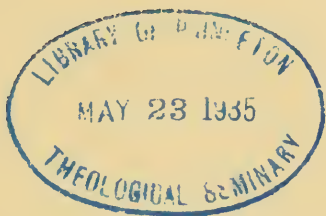




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Sermons in songs

SERMONS IN SONGS



BY

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PREFATORY NOTE.

THE title of this volume was suggested by the fact that the texts were chosen from the "Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs" of the Old Testament and the New. The sermons were prepared along the course of the author's ministrations during a period of years. We all know that often in work there is worship, and that sometimes there is preaching in praise.

CHAS. S. ROBINSON.

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CONTENTS.

	PAGE
I. THE KING'S DAUGHTER	9
“The king's daughter is all glorious within; her clothing is of wrought gold.”— <i>Psalm</i> 45 : 13.	
II. THE PRINCE'S BRIDE.....	21
“She shall be brought unto the king in raiment of needlework; the virgins her companions that follow her shall be brought unto thee.”— <i>Psalm</i> 45 : 14.	
III. THE BRIDE'S PRESENTS.....	34
“And the daughter of Tyre shall be there with a gift.”— <i>Psalm</i> 45 : 12.	
IV. “FOLDED HANDS”.....	46
“Whereas it was in thine heart to build a house unto my name, thou didst well that it was in thine heart: nevertheless thou shalt not build the house.”— <i>I Kings</i> 8 : 18, 19.	
V. THE “MAGNIFICAT” OF MARY.....	58
“My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.”— <i>Luke</i> 1 : 46, 47.	
VI. THE SERMON ON THE CROSS.....	69
“I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee.”— <i>Psalm</i> 22 : 22.	

	PAGE
VII. A BEATITUDE REALIZED.....	81
“ And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord.”— <i>Acts</i> 4 : 24.	
VIII. THE “GLORIA IN EXCELSIS.”	90
“ Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will toward men.”— <i>Luke</i> 2 : 14.	
IX. MEDITATION, EMOTION, UTTERANCE.....	102
“ While I was musing, the fire burned ; then spake I with my tongue.”— <i>Psalms</i> 39 : 3.	
X. THE RESERVED POWER OF GOD.....	116
“ He had horns coming out of his hand ; and there was the hiding of his power.”— <i>Habakkuk</i> 3 : 4.	
XI. THE “NUNC DIMITTIS” OF SIMEON.....	128
“ Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word.”— <i>Luke</i> 2 : 29.	
XII. RESTING IN THE LORD.	139
“ Return unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee.”— <i>Psalms</i> 116 : 7.	
XIII. THE SINGERS IN PRISON.....	151
“ And at midnight Paul and Silas sang praises unto God.”— <i>Acts</i> 16 : 25.	
XIV. THE LATERAL FORCE OF PRAYER.....	164
“ And the prisoners heard them.”— <i>Acts</i> 16 : 25.	
XV. SECRET SINS	176
“ Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance.”— <i>Psalms</i> 90 : 8.	

	PAGE
XVI. THE "BENEDICTUS" OF ZACHARIAS.....	186
"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel ; for he hath visited and redeemed his people."— <i>Luke</i> 1 : 68.	
XVII. THE FIRST PSALM.....	195
"For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous : but the way of the ungodly shall perish."— <i>Psalms</i> 1 : 6.	
XVIII. GETTING RID OF STRANGE CHILDREN.....	208
"Rid me, and deliver me from the hand of strange children, whose mouth speaketh vanity, and their right hand is a right hand of falsehood : that our sons may be as plants grown up in their youth ; that our daughters may be as corner-stones, polished after the similitude of a palace."— <i>Psalms</i> 144 : 11, 12.	
XIX. UNDER HIS SHADOW.....	220
"I sat down under his shadow with great delight."— <i>Solomon's Song</i> 2 : 3.	
XX. THE TEXT-BOOK IN AFFLICTION.....	230
"It is good for me that I have been afflicted ; that I might learn thy statutes."— <i>Psalms</i> 119 : 71.	
XXI. NATURE AND REVELATION... ..	239
"The heavens declare the glory of God ; and the firmament showeth his handiwork."— <i>Psalms</i> 19 : 1.	
XXII. THE AVAILABLENESS OF PRAYER.....	251
"From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed : lead me to the rock that is higher than I."— <i>Psalms</i> 61 : 2.	
XXIII. GUIDANCE BY THE EYE.....	261
"I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go ; I will guide thee with mine eye."— <i>Psalms</i> 32 : 8.	

	PAGE
XXIV. THE EUCHARIST HYMN.....	273
“And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives.”— <i>Mark</i> 14 : 26.	
XXV. GOD'S THOUGHTS OF US.....	287
“But I am poor and needy ; yet the Lord thinketh upon me : thou art my help and my deliverer ; make no tarrying, O my God.”— <i>Psalms</i> 40 : 17.	
XXVI. OFF AND ON.....	299
“I have put off my coat ; how shall I put it on ?”— <i>Solomon's Song</i> 5 : 3.	
XXVII. THE ARGUMENT OF EXPERIENCE.....	311
“Be thou my strong rock—for thou art my rock.”— <i>Psalms</i> 31 : 2, 3.	

SERMONS IN SONGS.

I.

THE KING'S DAUGHTER.

“THE KING'S DAUGHTER IS ALL GLORIOUS WITHIN ; HER CLOTHING IS OF WROUGHT GOLD.”—*Psalm 45 : 13.*

THE opening sentence of this psalm leads you to expect something unusual, for its author announces it is a “good matter” which his heart is inditing. And as you read on, passing more deeply meanwhile into its interior meaning, you are struck with its dignity and the stateliness of its march. It moves along with a splendor of diction unwontedly glowing and a vividness of dramatic force gorgeous and beautiful. You begin to anticipate some grand development. Your imagination is kindled by the picture of this extraordinary King. His glory fairly transcends language, his majesty is supereminent, his kingdom stretches from shore to shore.

Just then suddenly you come upon that significant verse, which your memory recognizes as quoted in the New Testament, and applied there only to one King, and to him simply to prove his

Hebrews 1 : 8.A new personage.

divinity : " Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever : the sceptre of thy kingdom is a right sceptre." This settles the reference of that part of the psalm with no further question. The whole prediction contained in it must be Messianic ; it was written concerning Jesus as the King whom God himself has anointed and crowned as his heir and his Son.

But now, in the midst of the inspired song, you perceive an abrupt change in the direction of the thought. A new personage appears. A beautiful maiden enters upon the scene. She is first addressed, and then described ; addressed as welcome and accepted in the name of the Monarch whose name she bears ; then described, as if the psalmist were catching a fresh fervor from the vision of her loveliness, disclosed to him as he speaks. For he exclaims with enthusiasm, growing prophetic as he looks along the admiring ages, " Harken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear ; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house ; so shall the King greatly desire thy beauty : for he is thy Lord ; and worship thou him."

From this the excited singer passes over into description of the bride, drawing his portrait of her with a free and friendly hand, actually multiplying epithets in order that not so much as one point of what seems to him supremely attractive and admirable should escape notice from having been untold in the strains of his music.

It is this likeness, which is limned with such a

Who is this Bride?

No mere epithalamium.

master-hand, that I desire this morning to bring under your examination. Only to discover who this bride is, and help you to see how fine are her adornments—this is my present purpose.

Of course our earliest inquiry must be concerning her identity. Who is this amiable paragon of feminine perfection, introduced by the psalmist to his readers here as a King's Daughter, come to be a King's Bride? Is he talking of a real maiden, whose name can be mentioned, and is it possible for us to know in what monarch's palace she was born and reared?

There are some expositors who say this psalm was a mere epithalamium, or marriage ode, written on the occasion of Solomon's wedding, or Ahab's, or perhaps that of one of the later Jewish or Persian sovereigns. But the prophetic character, which we have already seen that it bears, necessitates a far higher reference. And if we admit that the Messiah is its subject, we are reminded at once of the more extended allegory which lies before us in the Canticles. There, as we remember, Jesus Christ is represented as a regal Husband, while the Church is personified as his Bride. We recall also, now we set ourselves about it, that on one occasion in that Song of Songs she is addressed as a "Prince's Daughter," as well as a "King's Wife." This offers us an interesting parallel passage for the explication of our present text, for it familiarizes our minds with the thought.

In the prophecies.

In the Apocalypse.

Such a figure, moreover, is found frequently in the ancient prophecies applied to the collective body of believers as it existed under the former dispensation. For, so says the pleading Jeremiah, as if uttering a voice from heaven to earth, "Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord; for I am married unto you." And even this is hurried over into New Testament times. The Almighty complains that his people had broken their covenant sinfully, "although," says he, "I was a husband unto them."

You will recollect, likewise, that in the Apocalypse John the apostle was bidden to come and see "the Bride, the Lamb's wife." Carried away in the Spirit to an elevated mountain, what he did see was a "great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." And yet we immediately gather from the voices he was made to hear that it could not have been a mere town—some sort of municipal organization—which was here intended; God's Son was never betrothed to a metropolis. Reference must have been meant to the living element in the conception of a populated place; the inhabitants are somehow included in the suggestion made. The explanation, which fixes the intelligible reach of the thought, is discovered in the language of the more literal Paul. This apostle, after a long disquisition about the relations and duties of husbands and wives, closes a counsel swiftly with the significant declaration:

The Church invisible.

The body of believers.

“ This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the Church.” Thus we learn, in the end of our search, that this is the King’s Daughter—the Church—who is one day to become the Prince’s Wife, and share with him the glory and grace of his millennial kingdom.

Such an explanation we are all ready to accept. The entire body of true believers is here indicated, the Church invisible. Those are meant who, in all ages, clothed in robes of righteousness which is by faith, and adorned with the graces of the Holy Spirit, adhere to the one Saviour in singleness of heart as well as in fidelity of life, and who, on this account, are admitted into the most endearing union and communion with the Chief among ten thousand and the One altogether lovely. So we are told plainly that Christ loved the Church, and gave himself for the Church, which is his body, “ the fulness of him who filleth all in all.”

Now, what makes this title of such interest to us here to-day is the fact that the Church is always as its members. Indeed, there is no such thing as a Church distinct from its members. The aggregate is typed in the individual. All that belongs to the Church, as such, fully belongs to him who is spiritually in the Church. Is the Church the Lamb’s wife? Then is each soul a bride by experimental espousal. Is the Church all glorious within? Then it is because every soul in the invisible body of believers is glorious within

A royal family.

New rank at death.

also. Hence, the relationship of every regenerated Christian is royal in rank and affectionate in feeling. Each believer is one of the King's household. "Ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's."

There must be something in this worth our consideration. Whenever we approach a son of poverty and honest toil, or come into association with a daughter of much weariness and many cares, and recognize the Saviour's likeness reproduced, we are bound in some measure to disregard the earthly estimate, and remember the divine. Mephibosheth is to be reckoned, not by his deformity, but by the seat he has at David's table. A Christian man is a prince; a Christian woman is a queen. For a heraldry, higher than any which ever ruled a human court, overrides all the grades of distinction we accept, and stamps each decent follower of Jesus Christ a child of God. We are of God, and all the world lieth in wickedness. Esther never touched a sceptre more princely than that which a sinner touches in the supreme moment when his sins are forgiven. Pharaoh's daughter could not take the outcast slave-infant Moses to a palace half so royal as that into which Simon Peter took his brother Andrew when he just led him to Jesus. One of the devout noblemen of Britain, at the point of death, said to his heir standing by—the relative who was to receive his estate and his title the instant he breathed his last—"Brother, in an hour more

Just any believing soul.

"All glorious within."

you are to become a duke ; but I shall become a king !"

Be very solicitous not to lose this thought in the vague notion of the Church as a society of believers, bearing a banner and meeting in an edifice on the Sabbath. The characteristics which our Lord admires are those of a spirit, a person, a soul, and not at all those of a mere corporation. Keep asking yourself whether you are wearing the Lord's jewels. For other grooms love their brides for the beauty they discover, and admire them most for the sake of the attractions they find ; but the Lamb of God loves this foreign King's Daughter for the adornments he gives her, and admires her most for the radiancy of the charms which his own hand has bestowed.

Really, therefore, in answer to the question we have raised as to the person here designed, I think we might safely say this King's Daughter is any true, pure, believing soul.

But we must not pause just there ; we must pass on to study the character which is sketched as belonging to this princess. For that must be what is meant by the King's Daughter being, as the text says, "all glorious within."

Some expositors have seemed to find trouble in their interpretation of the verse. It has been said that this word "within" means within her abode in the father's house she came from. The allusion is claimed as local ; it is insisted that it should be applied to the maiden's surroundings at her

A queen on a tower.

The New Revision.

home. So some construct the imaginative picture of an enamored lover nearing the castle in which his queen of beauty resides. She has come forth upon the battlements of the ancestral building, wearing her attire of radiant robes. And the instant his eyes catch a glimpse of those towers—the instant he sees the form of her whom he admires outlined against the serene sky—he breaks forth in tones of rapture and exultation: “The King’s Daughter is all glorious within”—that is, within the palace walls.

But this seems very tame, no matter how much one tries to work it up into poetic feeling and fact. Nor is it any better to say, as some do, that the clause ought to be rendered: “All-glorious in her intimacy”—that is, intimacy with her monarch-husband, the Church companionable with her spouse, Christ. Others have supposed that the expression refers to the interior apartments reserved in Eastern houses for the females, and they think that it here suggests the gorgeous furniture of the chambers which the queen was occupying, with perhaps an allusion to her own sumptuous apparel. This appears to have been accepted by those who have issued the late revision of the Old Testament, for the verse reads thus: “The king’s daughter within the palace is all glorious; her clothing is inwrought with gold.” But here there was evidently found the need of an additional explanation; for a side-note is given, stating that the clause means “in the inner part of the

The Bride's character.Fidelity first.

palace." This is a sort of modification of an interpretation older still—namely, that the description must be confined to the raiment of the maiden so gloriously attired for her wedding-day, but kept out of sight for a season in her customary retirement, as it were, within veils and costly tunics, her beauty concealed under golden-textured raiment, and to be seen only by the eyes of her Lord.

For one, I cannot say I like any of these ; I accept, as on the whole the best, the old and familiar exposition which applies the language to the royal damsel herself, and makes it indicate her internal qualities rather than her external advantages. I take the text as seeking to show that the Lamb desires in his wife just that which, under inspiration, we have learned divine wisdom counsels the wives of others to seek : " Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel ; but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price."

