron ravine: but that cavern was the ante-chamber where the architect planned Solomon's temple. Isaac was foretold as the very child of promise; how contradictory, then, it seems to find him going up the hill, with his almost distracted father, to be offered in sacrifice. But cannot we now see how that journey to Moriah came in as part of his and his father's spiritual outfitting for a place in the line of the patriarchs!

All these extraordinary events appear in their symmetrical relations in the passage of time. The law is almost universal. Nearly all men of mark require a serious and separated period of moulding in silence, and oftentimes out of sight. Many a true Christian wonders what his great Master is really intending to eventuate through his experience. It doth not yet appear to him what he shall be. He begins a notable preparation to do God's service. Just as he stands upon the threshold, however, he is bidden to retire and wait. A period of seclusion perfects the discipline.

IV.—Observe, once more, that if these varied instruments employed in carrying out the grand purpose are so many, and need so much preparation, there will be an evident necessity that a large number of teachers and trainers shall be kept at God's service in instructing them.

Hence, sometimes one life will appear to have been almost solely devoted to the mere selecting, developing, and energizing another. For example, remember Hannah. Her lot was an exceedingly humble one. It seemed linked with a purpose no more extraordinary than that of a hundred other Hebrew mothers. She came to Eli at least twice in the temple; yet so unobtrusive and so unremarkable was she, that she had each time to introduce herself to the busy man, and repeat her name and errand. To wean the infant Samuel, and bring him a little coat every year, was about all we know of the purpose for which Hannah's life was set in the infinite counsels of heaven. So of Andrew: he was one of the

chosen twelve, and there is one pattern of cross that bears his name, because he was martyred upon it. But all we positively read about a man so true and good, is that he brought Simon Peter to Jesus. So of Joseph, the Nazarene carpenter; he shows himself in the early history of the Bethlehem babe; but Scripture, after it has exhibited how useful he was in guarding the reputation of the virgin-mother, dismisses him so suddenly that nobody knows where he was buried, or even where he died.

None of these persons ever made any great ripple among the waves upon the tumultuous sea of existence. Their lives seem to have been exhausted in notable service; and yet all they did was to make other lives ready for God's conspicuous counsel.

Thus, my Christian hearers, have we reached the meaning of our text. God, who made men, holds them in his grasp. He will not leave them until he has done that which he has spoken to them of. He directs all the unconstrained and natural outgoings of individual history into the one mighty stream of his eternal plan.

Now what will we do with this? It is possible that an individual should have an immense deposit in the bank, and yet be utterly unsupplied with money for the morning market. Through lack of intelligence in business affairs, he may be unable practically to lay hands on what is his own. Just so in literary life. A scholar may be profoundly learned, and still be without the facilities of making use of his vast acquisitions to any proper advantage. One of the best of our English poets could in the quiet of his own room conceive images of exquisite beauty, and clothe them in language of melody unsurpassed. And yet in the presence of others equally gifted, he was so volatile and vain that they likened him to a parrot.

But what shall we say of one whose Christian faith is out of his own reach; one who has great treasures laid up in heaven, not even one talent of which he can expend to profit

in an earthly exchange? We know men whose religious life is totally distinct from all the circles of experience into which they are constantly thrown. In no form, and by no means, can they make it available for common wants. It does not comfort them when they are in trouble. It does not suffice to guide them out of their often bewilderment. It does not even elevate their minds above sordid ambitions and beggarly desires. That is, piety does not do for them what they honestly believe it can do, what they clearly perceive it has done for others. They have spiritual wealth, but it is unavailable. They cannot realize on it.

Now I have seriously to remark that the Bible is not to blame for this lamentable state of things. Piety is a tangible practical thing. The experience, into which the renewed soul enters, is useful in all the ways of an every-day existence. It is not mystical at all. It is ready for immediate employment, serviceable for any emergency, however sudden or severe. In order that there may be no possible mistake, great pains have been taken to give prominence to the earthly element in the theory of religion. The offers of grace are not mere commemorative medals, struck with the image of the King of Heaven, just to perpetuate the recollection of his love. They are the true coin of his realm, and are meant for immediate and continuous circulation.

Hence when a truth, so grand as this is, which we have been considering, is given to us, it is most pitifully unwise to lose it in any vague generalization. It is worth more than human language can describe, to know that God takes every Christian life into his own hands, and holds it through all its chances and changes as a thing dear to himself. He promises grace; and there is a purpose in the promise. As a child lays his hand in his father's, and knows it is going to hold him; so we put our existence into God's care, and we cannot get it back again by any petulance or any pride. Never forget that if you are ever saved, it will be by God's love for you, and not by your love for God.

It is this which so finely uplifts every lot in a world so full of confusion, out of the dead commonplace plane of drudging toil. That verse, addressed to the early converts of the New Testament, gives us a new motto of life. He says—this grand old Apostle, who knew so well from experience what he was talking about—“Let every man abide in the calling wherein he was called.” Think of a name like that for a moment; each avocation we follow is a *calling*—Who calls it? God. And hence the exquisite appositeness of that other inspired direction—“Let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide *with God*.”

Now it gives dignity to any becoming employment, for man or woman, to know it is God's calling for us, and God will abide with us in it! He will accept any self-respecting labors performed for him. One honest deed is just as notable as another, if done as purely as another for his glory.

Men and brethren, learn to respect your lot in life. Quite possibly it may seem to some of us a grander thing to stretch out the rod over the sea like Moses, and divide the waters for Israel to pass; but it is really just as grand for some Miriam to do God service, coming forth with her timbrel to hymn the triumph, as the delivered tribes set foot on shore. Not always what show a life makes, but what God works out of it for its end, is its fitting coronation.

God's hand sweeps around among the various agencies in this fallen and tumultuous world. He selects here this one, and there that, and groups them all together under his own counsel. Paul making tents at Corinth—Elisha holding the plow at Abel-meholah—David tending sheep at Bethlehem, were all as worthy of the all-wise approbation, and as much under divine guidance, as John amid the serene and seraphic experiences of Patmos writing the Apocalypse. All these men were made majestic by being embraced in a majestic purpose. And after this the patient Apostle, the industrious seer, and the ruddy-cheeked herd-boy, had their undisturbed place in the sovereign counsel of God. For all the

remainder of their mortal career that purpose swayed their lives, leading them always to God's glory.

For we are also to bear in mind that once we are guided into the divine counsel, we are absorbed and held by it. God's purpose is far more than man's life ; put the purpose inside of a life, and it will be the king of the life. God does sometimes mysteriously intrust one of his designs to a human life, as he covers an oak in the shell of an acorn. You may bury an acorn under the snow ; you may cast it out as a forgotten thing ; you may lay it high on a rock for years, but by and bye it will sink into the soil, and the germ will spring up into vigorous existence ; the oak is in the acorn, and that has preserved it from decay. So with men ; they cannot go out of influence, they cannot go out of sight, they cannot go out of notice, till God gets through with them ; they cannot even die. Whitefield, in the high faith of his fearless consecration, was not at all extravagant, when as they warned him he was wearing out, he exclaimed, " I am immortal, till my work is done ! "

See, then, finally, the grandeur of that one act of surrender at the cross by which a man becomes a Christian. Then first his life receives the promise which controls him. Then first his being enters the majestic stream of almighty purpose. Thereafter he can never be the same man as before. He becomes an agent in executing the decrees of God. The high seal of character is set, and his forehead is fitting for his crown.

For there remains this one remembrance, never to be slighted, never to be lost :—Every true man's life is charged with a purpose of God, which will mould it and master it, so as that it may best work out his glory.

STEP BY STEP.

HEAVEN is not reached at a single bound,
 But we build the ladder by which we rise
 From the lowly earth to the vaulted skies,
 And we mount to its summit round by round.

I count this thing to be grandly true :
 That a noble deed is a step toward God,
 Lifting the soul from the common clod
 To a purer air and a broader view.

We rise by the things that are under feet ;
 By what we have mastered of good and gain ;
 By the pride deposed and the passion slain ;
 And the vanquished ills that we hourly meet.

We hope, we aspire, we resolve, we trust,
 When the morning calls us to life and light,
 But our hearts grow weary, and, ere the night,
 Our lives are trailing the sordid dust.

We hope, we resolve, we aspire, we pray,
 And we think that we mount the air on wings,
 Beyond the recall of sensual things,
 While our feet still cling to the heavy clay.

Wings for the angels, but feet for men !
 We may borrow the wings to find the way—
 We may hope and resolve and aspire and pray ;
 But our feet must rise, or we fall again.

Only in dreams is a ladder thrown
 From the weary earth to the sapphire walls ;
 But the dreams depart, and the vision falls,
 And the sleeper wakes on his pillow of stone.

Heaven is not reached at a single bound ;
 But we build the ladder by which we rise
 From the lowly earth to the vaulted skies,
 And we mount to its summit round by round.

Bethel:

UNCONSCIOUS PROVIDENCES.

"And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not."—GEN. 28: 16.

IF it be a fact that every true man's life is embraced in the promise and purpose of God, then in it will be found a fine high proof that there is a divine plan in human history. For if the Lord is in all biography, he certainly is in that which it makes. Out of this mighty aggregate of activities, little and large, massed and managed by second causes, he fashions the temple in which he is to be glorified by the work of his hands.

You cannot understand the annals of the race, unless you employ the doctrine of special providence for your key. "We need celestial observations," said Coleridge, "whenever we attempt to mark out terrestrial charts." It was reported as great wisdom, though uninspired, when somebody remarked, "Man proposes, God disposes." But wisdom inspired had said long before that, "There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless, the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand."

I.—Let us look, for a moment, through the familiar incidents of the Scriptural story, for the sake of some quiet illustrations they furnish.

The sleepless night of Ahasuerus, when, compelled to read the Chronicles, he became reminded of Mordecai, saved the Jewish nation from sudden extinction, and kept the counsels of divine wisdom from infraction. The Lord was in that

place, but the king knew it not. As if to render the ignorance more striking, the name of God is not even so much as mentioned in the Book of Esther. Take another instance: the loss of some insignificant beasts of burden, which Saul's father sent him after, led the way to this young lad's being anointed the first monarch of Israel. Thus in many lives recorded in the Bible, the slightest circumstance is seen to have turned the entire course of events, and given new shape to human history.

Perhaps there was nothing more fixed in the customs of men in those days, than the rights and immunities belonging to a chieftain's oldest son. To him conspicuously went many and most important privileges. But think of it: how significantly, and almost always, the counsels of the divine will smote primogeniture in the face.

Ishmael was Abraham's eldest son: God rejected him for Isaac. God preferred Abel to Cain. Esau was hated, Jacob was loved. Reuben was the first-born, God took Joseph. Aaron was older than his brother Moses; but Moses wielded the rod. Eliab, Abinadab, Shammah, and seven other sons of Jesse passed unselected before Samuel; David, the youngest of all, had to be sent for from the field to receive the oil on his head.

So true is this principle concerning the divine choice of human instruments in the execution of great decrees, that one's study of the Bible becomes an exercise of liveliest interest under the pressure of a constant surprise. He marks how singularly events are worked out; and he cannot refrain from exclaiming, as Jacob did when he suddenly discovered the mission he was on, "The Lord was in this place, and I knew it not!" Indeed, the only way to look upon Scripture characters is to contemplate them on the heaven-side, to just look up straight at them. In our conceit, we are sometimes wont to estimate these worthies of the Old and New Testaments, as being altogether such as ourselves wilfullest and most blind, moving self-impelled in orbits of earthly history.

Just as a child contemplates the stars it sees far down in a placid lake, over the surface of which it sails. They do seem mere points of fire under the water, and an infant mind may well wonder what is their errand there. It ought, however, to need no more than a mature instructor's voice to remind the mistaken boy that these are but images ; the true stars are circling overhead, where the creating Hand first placed them in a system.

So these orbs of human existence, distinct, rounded, inclusive, must be judged, not as they appear down here in the confused depths of a merely human career ; but aloft where they belong, orbited in their settled and honorable place in the counsels of God ;—

“ Forever singing, as they shine,
The hand that made us is divine.”

II.—Nor is the case otherwise, when we enter the field of secular history for a new series of illustrations.

The Almighty in building up his architectures of purpose, seems to have been pleased to use light and easy strokes, slender instruments, and delicate tools. He uses the hands less, the horns coming out of his hands more, for “ there is the *hiding* of his power.” He has employed the least things to further the execution of his widest plans, sometimes bringing them into startling prominence, and investing them with critical, and to all appearance incommensurate, importance. What we call accidents are parts of his ordinary, and even profound, counsels. He chooses the weakest things of this world to confound the mighty.

Recall how much civilization owes to what might fairly be considered the peradventures of human life. Almost all the great discoveries of science, to which are linked so many blessings for our race, have been made unexpectedly. What was so unlikely as that throwing an emptied wine-flask in the fire should furnish to human intelligence the first notion of a locomotive ? Yet there were needed three entire lives of in-

vention, between that lazy current of steam and the swiftness of a railway train. Again: what was more unlikely than that the sickness of an Italian chemist's wife, and her absurd craving for reptiles for food, should begin the Electric Telegraph? And yet half-a-dozen lives, toiling on in secret, lay between the battery for acid, and the wire for thought. The Lord was in all these places; men knew it not.

Remember, also, how much the useful arts owe to the merest happenings of human life. The grandest inventions, like the grandest discoveries, have been suggested by means out of the ordinary line. An unnoticed Hollander was indolently whittling his name on the bark of a tree, a fragment of which he had picked up from the sward. Letter after letter he worked rudely out with his knife; then wetting it with his lips, and pressing it into the dust at his side, he stamped it on the back of his hand. A child's amusement; but here the art of printing began. Those bark-chips were the earliest movable types human eyes ever saw. That man's name was the first ever printed; it will certainly be the last ever to be forgotten.

Now the important thing to be most prized and remembered is, that Christianity is receiving all the benefits which both Art and Science have to bestow. Nature is to religion what the little affectionate maid in his wife's chamber was to Naaman, helpful for every one of its present needs, and wistful for its betterment. God uses all sorts of agents in advancing his kingdom. But the mute forces of the earth need to be marshaled by mind.

And this is our point; let it not be lost. He himself organizes and moulds the mind to his own uses. He arrests or prompts a life, as he pleases, in order to advance it to a place in his plans. The cause of Christ owes very much to the slight events of every-day and commonplace history. The great exploits of God's people have had their origin in an unobtrusive and an unexpected way. Some human life there has been, quite possibly now unnamed and unhistoric, which

Almighty Wisdom has urged into being, and planted right in the path of duty. "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation." So nobody noticed how a great movement started ; all saw the mighty end.

Two college-students by a hay-stack began the Foreign Mission work. An old marine on ship-board commenced the Association for Sailors. The tears of a desolate Welsh girl, crying for a Testament, led to the first society for distributing Bibles.

Were these events accidents? No: nor these lives either. God reached the events through the lives. "The Lord" was "in that place." He established those lives, nameless or named, like sentinels at posts. They did their office when the time came. They may not have understood it, but the Lord did. And even they understood it afterwards.

III.—We might arrest the argument here. I choose to push it on one step further, and enter the field of individual biography.

In our every-day existence we sometimes run along the verge of the strangest possibilities, any one of which would make or mar our history. And nobody ever seems to know it but God. In one of the bright tales of polite literature, there is drawn a picture of real life, in a very simple, but most powerfully suggestive apologue.

A youth, ingenuous and ambitious, starts to seek his fortune far away from his native village. Wearied with travel, he falls asleep at the entrance of a city, beside a public fountain. While he lies there, unconscious and apparently unprotected, the throng of hurrying hundreds continues to pass by him. Many a one has a remark to make concerning the slumbering lad, so helpless and alone. An aged couple stand for quite a while conversing softly about a plan of adopting him for their son. A merchant looks down in his face, and pauses to consider whether he will not make him a partner or a clerk. Two robbers catch a greedy sight of him, and whisper together, plotting to murder him for the sake of

his little wallet and clothes. A young girl, of wilfulness and wealth, pleased with the ruddy and honest countenance, beseeches her father to send the carriage to bring him to their home, that he may live there with them. Thus, in turn, the changes and chances of life, the evil and the good, hover over him, and all within hailing distance. Yet the young stranger sleeps on, and at last rises for his journey again, never knowing how near he had been to what would have been thought his making or his ruin. God had his own plans for his career; and in the end the story develops them, and all are for good.

Now we have all passed through just such crisis-times as this. One single alteration in our tastes, our principles, or our opportunities, in certain formative years, might have forever checked the usefulness of our lives; certainly would have widely and permanently altered the current of them. One purpose, impelled by merely human wisdom, or suggested by worldly prudence, might have turned away the most gracious purpose of God, and stranded us on the sand, wrecked and dismantled. Richard Baxter has recorded with much gratitude in a characteristic fragment of auto-biography, a kind interposition of Providence, by which, he says, he had in early life "narrowly escaped getting a place at court." If he had been entangled then, where would the poor world have found its Call to the Unconverted, or the hungry church sought for its Saints' Rest?

I feel quite sure most of us could mention the day and the hour when a certain momentous question was decided for us, the effect of which was to fix our entire future. Our profession, our home, our relationships, all grew out of it. No man can ever be satisfied that his life has been mere commonplace. Events seem striking, when we contemplate the influence they have had on ourselves. A journey, a fit of sickness, a windfall of fortune. the defection of a friend—any such incident is most remarkable, when all after-life feels it. We never appreciate these things at the time. Yet at this moment you can point

your finger to a page in the unchangeable Book, and say honestly, "The Lord was in that place, and I knew it not."

We are ready, now, I should suppose, to search out the use to which this principle may be applied in ordering our lives.

1. In the beginning, we learn here at once, *who are the heroes and heroines of the world's history.*

They are the people who have most of the moulding care, and gracious presence of God. It may be quite true they know it not. But they will know it in the end. Out of all the rough discipline of existence they work their manhood and womanhood into the line of the divine counsel.

When the Jews could not comprehend the awful grandeur of the Saviour's life, he explained it to them with a word : " My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." What a world of sublimity there is in the spectacle even now which we sometimes see, of a noble man standing true for the right, and bending the energies of his being to secure some end, that day by day the more unfolds itself, giving, as an explanation of his singularity, the quiet thought, I am doing this for God ! Vaguely he may apprehend the majesty of his own zeal ; but as far as he feels that the Lord is " in that place," so far he lives truly.

You have seen a mother, urging all her force to the fulfillment of a covenant she had intelligently made for her child. Bound by perplexing cares, she could not be a Dorcas to sew garments for the poor ; fettered by toilsome labors, she was not free to be a Lydia, and open her humble home to entertain wandering Apostles. But there was no reason why she should not be a Eunice or a Lois, to pray for her little ones, and lead them to the truth. " The Lord was in " such a life, whether she " knew it " or not. Let no man judge of what he sees, by the show it makes.

" The gentle heart, that thinks with pain
It scarce can lowliest tasks fulfill,
And, if it dared its life to scan,
Would ask for pathway low and still ,

Often such gentle heart is brought
 To act with power beyond its thought ;
 For God, through ways they have not known, ,
 Will lead his own !”

2. Our next lesson has to do with what may be considered *the sleeps and stirs* of experience.

There is a period in the history of every growing mind in which the idea dawns earliest of the nameless and indescribable secret of existence. You may even know its arrival, if you are gentle and observant. You will recognize it by the restless spirit of inquiry, by the crude opinions obtrusively ventured, by the outshootings of absurd religious conceits, and the utterances of a more than half-heterodoxy. The soul is beginning to battle with its human belongings, and to struggle after peace under the pressure of high purposes, the sway of which it neither wills to receive, nor dares to resist. *The Lord is in that place, and the man knows it not.* Now what needs to be done, when Christian charity deals with him?

You see he is asleep ; yet the ladder of divine grace out in the air over him, makes him stir. He dreams. He is sure to see the passing and repassing angels soon, if you treat him rightly. He must be carefully taught, and tenderly admonished. He will put forth absurd dogmas of his own sagaciously-invented belief. He will at times grow fearfully excited under the quick checking of his reinless emotions. But you must bear with him, and pray for him ; and above all, you must keep calm and firm in your efforts to waken him from his dream without a shock, so that his mind shall be still full of the vision of the ladder which is Christ.

3. We may learn, likewise, a third lesson ; the text teaches something as to *blights in life.*

The world is full of cowed individuals ; of men and women broken in spirit, yet still trying to hold on. Some catastrophe took them down. They cannot right up again. Many a man knows that a single event, lasting hardly a day or a night, has changed his entire career. He questions

now, in all candor, whether he might not as well slip quietly out under the eaves, and take his abrupt chances of a better hereafter.

If a blight results from one's own wilful and intelligent sin, he deserves a scar and a limp. Pray God to forgive the past, and try to work the robustness of what remains into new results.

But if we were only sinned against, or were unfortunate, that goes for nothing. If we only suffered, and no sinew is wrung, we may well have done with thinking discontentedly of it. While the world stands, all Adam's sons must work, and all Eve's daughters must wail. No life is now, or is going to be, blighted, that can still take a new start. Begin again. These periods of reversal will all sweep by-and-by into the system of purposes. We shall sing songs of praise about them in heaven. You will choose the spot of your heaviest misfortune, and say, "The Lord was in that place, and I knew it not!"

Your mother died; your child left you; your innermost friend broke your confidence; your business crushed up like a hollow shell; your fortune crashed, and men whispered; what then? You will praise God for that one time. Let the dead past bury its dead. The fire is yet in your eye, the pulse at your heart, the glow on your cheek, your pluck is unbroken. You are master of everything—but God; and God is your Master, and claims your whole self in a new and hopeful following of his will.

4. Hence our best lesson is the last; it tells us how to estimate *final results*.

The true valuation of any human life can be made only when the entire account shall come in. Oh, how fine it is for any one to be told, as Jacob was, "I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of!" How it magnifies and glorifies a human life to understand that God himself is urging it on to its ultimate reckoning!

"Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy

crown." Earthly history is merely a record of a true soul's exercise in facing its oppositions, bearing its trials, and doing its work. The better one accomplishes all this, the higher is his place on the register. You cannot exactly, therefore, pronounce any one a success or a failure, till you see the whole of him. You cannot say just how life foots up till the final books are balanced.

There is an unwritten history of this world, kept very carefully, and compiled from the most authentic sources. We shall all read it some day, perhaps with a measure of surprise. The name of the mighty man is in it, as a matter of course ; and that of the distinguished preacher, and the sound divine, and the devoted missionary, and the eloquent writer, and the able commentator, and the deeply-read scholar. But the name of the faithful mother is there, too, and the dutiful child, and the patient elder sister, who took the after-care of the orphans, and the brave son who stood in his father's place beside the widow, and earned the bread the family lived upon. And there, too, is the name of the diffident man, who could make prayers in his closet that he never had courage to repeat in the presence of the Church ; and the man who, deserted and bereaved, bore up his awful burden valiantly, and never murmured a word ; and the lonely maid, who schooled her own heart, and tried to convert the heathen memories and longings within it ; and the worn invalid, who battled with disease through a time longer than Alexander's campaigns ; and the poor, passion-tossed slave to appetite, who conquered his own craving for sinful indulgence, but broke in the triumph, and victoriously died. These heroes and heroines of that history are "hidden ones" yet. But I have not a doubt it will be a grand thing for us all to meet them a hundred years—perhaps less—from to-day. Then we shall learn the exact places where the Lord has been, and men knew it not.

JACOB'S LADDER.

AH! many a time we look on starlit-nights
 Up to the sky, as Jacob did of old ;
 Look longing up to the eternal lights,
 To spell their lives of gold.

But never more, as to the Hebrew boy,
 Each on his way the Angels walk abroad,
 And never more we hear, with awful joy,
 The audible voice of God.

Yet, to pure eyes the ladder still is set,
 And Angel visitants still come and go ;
 Many bright messengers are moving yet
 From the dark world below.

Thoughts, that are surely Faith's outspreading wings—
 Prayers of the Church, aye keeping time and tryst—
 Heart-wishes, making bee-like murmurings,
 Their flower the Eucharist.

Spirits elect, through suffering rendered meet
 For those high mansions—from the nursery-door
 Bright babes that seem to climb with clay-cold feet
 Up to the Golden Floor—

These are the messengers, forever wending
 From earth to Heaven, that faith alone may scan ;
These are the Angels of our God, ascending
 Upon the Son of Man !

Bethel:

THE GATE OF HEAVEN.

"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."

—GEN. 28 : 17.

THE exclamation, recorded in this verse, is singularly appropriate upon every Christian's lip, as he enters the Sanctuary for divine worship. Neither the enthusiasm of an ignorant man, nor the alarmed confusion of a fugitive, nor the floridness of oriental imagery, will account for its grave solemnity. It is the honest expression of the human heart when suddenly confronted with a disclosure of that almighty Being, whose symbol of flame once shook the mercy-seat between the Cherubim, and whose voice spoke to the fathers from off the altar of vision. A very slight analysis will suffice to enumerate, and a simple process of illustration will be quite enough to impress, its lessons.

I.—Accept this statement in the outset:—**GOD'S HOUSE IS ALWAYS WHERE THE LORD'S PRESENCE IS.**

Jacob's earliest discovery, as we learn from this narrative, was that his vision had been sent directly from heaven. There was no mistaking the fact or the purpose of this providential interposition. The moment he awaked, he acknowledged that the Lord was in the place and he had not suspected it. That discovery alone was what led him to say, "This is none other but the house of God." The Lord's presence made Luz to become Bethel; the Lord's presence

in any place makes that place the house of God, and gate of heaven.

It does seem somewhat singular, therefore, in all the ages, to find believing people discussing the question what constitutes a Church, and which is the true household of faith? For the easy test, which fixes the basis of fellowship, is found right here in this verse. Surely God himself ought to be understood as knowing them that are his. He cannot be supposed to be still in confusion as to where his own children are gathered. That is most certainly God's house where the most of the Lord's presence resides.

Three facts are always to be borne in mind, which show that, in these belligerent denominational debates, externals of time, place, and ritual, even if they could be settled clearly, really go for nothing.

1. One is this: *No forms whatsoever for church organization, or Sabbath service, are given in the Bible.*

The nearest approach to anything of the sort is found in the Apostles' example: and yet it cannot be shown that they ever established congregations in any two instances exactly alike in everything, or that they left any general plan they approved for perpetual or universal use. Nor does it seem possible for even the most determinate enthusiast to prove that the least reference to organic name or shape was had in what Jesus once said to what he vaguely called "the church." All his words are exceedingly loose. "Whosoever two or three are met together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." And whether these two or three are met *in his name* or not, will be evidenced, not by any intoned roll of religious sentences in their devotion, or by the shining folds of any colors of garments, but by the Lord's presence in spiritual benediction. Nor will this last be seen—only felt—felt in warming the emotions of each believer, awaking his charities for all the rest present, and his anxieties for all absent, kindling his desires, and permanently moulding his life.

Hence there is really more of true edification in the incon-

sistent preface to the English Book of Common Prayer, than there is in the stately exclusions which follow it. The rubrics demand that no service shall ever be held without the use of the entire Liturgy ; but the introduction of the volume says in so many words:—"It is a most invaluable part of the blessed liberality, wherewith Christ hath made us free, that in his worship different forms and usages may be without offence allowed, provided the substance of faith be kept entire."

2. Another fact is this:—*Out-of-the-way places, unusual times, and unexpected assemblages of people, have been often chosen for extraordinary manifestations of the Lord's presence.*

Christ in person revealed his finest doctrines to single and unpromising hearers. On the boat, at the well, in the temple, beside the tomb, among the trees, he everywhere indiscriminately chose his followers, and called them brethren. In the remarkable conversation he held with the woman of Samaria, she tried to avert the force of his persistent personal address to her by raising the well-known sectarian question, which she imagined he would be weak enough to catch at. She thought—very shrewd woman that she was—that he would start the old argument, when she told him that Mount Gerizim was a more orthodox place for divine service than Mount Moriah. But he did not seem to wish to bandy theological assertions with a woman who had five husbands at once. And he only replied—"Woman, believe me, the hour cometh when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. God is a Spirit ; and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." One such statement as this forever settles the principle. Outward circumstances do not count ; he is a Christian who truly loves and serves Christ.

Hardly anything in the Scriptures can be found which is more sternly reprobated, than the sin of religious exclusiveness, and Pharisaical rejection of others. The men, who claimed precedence in Jeremiah's time, received a most

pointed and violent denunciation, when the voice came to their ears rebuking their sleek satisfaction and pride:—
 “Trust ye not in lyīng words, saying, The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, are these!” It is not in consecrated places, but in holy assemblies, that the Lord chooses to dwell, and make his presence felt.

“A man may cry Church, Church, at every word,
 With no more piety than other people;
 A daw’s not reckoned a religious bird
 Because it keeps a-cawing from a steeple.”

3. The third fact is this:—*The Head of the church has given blessings to all Christians alike, of every name, when they have fully kept his covenant.*

Surely this was to be expected, for never was a promise more explicitly made. “Thus saith the Lord, the heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; where is the house which ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest? For all those things hath my hand made, and all those things have been; but to this *man* will I look, even to him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.” That is to say, God chooses not houses, but hearts, for his residence. The ministrations of divine bounty do not at all follow the rigid lines of any sectarian enclosure. They are governed (on the human side) by character, not creed; by right, not ritual; by charity, not church.

One of the most precious, and at the same time most pathetic, of all the engagements of God’s love seems to be that he makes, when, speaking of some wanderers away from home, he says—“Although I have cast them far off among the heathen, and although I have scattered them away among the countries, yet will I be to them *as a little sanctuary* in the countries where they shall come.” He means by this that his presence makes any spot, however distant, however desolate, a private oratory, a personal church, to each one that loves him. Havelock held a prayer-meeting in the

grand temple of Boodha at Rangoon, and actually fixed the candles in the laps of the heathen idols to hold. Yet the Lord was in that place, and filled the hearts of those who sought him with his own blessed presence.

II.—Thus much for our first observation in development of the text:—God's house is anywhere where the Lord's presence is. Let us now move on to a second, namely this:—
THE LORD'S PRESENCE IN GOD'S HOUSE MAKES IT TO BE THE GATE OF HEAVEN.

I. It is not likely that any of us can appreciate the force of the *figure* here employed as well as they could who dwelt in eastern countries where so much was made of the gates of exit and entrance. There is no end to the verses of Scripture which might be quoted. In those war-times, and among a rude people, it was necessary to wall in the larger towns with a high rampart of stone. Openings were constructed for convenience on all sides of approach. But these would also be exposed as conspicuous points of attack. Hence the barriers themselves were often made of brass or iron, and of immense size, so that it might well be a wonder that Sampson could carry those of Gaza to the top of a hill on his shoulder. Almost always the gates were constructed double, barred within and barred without. Towers flanked the wide roadway on either hand, and arches covering it stretched across. It was natural that these cool vaults of masonry should become centres of resort. Newsmongers would come there to **watch** and to gossip. They could rest in the shade, and see all that came in or **went** out. So gateways came to be the chief places likewise of business concourse. Purchasers met each other there in a sort of common exchange—land was bought and sold—markets were held—courts of justice were established—proclamations were posted.

So it comes to us in the sacred history that Boaz met the elders of Bethlehem at the gates, when he betrothed himself to Ruth. Eli sat in the gate of Shiloh when the news came to him that the ark had been taken, and he fell off the stone

ledge he sat on, and died. David went up into the chamber, over the gate of Mahanaim, when he mourned for Absalom his son. Most fittingly, therefore, the gate of a town came to be a symbol of pretty much all there was of it. To sit in the gate of a city was really to have the best place in it.

2. Turning now from figure to fact, it is easy to understand the wonderful reach of Jacob's language, when in the text he exclaimed: "This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." The Lord's presence, so near, so splendid, so significant, made him seem to himself to be at the very portal of the celestial city.

Most devout Christians could share with him in his excited enthusiasm. For the time has been to many of us, first and last, when the sanctuary of divine worship has appeared almost radiant with the glory of God, as we sang and prayed before him. Then our faith grew so clear, and our hopes so high, that we fairly disdained the bounds of flesh and sense. Our devotion seemed to open a veritable gate, through which heaven's mercy descended upon us—through which heaven's joys were disclosed to us—and through which heaven's inhabitants came down to commune with us.

1. "Of Zion it shall be said, this man and that man were born in her." And that seems to be one of the "glorious things" which were spoken of her. God avows himself as prizing nothing else so much as the conversion of one soul. Whenever a sinner is redeemed by the precious word of God, washed from his sins in the blood of Jesus, it does seem as if the very gate of heaven had been flung wide open that day, and God's mercy had come down to shine among men. Joy on earth meets and re-echoes the joy in heaven.

2. Then, likewise, here in the house of God we receive foretastes of our inheritance in heaven. Who is there among us now that cannot tell the day and the hour when he came to the sanctuary cold-hearted, depressed, sad and sinful? But divine love and pardon met us there. Tears were in our eyes, but exultation unmeasured was in our hearts. For the

dear Saviour met us in perhaps the prayer, the sermon, or possibly the psalm ; and, almost before we were aware of it, our whole souls were subdued and suffused with love unspeakable and full of glory. The beautiful gate of heaven itself turned on its hinges, and there flashed out upon us from the innermost splendor something like the vision Stephen saw—"the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God."

3. Chiefly, however, when the ordinances of the church are in celebration, does this place seem to us to be the gate of heaven. For then we cannot help thinking we come nearer than ever to the loved and the lost—and to hold living communion with all the good and the true, the pure and the noble—in one feast of celestial charity and blessedness. Bunyan says quietly enough of one of his pilgrims: "Drawing near to the city, he had a yet more perfect view thereof." Of course ; and he who sits close by the gate of heaven, cannot fail to hear the ringing of the bells, and the shouts of the happy people within it. While we are at the Lord's table, we think of those who used to sit with us there. They appear to be present now in spirit. The old voices sound in our ears. We know they are at the banquet, of which ours is but the symbol. They are with Christ, whose love we commemorate. And we long to pass further in, and we keep repeating the fine words: "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city."

Now it is not worth while to linger longer on the mere development of our text as a topical theme. We had better move on rapidly to the rehearsal of a few practical thoughts which grow out of it.

1. *Learn to prize church privileges.*

It is always a matter of curious study how far the mute things in this mysterious world share sympathetically with man under the plan of redemption. "The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now," by

reason of the curse. We are a little imaginative, perhaps, but sometimes it seems as if an old church held human histories intelligently in its benches and walls. At any rate, our mental vision reproduces faces, and scenes, and experiences in the remembered precincts. We visit the early homes of our childhood; and surely the old meeting-house it is, which sends us back into most pathetic reminiscences of the past. The minister who preached, the deacon who prayed, the chorister who sang—these all live in their wonted places.

So we are writing history now, and pressing it into the walls of the sanctuary. Some enthusiasts say that an old violin bears in the wood itself the strange weird traces of the tunes that have been played upon it. The vibrations have moved and marked the fibres into wavy lines of musical record. How full of memories eventually a church comes to be! How we might well learn to love and cherish it, for the sake of all the dear Lord does for us under the roof!

2. *Honor the Fourth Commandment.*

Paul the apostle went once into the third heaven, and could hardly ever think of anything else for fourteen years afterwards. Here, once every week at least, we are permitted to draw nigh the very gate of heaven. Such days are to be remembered, and kept holy. They ought to become part of our being, and substance of our lives.

In one of the great English coal mines there is the constant formation of new rock, as the moisture drips from the ceiling of the cavern to the floor. The water is heavily charged with lime in solution, which it deposits as it falls. When the excavations are going on, the dust flies in the air and stains the sediment. This gives a gray layer in the mass. Thus it curiously comes to pass that night and day, as the workmen rest or labor, become marked with alternate strata of different colors. Of course the Sabbath always appears with a broad white deposit, larger than any of the rest. So the miners call this the "Sunday-stone."

Every man's history should thus keep tally of God's days

as white days—purest and dearest. Perhaps you will like old George Herbert's sweet verse better for a figure :

“The Sundays of man's life,
Threaded together on Time's string,
Make bracelets to adorn the wife
Of the eternal, glorious King !”

3. *Have done with jargon.*

Here you need a little etymology to make you remember the counsel for its quaintness. How many of you know what *jargon* means, more than to say—it is what men speak when they wrangle and quarrel? But away back in the middle ages, a clergyman was called *Chiericon*. And when the priests began to mumble masses and intone prayers ; to bless and curse in Latin ; the common people only knew they muttered *church-talk*. So they named the nonsense after the man, and *jargon* is simply *chiericon*—sectarian clash and presumption ; the dispute of schools.

One who sits at the gate of heaven had better talk in harmony with its songs of peace and joy. There is good everywhere among the people of God. Indeed, almost every branch of the church invisible has its advantage. The sainted Howell was right, when he exclaimed, “To make a man a Christian complete, he must have the works of a Papist, the words of a Puritan, and the faith of a Protestant.” The very nearness of the soul to God, draws it nearer to all who love him, of every name.

This is what makes it most singular and abhorrent, that some of the so-called Christian sects should choose even the Lord's Supper as their signal of division. It is recorded in history that when some hostile armies once invaded Palestine, they came suddenly on the spot traditionally supposed to be the sepulchre of Jesus. They laid their weapons down on the sward, and embraced each other. It does not seem possible that brethren should divide, when the Master's face is shining near them.

How all our creeds and shibboleths disappear, how our

professions narrow, when the call comes through from heaven, while we sit in the gates, for us to enter! A stranger once lay injured in a hospital. The visitor of that ward drew near, but discovered he was dying. Yet he asked, "Are you a Christian?" And the answer came, "Oh, yes, indeed; this many a year!" So he went on—"And of what church?" The man replied, "Of the Church of Christ." The inquirer continued, "But I mean, of what persuasion are you?" The dying believer's face lit up as he said, "Oh, yes, I know that verse very well!" Then he quoted: "I know whom I have believed, and am *persuaded* that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day." That was all the persuasion he could just then seem to remember.

4. *Do not make the Lord's house the gate of hell.*

There is something very singular in all the mercy of God to man. It never leaves him where it found him. The same sun softens wax and hardens clay; bleaches and blackens, according to what it falls on. And the gate of heaven, to some, opens the way to hell, to others. It depends upon how we treat the day and the house, where the Lord's presence is.

It cannot be doubted that in the remembrances of the future life, all misimproved opportunities of saving or bettering one's soul will give most pain. Even here we sometimes think of it. It fell in my reading the other day to recall the story of the Esquimaux chief, who used to go and hear the Moravian preacher in Greenland. One day he was found weeping beside a tree curiously notched. And he said that here, each time as he returned from the settlement, he had cut a rude hack in the bark. Thirteen Sundays were now reckoned; and these, he said, were just thirteen solemn rebukes for having heard the gospel in vain. Oh, how lengthy the tally of Sundays lost, and sermons unheeded, and prayers unshared, there is keeping for many a one of you here!

THE BEAUTIFUL GATE.

Lord, open the door, for I falter ;
 I faint in this stilled air,
 In dust and straitness I lose my breath ;
 This life of self is a living death :
 Let me into thy pastures,—broad and fair,—
 To the sun and the wind from thy mountains free ;
 Lord, open the door to me !

There is a holier life, and truer
 Than ever my heart has found ;
 There is a nobler work than is wrought,—within
 These walls so charred by the fires of sin,
 Where I toil like a captive blind and bound :—
 An open door—to a freer task
 In thy nearer smile I ask.

Through the rosy portals of morning,
 Now the tides of sunshine flow
 Over the earth and the glistening sea,
 The praise thou inspiriest rolls back to thee.
 Its tones through the infinite arches go ;
 Yet crippled and dumb behold me wait,
 Dear Lord ! at the beautiful gate.

I wait for thy hand of healing—
 For vigor and hope in thee :—
 Open wide the door,—let me feel the sun,—
 Let me touch thy robe ; I shall rise and run
 Through thy happy universe, safe and free,
 Where in and out thy beloved go,
 Nor want nor wandering know.

Thyself art the door—most holy !
 By thee let me enter in !
 I press towards thee with my failing strength :
 Unfold thy love in its breadth and length !
 True light from thine let my spirit win !
 To the saints' fair city—the Father's throne—
 Thou, Lord, art the way alone.

From the deeps of unseen glory
 Now I feel the flooding light :
 O rare, sweet winds from thy hills that blow !
 O river, so calm in its crystal flow !
 O love unfathomed—the depth, the height !
 What joy will thou not unto me impart,
 When thou shalt enlarge my heart.

To be made with thee one spirit,
 Is the boon that I lingering ask,
 To have no bar 'twixt my soul and thine,
 My thoughts to echo thy will divine ;
 Myself, thy servant for every task ;
 Life ! Life ! I may enter through thee, the door—
 Saved, sheltered for evermore.

Bethel:

MEMORIALS OF BLESSING.

"And Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone which he had put for his pillow, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it. And he called the name of that place Bethel; but the name of that city was called Luz at the first."—GEN. 28: 18, 19.

IN the fashioning of monuments and cemetery designs, there has been in our country great progress made during a comparatively recent period, so far as taste and fitness are concerned. Many most exquisitely conceived, and successfully wrought, models might be found in Greenwood, Laurel Hill, and Mount Auburn.

As a general rule, it is safe to say that the simplest tombstones are the best. A broken column for a statesman, a shivered mast for a sailor, a severed flower for a child, are surely great improvements upon the hideous and grotesque figures we used to see in ancient church-yards. The day of skull and bones, as well as impossible cherubim, is happily passed forever.

The thing to be sought for is significance. These devices are put in the place of articulate speech. It will surprise you sometimes to discover how much meaning there is in even the most unpretending of these forms of utterance, when read as they ought to be with the full imaginative force of the symbols. Take for example, the frequent emblem, an anchor inside of a ring. The anchor means Hope, and the ring Eternity. "Hope in Eternity," is a short formu-

la, telling the story of the Cross. And if you place alongside of this the winged hour-glass upon a clasped book, you will read an impressive warning, such as the gospel urges : "Time flies, and the record is closed."

Now when you bear in mind that all these designs are intended to be the embodiment of feelings in the heart, and are really nothing more nor less than pictured expressions of spiritual experiences, such as bereavement and faith, affection and anticipation, each of them meant to be read aloud in human language, then you will perceive how aimless, and even coarsely offensive to every thoughtful mind, are those showy and inane groupings of statuary we frequently find under glass cases or in recesses of brick-work. They attempt to make exhibition of that which would be more finely and fitly taught by suggestion. They offer us costly prose instead of the ingenious subtleties of poetry. Hence they produce upon every practical intelligence precisely the wrong impression they should. Monuments are certainly for purposes of perpetuation. What can we think, then, of a memorial, itself so delicate and frail that it demands care to preserve it? How long is a structure of artistic symbolism going to be helpful in keeping a memory safe through the dangerous years, when it needs in itself to be protected from the climate, and covered carefully from a storm?

Even the fashion of the symbol needs to be mindful of its errand. A sculptured dog, lying at the foot of a grave, is graceful and impressive. A sculptured child in the same position is untasteful and absurd; and all the more so, if it be wrought as an image of the infant buried beneath it. For these are both to be judged by what they suggest, not so much by what they intrinsically are. The dog is the emblem of faithful care and guardianship; the child, if indeed it has any meaning, is only the broad sign of needless exposure. You can test this for yourselves. Let any bereaved parent think of those two together in the winter midnight. Imagine the silent fidelity of the hound, waiting and watching. Then

imagine the pale, cold countenance of the child—likeness perfect—out in the snow!

Nothing can be more truly worthy of study, by a Christian people at large, than this very subject of memorials for departed friends. It is not a trivial thing, this erection of a monument over the grave of one who sleeps in Jesus. It may be to us and to others as a living voice for many a year to come. Our gospel faith is peculiar in this respect. It preaches in the sepulchres as well as in the sanctuaries. A believer being dead, yet speaketh. And there should always be something of hope and cheerfulness to catch the eye, and rivet the attention, of each passer-by.

“Put a sun-dial over my grave, and then let me be forgotten!” So said the great John Howard. But this was the best way to make such a man remembered. Even his grave-stone should become serviceable. A mere sun-dial for a monument is not so bad after all. If we give it language, it might well speak in the fine lines of our poet Whittier :

“With warning hand I mark Time’s rapid flight,
From life’s glad morning to its solemn night ;
But, through the dear God’s love, I also show,
There’s light above me by the shade below !”

I have been led into this train of remark upon a subject, useful enough not to be so unusual as it is in a pulpit, by the suggestion of that part of Jacob’s history which comes now in order under our eye. We left him awe-struck and solemn, thoroughly aroused by the wonderful vision of the ladder and the angels. You cannot help observing his whole action. He admits that God was in the place, and he had not been aware of it. He is afraid, and, with an emotion no one would expect to find in him, exclaims, “How dreadful is this place ! This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven !”

But one of the most unmistakable, as well as most remarkable, manifestations this man makes of himself, is found in the suspicion he appears to have of his own sincerity. Devo-

tion was a very novel feeling to him. He seems to be doubtful how long it was going to last. Present sense of obligation under the weight of the mighty blessing he had just received, he recognizes as a most fitting emotion. But, as if he knew his own heart enough to have well-founded doubt of his own likelihood to keep it up, he proceeds at once to the establishment of a permanent reminder of the whole night's history.

Our study leads us straightforward to-day to the method he employed to perpetuate the recollection of this incident, and carry into the future certain resolutions he felt constrained to make. And if any Christian deems this a slight matter in Jacob's biography, let him pause in the meditation long enough at least to gain a lesson concerning his own usual plans for keeping God's mercies in mind.

I.—First of all, we are told that Jacob erected a material monument, and planted it as a fixed landmark on the spot. Concerning which, remark these three things: he did it immediately, he did it symbolically, he did it religiously. There is instruction in each.

1. "He rose up early in the morning." He took the moment when the memory of his bright vision was the clearest, and the emotion it roused was at its height. He caught the fitful experience when it had most force, as if he knew it might grow less before long.

I think you will read the entire history of this patriarch in vain, if you search for an act more significant or more worthy of imitation than this. Religious sensibilities are among the most valuable, and yet most evasive, of all our mercies. They often promise much, and result in little. When the Spirit of God moves upon a human heart, he goes up only to a certain limit. There he leaves the heart to work out its own salvation under his abiding presence. God works, under the plan of redemption by Christ, always towards points of decision. He presents poses of choice. He produces crises. He suggests alternatives. He says, surrender or *not*. He says, choose God, or *Baal*. He says, be hot, or be *cold*. He

demands that if we are on the Lord's side, that we declare it so and *stay there*.

Under the light of such an incident as this, every one can see what is the duty of that person whose heart is tender, whose mind is aroused, whose conscience is quickened, by the Holy Ghost. He will never have another moment on earth so propitious as this. He is nearer hope and heaven than ever before. "How long halt ye between two opinions!" He is wise to yield on the instant, and give his heart to God. When divine grace invites, and kindles, and stands ready to help, no time must be lost.

2. Remark again, Jacob "took the stone that he had put for his pillow, and set it up for a pillar." That is to say, he made his affliction the monument of his mercy. Plenty of stones besides that there were lying about in that bleak plain. But he chose that one, so as to identify the history, when he saw the spot.

Herein was the very spirit of splendid symbolism. Nothing could be finer. No emblem could be more pathetically accurate, as a picture of the utter desolation which he, as a homeless fugitive, had felt the evening before, than the fragment of rock he had been obliged to lay his head upon to sleep. Now to make that, the reminder of his friendlessness, the monument also of his disclosure of divine adoption, was matchless in ingenuity. When he should see that pillar in the future, he would say, "Behold the outcast, and the prince! behold man's necessity, and God's opportunity! behold earthly weakness, and heavenly help! see where I was, and where I am!"

It is thought by many that the secure height of Christian experience is reached, when under the pressure of a deep desolation of bereavement or pain, one says nothing. Useful comments are made on the record—"and Aaron held his peace." To attempt to go a step further and turn a grief into a gladness, to uplift the pillow of poverty into the pillar of praise, is deemed spiritual rashness or an impossible grace. Samson

might say now in the Church what he said in Timnath, "Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness," and there would still be found some believers who "could not in three days expound the riddle." It is one of the highest reaches of grace for a Christian to attain, when he is able to say, as did the Apostle Paul, "I take pleasure in distresses; if I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities, for when I am weak, then am I strong."

In a quiet circle of conference and social prayer, I remember listening with great profit to an exposition of a mere passage of scripture, under the scrutiny of some gifted minds. The leader had read the eighty-fourth Psalm, and introduced these fine verses:—"Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee; in whose heart are the ways of them, who passing through the valley of Baca, make it a well." He explained the word *Baca*—tears—and told us this symbolized human life, the Vale of Tears; every one wept; every heart knew its own bitterness. Then another speaker called attention to the significant words—"passing through"—and showed how each sorrow was evanescent; we pass out of them all; and that before long nothing lasted but God's love and covenant. And another said that we must not forget that even in *Baca* there was "*a well*;" in every deep affliction there was a singular sluice of refreshment; in each sorrow there was crystal water for the soul's thirst; we must not mind the disciplines; but be sure to appreciate the good. Then up rose a feeble old man, and remarked gratefully upon the comments of his brethren, but reminded them that the verse did not say—make *in* the valley of *Baca*, a well—but—"passing through the valley of *Baca*, make *it* a well"—and then with gentle illustration he proceeded to show how the good God had rendered it possible to so subdue and tame an affliction, the most riotous and reinless, as to force it to become our most friendly and domestic helper; and he tenderly exhorted us all never to despise a bereavement or a pain; do not try to

be a happy child of God in despite of his hand, but under his hand find deepest sources of joy.

3. But observe, once more, Jacob, having set up his pillar "poured oil upon the top of it." You are quite familiar with Old Testament uses of oil in religious service. These were established by direct order. The command given early to Moses was—"Thou shalt take the anointing oil, and anoint the tabernacle, and all that is therein, and shalt hallow it, and all the vessels thereof, and it shall be holy." This direction was extended so as to cover the altar and the laver, and even the priests, Aaron and his sons. The Spirit of inspiration laid hold of what was an earlier custom, and so consecrated it.

If Jacob had said concerning this great incident of his life, It is the turning-point of my history, and I will not forget it, he would have done no unimportant thing by itself. But by anointing the pillar, he made it a definitely religious memorial. It recognized not only his extraordinary blessing, but recorded forever the fact that God had bestowed it upon him. It was an act of devotion. There was worship in it. There was self-consecration in it. He gave himself in a perpetual covenant of gratitude to Jehovah.

And no less than this could have been becoming in him, or worthy of the grand occasion. When a man has been prospered, he must remember not only the prosperity, but who bestowed it upon him. When God says, "I will not leave thee," the answer is, "I will not leave THEE."

II.—The lessons thus far learned, however, will become clearer and more impressive when we pass on to consider the second form of perpetuation this patriarch adopted. He proceeded to invoke the help of his fellow-men. "He called the name of that place Bethel, but the name of the city was called Luz at the first."

Bethel—House of God! Here originated that familiar name for a sanctuary, which has come down to us through the chances and changes of thirty-six hundred years. Jacob seems to have adroitly thought that every inhabitant of that town,

and every traveller who ever visited it, might be made to bear witness to his vision and covenant. When the new name was repeated, the story would inevitably be told. So the old earth itself should become a witness.

How affecting it is to think of these memorial places all over the world! Human history subordinates mute nature to an articulate service. There are annals of religious experience written on all the hills and the plains. Every rood of it may have been somebody's unseen Bethel. There is something more than mere vividness of imagery, when the prophets one after another, call the earth to bear testimony at the judgment. "Hear ye, O ye mountains, the Lord's controversy; for the Lord hath a controversy with his people, and he will plead with Israel!" All human life perpetuates itself into the scenery with which it is surrounded. The secret everglade holds the remembrance of the deed of guilt that was wrought in it. And each broken vow, each unkept promise, remains graven in the rock, by which he kneeled who made it with his God in the hour of covenant.

Hence it becomes a most interesting inquiry, How large a portion of this wide world will be mapped out in the memory of the redeemed in heaven, as the Bethels shall be reproduced, and laid down side by side in glad recollection. One poor woman there will be, of course, who will remember the well of Samaria. Another will think of the little city-gate of Nain. Bartimeus will never forget the beautiful suburbs of Jericho. Naaman will have much to say of the banks of the Jordan. Lydia will joyously recall an unhistoric place where prayer was wont to be made, near the walls of Phillippi. Paul will see again the road to Damascus. The Ethiopian eunuch will recollect the stream in the desert of Gaza. Nor will the martyrs of later times forget those crimson memorial spots along the slopes of Nithsdale and the borders of the Ayr and Irvine. The covenanters will be there, talking of the green kirk-yards, where they put their names to the parchment. Henry Martyn will think of the shining Lake of Ooroomiah,

Judson of the prison-house in Rangoon. And so, much of this earth, the much that is worthiest of all this worn planet, will be perpetuated in the joys of a world that is worthier.

My Christian friends, it is high time that we arrest, for the present, the study of our story. I feel some little solicitude lest your minds may be seduced away from the plain teaching it brings to ourselves, by the fine appeal to your imagination from a spectacle at once so graphic and picturesque. Suffer yourselves quietly, then, to listen to two or three of the earliest lessons of the theme.

1. *Count up your mercies for rehearsal and record.*

Perhaps you may have already forgotten some of them. You did not note them "early." You took no pains to fix them in remembrance. Perhaps you did not understand them as mercies. At the time they seemed like disciplines. But I hope some of your valleys of Baca have since proved to be wells of salvation. If you have studied your life well, you have begun to mark the traces in it of the presence of a higher Power than yourself. You are to be pitied sincerely, if you have not discovered that now and then what appeared a most uncomfortable pillow, becomes all the better a pillar because of its hardness. Think of the day when Jesus sought you as a stranger, wandering from the fold of God. Think of sorrows and sunshines, majors and minors, all parts of the same harmonies of life. Never be constrained to lament, at any period of your history, "The Lord was in this place, and I knew it not."

2. *Confess Christ openly before men.*

Thus you make others your helps in remembering your covenant. There is hardly any limit to the charitable consideration of friends, when religious experience seeks an audience. Here was a whole town ready to change its ancient name, because a converted Jacob wanted to have it called Bethel. Say to those nearest to you, "Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my

soul!" Quaint old version of the hundred and twenty-sixth Psalm is that in which Watts made the fathers sing about a young Christian's story, and the way in which it was received all around him:—

"Great is the work," my *neighbors* cried, and owned the Power divine;
"Great is the work," my heart replied, "and be the glory thine!"

3. *Set up memorials of blessing.*

Our great trouble is that we continually dwell under the pressure of such sweet self-flatteries, that we forget to acknowledge God in our benefits. We take successes coolly, as if they were part of our luck, or the legitimate acquisitions of our skill. Do you recall the sarcastic picture the ancient seer has drawn of treacherous memories in his day? "They take up all the fishes of the sea with the angle, they catch them in their net, and gather them in their drag; therefore they rejoice, and are glad. Then they sacrifice unto their *net*, and burn incense unto their *drag*!" Oh, how ready men are to acknowledge any help but God's! Let this be a sin not so much as mentioned among us. Make your home, your chamber, your family altar—make anything you can impress into service, a help in fixing in your recollection the mercies of God.

4. *Expect to understand your own biography by and bye.*

A good many years after this, Jacob came around by Bethel again. It must have been a moving sight to him, this silent pillar on the hillside once tremulous and wavy with the wings of the angels! He could read all the meaning of the divine promise then. Oh, the mighty Hereafter, of which all this earthly existence is hardly a title-page! Write the record carefully, for you will turn the leaves thoughtfully when you are before the great white throne. "And I saw the dead small and great, stand before God, and the books were opened!"

EBEN-EZER.

BEGONE, unbelief, my Saviour is near,
And for my relief will surely appear ;
 By prayer let me wrestle, and he will perform ;
 With Christ in the vessel, I smile at the storm.

Though dark be my way, since he is my guide,
 'Tis mine to obey, 'tis his to provide ;
Though cisterns be broken, and creatures all fail,
The word he has spoken will surely prevail.

His love in time past forbids me to think
 He'll leave me at last in trouble to sink ;
 Each sweet Eben-ezer I have in review,
 Confirms his good pleasure to help me quite through.

How bitter that cup no heart can conceive,
 Which he drank quite up, that sinners might live !
 His way was much rougher and darker than mine ;
 Did Jesus thus suffer, and shall I repine ?

Since all that I meet shall work for my good,
 The bitter is sweet, the medicine is food ;
Though painful at present, 'twill cease before long
And then oh how pleasant the conqueror's song !

Bethel:

COVENANT VOWS.

"And Jacob vowed a vow."—GEN. 28: 20.

THIS mention of a vow is the first which is made in the Scriptures. The narrative presents us with the earliest instance on record of a voluntary covenant proposed by a human being with God. Up to this moment in the patriarchal history, it was always Jehovah who began the conversation. During his dream Jacob had heard the voice speaking from heaven ; now he suddenly starts out to use his own.

What he vowed may perhaps come under our notice on another occasion. It is not necessary for our present purpose that we dwell upon the story at all. An opportunity, quite the more striking because fully unsought, is afforded us for an examination of the whole subject, rather than the particular instance. Few persons have reached maturity without having been pressed, first or last, with some most perplexing questions concerning the duty or privilege of making vows. It is a rare theme in the pulpit—not so rare in our pastoral conversations. Perhaps good will come out of the study of it, once for all.

I.—Let us, in the beginning, consider what is taught us in God's word about vows in general, and that will lead the way easily to the examination of those peculiar to the Christian dispensation.

1. The Old Testament is the main source of all profitable

information. Indeed, it hardly appears necessary to go beyond it. Classic history, however, makes clear the fact that all religions and schemes of faith have encouraged their devotees in the practice of making vows to their deities. Temples of every sort, the world over, are filled with votive offerings, presented by grateful recipients of divine favor, when they have been delivered from danger, or prospered in difficult enterprises. Even the rituals of heathenism, the wildest and the wisest, seem to agree in this. The custom, therefore, has very ancient authority. It was not an original invention of Jacob. Nor was it introduced by Moses, nor was it ever announced from heaven. Its history is as old as the annals of the race.

Hannah vowed that Samuel should be devoted to the service of the Lord all the days of his life, and no razor should come upon his head. David vowed unto the mighty God of Jacob that he would find a habitation for the tabernacle, before he would give sleep to his eyes or slumber to his eyelids. A wild and thrilling interest is given to the whole book of Judges by the unfortunate vow of Jephthah, that he would offer up for a burnt-sacrifice whatsoever came forth first from his doors to meet him, when he returned from fighting with Ammon; it proved to be his own daughter.

Concerning all of which, one can see evidently as he reads, nobody ever for an instant seems to have doubted that the obligation incurred was positively irrevocable. The main pressure of a vow lay in the fact that since it was voluntary it must be scrupulously and religiously observed, no matter how fierce the reluctance or unexpected the result. If any one else had imposed it, then he might be implored to interfere for release; but a vow, by its very nature, assumed independent self-decision, from which there could be no appeal. Hence the entire public sentiment of the times was concentrated in the utterance of the Royal Preacher: "When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools; pay that which thou hast vowed. Better is

it that thou shouldst not vow, than that thou shouldst vow, and not pay."

The great law-giver Moses, acting under divine direction, found this custom when he came to the leadership of Israel. He simply set himself to regulate the practice, and put it under some code of intelligent management. His language is exceedingly significant. He not only omitted all sort of confirmation and countenance of the exercise, but he adds a single sentence, which might almost seem like a deprecation. These are his words on introducing the subject: "When thou shalt vow a vow unto the Lord thy God, thou shalt not slack to pay it; for the Lord thy God will surely require it of thee; and it would be sin in thee. But if thou shalt *forbear to vow*, it shall be *no sin* in thee."

But after the announcement of the principle—namely, that if any one refused to make a vow, he did no wrong even to a venerable custom; but that if he did make one, he must carry it out unalterably to even its smallest provisions—this earliest legislator proceeded to lay down what now seem to us most complicated enactments. Children could not vow without the consent of their parents. A wife was released from any vow, if she had entered into it without the knowledge of her husband. Wives, however, could reject their husbands' objections, if they delayed making them at the time. All vows were void, if forced by violence or fear. To vow an animal to God made it necessary to bring it at once. To vow an imperfect or blemished victim was a misdemeanor. And certain low or vicious matters, as to concubines and dogs, could not even be made the subject of a vow.

Thus the practice inevitably brought with it a most intricate and perplexing train of casuistical distinctions. And the Rabbins in after years had to keep up the hair-splitting evasions. Refinements, as subtle as language could state, allowed or disallowed the infringements of exact terms. If you vowed a house and the house fell down, then you were not responsible; but if you had said instead the price of a

house, then you had to make it good. If you vowed an animal, and then it proved unsound, you were exempted from blame; only you must give another animal. Then one was forbidden to evade his vow by a subterfuge. He could not say, I vowed a sheep, but not his bones. So one who had vowed not to sleep on a bed, could not be arraigned for sleeping on a skin. Thus the fine-spun entanglements multiplied, until, at the coming of Jesus Christ, the Jewish nation had a code of traditions and glosses, so intricate and confused that the original sense of Scripture had become almost totally obscured.

2. There can be no good in following these examples further. The New Testament doctrine can be stated in a very few words.

The most observable thing seems to be this: no precept whatsoever is given on the subject. No regulation is prescribed. Indeed, an absolute silence is preserved as to any principle or duty involved. You may search your concordances in vain; the word *vow* occurs but twice in all the New Testament; and then without any connected expression to give us a hint of rejection or approval.

These two instances are all there is on record. The Apostle Paul made a vow, nobody knows what about; and there were four men in Jerusalem, unnamed and unhistoric, who had a vow on them, and could not shave their heads; but that is all we can learn on the subject. These appear to have been summoned before James and Paul, and the elders, and told to consider themselves no longer bound, proceed at once to purification, and behave themselves like Christians under grace.

On the whole, therefore, it would seem that we are at liberty to infer entire release from the old bondage of such customs as these. If it be asked, with any real candor of desire for an answer, whether there may not be some good in the practice of special vows, or definite covenants with God, to which Christians might profitably resort, then the reply

must be given with serious caution. The Spirit of the New Testament is one of freedom. Freedom, however, is not lawlessness; liberty is not license. It is possible that there may be found in our churches some persons, or even in our own moods some moments, to which vows could be of service.

There are in existence certain prescribed formulas for self-consecration—Doddridge has prepared one, Baxter has prepared one—written in detail, with the view of having them copied by each individual, and signed by his own hand, as his vow of personal surrender, for time and eternity, to God. I can conceive of some usefulness, in rare cases, being served by these. But with no experience to draw upon, and only slender observation, I cannot say I commend them to those to whom my ministry is addressed. It seems to me I can state some objections that have weight.

The plan is this: let us understand each other. Copy the covenant—spread it before you in the Bible—kneel as you subscribe—read it soberly aloud—then sign your name—now you have vowed yourself unto God. Repeat this each year, on your birthday, or the anniversary of your conversion. Thus let the renewal of the record run on.

Now my objection is that all this tends to bondage of legalism. It forces one to fall into the habit of thinking that he must serve God, not so much because he loves God, as because he is bound to God. He becomes self-introspective. He has an instrument that bears upon his limbs. When sinning even by the slightest accident of surprise, or under sudden onset of temptation, his first thought is—not that of grieving his Saviour—but that of breaking his covenant. So the result is not sorrowful penitence, but superstitious fear. He is more frightened than contrite. He looks for judgment on his perjury.

I am sure that any system of action, which turns a believer back on anything *he* has ever done or is doing, is hurtful. He had better by far rest in Christ than in a covenant with Christ. No child will obey his father as he always ought to,

any the more perfectly by forcing himself to sign a contract to do so. No true man is going to be more gentle and pure and faithful, because his wife has a certificate of marriage. Love, and not legalism, lies at the basis of Christian life. It is Christ's covenant that holds us, not ours.

Of course, all this reasoning bears with ten-fold violence against these special vows, which sometimes give such terrific soul-torments in after years to some impulsive Christians who make them. Parents on their dying beds are weak enough to bind their children by vows to certain professions or occupations in life, or even to closer and tenderer relations. While the heart is broken under the awful presence of death, when the will has become nerveless with watching, and the long loneliness of the future, darkened with bereavement, glooms just before, any young man can be beguiled into a promise that he will study for the ministry; any young woman can be persuaded to covenant she will put her stubborn affections at school. But when the spring leaves and blossoms shine out over the fallen foliage of the other years, when time has come with new tastes and aptitudes, who shall be responsible for the bright lives ruined by the mistake of an unintelligent vow? There is no counsel which needs to be pressed more earnestly than this of reserve, and caution, against rashly committing one's way to a covenant, instead of to God. "It is a snare to a man, *after* vows, to make inquiry." Better do this beforehand; and better wait till the Lord calls always, lest we run before we are sent.

II.—From these general considerations, it gives us pleasure and relief to turn to the special examination of what we term Christian vows.

1. We mean by this expression to cover a class of covenant engagements, which stand in close relationship to the New Testament church. They are represented in the two ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. These belong to us as a gift from high heaven. They are not of human origin, and do not hold their authority by any ecclesiastical

institution. Baptism seems to have been set apart as an initiatory rite or ceremony, by which one who loved the Lord Jesus Christ could become organically connected with others who love him, at the same moment in which he dedicated himself conspicuously to his service. And the Lord's Supper is a social ordinance, likewise; believers there identify each other, and commune with each other, at the same moment in which they covenant obediently to give themselves renewedly to Christ. There is, therefore, in these ceremonies always a double significance. They are individual and social; reminiscent and prospective; dedicatory and experimental; a gift and a reception.

We sometimes call them *sacraments*; and in this term there is intelligent description. On the eve of a great campaign, each Roman soldier displayed the eagles of the Empire, and renewed his oath of fidelity even unto death. That oath was in the Latin tongue—*Sacramentum*—and our word comes straight from it, with meaning almost unchanged. The ordinances are our battle-oaths of fresh enlistment and new consecration to Christ, as the Captain of our Salvation, and the Prince of Heaven. There can be no possible need of mistaking their purpose. Hence our standards read thus:—"A sacrament is a holy ordinance instituted by Christ; wherein by sensible signs, Christ, and the benefits of the new covenant, are represented, sealed, and applied to believers."

2. The reach of these vows is universal. They cover our possessions—our ways—our hearts—our lives. We specifically engage to give our entire possessions to God's service—our entire ways to God's guidance—our entire hearts to God's love—and our entire lives to God's work.

In these promises we understand ourselves intelligently to include our time—our talents—our education—our wealth—our social position—our influence. We say and sing—"Here, Lord, I give *myself* away!" The temper in which we make this proffer is in nowise reluctant or constrained. We volunteer the act. We surrender in simplicity of childlike

trust. We move towards the altar of service with cheerfulness and eager desire. And for time and eternity we commit our souls to divine keeping in filial affection and hope. We avow our love for God's law—for his cause—for his kingdom—for his friends. We claim that thereafter we are not our own, we are bought with a price. We assert that we choose our occupations, select our associates, modify our plans, adjust our purposes, for all our after career, with only this question to aid the decision—Where can I best glorify God?

3. A reach so extensive as this flings over the whole transaction a spirit of profound solemnity. The parties to the covenant are not man and man, but man and God. The witnesses, who stand around, are the world, the church, angels—and devils. The thing cannot be done in a corner. The ratification of the contract has been already provided. It is brought to us, engrossed, as it were, on stamped paper. The Jews used to consider the oath—"by Abel's blood"—the most unutterably solemn and irrevocable human lips could ever repeat. Our parchment comes to us for the contract; so to speak, sprinkled with the blood of the only-begotten Son of God, "which speaketh better things than that of Abel." The sanctions of the covenant are inexpressibly sacred and awful. All the good and evil of this life, all the blessings and the curses of the life to come, hang upon the question of our fidelity in keeping the faith we have pledged.

4. Now no mere human being could abide the pressure of engagements of such reach and solemnity, except for the alleviation annexed to them. There is a promise underneath each one of them all. God not only keeps his own covenant, but helps us keep ours. We are not left to rely on our own strength. And so evidently does he fulfill his word to every one who trusts him, that no true believer ever felt the bonds of his covenant upon him to be heavier than a bride's promises, delivered in the beautiful cheer of her marriage morning. It is only the unfaithful hypocrites that are alarmed. He who feels the restriction of his communion seasons becom-

ing severe, may ask himself the question whether sin does not lie at the door. The true child of God calls these ordinances feasts, not fasts. He exclaims with exultation—"I will pay my vows unto the Lord now in the presence of all his people, in the courts of the Lord's house, in the midst of thee, O Jerusalem ; Praise ye the Lord !"

5. The use which can be made practically of these covenant engagements of ours, is threefold. They give us a profitable caution ; they furnish ground for fresh hope ; they remind us of former experiences of trust and deliverance. The stated, steady repetition of them, at periodic times, is of prodigious service. They suddenly arrest us in the midst of daily life, and demand a return of thoughtful surrender. The moment temptation confronts us, a voice seems to speak in the air—Remember thine oath ! And if we are intelligent, we are quite glad to remember it ; for God covenanted when we did. There is a dowry in every duty, and a promise in every call. Our vows come to be burdens less, and badges more ; they are not fetters on our limbs, but rings on our fingers.

In making final application of this entire theme, I desire to leave upon your minds a pointed and plain memory of all the lessons at once. I think, if it were allowable, I would take a new text. There is one sweet verse of an old Psalm, which can be quoted easily ; it could be engraved upon a seal-ring ; I once thought I would have it etched on my watch-dial, so as to read it every time I sought to know the hour. You ought to find it familiar when you hear it:—"Thy vows are upon me, O God ; I will render praises unto thee !" How sweet to say in the morning, when one first looks out upon the new day—"Thy vows are upon me, O God !" How fine it is to say in the evening, when the shadows fold over us at the end of a busy day—"Thy vows are upon me, O God !" How inexpressibly solemn, but welcome to the heart of us all it is to say in the deep midnight, when the bell tolls—"Thy vows are upon me, O God ; I will render praises unto thee !"

This verse occurs in the fifty-sixth Psalm. The title which is borne at the head gives an unusual depth of meaning to this one of those ancient songs of Zion. It is called a "Michtam of David;" and *Michtam* means a secret. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him." What he whispered in the ear of David, as he lay captive in the hands of the Philistines, we cannot know. But whatever it was, it was a mighty comfort to him. God has a way of whispering sweet comforts in the ears of those who love him. And so David sings up joyously, as if he had no alarm—"In God, I will praise his word, in God I have put my trust; I will not fear what flesh can do unto me. What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee."

There is nothing so conducive to peace as the consciousness of truth and integrity in one's soul. It makes no difference where he is; God is there also. Fatherly kindness follows filial affection even to the ends of the earth. The name that David chooses, in the title here, for himself, is beautifully significant—"an uncomplaining dove far away." But he did not feel homesick. He speaks up cheerfully—"Thou tellest my wanderings." He remembered that he belonged to God, and so could not be dropped out of sight.

Solemn—awfully solemn—were the covenant engagements this Psalmist had made; but he does not feel their solemnity now. He cries out, in simple gladness at the recollection—"Thy vows are upon me, O God; I will render *praises* unto thee!"

Choose we this, then, for our motto. In all the chances and changes of life, remember the vows of God that are on you. Be frightened, if ever they fret you. Suspect yourself, if they ever become irksome. Renew them easily. Take every occasion. Have silver weddings—golden weddings—of the soul. Never be ashamed of them. Say with the brave Apostle—"From henceforth let no man trouble me, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus!"

“ALL FOR THEE!”

**LORD, I am thine, entirely thine,
Purchased and saved by blood divine •
With full consent thine I would be,
And own thy sovereign right in me.**

**Grant one poor sinner more a place
Among the children of thy grace ;
A wretched sinner, lost to God,
But ransomed by Immanuel's blood.**

**Thine would I live, thine would I die,
Be thine through all eternity ;
The vow is passed beyond repeal ;
And now I set the solemn seal.**

**Here at that cross where flows the blood
That bought my guilty soul for God,
Thee my new Master now I call,
And consecrate to thee my all.**

**Do thou assist a feeble worm
The great engagement to perform ;
Thy grace can full assistance lend,
And on that grace I dare depend.**

Bethel:

A LONG LOOK AHEAD.

“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.”—GEN. 28: 20–22.

THE Psalmist once asks a question, perhaps now the most familiar to us all here that is ever quoted: “Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?” To this he gives an immediate answer, equally commonplace and direct: “By taking heed thereto, according to thy word.”

Now any one would suppose that an admonition so prudent as this must awake an instantaneous response. It intimates that most men’s ways need cleansing; and that this work would be better done while they are young. It is character, established with a good beginning, which eventuates itself in noble deeds. Even inspiration holds this ambition up for our kindling:—“The people, that do know their God, shall be strong, and *do exploits*.” When the Duke of Wellington, visiting the school where he prepared for college, was cheered loudly by the boys for his grand military achievements, he only said to them:—“Waterloo was won at Eton!”

Really it is a wonderfully fine thing for us that so much

of God's word is biography. Thus we learn how principles, good and bad, can sway a human life, and be wrought into its very bone and sinew. When Hannah More and her sister moved to Cowslip Green, and began to work there, they found but one Bible in the parish, and that was used to prop up a flower-pot. Such destitution seems astonishing in a Christian land; but how is this any worse than neglecting the Bibles which we have?

Are there no young men here to-day, whose Bibles are serving even poorer purposes? Into your trunk, when you left home, your mother's hands, perhaps, put the sacred volume with all care. It may be possible you read it for a little while; but where is it lying in its dust now?

Now all Scripture is profitable, and that to everybody. But there are certain portions of it which are singularly pertinent to special cases. And this narrative of Jacob presents, at the crisis indicated in our text, the most pointed instruction to young men; to young men just starting out in life; to young men leaving their early homes to seek a fortune in a great city like this of ours.

The story hardly needs rehearsing, it has become so familiar to us already. But before we commence the analysis of it, it will be needful that we divest our minds of a single impression, which most likely has been the growth of years, and may be held unconsciously now.

The general phraseology, employed by Jacob himself, has misled some commentators into the statement that he was merely *bargaining* with God. He certainly does seem to say that his religious surrender and service will be contingent upon the continuance of divine bounty. He will do his duty, if God will reward him well. But the entire meaning hinges upon only one word, and that the smallest in the sentence. Had our translators put the conjunction *since* in the place of *if*, as they might, the exact sense would have been much clearer than now, and the expression would have represented better the state of Jacob's mind.

We are prepared to admit that in this man's character there is little to commend. He was mercenary, no doubt of it, and shrewd even to sharpness. And we have never found reason to praise very sincerely his disclosures of himself along these years. But we are by no means ready to say that he was only making a new display of the sordid side of his nature in this remarkable vow. We think, on the contrary, that his action that morning, imperfect and mixed as it was, is about the finest thing recorded of him in all those thirty years.

We are willing rather to understand that what Jacob really intends to say is this :—"Since God has promised to be with me, and to keep me in the way that I go, the Lord shall be my God." Remember that his forms of expression repeat almost precisely those which the Voice had used in the night from above the ladder. Observe carefully the princely and magnificent engagements freely proffered him. He was told in so many words that the whole region about him should be his. So when he asks for mere food and raiment, the petition cannot be considered extravagant. Moreover, God had told him he was bound never to leave him until every one of those most glowing promises had been fulfilled. Surely, then, it would be disingenuous and unfair to assert that he was selfish and grasping when he implored that God would bring him around to his father's house in peace.

That is to say, when lordship in the land is promised, it is not mean to ask mere subsistence. It does seem the rather that Jacob's requests were strikingly moderate. There is certainly defect enough in his religious life, as it here confronts us, without assuming that he was merely a time-server, or was attempting godliness simply because it was profitable unto all things.

But further light will be thrown upon this, as we advance to the discussion of another question, of much more importance. Did Jacob, at this moment in his history, become a converted man, or what we now term a Christian?

There has always been in some quarters a good deal of doubt as to the real orthodoxy of ancient believers, upon certain points of evangelical experience. It seems specially to be feared that Old Testament piety is defective. It lacks spirituality. It sometimes appears grossly legal. It seems to rest almost altogether upon mere moral principle. And there are people now, who think they are very ingenious at exposure, when they begin to insert modern terminology into the rehearsals of ancient religiousness.