So we move on directly to inquire what these elements of character are which the maiden's Lord admires. A few of them are within our reach, for the Scriptures have detailed them.

Fidelity, of course, comes earliest. The Lamb's bride is absolutely stainless in her purity of heart and demeanor. Even among the shadows of earthly envy and detraction no suspicion must be

Simplicity in Christ.

Affection a second element.

permitted to hiss at her. The force of the apostle's figure, in his warning to the Corinthians, cannot be overstated. A false wife can no longer be an honest woman. She is just a lost creature : " For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy : for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ." That word " simplicity " means, not artlessness, nor insipidity, least of all, but singlefoldness. What has any redeemed believer's soul, ever after his first espousals, to do with another lord ?

Affection is a second element in the glory of this King's Daughter. No doubt, in the husband's estimation, it is the chief one. No beauty, no dowry, no station, can for a moment compare, in its welcome, with that which he gives to the wealth of her heart when she bestows it wholly upon him. And I may just as well say now that it would be likely that the Saviour should endeavor to increase this love for himself by rendering every possible rival, in showiness of attraction, around his bride insipid and tasteless to her. The slenderest of all philosophy will tell us we love that the more which costs our hearts some little labor of endurance or suffering. And God's providence often smites away that which would tempt us on to ruin ; this is in order to shut us up to him. So the old Puritan had it right when he

Shutting us up to Himself.

Martin Luther's Amen.

exclaimed : " The scourging which frets others makes God's children only shine the brighter ; that weight which crushes others makes them—like the palm—grow higher ; and that hammer which knocks others all in pieces shall but beat them nearer to Christ, the corner-stone."

In the third place, we must reckon patience as among these superior wifely virtues in the King's Daughter. For it is evident she will always have much to put up with till her husband comes to take her home. She must quietly narrow down her circumstances for a brief while, because her happiness is out at interest gathering the aggregate of her heavenly income. Martin Luther seems to have understood this very well, for he once wrote in his journal this prayer : " Strike, Lord, strike and do not spare ; for I lie down in thy will ; I have learned to say *Amen* to thy *Amen* ; thou hast an abiding interest in me greater than I have in myself ; and willingly, therefore, am I at thy disposal."

And then, beyond this, there is humility as an element in the character of this King's Daughter. Evidently she has been lifted in rank, as well as honored in adornment. She comes up from the wilderness leaning upon her Beloved. No matter what her lineage, she is exhorted to forget her father's house, and cut herself loose from her own people. She owes everything to free favor. Her husband is her benefactor as well as her Lord. In this is the most perfect parallel for each one of us.

Quaint John Berridge.Joseph's central sheaf.

We look back and look down to our origin. We were born in sin and reared in shame. We were hewn from a rock, we were digged from a pit. God's dealings with us are very kind, but they are all designed to keep under that disposition which is in us most repulsive to him—our pride. He rarely sends any great honor without some balancing trial, just to force us to hold steady, and not become puffed up. Quaintly enough, but with much sense, did old John Berridge write to the excellent Lady Huntingdon: "The Master will always shave your crown before he puts a fresh coronet upon your head. I expect to hear of a six-months' illness whenever I learn of your building a new chapel."

It is necessary that we arrest the study of this psalm at this point, leaving much unsaid and unlearned. A single thought will give a closing reflection. Even a King's Daughter yields her glory to that of her King. Let each soul among us see to it that every sheaf it is permitted to garner is placed where it can best and most gracefully make obeisance to Joseph's; for even if he be our brother he is, after all, the Prince in the household. Other kings seek alliance with royal families, and lead to their palaces the daughters of monarchs; but this Prince of all the kings of the earth makes his choice among plebeians, marries one whom he has to exalt to make his equal, and calls to his throne-room a queen whom he first crowns.

II.

THE PRINCE'S BRIDE.

“SHE SHALL BE BROUGHT UNTO THE KING IN RAIMENT OF NEEDLEWORK ; THE VIRGINS HER COMPANIONS THAT FOLLOW HER SHALL BE BROUGHT UNTO THEE.”—*Psalms* 45 : 14.

LAST week we began, and were not able to finish, the study of this psalm. But with some painstaking we were successful in reaching the conclusion that the royal maiden here introduced to our notice was intended to be a figure of the Church just on the eve of her ultimate espousal to her divine Lord.

Her royalty was threefold, and that of itself is worth a moment's comment. History relates that the Empress Matilda was the daughter of a king, then the wife of a king, and at last the mother of a king. So with equal admiration here we may remark that in one place the Church is apparently called a King's Daughter, in another is reckoned as a Monarch's Mother, and in our text is shown to have been a Prince's Bride.

Still one more thought needs to be repeated in commencing our study again—namely, that this whole figure is true of each soul that is in the Church invisible, just the same as it is of the Church as a body. And now we are ready to go

 The Bride's raiment.

 "Wrought gold."

on a little further in the exposition. We are invited to a wedding, and we find a glowing description of the bride's raiment, the bride's maids, and the bride's new home. We can take these up in turn.

1. Let us begin with the raiment : " She shall be brought unto the King in raiment of needlework : her clothing is of wrought gold." This is very much what had been intimated before in the ninth verse, when the poet was singing of the king : " Kings' daughters were among thy honorable women : upon thy right hand did stand the queen in gold of Ophir."

The richest of all the metals is gold ; this has been true, for all we know, since the world was made. And of all gold, that gold from Ophir was the purest gold. Christ suffers nothing cheap or common to be placed upon the person of his Bride the day when she is to be married. But let us observe carefully the adroit grace of language with which these descriptions are lodged in our imaginations. A garment of metal strikes us as very stiff, very awkward and ungainly for a bride's dress ; and gold is certainly one of the weightiest of metals, almost as unwieldy and burdensome as lead. The inspired poet lifts his image, therefore, with exquisite delicacy ; he says " wrought gold." In the text he enlivens the picture still more ; he says the queen shall be brought to the king " in raiment of needlework." Such curious helpfulness of terms in the speech

Aaron's robes.

Christ's righteousness.

makes us think of those ancient times in which the skill of metal-artisans fashioned garments of intricate chains and links, woven of so light a texture that the filaments seemed of silk rather than of silver or steel or gold—gossamer threads of spun metal, which are said to have floated in the air. Something like this was certainly done when the "holy garments for Aaron" were made; for the record says: "And they did beat the gold into thin plates, and cut it into wires, to work it in the blue, and in the purple, and in the scarlet, and in the fine linen, with cunning work." Our New Revision renders the text thus: "She shall be brought unto the King in brodered work; her clothing is inwrought with gold."

But now the chief thing for us is concerning the significance of this wonderful dress: what does the picture mean? In other words, what are the new garments which the soul that is espoused to Christ the Saviour is going to put on at the bridal? To gain an easy answer to such a question, we must lay the imagery of the Apocalypse alongside of the prophecy and the psalm. Finer vision no human eye ever saw than that which passed before the Apostle John in the lonely island of Patmos: "And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his

 Fine linen.

 " A fair mitre."

wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white : for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints." The garments of the Lamb's Bride, then, are significant of her character. It is the righteousness of the saints with which they are clothed. This language turns us back at once to the enthusiastic song of the prophet Isaiah : " I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God ; for he hath clothed me with garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels."

With this we also recall the vision of Zechariah, that in which he saw Joshua the high-priest coming up at first before the angel of the Lord with filthy garments upon his person ; the explanation of this has always been clear as a picture of human need under the defilement of sin. But suddenly, while the prophet was looking at the scene, the angel gave command that this raiment should be all stripped away from him ; he also said, " Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment ; let them set a fair mitre upon his head." This means the bestowal of Christ's righteousness in the place of man's pollution. The " fair mitre" is rendered in the margin of the New Revision as a " clean turban." A swift change of outward appearance, from filth to cleanliness, is the sign of

Inward cleansing.

The Bride's maids.

inward washing from all defilement of sin. Such a passage is the more remarkable because it is found in the prophecies of the Old Testament, and not among the clearer fulfilments of the New. "Our righteousnesses are as filthy rags." Joshua is here put as the type man of the race. The angel of the Lord is Jesus Christ; he gives his own robe for man; that represents his mighty and inexhaustible merit before the law of our Maker. No soul of earthly defilement can ever enter the presence-chamber of the Lamb of God on that day of days when he takes his Bride home, unless he has on him a recognized wedding-garment of the imputed righteousness of the Redeemer. God "hath made him, who knew no sin, to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." All this picturesque presentation of the gospel plan was put on the inspired record full five hundred years before the shepherds heard the choirs singing out in the air over the Bethlehem hills.

2. Thus, now that we know what the Bride's raiment signifies, we are ready, in the second place, to inquire about the Bride's maids, attendant upon her at this wedding: "She shall be brought unto the King in raiment of needlework: the virgins her companions that follow her shall be brought unto thee. With gladness and rejoicing shall they be brought: they shall enter into the King's palace."

We shall not catch the full power of this similitude unless our imagination lends itself willingly

to the gorgeous fancy in the scene. It is an oriental marriage festival which is pictured ; but a group of choice epithets is suddenly aggregated in the description. The maiden's train of companions is made up of honorable women ; princesses advance to give her a welcome as she passes. There is in all this the showy pageantry of a wedding, with something of its bewildering confusion of display as well as of its splendor, wherein nobles vie with each other in lavish expenditure. For it is a King's Daughter who is the betrothed maiden ; it is a Monarch's Son who is the groom leading home his Bride. He has wooed her royally ; he will crown her at the instant of espousals ; then he will provide her a palace for her abode. But how much of all this is literal in the turn of the similitude, it is not easy to say. We have reached the satisfactory conclusion that the Bride is the Church ; there is no doubt as to the meaning of the psalm so far : " Christ loved the Church, and gave himself for the Church, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing ; but that it should be holy and without blemish."

But now we are not sure that we can fix the meaning of each particular in the pageant. When we read that these virgins who accompany the Bride as her maids shall likewise be conducted to

Who are the maids?Shoshannim means lilies.

the King, being brought to him precisely as herself, it perplexes us to decide who they are. They are not her waiting servants or attendants merely, to be disposed of at her serene pleasure; they are her equals, her companions. If there be any religious instruction in this part of the picture, it is to be found in the suggestion that the Jewish privileges under the former dispensation were to be shared, as they certainly were, under the later dispensation, with the Gentiles.

Still, I cannot believe that much good will come from any close analysis of the poetic description; for I do not think a writer so excited would pause to fix his references so definitely. Most of us would prefer to look up and see this grand procession moving on, without inquiring who the maids were, or who the singers were that chanted the songs. Indeed, the psalm has a very unusual form of dedication; it is entitled: "To the chief musician upon Shoshannim;" and the word *shoshannim* means *lilies*; hence some of the soberest commentators suppose that reference is intended here to the maidens whose purity and beauty shine like lilies in the marriage train. Only one thing is clear to us as we read along through the song; every device of rhetoric is put into employ in order to fill our imaginations with a sense of the splendor of that train on the way toward the King's dwelling, where the feast is to be spread, and the guests entertained.

A grand procession.

The Bride's home.

3. Now, in the third place, it is left for us to consider the Bride's new home: "They shall enter into the King's palace with gladness and rejoicing."

Of course it is a royal abode which is to be this maiden's future residence; for it is the mansion of her lord into which she goes. This psalm does not take up the task of singing its praises; it is occupied with hymning the beauties and the honors, the graces and the glories, of the Prince and of his Bride. The new wife will then be a queen; she will be regnant as well as regal. Christ promises all that now; and as we begin to think how much of comfort and help there is in the spiritual application of the inspired poem, it will be well for us to dwell for a few moments upon at least two admonitions.

The one of these has reference to our patience in waiting for our Lord's coming. He observes the steady hopefulness and endurance of all his followers, while as yet he does not establish his whole rights here on the earth. Historians always remark concerning the pathos of the moment when an exiled monarch, restored at last, bestows royal favors upon the faithful adherents who shared his fortunes while he was contending for his crown. King Jesus does not seem to have much to give his followers now. But a better season is sure to arrive. I remember that in Roman annals it is recorded concerning one poor citizen named Agrippa, really poverty-stricken and worried,

*Agrippa's new chain.**The long run.*

that he uttered the wish aloud that Caius were the emperor. The reigning tyrant on the imperial throne was offended, and so threw the man into prison. Slow years passed on, and by and by Caius did indeed come to the throne. And then he gave a province to the freed Agrippa; and he cast a chain around his neck, ringing as it shook its links of beautiful gold—a chain measured so as to be of the exact weight of the fetters he had worn while in jail for the honor of his master. Such a thought fills us with hope when we suffer and toil for the Lord Jesus. And the little story recalls the glowing words of the prophet who sung them nearly three thousand years ago: “For brass I will bring gold, and for iron I will bring silver, and for wood brass, and for stones iron: I will also make thy officers peace, and thine extractors righteousness. Violence shall no more be heard in thy land, wasting nor destruction within thy borders: but thou shalt call thy walls Salvation, and thy gates Praise.”

It becomes really wise and salutary, therefore, for any Christian, who would rightly estimate the worth of his sonship in God, to learn to reckon what in our familiar language men are wont to call “the long run.” He must train himself to turn away from the tyranny of the present, and accept the eminence of the future instead. He must discipline his imagination to live with more extensive sweeps of fancy out in the air before it. We judge poorly of what we think is for human

The tyranny of the present.

Forecast the future.

advantage, merely because we attempt to estimate at too short ranges ; thus we miss all true perspective ; and thus we become entangled with foolish longings and more foolish conceits. There are times in which God's dear children would actually sigh for some onions and leeks, such as they used to eat in Egypt, and be willing to forget the fair and happy land of Canaan lying on ahead.

Out in space are stars so distant that we cannot discern any parallax. Yet we are certain they have orbits wide beyond any possible register of human measurement. It is owing to the simple fact that our planet is nothing but a point in the solar system that we cannot see beyond the sun itself. And still we trust the astronomers who are wiser than we are with figures.

Just so we ought to take on faith the statement that our immortal souls are going to circle in orbits of inconceivable experience, which we need not expect even to comprehend at this poor moment of our earthly history. We must learn to forecast our future ; for our glory lies in the life to come, and not in this : " For I reckon, that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God."