For example: it is deemed fairly witty to ask whether Enoch ever "had a change of heart"—was Ruth a "converted" woman—is there any way of being sure Rahab became a "professor"—did the young Josiah "love Jesus"—had Samuel any evidences of "vital piety"—did Mephibosheth "obtain a hope" before he died—or had even David "experienced religion" when he wrote the pathetic poetry of the fifty-first Psalm?

Perhaps it is just as well to be serious about this, for it is considered sometimes to have force. As to the terms employed to express our modern conceptions of religious experience, we must remember that much of the common phraseology is the sheer invention of the excitable sects, and the mere cant of the system-makers. No small measure of it might well be dropped, or surely exchanged for that which is positively Scriptural.

Queer choice of technical names, it is observable, grows out of differing customs and notions among men in diverse latitudes. In the Micronesian islands, (so we learn from the preachers there,) the people are wont, with their slender philosophy, to locate the affections in the larynx. So when religious treatises were made in order to instruct them, the ordinary expressions, bandied around us in revival times, assumed a somewhat odd shape. As the missionaries wanted to speak of the necessity of being born again, they had to call the wonderful mystery a "change of *throat*."

Why not use the Bible language, you ask. Well, the mis-

fortune for those, who think they need to employ such terms, is that there is no Bible language for them. There can be no doubt that Old Testament and New Testament piety were the same. Terms for experience, and forms of order, may have been unlike ; but the Church has been only one in all the ages. Hannah and Lydia were saved through the merits of the same Redeemer, Jesus Christ. Isaiah and John preached the same gospel. There can be no possible doubt that Naomi and Dorcas, Elisha and Simon Peter, Asaph and Jude, are to-day all in the same heaven, and singing the same song.

But it may as well be admitted that some of our present conceptions of personal religion do not seem to fit very well when we apply them to the historic characters who figure most in the Pentateuch. It is evident that under the Old Testament regimen, more stress (in the popular estimate) was laid upon behavior and life than now ; and less attention was paid to mere moods of feeling, and less value was set upon them.

Solomon says : " Fear God, and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man." Micah says : " He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good ; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God." Now since there is no explicit mention, in either of these formularies, of a necessity so pressing as justification by faith assumes, we are sure that something unexpressed must be understood, so that the entire experience may be considered evangelical. Alongside of the daily literary life of an old believer lay a practical life of penitence, service, worship and sacrifice. What he said, and thought, and wrote, and sung, was intensely modified by the morning and evening smoke on the altar. So he generally talked duty rather than emotion ; and considered himself on the direct way to heaven, when faithfullest to his covenant. And we suppose this is the reason why those patriarchs, whose names we hold in such honor, never seem to have run

into any mysticism of religious life. They thought upon their ways, and turned their feet unto the testimonies of God.

Hence, if any one presses the inquiry we have raised just now, and desires to have it explicitly settled whether, at this solemn juncture in his career, Jacob was truly regenerated by the Spirit of God, we cannot be certain he will get a satisfactory answer. Sure we are that there remained in this perverse man's nature a great ferment of corruption, still to be cleansed away. Whether the first seed of grace was then planted in his soul or not, will ever be a mysterious and undecided enigma. No possible harm can come, however, from our assuming that divine mercy began, at that supreme moment in his biography, to strive with him; and that in his weak and bewildered way, he set himself to attain a better life. For note the circumstances.

Religion consists of three things—knowledge, feeling, and duty. A man must be acquainted with the atonement—must believe in Jesus—and must commence service with his new Master. That ladder taught Jacob, Christ. His manner evidences solemn and all-pervading emotion. And this covenant he proffers seems the full surrender of himself to obedience. To say that he cannot have been very intelligent, that he got over his feeling, and that he forgot these vows, is only to say that he was a weak man, and by no means a model. But if Jacob had died, in the gray light of that morning at Bethel, most people would have declared he was saved and safe in heaven with Abraham.

Surely, then, dropping all particular reference to this most contradictory man, we have the intelligent right to say, that whether he began then a Christian life or not, *this is the true way for any one of us to begin one.* Our best counsel will come from a simple examination of his covenant. You will perceive that he asked four things, and promised three. He asked divine presence, protection, providence, and peace. He offered his heart, his life, and his fortune, in return.

The first thing he sought was God's presence. He said:

—"If God will be with me." This was merely retorting the language he had heard in his wonderful dream: "Behold, I am with thee."

It seems to lie at the very basis of human nature, this sense of loneliness and exposure. We crave companionship. Our souls cry out after what is higher and stronger than ourselves. When a young man leaves home, and finds himself out from under the securities of the old roof, in the midst of a furious city like this, he will discover in his innermost experience a new desolation. Nobody has any knowledge of him. Nobody cares for him. He receives what drifts towards him. And what drifts towards him is often vicious and full of peril.

At this crisis the instinct of self-preservation makes him seek for help. Feeble little subterfuges are put up for a guard. Manhood is summoned. There are times in the life of most persons, when they sit soberly down to take account of stock in spiritual resources. Plutarch tells us of a Greek, even as long ago as his day, who actually let his beard grow, so that the sight of it might keep him from running into folly. Home memories are invoked. A Polish nobleman used to wear around his neck his father's likeness; saying that whenever he was tempted, a quiet look at it would restrain him from dishonor. All this is merely trying to render the heathen notion real; it is the marshaling around one's soul of a host of guardian angels.

Better reach the highest point at once; better say—Let God be with me! If God be for us, who can be against us? Amulets will not help. Charms are not available. Resolutions will break. But he who puts his trust prayerfully in his father's God, will be sustained in every day of trial.

Then the next thing Jacob wanted was divine protection. He said—if the Lord "will keep me in this way that I go." By the time he had journeyed, in this desolate and dreary path, on as far as the heights near the old city of Luz, he had

begun to feel that it was a most lengthy labor which yet lay before him to reach Padan-aram.

He had just experienced one help. He could have said with more than usual intelligence, after such a night and such a dream, "I will both lay me down in peace and sleep; for thou, Lord, only makest me dwell in safety." And now when that Voice said to him—"I will keep thee in all places whither thou goest"—he took the words up at once. He found no pillow was hard, when a sweet promise was around his head—no hillside was desolate, when the ladder to heaven came down to touch it—no road was lonely, when God would walk beside him in it.

Then again, Jacob implored divine providence. He said—if God "will give me bread to eat and raiment to put on." It seems now as if he had begun to know how easy his life had hitherto been, and how rough it might become hereafter.

While the world stands, it will be hard for most of us to give over taking thought for the morrow. Especially do we carry care for others. Our children—who will feed, clothe, educate them? Many of us are conscious of a strong, even a masterful and mighty desire, to compass the future in some small degree, and help those who are improvident, and are naturally turning to us for assistance, while at the same moment we are utterly at a loss how to proceed. We find our picture in the masonry of a wall, around which a slender vine is clinging, the drear morning after an autumn frost. We are willing to afford all sort of support, even at the cost of hiding our finest tracery. If holding on to us would only just do it! But all we can do is to stand silent as the stone, and offer our pity as clumsily. And it seems to come to nothing.

Not so with the dear love that bends over us from heaven. God says, "Come to me; seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." He encourages us to come close to him for special help. Among the private papers of the sainted Christmas Evans was found this prayer:—"Oh, let thy care

be over me as a covenant privilege between thee and myself, and not like a general care to feed the ravens that perish, and clothe the lily that is cast into the oven; but let thy care be over me as one of thy family, as one of thine unworthy brethren!"

Then Jacob asks for divine peace. His words are, "so that I come again to my father's house in peace." You know he left home because he had quarreled with Esau, and had reason to be afraid of him. And here we see that he expected some day or other to return from his exile.

Among the pure and beautiful ambitions of young men, I have never met any more attractive or more noble, than that of going back, at no distant day, to the old village where they were born, and caring for the beloved ones they left behind them. They often pray, even through their manliest tears, that if God would be pleased to prosper them, the hour should certainly come in which they would lighten the cares on the dear face of a mother, who has toiled for many a hard year.

To clear a mortgage off a farm—to make it possible for a patient sister to set up a home of her own—to speak the delighted word which tells the longing brother he may start for college—oh, these seem so commonplace, and yet they are so glorious! Cling to your hope, my brave friend; trust in God, and he will yet bring you around to your father's house, with your hands full of benediction.

Now on the other hand, this patriarch leaving home, pledges three things in his vow to God. They are closely connected. They all really go together. He says the Lord shall be his God; he will come back and make an altar out of the stone his head lay on; and of all the wealth he may have acquired he will give a tenth part in religious alms.

In the outset, then, this means he will give his heart to God—himself, all he is—he will surrender his entire being, and begin a new life. He will become a man of prayer. He will ask God if he may do this or that, and be governed by what he can learn of the divine will.

Next to this, he says he will make open confession of his purpose. He will turn that pillow of stone, which he had already consecrated as an altar and memorial, into a permanent place of prayer. He will establish a perennial reminder of divine goodness and mercy on the spot where he had first found it. It shall be God's house for his public acknowledgment of his covenant.

And further: he says he will consecrate to God a fixed portion of his income, for all benevolent and religious use. Of all his action that morning, this is the most significant part. Some minds there are in this world, of that peculiar character, not always gross, nor always particularly given to earthliness, but so constituted that they better measure by *money* than by anything else. Jacob was quite a type in this respect. He was hardly safe except under bonds of pecuniary risk. When you hear him say, of his own accord, he will pay tithes, you may begin with some hopefulness to trust his professions.

Now I do not choose to fashion any other application of this sermon than that here exhibited. If you have followed the story with any degree of care, you cannot miss the pressure of the admonition at the end. To young men beginning life, here is a most winning example.

On the one side, God says he will be with you, he will keep you in the way that you go, he will give you bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that you come again to your father's house in peace. And on the other hand, he asks you, will you give to him your heart, your life, and your fortune? There is just no limit whatever to these pledges. When you have divine presence, protection, providence, and peace, you have all there is in God to be bestowed on a mortal. And you are to turn, with equal inclusiveness, to him with all you are, all you expect, all you ever shall become. Henceforth you are not your own, you are bought with a price. He says—you are mine, and I am yours.

A QUESTION FOR YOU.

Oh, what are you going to do, brother?
Say, what are you going to do?
You have thought of some useful labor,
But what is the end in view?
You are fresh from the home of your boyhood,
And just in the bloom of youth;
Have you tasted the sparkling water,
That flows from the fount of truth?
Is your heart in the Saviour's keeping?
Remember he died for you!
Then what are you going to do, brother?
Say, what are you going to do?

Will you honor his cause and kingdom,
Wherever your path may be?
And stand as a bright example,
That others your light may see?
Are you willing to live for Jesus,
And ready the cross to bear?
Are you willing to meet reproaches,
The frowns of the world to share?
Your lot may perhaps be humble,
But God has a work for you—
Then what are you going to do, brother?
Say, what are you going to do?

Bethel:

TITHES AT THE START.

"And of all that thou shalt give me, I will surely give the tenth unto thee."—GEN. 28 : 22.

IT would be worth while, if there were any hope of success, to search out the reason why some persons shrink back with such utter recoil from circulating a subscription-paper. They tremble under their errand, when they pull a Christian's door-bell. They stammer when they try to tell him what they want. And when at last the detestable duty is done, and they have reached the free air on the street, they feel as happy as a fugitive slave safely arrived within Canadian borders.

Now this reluctance is really unworthy of a manly follower of Christ. If any one of your brethren makes a visit of this sort awkward for himself or for you, on him be the responsibility. God loves a cheerful giver; if this man prefers not to be a giver, or to be a grudging giver, then let him have his preference.

Prayer and alms-giving are put exactly alongside in the Sermon on the Mount. And if any one, claiming to be religious, makes it hard for another to collect his contribution, he simply lowers confidence in his own covenant. We have no more reason to feel humiliated, than if we had asked him to lead in prayer, and he declined. We can stand up just as unfrightened, as if we had been talking to him about the

millennium, and he had remarked, in view of some operations, he hoped it would come slowly; or as if we had been speaking of the river of life, and he had expressed a distaste for the water of it. It is a shame on us that we are ever afraid to discuss this theme. Why cannot we talk out about giving money just as we do about everything else?

The two important matters of notice, in this text I have chosen, are the early *purpose* of this young patriarch to give a portion of his wealth to religious ends, and the establishment of a fixed *system* in presenting it. It seems to be in Scripture history the exact beginning of all that custom of tithing the people which meets us everywhere in the Old Testament. It has arrested my attention; because it is the act of a young man just starting in the new life. It furnishes me with this for a topic: Systematic Beneficence, its Principle and its Measure.

I.—The principle may be stated in one compact sentence; A CHRISTIAN IS TO CONTRIBUTE, NOT ON IMPULSE, BUT BY PLAN. Jacob seems to have understood in the outset that this was to be the practical side of his life.

1. This duty should be taken up early by every young Christian as a matter of study. It is the New Testament rule: "Every man, according as he *purposeth in his heart*, so let him give." It is just as much his duty to purpose what he will give, as to give what he has purposed. The amount and direction of all our contributions should be pre-determined, not capricious. Every one should seek to be intelligent. It is not a Christian thing to do, to interrupt the solicitor explaining the object with the impatient words—"Well, well, I have no doubt it is all right; about how much is my share?" It is an unmanly shirk of duty to leave investigation to others. There are some who give liberally; but they trust to the opinion of those who call upon them. They pay any amount at which they are rated, charge it to profit and loss, and tranquilly wait for a new attack from another

quarter. There may be gracefulness in this acquiescence ; but there is no grace in it.

2. It will not do to discharge this work all at once. There is on record the name of one church, which made a calculation of what they had done during ten years for all benevolent enterprises ; disgusted at appeals, they raised as much more, and then bade the minister announce no new cause for ten years thereafter. To his honor, be it said, he consented only on condition that they would have a fortnight's steady preaching, a week for prayer, and a month for singing ; then shut up the church. Now what a congregation cannot do, no man by himself can do. A settled habit of giving is promoted only by a settled exercise of giving.

3. It will not do to leave this duty to a mere impulse of excitement. Christians ought never to wait for fervid appeals, or ardent addresses to sympathy. That man, who is influenced only by the power of eloquence, who does his giving only under the tearfulness wrought by vivid pictures of need, or thrilling descriptions of suffering and pain, would have equal right to decline giving when the request was tamely put. If his purse cannot open, except when some tremendous oration of a master has flung him all at once into a spasm of generosity, then it is proof he has not even so much as commenced the study of the logic of benevolence. For this duty is not grounded upon the power of human speech to either move or disgust him ; but on his relations to God and God's work. That man bestows alms to little benefit, who has to be inveigled into it by stratagem. He may find his resemblance in the unhistoric fish, which Simon Peter caught at our Lord's command, when they fell behindhand in their call to pay taxes. It was good for nothing in itself, and would never have been heard of, but for the piece of money taken from its mouth. And even that the Lord miraculously placed there beforehand.

4. It will not do to perform this duty as a mere mechanical form. We are told, in one familiar verse of the New

Testament, that "he which soweth sparingly, shall reap also sparingly." This singular word *sparingly* occurs nowhere else in the Scriptures. It means grievously, regretfully; holding back after the gift, if such an expression may be allowed. There are, in all our congregations, those who are led to contribute by a mere flash of pride. Others are doing so, and they dare not keep out of sight. But the following feeling is hardly safe under analysis. It consists of a mixture of indignation and grief, resulting in a sort of provoked state of mind. They call hard names. They say they hate begging sermons. They are inclined to resolve they will not be found amid such perils again. Now any man who gives in this way, and contemplates the giving in this mood, has just committed two sins; one of omission, and one of commission. He has not given his alms, as he ought; and he has shown his temper, as he ought not. "So let him give, not grudgingly, or of necessity; for God loveth a cheerful giver." Giving dollars and cents, you know not and care not how much, to you know not and care not what Society, for a purpose you know not and care not what, is not doing the work of our divine Redeemer at all. The cup of cold water which any one of us gives to a disciple in the name of a disciple, is not to be dripped off from the end of an icicle.

5. This duty is to be discharged only with a diligent comparison of means with ends. Before he had anything, Jacob settled that he would give at least one-tenth of what should come to him. System in giving is the secret of all success. Our stream of benevolence ought to flow clearly and constantly, as the brook which followed the uplifted staff of Moses in the desert. But we are not to carry the simile any further. It is no pattern of ours, that cold rock in the cliff-side, full of crystal springs, but stubbornly waiting to be struck before it would start them. A definite and large-hearted calculation should be made by each individual in the beginning of his Christian career. Percentage is the readiest rule; for it is elastic in each direction. In some

quiet, unexcited, hour, let each young man prayerfully strike his balance of income. He can easily obtain a list of all the ten or twelve causes of benevolence, sure during a given year to come before him. Then let him calculate how much per cent on his income he can give ; and this should be divided in a proper apportionment among the calls. On his journal, at regular dates, let him enter these monthly sums as he would any other covenant notes of hand ; so be ready to meet them.

II.—Of course, this leads us on directly to our second matter of consideration, the measure of Christian beneficence. If any one asks for a general rule by which to fix his calculation, I feel very certain I should answer—GIVE TITHES, TO START WITH.

1. That is to say, begin with ten per cent. There must have been some worthy wisdom lying at the base of that Old Testament rule, or it never would have been adopted. All the ancient people of God brought their tithes into the storehouse. And when they began it, they were a simple nation of slaves. The Israelites were among the poorest creatures that ever wrought out a starveling existence. But they consecrated, from the earliest annals of their history, one-tenth part out of all their annual gains from harvests and from toil. Animals, money, grain, and first-fruits ; these they conscientiously divided and tithed for God's service.

Now it has not fallen in your way hitherto to waste much admiration upon this man Jacob. He is a fugitive and a vagabond, for reason. He exhibits a most penurious and grasping spirit. We have even had occasion once to call him the typical *Jew*. Of all the close, tight men of the Scriptures he seems ever to have taken the fair lead. But while you are studying the points of his character, you surely ought to be careful lest his example rebuke you. If the meanest man in history gave ten per cent to God's service, I cannot see how we can give less.

2. So that leads me to say, that tithes, just to start with,

will in many cases force a Christian on to increase as he grows in fortune. Ten per cent was the Jewish rule; the New Testament regulation is thus announced:—"Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom; for with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again." This intimates that when life grows easier, and gains more plentiful, the good Lord, whose stewards we are, raises his rates of loan, and expects more liberal returns.

Now it is the business of us all to help each other the most we can in difficult decisions. Life is short, and the cool of the day will be upon us soon, when we are to look for the Lord God coming down to talk with us in the twilight. No one man can say for another how much, or when, or to what, he should give money. But possibly we can all grow clearer if we quietly note the prominent considerations which enter into the reckoning.

It is well for us, in the first place, to think of *what has been done in our behalf* by God, our Maker and Redeemer. A simple principle of just account, a balance of debt and credit, would throw great light upon our primary calculation. What shall we render unto God for all his benefits? That question is one of the most searching, and reaching, that human lips ever raised. When king David remembered how God had succeeded and honored him, he planned to build the most glorious temple the world ever knew. When Zaccheus, that man of little stature and great heart, had received the Lord Jesus under his roof, he felt he was distinguished and blessed forever; his first remark was most business-like; he said, I am going to increase my contributions; hitherto I have given tithes; now I want to bestow *half my goods* on the poor! We should measure our gifts in money by our receipts in grace. When the cause of Christ comes up for help, we should think of what we owe to Christ. It should be the very hand which takes the communion-bread, that

drops the coin in the plate ; the very lip which the communion-wine touches, that should lift the prayer for success.

In the second place, we should do well, in making up the calculation, to remember *whence the prosperity came*, out of which we give money. It is much more flattering to business-men to assert that those grow rich who are the shrewdest, the most industrious, and the most frugally honest. But it must be admitted, in a history like ours, that most of the men who are opulent, have become so by striking providences in their career. So true is this, especially in our own land, that no American Christian will act wisely who refuses to take it into account. Discovery of mines, sudden fluctuation of stocks, growth of city lots, rise in price of what was apparently worthless inheritance—these so-called chances in life have made more men wealthy than anything else in this present generation. And when a man has honestly to say, as this Jacob did afterwards—“With but my staff I crossed the Jordan, and now I am become two bands”—he ought to note carefully that God seeks where he has given, and so raise his rates.

Nor is this all: it is well for us to consider *the extent of the work which is to be accomplished*. Let an intelligent proportion be set apart for each branch of Christian effort. It costs more to evangelize a nation than to stock a Mission-school, or support a poor family. To many men a collection is a collection, no matter what its object may be. Now Christians should be as shrewd in definite calculations of necessities and expenses, when church business comes in for aid, as when other business. It is high time the ancient reproach was ended:—“the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light.” That was true when the people of God gave only tithes of their substance. It is short-sighted, puerile, unmanly, to meet a great cause with a niggardly pittance. Such an act is not giving to a cause, it is a mere giving to a contribution. It is folly and thoughtlessness to talk about foreign missions in India, and

then exhaust one's beneficence on a mere stamp for the letter, which would fail half way to Hindostan.

Then there is a fourth consideration, which ought to be noted, while we reckon our percentage: *think of the promises which reward the free giver.* There is a kind of holy and lawful appeal made even in the Bible to one's sense of thrift and permitted cupidity. "The liberal soul shall be made fat." In all time, it is observable that those Christians succeed the best, who devise most generous things. Hence it is that the poor are summoned to bestow their goods out of their poverty. The mistake is positively fatal to any laboring-man's piety, for him to say he can do nothing for God. He might as well declare that, being a man of few words, he cannot spare even a sentence for secret prayer. No one should ever run in debt—not even for religious contribution. But any true Christian may certainly assume that God will help him out, in whatever he plans by faith. When Whitefield was pleading for his orphan-house in Bethesda, the poor were among his most generous contributors. On one occasion a hundred dollars was given in simple half-pennies, more than his porter could carry away at a lift. Five thousand church-members gave in Jamaica seven years ago thirty-five thousand dollars to Christian work; and these were emancipated slaves and their children. Recently the poor converts in Marash sold the copper dishes from which they ate, to build a church edifice. It is this simple surrender of all, trusting God, which in the end is most munificently rewarded.

It is well, in the fifth place, for one who is making up his mind about his percentage, to think of *the exigencies arising under the favoring providences of God.* I have already called your attention to the sudden prosperities that often befall men of foresight now-a-days. Has it never occurred to you that the Church of Christ has often to double its outlay, simply because capital was wanting to it to enter its field at the nick of time? Indeed, the reproach is sometimes leveled at those who manage our Boards, that they are most awkward

and unsuccessful financiers. They need a site for an edifice ; and men say, oh, why did you not purchase ground two years ago? Then at the West railways sweep through a tract of unopened country ; villages are gathered ; and capitalists exclaim, why was this ruinous delay? Then you all laugh because the blundering ministers, and unbusiness-like Secretaries, come pleading for quadruple contributions! Alas, why is it that Christian enterprise is so stupid? Not for want of sharpness, I tell you frankly, but for want of funds. God opens the door, and everything goes in, but God's people! In my college days we used to say—" *Bis dat, qui cito dat*"—he gives twice, who gives quickly. Oh, when I mark the opening history of this republic, as it shines out in the next ten years, I wish I had the voice of a trumpet to call on our young men to arise in God's name to meet it, as it deserves!

"I hear the tread of pioneers of nations yet to be,
The first low wash of waves, where soon shall roll a human sea."

Shall divine mercy urge up the opportunities, and just our backwardness give them all away through lack of enterprise ; and then by and by, slow and solemn as destiny, shall we be summoned to take up our dull burden at a prodigious disadvantage, grown to twice its weight, and only solace ourselves with recrimination, while we redeem the time !

Then for a final consideration, think of the listlessness of others. Believe me, this, which many men reckon an excuse, becomes the most pressing argument. If some Christians make all their religious fortune early, and then retire, shall the streets of the new Jerusalem become overgrown with grass? Do we want a generation of *retired Christians*? The other day came an appeal from one of our great Boards—"Urge your men to put our cause *in their wills!*" Have we reached so low a point as that? Has the heavenly Bridegroom no hope beyond receiving his dowry of thirds after his Bride is dead? Then let us start a new age, and begin again.

So I close this sermon by coming around to its start. I desire to leave the picture of this patriarch clear and conspicuous before your minds. He was nigh seventy years of age, but his life was before him, and to all intents and purposes he was a young man. I can find no better evidence that the root of piety was planted in his heart, than this calm consecration of a portion of his possessions to God. What he had, or should have, he said he would divide.

The main point of all the counsel is found in the calculation at the outset. He began right. If our young men, just starting in life, would only make some definite plan, the great end would be gained. It seems impossible to persuade elderly men to take up systematic beneficence. If it be not adopted in early life, it never is heartily afterwards. There is a mysterious result wrought out by prosperity. It deludes and betrays, always with some ingenuity peculiarly its own.

Once a wealthy merchant gave this excuse. "I had a dream," he said; "I was erecting a pyramid of gold. Its vast base stood four-square on the rock. Its glittering sides shone in the sun. But its pinnacle was yet unfinished, as it rose near the sky. I saw how the gains of toiling years were lifting it layer by layer. I even awoke myself by exclaiming, When it is entirely done, I will begin to give away." Then the slow months passed, and the twelvemonths vanished. And again came the call, with the question, Is the pyramid finished yet? And the answer was quite ready. "I have had another dream; the mass of gold was shining clear to its apex; it was the wonder of the world; but I said, as I waked from sleep, How can I pluck away from its beauty, or injure the symmetry of its pattern? I am now busy laying up a little more, lest it should ever crumble, and need repairs."

He who gives tithes at the start, will grow himself as his fortune grows. He that delays, will harden. And it should never be forgotten that money is only the measure of manhood, when consecrated to Christ. It is ourselves we give to him, ourselves he demands.

“FREELY GIVE.”

Give! as the morning which flows out of heaven :
 Give! as the waves when their channel is riven :
 Give! as the free air and sunshine are given :
 Lavishly, utterly, carelessly, give !
 Not the waste drops of thy cup overflowing,
 Not the faint sparks of thy hearth ever glowing,
 Not a pale bud from the June roses blowing,
 Give, as He gave thee, who gave thee—to live !

Pour out thy life like the rush of a river,
 Wasting its waters forever and ever,
 E'en through burnt sands that reward not the giver ;
 Silent or songful, thou nearest the sea !
 Scatter thy life, like the summer showers' pouring !
 What if no bird through the pearl rain be soaring ?
 What if no blossom look upward adoring ?
 Look to the Life that was lavished for thee !

Give! though thy heart should be wasted and weary,
 Laid on an altar all ashen and dreary ;
 Though from its pulses a faint miserere
 Beats, to thy heart the sad presage of fate ;
 Bind it with cords of unshrinking devotion !
 Smile at the song of its ceaseless emotion !
 'Tis the stern hymn of eternity's ocean !
 Hear ! and in silence thy future await !

Almost the day of thy giving is over ;
 Ere from the grass dies the bee-haunted clover,
 Thou wilt have vanished from friend and from lover—
 What shall thy longing avail in the grave ?
 Give! as the heart gives, whose fetters are breaking,
 Life, love, and hope, all thy dreams, all thy waking ;
 Soon Heaven's river thy soul-fever slaking,
 THOU SHALT KNOW GOD, AND THE GIFT THAT HE GAVE !

Bethel:

VOWS FORGOTTEN.

"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."—GEN 35: 1.

WE have already had under examination certain covenant engagements which this man Jacob made on the morning after his wonderful vision of the ladder. Perhaps it is quite as well for us to anticipate the progress of history a little, and follow out these vows to the end, while they are familiar in our minds.

You must remember that no one constrained Jacob to promise he would come back to Bethel some day, and make an altar out of the stones he pillowed his head upon. It was his own idea; and he gave it expression voluntarily. Yet strangely enough does the fact come out that here actually thirty years had passed away, and the command recorded in the text found this patriarch quietly abiding under the shadow of his own content, in the city of Shechem. It was only a very few miles from Bethel; yet it is evident Jacob had no notion of going any farther that way, for he bought land, established his family, and settled down apparently for life. He had forgotten his vows utterly.

It is observable, whenever in the honest history of the Bible the sins of any of the patriarchs are recorded, that the

statement is received according to the temperament and general purpose of each reader. To some it brings a feeling of pensive regret; a real sorrow and disappointment to think that even good men could not stand more steadily in a consistent life. To others it brings a new lusciousness of malicious enjoyment; a kind of ribald delight to see how wilful, and wayward, and wicked everybody is, when anything happens to show him up. The true impression, however, ought to be healthy; and indeed it is on every fair mind. None of these people were ever set up as models. Human nature is weak at the best, and often perverse. And it is not at all unlikely that each one of us would show up quite as poorly, if the scrutiny should be made as strict.

Here is just as good a place to begin at, as any other. How many of us, now in this house of God, have in perfectly clear remembrance the day and the hour, perhaps years ago, when we promised quite as much as ever Jacob did, and then forgot the covenant fully as quickly? Some of our number did this in public, and made an open confession of Christ. Others recall the time when a child was ill—or fortune was endangered—or health was menaced—or home was rocking under pressure and swell of peril. Then you solemnly said, if God would put you forth from this agitation and alarm, you would begin to be a better man. How clearly you understood yourself then! No evasion was even intended. Every line of duty was sharply cut, and plainly drawn. Your surrender of the world was whole-souled and all-embracing. You were even going to be unusually zealous and correct. For you had been one of those keen-sighted people, who generally occupy themselves in discovering the faults, and commenting upon the infirmities, of others. If there was one thing you hated, it was cant; if there was one thing you despised, it was hypocrisy. So your intelligent plan was to be strikingly exemplary. Oh, the Lord should be your God forever! If he would only bring you around to your father's house in peace, nothing of

all you loved and owned should be held too costly to be surrendered.

So then, we all feel quite at liberty to put the question, in case you are disposed to be too hard on Jacob, How stand your own vows to-day before God? Is there no record behind you of unfulfilled engagements even now?

While this patriarch was sitting quite at ease, there came this sharp, peremptory command to him to pull up his tents and start for Bethel. "*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.*"

It is here in this verse that we discover how far astray this man had suffered himself to go. In his very household, and with his confessed knowledge, there were false gods at this moment; images that were worshiped by members of his family. And on pushing our inquiries, we find further that even these were stolen. When Jacob left Laban, it seemed to be the rule to cheat all around. Even Rachel—that beautiful attractive creature we are taught to be so fond of—proves herself a thief, and pilfers some teraphim from her own father. These were simply images of gods, of small size, resembling in general the form of a man, made of stone or metal. It was believed they possessed a magical if not spiritual power to benefit a person who worshiped them.

Of course, there was no possible return to decent duty until these were all put away. And the radicalness of the change, which was now coming over Jacob, as well as the thoroughness of his purification from sin, is seen in no one thing more admirably than in his insistency that his entire household should be cleansed of infatuation and folly. There was no use in building an altar while these women consulted the stone oracles.

Most intelligent people nowadays reject the notion of idolatry as even a possible sin. We sometimes in our excursions visit the rooms of a Missionary Society. We find in the curious cabinets on the wall many forms of deities, sent

home here from heathen temples. More horrible, misshapen, monstrous abominations are not to be found on earth than some of these idols, little and large. Nobody would admit he had any such in his household in this land of light.

But then idolatry is by no means an uncommon sin even among intelligent and educated people. There are idols in the heart which have no external shape at all. Our idol is simply the thing we love and care for the most, so that it advances itself into the place of God in our thoughts and sympathies. To one man it is his family pride; to another, it is his literary ambition; to one, it is his wealth; to another, it may possibly be a favorite child. It is idolatry to bestow on anybody or anything that which belongs to our Maker alone. And while we blame Jacob here, for suffering such folly to find place in his family, let us at least render him one acknowledgment of praise for the immediate acquiescence with which he sprang to his duty, and the searching reach of the clearance he proposed.

It is evident that he recognized himself as the head and high-priest of his household. He turned over to them the order he had received. With no hesitancy, he said:—“*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.*” Concerning which words of soberness we must all remark three things—the instantaneousness of his obedience—the intelligence of his rehearsal—and the full humility of his acknowledgment of good.

He waited for nothing. God had said—“Arise.” Jacob repeats it—“Let us arise.” The important matter of notice is, that he made no feint of waiting to get better before he started to get back. God’s expressions are very kind—quite as remarkable for what they omit as what they employ. He uses no upbraiding. He does not tell his derelict servant how wrong he has been. He reminds Jacob of his need; and leaves him to infer his sin. So here appeared a new chance, and reparation was within reach.

The divine command to every backslider, and every covenant-breaker, is peremptory. He says we are to wait for nothing; begin exactly where we left off. I can come to any discouraged man, whose heart is heavy under the remembrance of forgotten vows, and tell him our Saviour desires to give him a fresh chance. He says you are to go back to the hour of your covenant, as Jacob did to Bethel, and begin again.

Now the moment you read the little speech over, which this man made to his family, you are arrested with the evidence of his intelligence. He does not beat around upon the frontiers of duty. He knew that the main thing he had promised was that the Lord Jehovah should be his God, and he would make an altar for his worship out of the pillar of stone. It was no alarm that set him into action; but a solemn sense of devotion and duty.

The ancient heathen have given us their idea of an avenging deity, ever relentlessly following on, clamoring after his own tributes, locking behind him the gates of an irreparable past, and driving any sorrowful soul he finds behindhand in duty forward into irrevocable doom. But our God is no Nemesis. He has no pleasure in the death of any sinner. He would rather every sinner should turn unto him and live. And for one, I am ready to say that the brightest revelation in all the good news of the gospel, is found in the intimation given us that we are permitted to try again, and make up our past time, and retrieve folly.

Then watch these words of Jacob for another thing. See how frankly he acknowledges that while he forgot all his own engagements, the Almighty had fulfilled every one he had made. He states distinctly that God had answered him in distress, and had been with him in the way he went. There is something very pathetic in this. We have no reason for supposing he had ever told Rachel and Leah of this wonderful ladder at Bethel. There is always a peculiar experience of sympathetic curiosity in the heart of any young wife when

her husband suddenly discloses for the first time to her some momentous incident in his life before they had been married. It really seems one of the most attractive scenes of Jacob's life—this when he is telling all that circle of home ones the story of his former blessing, and recounting the hopes he yet cherished in penitent zeal for the days to come.

What moved Jacob's heart in this experience, more than anything else, was the firm conviction that, in the years of so much shame to him, God had never failed in even one of the promises he had made. God never does break a covenant. God never does forget an engagement. The words of the patriarch are significant, because they simply retort the terms of the original promise. As this man stood at the foot of the mysterious ladder, the voice from above it said—"I will not leave thee." And now here Jacob answers to the fidelity, as he says—he was "with me in the way which I went." God had kept his word.

Such discoveries always move the heart of any candid man. More than one of us here can recall the day when we left our old home in the country, and set out upon life for a risky journey. How sober the future looked. How insufficient we felt for the struggle before us. Your mother prayed for you, and put the Bible in your trunk. Your father counseled you with a tenderness you felt thrilling in the quiet tones of his voice. You could hardly stand the pressure; yet were you ashamed to break down. When no one knew it, late on the last night before departure, you kneeled beside the bed of your boyhood under the dear old roof, and told God you were going to be true; if he would only bring you around again in peace to your father's house, he should ever be your God, and you would be his child. Then you slept comforted; for you seemed to feel a new conviction of divine presence accompanying you, almost as if he had said in words—"I will be with you, and keep you."

Since then, summers and winters have come and gone. You admit you have been wayward and thoughtless. But

you see now how unfalteringly God has followed you all your life. He "answered you in the day of your distress, and has been with you in the way which you went."

When Jacob repeated these historic experiences to his family, it is possible he felt some degree of hesitation. But they all met him cordially in the matter. "*They gave unto him all the strange gods which were in their hand, and all their ear-rings which were in their ears ; and Jacob hid them under the oak which was by Shechem.*" It is quite possible that there was some relation between these ear-rings and the images, of a religious sort. They may have been amulets or charms.

Even if they were only ornaments, the quick surrender argues well for the affection, the obedience, and the sympathy of these women with Jacob in his purpose of a new life. It involved a good deal for them to immediately give up their home, and set out for a fresh establishment in a region unknown. But when a religious motive was offered, they felt its power. The love of personal adornment is proverbial in eastern countries. Females wear their fortunes on their heads in jewelry. And we cannot help thinking that there was a most admirable spirit in this household, when the new purpose of Jacob to lead a better life was announced.

I have seen this same experience repeated in almost identical particulars in our own time. The father of a family, led by the providence and the Spirit of God to see himself as the child of many prayers, and the offerer of none, resolved to become a Christian. But he feared the explosive rejection of his wife and children, the moment they knew it. How could he tell them of his purpose? And yet more he dreaded the long and weary struggle between his piety and their worldliness afterwards. But the day came when there could be no longer delay. Awkwardly he related his history, and announced his plan. To his utter amazement, worldliness was laid at his feet, like the ear-rings of Leah, and the

little gods of Rachel. Tears of welcome met him as he set up his family altar.

There may generally be anticipated a real sympathy in the hearts of every family worthy of the name, when the father starts out in the Christian life. He need not be afraid of them. God and truth and manhood are on his side.

You must not let Jacob's peculiar action at this supreme moment escape your notice. It is one of the deepest of all human sensibilities which leads us to feel that whatever has been even for once worshiped by any heart, is to be treated at least with decorous regard. Jacob wins our respect when he buries these idols and charms under the tree at Shechem. No iconoclastic violence marks his victory over Rachel's idolatry. He lays her cherished gods reverently away in a not unseemly grave. He accepts the symbolic change of garments without any taunt of injudicious triumph. He utters no upbraiding for the past; merely resting his satisfaction on the certainty that now they started on the new career together, an unbroken family. And nothing can be more beautiful than this cheerful, charitable forgiveness of each other's faults, as this united household begin life again.

"And they journeyed; and the terror of God was upon the cities that were round about them; and they did not pursue after the sons of Jacob." You remember that these men had met and punished in the city of Shechem a dreadful crime. Simeon and Levi, especially, had shown a blind and bloody spirit of revenge, as they slaughtered those who had insulted their sister. And retaliation of a like character hung on their heels. But the moment it became clear that this family had passed under the protection of divine help, no one ventured to lift a spear against them.