Then the other admonition which is suggested here claims notice. It has reference to the ills and inconveniences, the trials and pains, of this present

Tediousness of dressing.Princess Elizabeth.

state of our existence. It is wise always to remember that our Lord is making every one whom he loves ready and meet in character and in tastes for the true life that is on before them all. Disciplines of Christian souls are but the small annoyances of an attiring-room to the King's Daughter, going forth to her bridal feast, where the Beloved is to see her face earliest. She ought to be patient and brave, surely, just while she is being dressed for the occasion and made meet for her inheritance in the light. It is related in history that on the day when Mary of England was advanced to the throne, the Princess Elizabeth, her sister, younger by many years, and so the heiress of the honor to which she now ministered, was deputed to carry the new queen's crown in the coronation procession; she turned to the French ambassador pettishly, and complained of its weight in her hands. The adroit courtier replied significantly: "Be patient awhile; it will seem much lighter when it shall rest on your head."

What we endure for others, what we have to bear for ourselves, should be looked upon in the light of simple present inconvenience, to be one time forgotten altogether in the perfect fruitions of our final establishment and rest. This is not to be achieved by just an impulse of self-revolution; it comes only of long self-discipline. We must learn to look up and off and far on ahead, so as that we really live in another world than this. You have seen the signs on a guide-board: the hand painted

Index fingers.

A far-off look.

in conspicuous letters, with the forefinger extended to point the path or show the way. Suppose a Christian should put on his front door, on his business entrance, on his counting-room desk, on his iron safe, on the panels of his carriage, on the furniture of his table—indeed, on everything which habitually he saw or touched—a small quiet hand with the index finger pointing upward and far away; how some people would smile at him! It might not be wise; but suppose he should seem to see it, think he saw it, wished to keep seeing it always; then he would sometimes say to himself gently and joyously, “This is no home, nor rest, nor abiding-place for me; I belong elsewhere; the future is my land, my country, my residence, my hope!” Would there be any pressure thereafter of daily burdens of care? “For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.”

Each suffering, which begins at all or ends at all, bears no perceptible or measurable relations to eternity, which is without beginning and without end. It might be reproduced over and over again, and then die out and be utterly forgotten. Let the Bride keep thinking of the day when she shall be brought unto the King's palace, and shall enter it with gladness and rejoicing. We must set our thoughts upon that vast hereafter; and then all these worries and disappointments, these cares

The bride's companions.

A classic story.

and weights of work, will sink into their own proper insignificance. "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory : while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen : for the things which are seen are temporal ; but the things which are not seen are eternal."

Meantime, let the Bride's companions sing as they go. We may find all the sermons we need in the songs that we sing. "We are on our way to God." In the old classic story we were told that Ægistheus could not turn Clytemnestra away from her joyous duty till he had murdered the venerable bard whom Agamemnon had left behind to sing with her. The procession is a part of the wedding, even though the street be hot and the way be long. And the home stands yonder on the hill : "Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear ; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house ; so shall the king greatly desire thy beauty : for he is thy Lord ; and worship thou him."

III.

THE BRIDE'S PRESENTS.

"AND THE DAUGHTER OF TYRE SHALL BE THERE WITH A GIFT."—*Psalm* 45 : 12.

IN the casino of the Rospigliosi Palace at Rome there is a painting upon the ceiling which has long attracted the admiration of the world. It represents Aurora, the goddess of the morning, advancing along the sky to bring in the dawn. The car of Phœbus is drawn by steeds that seem almost alive in the air. There are groups of female attendants, symbolizing the hours, all around; some of them pale and gentle, as if lit only by twilight and waiting quietly for their turn to come to rule the declining day; some eagerly alert and exultant, as they rush and shine in the blaze of the sunrise it is their office to welcome. Up overhead there is a Morning Star, bearing a torch in his outstretched hand, the flame of which is blown back by the swiftness of his speed as he hastens on to kindle the lamps of day.

But the fairest figure of all is that of Aurora herself. It does not seem as if it could be possible for human pencil to put into lines and colors a beautiful woman more comely or more attractive. She walks as firmly as if she were on a meadowed

The "Aurora" of Guido.

A pageant in a poem.

sward, and yet so light is her elastic step that she rests easily upon the atmosphere she treads.

The thought which always impresses one at first sight of this marvelous picture of Guido is that of velocity in action, a certain sort of vigorous healthiness of life moving on, positively indescribable in mere words. The horses are all afire in the light which they are facing. The Hours are gentle and soft in their feminine graces, but still display a matchless force in their unfatigued rapidity. The car is borne forward on wheels that are indistinct with the whirling. Everything is floating and moving ahead, and the sky is full of life. It is as if the artist had caught a mere flash of the grand procession of the dawn in the heavens, and had fixed it there on the roof of an earthly palace for mortals to look up to.

To those who have visited the Italian city and seen this masterpiece of art there will be needed no explanation of the present allusion to it. Any one who reads this forty-fifth psalm will catch the suggestion. It is a pageant in a poem. It is a pageant of marriage, and the bride is a king's daughter, and becomes a prince's wife. The psalm moves on with the same kind of living celerity that arrests attention in the famous painting. It seems as if we could almost see the procession on the way to the bridegroom's house. The sacred poem celebrates the union of Christ with his Church, and so it swings onward, and sings along by itself. Our eyes are kindled as we

A matchless maiden.The New Testament church.

behold this matchless maiden, who is the centre of the scene—indeed, until the bridegroom shows himself, the fairest of all the company, although she has kings' daughters for her honorable women—this queen standing there in gold of Ophir. It is with a reverent sense of its fitness that we wait while the inspired poet makes his address to one so worthy of his praises :

“Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear ; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house : so shall the king greatly desire thy beauty : for he is thy Lord ; and worship thou him. And the daughter of Tyre shall be there with a gift ; even the rich among the people shall entreat thy favor. The king's daughter is all glorious within : her clothing is of wrought gold.”

It relieves this psalm of all minor criticism as being too florid in its orientalism, too gorgeous in its imagery, to consider it, as it undoubtedly is meant to be, prophetic of gospel times, and symbolic of the New Testament church. This maiden is the Lamb's wife, and she is on the way to her husband ; he is waiting for her at the marriage feast now. It is with this interpretation that the poem becomes specific. We can see the far and beautiful reach of many of the otherwise obscure references, and we can understand many of the suggestive expressions.

When, for example, we read, at the close, that, “instead of thy fathers shall be thy children, whom thou mayest make princes in all the earth,”

The rich entreating favor.

An ancient custom.

we may learn that Jesus Christ is the only true king-maker ; God will raise up for himself a spiritual seed whose line shall never fail so as to become extinct ; though veterans depart in the ranks of the spiritual army, volunteers shall arise to fill their loyal places ; and when Immanuel's crown shall rest on his head, he will reign over a New Jerusalem of palaces and a kingdom of kings. And then also, when we read that " even the rich among the people shall entreat thy favor," we may congratulate ourselves that all the vast wealth of the world shall become consecrate, so as to be laid eventually at the feet of the Church of Christ, and that for Christ's sake. It is thus that the grand promise shall be fulfilled, as it is made here in the psalm ; thus it is that the Church's name shall be remembered in all generations, and God shall be praised by the people forever and ever.

In this way we come to perceive, and we begin to appreciate, the matchless meaning of that fragment of a verse which we have, more or less by itself, chosen for our present theme of comment : " And the daughter of Tyre shall be there with a gift." Here is allusion to the presents which a beloved bride is accustomed, now as then, to receive from all acquaintances. A custom is this so ancient that no man's memory can tell its origin, that of bringing for the new wife's acceptance articles for use and adornment upon the day of her marriage. All the world over this is one of

Oriental processions.Isaiah's description.

the common and beautiful ceremonies of the wedding. We have seen in the East the procession of menials and servants advancing with the sound of music through the streets of the city at mid-day. So fine and so showy have been the trains that, as strangers, we have imagined them to be bridal displays; but indeed they were only the files of porters carrying home the costly vessels, and rings, and bracelets, and garlands, and wreaths, and mirrors, with which friends were going to grace the occasion when a maiden should become a wife. Huge trays of burnished silver were borne high up on the heads of stalwart men, and on these lay jewels, and vases, and plumes, and flowers. And all this was because it was the day of a marriage; the groom was waiting in his palace, and the bride had made herself ready. The daughters of wealth were coming with gifts.

It is to keep up the poetic style that for Tyre is put in peculiar phrase, "the daughter of Tyre," and that one vast and opulent city is put for the whole outside world. History tells us that, in the day of the psalmist, Tyre was probably the most wealthy and conspicuous town then existing. It is referred to in this instance as representing persons of the highest rank, as well as countries of the most exalted position, and nations of the loftiest supremacy. So this is a repetition of the thought which was afterward reannounced with more fulness by the prophet Isaiah: "Thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I will lift up mine hand to

Why daughter of Tyre?Put for us Gentiles.

the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people : and they shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders. And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers : they shall bow down to thee with their face toward the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet ; and thou shalt know that I am the Lord : for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me."

But the selection of such a town signifies more even than appears on the surface, for Tyre was a heathen city. It is in the New Testament noted as the only place that Jesus Christ ever visited outside of Palestine. He went once over across into Phœnicia and came to the coasts of Tyre and Sidon. It never reaches our minds as it ought ; but the fact is, we are not Israelites, and the covenants never pertained to us for many a solemn century in the Old Testament church. We are all Gentiles ; and only because the middle wall of partition has been broken down are we now admitted to equal spiritual privileges. In the splendid pageant of this maiden's marriage, Tyre represents us—ourselves—here. Our particular office in the forty-fifth psalm seems to consist in bringing presents to the bride. The plain, practical meaning of the verse, therefore, is this : God has promised the Church that the highest national strength upon the earth shall become tributary to the coming kingdom of Jesus.

And further, there is significance in the abrupt

Superfluous italics.

A prosaic conclusion.

form of expression employed here. Even the New Revision is constrained to continue the use of the italics in the verse. The original Hebrew does not say, "The daughter of Tyre *shall be there*;" it says no more than this: "The daughter of Tyre—with a gift!" It is an explosive and picturesque indication of one's admiration and delight, as if a bystander were viewing a procession, and should suddenly catch sight in it of an important and unexpected guest, and in real enthusiasm should exclaim, "Oh, see there! The daughter of Tyre! She has come! And with a gift in her hand, too! Why, even the richest and the grandest are proud to join the train of our sweet Bride to-day!" It is in this instance the gift which attracts notice; and we, who are typed in that Gentile city pouring forth its treasures at the wedding of the King's Daughter, must see that our main office in this grand pageant of the Church going home to Christ in the celestial palace is found in the bringing of our wealth in gifts.

It must be mournfully confessed now that there is danger of our smothering all enthusiasm over this psalm by so prosaic a conclusion. Is it true, then, that this exquisite ode has no higher purpose in Christian instruction than to stimulate contributions of money for the ordinary religious ends?

No; we enter instant protest against such cold construction. Is that the way we train ourselves to look on weddings and on wedding-gifts from the bride's friends? Do we propose to drag

Is this sheer commonplace?

We are at a wedding.

everything down to sheer commonplace because there is money involved in the custom? Is it just a weight of gold, and silver, and nickel, and gilt, with a measure and a bundle of silk, and fur, and linen, which lies piled up in the chamber where the guests go to look at the presents? Is there no romance, is it to be understood that there is no affection, no sincerity, no faith, no memory, in the offering, no taste, no gracefulness in the care of selection, no joy in the work, no kind wishing, no heartiness in the hope for a bright future? Do we care whether the bride cares for what we have brought her? When we purchased, or fashioned, or wrought the modest donation we placed there on the table, was there no gentle thought in the choosing of it for her because we loved her? Had we no imagination in our own minds of her pleasure by and by, when she should have leisure to look the articles over, and should happen to notice that which we gave her, modest though it might be, and did we not even whisper to ourselves: "She has been a dear, good girl; God bless and keep her in all the fine, fair future!" Was it all dead, heavy business throughout, and did we look upon such occasions as one of the inflictions of society, and one of the burdens friends had to stand under because they were so weak as to have friends?

So now, my Christian hearers, we are at the wedding to-day, and the Lamb's Bride is on her way to her husband. Why give up all this beau-

Enthusiasm of affection.Heathen liberality.

tiful romance on an occasion like this? What is wanted in our Christian work is precisely this enthusiasm of an honest affection. It is among the poorest and the humblest often that we find in these times the most devotion. And this is owing to the presence of a simple-hearted love, and the absence of anything like chill and cautious calculation in their action.

Hence it comes about that it is the contributions of the feeblest which have done so much of the work of the world so far. When Whitefield was pleading for his orphan-house in Bethesda, the poor were among his most generous givers; on one occasion a hundred dollars was offered in simple half pennies—more than his porter could carry off at a lift. Five thousand church members in Jamaica gave twelve or fifteen years ago thirty-five thousand dollars to Christian work; these were emancipated slaves and their children. Recently the indigent converts in Marash sold the copper dishes from which they ate, to help build a church edifice. The explanation of such manifest wonders is found in the fact that the hearts were alive with interest, and then the people had a mind to work. It is all well to teach our children that there is great value in the cup of cold water given to a poor disciple in the name of Christ; but they are far more likely to give it if they do not imagine it will be more welcome when dripped off the end of an icicle.

Panic of 1857.Nestorian Christians.

When the terrible days of panic were over the American nation in 1857, crippling every one of our great missionary societies, so that the cry of retrenchment was borne passionately across to the foreign fields of effort, workers were discharged and missions were closed. Report of the embarrassments over here came in due course to a small band of Nestorian Christians in Persia. They instantly summoned an assembly to consider how they might act so as to bestow help the most quickly and with most force. The meeting was called to order by an aged believer, who began the conference by a distinct allusion to the costliness of their wedding ceremonies in those Oriental lands. He insisted that young people might be married in plainer costume. "Now here," he continued, "is the Church, the Bride of our Lord Jesus Christ, and she is compelled to go unprovided for to her Master's palace! Cannot we join hands to-day to give her a fair outfit?" The figure seemed at once to arrest the imagination of those simple-hearted and loving Christians, and they took it up.

One arose, saying, "She ought at least to have a ring; and I am ready to offer the price of one now, just such as my wife received when she was wedded to me." Another added: "She needs a veil quite as much, and I will see that the Lamb's Bride does not set out on her journey to her husband's house without it." Another sprang up with the exclamation, "She can never go on foot

Beautiful conception.Mar Yohannan's gift.

over the mountains ; you may look to me for a horse she can ride." Still another caught the symbol in his grave, sweet way : " How beautiful are thy feet, O Prince's Daughter ! If she rides, she will have to wear a richer pair of shoes ; perhaps I might be permitted to clothe her feet." By this time their invention was put sorely to task. One more spoke out somewhat awkwardly : " Wedding guns are fired for joy ; I will give two cannon, and will supply ammunition."

Then the women, who knew more of marriage necessities, began to whisper together. A maiden stood up modestly and said : " Now for her ornaments ! I have some of my own I can spare." An impulse of affectionate generosity moved every heart. One old man said he had nothing but a mat, but " perhaps the Queen would deign to put her feet on it when she should alight." Then said the leader : " What is she to eat on the way ?" One of the landholders answered, " You may look to me for fifteen outside rows of my vineyard next the sun." During this excited colloquy there had been sitting in the assembly no less a personage than Mar Yohannan, their ruler. The aged leader in the chair shrewdly asked the question, " She is a King's daughter and a Prince's bride ; who is to give her a crown ?" And then the royal guest took the hint, and held up his hand.

So the churches in America were thrilled with

A new notion.

A trustful bride.

the news that the Nestorians were going to take care of themselves. Oh, when the heart is all right and loving, what is there it will not do for the Bride, which is the Lamb's wife, on her way to her marriage?

It is the notion we have of contribution which renders so plain a duty pleasant and so self-sacrificing an exercise welcome. A fine high imagination of a beloved friend becoming the bride of a prince, and confidently, lovingly, trustfully looking over to us for the merest decencies of her dowry; asking us to see to it that she does not go to her husband in shame of pauper garments; putting out her hand frankly and gratefully, as if she knew you and I had just been in the gift-chamber, and had left there some token she will have time to look at by and by; this—this is what a contribution-box means! How would this daughter of Tyre look if she came without her gift?

IV.

“ FOLDED HANDS. ”

“ WHEREAS IT WAS IN THINE HEART TO BUILD A HOUSE UNTO MY NAME, THOU DIDST WELL THAT IT WAS IN THINE HEART ; NEVERTHELESS THOU SHALT NOT BUILD THE HOUSE. ”—I *Kings* 8 : 18, 19.

THESE words are found in Solomon’s biography, yet they belong to David’s. The august transactions which joined on this king’s reign to that of his father had reference to the building of the fairest and finest fabric of human hands that earthly eyes ever saw. There are songs and sermons about it all along, scattered through several books of the Old Testament ; the narrative appears more like a lyric than a record, more like a poetic ode of triumph than a sober chronicle of what was occurring.

The history of the time to which the king refers is found in the second Book of Samuel. The chapter which contains it divides itself into verses like the strophes of a psalm ; it needs no definite form of analysis to make it clear. Indeed, it will exhibit its meaning better by an appeal to our imagination, for there are in it three pictures ; out of these comes admonition.

I. It will be of much help to lay alongside of this history that recorded in the seventeenth chap-

The first picture.

A meditative king.

ter of First Chronicles ; for a few graphic particulars are added there that are not here.

1. The first picture represents a great Eastern king, sitting in one of the rooms of his eminent palace, somewhere about three thousand years ago. Evidently he was wrapped in deep and serious meditation. This building had been lately erected specially for his use, and his removal into it had marked an era in his personal history. Its beauty filled him with admiration as he gazed upon it ; it made him reflective and pensive as the servants came and went, in and out, before him. How had he risen into all this regal honor, and what had he done to deserve it ?

We have a hint even as to his thoughts in the interesting hours he passed that day. He remembered how, when he was a modest shepherd-boy tending his father's flocks in Bethlehem, the strange visit had been made to him by a venerable prophet of Jehovah the Lord. That old man had announced to him that one day he was to sit upon the throne of Israel ; and then he had anointed his youthful head with oil, proclaiming that he, a ruddy-cheeked lad, should by and by be a king and rule over a mighty nation.

Time had drifted on and away since then. Singular events had moulded his career and filled the annals of the people with unwonted vicissitudes. Along a path checkered with sunshine as well as shadow, he had been steadily advanced toward the prime headship that was promised ; he

The second picture.

Nathan's precipitancy.

was now the sovereign, his permanent home was Jerusalem, and the name of David was famous among the tribes all around him. Even civil wars had ceased ; the conflicts of succession were ended ; all was peace and tranquillity.

2. The second picture represents this monarch at the critical moment when he stirs in his seat with a strong emotion, and summons instantly into his presence the prophet of the Lord, Nathan, full of a purpose which he wished to communicate. The very magnificence of his abode had suggested to him a plan for an extraordinary deed of consecration and religious endeavor. "See now," he says, breaking out abruptly, as if the idea were startling to himself, "even I dwell in a house of cedar, but the Ark of God dwelleth within curtains!" That was quite true. Nearly four hundred years had passed since the people of God had entered the promised land and secured their permanent resting-place ; but as yet no building had been found in which might be fittingly located that old sacred symbol of the divine presence. With a sort of shame for his own luxuriousness, David now proposed a building which he would erect and devote to the service of God.

The prophet accepted the proposition at once ; it cannot for a moment be doubted that he was intensely gratified. Though that nation had ceased to be nomadic, and their wilderness tents had for centuries been unused, there was this chief tabernacle, with its badger-skin covering, still standing

The third picture.

Consent withdrawn.

out in the air. Nathan must have felt that the whole affair was providential, and with all his heart he bade the king proceed ; the Lord was with him.

3. Our third picture represents the same king a day later. The prophet comes back into his presence, and declares that his permission on the evening before had been hasty, and could not abide ; he had received a vision during the night, and the divine message was sent to him that he must tell the monarch that such an acquiescence had been inconsiderate ; the Lord was pleased in seeing the purpose of his servant ; but the fact was, David had been too much a man of blood for this undertaking ; he was a warrior too famous to be fit for so holy a task as this ; the spirit he showed was praised gently and generously, but the proffer of a temple was declined. Still, Nathan was commissioned to state that Solomon, the king's son, might undertake this work, and David might gather the materials and raise the money to help him.

Now, it might have been expected of most men that some violent explosion of disappointed feeling would have marked such a startling and severe denial from above. But the records of the king's experience are among the brightest in the Bible. He has no rebellious feelings ; he accepts the decision joyously ; it is enough for him to know that the Lord will let him have anything to do in a work so grand and so holy. The whole of the chapter is afterward taken up with a strain of humble and

Cruel denials,

Prayers kindly unanswered.

hopeful gratitude so exquisite that it sings like a psalm of thanksgiving.

II. Now, out of this comes our lesson ; it is single and eminently practical, and yet it will not be learned unless hearts are softened to meet it, and God's Spirit prepares the way. It is addressed to such Christians as think they have been cruelly denied the wishes of their lives, and are now moving in some secondary sense of existence, and are likely to achieve a failure.

1. Let us understand that *a purpose may be good, yet providence may see fit to deny its accomplishment*—that is to say, God may take the will for the deed. We may work up a thrill of personal enthusiasm, and because the end appears supreme in our eyes may expect that Providence will immediately accept it ; but the question is not whether the plan is good, but whether it is God's plan for us in which to serve him. Such so-called crises of human existence are sometimes nothing more or less than mere crises of human will, dictating to God what ought to be done.

2. Let us remember that *a wish may be intense, and yet it is not on that account alone to be granted*. We act so often from mixed motives that we are not always the ones to know whether wishes we cherish are not wiles of the devil. The day has been for many a child of God, when he struggled with some most eager and passionate desire of his heart ; God denied it, and the believer has lived to thank him on the bended knees of his grateful

Philippians 4 : 19.

Richard the lion-hearted.

soul. God has promised to grant, not what we seek, or crave, or implore; these are not his words; he says he will give what we "need."

3. Let us acknowledge that *sometimes a human heart is too full of unworthy feeling for success in high spiritual endeavor.* Hence the Lord does not intrust this to such agents. Let us go over once more the exact words of the history; what does God say?

"And David said to Solomon, My son, as for me, it was in my mind to build an house unto the name of the Lord my God: but the word of the Lord came to me, saying, Thou hast shed blood abundantly, and hast made great wars: thou shalt not build an house unto my name, because thou hast shed much blood upon the earth in my sight."

The decision turns upon previous history of this monarch. Character had in his case progressed too far for any radical change. He must stand now and take the chances which his life had fixed. To some the language may seem harsh; if David was forgiven as a true believer, why not trust him in the undertaking? This hard estimate of unfitness is not without a parallel in modern experience; what is it to be a "man of blood"? Richard Cœur-de-Lion wrote that for seven whole years he would not suffer himself to take the sacrament, because he was conscious of angry hatred in his heart toward the monarch of France. It is, quite possibly, a poignant experience, but it may

"Some things I cannot do."

Other instruments.

be profitable to acknowledge, "There are things I cannot do, because God is holier than I am." For this will leave the way open for fresh increase in holiness at once; and it also settles one's mind down to give over impossibilities, and take up what is legitimately within reach.

4. Let us admit freely that *an intention may be excellent, and yet have to be surrendered into another's hands.* This plan of David was good, but it was Solomon who was to carry it out—that was all. Solomon puts this frankly on record when he ends his building, and stands ready for the dedication of the house:

"And it was in the heart of David my father to build an house for the name of the Lord God of Israel. And the Lord said unto David my father, Whereas it was in thine heart to build an house unto my name, thou didst well that it was in thine heart: nevertheless thou shalt not build the house; but thy son, that shall come forth out of thy loins, he shall build the house unto my name. And the Lord hath performed his word that he spake; and I am risen up in the room of David my father, and sit on the throne of Israel, as the Lord promised, and have built an house for the name of the Lord God of Israel."

The fact is, God may choose to have his work finished by the instruments whom he selects, and not by volunteers. Just observe how David sings when he knows he has still the chance to gather some money, and bargain for timber, and arouse

Gladness in drudgeries.

David's enthusiasm.

some zeal, and even to assume the merest drudgeries to insure Solomon's success :

“ Furthermore David the king said unto all the congregation, Solomon my son, whom alone God hath chosen, is yet young and tender, and the work is great ; for the palace is not for man, but for the Lord God. Now I have prepared with all my might for the house of my God the gold for things to be made of gold, and the silver for things of silver, and the brass for things of brass, the iron for things of iron, and wood for things of wood ; onyx stones, and stones to be set, glistening stones, and of divers colors, and all manner of precious stones, and marble stones in abundance. Moreover, because I have set my affection to the house of my God, I have of mine own proper good, of gold and silver, which I have given to the house of my God, over and above all that I have prepared for the holy house, even three thousand talents of gold, of the gold of Ophir, and seven thousand talents of refined silver, to overlay the walls of the houses withal : the gold for things of gold, and the silver for things of silver, and for all manner of work to be made by the hands of artificers. And who then is willing to consecrate his service this day unto the Lord ?”

What can it matter who it is that erects the upper courses of a building, when the lower courses are just as necessary and just as honorable ? Is not God worshiped by the edifice as a whole ?

Can a life be ruined ?

A new purpose.

5. But now let us seek another lesson, and we shall find that it will help in the impression of this one. We see that *a life may claim to be ruined, and yet much of value may be left in it.* David had no notion that he was a dashed and beaten man because Nathan's message had deprived him of the hope of his later years. It is a grieved sense of hankering after old and denied ambitions that in our times brings most hindrance to Christian efficiency. Mere morbid feeling is destructive of zeal in every kind of labor. When a man has given up what evidently divine providence had never designed for him, let him cease mourning over it ; let him cheerfully clear his mind of sore memories of it ; let him keep away from associations which suggest it. It is given as one of the counsels of a Jewish rabbi, that a child, once bitten by a serpent, ought to fear even a rope's end—that is, be suspicious of everything which looks like a snake.

6. Let us believe that *a true heart may be apparently broken, and yet remain full of joy.* Every now and then we fall on some new chapter which shows King David's frank delight in this moderate task which had been permitted to him. He kindles that whole nation with his enthusiasm, and yet his first sentence of address is a candid statement of his purpose which the Lord had thwarted the moment he mentioned it, and then of the purpose he had accepted in the place of it, making him as happy as a child.

Albrecht Durer.

The two pictures.

Now, let us only add an illustration of this whole thought, and finish the discourse. I have seen the little story that is the best within my reach to show from modern biography just what is the counsel which I have been trying to press. But I am not going to vouch for its literal truth as an incident in the long career of the painter with whose name it stands connected. Still it will serve us here for a compact and commonplace display of real life. Two boys, Franz Knigstein and Albrecht Durer, once lived together in Nuremberg; they were going to be artists, and had entered Michael Wohlgemuth's study for instruction. The parents of both were poor, and were struggling to keep their sons at their work until they should be able to care for themselves. Of these two pupils the master knew that Albrecht possessed genius, but Franz would never make a painter of whom men would be proud. But both were industrious, and frugal, and affectionate. They loved each other tenderly, and were kind and faithful unto all at home. Years passed on; one went to Italy, the other continued study in Germany. Ere long Franz married, and by and by Albrecht, and the old people died, and times were hard, and art was dull. Albrecht feared that Franz had not the artist spirit, and could never succeed. Once they planned together to make a drawing of the Passion of our Lord; when they came to show each other what had been accomplished, the picture of Franz was cold

The artist-spirit.Folded Hands.

and lifeless, while that of Albrecht was full of beauty. Franz himself saw it then. He was in middle life, and now he knew he had been so far a failure. He must give it up; he could not be successful as an artist. But he did not complain; only for a passionate moment he buried his face in his hands. Then he said in broken tones, though still full of courage, "The good Lord gave me no such gift as this, but he has something yet for me to do; some homely work shall be found for me; I was blind so long, so much time I have lost; be you the artist of Nuremberg, and I—"

"O Franz, be quiet an instant!" exclaimed Albrecht; and a quick rush was made to the paper before him on the table. Only a few lines with a swift pencil; Franz thought he was adding another stroke to his drawing, and waited patiently, leaning over the mantel with his fingers twined and clasped. And then, next day, Albrecht showed his friend the sheet: "Why, those are only my own hands," said Franz; "where did you get them?" And there was hardly need of an answer: "I took them as you stood, making the sad surrender of your life so very, very bravely; and I murmured to myself, those hands that may never paint a picture can now most certainly make one; I have faith in those folded hands, my brother-friend! they will go to men's hearts in the years to come!" And sure enough, the prophecy was true; for over the artistic world has gone the tale, and over the worlds of love and

A brave surrender.

A sermon for a preacher.

duty has gone the picture ; and the “ Folded Hands” by Albert Durer are but the hands of Franz Knigstein, once folded in sweet, brave resignation, when he gave up his dearest wish, and yet believed the good Lord had a homely duty for him to do worth the doing.