We read in the Acts of the Apostles that, although the early Church was running counter to all the prejudices of the unbelieving world around, and was exposed all the time to direful persecution, yet when "they continued daily with one

accord in the temple, and, breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God"—they had "favor with all the people." It must not be forgotten that, though piety is not popular, it certainly is respectable. When any family, or any man, becomes truly and devoutly religious, it may be expected that a deep and wholesome reverence will surround the life which centres itself in God. He is ready to stand by his own, and is sure to reveal himself in a thousand forms of protection and love.

"So Jacob came to Luz, which is in the land of Canaan, that is, Bethel, he and all the people that were with him." I fear I cannot reproduce in your minds at all, the feeling of profound sympathy, which rises in my own, as I think of this man, now back on the old hillside once more, where he had seen the vision of the ladder and the angels, and heard God's voice in the covenant. When, after thirty years, he reached the spot, and found standing there his own erected memorial, the very pillow his head lay upon in that desolate night, as he fled from his father's house, he could not have been human if he had contemplated it without overmastering emotion. But was there not, mingling with his joy, some sense of sadness and even of shame, as he looked upon the moss which may have grown over the forgotten monument, and the sand which had drifted in upon the oil?

But I have seen, in my day, the kneeling form of a penitent and rejoicing man, returned from his backsliding, after absence of sad and worldly years, and now once more at the communion-table. Oh, with what subdued and gentle tears he renewed his vows, and in humble but unalterable resolution covenanted to redeem the past!

Thirty years of changes; thirty years of blessing; thirty years of repeated warning; thirty years of forgotten vows! But Jacob had no time for mere regret. Duty came first, and he rose instantly to meet it. *"He built there an altar, and called the place El-beth-el; because there God appeared to*

him, when he fled from the face of his brother." No new reckless invention—nothing more than merely doing what he said he would; when the vow was made.

And here comes out the main lesson of the story. The fresh life of a truly returned backslider demands no novel symbol. *He needs to begin just where he left off.* He repents, and does "the first works."

And yet, in his re-naming of the place, Jacob puts in a little more of remembrance of divine mercy; he said *Beth-el* before; now he says *El-beth-el*. EL is the name of God, you remember; so he says "from beginning to end of my covenant, it is in God's strength alone I rely."

This entire story closes with an incident most affecting and attractive. "*Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died, and she was buried beneath Bethel under an oak; and the name of it was called Allon-bachuth.*" This name means "the oak of weeping," and intimates that it was a sorrowful affliction to them.

This old servant's presence in the company makes it likely that Jacob's indulgent mother was dead now. But she may have left word that, if ever her beloved son should return, this woman, who had nursed him, should go to his side. Deborah may have come up from Hebron to meet him, and found the journey too severe. But she lived long enough, perhaps, to offer her message. Then they laid her reverently in her grave, and gave her a monument of living oak.

And our drama closes with that exquisite picture; the respectful funeral; the new life begun; the altar rebuilt; the past redeemed; and Jacob, penitent and resolute, in wholesome tears beneath the tree of weeping. "*And God appeared unto Jacob again, when he came out of Padan-aram, and blessed him.*"

AT THE DOOR.

THE mistakes of my life are many,
The sins of my heart are more,
And I scarce can see for weeping,
But I knock at the open door.

I know I am weak and sinful,
It comes to me more and more ;
But when the dear Saviour shall bid me come in,
I'll enter that open door !

I am lowest of those who love him,
I am weakest of those who pray ;
But I come as he has bidden,
And he will not say me nay.

My mistakes his free grace will cover,
My sins he will wash away ;
And the feet, that shrink and falter,
Shall walk through the gate of day.

The mistakes of my life are many,
And my spirit is sick with sin,
And I scarce can see with weeping—
But the Saviour will let me in !

I know I am weak and sinful,
It comes to me more and more ;
But when the dear Saviour shall bid me come in,
I'll enter that open door.

The Story of Esau.

"Thus Esau despised his birthright." Gen. 25 : 34.

THE story of Esau's life, as it comes in contact with Jacob's, is one of the most serious in the Bible—one of the most instructive—and on the whole, one of the most pathetic. Perhaps it is the natural relationship between these two men, whose destinies so interlace and influence each other, that renders the tale so deeply tragic.

In one of the suburbs of London, there was, during the last century, a place of curious resort, called in the popular phraseology the "Field of Forty Footsteps." The local tradition declared that, in the time of Monmouth's rebellion, two brothers had a falling out, and fought so fiercely that both were killed in the encounter. To this, superstition added that the tracks, formed from the vengeful struggle, remained in the sward, conspicuous for fifty years thereafter. Indeed no grass could be made to grow tall enough to cover them; no grain could be produced on that mournful soil. There the outlines of all the fatal wrestle lingered in a permanent record, showing just how the heavy footfalls, advancing and returning, drove their way into the earth. Forty of these, it was asserted, could be actually counted. The simple people in the neighborhood would go and visit the spot, and hush their voices as they looked thoughtfully upon the arena, where brothers' hands in violence had shed brothers' blood.

We have a field of equal reminiscence and suggestiveness in the chapters before us. And it becomes all the more impressive because the conflict was spiritual, and these two lives wrestled together for the prize of eternal welfare as well as temporal.

The two sons of Jacob differed in many respects, but they were alike in one. They must have been very dissimilar in their physical characteristics—Esau being more robust and sinewy; Jacob, more slight and frail. They were unlike in tastes and habits—Jacob preferring the less stirring life of a shepherd, and the more quiet home of a dweller in tents; Esau loving the chase, and delighting in the hardier pursuits of the hunting-field. What may have been the effect upon their dispositions of an injudicious training in their boyhood, it is not easy to say; but the important fact needs to be noted that Jacob was always the favorite child of his mother; Esau, that of his father.

In one thing, however, these two brothers agreed—each committed one great sin which moulded all his after life. It so happens that this is recorded in the same chapter of the Bible—as it might well be, for each act was embraced in the same deed. A subtle intertwining effect—like the lithe grapple of athletes—was produced by the sudden contact of these two wills; so that each preserves his own responsibility in the moment when he actually seems helping on the other's crime. Jacob sinned, with a guilt entirely disentangled and discriminated from Esau's, when he bought his brother's birthright and stole his blessing. Esau sinned perfectly unconstrained and intelligent, when he sold the birthright and lost the blessing he knew went with it.

The story is quite familiar to us all. Indeed, the whole biography of Esau is of easy acquisition, although it runs somewhat loosely into the two Testaments. It concerns our present purpose to rehearse only the portion of it in which he is supplanted by his brother.

Esau had been out on one of his usual hunting excursions

sions, and came in ravenously hungry. While he was away, (so the record reads,) "Jacob sod pottage." The word "sod" is the past tense of the verb "seethe," which means to *boil*. The word "pottage" of itself only means a boiled dish. We happen to know, however, that this was made of lentiles, a kind of podded vegetable resembling beans or pease. When cooked according to the eastern custom, the compound consists of a thick mass, reddish in color, and most nutritious and palatable in taste.

The eager Esau, just returning home from his sinewy sport, was wearied and famished. He rushed in impulsively, the moment he perceived what the quiet Jacob was at in the tent, and exclaimed—"Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red pottage; for I am faint." The word *pottage*, you will observe, is not in the original language; it appears in our version in *Italics*. A word is left out also, as well as one put in. It seems as if he burst out, all excitement and all in a glow, the temptation too strong for him as he sees his brother's toothsome dish—pointing abruptly to it—"Give me some of that red—that red." He does not say what; he repeats the word twice—"that *red*, that *red*!" So we know his impetuous haste.

Jacob, cool and calculating, hesitates a moment, and then proposes to bargain for it. "Sell me this day thy birthright," he replies. Perhaps they had talked this matter over before, for Esau shows no signs of being surprised or alarmed at the demand. He hesitates for a single instant with himself; then, pressed by hunger, he agrees to the sale. Jacob is not satisfied with his mere word, but insists upon his solemn oath. Esau reasons most recklessly. He says—"Behold, I am at the point to die; and what profit shall this birthright do to me?" So he swears all his cunning brother claims. Jacob then divides the savory mess. He gave Esau "bread and pottage of lentiles; and he did eat and drink, and rose up and went his way; thus Esau despised his birthright." There the story closes.

Now some may ask why we term this transaction a *sin*. Nobody doubts that in the end Esau found he had made a hard bargain. And nobody respects Jacob for thus selfishly taking advantage of his tired brother's necessity. But how could there be any moral guilt in the matter? In the epistle to the Hebrews there has been used exceedingly strong language about it. Esau's example is held up as a warning. He is called a "profane person;" and this, because "for one morsel of meat he sold his birthright." That was the costliest morsel human tongue ever touched since the forbidden fruit was eaten in Paradise.

It is well enough to remember that, when Esau speaks of his being so near death, he does not refer to his physical condition at the moment. He was at home. He could have supplied mere passing wants. "Had Rebekah become so poor a housekeeper," asks Matthew Henry, with his usual queer directness, "that he could find no convenient food?" These words of his are only a part of the general form of reflection which ran through his mind, as he looked on into the future. Paraphrased, they would read thus:—"How exposed is my whole manner of life! I may be cut off any time; this fact of merely having been born first is of exceedingly slight value; I never had any good from it; I get tired of waiting for a mere reversion; let it go; let me eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow I die!"

He spoke, as worldlings always speak, when they prefer present satisfaction to future store. Give me enjoyment now, let time to come take care of itself. Give me the pottage; let the birthright go; it will all be the same a hundred years hence! The temper, therefore, was one of reckless improvidence and animal greed.

But further: look at what he really sold. Under the ancient order of things, there were extraordinary privileges conferred upon the first-born son. The birthright included at least five valuable perquisites. The first was peculiar consecration to God—then, a place of honor next the parents

—then, a double portion of the inheritance—then, a fixed succession to the family headship—then, the office of the domestic priesthood, and the administration of the public worship of God. Herein, therefore, is where the “profanity” lay. Esau voluntarily relinquished his right to be the servant of the Almighty, and the patriarchal priest of his kindred.

It may seem difficult to pronounce, at this period of evangelical history, how much Esau, or anybody else, comprehended, in those early times, of what we now call piety. But one cannot resist the conclusion that whatever this man did know of service of Jehovah, he declined. In this supreme moment of his existence, *he deliberately rejected a religious life*, and threw in his lot with the world of unbelieving and rebellious. Then “the root of bitterness” was implanted; then he forever “failed of the grace of God.”

It is a sad scene that rises on our imagination, as we look upon this man, after his repast. He appears content, and wipes his lips with sleek satisfaction. But all is lost. You have read of that Egyptian queen, who in her barbaric splendor of sumptuous life thought it a rare feat to dissolve her most magnificent pearl in her wine, and drink it at a draught. But here we see Esau eating the very birthright of his wealth and honor, as well as of his future destiny, with an improvident gluttony worse than Cleopatra’s. You may exclaim in dismay at the infatuation of his folly. But he surely is not alone in it.

Esau stands, for all the ages, as the type of those, who, for the brief gratification of a sensual taste, will barter away a whole heritage of manhood, and suffer a whole future of spendthrift poverty and shame. Look around you—where is the family circle that is not to-day drawing the mantle of its loving apology over the presence or the memory of some Esau among its inmates? There are misers selling their souls for gold. There are silly women bartering every jewel of hope and home for the meretricious displays of dress and equip-

age. There are men ambitious for office, surrendering truth and honor for mere authority and chance of plunder. There are filthy "fornicators," like Esau, who buy sensual gratifications at the price of heaven, and the cost of hell.

Now it so happens that some people are not in the exact mood to judge this man Esau fairly; for his history has been wilfully confused by representations concerning his character, and concerning his birth.

As to his character, it seems fashionable to say that he centres in himself all the virtues Jacob lacks. He is generous—noble—frank. He behaves chivalrously towards his old father; and in the end makes peace with his brother. In the hour of his discovery that Jacob has really got the birthright blessing he bought, the scene is exceedingly dramatic. He pleads with Isaac to bless him, precisely as if he had the right to it. And evidently enough, Isaac wants to do it; only Jacob came in ahead. Our sympathies are aroused. But why do we persist in admiring Esau so?

There is just the same perversity in our estimates of dissipated people. Everybody says of a son who is becoming a drunkard, that it is his generous—open-handed—free, good-hearted—nature, which is his ruin. *But some of us suspect that kind of generous good-heartedness, which looks only one way.* When a husband sells his birthright for strong drink—fills his wife's eyes with tears—shadows his children with shame—it may seem a very sweet thing to him to be called generous and kind. But a calm consideration would suggest that more generosity towards those who love him and lean upon him, would be better in place. A man cannot atone for the miserable selfishness of his indulgence, the criminal cruelty to those he is bound to cherish, by any mere profusion of money-spending, as he generously—free-handedly—asks other drunkards to drink with him!

It is not true that Esau is all attractiveness and chivalry. He sold his birthright with his eyes open. That took everything with it. Then why does he go back on his own

agreement, when he finds Jacob has entered into what he bought? He says he will kill Jacob, the moment his father dies. Then he marries heathen women for his wives. He becomes a torment to Rebekah. He grows wilder and more headlong in his passions. He lives a turbulent and unruly life. He is fickle and revengeful. To be sure, he seems to be reconciled at the last with Jacob, but he utterly refuses to live at peace with him. And if any one says it was a bought surrender of his purpose to murder, it would be difficult to contradict the assertion. Indeed, while we would be far enough from any attempt to blacken the character of Esau with rehearsals of his wickedness, we do distinctly own that there is not in the Scripture any ground for this sentimental admiration of him, to the prejudice of Jacob.

Now, on the other hand, it becomes necessary to meet a comment upon Esau, coming from precisely the opposite direction. He has been held up as a reprobate from the start; and that in such terms as imply that divine decrees ruined his entire chance for this world and the next; that God's sublime sovereignty created him just to damn him; foreordained him from all eternity as the example of a soul lost before the man was born.

This statement would not require serious confutation but for a passage of Scripture quoted to back it. "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." And then the other verse next to this says—"for the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth." Out of this is drawn the doctrine that it made no difference whether Esau had a birthright or not; he could not do anything with his advantage; he never had fair play; he came into life branded like Cain with a mark of doom on his forehead.

In perfect consistency with a view so harsh, we are told that even the Rabbins of old painted awful pictures of his action. They fabled that Satan hindered him in the chase;

that hell opened when he went in to his father; that he attempted to feed the blind old man with dogs' flesh instead of venison; that he tried to bite Jacob as he returned from receiving the blessing.

All this wild and unwise violence is out of place. Let God be just, though every man a liar. The one great undertow of candor, which is enough to rebut and reverse the dash and foam of opprobrium, is found in simple common sense. Nobody can read this story without being perfectly satisfied that Esau sold his birthright, not because God hated him, but because he "*despised* his birthright;" not because he had no chance of a better life, but because he *declined his chance*.

Still the passage of Scripture has meaning. It is originally quoted from Malachi by Paul. The prophet uttered it, and the apostle used it to clinch an argument. There is in it, therefore, a double resident portion of inspiration, and it cannot be lightly treated, or perverted into a mere cavil.

When Jehovah is represented as saying—"Was not Esau Jacob's brother? yet I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau"—his words must be understood as referring to their descendants as well as themselves. To *hate* means here to love less, not to cherish spite, or maliciously fix rejection. Our Saviour says that no man can come unto him unless he hates his father and mother. And we all understand that this means mere comparison of love; we must love Christ more than we love even parents or relatives. Just so we read in this very story. Leah once says she knew her husband hated her; but afterwards the explanation comes that "Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah." It is not in evidence that Jacob hated Leah at all; he seems to have been faithful and kind to her. But he certainly did prefer Rachel.

It seems plain, then, that no malevolent feeling on God's part enters into this reprobation of Esau, and no possible constraint fell upon him from any divine decree. The Crea-

tor of men is sovereign in all his distribution of favor ; but he never forces any man to sin ; and he never leaves a man without giving him a chance, and seeing to it he has fair play in his choice.

It is a little trying to patience to be continually compelled to expose and rebuke the perversity of some, who carp violently at "the faith once delivered to the saints," while in the same breath they suppress the inspired evidence by which it is sustained, and misquote the explicit limitations, even in statement, by which it is relieved. The entire doctrine of the churches was put into unmistakable English, hundreds of years ago :—

"God from all eternity, did by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass ; yet so as thereby neither is God the author of sin, *nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures*, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established."

When Esau lost his eternal salvation, it was not the devil that ruined him—nor the world—nor Adam—nor God. His epitaph was this : "Thou hast destroyed thyself." He certainly *had* a birthright—can any one doubt that? And God gave it to him by decree. But Esau despised it—and sold it—and that was what, simple and alone, drove his soul a-wreck.

There remains only one more point to be noticed, as we leave this story. We pass by the fruitless, and yet characteristic, violence of wrath against Jacob, into which Esau's ungovernable temper exploded. We take up only a single text in the New Testament, which pictures the vain regrets of Esau's after life. "For ye know how that afterwards, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected ; for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears." The lesson comes out here that regret and remorse have no availableness in restoring a soul's ruin.

He deliberately refused the call to a better life. Time flowed on. In the singular events of the ensuing years, we can trace the hand of an overruling Power silently shaping the course of his life. Esau married Canaanitish wives. This bred contention in Isaac's household. Rebekah would not submit to it. So he became estranged, and left his home. He seems still to have had some notion of parental priesthood, for he went to his father for a parting benediction. Then he learned that all this had gone to Jacob. For one wild passionate moment, he saw the loss he had incurred. *He had sold his chance.* And what had he to show for it? The remembrance of a poor little dish of boiled lentiles, eaten forty years before! He could not force his father to take back his uttered word.

For remember, this does not mean that he found no place in his own mind for repentance; *he never tried to find any*; he went out with murder in his heart, not any sort of contrition. It means he found no second chance in Isaac's mind. "He cried with a great and exceeding bitter cry—Bless me, even me also, O my father! And Esau lifted up his voice, and wept."

Oh, I have seen many a wretched man mourning over the loss of a great birthright of strength and hope and promise, sold and gone forever! And all he had to show for it was a diseased body, a polluted mind, a desolate hearth—and the shadowy remembrance of a luxurious indulgence, luscious and lost years and years ago!

God says—take your chance *now*—come *now*—you may come *now*. But there is a time when even God covers his face, and says—Let him alone; joined to his idols, let him alone! I cannot understand the apathy of men under truth like that. I could pity a soul that lost its birthright by accident. But how even Esau could *despise* it, passes my comprehension!

THE DOOMED MAN.

THERE is a time, we know not when,
 A point we know not where,
 That marks the destiny of men
 To glory or despair.
 There is a line, by us unseen,
 That crosses every path ;
 The hidden boundary between
 God's patience and his wrath.

To pass that limit is to die,
 To die as if by stealth ;
 It does not quench the beaming eye,
 Or pale the glow of health.
 The conscience may be still at ease,
 The spirits light and gay ;
 That which is pleasing still may please,
 And care be thrust away.

But on that forehead God has set
 Indelibly a mark,
 Unseen by man, for man as yet
 Is blind and in the dark.
 And yet the doomed man's path below,
 Like Eden, may have bloomed ;
 He did not, does not, will not know,
 Or feel that he is doomed.

He knows, he feels that all is well,
 And every fear is calmed ;
 He lives, he dies, he wakes in hell,
 Not only doomed, but damned.
 Oh, where is this mysterious bourn,
 By which our path is crossed ;
 Beyond which, God himself hath sworn,
 That he who goes is lost !

How far may we go on in sin ?
 How long will God forbear ?
 Where does hope end, and where begin
 The confines of despair ?
 An answer from the skies is sent :
 " Ye that from God depart !
 While it is called TO-DAY, repent !
 And harden not your heart."

Mahanaim.

"And Jacob went in his way, and the angels of God met him."—GEN.
32: 1.

THAT particular word, which, in the Old and New Testaments alike, is rendered ANGELS, means only a *messenger*. It is sometimes applied to a mere post-runner, going on errands for his master. In a few instances the prophets are called angels, as being the bearers of tidings from heaven ; so are the priests under the Jewish dispensation, and ministers under the Christian.

Careful study would likewise show that in rare cases even the impersonal agents of the divine will receive the same name ; pestilences, winds, violent plagues, and diseases. The Apostle Paul calls his thorn in the flesh an angel of Satan.

But the special reference of the term is eminent and dignified. The Scriptures give us to understand that there are in existence certain spiritual beings, of a high order of heavenly intelligence, and of an entirely distinct and peculiar nature, resident in the immediate presence of God, but exercising their office even in the most remote portions of the universe. These the Almighty employs to manifest his presence, to carry his commands, to execute his purpose, and to wield his power. They are generally invisible, moving on viewless wings with noiseless expedition ; but they can make themselves to be seen, whenever there is necessity or occasion.

Perhaps the most astonishing thing revealed concerning this class of creatures is that they never seem to have any personal manifestations of their own. Nobody ever heard of an angel's getting angry, nor of his exercising spite; not even of his pitying, sparing, or loving anybody on his own account. They appear sent to exhibit not themselves, but the divine wish and will alone.

And this is what renders their messages so welcome, and so trustworthy from on high. They have positively in manifestation no passions nor preferences, any more than if divine wisdom and compassion sovereignly gave intellect to eagles, or voices to mutes. Indeed, one of the most exquisite names ever applied to angels, is that of the poet Dante, when he calls them—"Birds of God."

To any thoughtful mind, no argument is more profound, no illustration more shining, by which to magnify the greatness of God's unutterable majesty, than this supreme fact—that the holiest, loftiest, most transcendent order of beings in the universe, are joyously content to be simply lost in his service, and consider themselves actually honored when bearing his lowliest errands to his wretchedest race.

We are still lingering in the midst of this interesting history of Jacob. Our attention is arrested just between Bethel and Penuel, those two important landmarks in it. As he leaves Padan-aram, and pauses on the borders of Palestine, he suddenly finds himself once more confronted with a wonderful vision. The very phraseology indicates abruptness and surprise. "And Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him. And when Jacob saw them, he said, This is God's host: and he called the name of that place Mahanaim."

How he saw this spectacle is not put on record. Some of the old Jewish commentators say that he was visited most likely by special groups of human messengers, who confidentially told him that Esau, his offended brother, was on the way to meet him. But there would be no reason for

calling such persons the "angels of God." Nor would this seem to be an adequate explanation of his changing the name of the place where it occurred. It is better to receive the statement as a literal fact.

There was sufficient dignity in the exigency of his affairs at that moment to warrant some little expectation of a divine interference. Things were just taking a turn with him. He was out on his way to his native country by direct command. Now that he knew of the threatening front presented by his exasperated brother Esau, he fell into some serious perturbation of feeling, and perhaps he really was in some real danger. Such a disclosure of the divine will would be in perfect keeping with the promise God had given him twenty years before. "I will not leave thee, until I have done that I have spoken to thee of."

It is nowise out of the way, we may conclude, therefore, for us to accept the narrative exactly as it stands; and assert that this remarkable man, for the second time at least in his biography, was visited by a troop of celestial beings, whom he saw with his own eyes.

When Jacob bestows the new name upon this locality, there is noticeable one slight felicity in the employment of the Hebrew language, which it is impossible to translate into our ordinary English. The word *Mahanaim*, which means *hosts*, is in what is termed the dual number, and so implies that the angels were divided into *two* hosts or encampments. Most likely there is a historical allusion to this incident in the expression we so often quote from one of the ancient Psalms—"The angel of the Lord encampeth around them that fear him." Here the term is a collective, a name of multitude, and means the host of angels, the entire army of angels in heaven. We shall not err, if we conceive that these celestial visitants, as Jacob saw them on this occasion, were ranged into separate guards, behind him and before him; so as to correspond with the forces of Laban, which had pur-

sued him from the rear, and the four hundred men-at-arms of Esau, which were out in his path in front.

As to the place itself, ever after to be remembered as one of those mysterious spots, at which heaven came in contact with the earth, there is not much which needs to be said. This story we are noting, was the finest thing in all its annals. On the rocks around was eventually constructed a powerful citadel. The town fell into the possession of the tribe of Levi, and was inhabited by a population of priests. When Ishbosheth, the son of Saul, declared war against David, this was chosen as the royal seat, and yet more strongly fortified. So when David, in his turn, became engaged in war, and was trying to put down the rebellion of his son, he established his headquarters at Mahanaim. There it was, that the king, when the dead body of the long-haired prince was brought in, went up into the private chamber over the gate, and mourned—"Would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!"

Now in passing this wonderful incident in Jacob's life, I cannot be content to treat it as lightly as he did himself. We never afterwards find him making any mention of it. There is not much evidence that he cared in any way particularly about it. But surely the narrative contains a depth of profitable meaning to those who will consider it carefully. If it does nothing else, it leads the way to a study of the Scriptural doctrine concerning angels and their relation as heavenly messengers to men.

There is a class of persons, Liberal Christians, so-called—better, rationalistic—who, in their anxious zeal to be rid of the personality of Satan, have gone so far as to deny the existence of any such order of spiritual beings as these. So there were, in the Apostle Paul's time, Sadducees, who rejected the resurrection, and refused to admit the existence of the soul of man, and ended by denying the personality of angels.

Surely it is altogether unprofitable to attempt to conduct

an argument with those who read their Bibles so poorly. The Scripture representation seems to give us information more or less clear in reference to the nature of angels, their number, their character, their orders, their form, and their office.

They are not spectres or apparitions. They are treated as living beings, intelligent and personal. They eat and drink ; they walk and run and fly ; they speak and argue and sing. They have no material bodies ; they are spirits. They are created and dependent ; and yet they are immortal. They came into existence all at one time, and so are all of the same age ; and this was long before the six days of the earth's Genesis. They are possessed of a higher order of intellect than human beings. They have been educating for thousands of years. No hindrances, like those we labor under, have ever kept them back from the full enjoyment of their vast opportunities of discovery and immediate acquisition.

As to the question how many of these beings there are, it cannot be said that any fixed and exhaustive statement has been put on record. The prophet Daniel intimates that there are "thousands of thousands," and "ten thousand times ten thousand." Luke tells us that the shepherds heard a "multitude of the heavenly host" singing when Jesus was born. Christ assured his disciples he could have "more than twelve legions" for his defence, if he would ask for them. In the epistle to the Hebrews, they are reported as "an innumerable host," the Greek word means *myriads*. All these seem to be confessedly inaccurate statements. But their purpose is to leave on our minds the impression of extraordinary countlessness.

Concerning their character, however, the Scriptures is explicit. They were originally created pure and absolutely free from all sin. But some of their race once rebelled, and in awful judgment were turned out of heaven, and shut up in the lurid flames of hell. Those that remained unswayed in

celestial allegiance, kept their first estate in stainless purity. For the details of more than a thousand centuries of history, there is not one record of blame. They never displeased God, nor felt displeasure toward him.

Something might be said here as to the orders or rank of these unseen servants of God. There are different names applied to them—cherubim, seraphim, thrones, dominions, principalities and powers. It is profitless, however, to attempt to delineate the grades of precedence which they occupy, if such there are. Only one remark needs to be made to correct a common mistake.

It is not right to speak of angels and archangels—for there is only *one* Archangel mentioned in the Bible, and his name always occurs in the singular number. It is to be understood that this title belongs supremely and only to Jesus Christ. He was the "Michael," who contended with Satan for the dead body of Moses. And he is the "Lord himself," who shall descend from heaven "with the voice of the Archangel, and with the trump of God." There is no other personage with that rank or that title.

The question of form—that is, the shape and appearance—of angels has been raised. Of course, no account can be given beyond the mere description of the look they bear when rendering themselves visible among men. In a multitude of cases this has been done; and then the angels simply appear in human likeness. Thus Abram saw the three "men" at the door of his tent. Thus John says the dimensions of the new Jerusalem were in one direction a hundred and forty-four cubits, "according to the measure of a man, that is, of the angel." As to their essential shape, however, these revelations of their merely assumed presence are of no value. Some of them are represented as having wings—two, or four, or six. The artists, ancient and modern, may be pardoned if they really get confused as to the arrangement which angels' pinions claim; for in Daniel we are told they seem like "four wings of a fowl"

on the back of a leopard ; and in Zechariah we read " they had wings like the wings of a stork." Indeed, this whole matter is left to imagination, and for a thousand years the painters and poets have had their own unhindered way.

Small criticism only takes time away from better things. But it may be just worth while to say that frescoes in old churches are responsible for the curious epithet fond parents apply to their child, when they call him a "*cherub* boy." All that the Scripture does to countenance such a term of preposterous imagery may be conjectured, when we read over that wonderfully majestic description of the almighty God coming through the sky—" He bowed the heavens also, and came down, and darkness was under his feet ; and *he rode upon a cherub*, and did fly ; yea, he did fly upon the wings of the wind ! "

Furthermore : nowhere is it ever told us that angels have " crowns upon their foreheads," or " harps within their hands." These belong specially to the redeemed spirits of men, who sing—and who alone are ever to sing—the new song of Moses and the Lamb. Angels are always represented in the Bible as men rather than women, and invariably mature. They " neither marry nor are given in marriage." No angel was ever an infant ; nor will any human infant ever be an angel.

The main interest, however, which we personally have in all this doctrine of angels, centres in their office, rather than in anything else. One grand text of the New Testament discloses the whole revelation—" Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation ? " High as is their nature, their work brings them down under bonds of serviceableness to men.

Angels shouted for joy, as they sang together, when this world was earliest made. They worshiped the departing Prince of the kingdom of heaven, when he went through their shining ranks on his way to be the Saviour of men. They saw him all along his sorrowful errand. There was

a vast choir of them out in the air over Bethlehem, while Jesus lay in the manger. Some few of them went down into Gethsemane, while Christ was in agony, and strengthened him ; perhaps the very same who came to minister to him just after he had foiled the devil in the wilderness. They remained around his sepulchre the morning after his resurrection, and the women saw them. The explanation of all their fidelity is found in the verse—"which things the angels desire earnestly to look into." They feel an intense interest in the redemption of our race. "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."

From the earliest history, these heavenly beings have been employed in such acts of providential and redemptive service for the men, whom God himself has loved and chosen. The promise is wonderfully explicit—"Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the Most High, thy habitation, there shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. For he shall give *his angels* charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone."

Hence we find an angel drawing Lot forth from Sodom—and an angel delivering Peter from prison. And in defence of many saints, we find an angel smiting the Assyrian army, and an angel inflicting the plague on Herod. How far this carefulness extends, or into what intricacies of danger it may reach, we cannot ever know ; for its very purpose is to relieve us of peril so completely that we never know the nearness of it.

And at the last, angels are deputed to receive the souls of the dying, and convey them into their celestial rest. They will summon the race to the judgment, and gather the elect from the four winds of the earth.

It would seem, therefore, that we, who have received all these multiplied and splendid revelations concerning the

presence and protection vouchsafed by angels, would enjoy, far beyond Jacob himself, the comfort afforded by a real historic fact like that in his experience. Here he was, fully at his wit's end by reason of the complicated embarrassments and true perils of his position. Suddenly heaven was opened and he was irresistibly made to understand that all its hosts were on his side, pledged to his help in any moment of need.

The parallel instance, quite familiar to you, is that recorded in the biography of the prophet Elisha. His attendant became frightened, when he saw all the soldiers of the Syrian king sent to apprehend him. Elisha knew that the vast resources of divine help were just out of sight, but not out of hearing. He said—"Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see!" Now this prayer did not bring any angels, only it showed them. "And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw; and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha." There they had quietly and viewlessly been all the time!

The one fine lesson of all this story, therefore, is concerning our confidence, in all seasons of exposure, that God's angels will interpose for each one of us in the hour of need. I attach much significancy to the fact that these angels at Mahanaim said nothing and did nothing. For herein is one of those exquisite revelations about the delicacy of the divine touch in dealing with a perturbed experience. The Almighty never comes out coarsely before the true believer, with mere material show of help. He draws the curtain aside, and suffers us to know he has been ready for us all along.

Be it understood always that most of our troubles are imaginary. Ills that never happened have kept the world in apprehension. If we can only bear in mind that there is a great reserved force of protection all around us, ready for any exigency, it will enable us to move on undismayed, so utterly untouched by danger that we are not conscious of its approach. This is the sentiment of the Psalmist—"Yea,

though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will *fear* no evil, for thou art with me."

I remember once hearing a timid woman say—one who was new to a soldier's life, and had left her home for a fort on the frontier—how comforting to her mind was the thought every evening, as she crept noiselessly up out on the rampart, and peered curiously off into the undistinguishable darkness, that there all around among the shadows were the lines of sentinels posted for protection. Not one of them could she see; but it was worth everything to be certain they were faithfully there.

Oh, how it rests and renews a tired soul, worn with the alarms of every-day attack, to steal out on the high outlooks of prayer, and think of the Mahanaim—the Two Hosts of God! Nobody can see them, or hear their tread; but

"Millions of spiritual creatures walk the earth,
Unseen, both when we wake and when we sleep."

And then the believer goes back to his exposure, content and calmed, saying like Job of old—"Is there any number of his armies?"—or like David—"I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep; for thou, Lord, only **makest** me to dwell in **safety.**"

ADSTANT ANGELORUM CHORI.

Angel choirs on high are singing,
 To the Lord their praises bringing,
 Yielding him, in royal beauty,
 Heart and voice, in love and duty.
 Waving wings the throne surrounding,
Timbrels, harps and bells are sounding!
 See their heavenly vestments glisten;
 To their heavenly music listen;
 Hear them, by the Godhead staying—
 “Holy, holy, holy”—saying!

None that grieveth or complaineth
In that heavenly land remaineth;
 Every voice in concord joining,
 Holy praise to God combining.
 Holy love their minds disposeth;
 Heavenly light to all discloseth
 Blessed Three in One united!
 Seraphs worshiping delighted,
 Sweet affection overflowing;
 Cherubim their reverence showing.

Oh, what fair and heavenly region!
Oh, what bright and glorious legion!
Saints and angels all excelling,
In that glorious city dwelling,
 Which in rest divine reposeth,
 And sweet light and peace discloseth.
 Every one who there resideth
 Clad in purity abideth;
 Toil nor ignorance undergoing,
 Trouble nor temptation knowing.

Oh, how beautiful that region,
 And how fair that heavenly legion,
 Where thus men and angels blend!
 Glorious will that city be,
 Full of deep tranquillity,
 Light and peace from end to end!

Peniel:

GUILT ALL ALONE.

"And Jacob was left alone."—GEN. 32: 24.

DURING the twenty years Jacob had passed in Padan-aram, he had seen no one from home. Isaac had left him to his fortune; and, so far as we can judge, Rebekah had already died. The fierce Esau still trained his soldiers in the wilds of Idumaea. "A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city, and their contentions are like the bars of a castle."

When the command came that Jacob was to return to his native land, he was quite willing to go. For his relations to his kinsman Laban had grown complicated and disagreeable. He had outlived his entire welcome in the family. He set out on the journey with alacrity. But the territory of Esau lay exactly in the way. It was embarrassing to be compelled to pass through it.

Our story is resumed at that precise moment when he actually stands on the border of Palestine, and is in full view of the perilous entrance. Perhaps you will group the particulars, for order's sake, around these consecutive points:—

I.—THE MIXED EXPERIENCE HE EXHIBITS:—

II.—THE INGENIOUS PRECAUTIONS HE TAKES:—

III.—THE UTTER LONELINESS HE REACHES.

I.—His EXPERIENCE is singularly transparent, though seriously mixed.

1. We know, for one thing, he was in positive *fear*. There was reason for it, too. He sent over a plausible message to his injured brother. Nobody told him how it had been received by Esau. But the couriers brought back, as an item of information, that he—this wild brother of his—had come to be the Edomite chieftain; and that he was now on his way in person to meet him at the border; moreover, he had a military train of four hundred men-at-arms; and the servants did not know whether he was disposed to amity or war. “Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed.”

No doubt if Jacob had been a hero, he would have blustered a little. But he never was anything of that style of man. He says—“My lord Esau”—as if he had been twenty years at court, and adds some very obsequious words about finding “grace in his sight.” But he makes no attempt at bravado. He is too much frightened for that.

How it breaks any man’s courage to find himself confronted with an old sin! How meanness and wrong comes back again, home to its own father, after even twenty years’ silence!

2. Then, next to this, we observe there was *solicitude* in his experience. With all his faults, I am sure we ought to credit Jacob with being a man of much kindness of heart. He was gentle and loving in his family relationships. He now felt keenly his inability to protect those whom he was leading. He exclaims, in his prayer to God, that he fears Esau will “smite the mother with the children.” Rachel was there, you see; and the little ones that called him father.

Here is another sore spot where old sin strikes. When a man has covered up his early life, and tried to grow respectable; has married a pure, good woman; has set up an affectionate home; alas, how dreadful is the sight at his threshold of one of his almost-forgotten transgressions, come back to claim acquaintance! Must these innocent ones suffer the shame of that crime?

3. Then, likewise, there was *reminiscence* in his experi-

ence. He was now on the heights of Gilead—that long range of hills on the east of the Jordan, marking the limit of Syria and the Assyrian desert. The line of the river was just visible in the distance. He recollected well the day when he had crossed it, a feeble fugitive, in his hand his staff, on his shoulder his fortune. Down at the base of the eminence, wound the deep defile or ravine, through which the Jabbok forced its devious way—a little troublous river, deriving its name, which means *wrestling*, as much from its own struggle to work through the glen and around the rocks, as from the scene it was in after years to commemorate at one of its fords.

From his elevated off-look he could distinguish the outlines of much of that land which had been promised him in the vision at Bethel. His memory went forth with his sight. Far to the south and west of him lay Hebron—the scene of his earliest innocence and subsequent sin. He recalled the desolate night he had spent with his head pillowed on a stone. He contrasts his former poverty with his present wealth, even in the audible utterances of his prayer. But he discerns plainly how irrecoverable all that past is. Parents dead and gone, home changed, his brother an enemy, his neighbors scattered, he knows he has no welcome anywhere to expect. In middle life, prospered—even wealthy—he was returning to the scenes of his youth, with nothing to come forth and meet him but the reminiscence of old sin.