That is the picture which hangs up over my table, and has hung there for years—a mere copy of a drawing that I am told belongs in the gallery of Vienna. What it means is, there are some things, my Christian friend, you and I cannot do. But there are others we can do ; and we can always do something toward accomplishing a preparation for some one else to finish ; and what matters all the disappointment to us if only the dear Lord gets the glory ?

V.

THE "MAGNIFICAT" OF MARY.

"MY SOUL DOTI MAGNIFY THE LORD, AND MY SPIRIT HATH REJOICED IN GOD MY SAVIOUR."—*Luke I : 46, 47.*

ABOUT six months after the announcement had been made to Elisabeth that she should soon be the mother of John the Baptist, Mary, to whom had been also now made the announcement that she should become the mother of Jesus, determined to visit her cousin in the lower-hill-country of Judea, probably near the town of Hebron.

It will prove an interesting exercise to trace on the map the route which this Jewish maiden must have taken in going down across the plain of Esdraelon, from Nazareth southward. It was doubtless the same general path to which she had been accustomed, from her ordinary journeys to the Holy City, at the solemn annual feasts. But just now her mind was in a strange new frame of feeling. Each familiar locality, so crowded with history and devout reminiscences of her nation's annals, would, under these present circumstances, make on her imagination a far deeper impression than usual. We must remember this, for it gives help in the interpretation of her song.

Mary's journey.

The "hill-country."

Out from under the shadows of western hills, she would come into full view of the whole country, quite across to Mount Carmel, on the desolate ridge of which Elijah defied and conquered the priests of Baal. Megiddo, where Josiah lay dying; Jezreel, where Ahab sinned; the brook Kishon, beside which Deborah sang, after Sisera was slain—these were close at her feet. Before long she would arrive at Shechem, and seem to hear the old burden of cursing and blessing echoing from Ebal and Gerizim. Perhaps she paused a moment beside Joseph's grave; perhaps she sat to rest, and quenched her thirst at Jacob's well. A little farther down she would reach Jerusalem, "beautiful on the sides of the north," and catch glimpses of the golden-roofed temple shining in the sun. Diminutive Bethlehem next would have to be passed, and her tired feet would tread the lonely path that goes by Rachel's tomb. Her eyes would roam over the verdured fields where David tended his father's flocks, and caught the starry figures of the eighth and the nineteenth psalms. And while she lingered on such a spot, she would think of Ruth returning with Naomi after bidding Orpah farewell. Hard hills are those which now she would have to climb, before she could reach the cave of Machpelah, or discover the small houses of Hebron in the distance.

Of this we have no detail. But it aids us much afterward to keep it in mind; for it shows how she went thinking all the way to her destination.

 Women understand women.

 Confidence restored.

We meet her first in the story in the presence of Elisabeth, dwelling, perhaps, almost beneath the shade of Abraham's oak in Mamre.

The description of that interview arrests our imagination powerfully. Art has loved to dwell upon it; and the Eastern galleries are full of pictures by the most eminent masters. But such a scene is too simple and too majestic for a painting. It is likely we should get no good from what we find on canvas; almost all that we read of show Elisabeth as a withered old woman, and in even the best of them Mary looks quiet and tame in her bashful demeanor.

We conceive more nobly of the spectacle, when we rest contented with the sublime words of Scripture. Good Bishop Hall says well: "Only the meeting of saints in heaven can parallel this meeting of these two cousins. The two wonders of the world are met under one roof, and congratulate their mutual happiness. Grief grows greater by concealment; joy, by expression; happiness communicated doubles itself."

The dialogue is brief; those two women talked together as only two women could talk who perfectly understood each other. Mary heard Elisabeth say: "Whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" Her troubles had been so hard, her joys had been so great, and her silent heart had been so full of both of them, that her relief must have been sudden and overwhelming. When the sweet face of that pure un-

"My soul doth magnify."

The best Psalter.

married maiden saw in the joyous countenance of that incorruptible Jewish matron the sign that she would be welcomed as faultless and true, oh, in that supreme moment, she could answer only with a song, and pour forth her gratitude in nothing less than the inspired numbers of a New Testament psalm !

It is that psalm we now propose to study in detail. In ecclesiastical history it is named the "Magnificat," from the word in it which in the Latin Vulgate means "doth magnify." The reformed churches have admitted it into the ancient liturgies. So it is often sung in the services of Christendom by thousands of tongues.

I. Let us look, first, at a few of its external characteristics. It is worth much just in itself as a Christian hymn.

1. Begin with the poetry of it. It strikes us with wonder in these modern days that a peasant woman of Galilee should be able to chant in so exalted a strain. But we know "a pure heart makes the best psalter." And she was speaking out of the abundance of hers. Yet never was such an occasion, never was such an angelic preparation ; never—surely never before—was such a theme ! Israel's Messiah was on his way, God was about to manifest himself on earth in the flesh !

2. Observe also the Israelitish aspect of the song. It would be easy to parallel almost every expression in Mary's poetry, by an utterance very similar in the anthems of the temple service. The

 An "ideal Puritan maiden."

 Mary's devotion.

mechanical structure is not very difficult ; for the Hebrew and Syriac languages are easily wrought into rhymeless verses. There is extant now a gospel in Hebrew ; those who can read it are interested in noting the idioms followed here in the Magnificat. The mind of this woman was filled with the old prophets' imagery. Her whole thoughts were tinged with what she had studied and committed to memory. So this song has been exquisitely compared to what might have been expected from "some ideal Puritan maiden," whose mind was so imbued and saturated with the Scriptural forms of expression that it would fall unconsciously into inspired phrases when she spoke.

3. Then, observe the femininity of this song. No one but the queen of her sex could possibly have composed the Magnificat. Mark the delicacy of turn in the sentences, the mingling of dignity with humility ; the majesty, as sublime as Ezekiel's, and the tenderness, more gentle than John's. For this shows the mind and heart of just the one woman whom Elisabeth could call the "Mother of her Lord."

II. Let us move on now, to consider, in the second place, a few of the internal characteristics of this matchless song.

1. Most prominent here, observe Mary's *instant devotion*. She does not pause to return Elisabeth's greeting ; she does not wait to pass back the congratulation ; she seems to think only of God

 The new word "Saviour."

 Personal humility.

above. "My soul doth magnify the Lord!" She comes forth like Hannah, in the older time, with a full ascription at the first beginning: "My heart rejoiceth in the Lord; mine horn is exalted in the Lord." A maiden without any companions, and without even a timbrel, she sets Miriam's song to new music: "Sing ye to the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously!" How alike devout these female voices seem!

2. Then, notice her *evangelic faith*. She is thoroughly orthodox in the gospel. She sings: "My spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour." Mary, then, felt need of a Saviour, just as much as any one else. There is here no intimation of a "Madonna" of sinless perfection. "And blessed is she that believed; for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord." She was blessed in that she "believed." So she knew her sins would be forgiven, because there should be "a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord." A great word this, "Saviour;" here first it appears in the New Testament; the word which the heathen orator said afterward he found on a tomb that he passed on one of his journeys: "*Salvator*; a new word, but very beautiful, as it appears to me."

3. Next, we see her *personal humility*. How sweetly she says: "He hath regarded the low estate of his handmaid"! What was this Galilean damsel, poor and lonely now, that she should have been singled out for so exalted a lot? There

 The happiest woman in history.

Peerlessly ambitious.

is in her whole demeanor during this pathetic part of her history an unusual poise and serenity. She was not even frightened or abashed by the angel; she meekly received his announcement, neither overcome nor unduly elated in her prospects. As she acquiesced then, she sings now: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word."

4. Now, put with this her *lofty ambition*. Her heart rises to its supreme elevation at the next utterance. For this is the last Mary speaks of herself; all the rest of the song is about God. She sings: "From henceforth all generations shall call me blessed; for he that is mighty hath done to me great things." She is glad with her whole heart that the chance is going to be given to her to become a blessing. Watch the language; not—They shall call me rich, and prospered, and honored, and famous, but—They shall bless me for what I peril my life to bring to them. She is peerlessly ambitious to do good. It penetrates and sways her whole being with unutterable joy to think of the souls she will gladden when they come to learn that she offers to the world its Redeemer and Christ.

5. This is what prompts her *voluminous praise*. Here are several verses now that mention the divine attributes one by one. Mary makes each in succession record God's glory in a new light. Over and over again in her mind she turns her thought, as one would turn the choicest jewel

Divine attributes.How much had Mary traveled?

in his hand, in order to find a fresh facet to shine.

God's holiness, first: "For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name." It was as if a notion of his infinite purity had entered her heart anew, when that angel had said: "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore, also, that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God."

Then God's grace: "His mercy is on them that fear him." Oh, how much more meaning than ever before did those ancient words have to Mary now: "From generation to generation"! What a worthy line of ancestry she had had, and how affecting was the thought that the covenant of Almighty God with the Father of the Faithful was perpetuated through herself and this wonderful Child for all coming ages!

God's power likewise: "He hath shewed strength with his arm." Just how much of opportunity to observe physical energy in exercise Mary had enjoyed, we do not know. Nazareth was high among the south ridges of the mountains of Lebanon, and was not far from the Mediterranean which taught David all he knew about ocean storms. But if, all the way down from home to Hebron, she had been thinking—thinking—as we have been led to conjecture, she certainly must have recollected many a history, suggested by hillside and plain, which would exhibit the

Abraham's old outlook.A maiden's patriotism.

power of Jehovah in scattering by the breath of his wrath enemies who were "proud in the imagination of their hearts."

So next, God's justice; the great retributions of divine providence always had found their right objects: "He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree." Mary at that moment was not far from the very spot from which Abraham looked when he saw Sodom and Gomorrah smoking as if from the destruction of a furnace.

Then, God's beneficence also; this she knew was generous, but discriminating; her own experience taught her what she now said in the song. Her heart had never been opulent with graces, but surely it had often enough been filled with longing, and so she knew that it was God's way to fill "the hungry" with good things, but "the rich" would be sent empty away, until they should learn humility.

6. One thing more in this wonderful song claims our attention. Observe Mary's *magnificent patriotism*. For she passes almost unconsciously from God's attributes to God's people. She thinks of that ancient covenant he had made with "his servant Israel." With the full sense at last of the glory of her royal lineage dawning brightly upon her imagination, this maiden speaks of "our fathers," and of "Abraham and his seed forever." She must have seen how intricately her history had been linked with the choice heroic annals of

Raphael's Madonna.Retiring out of notice.

her race from the far beginning. Here is where art has for once offered a little help to our imaginations. One of the noblest conceptions of that greatest master of painting, Raphael, is found in the simple roll of ancient parchment he has placed in Mary's lap, while she fixes her eye on the vacant distance, as if in profound thought over the new discovery she has made that her life has all along had a place in the grand purpose of Israel's covenant of grace. And so here the finest thing in the Magnificat is this adoring ascription of praise to God for what he had done for her country and her race. "He hath holpen his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy ; as he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed forever !" A great lesson is this ; that nation may well be considered safe, when only the women and mothers that dwell in it are patriots.

Just two reflections remain for closing our study. One is this : How easily Mary retires now from her conspicuousness ! One immortal song she has given to the world and the church ; but it was her swan-song as a poetess. She subsides quietly hereafter into the mother and the wife. She appears in the story of Jesus' life often ; still, it is not recorded that she ever said or sung anything more that is extraordinary. Think how noble it seems to be ready to come into notice for God, just as he will, and then go out of it, just as he will, into quiet waiting and restful service, without repining !

Mary's Saviour."Who is my mother?"

The other reflection is this: Spiritually, any one now can be all that Mary was to Jesus; spiritually, any one can have all that Jesus was to Mary. He was her "Saviour;" she was his "mother." Let us read over together the familiar verses in Matthew's gospel:

"While he yet talked to the people, behold, his mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him. Then one said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee. But he answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother."

VI.

THE SERMON ON THE CROSS.

“I WILL DECLARE THY NAME UNTO MY BRETHREN : IN THE MIDST OF THE CONGREGATION WILL I PRAISE THEE.”—*Psalm 22 : 22.*

THERE is some reason for believing that Jesus our Saviour repeated the twenty-second psalm entirely while suspended on the cross in the agonies of the crucifixion. We know that he spoke aloud the opening sentences of it : “ My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me ? ” And there are some scholarly and careful expositors who tell us that the final expression in it—that last clause with which our version awkwardly closes (“ that he hath done this ”)—if rendered exactly in translation, would read, “ It is finished, ” which, as we all remember, was another of our Lord’s utterances on Calvary.

It may be that with one bitter cry under the darkness and desolation, which is recorded, his speech collapsed into silence, and that then only his mind took up the remaining verses into meditation and rehearsal. At any rate, we quite understand he was educated to great familiarity with all the Old Testament Scriptures, and often adduced them in argument with an aptness which showed an evident acquaintance with each im-

This strange psalm.The Messiah's song.

portant passage. And, surely, in his studies concerning his own Messiahship, he must have fastened deeply in memory such sentences as these : " They pierced my hands and my feet ;" " They part my garments among them and cast lots upon my vesture ;" " They shake the head, saying, He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him ; let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him !" Think a moment upon the dramatic force of such expressions, when repeated in the act of crucifixion, all of which are found in this psalm.

Now that we know the exact history of this awful scene, how wonderful seem the words of description, penned a full thousand years before Jesus was born ! But what renders the question—whether Christ rehearsed these predictions or not during those suffering moments while he was accurately fulfilling them—of more interest to us is the fact that among the verses is found a statement amounting to a literal promise that the Messiah, at the very height of his grand offering of atonement, should deliver an address. For he says : " I will declare thy name unto my brethren : in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee."

If there be any remaining doubt as to the person to whom so startling an announcement belongs, it is relieved by the plain reference of the entire passage, which we find in the epistle to the Hebrews. There the language of the twenty-second psalm is ascribed directly and without

Christ crucified preaching.Christ crucified preached.

change to Jesus. And in that place, likewise, you will be pleased to discover an explanation of what the Psalmist must have meant by that which he here calls "the congregation." It is interesting to note these verses, as Paul quotes David, and unhesitatingly gives David's words to Jesus :

"For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one ; for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the Church will I sing praise unto thee."

What David calls "the congregation" is, therefore, the assembly of those "who are sanctified"; and what the Messiah is represented as calling his "brethren" is the "Church." Hence, a most weighty and most welcome declaration is this: the Lord of Glory, even in agony, speaks from the Cross to the Church.

What a pulpit, what an audience, what a preacher! We have received from the sacred record one Sermon on the Mount; here is another. Calvary is a lowlier hill than Hattin, but this Sermon on the Cross is a grander discourse; for Christ crucified is preached by the lips of a crucified Christ!

It, surely, is not necessary to ask or to answer what were the words which Jesus spoke during the hours while he was dying. For they are enduringly familiar to us all. But our special purpose with them just now requires that we carefully contemplate their order of arrangement

and their relation to each other. There are known to be exactly seven of them in all—the seven distinct heads to this Sermon on the Cross. One is given us by Matthew, Mark repeats the same, Luke records three more, and to these John adds three.

The first was a prayer for his executioners. The soldiers were brutal, the populace ignorant and harsh ; but at the moment when any one would think our Lord was going to utter a denunciation wilder than an apostle's " Anathema," you hear only the tenderness of supplication, backed with the charity of an excuse. Then said Jesus : " Father, forgive them ; for they know not what they do !"

After this comes silence. Time passes on. Suffering deepens. A thief, crucified on another cross, set beside Christ's in order to shame him the more, becomes penitent for his sin, and has faith in Jesus sufficient to surrender to him as a Saviour. He exclaims : " Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom." That cry was not lifted unheard. The head of Jesus instantly turned—in pain, but in pity—till eye met eye ; and then the lips spoke the second time, grandest words of pardon and promise : " Verily, I say unto thee, to-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise."

Now again ensues quiet, and the hour wears wearily on. A little company of dear friends are sitting at the foot of the cross ; among them

A mother bequeathed.

Jesus saith, "I thirst."

Mary, Jesus' mother, and John, the disciple Jesus loved specially. Higher relationships were beginning to over-ride the lower. It was time to say farewell to all earthly ties. Jesus seems here to make his will. Alas! what a death-bed, and yet what a testament! A living mother is bequeathed as a comfort and a care. Thus he spoke the third time: "Woman, behold thy son!" And when John's eager look was raised to his, he simply added, forestalling all thanks and exacting no conditions: "Behold thy mother!"

The next three of these utterances seem to be official. The Saviour himself is the subject of each in turn. Hence his priestly work, his prophetic, and his kingly are all mentioned.

Down in the depths of awful desertion, as he lay—the Lamb of God—upon the altar of atonement, bearing the curse of sin in his person, he cried: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

Then, as he came up a little way out of the depth of the darkness, perhaps saying over the rest of the twenty-second psalm, he recalled one prediction as yet unanswered by any fact. David had said this in his seer-vision: "They gave me also gall for my meat, and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink." Christ would be reminded of that prophecy of the Messiah, the moment that in his rehearsal he met the verse: "My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws." There can be no doubt that

“It is finished.”

A decorous greeting.

Jesus felt natural desire for drink under the fever of crucifixion ; but his motive in that wild call for some refreshment was more the wish to keep Scripture record clear. You will miss much if you neglect the most strange and suggestive language here : “ After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst.”

Then, glancing over all the past and on into the future, he rose to the height of proclamation, and said “ with a loud voice,” as it merited : “ It is finished !”

Only one thing more remained. As a sovereign leaves his throne sometimes for the field, in order to subdue a rebel province, so Christ had put off his royal purple and his celestial crown, that he might become the Captain of Salvation on this revolted planet. His military work was now done. As that sovereign returns victorious, with all his triumphs on his brow and his captives in his train, announcing in the presence of his army that the campaign is ended, so Jesus at last gives the note of a closed conflict, and the signal for leaving the plain on the immediate march to the capital. He is going at once, the prince royal, to the royal abode. A message beforehand seems becoming.

So he speaks his seventh word. There upon the tree of humiliation he sends tranquilly aloft into the not distant ear of the Infinite One his final utterance—a mere decorous greeting to

his Father: "Into thy hands I commend my spirit!"

"And having said thus, he gave up the ghost." These seven expressions, then, constitute the fulfilment Jesus made of the Messianic promise recorded in the psalm. They are significant even when detached and separate; but you will feel their full power the more when you consider their order, the line of consecutive thought in which they occur.

Perhaps there is no way in which they can more vividly be grouped together than by adopting the ancient conventional form of memorizing employed by classic orators in recalling the points of a speech. They used to localize the heads of discourse by fastening them in imaginative connection around on the conspicuous parts of the building. Hence came our phraseology, "in the first place," or "the second place," and so on. Let us reverently conceive the Saviour in the very posture of crucifixion, turning his head, and picking up one suggestion after another with the glances of his eye, as the progress of his thought shifts the subject of remark. Our question is: Why did he say the first thing first, and the next thing next, and all the rest in just that succession he chose? Imagine him, if you will, surrounded by concentric circles of hearers—some remote, as it were, some near at hand—and touching each in turn.

He looks away from him—sees the crucifiers, and utters his cry for their forgiveness. He looks

beside him—sees the penitent thief, and utters his welcome to Paradise. He looks beneath him—sees his mother, and utters his bequeathal of her to her new son. He looks above him—sees the mantle already drawn across his Father's face, and utters his lament of desolation. He looks within him—sees his poor weakness of thirst, and utters his acknowledgment of the reminder it makes that Scripture must be fulfilled. He looks around him—sees the Messiah's work all along the toiling, waiting centuries, and utters his triumphant announcement that he has completed it. He looks before him—sees, far through the bounds of earthly vision, his Father's face, and knows his favor is restored, and then utters his peaceful surrender.

Any one, therefore, can readily perceive the journey of Jesus' mind by these impressive words coming out now and then to mark its course. He begins on the extreme outskirts of the kingdom of God, and works up toward the throne which is its centre. He starts with the subjects; he continues with the Prince; he ends with the King. He divides the subjects into three classes, according to their spiritual distance; he predicates three conditions of the Prince, according to the progress and achievements of his work; and then he ascribes all supremacy to the King, by yielding himself to his hands.

The Sermon on the Cross, so it follows, is thoroughly logical, and is actually founded upon a

symmetrical analysis most exquisite in structure. These may be seen to be the particulars in fair order.

I. The subjects of the Kingdom.

1. The hardened and unconcerned. A prayer for them : " Father, forgive them."

2. The penitent and believing. The acceptance of them : " To-day with me in Paradise."

3. The accepted and beloved. A care toward them : " Behold thy mother—thy son."

II. The Prince of the Kingdom.

1. The priestly Victim. Under vicarious guilt ; hence, forsaken.

2. The prophetic Revealer. Under responsibility for all truth ; hence, careful.

3. The kingly Leader. Under victorious banners ; hence, jubilant.

III. The King of the Kingdom.

Only a single word of serene self-announcement, as he starts in person to return through the lifted gates into the glory he had before ever the world was.

An entire sermon would be needed on each of these seven texts, before even a moiety of their reach and fulness of instruction could be presented to you. Two lessons are all we now seek to make clear. One of these concerns the savers of souls ; the other concerns the souls that are saved.

Rehearse, now that you are measurably familiar with it, this journey of Jesus' mind, once more ; *for it is the line of spiritual travel along which every*

Going after a lost soul.

Homeward steps.

true follower of Jesus must go in order to bring men savingly to him and to heaven.

He begins at a distance. Far away on the borders of Satan's country, Christ seems to descry a few men, passionate, uncouth, and blasphemous. His heart yearns over them. Those whom no one loves, he pities. Those whom no one warns, he prays for. Oh, the infinite tenderness with which Immanuel then reached out his hand to save them who were almost doomed and damned already! Where, then, is the man beyond the reach of our charity or our prayers!

Then he draws a step nearer, and meets the pleading malefactor on the way. From the very edge of the bottomless pit did Christ catch that perishing penitent, and draw him safely into Paradise. And this, when at the moment every fibre in his body, and every sensibility in his soul, was racked with pain indescribable. Oh, how frequently our ease interferes with our usefulness; how often we check our footsteps going forth "bearing precious seed," because we think we must stay to do our "weeping"!

One more step is now all that Jesus needs to take. He is never so busy in zeal for reprobates as to forget fidelity to his friends. When we notice his solicitude for his mother's earthly lot, and the graceful ingenuity with which he compassed the two ends of providing for her and comforting John, we cannot fail to learn how helpful he means to have all that love him to be

A lost soul going towards God.

Sin hated, not sinners.

to each other. "Whoso shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my mother, and sister, and brother." Thus having loved his own he loved them to the end. And our lesson is—begin, no matter how far off; persist, no matter how much; continue, no matter how long; so that in the end we compass a soul!

The other hint of instruction we gain from these utterances on the Cross has relation to *the evangelical experience through which every soul has to pass in its return and reconciliation to God*. This very journey of Jesus' mind indicates it—that is, the experience our Lord himself shares as he utters those three personal exclamations, which culminate in the calm triumph of the last.

When Jesus lifts that great and bitter cry—"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"—he seems about as far from his Father's love as human mind can conceive. He knows himself to be the true, only-begotten Son of God, but he is apparently on the very outermost line of recognition. He is bearing the sins of the world, and his Father has hidden his face in sorrow and reprehension. Just there starts every unforgiven soul of man.

Oh, if God hates *sin* like this—if he would turn away from that suffering Redeemer in such an hour as this—if he refuses to look upon guilt in a mere *Surety* with such rejection—what can any actual sinner have to-day for a hopeful apology, when, covered with his own transgression, he

Caring for those one seeks.

Rest reached at last.

goes up above to make terms for himself with the Judge!

But Jesus advanced one step, after a while. Though forsaken, he kept the faith. Lest a single word of prophecy should fail, he bent to the humiliating need of asking his enemies to pity his admitted weakness. He did all this to save two or three verses in two or three Psalms. So he honored the word, and confirmed its least record.

Here, again, let each sinner learn that God will be true, though every man become a liar. To even the most despairing there is promise, there is proffer, there is pledge, of grace, on condition of penitence and faith.

Then Jesus comes up the third step, and all is clear. The marvelous reach of those little words—"It is finished!"—can never be told. Types all answered, predictions all fulfilled, provisions all made, he is on the summit of triumph.

And with those words on his believing lips, every sinner comes to his eternal rest and peace in the gospel. The word of Jehovah meets him: "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." So he, like his Lord, commends his spirit into infinite care. From the verge of the outer darkness, where the wandering stars are lost, he has at last pushed his way, through all the intervening orbits, to the Sun of Righteousness, which has risen upon him!

VII.

A BEATITUDE REALIZED.

“AND WHEN THEY HEARD THAT, THEY LIFTED UP THEIR VOICE TO GOD WITH ONE ACCORD.”—*Acts* 4 : 24.

THE peculiar paradoxes of the Christian life are nowhere brought to view more evidently than in those dogmatic declarations of our Lord himself with which he opens his Sermon on the Mount. Each one of the beatitudes there pronounced suggests a philosophy which is in utter defiance of all legitimate human expectation and experience. The world says, “Happy are the opulent and the prosperous ;” Jesus says, “Happy are the poor.”

The world says, “Happy are ye when ye are merry and glad ;” Jesus says, “Happy are they that mourn.”

Thus the list moves on, a strange enumeration of apparent contradictions. Seven classifications of positive evils are made, and then the octave is touched with a note the most wonderful of them all ; it is surely the most surprising and preposterous of all things to say in a promiscuous assembly, “Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake : for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Yet this statement is repeated twice in succession, and then an applica-

Singing under persecution.

Reach of the beatitude.

tion of it is forced directly on those who are listening, as if to confirm a principle so likely to provoke a dispute.

Now, it so happens that, in the chapter where the text is found, we have come upon a literal fulfilment of this prediction of Christ ; the disciples are in the midst of severe persecution, and yet we not only find them singing in the exuberance of their joy, but the new song they sing is handed down to us as a fine contribution to the hymnological treasures of the church at large. Evidently these brave men are realizing a beatitude, and the excellent illustration they furnish ought not to be lost. Let us analyse the verses in Matthew, and then lay them alongside of those in the Acts ; so we shall easily perceive the practical help given.

I. What was it exactly that our Lord declared in the beatitude? We must be just as careful in tracing its limits as its reach, or else we shall make a sad mistake at the start.

1. Its reach includes hard words, harsh deeds, and hateful insinuations : " Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake." Taunts, sarcasms, ridicule—these are more difficult to bear than blows ; and these are what the apostles were now receiving in full measure.

The word which our Lord used is figurative ; he takes his trope from the pursuit of a hunter :

Hounded by a hunter.

A prairie reed.

Blessed are ye when wicked men shall "hound" you. Most men of refined feeling are little moved by mere coarseness. It touches no sensibility when some rude creature swears at us in the street; the barking of a dog would annoy us very much the same. The very grossness of the attack renders it comparatively ineffective; we pass it by undisturbed. I think we can understand something of the equanimity of David under the curses of the foul-mouthed Shimei. "And as David and his men went by the way, Shimei went along on the hill's side over against him, and cursed as he went, and threw stones at him, and cast dust. And David said to Abishai, Let him alone, and let him curse; for the Lord hath bidden him. It may be that the Lord will look on mine affliction, and that the Lord will requite me good for his cursing this day."

A delicate-minded Christian will, like a prairie reed, bend to a swift blast of the tempest, and in his graceful yielding find safety; only the lighter winds can make him tremble. The day has come when our persecutions consist pretty much of insinuations, misrepresentations, and perversions. A shrug of the shoulder, a whisper of defamation, a look of suspicion, may fling reproach on the most spotless reputation.

2. The limit of Jesus' language in the beatitude is found in two particulars: the reproach must be *groundless*—note that word "falsely;" and it must be *religious*—"for my sake." That these disciples

Buffeted for real faults.Deacon Morose.

understood perfectly the distinction is plain from what one of them, Simon Peter, wrote long afterward ; he says it does not amount to much if one is buffeted for his real faults, and deserves the censures he gets ; it is only when one does well and suffers for it, that the pain becomes "thank-worthy" and "acceptable to God."

Furthermore, the persecution must be for Christ's sake only, if we expect it to count in realizing the beatitude. Once in a class a somewhat pert lad exclaimed, "I think a peevish or quick-tempered man like Deacon Morose will make heaven very uncomfortable for the people in that part of it he goes to." The teacher rebuked him : "Some persons are hard on Deacon Morose ; he is a dear, good, pious man." The boy continued : "He is not to blame for being pious, but for not being pious enough ; I never thought he was so unpopular for Christ's sake, but for his own. If he were a little more amiable, he would be a good deal more religious." Such a thing is worth thinking of any way. For in another verse this same apostle takes occasion to make a frank enumeration of particulars which might be easily mistaken for unusual grace. In his day there were some who suffered as evil-doers—thieves, gossips, meddlers, and the like ; it was enough to tell them that this was useless. "But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evil-doer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him

Reliant pride of heart.