There have been other experiences in common life resembling his. More than one young man has gone forth from home under the shadow and shame of an early indiscretion. Some wilful sin has blighted his hopes among his neighbors, until in desperation he has slunk away in the night to hide its record and get better charity with strangers. And twenty years afterwards, having made his fortune, he has journeyed back to the village where he was born. He has paused on the hillside, from which the church-spire could be seen. Before his eyes lay the unaltered little hamlet, as virtuous, as

uncompromising, as peaceful as ever. There can be no joyous greeting there. What floods of memory pour over his soul! The father who sorrowed, the mother who wept, are silent enough now under the white slabs of the grave-yard. It is too late to retrieve the wrong. Money will not buy back time. Alas, how poignant is the pain of a wound which only the solace of another world can heal!

If one in his riper years could only be permitted to pick up the past and knit in again its dropped stitches, how joyously he would hail the new chance! But time is relentless; it never turns back the wheel. We are told in one part of the history, that when Esau had despised his birthright, "he found no place for repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears." It would seem now that Jacob was equally unfortunate. He could not get back to where he was stainless with sin.

4. Of course, therefore, there was also *remorse* in his experience. More and more distressed he grew at his prospect of peril. But you will mistake his feeling and character much, if you seek to discharge all the disturbed perplexity of that night on the mere apprehension of impending bodily ill. Men of his stamp are apt to become desperate when situated as he was then; a sort of bravery is awakened, as they stand at bay. But he was demoralized at every turn by an inner sense of ill-desert. He knew how iniquitously he had outraged his brother and offended God. It was no good cause he fought in, even when he tried to stand for himself. A great burden of guilt bore upon his conscience. Retribution had found him, and now demanded requital. Agitated in the innermost recesses of his soul, he told his tale to no one. Esau did not seem like an enemy, whom it was exhilarating to meet and to strike. He resembled more some officer of law—some emissary of judgment and doom—whom it might be a natural instinct of self-preservation to avoid, elude, defeat, but whom it would be useless to murder, and only further peril to harm.

It would seem that there never could be reached in human history a more profound depth of sorrow and shame, than when a criminal remorsefully admits to himself he is not worthy to defend his own honor. Every man, sooner or later, discovers that in this world he is his own best friend. If, therefore, a consciousness of guilt forbids him to put forth all his resources in his own behalf, he is betrayed on the instant. Oh, if he could only forget his sin! If he could only beguile himself into disregard of it! But it comes up every moment, and weakens him and wearies him with the pressure of old pain. Wonderful picture is that drawn of Eugene Aram by the poet—the famous scholar haunted by the memory of an ancient crime—he sits in the midnight reading, trying to wile his busy mind into quiet with curious lore—he cannot confine himself to the page:—

“At last he closed the ponderous tome with a fast and fervent grasp;
He strained the dusky covers close, and fixed the brazen hasp:—
‘Oh God! could I so close my mind, and clasp it with a clasp!’”

II.—Perhaps this analysis is enough now to make Jacob's experience clear. We are ready to pass on to note the ingenious *precautions* he took, in order to break the first shock of Esau's arrival. He did not lose his sense of foresight. He made the best disposal of all his affairs that he could under the circumstances. Four things there were on which he grounded some hope.

1. One was this late *vision of the angels* at Mahanaim. It came at the opportune moment just after Laban and his troops had left him, having relinquished his threatening pursuit. When he discovered the bands of ministering spirits around him, he became certain that even now God was not unmindful of him, or indifferent to what might befall him. Like Elisha, long after, he found himself surrounded with the celestial chariots of God. This gave a religious turn to his thoughts. It reminded him of the ladder at Bethel.

Instantly, then, he interposed this ancient promise as a

barrier between his present weakness and his coming exposure. He hastened to remind the Lord God, in a passionate, explosive, importunate prayer, that there had been once made an engagement, of which the angels were witnesses. "Thou saidst, I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude."

2. There was another resource, namely, his vast *worldly wealth*. He had gained enormous possessions during these twenty years of close, subtle dealing with Laban. Massing it together, he had brought his property with him. Herein, on the human side, was hope. He knew *he* would do almost anything for money—perhaps Esau would. From his herds and flocks, he chose out a most princely present of goats, sheep, and camels, sending them forward in separate droves to meet his brother on the way. Now you cannot fail to commend the prudence of this man, but it is almost amusing to note how his craft returns into the calculation. He thinks that one drove, and a message of good will—then another drove, and a new message—and then another and another—like the golden bells and pomegranates on the hem of a priest's robe—will bewilder and dazzle Esau, better than if it all came at once, a mere bulk of generosity!

We have no right ever to disparage or belittle our own means of extrication in times of trouble. God helps those who help themselves. It is not well to fold hands that are full, and sit down supinely waiting for some divine interposition. Ends are most hopeful, when conditions are most faithfully met. It may seem a very sweet and attractive submissiveness of mind, when we betake ourselves solely to crying to heaven for aid; whereas it may quite likely be true that God is sending our peril merely to make us conscious how lachrymose we are.

3. Then, in the third place, Jacob places a small measure of reliance upon his *disposition of forces*. He was not a military man, and Esau there had the better of him. But he

possessed common sense enough to know that he had better not put all his risks into one venture. So he divided his large train into two companies ; saying to himself that if Esau should attack one of them, the other might get free. The four hundred soldiers would possibly use up some of their violence upon the outleaders, if there should really be a fight, and so the remainder might escape.

There is nothing in all this narrative that so shows Jacob's straits, and evidences his sad sincerity, as this feeble thrusting forward of all he was worth in the world to act as a sort of buffer or cushion to receive the blows of retribution. Do you not see how willingly he would have surrendered everything just to be at peace, and innocent of the old sin? Twenty years of working now might have to go in payment of the wickedness of one hour of wrong. And cheerfully he would have let it go, if he could have been assured of safety and pardon.

4. But Jacob's main reliance was found in his *privilege of prayer*. He was a guilty man, and a suffering man ; and he deserved the suffering for the guilt. But for all that, the way to heaven was not yet barred. He could send his petition straight in at the beautiful gate. Neither his cunning craft, nor his pressing peril, had anything to do with the question of his resuming intercourse with his covenant-keeping God. This he knew. And the turning-point for all time and eternity, in Jacob's history and character, is reached, when he begins again those forgotten sentences, and says—"O, God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac!"

How unutterably pathetic is this plea! How affecting it is to find guilty men, the world over, beginning when they pray, to invoke God as if he were some dear old home friend! When some poor guilty wanderer has been led to see his wrong, and feel his helplessness, how instinctively he appears to know he has no rights for himself, and yet to feel he has been all his life-time a child of many prayers. When he

says—"My mother was a Christian, if there ever was one; my old father was of the salt of the earth!" And he cries, in the depth of agony—"O God of my father, God of my mother, hear me in my hour of need!"

III.—It is important that you closely observe just here, that even when all these precautions have been taken, Jacob is unrelieved. The utter LONELINESS of the man is unmistakable. His sense of separateness deepens.

1. You watch his conduct, and you perceive he grows increasingly anxious and depressed. When he has finished preparations, he finds the suspense unendurable. The longest twenty-four hours passes that he ever knew. He goes to his couch as usual. He cannot sleep. He rises up again. He cannot bear to be with his family. But he will not go away from them. In the midnight he fords that slender rivulet, seeks a new camping-ground. Then he returns, and arouses his entire household. Over the stream he now sends his wives, servants, and sons. As soon as they are safe in the new tents, he bears over to them all the wealth he yet has in hand. He moves around silent as a ghost. He explains nothing. At last he mysteriously betakes himself to the old spot, without retinue or companion. There he waits, with the river between him and all the world he knows. "Jacob was left alone." Evidently he has drawn himself aside for a purpose—what is it?

2. We must answer this question in the light of subsequent events. And we reach our information easily. He learned, in the very act of pleading for deliverance from his brother, that his danger did not lie in that direction so much as in another. He had offended God, and judgment with righteous wrath might fall on him any moment. It was the dead of night now. Starless and still, the sky lay over the mountain. He could hear the feeble sound of the water. He could listen to the moaning wind. Wild and gloomy were his visions of shapes among the shadows. But the tempest was in his soul. His heart was more tumultuous

and turbulent than the torrents or the gusts. He was in the deepest depths of the remorseful conflict, which a guilty man has with the memory of past sin. Of course in this he was alone. Wealth went for nothing. Attendants had no part in the secret. Friends fell away. Unshared and unappreciated, he must bear his awful burden by himself, and work out the penitence and the prayer by which to relieve it.

3. Another question: what was it that opened Jacob's eyes to discover this guilt of his, after a disregard of it for twenty years? There can be no hesitancy in answering, it must have been his *prayer*. For it had been a real prayer. He wanted help, and he said so. From the bottom of his heart he uttered that imploring cry to his fathers' God. And on the instant, back upon himself it had turned him for one good honest look. Then he became reminded of his own hollowness hitherto. No doubt he had preserved some semblance of communion with his God during those miserable years of money-making, plotting and planning to over-reach Laban. Not much however; for his wife now was hiding some images she worshiped; he never had taught her better.

He began humbly enough: "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shown unto thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands. Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau, for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me!"

Now this prayer, which he expected would be of great comfort, was exactly what drove him into inexpressible pain. He perceived that there was no answer coming to it. The very sound of his voice was empty. *He saw he was not on speaking terms with God.* Danger led him to the mercy-seat. Guilt told him he must come on another errand. Self-interest said—fear Esau. Penitence said—fear God. It flashed into his mind, in one wonderful instant of disclosure, that he needed far more to plead for pardon than for peace. In the rush of these awful experiences, the alarm, which first moved

him, was almost lost in the consternation to which he had come. He had been frightened for his family; now he actually took his family one step nearer his marching brother, and even put the stream between them. One experience mastered and swallowed up the other. You see all this in the final wrestle; not one word further about Esau, but only—"I will not let thee go, *except thou bless me!*"

Jacob wanted immediate relief at one plain point of need. He supposed he was perfectly at liberty to pray for it. But the moment he opened his mouth, he discovered he must pray another prayer before he began that. He had the right of petition only under one head. Little by little all earthly props fell away from him. Then he was shut up to God. Then, to the awful convulsion of his entire being, he perceived he was shut up to a single, narrow, personal prayer—"Oh, God of my fathers, mercifully forgive me my sin!"

And the truth is, that is the rule for all time and all history. *No guilty man has any rights at the throne of grace, beyond imploring pardon for his sin.* He must seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness *first*; then all other things will be added to him. One solitary permission is granted—confess, and be forgiven.

And each person who goes in distress to the unwonted exercise of prayer, and seeks help, will only be calmly answered—*ask forgiveness first.* While you are a rebel, you cannot treat with the government about farms and merchandise; you are to lay down your arms, and seek amnesty.

Whenever any man reaches an experience like this, it surprises him to find himself so utterly forsaken. *Guilt is always all alone.* There is a grand gloomy solitariness in one's ownership of sin. Wives, children,—friends and companions—are all the other side of the stream beyond which the soul wrestles for its pardon, and triumphs into peace. That soul must do its own errand, and work out its own salvation.

"ALONE, YET NOT ALONE."

Fighting the battle of Life, with a weary heart and head!
For in the midst of the strife, the banners of joy are fled;
Fled, and gone out of sight, when I thought they were so near;
And the music of hope, this night, is dying away on my ear.

Fighting alone to-night—with not even a stander-by,
To cheer me on in the fight, or to hear me when I cry!
Only the Lord can hear; only the Lord can see
The struggle within, how dark and drear, tho' quiet the outside be.

Fighting alone to-night with what a fainting heart!
Lord Jesus, in the fight, oh, stand not Thou apart!
Body and mind have tried to make the field my own,
But when the Lord is on my side, He doth the work alone.

But as with sudden pain, my hands unclasp and fold,
So doth my will start up again, and take its old firm hold:—
Lord, fix my eyes upon thee! and fill my heart with thy love,
And keep my soul till the shadows flee, and light breaks forth from
above!

Genael:

WRESTLING JACOB.

"And Jacob was left alone, and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day."—Gen. 32: 24.

OUR patient and protracted study of this story hitherto has been to little purpose if we are not clear now as to the exact reason why Jacob, having sent his family over the brook Jabbok, at once returned to the original camping-ground, and sat down under the midnight in solitariness and shadow. He had at last learned that there was before him a work of penitence and supplication entirely unshared by any living human being. Frightened at the prospect of meeting his offended brother, he had attempted to pray. And in the prayer he had discovered that he had absolutely no right to ask any favor whatsoever of God except the immediate pardon of his own old guilt.

Back, then, over the river he goes in order to work out that problem by himself. He begins by thinking—"I shall see the face of Esau"—he ends by thinking—"I must first see the face of God."

I.—We visit him again at the exact moment, when he is fairly established on the banks of the stream, and resumes his meditations. The history, traced a little further on in detail, will open the way for our enumeration of lessons to be learned

1. His rehearsals of his own views must have been the most profitable of all his exercises that night. Up to this time God had been content to deal with him in a gentle way. And it may as well be admitted, little or no advantage had come from such treatment. When he first fled from home, a full score of years before, he had had the chance to turn over a new leaf. God had met him at Bethel with a most resplendent vision of the ladder and the angels. Guilty as he was then, a deceiver and a supplanter, the all-merciful One had stopped him on the very threshold of this second stage of his life, and offered him amity and peace.

Some slight impression was made on his mind then. But on the whole, this man estimated that interview quite too lightly. How do we know this? Why, you remember he made a sort of altar of his stone pillow, and promised in a vague sort of vow to build a temple, and pay tithes. Now, if you read a chapter still later in his history than this, you will discover that he actually forgot all those engagements of his. He had to be reminded of what he covenanted to do at Bethel, long after he had returned to the place. At this very moment, as you see him sitting there by the brook Jabbok, you may be certain he had no notion whatsoever of keeping the promises he made.

It is plain, therefore, that this is no way to deal religiously with such volatile people as Jacob. The soft words are too much like their own. They like promises; to make them, and to receive them; for the pledges received may come to some profit, and the pledges given are not likely to be much of a burden when they slip out of mind. And we shall cherish exceedingly inadequate notions of divine wisdom and forbearance, if we suppose that God does not know when he is cheated by human hypocrisy, or that he proposes to go on repeating assurances of peace while the treachery continues. What is needed in such persons' experience is some awfully convulsing intervention that shall never slip

out of recollection. Some terrific upheaval of such a soul will generally bring it to terms.

So we easily conjecture, from all the mysterious movements of this unhappy man, that he understands a momentous crisis in his personal career has arrived. All his past history has been converging to this hour; all his future history will hinge upon it. Hence this unmistakable manifestation of undefined dread; this new oncoming of a sense of restless insecurity; this consciousness of an individual dealing with God, which no fellowship can enter or share.

2. Now next to this, you note that his meditations there by the stream, whatever they were, were broken in upon with startling suddenness. Possibly, Jacob was half-reclining in moody silence, with his hands clasped before him, his thoughts deep and heavy, his heart sad. It is not likely there was any premonition of warning. Violently he was grasped by an unseen personage, after the manner of the athletic antagonists of those and later times. "There wrestled a man with him, until the breaking of the day." Surprised he must have been. Perhaps he was frightened. He had once fought for a blessing in his wonted way—by treachery; now he was to fight for the keeping of it, and the getting of a new one, with the blows of a stalwart arm.

Jacob never gives us reason to suppose he was a physical coward. He generally preferred subtlety to force, because he knew that in that lay his best points. But his out-of-doors life had inured him to much active exertion. He doubtless supposed that Esau had arrived already by some earlier march, and that some swift outleader of his army had attacked him for arrest. There was no time, however, for inquiry as to this. Grappling at once with sinewy hold, he stood up boldly in his own behalf. It proved no work of a moment that he had to do. The picture which rises on our imaginations is full of curious interest. Not a word escapes the tight lips of the struggling men, as hour after hour they plant foot to foot and turn hand to hand. Not until the very

day-dawn kindles the summits of Gilead, is **there** either question or answer. Nor until then does it appear **who** is getting the best of it.

3. We confess very freely that this singular incident would be far less difficult of explanation as to its practical bearing, if we could only settle its actual form as a fact. Some have declared that Jacob simply saw a vision, or had a dream, in which he seemed to be wrestling with somebody; and so a mere spiritual conflict is intended to be indicated under a spirited figure of speech.

But after patient study of much which has been attempted in order to divest the scene of reality, I cannot persuade myself to admit a principle of interpretation so dangerously loose as this requires. I think it must have been an actual muscular struggle for Jacob; and that too, while he was awake and intelligent. There was a spiritual conflict underneath the surface, no doubt; but the main story must be historic and literal. He had a Personage in the form of a real man for his antagonist.

For if one departs here from the plain narrative at all, where will he rest? If there was no man, I cannot see how there could be any brook, or any midnight. It plays fast and loose to let in myth here.

Then, moreover, how came these names established for hundreds of years after? The name "Jabbok" is said to mean "wrestling;" some derive it from another root that means "dust," and refer to a common term of description for athletes in such conflicts, because they were accustomed to excite dust in clouds, as the wrestle went on, in order to coat over the oil on the skin of their antagonists so as to get securer hold of their slippery bodies. The designation of this brook and this place Penuel would hardly have come permanently out from a mere dream.

Then, too, there was a most striking custom for many generations among the Israelites. When they butchered a creature for food, they carefully removed one sinew from its

thigh, and guarded most sedulously from any one's eating it. It was the memorial of a limp which Jacob brought away from that contest. And that limp, from a shrunk sinew, when his thigh was put out of joint, is the most commonplace and convincing of all arguments on this point. Who ever heard of a man's getting lame in his limbs over the spiritual conflict of a dream?

It seems best to conclude, therefore, that this was a positively human antagonist, and that the struggle was a corporeal wrestle for the mastery. We may safely admit that there was a spiritual conflict just subsequent to it—to which Hosea alludes in his prophecy—a wrestle of prayer with a violence of imploration and tears. But this story here must be taken literally as it stands on the page.

Further, this antagonist is called the "angel of the Lord." And if it be true, as scholars now all agree, that he, who is thus named in many instances, was God himself—that is, the Second Person of the adorable Trinity—the same who in after years was born into human life and was known as Jesus the Christ—then it hardly concerns us to worry ourselves over the complaint which is urged—that he demeaned himself and lowered his dignity by this rough and tumble contest in the wood. For divine wisdom can take care of divine propriety. It seems no more difficult than his entering Abram's tent, eating in his company, and suffering his feet to be washed. And to be candid about it, let us remember that a dream offers no relief on this particular; for is it any more undignified for the Angel of the Covenant to wrestle, than to represent himself as wrestling? If propriety turns on the look of the thing, does not the thing look just as bad in a figure as in a fact?

II.—The main question here, however, is concerning the practical purpose this entire experience was intended to serve. This we now pass on to consider. Many mysteries yet remain; some of which will find elucidation hopefully, as we advance in our study. But we may as well pause at

this point, and attempt to answer the inquiry as to the teaching of it all to Jacob and to us.

1. As to Jacob, enough has been developed already to render it unnecessary to extend the analysis. It will be sufficient just to group his lessons together for mere mention.

He learned that *covenants have two sides*. Fine profitability is there in a promise, when God makes it. Only remember that when the bright sun shines in the fountain of refreshment, he flashes his own image there, which the fountain is to return with fidelity of clearness.

He learned, likewise, that *forgetting engagements does not discharge* them. It seems a very sweet and generous thing, sometimes, for a proud man to say magnanimously to his Maker—"Well, I resist no longer; let by-gones be by-gones." But God seems to reply quietly—"There are certain obligations of yours out-standing; these are not by-gones, just because they are gone by; you must fulfill your own vows."

He learned that *long-suffering is not necessarily pusillanimity*. "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." Now Jacob had been treated with extraordinary forbearance hitherto. He had been suffered to have pretty much his own way. And no doubt he quite enjoyed this continuous prosperity of promise. But in the night-wrestle by the brook Jabbok he discovered that the Almighty was in possession of other and sterner methods of dealing with his perverse creatures than those represented by the splendid ladder he showed at Bethel, and the more splendid vision of angels that shone at Mahanaim. This man had deeper respect for the divine majesty after he had been convulsed by the experience which almost tore him to pieces.

He learned also that *remorse is not repentance*—that terror is not contrition—that fear of man is not fidelity to God—in a word, that human nature, in all its exercises, needs reform not half so much as renewal. It needs an

entire overwhelming reversal in motive and in action before it can demand even a hearing from God.

He learned that *sometimes prayer becomes an instrument of torture and retribution*. It is necessary to put with the lessons we are learning now those indicated this morning. It is the main point of this whole part of Jacob's history—when in his last exigency through alarm at the coming of Esau he fled to supplication, he found that all his prayer did was to show him he had no right to pray. One solitary petition remained for him to press—forgive me my sin, and wash me from my old guilt—that was all.

2. But the lessons for ourselves are much more relevant to our consideration now. God did appear bodily to men in those days; he does not now. To us the narrative is symbolic alone. Here originated that most pathetic and familiar form of expression—"wrestling with the Angel of the Covenant." Spiritual conflicts there are, which shake the soul to its centre. It often happens that a person suffers the more because he does not comprehend the mystery of his own wrestle.

Let us follow up the thought with commonplace illustration. Here is a man in ordinary life, working along as everybody else. He is absorbed in the world, and business presses him hard. Suddenly he is arrested by the dangerous and frightful illness of his favorite child. He sits up watching night after night. He is told the boy will die. He has summoned physicians and nurses, one by one, until he is sure no further human help will be of any use. But death advances. "In agony," says Hannah More, "nature is no atheist; that troubled mind, which knows not where else to fly, flies to God."

Here commences a second stage of experience. This father has followed the example of Jacob very nearly. He has used all the common appliances of human resort. When these fail, he begins to surmise that only divine power can interfere to any purpose. He starts to pray. He encour-

ages his heart in a faint vague remembrance of some early experience of religiousness. He invokes the God of his father, and of his mother. He has always been taught that when a man prays, God will hear him if he be in earnest. He lays out his whole soul now for the recovery of his boy—"O God, rebuke this disease, and let the child live!"

To his utter amazement he is simply frightened rather than relieved. He is more restless after prayer than before. For this thing occurs to him—"I covenanted years ago to be a Christian man; I have never kept my vow; and to-day God will not hear me!" Thus his solicitude changes form. He begins—"I am a sufferer;" he advances with a leap of discovery—"I am a culprit." Grief agitated him; now guilt alarms. He has discovered just enough of the holiness of God to send him back on his own defilement. He has learned that he cannot be heard for his dying boy, till he has got on speaking terms with God for himself.

Take another illustration. There was a wife, who, living along carelessly, was abruptly startled by the news of her husband's unfaithfulness. It seemed as if an earthquake had split the foundations under her feet. She sought friends; she labored herself. Everything added exasperation to wilfulness, and affairs grew worse. Then she began to pray. And the very first petition made her recall her marriage vow of service unto God. So she saw she could not pray for her husband's return, until she in person had returned by faith and repentance to Christ. So she began a wrestle with the Angel of the Covenant for her own pardon and peace.

Again: here is a merchant in a panic. The gains of years tremble in the pressure. In the solitary midnight he walks his room, fearing with indescribable torture that the dawn will find him a beggar. He has done all that business thrift can suggest. Now it flashes across him to pray. And he falls on his knees before God, and cries—"Oh, be pitiful unto me, and impoverish not my wife and children!" But the prayer gives him no comfort. It only makes him remem-

ber that when he set out in life he had promised to devote himself to the service of his Maker as a Christian man. All this he had neglected. Now his eyes sweep across the bleak barren plain of twenty years, and see only guilt—guilt. This dreadful posture of affairs is not calamity, but retribution. There they lie out in the pathway—those resolutions unfulfilled, those vows unkept, those prayerless hours of worldly absorption; he met them in the transit of his petition. And now he forgets his business peril in the consciousness of sin. Ruin, though it beggars his household, is nothing to guilt that poises his soul over the edge of the pit of perdition.

Let us bring this matter closely to our own hearts. It does not make any difference what may be the exigency. Anything will answer. Your son, we will say, is away from home. You get tidings of his dissipation and disgrace. Your heart is well-nigh broken. You use the nearest appliances of human prudence to repair the wreck of your hopes. But must the young man be lost? You take refuge in prayer with some vague sense of impotency. But your prayer does not lay hold. It grapples to nothing. It only discloses you to yourself. Like a flash of lightning, opening all the hills and valleys of a landscape even in the darkest night, it has discovered to you your own heart, and you can never fold the shadows over what you saw when you looked in. Oh, the dreary years of heartless hollowness you now acknowledge!

Now the question is—will you reject this upheaval of all past experience, or accept it? When you find out you have a wrestling to do in your own behalf, will you enter upon it?

Look again at this man Jacob. With what an air of business he puts away his first anxiety! He sends all his family—all his stores—everything at once over the stream, that his attention may no longer be absorbed. He must fight out his way to peace before the morning. Back alone then, over into the shadows he goes to work the problem through to solution.

And that is just your duty and mine when the urgency comes on us. When a temporal trouble forces your lips into unwonted prayers, and the prayers drive you to the recognition of unforgiven sin, there is but one release for you. You stand in all blankness and amazement to find you are so helpless and exposed. And each petition tears up your whole life, and tells you you are a poor, sinful, backslidden, wretched hypocrite, whom even the God of your pious mother will not hear!

It is a strange temptation that the great adversary presses at such a time. He says we cannot make ourselves heard in heaven; we have tried it and failed; why try again? how can we order our speech better?

Wise remark is this, made by an ancient preacher:—“When a man prays aright, he forgets the philosophy of prayer.” Jacob, in that awful wrestle by the brookside in the dark, did not concern himself to buffet and trip according to rule. When a truly penitent sinner finds himself shut up to just one prayer, let him urge it the more persistently. Make no hesitancy for language. Words are not prayer; only the robes prayer puts on for decorum when there is full time. Once we read the Lord challenged Moses—“Wherefore *criest* thou unto me?” Yet Moses had not said a loud word. And once David pleads that God would listen to his silence—“Consider my *meditation*.” Sometimes prayer has no articulation whatever.

“For it is with feelings as it is with waters;
The shallow murmur, but the deep are dumb.”

Now you can only go back over the river alone, and wrestle this experience out into reconciliation with the Angel of the Covenant. Better a right arm should fall, than that your whole soul and body should be cast into hell. Admit the worst. Say—“I am lost, lost; but I will not let thee go, except thou bless me!”

IN TENEBRIS.

COME, O thou traveler unknown,
 Whom still I hold, but cannot see,
My company before is gone,
 And I am left alone with thee ;
 With thee all night I mean to stay,
 And wrestle till the break of day.

I need not tell thee who I am,
 My misery or sin declare ;
 Thyself hast called me by my name ;
 Look on thy hands and read it there !
 But who, I ask thee, who art thou ?
 Tell me thy name, and tell me now.

In vain thou strugglest to get free,
 I never will unloose my hold ;
 Art thou the Man that died for me ?
 The secret of thy love unfold.
 Wrestling, I will not let thee go,
 Till I thy name, thy nature know.

Yield to me now, for I am weak,
 But confident in self-despair ;
 Speak to my heart, in blessings speak,
 Be conquered by my instant prayer !
 Speak, or thou never hence shall move,
 And tell me if thy name is Love !

'Tis Love ! 'tis Love ! Thou diedst for me
 I hear thy whisper in my heart ;
 The morning breaks, the shadows flee ;
 Pure universal Love thou art !
 To me, to all, thy bowels move ;
 Thy nature, and thy name is Love !

Penuel:

THE DISCIPLINE OF SURPRISE.

"By his strength he had power with God: yea, he had power over the angel, and prevailed."—Hosea 12: 3, 4.

IT will always seem strange to us to find one of the inspired writers in the Old Testament supplementing the records of another by the addition of new fact. Now here—how does it happen that Hosea, a thousand years after Jacob's conflict at the brook Jabbok, knew more about it than Moses? Yet he tells us of one or two important particulars for which you may look in vain in Genesis.

It is possible that there remained among the people a floating tradition, upon which this prophet laid hold. Or these items of history may have been communicated to him by special revelation from heaven.

The text must be considered in the light of the story as we find it in full in the Pentateuch. And it will not be understood unless it is laid alongside of two other verses. One of them reads thus:—"And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a *man* with him until the breaking of the day." Mark here carefully that his antagonist is called a man. Couple with this the final declaration of Jacob himself—"And he called the name of the place Penuel; for I have seen *God* face to face." Note here with equal care that the antagonist is declared to have been God. Now between

these two put our present text—"By his strength he had power with God; yea, he had power over the *angel*, and prevailed." Here the antagonist is called an angel, and also God. A serious question, therefore, arises at this point. Who was the Being that wrestled with Jacob at Penuel? Was he human, angelic, or divine? And what was his errand?

Our text, then, proposes these two matters of discussion:

I.—THE MYSTERY OF THE CONFLICT:—

II.—THE PRINCIPLE WHICH UNDERLIES IT.

I.—No doubt to the patriarch himself the answer to the curious inquiries we have been raising was easier than to us. For he was not without a certain previous acquaintance with such supernatural scenes. We are sure he bears this in mind, for he links the two great incidents of his life together. Twenty years previous to this, he had been favored with a vision of marvelous splendor. He recalls this now at Penuel: "The angel of the Lord said unto me, I am the God of Bethel." Here he calls an angel God.

There is mentioned, quite frequently in the Old Testament, a Personage of great majesty, to whom are given the appellations and attributes of the supreme Jehovah. In the phraseology of our excellent English version, he has been generally called the "angel of the Lord." The literal Hebrew, however, leaves out the two words used as connectives; our better form of representation would be to connect the others by a simple hyphen. It is far more accurate to say—the Angel-Lord—or the Angel-jehovah; that is, the Jehovah who is the angel or the message-bearer of the Godhead.

Hagar saw him once in the wilderness. He appeared to Gideon at Ophrah. He came to Abram's tent to announce the destruction of Sodom. He was sent to Manoah to predict the birth of Samson. Zechariah saw him mounted on horseback among the myrtle-trees.

From a diligent and judicious comparison of these and many other passages in the Scriptures, we draw the inference

that the Angel-jehovah was the Second Person in the Trinity of the Godhead. He is to be considered the same Being, to whose advent the Jews anxiously looked, for their Messiah; the same, who in the fullness of time became man for the work of atonement. Startling, therefore, as the disclosure may be, there is reason for soberly believing that it was with him who is known to us as Jesus Christ, Jacob wrestled on that fearful night.

II.—The profit of this discovery lies in the revelation of one important principle which is involved in it, and vividly illustrated by it. It offers an explanation of Jacob's eagerness and pertinacity. And so the story affords an instance of rare luminousness, with which to exhibit that form of dealing with men, so peculiar to the divine economy of redemption, *the discipline of surprise*.

God, in his infinite wisdom is accustomed to centre the great matters in the little, the celestial in the earthly. Things are not what they seem. We are sitting (perhaps) at ease in Zion. It is not safe for us to remain listless. We are therefore thrown into conflict. We find ourselves attacked suddenly by a difficulty or a duty. We look up and our antagonist is a man—so we grapple with a man. As we bear down upon him in all sturdiness and fidelity, we find he is an angel. No one can doubt that the fight grows serious and solemn now, but we dare not retreat from it. We struggle the harder for the mastery of the angel—and then we find he has been God.

Practically—for I do not wish to seem fanciful—this is the way it comes about. A little obstacle is thrown in our way of privilege or duty. Our faith knows it ought not to be hindered. The battle begins. The bar is to be beaten away, and we push boldly at it. To our surprise, it does not in the least yield. It proves worse than we anticipated. We are staggered. And all at once it flashes into our minds that this perplexity is a providence. Divine wisdom is intelligently in it. So we persevere. Indeed, we are

eagerer than ever in our perseverance. And when, after an intense wrestle, we do prove at last victorious, we discover we have been at one of the mightiest works God ever sets a mortal to do.

Life is made up of just such inevitable and influential crises. It is well emblemed by the "wheel in the middle of a wheel," which Ezekiel saw in his vision. And in this intricate economy of divine arrangement, it is generally the little wheels which turn the large ones.

There is a beautiful fable of Scandinavian mythology, teaching the same lesson. A hero, under promise of becoming a demi-god, is bidden in the celestial halls to perform three test acts of prowess. He is to drain the drinking-horn of Thor. Then he must run a race with a courser so fleet that he fairly spurns the ground under his flying footsteps. Then he must wrestle with a toothless old woman, whose sinewy hands, as wiry as eagles' claws in the grapple, make his very flesh to quiver. He is victorious in them all. But as the crown of success is placed upon his temples, he discovers, for the first time, that he has had for his antagonists the three greatest forces of nature. He raced with Thought. He wrestled with Old Age. He drank the Sea.

Now there is no harm in Christianity's acceptance of this little story. It pictures with all necessary accuracy God's ordinary dealing with men. Herein lies the solemnity of life. We are not permitted to call anything little, until we are wise enough to know its infinite surroundings. Divine wisdom proves us with discipline, and then rewards us with surprise. And by and by we learn that even the surprise was included in the discipline.

It seems unnecessary to go on further with any illustration of the principle thus clearly presented. The real value which it will possess to any given individual will depend upon the utterness of simplicity with which he works it. It belongs in every-day experience, and must be used there. It cannot even be driven into regions of mysticism, nor be

thrust up among the high heroics of an enthusiast. Its every application is decidedly commonplace and practical.

1. See, now, for example, how finely it proposes a test for our *sincerity in personal consecration*.

This, you have learned, is the earliest reach of the story before us. Jacob was coming back penitently to God. He went back over the river alone to work out the surrender. Suddenly he was caught in the grip of a human hindrance. What if he had failed? Then he would never have become a princely prevailer with God, and with man. He accepted his rough challenge. "By his strength he had power with God; yea, he had power over the angel, and prevailed." That is to say, he fought the man, and that conquered the angel, and that gave him victory with God.

We shall err much if we limit this experience to him. Ourselves are within the reach of it often. We say—Here we give ourselves away unto thee in covenant; body, soul, past and present, all to thee! The question is, are we in earnest? It would be human nature to desire some grand dramatic test that would wake the world. But instead of this, some small insignificance of earthly duty is sprung upon us. We go listlessly to meet it; but we find that the moment we really grapple with it, it has a mighty wrestling power. The fiercer our onset, the more sinewy its force. We urge ourselves now the harder. In the end we conquer; then we learn what we have been truly about. We fought the man; he was an angel; we conquered the angel, and found we had surprisingly prevailed with God.

Some people succeed in these things; some fail. The young ruler, whose affecting history is in the New Testament, came running to Jesus, with a great burst of petition as he fell upon his knees—"Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" Our Lord gave him the most unromantic reply conceivable—"Go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor." A mere human wrestle proposed, you perceive; and wealth was the antago-

nist. The man declined the challenge, and went away sorrowful. Who can say how much he lost in the end?

Naaman was told to wash in the Jordan. It seemed such a little thing, that the command actually made him angry. But he took up the wrestle nevertheless. And when he came up out of the water for the seventh time, his flesh like that of a little child, he found he had conquered an incurable disease, and a violent will which was incurable too.

We are to expect our tests in precisely this form and direction. We surrender ourselves with vast show of magnanimity. And God says to one—if you are in earnest, begin family prayer. We like that; it seems very easy; but in four or five weeks, it shows it has force like a giant, and comes near throwing us off our feet. We would give anything not to have begun; but we cannot retreat now. We persist and conquer; then we find we have gained a new heart—the most wonderful gift of a merciful heaven!

Tests differ. Another man is bidden to break a friendship. He does so; but the villain turns on him as an enemy. Vicious, malicious, he shows his real character; and the wrestle is harder than ever. Another man is bidden to surrender a business—to forsake a habit—to give up an amusement. Everything seems so simple at the beginning, but shows so hard before the end. But the principle holds through all the varieties of tests. God is exercising us under the discipline of surprise. And our duty is just to keep on, saying—"I will not let thee go, except thou bless me!"

2. Put with this a second application of the thought, very much resembling it. See how well our *fidelity in duty* is tested likewise.

Here we have a plain statement to quote, which gives help in the elucidation—"He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least, is unjust also in much." This bears on our entire Christian life. We are always ambitious. We seek some

notable form of service. God says—there is a little office, do that first. We do it, and in the doing, find it harder than we anticipated ; still we do it. And when it is accomplished, we are surprised with the discovery that in it was involved one of the grandest events of history.

Paul and Silas no doubt wanted to arouse all Philippi with the eloquent proclamation of the gospel. But the quiet providence of God seemed to say to them—not now ; go out to a little female prayer-meeting on the banks of the river ; talk to the women there for a Sabbath, and try doing good in a small way. In all humility they obeyed the voice. Lydia was converted, her family were baptized, and she went back, the first Christian on the continent, to spread the glad tidings which brought the great church in Thyatira into being. They did more than they thought.

Ahasuerus supposed he was only performing an honest act of duty in making deserved recompense to Mordecai, when he gave him favor from the throne. Surely that heathen monarch of the Persians had no kind of notion he was helping forward the Christian religion. But by his decorous fidelity to his word, he opened unconsciously the way for Esther to plead in behalf of his people, and save Israel from destruction. And then with a similar unsuspectingness of historic importance, Esther entered the king's presence to ask for relief from an oppressive decree. But by her success in the pleading, the nation was delivered, the line of Judah was preserved from being broken, the Messiah was born of the proper tribe, prophecy was kept intact, the word of God was confirmed, and his decree was saved from infraction. The sovereign merely did a work of kingly requital. The queen did a work of womanly generosity. But it turned out in the end that the entire plan of redemption lay enfolded in an act of kindness to a feeble old Jew. A whole book of the Bible, in which the name of God does not so much as once occur, is seen to have been introduced to perpetuate the truth of God in one of the most momentous crises of

history the world ever knew. Mary sang the Magnificat because Esther touched Ahasuerus' sceptre.

The lesson here you cannot misapprehend. Do the duty of the present hour, for all the future may hang upon it. Do the slight and apparently insignificant duties with great caution and care, for the mightiest results may turn upon them. Despise nothing because it seems human; it may be angelic: it may be divine.