“ Draw me nearer—nearer.”

not be ashamed ; but let him glorify God on this behalf.”

II. But now we move on a step in the study. This being the condition, what was the beatitude ? How were the apostles blessed in their persecutions ?

1. Reproach for Christ's sake cuts off one's reliant pride of heart. “ Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, if we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole ; be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at naught of you builders, which is become the head of the corner.”

Observe carefully how these men appear to forget themselves in the transactions which were causing such wonder. If a man does a great good thing he is apt at first to become vain of it ; but it needs only the briefest experience of success to discover that great good things are what the world hates and maligns the most. This takes the conceit out of his heart, and then he begins to render all the glory unto God.

2. Again : reproach for Christ's sake drives us nearer into close communion with the Almighty himself. “ And being let go, they came to their

The Apostles' song.David at Engedi.

own company, and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said unto them. And they, when they heard it, lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, O Lord, thou that didst make the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that in them is ; who by the Holy Ghost, by the mouth of our father David thy servant didst say, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. For of a truth in this city against thy holy Servant Jesus, whom thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, were gathered together, to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel foreordained to come to pass. And now, Lord, look upon their threatenings ; and grant unto thy servants to speak thy word with all boldness, while thou stretchest forth thy hand to heal ; and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of thy holy Servant Jesus.”

It is not difficult to dare men when one fully trusts God ; magnanimity toward a foe is easy when one has a friend in his God to whom he may appeal. We conceive nobly of David when in the secret cave of Engedi he turns away from doing violence unto Saul, and leaves him to the dealings of Providence. “The Lord judge between me and thee, and the Lord avenge me of thee ; but mine hand shall not be upon thee.”

The speech of men.High-born Kinsmen.

Christ once told his disciples that there was a woe upon them if all men should speak well of them ; they understood him better in these hard times when they felt his love so near ; he was manifesting himself to them as not to the world. Remember that one of those men who were singing afterward wrote the brave wise words we so often quote : " For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God ; and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God ? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear ? Wherefore, let them that suffer according to the will of God, commit the keeping of their souls to him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator."

3. Reproach for Christ's sake likewise is a blessing because it brings one into genuine companionship with the great and good of all the ages. How suggestive it is to find these disciples of the Lord quoting an ancient psalm as a part of the New Testament hymn they were composing to sing now. This was precisely what had been told them in the Sermon on the Mount : " Rejoice, and be exceeding glad ; for great is your reward in heaven ; for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you." In days gone by, so we are informed, martyrs and confessors used to etch on the walls of the dungeons they occupied brief exhortations to steadfastness, calls to fortitude, and reminiscences of grace, so that

those who should come after them in the same prisons might have the cheer of the example they set ; “ seeing, would take heart again.”

4. Finally : reproach for Christ's sake introduces every true Christian into fellowship with the great Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Jesus himself. “ It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord.” We look up and seem to see these preachers before the same great council that condemned Jesus ; think specially of John and Peter ; when were they there last ? There were the identical faces, scowling and hateful as ever. “ And Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem.” In that room Jesus had sat when he gave Simon Peter the look which filled his eyes with penitent tears ; do you suppose Peter was going to give in now, and deny the Master again ? Or rather, we imagine a man like him would take a grand delight in showing in these days that he could be courageous if he tried. You must turn over once more to Simon Peter's epistle, and see how tenderly this disciple, a sheep going astray once, now has returned unto the Shepherd of his soul, and how humbly under such memories he exhorts the rest.

“ For even hereunto were ye called ; because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps. Who did no sin,

Surprise at trial.

A peaceful life : no beatitude.

neither was guile found in his mouth ; who, when he was reviled, reviled not again ; when he suffered, he threatened not ; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously ; who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness : by whose stripes ye were healed. For ye were as sheep going astray ; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.”

We ought not to be surprised at this kind of trial even in these easier days. “ All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.” But the beatitude holds. This is part of the cost one must count when he first purposes to surrender himself to the Saviour ; is the price sufficient ?

“ And when they had prayed, the place was shaken wherein they were gathered together ; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.”

A peaceful life may not always be the most desirable. It amounts simply to the reckoning thus : less persecution, and so less beatitude. One may live far from conflict, and then discover he has been also living far from Christ. “ And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name ; and daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.”

VIII.

THE "GLORIA IN EXCELSIS."

"GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST, AND ON EARTH PEACE, GOOD WILL TOWARD MEN."—*Luke 2 : 14.*

THOSE who are so apt at saying bright things about the Madonna and her Child—and those who are so foolish as to talk concerning the Church and her Christ—might, if they would, take notice that, when the Scriptures speak, they always mention the Child first.

One can easily imagine that the shepherds, when they entered the presence of "the young Child and his Mother," were satisfied to know they had something to tell, as well as something to listen to. And our curiosity almost runs riot, as we think of the conversation there at the side of the manger. How the quiet Mary's eyes would glisten, when she heard about the song of angels on the hill!

Indeed, Joseph and Mary might well welcome these homely men; for there was in their plain words of congratulation that which rejoiced their souls far more than those gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, which the Magi brought them afterward. Good words are always more valuable than wealthy offerings, which have less heart in

Shepherds' words : Magi's gifts.

Was Gabriel the leader ?

them ; they are like " apples of gold in pictures of silver."

In gathering the matter for our own instruction just now, we ought to be satisfied if we can be led to remember this same song, and hold the rich significance of its three announcements of glory to God, peace on earth, and good will toward men. First, however, we will make some inquiry about this celestial CHOIR ; then we will take up for study the wonderful ANTHEM which they sang : " And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

I. One particular angel, you observe, seems to assume a sort of leadership to a company of others ; he delivers the message, and then they unannounced burst forth into a strain of music. Curious questioning all aside, the thought of surpassing interest to us in this story is concerning the sincere sympathy that these celestial beings all seem to have for every matter which touches our race under the plan of redemption. Angels appear in every instance.

Gabriel it was who brought prophetic announcement of the Messiah to Daniel ; the same messenger foretold Jesus' birth to his mother. From the beginning to the end of our Lord's earthly career do these inhabitants of heaven seem to walk alongside, just out of sight. We discover them ministering to him when in the wilderness of

temptation ; they are found strengthening him under the terrible agony of Gethsemane ; the women saw one sitting at the head and the foot of the spot where the crucified Saviour had lain in the sepulchre. We are given to understand that angels are even now all the time God's messengers to the heirs of salvation. They are coming, at the last day, with Christ when he advances to judgment. And in the glory of heaven, while they sit singing praise on the mount of God, the chief burden of their happy hymns is joy over each repenting sinner. Is it not a fine thing to have such friends at court ?

Just here it is worth an inquiry, how it comes about that angels from a sinless heaven are interested enough in the birth of a human Redeemer to show such lively and exuberant pleasure as makes these Bethlehem hills ring with their praise unto God. And the answer cannot be difficult. You must recall the description furnished us of angels' feelings, under the awful mystery of Christ's sufferings. They are presented to us as fitly imaged in the Cherubim on the mercy-seat of old ; those two singular figures of gold, bending reverently forward toward each other over the ark in the Holy of Holies, with eyes cast downward, as if they were curiously listening to whatever might be spoken from out the ineffable light between them. In like attitude, we are told to conceive of those angels who stand in the real presence of God, where are solved such wonder-

"Peering over into."

When did the angels learn?

ful problems of grace—grace purchased by the vicarious humiliation of the divine Daysman, his equal and beloved Son.

You easily quote the language ; but there is in it a felicity almost lost in its rendering into ours. "Which things the angels desire to look into ;" this means, which things they are peering over into—bending their heads down and fixing their eyes, as if a holy curiosity possessed them, as if they were investigating an awful secret which demanded closest and most earnest attention.

Furthermore, you will remember that the Apostle Paul asserts, in a brilliant passage of the epistle to the Ephesians, that there was once a recognized and explicit moment in eternal history, when the manifold wisdom of God was made known unto the powers and principalities in heavenly places—the fellowship of the mystery, hid in God from the beginning of the world. When was that? At what precise instant—at what period along the ages of human registering by days and years—did the angels first learn the meaning and the majesty of Christ's incarnation, his suffering, and his death?

We can get no plain inspired answer ; but surely, there never was a more fitting opportunity for this sublime disclosure than we know was offered on the day when the incarnation became a fact ; on the morning of Jesus' birth, of course, was the appropriate moment to explain why he was born at all. It does not seem unlikely that

See Melvill's Sermon ; Vol. II.

Perhaps angels learned then.

when the midnight first fell away from over Bethlehem and its shepherds on the hills—at just that crisis in history, human and angelic—the heavenly host were earliest made aware of the deep significance of the amazing transaction they witnessed. It may be imagined without harm, as has been suggested by one of the most eloquent of English preachers, that Jesus' errand on earth was then explained to angels by just these very words we are reading, spoken by their leader, this chief angel, to those astonished men on the hill.

And if it be true that these high intelligences, who had until this supreme moment never before understood what it was for an unpardoned sinner against God to have an atonement ; who had gazed upon the wreck of a fair world without any hope of its restoration ; who had witnessed the action of inflexible justice, as it actually sent hell into existence for the doleful abode of some of their own race, even then chained in its horrible pit with no provisions for release ; if, I say, these angels now met one historic instant of disclosure, in which the veil of eternity dropped away from before its chief mystery, and so was revealed to their hitherto baffled minds the secret on which they had for ages so hopelessly pondered—if this be true, then it would not be surprising if the moment of such vast discovery, such unparalleled and immense acquisitions of knowledge, should give birth to a song transcending every strain they had ever previously chanted, filling the earth

What of the music also?Greek hymn: 300 A.D.

and the heavens alike with melody; and this would certainly give us a new force, if not a new meaning, to the old verse that to so many readers seems such a puzzle: "When he bringeth in the first-begotten into the world, he saith, Let all the angels of God worship him."

II. This leads us on now fitly to speak, in the second place, concerning the music heard on that eventful night. In the account which the listeners gave, the words alone are mentioned; one might be pardoned for wishing we had also the score!

We all know how an interesting strain of melody will fix itself in our memories; sometimes we can hardly keep from humming it over, repeating snatches of it we have caught, and rehearsing to others the way it went, so as to give an idea. It may be that the shepherds remembered parts of this; but if so, we have no means of ascertaining it. Only the words reach us; but they are well worth the study of the world.

From a single form of expression employed here, and coming along the ages through the Latin Vulgate version, has been named an uninspired chant, one of the noblest in history—the *Gloria in Excelsis*, given us by the Greek Church somewhere about 300 A.D.

The startling abruptness with which this seraphic anthem fell on the ears of the shepherds that first Christmas night, adds greatly to the dramatic effect of the scene. Hardly lingering for their leader to end his communication, that

 The shout of the Greeks.

 Three stanzas to the hymn.

choir of singers “suddenly” burst forth with loud volume of exquisite harmony, celebrating the praises of Jehovah, whom they saw in a fresh field of splendid display. There were a vast number of singers—“a host;” that is to say, an army; “an army celebrating a peace.” Surely there was enough to inspire their music; and great armies of voices sing together quite often with immense power of rich and voluminous harmony. It was an exaggeration, no doubt, but ancient history gravely records that, when the invader of Macedon was finally expelled, the victorious Greeks, who heard the news and so learned that freedom had come and fighting was over and home was near, raised along the lines and throughout the camp such a shout of “Sotēr! Sotēr!”—a Saviour! a Saviour!—that birds on the wing dropped down. It may have been so; but what was that little peninsula of Greece, as compared with this entire race redeemed from Satan unto God?

What were the actual words of this angels’ song? It is well that we all recollect them—“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men!” Three stanzas in one hymn.

1. The first of them, and the foremost in thought, is “*Glory to God in the highest.*” This is not a prayer at all, but an ascription. It was no time to be asking that God be glorified, when the whole universe was quivering with new disclosure

Not a prayer only.An ascription also.

of a Gloria in Excelsis such as blind men could see and deaf men could hear. Those angels did not pray—Glory *be* to God—but they exclaimed—Glory *is* to God in the highest, in the highest! And then they rush rapidly into an enumeration of particulars. The connection of thought is close. Glory is to God in the highest, because peace has come on the earth, and good will has already gone out toward men.

These angels are making proclamation that the rebellious race is forevermore subdued. No longer was this planet to circle around among loyal worlds in space, flaunting the defiant flag of a belligerent in the kingdom of heaven. Men should be redeemed; sin should be positively checked; all the ills of a worn-out and wretched existence should be banished; poverty should be removed, sickness and death find a master; Satan should be foiled by Immanuel in person: "Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, good-will toward men!"

Hence, this entire vision, which flashed on the awakened intelligence of the angels and inspired their song, was simply reversive and revolutionary. The whole earth seemed to rouse itself to a new being. Cursed for human sin, it saw its deliverance coming. The day had arrived when streams and lakes should gleam in the sunshine, when the valleys should smile, and laugh, and sing, when flowers should bloom and stars should flash—all to the glory of God!

The gates of Janus' temple.

Peace in a small way.

2. Then "*peace on earth;*" God was at last in the world reconciling it unto himself; the hearts of his creatures were coming back to him; their allegiance was to be restored, their wills were to be subjugated, their minds were to be enlightened; thus peace over all the world would be established, God's wrath would be averted, and the long wrestle of man with Satan would reach its end.

For when men are really at peace with God, they will come to peace with each other. Most significant fact is it to remember in all our studies of this period of Christ's coming, that on the very night when Jesus was born as the Prince of Peace, the whole political world was at rest. The Emperor Augustus had just shut the gates of the temple of Janus for only the third time in seven hundred years. Hopes were higher than ever before in the memory of man. The race might indeed have been finally composed, but for outbreking sin. These angels had hardly an hour of quiet to sing in, before the new clash of arms resounded. Alas! how long the desired day seems to be in coming, when swords shall be ploughshares, and warriors' spears shall be forged into pruning-hooks!

But surely it is easy to have peace in a small way all around ourselves. The fruit of righteousness shall be peace. What a fitting day—a blessed day—is this, the anniversary of a Saviour's birth, for the composure of all private and personal

"Knitting severed friendships up."