3. Once more: see how fitly a principle like this furnishes the needed test of our Christian *charity and zeal* in behalf of others.

It is an inspired command that we "honor all men." To this is added in another place that God's chosen children are to have in some measure the preference:—"As we have opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith." In the luminous exhibition of our text, how impressive a spectacle is that of a human soul, beloved and renewed by the grace of the Redeemer! How solemn a thing a man is! But a Christian man, above all others, is a sight for the angels to look upon. God loves him. The Saviour died to redeem him. The Holy Ghost dwells in him. And yet, poor creature, he sometimes needs food for his absolute hunger; sometimes he cannot get clothes for comfort; sometimes he thirsts along the heated way, and cannot reach a spring.

Here the Word of God says to you and me quietly enough—Go and help him; "whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only, in the name of a disciple, verily, I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward."

We take up this work of caring for the poor; we do it, after our fashion. But wherein lies the discipline of surprise? That is revealed in another text:—"Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto ME." There is something exquisitely interesting in the ancient legends of the saints, always refer-

ring to this. In the stories told of the men, fabulously pious and truthfully visionary, no one thing is more frequent than this sudden disclosure of the Lord Jesus in the person of a mendicant.

One hermit will be sitting at the door of his cave ; along comes a beggar ; he helps him ; then the beggar throws back his garment and vanishes. But as he departs, the hermit sees the wounds in his side and hands. He has given food to Christ. Then another will be in his room praying ; in stalks a laboring-man ; he is covered with dust ; the saint washes his feet ; and sees where the cross-nails went through ; his pauper guest is Christ. So they visit men in prison ; they clothe the naked ; they watch the sick ; they succor the oppressed. And everywhere, as the tale ends, it is made evident that they have been tested in charity, and given help to Christ. It is ever the "poor way-faring man of grief," who eventually starts, the "stranger from disguise," and praises the unconscious man who has given him help when in need.

Surely the lesson is too fine to be lost. Underneath the ascetic mysticism of the legends lies the grand truth—Christ surprises his people in their acceptances or neglects of charity, and says—"Inasmuch as ye did it, or did it not, unto these, ye have done it, or done it not, unto Me." He who wrestles with duty to a man, may find he has an angel before him, and that the angel is the Angel of the Lord.

4. Finally, see how well even our *privileges of promise* meet their test in a principle like this.

It becomes of vast importance, before we leave this verse, that we learn that it holds equally true on the heaven side. The promises of God appear very much like mere engagements of men. But there is that which is positively divine in forcefulness underneath the outer human form. There can be no doubt that Jacob understood perfectly well before morning that it was no wealth or power of his, no craft nor policy like that which he had all along played upon Laban,

which would succeed with Esau. It was a divine promise which took him into the conflict that night, and which in the end saved him and gave peace.

These covenant-engagements of God—how slight they seem, but what a resident omnipotence they possess! They may not impress the imagination much, but they will wrestle beyond measure! There they lie in the clear stream of Scripture like the five little stones in the brook of David; but each one is good for a giant. There they wait in the storehouse of God, like the five loaves and the two fishes of the unnamed lad at Bethsaida; they hardly filled his wallet, but they proved quite enough to feed the five thousand.

The simple fact is, that in all the engagements God makes he puts his own truth at stake. "All the promises of God in Christ are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us." Hence when human wrestling lays hold of a text of Scripture, it is all that a maxim of Plato or Confucius would be, and in addition—it is God himself.

There was no irreverence—nothing indeed but clearest intelligence and firmest faith—in the reply made by a harassed believer, to the ribald sceptic who told her that God's covenant might fail at the last, for she had no hold upon him. "Ah, no fear of that," she answered; "he has more to lose in it than I have!"

The truth is, there is something beyond sense in all the life that we live. The moment a man enters the divine purpose, his existence becomes new. He must expect to be surprised at every turn. Only let him be sure that with his strength he has power with God. In the human lies in-folded the angelic; in the angelic, the divine.

THE WAY-FARER.

A POOR way-faring man of grief
 Hath often crossed me on my way,
 Who sued so humbly for relief,
 That I could never answer nay.
 I had no power to ask his name,
 Whither he went, or whence he came;
 Yet there was something in his eye
 That won my love, I knew not why,

Once when my scanty meal was spread,
 He entered; not a word he spake;
 Just perishing for want of bread—
 I gave him all; he blessed and brake,
 And ate, but gave me part again:
 Mine was an angel's portion then!
 And while I fed with eager haste,
 The crust was manna to my taste!

I spied him where a fountain burst
 Clear from the rock; his strength was gone;
 The heedless water mocked his thirst.
 He heard it, saw it hurrying on.
 I ran and raised the sufferer up;
 Thrice from the stream he drained my cup,
 Dipped, and returned it running o'er;
 I drank, and never thirsted more!

In prison I saw him next, condemned
 To meet a traitor's doom at morn;
 The tide of lying tongues I stemmed,
 And honored him 'mid shame and scorn.
 My friendship's utmost zeal to try,
 He asked if I for him would die?
 The flesh was weak, the blood ran chill,
 But the free spirit cried, "I will!"

Then, in a moment, to my view,
 The Stranger started from disguise;
 The tokens in his hands I knew—
 My Saviour stood before my eyes!
 He spake, and my poor name he named:
 "Of me thou hast not been ashamed;
 These deeds shall thy memorial be;
 Fear not, thou didst it unto ME!"

Penuel:

PREVAILING ISRAEL.

"Yea, he had power over the angel, and prevailed: he wept, and made supplication unto him."—HOSEA 12: 4.

NO proper appreciation of this text can be had, unless we couple with it the entire narrative in the Book of Genesis, to which it alludes, and then read them both in the light of a true religious experience. For it is evident that underneath the mere rehearsal of fact there is lying a mysterious but forceful figure.

To us now the story is complete, and may well, as a whole, be allowed to interpret itself. And the Church at large, through all the past ages, has accepted with great propriety the scene at Penuel for its manifest significance as the type of effectual fervent prayer. If there had remained any hesitancy on this point, it would have easily been removed by these words in the prophecy of Hosea. It is true you may search the literal history in vain; you will find no hint as to prayer in it—save the mere request for a blessing. But now we are informed that Jacob, while he was in actual wrestle with the Angel of the Covenant, "wept, and made supplication unto him." There is nowhere else any mention of these tears; and nowhere else any statement so plain as this, given, as we have seen, a full thousand years after the occurrence took place, but fixing, beyond any intelligent

cavil, the fact that the whole scene had a lesson for all ages concerning the duty of prayer.

I.—Begin with this: what a picture is presented in this story of downright earnestness and business-like absorption, in our intercourse with God at the mercy-seat.

The spectacle that rises before our minds is wonderfully graphic. Those two combatants, beneath the shadows of the trees, knew that this was no hour for listlessness or trifling. You can seem to see their limbs of iron, their tensely braided muscles of steel. You can seem to hear the thick-falling blows they strike in the scuffle; the lithe movements, so sinuous and so rapid, as the advances and evasions, swifter than the flashing of an eye, sweep on resistlessly, in the myriad ingenuities of attack and defence. Your excited interest grows in intensity up to that final grapple for life or death, which extorts from even the angel the cry—"Let me go"—and in the convulsiveness of which Jacob grew bold enough to reply—"I will not, except thou bless me!"

Oh, is it not time to have done with all mockeries of supplication! God, the Almighty, has been pleased to take one special name for himself—the Hearer of Prayer. He seems to be bending over us, like a sedate and patient father, to hear our real wishes. We sometimes put up these strange utterances of mere lip-service. And he knows we are not in earnest. Then he turns sadly towards our hearts to ask—"How have I wearied thee? What have I done to merit this formality? I cannot trifle thus. In my merciful wisdom, I have put before the children of men a plan by which they could communicate directly with me. I gave my own Son to sufferings unutterable. Through pains, and loneliness, and sorrow, and agony—through sweat of blood, and shame of dying, and gloom of the grave, he opened a very king's highway of devotion. Can I consent that such caricatures of petition should be found wandering in it? To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? Bring no more vain oblations. Your new-moons and your ap-

pointed feasts my soul hateth ; they are a trouble unto me ; I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you ; yea, when ye make many prayers I will not hear ; your hands are full of blood !”

And perhaps we may as well remark here as anywhere, that in the merited severity and truth of such a rebuke is found an explanation of what to many minds seems mysterious. Why do the wheels of redemption move so slowly? If prayer means anything, why has not the millennium dawned already a thousand years ago? Why are the plans of sovereign grace so tediously behindhand in results?

The answer must be—their way is blocked by meaningless prayers. You see how it comes to pass that souls are not converted. Well, what is thus balefully effective on a small scale, becomes a bar on a large one. The churches are not revived ; the children of the covenant are not advanced, the ways of Zion mourn, iniquity prevails, and our hearts are discouraged. There is no recondite or even mysterious reason for this. It is because the bows of prayer are stringless, because arrows of prayer are dull at the points, because quivers of prayer are well-nigh empty.

Meantime all other processes rush and revel. The grave never is full, death cries like the horse-leech's daughter, “ Give, give,” sin is ribald, saintliness is reviled, damnation slumbereth not, and the earth grows old to ruin. God said, to try us—Let me go ! And shame on us, we just let him go !

II.—This, then, is the lesson which we are taught in this story concerning the spirit of prayer. There is another, following right on, concerning the forms we may employ to best advantage.

Perhaps there is no better figure in the Bible, than that which is offered here, to illustrate the permitted freedom which our charity ought to be on the alert to grant to all classes of Christians in public and private devotion. Each man must be allowed always to wrestle in his own way, if

he is to be held responsible for a victory. You cannot wisely put any athlete under rules. He has a right to claim he may choose his own method of tripping, striking—of grappling or retreating—according as he believes he can reach his end.

We are ready to admit this elsewhere. There is in every mechanical art what is termed a *knack* at clever performance. There is an inexplicable *knack* in slinging stones, in shooting arrows, in throwing darts. So there is a *knack* in cutting beads, and fashioning pin-heads, and tuning the strings of a viol. When we rise into the region of spiritual exercises, we give a more dignified name, and call this same thing a *gift*. There is a gift of prayer; there is a gift at preaching; there is a gift in conversing with inquirers. And within all reasonable limits one is to be suffered to employ his own adaptations of temperament, his fitnesses of education, and his knowledge of human nature, as best he knows how.

Hence, as a general thing, a Christian's prayers do not lawfully come within the reach of close criticism. It is fair for us always, in a quiet way, to try to enlighten, correct, instruct, and encourage each other. But all this wild denunciation and denial of extemporaneous devotion is unwise and unfair, besides being uncharitable, and irreligious. It is wilful wickedness to reject fervor and faith, and gibe at grammar or jeer at rhetoric.

So on the other side: some of God's children can pray better with set formulas. I am candid enough to admit I do not approve of written liturgies. I could not pray over and over the same thing out of a book. But I have no reason to withhold my profoundest respect for those who prefer them. I simply say I could not wrestle according to a chart of motions in order, with carefully calculated directions and departures, all intoned to music. But I distinctly deny my own right to make a fling at those who can. All I claim is an equal forbearance. Let perfect liberty be granted to all to meet the Angel of the Covenant in their own way.

It is astonishing to see how far a truly aroused soul can go towards the throne of grace, sometimes, under strong impulse of overwrought feeling. There is found on record one of the persistent supplications of that prince of praying men, Martin Luther. One time a sober fear fell over the feeble band of Reformers, that Germany would be lost to the cause. Then it was that this devoted man interposed his voice, and claimed a hearing from God :—

“ O God, Almighty God, everlasting ! How dreadful is this world ! Behold, how its mouth opens to swallow me up ! How small is my faith in thee ! If I am to depend upon any strength of the world, all is over. The knell is struck. Sentence is gone forth. O God, O God ! O thou, my God, help me against all the wisdom of the world. Thou shouldest do this. The work is not mine, but thine. I have no business here. The cause is thine ; and it is righteous and everlasting. O Lord, help me ! O faithful and unchangeable God ! I lean not on a man. My God, my God, dost thou not hear ? My God, art thou no longer living ? Nay, thou canst not die. Thou dost not hide thyself. Thou hast chosen for me this work. I know it. Therefore, O God, accomplish thine own will. Forsake me not, for the sake of thy well-beloved Son, Jesus Christ, my defence, my buckler, and my stronghold ! ”

For a moment he seemed then to pause. But then once more the bursting heart continued, with importunate yearning. It was as if he had reached the point where the Angel-jehovah had said—“ Let me go ! ” For with loftier faith that great will instantly sprung its bow back, to wing the petition higher :—

“ Lord, where art thou ? My God, where art thou ? Come, I pray thee, I am ready. Behold me prepared to lay down my life for the truth. For the cause is holy. It is thine own. *I will not let thee go* ; no, nor yet for all eternity ! My soul is thine. Yes. I have thine own word to assure me

of it. My soul belongs to thee, and will abide with thee forever. Amen. O God, send help! Amen!"

Now what I have quoted this petition at length for, is simply to show, by one notable example, how men *wrestle* in prayer; its very abruptness; its retreat and advance: everything reminds you of Jacob at the ford. Can any one doubt such supplication was prevalent and effectual; or that in answer to it, God gave Germany, and the Reformation to the Church?

I. My Christian friends, I do not think I care to go forward any further in the use of this story. My mind is arrested with the supreme thought of the wonderful preciousness and availableness of prayer as an instrument of communication with God. What could we poor mortals do without it here on the earth?

In one of the meetings a while ago, an old sailor rose to make some remarks. He said—"one of our boats was dashed to pieces at sea; six of the men clung to the fragments; three days they were without help; for we in the distant ship could not find them; they told us afterwards that the most awful and lonely thought they had in those dreadful hours was that *they could do nothing to make us hear them*; and that made me think of prayer; what if a man was just so cut off that he could not pray; what if when we were floating around on this mighty ocean of peril, we had no voice that could be sent over in any way to heaven!"

Oh, how matchless the mercy of God! We can talk to him in our own plain, artless, unconstrained way, and he takes pleasure in listening to us! Here, in the history, a poor mortal herdsman had power to prevail in a contest for a blessing with the omnipotent God. The success of just one real prayer of ours, ought to be the memory of a life-time. We might keep saying—I am the man, dust and ashes myself, who once, on such a day and such an hour, asked—and Jehovah answered me! Nay more, he told me to come

again! Think now of a human being, who can honestly say
—“I have daily audience for my petitions in heaven!”

“I wonder not the eye of man cowers lions in their den ;
Or that a son of genius can sway the minds of men ;
I wonder not the conqueror moves nations with his rod ;—
But rather that a little child can move the hand of God !”

2. And now, if all this representation be truthful, you will readily perceive that the exercises of one's soul preliminary to prayer are important, and in great measure essential to the reverence of the devotion. One of the finest incidental revelations of character, found in all the Bible history, is that which is discovered in the narrative of Joseph while in Egypt. Pharaoh sent for him ; and though this young man must have known now that his fortune was made, and though he longed inexpressibly to get out of the filthy dungeon, he was of too decent a turn to rush into the king's presence without care. He made all the retinue wait for him outside, though they came “hastily ;” he would not be hurried into indecorousness of behavior ; he “shaved himself, and changed his raiment, and came in unto Pharaoh.”

We need to pray for better gift at prayer. “It is harder,” so remarked the pious Gurnall, “to get the great bell up, than to ring it when raised.” Ejaculatory prayer is useful ; but there is need of set seasons likewise. “A great part of my time,” wrote McCheyne, “is spent just in getting my heart in tune to pray.” It is not wise to be headlong. “He that believeth shall not make haste.” A spirit of prayer is better than a mere act of prayer. The stringing of the bow, and the notching of the arrow, have much to do with the success of the archer's shot. We must search our hearts, and gird our energies up, so that it never shall be said of us—“None stirreth up himself to take hold on God.”

3. Still, let not the mistake be made of supposing that violence in mere externals answers equally well with God, as would real sincerity in the heart. Indeed, it does no possi-

ble good to simulate the form of intensity, when one is listless in spirit.

Some men redouble force simply because they are without fervor. I have known the members of a village prayer-meeting to be arrested by the affrighted neighbors on complaint of a breach of the peace, and disturbance of the Sabbath. But with all their tumult, they were not any the more remarkable for their grace or graces. The priests of Baal made any amount of noise more than Elijah. The people of Ephesus almost drowned Paul's voice with their uproar. Indeed, it would seem as if prayer had its proper place registered among the silent forces of the universe, and would be likely to prevail the more certainly in proportion to its tranquil quietness.

One little expression in our text has meaning. We are told here by Hosea that Jacob "*wept* and made supplication." We confessedly have to draw a confused picture to get all these particulars together. It is strange to think of a manly man in tears as he wrestles. But we can certainly go far enough instantly to discriminate, and admit that the tears were different things from the struggles. One came from the heart; the other was only a physically bold exercise. I think that the "supplication" was resident in the weeping.

Of even our divine Lord, we are told in one most remarkable passage, that he wept at his devotions. "Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications, *with strong crying and tears*, unto him that was able to save him from death—and was heard in that he feared." We couple such expressions as these with remembrances of Gethsemane. "And being in agony, he prayed more earnestly." The covering of his Father's face only made him the more filial. And no matter how strong was his crying, only a stone's throw off it had not power, with all its sobbing tumult, to waken even the beloved disciple to observe it. Feeling may be deep enough in any wrestling

Christian's heart to fill his eyes with tears ; and yet he need not become noisy in demonstration.

4. Only one more thought needs to be mentioned ; that lies plainly before us, seeming as if it had been dropped down from under the eaves of our subject. It addresses itself to those who never pray ; who neither wrestle nor prevail.

How strange is the spectacle of a habitually prayerless man ! We have heard of one who lived without a country. We know men without a home. But how an intelligent moral being can live, and yet not be on speaking terms with his Maker, passes comprehension. The privilege is open to all. Said good Bishop Leighton, with generous expostulation :— “ Remember none of God's children are born dumb ! ”

There is such practical value in prayer that in all ages there have been even ungodly men, who have attested its preciousness. Some people have great respect for Tennyson, and seem enthusiastic enough to call him an inspired writer. Well, hear what he puts in the mouth of one of his characters, just parting with a friend, and saying the last words :—

“ If thou shouldst never see my face again,
Pray for my soul ! More things are wrought by prayer,
Than this world dreams of. Wherefore, let thy voice
Rise like a fountain for me, night and day !
For what are men better than sheep or goats,
That nourish a blind life within the brain,
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer,
Both for themselves, and those who call them friends ?
For so the whole round earth is every way
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God ! ”

Most thoughtful men admit this in a soft, suffused, sentimental sort of way. They say—God bless you—as they separate even for a season. They murmur—Good Bye—even when they know it means God be with you. But it is ques-

tionable whether there is any sincerity or any value in going so far, unless one is ready to go farther.

It would have been of no use to Jacob, when attacked, to rise to the challenge, and go through a few of the first feints of wrestling, meanwhile occupying his mind with distracting thoughts of herds and flocks, or with wondering how he might outwit his antagonist with the craft which had conquered Esau, or the shrewdness that had overcome Laban. He seems to have grown solemn as he grew sincere. If one means to wrestle, he must give himself to it altogether.

And wicked men need to become Christians to give efficacy to their prayers. The Bible rule is irrevocable—"If I regard iniquity in my heart the Lord will not hear me."

Procrastination is the worst enemy of the soul. Many a young man prays, in effect, as the frank Augustine says he did in words—"O Lord, convert me, convert me—but *not yet!*" It is as if one should cry out in pain for a surgeon, because he was wounded; and yet wilfully refuse that the splinter, which festers in the irritated flesh, should be either searched for or extracted. Two evils result at once—the surgeon is reproached for want of fidelity, and the sufferer only goes on enduring fruitless pain. All attempts at relief only increase the radical wrong.

The Scriptures accept this as a figure definitely. Twice over, in two chapters, does the prophet Jeremiah exclaim against those who will continue to urge prayer, even as a privilege, while the heart yet conceals any evil—"For they have healed the heart of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace, when there is no peace."

He is our best friend, who tears away every subterfuge—scatters our refuges of lies—exposes our mockeries—and constrains us with fraternal violence of faithful rebuke to order our whole cause honestly before God, and wrestle with him sincerely into penitence and peace.

GOD CALLING YET.

GOD calling yet ! and shall I never hearken,
But still earth's witcheries my spirit darken ?
This passing life, these passing joys all flying,
And still my soul in dreamy slumbers lying !

God calling yet ! and I not yet arising,
So long this loving, faithful voice despising ;
So falsely his unwearied care repaying.
He calls me still, and still I am delaying.

God calling yet ! loud at my door is knocking,
And I my heart, my ear, still firmer locking ;
He still is ready, willing to receive me,
Is waiting now, but ah ! he soon may leave me.

God calling yet ! and I no answer giving ;
I dread his yoke, and am in bondage living ;
Too long I linger ; but not yet forsaken,
He calls me still—O my poor heart ! awaken.

Ah ! yield him all—all to his care confiding ;
Where but with him are rest and peace abiding ?
Unloose, unloose, break earthly bonds asunder,
And let this spirit rise in soaring wonder.

God calling yet ! I can no longer tarry,
Nor to my God a heart divided carry ;
Now, vain and giddy world, your spells are broken—
Sweeter than all, the voice of God has spoken !

Penuel:

THE DISCIPLINE OF DENIAL.

"And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me."—GEN. 32 : 26.

IN a curious sketch, one of our most analytic writers of modern times has undertaken to introduce his readers to what he calls the philosophy of composition. He chooses for his illustration one of his own poems, and proceeds to tell us the verse which in particular he wrote earliest. Selecting the very crown and culmination of his subject, he began to put it into metre first. Then he wrote down from it, and up to it—so completing his commencement and his end.

It is not to be understood that the sacred writer, who gave us Jacob's dramatic story, had any notion of such science or such art in construction. But if he had indeed chosen the chief incident in the whole tale of the wrestle at Penuel, he certainly would have fastened our attention upon the simple verse we have for our text to-day.

The spectacle, which more than all others seems singular, is presented at the precise point when this mysterious angel ceases his endeavor, and appears to surrender with the words—"Let me go!" It is as if he confesses positive defeat; as if he says—"I have attempted in this attack more than I could do; I thought to overthrow you; I am not myself over-

thrown, but I am ready to retreat ; you are stronger than I supposed ; let us stop where we are ; the day is breaking ; let me go !”

But Jacob did not begin this wrestle, and now he means his antagonist shall not end it. He grows braver, as the other grows timid. He clings the more tenaciously, as the angel relaxes his hold. Plainly he has discovered something to us unseen. He appears to know there is a meaning in this profession of weariness. A vision less keen, a penetration less searching, would have ruined this patriarch's prospects now. The narrower seems his chance of success, the more he redoubles his endeavor. But his answer is altogether inconsequent. He abruptly exclaims—“I will not let thee go, except thou *bless* me !” It is from this we infer that he had learned precisely who his antagonist was. It was not one of Esau's men at all—it was an angel—the angel was divine. And he understood that such an angel desired nothing so much as this unflinching freedom with him. So he persisted.

In this is found the entire doctrine of the Bible as to God's dealing with men. “The King is held in the galleries,” said the Bride in the Song of Songs, “I held him, and would not let him go.” Hence we have now before us for study these two particulars :—

I.—THE DISCIPLINE OF DENIAL :—

II.—THE INSPIRED REPLY TO IT.

I.—Chrysostom, the golden-tongued preacher of the early Church, has offered a splendid figure of illustration, with the quoting of which we may begin. He is speaking of prayer ; not that which is full of languor, and is feeble both in conception and in fervor ; but of that which is symbolized well in this wrestle of the patriarch ; that which is made with earnestness, whose birth is accompanied with spirit-throes ; which is produced by the intensely concentrated exercise of the faculties of the mind, and the fervors of the soul, at once and together. Of this he says :—

“As water, while flowing over a level plain and spreading unconfined on every side, springs not upwards; but when forced to descend into one channel, and compressed into narrow space, it bounds aloft with the speed of an arrow—so is it with the human devotion. When it enjoys unbroken tranquillity, it flows smoothly on, and dissipates its energies; but when through the force of circumstances adverse, it is depressed and imprisoned in a narrow channel, the influence of this salutary pressure of hindrance makes it pour forth pure and impassioned prayers even up to high heaven.”

It never seems kind or charitable to charge insincerity upon any of the children of God as a wilful sin. But the fact stands—perhaps carelessness will account for it—that a vast majority of prayers are mere mechanical performances. Believers fall into platitudes, and run in ruts of expression. The most formal petition one hears is quite likely to be cast into this most preposterous utterance—“Oh, make us all wrestling Jacobs and prevailing Israels!”

Travelers in eastern lands tell us they find among some of the nations a custom of using praying-machines. Blocks of wood are constructed in the shape of wheels upon a spindle. On these petitions are inscribed; and then the pious devotee sits patiently beneath, whirling them with a string. We have no such contrivances in our times. But there are stiff formulas of vain repetition, I fear, which would fit them. We certainly are too vague and diffusive in our devotions. Wisely has an ancient writer remarked—“Generalities are the death of prayer.” And when we are rambling the world over, sometimes the providence of God says almost audibly in our ears—“Let me go!” Back on ourselves, this is the signal for us to turn, and quicken our faith by concentrating its force and fervor, and arouse our zeal into condition of being wide awake.

But not even here can this experience be considered to end. There is a deeper philosophy still in this dread discipline of denial. It is intended to drop the man down into a

new prayer—and that new prayer introduces him to a wrestle which he never expected, and out of which he will come changed for all time.

The common habit of us all is to plead for more piety, fresher graces, higher attainment, truer consecration, thorough union to Jesus. But we are apt to run heedlessly on, hardly pondering our words. We seem to have no real knowledge what we mean. It appears finally as if God grew weary of the childish iterations. He says abruptly—"Let me go!" We know enough of ordinary religious life to be quite sure we must do something to keep him, and get answers to what we have been repeating. But we are clear as to nothing more than a vague restless desire, which would go all lengths just to be certain of anything. We therefore rush hurriedly into explosives of request. We say—"Oh, make us thine—thine on any terms—thine, now and forever!" And then we are taken at our word.

Do you remember the occasion when the mother of Zebedee's children came to our Saviour, asking if he would promise to put the one of them upon his right hand, the other on his left, in the coming of his kingdom? Now here was one of those reckless, thoughtless prayers, which mean anything or nothing, according to what afterwards becomes of them. What afterwards became of this was—the Lord appeared almost startled at her request. He attributed the boldness of the petition to her ignorance. He denied it instantly, in effect, with a sort of deprecation—"Ye know not what ye ask." Then he wanted her to see this for herself. So he put a question for her easy test—"Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?" To this there came the tremendous reply, as now the sons themselves joined in—"We are able!" He took them at their word. Through suffering they came finally to reign. The years passed on. They entered yet more deeply into the mission of the Master. So their prayer grew heavier. James became the first

martyr ; John the last exile ; so they reached the right and left hands of their Lord.

In this very way we all sometimes pray for advancement. The granting of our prayer involves, unknown to us, ineffable pain. God forewarns us in time to retreat. He often springs down upon us a little touch of trouble—a slight foretaste of what this thing is going to cost—he apparently denies our prayer, in order to test our sincerity. He frets us with a mortifying perplexity. He lets us suffer in limited measure, to see how we will bear it. A human wrestle, like Jacob's, grapples us in the night-time. We accept the challenge brightly. We press the prayer. Now comes the conflict. The man is an angel ; the angel is God. In an instant we are down in the depths of an awful experience, which we did not anticipate. We do not propose to retreat. But life becomes solemn for all the sinewy years, until we almost long to see the day-break which shall take us over the Penuel river into the sunshine.

So here in this discipline of denial is the test of growth. Are we coming more and more into sympathy with God ? Do we begin to understand him better ? Can we see him clearer every day ? Does all the world throb with his footsteps, to our disciplined ear ? Does the sky shine with his glory, to our clarified vision, as we look up for his morning welcome and his evening benediction ? In a word, is the grand purpose of our life so absorbed into his, that we can discover in each daily human duty the spirit of a loyal filial child ?

It is evident, that there is also included in the aim of this discipline of denial, the entire subjection of human will, the utter subordination of it to the divine. "Let me go"—said the angel. Not because he wished to go ; not because he intended to go. Not because he wished Jacob to loosen his hold, but tighten it. Not because he expected to depart without blessing him, but because he meant the blessing to be prized and valued when it came. So he simply drew out

all this man's uttermost resources of will, and exhausted them in an instant by a miracle. "And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint as he wrestled with him." Now where was human strength and prowess? Could a lame man keep up the fight? But at that very instant Jacob heard him say—"Let me go!" So he knew that the Being, who could shrivel his sinews with a touch, either would not, or could not, go, unless he permitted him. So he wrestled no more for victory; his will and force were gone; he only plead for blessing, and was willing to take it freely.

So God frequently deals with petitioners. In one notable instance, he used these very same words as a rebuff to Moses. When the people had made a golden calf, and were bowing down to it, even while the great lawgiver was up in the mount, the Almighty saw the disgraceful spectacle; and mentioning it to Moses with all the calmness of settled wrath, immediately said, as if forestalling all intercession—"Behold, this is a stiff-necked people; now, therefore, *let me alone*, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them." Here was denial before request. But do you imagine this would hinder a man like Moses? Was there not encouragement in the implication that if *not* "let alone," God would never feel free for the cursing of even an idolatrous nation? So it is no surprise for us to find this faithful man leaping boldly into the hottest breach of divine displeasure, on the instant; interposing himself between the bolts of fiery wrath, and the sinners that had merited them. "Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold!—yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin! and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book, which thou hast written!"

We may well suppose there was never another such prayer lifted by human lips. With it ever on his broken heart, this man fell down before the Lord, forty days and forty

nights. But there never was any real danger. When God says—Let me alone—he owns himself conquered. Moses' will was subdued, but God's grace was enough. The fierce anger was at once arrested, and Israel was spared.

Why do we not learn this lesson likewise? God tells us—"Hinder me not." We are troubled and give up. We say our prayers are not answered. But think a moment; how limitless is the encouragement in a rebuff like this! It is implied that we *can* hinder God. He seems to say—stand out of my way—when we are between him and infliction of judgment. But the fine thing is—this admits we can get in his way!

It is foolishness, then, for us, having implored divine guidance, to find ourselves in deeper perplexity. We ask for strength, and grow weaker. We beseech interposition, and he seems farther off. He strikes away all human helps we are trusting. But he is only enticing us onwards. He is challenging us to advance. He hides himself in order that we may stir up ourselves to find him. While really at work for us, he seems to conceal his agency. And his purpose is to exalt prayer to something more than a merely salutary gymnastic for the soul. He means to honor it as a down-right necessity, a real instrument of relief. He says, "let me go," not meaning to go, not meaning that our weak faith should let him.

Perhaps you will remember all this better under the guise of a bit of quaint Scriptural etymology. The Apostle Paul (in our excellent version) is represented as saying to the Romans he had long intended to visit them, but hitherto he was "let." So in Isaiah, Jehovah himself says—"I will work, and who shall *let* it?" The old English word *let* means *hinder*. Paul would have gone to Rome, but he was hindered. Jehovah will work, and who shall hinder him? So it seems as if Weak-faith might encourage his own heart a little, by just saying over to himself—when the Angel of the

Covenant tells me to let him go, his *let* means nothing but *hinder*!

II.—So much, then, about the discipline of denial, leads us quickly on to our second point—the inspired reply it should receive. It is all in the one verse of the text. “And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me!” The answer, therefore, is simple, persistent importunity. Human determination is invited reverently to exclaim—“I will not!”

Concerning which reply, however, it seems to me to be as necessary to say what it does not mean, as what it does. It does not mean apathy—nor bitterness—nor wilfulness—nor sentimentalism.

Not apathy—for no man can be in a right mood, who settles down into indifference, when he has begun to wrestle with God. An unanswered prayer is like a vessel over-due on the sea. A Christian cannot guiltlessly lapse into listlessness without taking active means to look it up.

Nor bitterness—for why should we be angry because God hides his face for a moment, or feigns to withdraw himself out of hearing? It would reach us with fittest reproach, if God asked us out of heaven, as he did the sullen Jonah, “Doest thou well to be angry?” The pitiful ill-temper did not even so much as revive the gourd again.

Nor wilfulness—for there is no addition to human ingenuity found in sheer rebellion. Mere wisdom in self-extrication will inevitably lead into unlawful measures. Let God be true, though every man a liar. It would not have made Paul any better a Christian to pray thrice for the removal of his thorn—and then deny that prayer could have an answer. “He that believeth shall not make haste.”

Nor sentimentalism—it is no heroic man or woman, who having been hindered in petition, sits in the doorway exclaiming, like another Jeremiah—“Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the Lord

hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger!" Sympathy does not help the case.

The reply is—"I will not let thee go!" Nothing more, nor less, than pray again, and keep praying. The two parables of our Saviour are exactly in point. The widow's importunity prevailed over even an unjust judge; how much more ours over One who is just and merciful likewise! The friend's importunity gained bread even at midnight for his guests, from one who was resistant and churlish; how much more ours from a Father who seeks chances for generous supply! And Jesus told his meaning at the beginning. "He spake a parable unto them, *to this end*, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint."

But there is one felicity in Jacob's story, which must not be passed over. He prevailed, so we say, and got a blessing. What blessing did he get? The same which he asked for. And that is the point. What did he ask for? Logically, he ought, under the circumstances, to have said—I will not let thee go, except I overthrow thee in this unsought wrestle. That was the way the thing began; that was what he had been all night about. It would be even within natural explanation, if he had said—"I will not let thee go, except I be protected from Esau with his four hundred men." The significant thing is, he left it to the angel to fix his own blessing, satisfied to know he was at last a prevailer in his hands.

So the soul of every true believer shows the truest wisdom when the exact favor is left unspecified and undescribed. See how finely in real life this principle is illustrated in the case of Bartimeus at the gate of Jericho. Through great opposition from all the throng that beggar had found his access at last to Jesus. He had wrestled with a prayer, the best he could think of—"Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me!" That was vague, unspecific, indefinite. At a word, our Saviour turned back the whole sunshine of his faith upon his greatest want, concentrating it as if with a burning lens on his long-borne blindness. He asked—"What wilt thou

that I should do unto thee?" Now Bartimeus did not really know, much less attempt to say, what the Lord should do unto him; he only knew what he wanted as a result. Nor was our Lord ignorant or evasive. He knew the man's history. He desired by the question to fix his confidence on some fact. And then, as might have been expected, Bartimeus answered—"that my eyes may be opened; that I might receive my sight." Each of the Evangelists, who records this miracle, employs the same ellipsis. The blind man leaves out all methods. He ventures, no more than Jacob, to indicate his blessing. It was as if he answered—"Anything; do anything thou wilt with me; that my eyes may receive their sight!"

Oh, when the wrestling soul has reached this supreme point of surrender, that it can say—"Do what thou wilt with me; only bless me"—the discipline of denial has already wrought out its fine lesson!

I wish, as I end this sermon, I could leave upon your imagination that finest of all pictures in the New Testament—the Syro-Phenician woman, who came to Jesus in a like wrestle, and with a like confidence in behalf of her daughter. How she plead; how she worshiped; how she persisted to get past the disciples; at our Lord's feet she lay at last. Instead of reaching down tenderly, he behaved as chillingly as a Pharisee. He gave her the abominable name, which the Jews applied to the barbarian, the uncircumcised, and the unclean. He said he would not "take the children's meat, and give it unto dogs!" She turned that into argument. Even animals have their rights. "Truth, Lord; yet the dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from their master's table!" That won the blessing. See him now, as he takes her kindly by the hand, and says—"O woman, great is thy faith! be it unto thee as thou wilt!"

TRIALS SANCTIFIED.

I ASKED the Lord that I might grow
 In faith and love and every grace ;
 Might more of his salvation know,
 And seek more earnestly his face.

'Twas he who taught me thus to pray,
 And he, I trust, has answered prayer ;
 But it has been in such a way,
 As almost drove me to despair.

I hoped that in some favored hour
 At once he'd answer my request ;
 And by his love's constraining power,
 Subdue my sins, and give me rest.

Instead of this, he made me feel
 The hidden evils of my heart,
 And let the angry powers of hell
 Assault my soul in every part.

Yea, more ; with his own hand he seemed
 Intent to aggravate my woe ;
 Crossed all the fair designs I schemed,
 Blasted my hopes, and laid me low.

"Lord, why is this ?" I trembling cried ;
 "Wilt thou pursue thy worm to death ?"
 "'Tis in this way," the Lord replied,
 "I answer prayer for grace and faith.

"These inward trials I employ,
 From self and pride, to set thee free ;
 And break thy schemes of earthly joy,
 That thou mayst seek thy all in me."

Peniel:

THE NEW MAN.

'And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel.'—
GEN. 32 : 28.

IN the midnight hour of his wrestle with the Angel of the Covenant, Jacob was educating faster than ever he had been before. His views, when he went back over the river, were painfully mistaken. He had looked upon life hitherto as just a mere strife of wit, and will, and wisdom. Many a door was opened for subtle bargains, and cunning increase of wealth. He thought it was a great thing to outwit Esau, over-reach Isaac, and be smarter than Laban.

But here, in this mysterious adventure, he learned a lesson which had never been taught him, indeed, which he never forgot. He found that in a man there was sometimes an angel, and the angel sometimes was God. The earth was only the footstool of Omnipotence. The human economy was only the pavilion of the divine. So the after history of this patriarch shows that a great change has passed over him. The true idea of God has now become established in his soul. Not that he had advanced immensely in mere intellectual acquisitions ; but the sympathy of his nature was now in besitting tune. God had taught him that his most tremendous enemy was not Esau, but himself. Let there be purity, and there henceforth would be peace.

From this moment we are to look upon Jacob as an Old Testament Christian. We need make no hesitation in applying to him the verse—"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." Our text offers us these two points of notice:—

I.—THE SYMBOL OF THE NEW LIFE;

II.—THE REACH TO WHICH IT EXTENDS.

I.—The Symbol here employed is found in the change of this man's name. He was no longer to be called Jacob, but Israel. And thenceforth in the inspired history, we constantly meet this new appellation. Even his descendants are called after him, "the children of Israel." And eventually the nation, as well as the land, were spoken of as Israelites and Israel.

Little, if any, explanation of an act so significant remains to be offered. You remember that in those days names were not mere epithets, as they are now. They were things. Each one of them had a meaning, intended to indicate personal peculiarities, or individual characteristics. The word *Jacob* means a "supplanter," and had been applied to this man with a reference to his supplanting his brother Esau in the birthright blessing. When in the wrestle the angel asked him what his name was, he evidently purposed to recall to his attention the items of his own history, and the character denoted by them. *Israel* means "a prince with God." The angel himself assigns a reason for bestowing so exalted a name on him as this:—"As a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed." Thus in this change of name was intimated an entire change of character. He was sent back in recollection over the years to the time when he had been a wicked man; and then he was sent forward in anticipation across the years, under the command that he should begin a fresh career.

From this night onward, he was to leave off his worldly cunning, and surrender his craft. He must become a new

man, and, above all, a true man. His early and continuous sins might now be forgiven; but he must lead an altered life.

Hitherto we could not admire Jacob much, and sometimes hardly respect him. Narrow-minded and sinuous, with always some machination or some secret deceit in his soul, meditating treachery, he merits no love. But when he underwent this convulsing experience that awful night, it was new work with him, and new life came out of it. There is significance in his phraseology when he says he met God "face to face."

Two faces, then—think of them. The mantle was drawn away from before that Face which could not look upon iniquity with any degree of allowance. Then, when his secret sins were set in the light of that countenance, Jacob, in one flashing instant of supreme discovery, learned what a hollow life he had led. And at the same moment, his own mask fell away. The vail was drawn aside from before his own face, which hitherto had wilfully refused to look into the glass of divine teaching, lest, beholding the glory of the Lord, it should be changed into the same image. So there—"face to face"—they confronted each other with not a barrier between! And the Spirit of grace went on through the wrestle, disclosing God more and more clearly, and in the luminousness of the exhibition disclosing Jacob as well, till Jacob lost his old name, and divine Mercy bestowed on him part of his.

Now there can be no doubt concerning the positively evangelical character of this entire story. For if this is not the putting off of "the old man with his deeds," and the putting on of "the new man, which is renewed after the image of Christ," then there is no instruction intelligibly attached to the words. This new name of Jacob's symbolizes new character. It means regeneration.

Come back to the New Testament verse already quoted. When the Apostle says—"if any man be in Christ, he is a

new creature"—he appears to be looking scenically upon an unregenerate person in the exact instant of his renewal by the Spirit of God. His figure of description is exceedingly majestic and bold. Nothing else will meet his rhetorical want, other than that grand period of eternal history in which the morning-stars sang together over a new-made world. The words—"he is"—are interpolated. Literally rendered, the passage would read—"If any one be in Christ—a new creation!" The Apostle is graphic and explosive. He seems to summon back into vivid spectacle that six-days miracle. He sees darkness flee away, the confusion subside into order, the chaos arrange itself into fresh forms of usefulness and beauty. And with this one interjectional word—behold—as a signal call for arresting attention, and a challenge to our admiring notice, he exclaims—"old things are passed away, all things are become new; behold, a new creation!"

Personal piety stops at nothing. It has no conceivable limit. It absorbs the whole man, body, mind, and soul. In every particular, his life is intended to exhibit the alteration. From the root to the branches, from the flower to the fruit, his nature is created over again. So the real reason why Jacob is called Israel, is—Jacob is vanished; Israel is born!

II.—Let us move on, therefore, to consider in the second place, by enumeration of particulars, the reach to which this new life extends.

1. Begin here—when once a believer is truly in Christ, and has put off the old name and put on the new, his standing with God is entirely changed.

Up to this moment, he has been a sharer in all that follows from the fall of our first parents in Paradise. He has been under the curse of God's broken law. But when justified by the faith which accepts the atonement, his relation shifts. He has been "delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son." He has "passed from death unto life." He is no longer an

enemy, but a child ; no longer a culprit, but a son. He is not even a prodigal ; he is home again, and has the seal-ring upon his hand.

In a word, he is out from under the law, he is now under grace. The curse is removed ; Christ has borne it. One of the most concise and vivid of all the statements of this wonderful fact is that found in the epistle to the Colossians :— “ And you being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses ; blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross.”

Here the picture is of sin as a debt. An acceptance or note of hand seems to have been pressed by a severe creditor, and the man is unable to pay it. Now a wealthy friend presents himself, and offers to assume the entire obligation. He receives the handwriting, and cancels it with mutilation. So Christ finds each human soul in hopeless bankruptcy ; he assumes the debt wholly, freely, munificently ; and, just as you have seen an old paper in the counting-room of a banker, thrust over a wire, whose sharp point at once defaces and preserves it, so here you are taught to see that Jesus nails to his cross all evidences of our sin ; thus destroying them, and still retaining them, to show, not that they are yet to be paid, but that they have been paid already.

When a debtor's debts are discharged, the law has done with dealing with him. And calling sins debts, this must be apprehended as the entire teaching of the Gospel. The sinner is under the severest penalty of the divine law until he is *in Christ* ; but the moment Christ has truly become his surety, he is in a new relation altogether. Once having been afar off, he has now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of his soul. Formerly an alien and a stranger, he is now under the covenant, and received with equal privilege into the household of faith. Once terrified by the thunderings of Sinai, now he seeks Calvary, finding repose. “ The work of

righteousness shall be peace ; and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever." For, you see, he has nothing to fear ; the law's demands are discharged.

Of course now standing in this new relation to God, God regards him quite differently. Every barrier is broken down between them. God is angry with the wicked every day ; but God loves his children dearly. The Father grows parental, the child becomes filial. The Saviour shows his love. The believer glows joyously under the sunshine it sheds. God's displeasure is over and man's enmity is ended.

He that is *in Christ* is in sure favor, because Christ is regarded with sure favor. This is the significance of that peculiar prayer offered by the Psalmist ;—" Behold, O God, our shield, and look upon the face of thine anointed." *Christ* means the *Anointed One*. Christ is our shield. His merit reaches over us as our defence. And whenever the Father looks lovingly upon his only-begotten Son, he sees us sheltered by him. Our new relationship to Jesus is one which he welcomes. It is a relationship of close companionship and acceptance. Justice has nothing more to demand ; not even Mercy has anything more to plead. Infinite Love now holds the sway.

And that eternally ; the change of countenance, so frightful in its intimation of wrath, is never going to give us alarm again. God is hereafter forever the beneficent Father ; the Christian is hereafter forever the obedient child. In the blessed reciprocity of a full restoration of confidence between them, the happy believer goes on his way singing the new song—" There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit ; for the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death."

2. But further : not only in state, but in character, is the true believer a new man. If he be in Christ, he will grow assuredly to resemble Christ.

He can hardly be said to have had a fair chance hitherto.

He has been influenced by what was low and sensual. He now begins to rise towards a more exalted meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light. All the elements of his personal being are reversed in action, the moment they are transformed in nature.

His affections are turned from what is gross and earthly, to what is celestial and pure. His constant out-going of soul is after greater nearness to God. "Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth I desire beside thee!" His conscience is unburthened. That old life of iniquity is vanished forever. He has no more to do with it than he has with the crimes of another man, or the guilt of a dead man. He revels now in freedom.

There is no mystery in this. I can conceive of a debtor so pressed by those whom he unfortunately owes that he can have no peace for an hour. Every step on the door-stone, every voice at the casement, gives him a start of uneasiness and alarm. He thinks the officers of justice may any moment seek him with a warrant of arrest. Such a man cannot keep in health. He will wear down under the pressure. Oh, what a relief in the dreadful years it is to be at last able to sit down by the cheerful fireside with the household, and fling wide open the shutters as if one had no more to fear, and put out the latch-string to let it be known he was actually at home! All the debts paid, and something coming in. In such an hour one becomes a man again. He is more amiable, more gentle, more industrious. His character changes with his state. His disposition and temper feel the new freedom from dreadful terror and depression.

There is just that sort of welcome to a pardoned believer, who has wrestled (as Jacob did) his way out of wiliness and peril into peace and prevalence. He quotes those grand words of the Apostle:—"Our old man is crucified with Christ, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin; for he that is dead, is freed from sin."

Yes: we are *dead*; that is, the former "old man" is dead; Jacob is dead, and only Israel yet lives. Our late self is at once out of reach, out of sight, out of recollection:—as if a sand-grain, washed off the cliff-side, were swept out by the billows, and buried in the cavernous solitudes of the eternal ocean! If any one think that is a bold figure, let him remember it is not mine. Inspiration has said—"Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea!"

From this time forward, therefore, it is only a question of time, for any one who is truly in Christ, how long it will be before he arrives at the stature of the perfect man in Christ Jesus. The tendencies of his nature were hitherto downward; now they rapidly advance under the guidance of the Spirit towards the heights of holiness. The understanding, which was "sometime in darkness," is becoming "light in the Lord." The desire of the soul is unto the name of God, and to the remembrance of him. And most of all, that peerless antagonism of the proud will, which, up to the final instant of revolution, has rebelled and recoiled with vice and violence, is now quiescent and submissive. Then it only shows itself more ingenious at self-sacrifice, as the change progresses. It becomes "willing in the day of the Spirit's power, in the beauty of holiness from the womb of the morning." And were absolute likeness to Jesus our Master permitted, during this period of our earthly stay, while the body of humiliation remains, the song of the Church triumphant might possibly be sung in its fullness here amid the shadows of time. "But we are confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."

3. One particular more: the new creation of a believer in Christ extends even to his experience, as well as to his state and character. When God rejoices over him with joy, he rests in his love; and to this the pardoned man makes full and quick response.

At the very basis of this new experience lies *confidence*.

There is no force in the complaint made of some Christians who feel secure in the love that has redeemed them. A measure of assurance is not only indulged but commanded. And every sincere expression of it is not presumption on our part, but only a cheerful tribute paid to the almightiness of the help we have received. A child, led along over slippery places by his father, and taking the firmest steps he can, need not feel particularly abashed at saying he believes he shall stand. If he grows bold enough to assert, in the impulse of his trustful affection, that he shall come in safe at the end, it may not be self-confidence that glows in his eye and trembles on his lip ; it is only a loving restfulness in the care which guards him, and a belief in the hand he holds.

Freedom is also an element in this new experience. I do not see how a child can be perfectly at ease with his parent unless he knows he has no reason to be unnatural and stiff in his presence. Some people think God retains an unceasing remembrance of their former infirmities. He does, if they are not penitent ; if they are his faithful children now, he bears no grudges. Legalism is a wretched disturber of all true Christian comfort. Ye are not under law, but under grace. The days of bondage are over. "If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." No man can live by conscience only, and thrive. It is as if the new man should be unceasingly on the attempt to pay the debts of the old man. Oh, I pity the Christian who tries to meet the divine law with hard observances, and rituals, and forms of devotion ! Stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ makes his children free. It is no office of a believer to retrieve the past ; Christ has assumed that for him. Let him now live a true, patient, and believing life.

And then, in this new experience there is *contentment*—a measureless and satisfied fullness of soul which has at last settled to its repose in Jesus Christ. It accepts any lot. It trusts God under any circumstances. It performs any duty. It will till the ground, post the ledger, drive the dray, sweep

the room—and yet say in the midst of toil the most menial—this is my vocation, and this I do for my Father! It will wait, unlettered and lonely, till divine providence shall open the way to further education. It will drudge on patiently in the valley-cottage, until God shall invite it into the palace on the hill. It will simply rest in its own love, and be satisfied that it shall be neither unnoticed, nor forgotten, in life.

Thus altogether the believer finds himself in Christ, a new creature. The secret of the new name reaches over his legal state, his gracious character, his personal experience.

And my brethren, I pause only to ask, what is there more than this in all the world? If I am in Christ, it seems to me I have nothing else to seek. Still, I do have more than that, when I truly believe in him. I find, daily falling on every honest path of duty, encouraging words and smiles of sunshine, which keep me up all the way. It seems enough just to be reckoned as a child; but oh, the ineffable gladness of now and then being greeted in affection by one's Father!

“Oh, the strangeness of the feeling, oh, the infinite revealing,—

To think how God must love me to have made me so content!

Though I would have served him humbly, and patiently, and dumbly,
Without any angel standing in the pathway which I went!”

See, therefore, how sad a thing it is for a soul not to be converted! It is Jacob always—never Israel. Out of Christ always—never in Christ—and so the dread dark reversal of all we have been noting. Your own soul, for example—an alien still, when the King comes to his own—a stranger still, when the Father calls the new names of his children—a lost, ruined, hopeless nature—no new creation, old things just remaining, nothing ever becoming brighter or better. And meantime the heavy curtains of the future are already rising on new scenes—there before us is the Hereafter with its two doors—glooming and gleaming—with curses or with crowns!

WHOLLY THINE.

O SAVIOUR, whose mercy, severe in its kindness,
 Has chastened my wanderings and guided my way,
 Adored be the power which illumined my blindness,
 And weaned me from phantoms that smiled to betray.

Enchanted with all that was dazzling and fair,
 I followed the rainbow—I caught at the toy,—
 And still in displeasure thy goodness was there,
 Disappointing the hope and defeating the joy.

The blossom blushed bright, but a worm was below ;
 The moonlight shone fair, there was blight in the beam ;
 Sweet whispered the breeze, but it whispered of woe ;
 And bitterness flowed in the soft flowing stream.

So, cured of my folly, yet cured but in part,
 I turned to the refuge thy pity displayed ;
 And still did this eager and credulous heart
 Weave visions of promise that bloomed but to fade.

I dreamed of celestial rewards and renown ;
 I grasped at the triumph which blesses the brave ;
 I asked for the palm branch, the robe, and the crown ;
 I asked, and thou show'st me a cross and a grave.

Subdued and instructed, at length, to thy will,
 My hopes and my longings I fain would resign ;
 Oh, give me the heart that can wait and be still,
 Nor know of a wish or a pleasure but thine.

There are mansions exempted from sin and from woe,
 But they stand in a region by mortals untrod ;
 There are rivers of joy—but they roll not below ;
 There is rest—but it dwells in the presence of God.

Peniel:

THE SEARCH AFTER GOD.

"And Jacob asked him, and said, Tell me, I pray thee, thy name. And he said, Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name? And he blessed him there."—GEN. 32: 29.

IT is somewhat difficult to conduct a series of discourses across the diversified plain of a lengthy narrative without accidental weariness to one's hearers. For we cannot avoid sometimes the necessity of tracing and retracing our familiar footsteps; especially when now and then the grand lesson to be learned involves the consideration of the whole story at once in order to its wise and adequate impression.

Here was Jacob, out in the midnight, alone upon the slope of one of the mountains of Gilead, suddenly caught by an unanticipated and unknown antagonist, who vigorously buffeted and beat him for many a weary hour. There must have been even to this patriarch a profound mystery in such an attack. What could this extraordinary wrestler mean? No time was left for calm reflection; the blows were too sturdy, the struggle for mastery too continuous and severe. Jacob could not be expected to understand it; indeed, he did not understand it till the day dawned on his victory. Then it was his triumph which became his teacher. He saw finally that his conflict had been a revelation of spiritual discipline, his commonplace wrestle was a religious symbol, his struggle was simply a sermon.

But there was evidently one thing more, which this man desired and expected to gain. For even after the contest was finished—after the pronouncement of extraordinary favor, as a princely prevailer with God, had been made—he still had a question to put. But the angel had come to the end of his errand. He evades any further issue—generously signifies his permanent good-will—and then mysteriously disappears.

Now I admit freely that there remains no hope of advantage in any attempt to follow up this mere historic incident as a fact. When the wrestle ends, that ends its instruction. But this was no ordinary part of Jacob's biography. We have seen before that it was so truly intended to be an emblem of wistful and importunate supplication, that a prophet was inspired, full a thousand years afterwards, to suggest its interpretation. The Christian church has taken it up at once; and now the expression—wrestling with the Angel of the Covenant—is as familiar as any of our household words, the world over.

So apt is this figure, that those erratic bands of Derivishes, whose devotions meet the tourist's eye almost everywhere in the East, have chosen it for their pattern in worship. Their so-called dances are to them nothing more nor less than prayers. They are intelligently attempting to give physical embodiment to this familiar exercise. They consider they are praying when they are putting forth these hideous dislocations of their limbs, this grotesqueness of grimace, and these contortions of person. Never was a worse caricature. It was not Jacob's sinewy struggle that constituted his entreaty; he wept while he wrestled; and in the moment of heaviest muscular energy there was a spiritual exercise quite distinct from it, though figured by it; then it was he "made supplication."

The experience, which is indicated in the precise verse of our text, and which becomes our study now, is that which in order follows closely on—but is quite subsequent—to suc-

cessful praying. The petition has been already laid before God; the answer has been given; the wrestle is ended. But the soul still heaves with irrepressible and unsubdued emotion. It is restlessly agitated with an unappeased desire, which is certainly far beyond mere curiosity, and really amounts in its mastering strength to an insatiate craving for what is higher still.

In this experience there seem to be three things—a request, a denial, and a compensation.

I.—The Request here, as Jacob urges it, is this: “Tell me, I pray thee, thy name.”

1. The manner is bold and abrupt. It appears strange, sometimes, as we note the real prayers on record in the Bible, to find them so short, so sharp, so resolute in utterance. “Master, carest thou not that we perish!”—“Lord, remember me, when thou comest into thy kingdom!”—“Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me!”—“Lord, save me, I perish!”

It is an old Reformer’s saying:—“Prayer is the Christian’s gun-shot. As then the bullet out of a gun, so prayers out of the mouth, can go no further than they are carried. If they be put out faintly, they cannot fly far. If they be hollow-hearted, then they will not pierce much. Only the fervent, active devotion hits the mark, and pierceth the walls of heaven, though, like those of Gaza, made of brass and iron.” Ah me! when the soul is distended with want, fairly full of wishing, it will not wait for mere decorous words or seek sounding liturgies. It bursts its conventional bonds, and grows fervid with its own forced forms of fire. It wings its flaming way directly and persistently up to the ear of God. Then it cannot be said to make its prayers; it prays.

2. But what does this request of Jacob mean? Indeed, it seems quite fair to retort the question of the angel. Jacob asked to know the name of the Being he had been wrestling with. Most surely, we are not left to imagine he still remained in ignorance who his Antagonist was.

You have already learned, from the change in Jacob's own name, that names in those days meant character, indicated personality. And when this wearied man girds up his remaining force for a new petition, he is simply pressing the old answerless question of the human soul: Who is God—and What is God?

I could not make you understand this, if you sought to consider it a mere intellectual inquiry. It is not the process—it is not even like the process—through which the mind passes when it labors to gain its primal notion of a First Cause. There is no argument in it. It will not abide rules of logic. It is a cry—not a thesis; it is spiritual—not academic; it is hunger and thirst—not dialectic calmness in search of scholastic crystals.

Few men reach any maturity of history or thought, without having, first or last, raised the question—Who is God? Who is this Being my father honors, and my mother loves? Where does he reside? What does he think of us? In what direction lies that beautiful city, of which he is the unending light? Who is this Parent of all good, whose benignant face I have sometimes dreamed I saw shining upon mine, when I was a guileless boy? Who is this awful Monarch that utters his supreme will in the agonies of my bereavement—the disappointment of my hopes—the blasting of my ambitions? Who is this—that hears my cry in the dark—that wrestles till my bones are all out of joint—then gives me all I ask in glorious benedictions? Tell me, I pray thee, what is thy name!

3. The order of experience in this heart-history is of special value, and must be noted also. It follows success and not failure. It best becomes, therefore, the symbol of prayer founded on encouragement. It suggests to us a rewarded soul, standing on the vantage-ground of a previous welcome, and stretching out its hand for a yet more advanced disclosure of love.

In the actual annals of Old Testament life, this scene finds its beautiful parallel in that interesting crisis of Moses'

interview on the mount with God. Nobody would suppose any mere mortal would dare ask to see Jehovah face to face. And our conjecture is that not even this courageous law-giver started to do so bold a thing. But he did enter the divine presence in the full expectation of settling several trying questions concerning the chosen people. These he proceeded to lay before God in plainest terms.

He was met with amazing condescension, and answered with immediate success. The divine replies were delivered instantly, and were quite explicit. Moses grew in courage. He pressed other petitions. God gave him unreservedly everything he asked. Then he suddenly changed the whole subject, raised the old question, and challenged the Almighty with a demand which no mortal lips ever before ventured to utter—"Show me, O Lord, thy glory!"

Up the heights of supplication this favored man proceeded, almost as if he were singing "songs of degrees" up the steps of the celestial temple, joyously growing bolder, as he knew he was surely drawing nearer the awful Presence within it. Then at last, with the unconscious temerity of an experienced faith, he suddenly announced he desired for himself to enter the Holy of Holies, and for once look upon the Shechinah!

There he met a kind refusal, and learned his request had gone too far. God answers need, not curiosity. He asked to see his Maker; but the Lord said, "Thou canst not see my face; for there shall no man see me, and live." But the same voice added that, although he could not show his servant the "glory" he sought, he would cause his "goodness" to pass before him in the cleft of the rock.

II.—There was the same Denial in both of these historic cases. And this leads us onward a step in the development of the text.

When the patriarch had pressed his question—"Tell me, I pray thee, thy name"—he was answered by another—"Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name?" This

was equivalent to a refusal on the angel's part to make a set reply, or offer any new disclosure. He withdrew from any further conversation. He had asked Jacob's name, for he meant to change it ; his own knew no change, and he reserved it.

You remember the same behavior, when Manoah, the father of Samson, was visited by this Angel of the Lord. This mysterious Personage announced the birth of that child, who was to become the Giant Judge of Israel. Manoah said to him, "What is thy name, that when thy sayings come to pass we may do thee honor?" To this he received the usual reply. "The angel of the Lord said unto him, Why askest thou thus after my name, seeing it is *secret*?"

It seems to be the settled determination of the divine will to hold in a holy and unbroken reserve the heights and depths of his character and being. Enough only is revealed for us to be sure he is our friend, and our well-wisher. And as the years pass on, he allows us to become better and better acquainted with him ; while at the same time he never draws us into the closeness of that familiarity which will breed disrespect, nor ever so fully reveals himself as to exhaust the disclosures, which will be the glory of the world to come, as surely as they are the blessed incitements of the world that now is.

It cannot be called an unwholesome question, this in our text, even though it never meets an earthly answer. It stimulates the soul. Even a reverent curiosity about God is better than a dead apathy. A hundred and fifty years ago, a splendid Hindoo mind put on paper the devotions which at the moment moved and swayed the anxious heart beneath it. These have been translated from the Tamil language thus :—

"I yearn for Him ! O ye sun and moon, tell me who set you in your unvarying course of day and night ! Do ye know his glory ? O thou blowing Wind ! by whose power dost thou whirl through the realms of space ? Speak thou to me of

him! O ye clouds, which come and drop in thirsty places your genial rain, think and speak! Can ye tell me the way in which my divine Master pours down, as freely as ye do, his copious showers of grace? O thou incomprehensible Sky, canst thou describe him, who transcends thy measureless height? O thou sounding Sea, thou of unutterable sublimity, who stretchest forth thy wave-hands, say who established thy vastest bounds! Tell me too, ye forest birds, with variegated wings, have ye ever gazed upon and spoken with him, who is my *lover*, who dwelleth everywhere? Oh, if ye have, commune with me about him!"

This was all that a heathen intellect, even of highest culture, and finest mould, had to say in the attempt to find its way to God. But this was better than stagnation. Piteable and sad seem these almost inarticulate yearnings of a great heart after the unseen One; but no one need fear it will fail of its reward. No man, who thus seeks audience with his Maker, ever misses him altogether. He is sure to learn thus much at the least—the Monarch of the universe is his "lover." The heart of infinite kindness above responds to the heart of infinite wistfulness below.

III.—So we come on easily to our third point in the analysis of the text. The Angel of the Covenant suffers this wrestling patriarch to have things pretty much in his own way up to the moment when he presses this request for his name; there he abruptly checks him—abruptly but kindly—for the words are added, "And he blessed him there." That is, he adds a Compensation to balance the denial; and the compensation proves more than what the petition first sought.

There is something surpassingly beautiful in this quiet statement. The mystery remains unrelieved, but the affection pays for it. Just as a loving mother grants every wish of her little one, until a serious mistake is pressed as a petition. Then she declines with a smile, and compensates with a kiss, so that the child is glad to be disappointed. And that is exactly the delicate figure of the Scripture—"As one

whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you, saith the Lord."

Nor is it safe to say precisely what poor human nature would do without this relief. This insatiate longing of the soul after God will not suffer itself to be trifled with. The entire being would cry out in pain under the sense of desolation. You may enter one of those vast excavated temples on the shores of the Nile, and find yourself quite surrounded with tall deities cut in the living rock. You know these colossal stones were worshiped once by educated and cultivated beings like yourself. You grow superstitious as you think of them standing there in the awful dark for these thousands of years. You lift your feeble little torch, and wave it in the air. The flame only flings a fitful glare across the great uncouth faces far up above you. Yet even that fills your gloomy fancy, and they seem half alive, as the changeful expression shadows their features. There have been sensitive men and women, who in those frightful solitudes have shrieked aloud with irrepressible feeling—"O ye gods of rock, will ye never speak! Open those lips of stone! Give us curses or caresses! Unseal the mystery! Break this awful silence! Love us, or hate us; oh, leave not our own answerless questions to come back on us in the air!"

It seems to me that if God, our Maker, were present only like those heathen statues with their tall heads calm and serene up among the impenetrable shadows, it would make a man go mad to pray! Why should he bruise himself beating against them?

But now you press the inquiry—Is there any answer to the old question—does not this same Being, who is to judge us at the last, as he made us in the beginning, elude our every search—oh, that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his seat—has he no word to speak to me?

Yes—I answer; there are two disclosures at least in this experience of compensation, that give relief. They are always made. They are here, as elsewhere, in the story of Jacob.

One of these is a clear revelation of *the right of human petition*. Jacob had that in the preceding triumph, when he became a princely prevailer with God. And so far as this signal item of his history becomes instructive for all ages, it shows that our Maker and Judge is neither ice nor stone. He has given us a name to call him by—he is the Hearer of Prayer. That patriarch knew now that the angel he had wrestled with was God in person. And we know that God in person—*the same Person*—has come to this world just to prove that you and I may speak up into these overhanging skies, and find they are neither brass nor iron; we are certain to be heard. God is not revealed to us as a Deity, whose name and nature are exhaustible by our understanding; but he is revealed to us as near, and willing and considerate. Over the wearied soul, then, there falls a new sense of rest. We are not utterly alone. We are not unnoticed. The heart is full of inexpressible awe—the mind is vague, but tender—the will bends to a kind of solemn worship—and though we are not clear, we are satisfied—though we do not comprehend anything, we are sure all will be right—and we say, with the perplexed but tranquil Job—“Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him; on the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him; he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him; *but he knoweth the way that I take*; when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold!”

And then the other thing given for relief in this experience is a *new repetition of divine confidence*. “And he blessed him there.” What the words were which Jacob then received, perhaps it is just as well now we do not know. Our blessing, most likely, is different from his. It is enough for us to be sure that whenever any true heart looks up in an honest search for God, he answers with some personal and appropriate benediction. “The *secret* of the Lord is with them that fear him.” He seems to write it as a motto on a

white stone—with a new name, like Israel's—but nobody knows what is written for anybody but himself.

Thus, then, with this revelation and this blessing, our sense of disappointment is appeased. We have gained thus much at any rate for our search—God *hears* us, and God *loves* us. Thus we become acquainted with him. Thus “we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness. And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding that we may know him that is true ; and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.”

Now there have been many discoveries made, during the time this inventive generation of ours has been on the stage ; but not one can be mentioned of greater value than that of a noble old Christian, two hundred years ago ; thus he described it—“God, and all he has made, is not more than God without anything he has made ; it is better, therefore, to enjoy him without anything else, than to enjoy anything else without him ; it is better to be a wooden vessel filled with wine, than even a golden vessel filled with water !”

This one desire, gratified, covers all others. When the soul is filled with insatiate craving for some answer to prayer—some innocent coveted indulgence, or some object of many years' longing—when the restless yearning will not spend itself on anything else, nor even grow quiet under denial—then there comes this strange power of a comforting providence. God seems to say, You cannot have that ; but you can have ME !

And in this disclosure of blessing there is wonderful peace and joy. Before ever we are aware of it, we are exulting in the sweet sacrifice, and exclaiming, “Whom have I in heaven but thee ? and there is none upon earth I desire beside thee !”

DRAXY'S HYMN.

I cannot think but God must know
About the thing I long for so ;
I know he is so good, so kind,
I cannot think but he will find
Some way to help, some way to show
Me to the thing I long for so.

I stretch my hand—it lies so near :
It looks so sweet, it looks so dear.
“Dear Lord,” I pray, “Oh, let me know
If it is wrong to want it so ?”
He only smiles—He does not speak :
My heart grows weaker and more weak,
With looking at the thing so dear,
Which lies so far, and yet so near.

Now, Lord, I leave at thy loved feet
This thing which looks so near, so sweet ;
I will not seek, I will not long—
I almost fear I have been wrong.
I'll go, and work the harder, Lord,
And wait till by some loud, clear word
Thou callest me to thy loved feet,
To take this thing so dear, so sweet.

Benue!

MEMORIALS OF CONFLICT.

"And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh: and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint as he wrestled with him."—GEN. 32: 25.

NO one can fail to notice, as he reads this story through, that there was in the divine mind a most thorough acquaintance with Jacob. Piety always partakes of the personal peculiarities of the man. And Jacob's memory was emphatically treacherous. He could promise with amazing solemnity; and then pitifully forget fulfilment for thirty years of folly.

So we observe, in this final instance of dealing with him, God made unusual arrangements for perpetuating all the lessons he had given. At least three pertinent reminders were instituted; any one of which would have sufficed for an ordinary man, but all of which seem to have been necessary for Jacob. "A threefold cord is not quickly broken."

I.—One of these was the alteration of his name. Upon this we have already commented. It is likely that we all understand that a new name meant forever a new man.

The relevancy of this experience to ourselves is direct. Every man, who wrestles in spiritual conflict with God, is for all time after that moment to become a changed being. He that has been aroused into strong prayer by some impending, or some realized, sorrow, is bound henceforward, in all the

years that succeed, to be a nobler and better man. Our afflictions will only harden, unless our hearts under their pressure grow mellow and more subdued. Sad, indeed, is it for any Christian father, from whom has been taken a beloved child, if the blow leaves him only vexed at losing a prized plaything, and petulant at a power stronger than his own. He should have become soberer, and more devout, a truer parent than ever to the children that remain.

So of every other kind of suffering and perplexity. Losses in business, trials in health, alienation of trusted friends, are meant to change the entire nature of the individual on whom they fall. Happy is he, whose nearest associates are accustomed to say, as they mention the year and the day when his great sorrow came—Ever since then he has been an altered man! The anniversary of a serious spiritual conflict should be a fixed date in our religious biography, the birthday of some new grace of character and life. He that misses all this will only have taken the bitter medicine without being cured. We may well pity the believer, who, when the cutting chisel of discipline has come, only experiences the pain without exhibiting the polish. The most touching memorial that can be created to perpetuate our wrestle in the dark and over the river, is the sweet serenity and rest of a new heart before God. Each man's second name is better than his first.

See then, let me remark in passing, what a fine work it is just to convert a soul. It is to spring its entire being up from ruin into perennial beauty. It is to open on its immortal vision a whole fresh world of motive, temper, enjoyment, and anticipation. It is to incorporate in its nature the power and the glory of heaven itself. Put the question to your own heart with closer reference—what is it for one of us to be made the instrument of conversion to another? To what honor does God ever advance a Christian parent higher, than that of permitting him to lead his child into the kingdom of heaven? You do sometimes think it a fine thing to introduce

a son or daughter into honored and honorable society. Oh, what would it be to give to either a free entrance into the court, the palace, the companionship, of the King of kings! There is rejoicing often under your roof on that day when your infant receives a name. How about this new name that turns the entire wrestle of life into a permanent benediction!

II.—Now to this there was added a second memorial. The name of the spot was changed, likewise. He called the place Peniel—or Penuel—for as he said, “I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.”

The word Peniel—or Penuel—with the substitution of an unimportant letter in the Hebrew, means “Face of God.” And hence we see how this patriarch carefully marked both of the historic localities of his grand visions with the name of the Deity he saw. So for all time the two towns go together—Bethel and Penuel—ah, how much history there was in both of them, and how much biography between!

How many of these memorial places there are in the heart-histories of almost all of us! Sacred to the memory of experiences of conflict, are they, which the world may quite have forgotten, or perhaps never knew. We make spiritual pilgrimages to them all alone, “these Palestines and Meccas of the mind.”

The little chamber, where your mother died, and in which you knelt by her side to covenant with God you were going to be forever after a new man—the enclosure where your wife or your child lies buried, and where in the still summer evening you yet continue to go unattended to think of the past—the old church, away off among the hills of your native village, where you were baptized, and where you sat at your first communion—your own quiet room at home, whose walls have mutely listened to the utterance of your tenderest musings, and most solemn resolves—that room into which you once took your burden, when sorrow well-nigh overwhelmed your entire force, so that your brain was as weary as your

heart—that room where you read the letter which told you your son had deceived your hopes, your daughter betrayed your confidence—that room, where you once were called to struggle with an awful doubt of yourself, seeing your own hollowness ; conquering at length, but lame and weak ever since from the wrench of the wrestle :—oh, how many of these PenueË spots there are, when one comes to reckon them up ! And still, I venture to say, none of them are unhappy spots to visit. We always prize the fields of fight when we left them fields of triumph.

What if, amid the versatilities of his changing life, Jacob may have had occasion in after years to pass through the mountains of Gilead again ? Do you suppose he would have failed to go around by that little brook Jabbok, and see the old ground of his wrestle once more ? And would his eyes have been tearless, his heart empty of grateful reminiscence ?

It is a joy for us generally to return in company to our ancient PenueËs. We even love to lead dear friends there with us ; friends, whose affection will bear with us even if we grow a little garrulous in a gentle recital. We would rather go there than anywhere else, if the hand of God should ever fall on us again. We would prefer to be ill in the old chamber, where we once came up from the grave's brink ; for ministering recollections would be cheerily around the bed. We would rather die there if so the dear Lord will, that we may leave to those who love us and close our eyes, the sweet heritage of the very spot to be their PenueË also.

For this is one of the fine curious characteristics of human nature ; we love to link others' experiences by slender lines of contact with our own. And this ancient planet already witnesses to many histories in one record. Scholars tell us there is reason to believe that the exact spot, on the mountain, where the ram was caught in the thicket when Isaac lay on the altar, was that on which the foot of Jesus' cross was planted, almost nineteen hundred years afterwards. If in the other world Abraham has ever met with Mary, they have

found one Penue! between them of common memory and interest.

There is no law which holds humanity more closely than this of association. In a world so fitful and fleeting, where everything hurries so and is lost, it is always wise to invoke every help within our reach. How soon our mercies—how soon our conflicts—are utterly out of mind! Hence Bethels become valuable, and Penuels grow priceless. Deep grief is never noisy. Firm resolve, like true prayer, is best made in secret. But nothing forbids our impressing rocks, hills, and valleys into service. They will enable us to keep our secret equally well, and keep our resolve, perhaps, better.

Out from the memories of a dimming past comes to you now the vision of a spot beneath the shadows of some trees by a brookside in a distant town. There you said your farewell words to a dear old friend, before you entered the busy rush of the city for your fortune. You never met him afterwards. He died long ago. Will you ever see him again? Yes; and know him immediately, if he was a Christian man, and your faith fails not. Did you promise him anything there under the branches? He is going to ask you about that, when he reminds you of the old spot again. You will hear the sighing of the wind overhead among the boughs, the falling of the water over pebbles, the twittering of birds, the rustle of leaves playing around your feet—all just as it was on that eventful day. The quiet question now is, have you kept the promise you gave then?

III.—The main memorial, however, employed to keep in mind the conflict of that night for Jacob, was the special physical symbol, of which the verse quoted for our text to-day speaks. When the angel "saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint as he wrestled with him."

It seems that the absolute deprivation was in some miraculous way and measure restored to him again, so that he was able to walk back to his family. But the result remained a

permanent disfigurement. He halted therefore in his step. His victory was modified, as well as evidenced, by this limp in his gait.

The dislocation of the hip is an exceedingly rare accident. It requires enormous strength to do anything of the sort to an antagonist in wrestling. And once done, there is a necessary end to the entire contest. A man, thus crippled, cannot possibly stand alone, much less wrestle any more. All that Jacob could do in this instance was to clasp his divine Antagonist in his arms, and so hang helpless but unyielding around his neck. In truth, he could neither press the fight, nor let go. The moment he relinquished his hold, he must drop to the ground. And at that moment the angel said, "Let me go, for the day breaketh." We see now the grandeur of that patriarch's faith. Broken and in pain, crippled and helpless, he yet says stubbornly, "I will not let thee go except thou bless me!" He gained the point; he received a blessing, but the limp remained.

Most affecting now to our imagination seems the picture of this patriarch, in all his after life bearing with him this imperfection in his person. It must evermore be the instrument to remind him of his conflict, and yet keep him humble as he recalled it. We cannot help drawing the parallel on the instant with Paul. He tells us he had a thorn in his flesh to keep him from undue pride. We do not know what it was—some physical trouble or distemper which mortified his vanity, and kept him continually embarrassed. He says it was a messenger of Satan to buffet him, lest he should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelation. He prayed earnestly three times that it might be removed. His Lord only replied to his importunity, "My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness." And then all that the brave Apostle could say, was—"Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."

If we give this story a literal interpretation for ourselves,

it would not be without some most pathetic applications. In these bodies of ours there is often perpetuated the recollection of some former sin, and the wrestle for pardon which grew out of it. You remember that during the awful fight with Apollyon in the Valley of Humiliation, Bunyan tells us that Christian, despite of all he could do, was wounded in his head, his hand, and his foot. Few men there are, whose early life has been profligate, who do not even to this day bear in their persons most recognizable pains—and perplexing inabilities—and mortifying memorials of the sorrowful past. Repentance brings pardon, but never restores the ravages of sin. In the child's story, we were taught that it was easy to draw the nails that numbered our faults, from the tree-trunk that recorded them; but the scars remained forever.

More often, however, this memorial of conflict takes the form of constitutional weakness, or besetting sin. An early inadvertence, a youthful vice, a wild habit, an impulsive act of criminal evil, from the guilt of which the penitent man has been restored by the pardoning mercy of God, has yet proved to be of sufficient moral force to leave behind it a permanent mark. The wound healed, but it is only cicatrized over; it can never be less than a centre of solicitude, tender and sensitive to exposure. Always after this that soul has one insecure, one vulnerable point to be watched.

There are men to-day, who just because they once swore an oath, have to put up special guards against profanity. There are men who once read a page of a vile book, that have never got over the tendency to impurity it bred in their souls. We may definitely conclude, from wide observation, that no wickedness has ever been committed, which has in the end left the man where it found him. God may forgive much; but the devil's service fixes its own memorial on the soul. One of its natural sinews of strength has been shrunk-en, and now it betrays itself by the limp.

Two lessons will follow just here. One is this:—Let

every person, young and growing, beware of all vice, and be on the alert against even early sin. You may be called upon to carry its stigmas with you to the great day of your death. You may be a weaker man all the days and years you live afterwards, just because of one seemingly trifling indulgence. This body of ours is a wonderful thing. It is the most beautiful object in the world. When the artists searched the universe for the curve of absolute beauty, they found it in the maiden's shoulder: when they wanted the color of absolute purity, they found it in the infant's cheek. But this body may be deformed, disfigured, ruined, by sin. Be careful about that!

The other lesson is one of consideration for others. When we see a man with a personal mutilation, every instinct of courteous life bids us hesitate to causelessly wound his feelings. When the weakness is mental or moral, the appeal is yet more direct and overwhelming to our thoughtfulness and care. He who would heedlessly disregard a sign of weakness or old exposure like this, is more unthinking and more ungenerous even, than he who would drink wine in the presence of one, who had once been a drunkard, or rattle dice in a reformed gambler's ear. The silent plea of feebleness ought to be simply irresistible to every noble mind. It seems to say plaintively, like the suffering Job—"Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, O ye my friends, for the hand of God hath touched me!" We must use our christian freedom cautiously, lest with our indulgence we should injure one for whom Christ died.

I think there can hardly be found elsewhere in the Bible a record of human thoughtfulness, love, and reverence, more beautiful than that contained in the last verse of this chapter. "Therefore the children of Israel eat not of the sinew which shrank, which is upon the hollow of the thigh, unto this day; because he touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh in the sinew that shrank." All the generations of men and women that followed, soberly repeated the tale of their ancestor's peni-

tence—wrestle—and pardon—and bade their children respect it for the angel's sake !

But most frequently of all, this memorial of conflict takes the form of a permanent change in disposition, taste, habit or life. No one can doubt that this is the first, as it is the final, intention of such heavenly discipline.

An unforgotten affliction affords an affecting explanation of that peculiar tenderness for others we sometimes observe in even the quietest men. They are undemonstrative in ordinary demeanor, and pass for unsympathetic and cold. But on rare occasions there flashes forth a quick responsive fellow-feeling that moves the heart, and fills the eyes with tears, sobers the mien, softens the speech to gentleness, and dwells on the whole life like an abiding presence. And so beautiful a trait of character is worth purchasing even at its cost. A bereavement, which has for its evident end our newer and thriftier growth, leaves its mark as plain as a node on a vine. But it surely is no disfigurement ; it is only a reminder there of a useless branch, which fell under the pruning-knife in order to increase the clusters of grapes.

You may go further. Even the stroke is holy. We care not how often we hear of it. Find me a true child of God, who has been in deepest pain ; and I will prove to you that it is false philosophy for one to reason he will open old wounds when he speaks to him of his days of suffering. He is ready to talk easily about them. He may weep while he rehearses the histories, but his tears are not salt with pain. The stroke took away his pride ; it severed his hopes ; it stripped from him his desires. But it became very precious when the future showed how needful it had been to his spiritual well-being.

The axe holds the odor of the spice-tree it has hewn down ; the shears bear the perfume of the flowers they despoiled of their blossoms. Just so our afflictions become lovely, our times of trial grow cherished, and even our disappointments are joyously recorded. For by reason of the good they have

done us, their very remembrance bears on its keen edge a kind of mysterious welcome.

Herein, let us understand, once for all, lies the whole secret of Christian life. If we simply admit that Christ is Master, and we are in his hands, all will grow clear. Then each fragment of existence falls into proper place. Perhaps you will fix the thought in mind better, if it lies before you in the matchless figure of old Jeremy Taylor:—

“I have known a luxuriant vine swell into irregular twigs and bold excrescences, and spend itself in leaves and little rings, and afford but trifling clusters to the wine-press, and a faint return to his heart, which longed to be refreshed with a full vintage. But when the Lord of the vineyard had caused the dressers to cut the wilder plant, and make it bleed, it grew temperate in its vain expense of useless leaves, and knotted into fair and juicy branches, and made account of the loss of blood by return of fruit.”

LAME BUT LEAPING.

MY prayer hath power with God ; the grace
 Unspeakable I now receive ;
 Through faith I see thee face to face,
 I see thee face to face and live ;
 In vain I have not wept and strove,
 Thy Nature, and thy Name, is Love.

I know thee, Saviour, who thou art,
 Jesus, the feeble sinner's Friend !
 Nor wilt thou with the night depart,
 But stay, and love me to the end ;
 Thy mercies never shall remove,
 Thy Nature, and thy Name, is Love.

The Sun of Righteousness on me
 Hath risen with healing in his wings :
 Withered my nature's strength, from thee
 My soul its life and succor brings ;
 My help is all laid up above,
 Thy Nature, and thy Name, is Love.

Contented now upon my thigh
 I halt, till life's short journey end,
 All helplessness, all weakness, I
 On thee alone for strength depend ;
 Nor have I power from thee to move ;
 Thy Nature, and thy Name, is love.

Lame as I am I take the prey,
 Hell, earth, and sin, with ease o'ercome ;
 I leap for joy, pursue my way,
 And as a bounding hart fly home,
 Through all eternity to prove,
 Thy Nature, and thy Name, is Love.

Penuel:

SPIRITUAL SUNRISE.

"And as he passed over Penuel, the sun rose upon him, and he halted upon his thigh."—GEN. 32: 31.

IT is to be wished that long ago you might have had your attention called to some celebrated picture or statue, which would have given your imaginations a bright and satisfactory conception of the wrestle at Penuel. But the fact is, the artists, both ancient and modern, have seemed to be afraid of this as a subject. Nowhere in any of the great galleries of the world, can there be found even a noteworthy attempt to produce, by chisel or pencil, this night-scene by the brook Jabbok.

One little drawing, and this alone, is described, as exhibited among the illuminations of a French manuscript, of the time of Charlemagne. There the Angel stands with the aureole around his head—taller much than Jacob, who seems puny and slight of figure, as contrasted with the other's majesty. This celestial antagonist is clad in white, and fights hard with his mighty wings outspread from his sinewy shoulders. Around his brow runs a fillet of gold twined with purple, holding back his hair.

The one grand thing in this picture is the attitude of Jacob. He looks so helpless, and yet so plucky, so invincibly resolute—so utterly unvanquished, and yet so unmistakably beaten. He is just a nothing now, but he will not give in.

He lifts his shrunk thigh up, as if in fearful pain ; his foot cannot touch the ground ; but he hangs on the Angel's neck, and so keeps himself up. On his face is an expression of mingled beseeching and firmness. He seems saying—" Bless me, oh, bless me ! I will not let thee go, except thou bless me !"

Now when we examine the literal narrative, it is just this palpable contradiction, which arrests our imagination. It seems inextricably paradoxical and interwoven. It is the utterly vanquished wrestler, who is making terms. The Almighty not able to resist a mere man on equal ground—compelled to resort to a miraculous crippling of his limb before he could prevail—nay, after all, the man prevailing, and jubilantly carrying off victory in the sunrise, as he halts in his gait !

Of course, we are compelled to understand that our explanation must be sought out of the common course—in the *spiritual symbolism* of this history, not in the *facts*.

Many a true believer has felt, as he kneeled in prayer, that God touched the main tendon of his self-confidence upon which he stood. Cut and hurt, he could only fall down helplessly. But if fall he must, fall he would into the arms of the One who crippled him. He would cling with his unshrunk fingers of faith to the very neck of the covenant-angel, and make him hold up the feebleness he had smitten. He prayed thus : " Oh, cast me not soul and body into hell !" And the Hearer of prayer listened, and answered ; the man was saved. Yet at a sacrifice—for suddenly a right arm dropped, a right eye was plucked out. And yet that was triumph—for the blessing of the sunrise came to the man that halted.

Oh, wonderful—wonderful—contest is this, of a soul with its Saviour, in which it is *he*, who is *conquered*, that gains the victory, and *he*, who *goes under* the yoke, that wears the crown !

To such persons we do not need now to attempt any ex-

planation of this story. It comes right along to them, as if it were simple fact. They tell us, as we wistfully ask interpretation, that there is a fixed purpose in the plans of God, which no false conception of his character, on our part, can ever disturb, no weak tenderness for us, on his part, can ever defeat. He means to root out from our hearts the last vestige of pride. He will abase us, and exalt himself. Most men have some unseen or undetected conceit of confidence in their own powers. They rely on some gift, some endowment, some eminent characteristic possession, which they imagine will avail them for any service in a superior degree. It is needful to their oneness with God, if he proposes to charge them with a sublime purpose of his own, that false dependencies like this should be broken. Jehovah will not have any man believe he is conferring a favor, even when he makes unconditional surrender of all he has, all he is, all he hopes to be, to him ; that is not much after all. And when the Angel of the Covenant begins to mould a soul for its highest errand, and discipline it into its new life, he will suffer it to wrestle advantageously for a little while, until the best and favorite sinew is fully put into the strain. And then, in the moment of expectant success, he will shrink it and shrivel it forever. The man shall be forced to feel that only *he* triumphs, who cannot even wrestle without permission—only *he* prevails as a prince, who has fairly yielded as a cripple.

Thus much concerning this halt in Jacob's gait, and the religious meaning it bears. We dismiss it now, with but a single remark as to the show it made to others. Very little did that band of women and children, waiting quietly on the far side of the brook, know of the hard struggle which this husband and father had in the lonely midnight of their separation. Yet the conflict was for their sake as well as for his own. When, early in the morning he came across, and the family saw the calm serenity of his countenance, they quite possibly noticed the disorder of his garments, and the limp

in his step. But feeble indeed must have been their comprehension of the fierce fight he had endured, in order to gain the blessing they were to share.

This is one of the affecting instances found in the Scriptures, which give suggestion of vicarious suffering and its beneficent result. Oh, how many of these trials do fathers and friends have to meet for the home-circles, which they lead and love, the explanation ever to be concealed, the benefit only to be felt! The reward comes "openly"—as promised; but the prayer is offered "in secret"—as ordered. Sooner or later, for some other one's good, each soul of true man or true woman in this world will have to wrestle—alone—in the dark—and across the river. We see the peace; sometimes notice the scar; but we never know the story of the solemn midnight.

Our text, however, adds a second particular, in its graphic recital. As Jacob passed over Penuel, "*the sun rose upon him.*" We shall miss much of the meaning of this statement, if we suppose that all which is intended by it is merely to fix the time of day when he came back to his family. This whole narrative carries a double significance. And the internal reference we have noted concerning the shrunk sinew, is precisely what we must seek concerning the sunrise. You must know that the splendid blaze of light, which poured over the hills and plains beneath this patriarch's eye, was but the magnificent symbol of that inner illumination of joy—rest—hope—anticipation—which was flooding his soul.

You will suffer me to remind you of some few peculiarities in the natural phenomena of that region where Jacob then was. Travelers in Southern latitudes, especially all around the Mediterranean, are frequently much surprised at the entire absence of *twilight*, either of morning or evening. When the day declines, the heat and light continue as blazing as ever, though the shadows keep lengthening. But at the moment of disappearance, the sun goes straight down at once—all at once—slides ungracefully right out of notice, and is off.

Then the night begins. Just so at dawn: the absence of clouds in the rainless seasons makes all the mysterious beauty of reflection impossible. There is never any gradual glimmer into glory, such as we are accustomed to watch. The sky, of most uninteresting bluish gray, lies altogether unmoved, unless it chances to be twinkling with its stars, or wonderfully white under the moonlight. The sun rises abruptly and unannounced. When it is time for opening the day again, he begins it in a way almost as commonplace and business-like as that of a clerk throwing up the shutters of a shop. He is up, he is all up, fully himself, and quite on hand for his usual day's work.

Here is suggested a meaning fresh and interesting for some of our familiar texts. When the sun appears on the stage of action, with this brisk promptness, he comes forth from his rest very like "a bridegroom out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race." His radiance rushes everywhere at once. "His going forth is from the end of the heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it; and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof."

But now we note another phenomenon peculiar to those countries. It was our gratification, on two remembered occasions, to see the whole presentation of a sunrise, very near the spot where Jacob stood at this point in the history. No one can describe the beauty of the sky, under the shining of that full passover moon. Up above us, in the serene vault of heaven, there was not one shadow of darkness. It was night, but the queen of night had her royal garments all on. There was a lit gray of immeasurable depth and richness, fairly shining, like silver in the ore. There could not be conceived a purity more uncontaminated or untouched. And no man knows how impressive seemed the utterance of the patriarch, when he spoke of the immaculate purity of God—"Behold, he putteth no trust in his saints; yea, the *heavens are not clean in his sight!*" How it rebukes spiritual pride! "Behold, even the moon, and it shineth not; yea, the stars

are not pure in his sight ; how much less man that is a worm, and the son of man which is a worm !”

When on the shadowless purity of that midnight, the morning began to usher itself, it was with none of our usual symptoms of approach. It came with outleaders of *color*, and not of *light*. Hence one of those sunrises is the most mysterious surprise, as well as the most gorgeous spectacle an observing tourist ever sees. The singular effect is hardly describable in words—the effect of *color*, glowing and radiating, before any perceptible illumination begins. And moreover, the earliest hues are seen on hills to the west, that is, away from the sun. One magnificent belt of purple, dissolving into violet and red, with an exquisitely lively play to it, almost like phosphorescence, lay along the bleak hills, as we turned on our track to look at them. Wilder pinnacles of rock, deeper gorges, more desolate and emaciated ravines, are not to be found anywhere else in the world. But they made glorious the battle-field where night and day contended for pre-eminence. Lines of shadow were drawn with intense distinctness, almost inconceivable, by that peculiarly sharp moonlight, as it yielded place to the equally sharp light of the sun. Only, remember that in hue, the one of these jets of illumination played yellow, and the other played white. And when by and by, along that ridge of splintered rock flashed the full force of the god of day, as he rode right up over the horizon in a moment, and the kindling radiance ran across the plain and up the slopes of the blue mountains of Moab—and when the shift and play of the color-full atmosphere shook the sky like the folds of an eastern pavilion, as the Arabs are striking it for removal—under the display of that one supreme moment, we fairly bared our foreheads as if at a pageant—and then we knew, as never before, what the enthusiastic and hopeful Zophar meant as he exclaimed—“Thou shalt lift up thy face without spot ; thou shalt forget thy misery ; thou shalt shine forth ; *thou shalt be as the morning !*”

Here then—oh, most inadequately—have I given you the

symbol, which is to be the interpreter of spiritual experience in the history of Jacob, and which comes down to us for a help in pressing the promises of God.

And yet I am afraid to turn upon you its application. There is something so fine, so delicate, so beautiful, in this inspired figure, that I hardly dare touch it with my clumsy speech. To one who longs for the daybreak on a couch of tossing pain, the morning is welcome; to one whose heart aches, and whose eyes are sore with spiritual conflict, it is doubly so. It is easy to imagine the relief of this wrestling patriarch, when the dawn caught him just crossing the stream. That light was only the sweet emblem of the dearer, brighter illumination he had in his soul. Every old cloud of apprehension was gone, every shadow of fear was banished. No more doubts, no more hesitancy; he could go forward on his journey unalarmed. Weeping endured for the night; joy came in the morning.

He felt himself now under the sunshine of reconciliation and peace with God. He had gained the blessing, he went across the brook to wrestle for. He was once more on praying terms with his Maker.

And the greater included the less also. If he could only surely know that the Almighty was within reach of his voice, he knew that he need no longer dread an encounter with his wild brother Esau. In the very wording of his benediction the hint was given; "thou hast power with God, *and with men;*" that last expression meant he should prevail over Esau as he had prevailed over God.

Nor was even that all which was given for his encouragement. The omniscient God reminded him that from his birth he had been chosen; it had been predicted "the elder shall serve the younger." This supplanting of Esau, however iniquitously accomplished by trickery, was now forgiven—overruled—and even accepted into the eternal purpose of Jehovah as a historic fact. So that all he had to do in the

future was to go on, obedient, godly, resting upon the grace and goodness of his almighty Friend.

Of course you remember the final history clearly enough to recall just how the meeting with Esau did turn out. The brothers came together in amity. The last we see of them is at the deathbed of Isaac. Two or three little verses tell us of their entire reconciliation. They buried the old blind man fraternally, and peacefully, and then each went his own way. They parted, as brothers should part, with no enmity, threats, or malevolence. Jacob had passionately prayed, "Oh, deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau!" He was heard in that he feared; and the finest thing in the whole matter is his quick intelligence to note just to what he owed all this success. The first words he said to Esau were these: "I have seen thy face, *as though I had seen the face of God*, and thou wast pleased with me." He knew perfectly, that when the Angel blessed him, all his human perils had disappeared. "So that *he* might boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me."

Oh, it is just this—just this—sweet consciousness, through all our wrestlings in the night of conflict, that we are fighting a campaign in a battle—that all the issues are in one—which gives to the experience its unutterable solemnity, and to the triumph beyond it its welcome of sunshine! If we can only wrestle into peace with the Angel of the Covenant, all else is peace. A man may be friendless, and lonely—misjudged and maligned—feeble and sick, and poor and old—and yet, if Christ be his Saviour, life is safe, and heaven is sure!

Hence the glorious records of sunrise in the soul, to be found everywhere in believers' biographies. Many have said, as they stood on the banks of a victorious Penuel, the fair sunlight falling over their heads, "Thou, O God, hast proved us; thou broughtest us into the net; thou laidst affliction upon our loins; thou hast caused men to ride over our heads;

we went through fire and through water ; but thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place !”

Oh, would that this simple exquisite picture of the text might remain in the mind of any suffering tried child of God ! You are struggling with trouble ; how can you make your Jabbok a Penuel ? Only by waiting, and fighting on. Say—“ I will not let thee go, except thou bless me”—and cling to that. There was a good man who had much the same experience as you ; and he said—searching lonesomely for God—“ Behold, I go forward, but he is not there ; and backward, but I cannot perceive him ; on the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him ; he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him ; BUT HE KNOWETH THE WAY THAT I TAKE ; WHEN HE HATH TRIED ME, I SHALL COME FORTH AS GOLD !”

It is in the hope of this result that brave souls struggle on. There is a *morning* after this midnight. “ If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.” Nobody ever rises so high in disinterested self-abnegation as to like pain and peril for its own sake. We endure it but for the discipline it gives—the companionship it brings—and the glory that shall follow.

For the discipline it gives—See Jacob now, a new nature, purified, elevated, and redeemed. The halt goes for nothing in the fine air of the sunrise. This lame pilgrim has won a mighty reward, standing there in the dawn-light. He has earned the power and the right to be heroic, and patient. His crown is that of manhood, noble, and true. Oh, blessed is he, who thus comes forth from midnight to morning !

For the companionship it brings—There is a certain battlefield, so the ancient story runs, where, at each anniversary of the struggle, the spirits of those who fought in it return to re-enact its stirring scenes. No clang of arms can be heard, no shouts of combatants, no groans of the wounded. But all the victors are there in spiritual array. And many are the

veterans from other fields, who join their company, thus seeking to show that all the bold and the true are one. Beautiful fable is this ; but the fact is finer. He, who goes into the thick of conflict for truth, has all the noble and the worthy for his fellows. He belongs to the first-born, whose names are written in heaven.

The glory that shall follow—That means simply the sunshine which rises in the dawn after Penuel.

“ *It will all be right in the morning !* ”
 ‘ Thus all through the world, by ship or by shore ;
 Where the mother bends over the cradle,
 The tenant of which has just gone on before—
 Where the lonely tread on in the ashes of woe—
 Where the brave fight their foes and their fears—
 Where the funeral winds, or the dirge murmurs low,—
 Where the eyes of the lover, through dimness and tears,
 Look aloft for the loved—oh, whatever the word,
 A welcome, a wail, or a warning,
 This is everywhere cherished, this everywhere heard—
 “ *It will all be right in the morning !* ”

There is a glorious reach to this figure, which fills the soul to the full. What is *all* this life of ours but a mere wrestle at the side of a mightier stream, just beyond which waits the flashing sunrise of triumph to the trusted and the true ? John, the beloved disciple, believed he looked upon one of the fairest sights of heaven ; “ And I saw an angel *standing in the sun !* ” But there will be even finer things to see than that, in the halls of victory, in the palace of God.

When the fierce wrestle is over, and the triumph is reached, there on the other side of the mysterious stream will stand any princely prevailer, who fought the good fight, and kept the faith. Away from him sinks all that is earthly. On his form rests the shining of the Sun of righteousness. Oh, the splendor of that purity and peace that lights his face, as they swing open the beautiful gates, and bid him enter his Father’s house, at the Father’s invitation !

AT THE GATE.

I'm kneeling at the threshold, weary, faint, and sore,
Waiting for the dawning, for the opening of the door ;
Waiting till the Master shall bid me rise and come
To the glory of his presence, to the gladness of his home.

A weary path I've traveled, 'mid darkness, storm, and strife ;
Bearing many a burden, struggling for my life ;
But now the morn is breaking, my toil will soon be o'er,
I'm kneeling at the threshold, my hand is on the door.

Methinks I hear the voices of the blessed as they stand,
Singing in the sunshine of the sinless land ;
Oh, would that I were with them, amid their shining throng,
Mingling in their worship, joining in their song !

The friends that started with me have entered long ago,
One by one they left me, struggling with the foe ;
Their pilgrimage was shorter, their triumph sooner won,
How lovingly they'll hail me when my toil is done.

With them the blessed angels, that know no grief or sin,
I see them by the portals, prepared to let me in ;
O Lord, I wait thy pleasure, thy time and way are best,
But I'm wasted, worn, and weary, O Father, bid me rest !

Bethel:

THE OBITUARY OF A NAME.

"So Jacob came to Luz, which is in the land of Canaan, that is, Beth-el, 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."—GEN. 35: 6, 7.

IT sometimes happens that a report of one's death is prematurely set afloat in the community, rendered quite inopportune, however, by the fact that he is yet alive and well. So he has the somewhat singular edification of reading his own obituary with his own eyes. And there are those who, under such an experience, declare that it is often as healthy as it is humiliating, for a man to know just what his neighbors think of him, and how they are going to register his life as a whole, unless it begins now to take a sudden turn.

It sometimes happens, also, that this experience is improved on the instant. The sudden turn is taken. The man quietly suffers his former history to be buried, according to the funeral notice; and then opens a fresh book of record for the rest of his allotted term. As the Scripture expresses it, he puts off the old man with his deeds, and puts on the new. He is the same, and yet not the same. We all observe the change, and it makes us think of the ancient custom in monarchical countries, when the reigning sovereign draws his final breath. The chief chamberlain of the realm silently

watches in the dying-room of royalty, and notes when the last spark of life goes out among the mortal ashes. Then he comes startlingly to the palace-casement, before which waits the crowd, breaks his staff of office in twain, and proclaims—"The King is dead!"—and immediately waves a fresh wand, exclaiming—"Long live the King!" One monarch is dead; another monarch is living; and the same kingdom moves unbrokenly on. Only the new ruler has a chance to retrieve the mistakes of the old, and build up for a more prosperous age.

Here, now, as I read the text to you, it sounds almost like the one I read full six months ago. But thirty years of wonderful existence lie between those two. A revolution has taken place. *Jacob* is dead; *Israel* still lives. So runs the record: "and God said unto him, thy name is Jacob; thy name shall not be called *any more* Jacob, but Israel shall be thy name; and he called his name Israel." As a matter of fact, this man is hereafter rarely called by his old name; henceforth he is called by his new, and his descendants are "the children of Israel."

My present purpose is merely to make this announcement, and pronounce the obituary of *Jacob*. We have studied these thirty years painstakingly by piece-meal, till the record of incidents is perfectly familiar. But before I dismiss them, we spend a single hour more in rehearsal, so as to draw our instruction. All these things happened unto this fugitive patriarch for examples: they were "written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come."

There are just two classes of lessons to be learned from the story of Bethel and Penuel, for there were just two persons in contact and conflict in this Thirty Years' War. The type of all is found in the early vision of the Ladder. At the foot of it lay Jacob on his pillow of stone: "and behold, the Lord stood above it." Hence one class of lessons will instruct us concerning God, and one concerning man. One touches on doctrine, the other on duty. So everywhere:

“The Scriptures principally teach, what we are to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man.”

I.—We begin with the lessons of DOCTRINE. The same divine Being, with all attributes and characteristics unchanged, rules to-day as then. It is wisely worth our while to note how he is wont to deal with a free-willed human creature, and how he manages a world of such.

1. Mark, for one thing, *how independent God is in choosing his special agents.*

It is difficult sometimes for short-sighted men to avoid the pressure of positive scandal in studying the Bible. Individuals are held up to us as nominal saints, called by blessed titles, put in situations of awful responsibility. And yet their lives are weak and wretched, their failures are lamentable, their faults perfectly open, their sins scarcely readable in the presence of intelligent children, honest men, or pure women.

We could get along better with these biographies, if the inspired writers would only help us just a little ; if they would tell us some excuse or extenuation ; if they would explain what God thought of the idolatry, the adultery, the murder, and the lie ; if they would apologize for the contradiction between the principle and the fact. But the chapters run on in a passionless recital, as if there were no blood in human veins, no cavils in human hearts. Inspiration seems to count the imperfections of conspicuous patriarchs as not worth carping at. Why were they not left off the page? We should never have known of them, if we had not been so carefully told. You may search patiently through the Pentateuch, Chronicles, and Kings, and you will not find one good, comforting, honest explosion of indignant feeling at the meanest crime.

Now it is no work of mine to vindicate God's ways to man. There is one lesson to be learned here, however, whether it was primarily intended or not. *If God can bear the imperfections of his people, we can.* If he can afford to send such

a Bible down along the ages, it is not for us to grow frightened to see it coming. He is our Maker and our Monarch. It is time for us to admit he has some kinds of sovereignty of his own. He chooses whom he will for his purposes; and he chose this man Jacob.

2. Now let us learn a second lesson, and possibly we shall derive some slight help before we get through with that. See *how wise God is in discriminating character.*

There were two sons of Isaac, born in the same home, and in the same hour. The Almighty could have had either of them. Jacob he "loved," Esau he "hated." All that such strong language means is—he preferred the younger one of the twins. It is well enough to notice always that Scripture makes short work with primogeniture. Esau had the birth-right; Jacob got it in a way not commended. But the point is, the all-wise God chose Jacob.

Now what for? And I answer—because he was the more *serviceable* man of the two. And let me state clearly, so as not to be misunderstood, that the principle of all God's choices in the Old and New Testament seems to be found in that word *serviceableness*. He selects men for an end, and for a purpose; and he grounds his preference on their fitness to compass the end, and carry out the purpose. Hence, if we go on, looking always for virtue, seeking invariably for goodness, and searching for evidences of sainthood in the divinely-chosen instruments of history, we shall simply be disappointed.

We are told in the Old Testament that David was a man "after God's own heart." Now there is no need of working up a scandal at this, because we happen to remember David's awful sins. For exegetically, that means only that David was sought as the best man to execute what was in the Lord's heart. In the New Testament, the rest of the verse seems added on to guard against mistake: "I have found David, the son of Jesse, a man after my own heart, *which shall fulfil all my will.*" That is, God had a certain explicit purpose, and he chose David to carry it out, not because of his moral

character, but because he was the most available person at hand for use.

This principle explains some things about Jacob. When the twins stood before his penetrating knowledge, the all-wise God saw that Jacob was the better man—not the better saint, for neither of them was much of a saint in those days—but the better instrument. One was calm, secret, quiet, self-possessed, ingenious—obsequious, pliant, timid, agricultural—tenacious, patient, hopeful. The other was hasty, passionate, impulsive, irregular, adventurous, restless—a hunter by taste, and a rover by disposition. Plainly, Jacob would make the best patriarch of the two. The long run in those days was a more desirable thing than the short cut. Patient steadiness was more serviceable for the divine ends, than mere executive rush. James would have been better than Peter to go on Old Testament errands.

3. But we pass on to a third lesson: indeed, we feel the need of it. Mark here *how persistent God is in preparing men for a better life by means of his choice.*

Most Christians would see without an illustration, and admit without an argument, that God prepares his agents to serve him, by a course of discipline of some sort or other. But my statement now is—this same *choice for a purpose*, that seems so preposterous in the outset, becomes the revolutionary moulder of the man. That is, Jacob carries out God's purpose, unconsciously at some periods, half suspicious of it at others, for thirty years; and in the end becomes Israel under its pressure.

Now you ought to remember that this is precisely what was to be expected. For on that wonderful Bethel-night, when the air trembled with the tread of the angels, and shone with their wings, the voice from above the ladder said in so many words: "Behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring you again into this land; for I will not leave thee until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of." It is the opportune moment

for us here to inquire whether this engagement was truthfully kept. For Jacob is now back at Bethel, and the time is up. There was more than a promise in that utterance ; there was a mighty purpose alongside. Jacob was doing for God, and God was doing for Jacob—and this, whether Jacob knew it or regarded it, or not. The purpose which the man was serving, was simply revolutionizing the man.

Just tell over the old fable, as you used to tell it to your little children, for there is an illustration of divine truth in it ; I mean that about the coward, whose cure was effected by an enchanted sword put in his hand. He was timid enough, but the trusty blade was of itself belligerent. He could not drop it, for it clung to his hand. He could not run to the rear, for the sword remained steadily at the head of the attack. He could not surrender, for the moment he got his foolish lips ready to cry for quarter, the weapon had already leaped from the scabbard, and was fighting like a thing of life. So at last he began to understand it ; then he began to obey it ; then he began to watch it ; then he began to trust it ; and then he began to be a new man under its working. And home from the campaign he came, the welkin ringing with praises of his prowess.

There is fine truth in that little tale. The sword of the Spirit is the Word of God. *It converts the man who carries it.* And before you go any further in commenting on the singular choice God made of Jacob, thoughtfully consider that the choice was the exact force which made Jacob, Israel.

4. One more lesson under this head ; see here *how perfectly satisfied God seems to be with the result of his selection.*

It is no use to say that Jacob was completely cured of all his folly, just by coming back around to Bethel again. His after life is not without some failings. He never became an absolutely perfect man till that grand day, when, having “made an end of commanding his sons, he gathered up his feet into the bed, yielded up the ghost, and was gathered unto his people.”

But here at Bethel the Lord appears, and accepts him just as he is. The divine voice renews the professions of favor which he had formerly spoken ; reiterates the glowing promises he had made to Isaac and Abraham. And our lesson is too welcome for us to afford to miss it. God loves men, not because they are altogether perfectly what they ought to be, but because he sees they have grace in their hearts. The turning-point was passed. This was never any more to be Jacob ; it was Israel. It should be a question of time only, as to when the full sanctification should arrive. It is affecting to see how much God engages, and how little comparatively he expects. And all the subsequent history shows that he only expects more, when he has given what he engaged.

Herein also was Jacob's reward. God had finally conquered his nature by persistent grace. And the man was forevermore happier for the subjection. We have found many an occasion for censuring this patriarch in our delineations of his story. All that is over now. His figure rises in beautiful majesty on our recollection hereafter. He is God's own child now, an Old Testament Christian. He lived a discordant life for these years, but his powers were reduced to harmony by the convulsions of experience at Penuel. They had been, for all this lonely time, like so many bells in a mediæval belfry, where saint and monk had failed—tuneless and tongueless with neglect—which some mighty tempest, rocking the turrets and towers, had unloosed from the rust, so that even the gentlest touch of the chorister could now set them ringing into chords—not sweet nor mellow at first, but growing more and more musical with each day's use, and by and by falling easily into their old wonted chimes calling to prayer.

II.—It is not necessary that we go on to note with equal detail the other class of lessons taught us in this Scripture story, those which look in the direction of *DUTY*, as these of doctrine. We may be content with mentioning a few of them

1. One is concerning *the recognition of God in even the personal biographies of men.*

You see how this comes out in the life of Jacob. You need not be asked to go over the particulars again. Instead of illustration, I offer you a quotation. Thomas Carlyle says: "I believe you will find in all histories that no nation, which did not contemplate this wonderful universe with an awe-stricken and reverential feeling that there was a great, unknown, omnipotent, and all-wise and virtuous Being, superintending all men in it, and all interests in it—no nation ever came to very much, nor did any man either, who forgot that. If a man did forget that, he forgot the most important part of his mission in this world."

2. Another lesson is concerning *what are sometimes called hard cases.*

The more we study Scripture biographies, the more evident it seems that the divine wisdom intends to baffle and reverse all our previous pronouncements as to the fitness of men for usefulness, as to their promise of good. We need to make one mighty discrimination. No natural characteristic of any human being is of itself bad; it becomes bad only by assuming wrong direction. *Avarice* in Jacob is only Solomon's "prudence" with a wicked turn to it. *Craft* in Jacob is nothing more than a sinful perversion of the "guile" with which the Apostle Paul says he "caught" the Corinthians. Passions are not bad; only bad passions are bad. There is amazing force in the hardest kind of men. We want the force without the hardness. The world is to be converted through the instrumentality of what we foolishly call the meanest traits of human nature; not in despite of them, but actually by means of them. That measure of *ingenuity*, wasted by Jacob in his pitiful trick at the sheep-troughs of Laban, would have been immensely valuable, employed on the side of right against wrong.

Hence in the most repulsive persons there is often grandest reason for hope, if only they become truly servants of

God. The explosive violence of steam can be reduced to service in a cylinder. The tempest can carry a letter swiftly through a pneumatic tube. Even the lightning, which split the rocks of Sinai, speaks to-day across the desert the Israelites traversed, simply because held to the wire. So it is a wonderful fact that the wildest natures become the most efficient ministers. And any tired, discouraged Christian worker may be well contented to toil on in prayer and care for even the worst man in the world. One "hard case" converted may be worth a hundred tamer, easier men.

And how they sometimes shine thereafter! Think of John Newton—think of Paul. Our new communion-table is before us to-day; made as you know, of olive-wood from Jerusalem, oak from Bashan, cedar from Lebanon. Oh, could you have seen the shapeless logs as they came to us over the sea! The workmen said the tough fibres turned the edge of their tools. How wonderfully beautiful is the wood now, on which we place the symbols of Jesus' love! And what makes me at this moment speak of it is, I happened to remember the quaint remark of an old divine. "All the wood-carvings in God's temple," said he, "have been made out of *knots!*"

3. A third lesson is concerning *the value of even one high attainment of grace.*

You see in some true Christians the glory of superior meekness; in others the beauty of unusual zeal. So on: these excellences are costly. They are rare; they have used up labor; they have been found with pain; but they transform and transfigure the whole character.

The little child asked its aged grandparent, as it laid its tiny finger in the furrow of his forehead, What made that wrinkle? He might well ask, for an artist would have said it alone was the old man's feature of beauty. But what made it? An early sorrow first cut it, deep, sharp, painful. Then a time of generous success rounded its edges somewhat. Then a loss went over the line, and made it plainer. As life

rolled on, that wrinkle became one of the permanent institutions of the countenance, so that things gladdening and things saddening all went into it. And by and by there came to be fixed this quiet, resigned, gentle line in the face, to give it all its character. The Italians call Time "an inaudible file." It took fifty years to smooth and fashion that one exquisite expression. So there are lines on the soul, which do not come at conversion, nor grow in an hour. *It is better to begin early to work for such.* Any one may miss his chance by being careless, and getting behindhand.

4. Our final lesson is concerning *the folly of losing thirty years of time.*

Our text to-day finds Jacob at last back at Bethel just where he started. A tremendous journey away around from Bethel just—to *Bethel!* And I close this long series of sermons precisely as I began it, with a single counsel to those who are wont to say, and honestly believe, they shall become Christians *sometime.* If you ever do, you will start from the same point you now stand upon, for your penitence and your prayer.

Do you think there is any profit in wasting time? Think how much of joy or suffering even one hour can be made to hold. Were you ever in great danger? Did you ever watch by a swooning friend, and long for return of reason? Did your fortune, or your fair name, ever tremble in the balance, while you stood in suspense? Oh, how your emotions crowded that day-or that night! How valuable is time, when you remember how full it is possible to pack it. Here then you are; the last hours of the year are waiting. Do you persist in going from Bethel to Bethel, away around by Padan-aram and Penuel, and then find yourself precisely where you are to-night?

HOMEWARDS!

Dropping down the troubled river,
To the tranquil, tranquil shore ;
Dropping down the misty river,
Time's willow-shaded river,
To the spring-embosomed shore ;
Where the sweet light shineth ever,
And the sun goes down no more.
O wondrous, wondrous shore !

Dropping down the noisy river,
To our peaceful, peaceful home ;
Dropping down the turbid river,
Earth's bustling, crowded river,
To our gentle, gentle home ;
Where the rough roar riseth never,
And the vexings cannot come ;
O loved and longed for home !

Dropping down the eddying river,
With a Helmsman true and tried ;
Dropping down the perilous river—
Mortality's dark river,
With a sure and heavenly Guide ;
Even Him who, to deliver
My soul from death, hath died ;
O Helmsman, true and tried !

Dropping down the rapid river,
To the dear and deathless land ;
Dropping down the well-known river,
Life's swoll'n and rushing river,
To the resurrection-land ;
Where the living, live forever,
And the dead have joined the band ;
O fair and blessed land !