Herdsmen visit a carpenter.

wars! What a day for forgiving and forgetting old grudges; for "knitting severed friendships up;" for explaining and apologizing; for soothing and assuaging; for restoring weary estrangements! What a blessed day indeed for anything which will bring sundered hearts together, as they once were! "O Lord, grant us peace in our time!"

3. And so, at last, "*good will toward men.*" That ends this song of the angel; that is what ought to be the beginning of each Christmas anthem and carol. God loves us; oh, how touchingly does the aged Paul in one place tell his young brother Titus about that "kindness and love of God our Saviour toward men!" God cherishes only good will toward any of us. Even the wicked; he takes no pleasure in their death. He would rather they would turn unto him and live. Oh, happy day is that in which he tells us all this unmistakably, with perfect plainness! Brethren, if God so loved us, then ought we also to love one another. Let the wolf dwell to-day with the lamb, and the leopard lie down with the kid; the calf, and the young lion, and the fatling together; for a little Child on his birthday has come forth from heaven to lead them!

"And all ye are brethren!" Away with all fancied superiorities and aristocracies on the common Christmas day—the gladsome birthday of Christ! Herdsmen are on a visit to a carpenter at an inn; and they are told to go to the outhouse

King David II.Two closing suggestions.

to find him ! Beasts are standing by a manger, in which lies the Child—King David the Second ! But, for all this seems so democratic and small, please remember that a choir of angels have been singing outside. Who among us is too proud to listen ? It is a significant fact that the Apocryphal Gospels, so called, those uninspired productions which long claimed a denied recognition in God's word, assuming to give a more full and detailed account of Jesus' life, although they are voluminous to repletion or prolix to weariness on almost every other incident, hurry right across this midnight scene of singing, in utter silence. These supercilious writers seem to have been mortified to find that this divine Messiah was announced to a company of mere laboring-men !

Not so Mary and Joseph ; not so you and I. We do not believe these honest and devout herdsmen felt any awkwardness in making an unceremonious entrance to the stable. Why should they ? Joseph understood himself to be a house-builder, come up from Nazareth just to pay his annual taxes. There is nothing ever in one's calling, if it be honest, to be ashamed of, when one is faithful in it ; we may be certain that, when coming to Jesus, there is nothing whatsoever to be ashamed of—nothing in the world—but just our sins.

My brethren, listen to two suggestions as I close this sermon. Beautiful tokens of love are around you these holiday weeks of the year. Where do

A child's gift of gold.

Why are men so apathetic now ?

they come from ? " Merry Christmas"—why is it the merriest and gladdest day we see ? You remember that after a while some wealthy wise men from far away in the East brought heaps upon heaps of costly treasures to that Holy Family. Suffer your imagination to play with a conceit better, at least, than the fable of a Saint Nicholas ; it is as if that small sweet child had reached his hand forth to the piles of gold from the Magi, and lifting some of it up where he could, had dropped it gently through into your home !

And then, think how the sensibility those singing angels displayed contrasts disadvantageously with the amazing apathy discovered in many a human heart, under the full exhibition of God's mercy to men ! They seem gladder to know that souls may be saved than some of the souls for whom that wonderful Child came into being !

IX.

MEDITATION, EMOTION, UTTERANCE.

“WHILE I WAS MUSING, THE FIRE BURNED ; THEN SPAKE I WITH MY TONGUE.—*Psalm* 39 : 3.

A GENERAL principle is frequently involved in an individual instance. So one man's experience sometimes stands as a type for another's. Here in this psalm we observe that David was intensely excited ; his heart was “hot” within him. He was thinking deeply of some things he had done and suffered. By this he was moved. His inner nature was aroused to feeling. While he was musing, “the fire burned.” And at once his tongue was loosed. He had covenanted with himself previously that he would keep his mouth with a bridle ; he would hold his peace even from good ; he would be dumb with silence. But his heart was too strong for his will. His impetuous zeal within burst over and through the barriers of self-restraint, and found vent in speech ; he “spake” with his tongue.

Now, for our present service, it matters little what was the cause of his musing, or how unhalloved was the flame that burned, or how hasty were the words he spoke. The principle of human action is all we need just at this moment.

Whatever a man thoughtfully ponders, moves him ; whatever moves him hotly within, makes itself to be heard and known without.

That is to say, three things here mentioned are apt to follow each other in turn—meditation, emotion, utterance. If one fails, the others will be absent.

This thought will be found helpful in many instances, and will explain some mysteries in Christian experience. We make use of it here to-day as we approach the Lord's Table. If a Christian muses, while he is sitting at this communion feast, the fire of religious emotion will burn ; and when he is hot with feeling, his tongue will be loosed into speech.

I. The line of proper experience begins with meditation.

A true believer should seek to become a thoughtful man, so that God may be in all his thoughts. It was once charged as a sin upon Israel by God himself : " My people doth not consider." It is this after-process of digesting spiritual food which makes it available for nourishment. When wonderful things were spoken of the infant Jesus, we are told that " Mary pondered them in her heart." Here, at the communion-table, beyond all other places in the wide world, we ought to be meditative. We all profess to be, and we all ought to be, " musing."

1. There is our former state to come in review. Most appropriate it is for a child of adoption to

No claim or desert.

The cripple Mephibosheth.

call to mind his early home of poverty, his worry and his want before the generous offer came which brought him to the mansion of plenty. And most meet it is for the adopted sons and daughters of the Lord God Almighty to think soberly of the time when they were far from his love.

How helpless we were when the call of divine favor came! Poor old Mordecai had some sort of a claim on King Ahasuerus. Barzillai had once put David under obligation to him. But we had never done anything for God, when he showed us his tenderness and grace. We were simply lost and ruined when the Saviour found us.

How unlovely and undeserving we were when he offered us his highest honors! In the barley-field, the beauty of Ruth found fitting exhibition before the eyes of her kinsman Boaz, and this won him to do her a kindness. Even the outcast infant Moses, down in the bulrush-ark, was a goodly child in the estimate of Pharaoh's daughter. But we had no spiritual loveliness—none whatever—to commend us to God's mercy.

How unpromising for the eternal future we were, when Christ brought us the pardon of our sins! Timothy gave all his young fresh heart to Paul, and so the apostle loved him. The crippled Mephibosheth was Jonathan's child; so David proffered him a seat at the royal table. But we had been rebels and enemies all our lives, and in no sense did we promise anything better for the

years to come. God never chose any man for what he was, nor for what he had been, nor for what unaided he was going to be. Just here, at this loneliest point, with no earthly parallel even for an illustration, the great grace of our Saviour began.

Now, this is a thing to be thought of. Our former state comes in review. God commended his love toward us, "in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

2. Then, next to this, there would come the plan for our relief, as a new theme for meditation. Of this the simple elements employed at the communion-table are designed to remind us. They picture the thought they suggest. The broken bread relates the whole story of the Cross; the wine poured out tells the tale of sorrowful Calvary.

The sacrificial atonement of our Lord Jesus Christ is the chief theme for our musing at this feast, just as it was the chief theme of conversation on the mount where our Lord was transfigured, when Moses and Elijah talked of "his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem." Here, as nowhere else, "ye do show the Lord's death, till he come."

The sacrificial atonement of our Lord Jesus Christ is what renders this ordinance the highest among all the institutions of the New Testament church. It is far more than a mere monument of commemoration; it is an instrument of instruc-

A doctrinal sermon.

Quaint old rhyme.

tion. Every administration of the Lord's Supper is one of the most vivid and powerful doctrinal sermons human ears are ever permitted to hear. "Christ and his cross are all our theme." Here at the table, each Christian should expect to receive, and should receive, a clearer and more admiring view of God's wisdom in furnishing a plan of salvation so stupendous, and provisions for carrying it out so munificent. Such a view he certainly will receive, if he "muses."

3. Nor is this all: there remains as a theme for meditation the present exalted position which the true believer occupies.

It is the wonderful swiftness of the change which men of the world can never be made to understand. From the lowest to the highest, from the mendicant to the prince, in one supreme moment the sinner becomes a child, the servant a son. Why is the rapidity of the spiritual change considered suspicious? Joseph stepped from the pit to the ruler's throne in Pharaoh's kingdom; Daniel came from the lion's den into Nebuchadnezzar's palace. Bartimeus was one instant blind, the next instant he saw. God never does anything imperfectly. The quick conversions recorded in the New Testament are the most worthy of trust. It was a quaint old rhyme which told the simple truth of Saul of Tarsus:

"Between the stirrup and the ground,
He mercy sought, and mercy found."

But the extent of the change is what appears to

Our exalted position.

Fire in one's bones.

the Christian the most marvellous, after all. "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons of God." We have the name of a new parent ; we are cared for from a new treasury ; we are defended by a new power ; we are guided by a new wisdom ; we are governed by a new sovereignty. We are reckoned in the royal family, and made heirs of a celestial estate. Justice, who came to us with a drawn sword demanding penalty, now stands at the door of the banquet-hall challenging the accuser, and crying out, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?"

Oh, these are the things to muse upon at the Lord's table ! These are the themes of thought which never grow old. We feel at such times as we imagine King David must have felt when he said : "Who am I, O Lord God ! and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto ? And this was yet a small thing in thy sight, but thou hast spoken also of thy servant's house for a great while to come."

II. Thus we reach our second point in the text. While the Christian muses, the fire burns. He feels like Jeremiah of old : "his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones ; I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay." Emotion follows meditation ; the believer's heart is full.

1. Gratitude is one of the elements of his feeling. Like Naaman, when he came up healed and

Gratitude and joy." Three great leaps."

clean out of Jordan, the new convert wants to make a present to somebody. If we were to analyze our wish, we should find that it has risen out of a recollection of what Jesus Christ has done for us. We love him because he first loved us. Thus the fire of gratitude burns.

2. Joy is another element of the true Christian's emotion. The moment that, in Bunyan's allegory, the burden of sin rolled off from the Pilgrim's back and was lost in the Saviour's sepulchre, one shining spirit came forth to say words of cheer and pardon ; then another stripped him of his rags, and clothed him with a change of raiment ; a third set a mark on his forehead, and presented him with a roll having a seal on it, which roll he was to give in at the celestial gate. Now, observe the happy Christian left all alone ; what did he do ? Will you smile at the poverty of Bunyan's quaint conceit ? What else could he do with his hero in that supreme height of experience, when he was so light-hearted and glad he could not contain himself ? He tells us that the Pilgrim " gave three great leaps for joy and went on singing." Thus the fire of joy burns.

3. Self-abasement is another element in the believer's emotion. True gratitude is always self-distrustful and modest. What has been received seems so much ; what can be returned seems so little. The soul of the humble Christian is as timid and bashful as that of the Bride in the Canticles. When the King says to her, " Thou art

"Fairest among women."

A child's sudden gladness.

beautiful, O my love, as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem!" she almost seeks to hide herself, and would murmur, "Look not upon me, because I am black, because the sun hath looked upon me!" But when he replies again so kindly and cheerfully, "O thou fairest among women," all she can say is, in the depth of her wonder: "He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love." Thus the fire of self-abasement burns.

4. Affection, therefore, may be considered the chief element in the Christian's emotion at the communion-table. There are periods in which the sternest heart seems more distended with feeling than usual, more agitated with love to an unseen Saviour than is its wont. We sit under his shadow with great delight. Like the disciples going to Emmaus, we feel a strange sort of welcome for his presence. Our hearts "burn within us" as he seems to talk by the way. We count all things but loss for the excellency of Christ. This ordinance has a sort of beckoning character to it. We have seen a child run to his father's arms sometimes with a full burst of surprising gladness, a shout of simple-hearted laughter fairly ringing in the room as he buried his face in his bosom. Now, this was not because that child just then discovered in his parent's face a loveliness he never saw before, nor because there flashed across his mind a sudden remembrance of how much he owed to his father for his care along the years;

“Mary—Rabboni.”

Speaking out refreshes.

but simply because in the midst of his play he caught a glimpse of a gesture from him ; he saw his arms were held out toward him, and so he rushed to reach his welcome in the caress. So at the communion-table, we seem to notice that our Lord is beckoning us to come into nearness of companionship with him. Mary Magdalene may stand in sorrow even when the gardener is at her side. But if he says “Mary” to her, in a way no one else ever said it, she will answer “Rabboni,” in her turn. But her love will have in it possibly less of prostration, and perhaps more of tears. So may ours ; while we are musing, the fire of affection burns.

III. Now we move on in the order of our text. Such feeling as this we have analyzed together will be sure to find vent. All these elements of Christian emotion are active. When they pervade the soul, they move the man. Generally they find manifestation in speech : “While I was musing,” says David, “the fire burned ; then spake I with my tongue.”

The child of God finds three objects of address in the utterance to which his emotion at the communion-table leads him. In the words of the young Elihu, he acknowledges it would do him good to talk : “I am full of matter ; the spirit within me constraineth me ; I will speak that I may be refreshed ; I will open my lips and answer.” The Christian has something he would like to say to his Saviour, to himself, to his fellowmen.

1. What would he be likely to say to God? Remembering all that had been done for him, and all that now was freely put at his disposal, praise and prayer are what he would choose for the vehicles of his expression. Christ himself would be all his meditation and remark. From the very fulness of his soul he would join with the apostle in exclaiming, "Thanks be unto thee for thine unspeakable gift."

This is the reason why holy men of old passed so suddenly into doxology, the moment they began to talk concerning the atonement made by Jesus. John was about to pen the Book of Revelation; there was no rhetorical reason at all why he should begin with an ascription of praise. But he mentioned the name of Jesus Christ as the "faithful witness," and instantly he could not contain himself; he burst forth: "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory, and dominion forever and ever. Amen." So Paul; he was composing a cool theological letter to the Romans. He had no need to do anything more than to reason clearly and prove his points. But the vision of grace and glory was too much for him. Overpowered with his own thought, he rose right up through his logic with an ascription of adoring wonder. In the midst of his argument, you are startled to see him lift his clasped hands to exclaim: "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge

Communion hymns by proxy !

The prodigal's thoughts.

of God ! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out !”

This is the reason, likewise, why communion hymns are always sung so much with the spirit and the understanding also. Christians are filled to the full with the love of God. When believers are most devoutly religious, they most sensitively disdain the aid of others in uttering their songs. They want to sing for themselves. Think of requesting another person to be our spokesman when we wish to say :

“ On thee alone my hope relies,
Beneath thy cross I fall ;
My Lord, my Life, my Sacrifice !
My Saviour, and my All !”

Oh, we need more of this outspeaking of our hearts unto God—more of this musing, and more of this burning fire—then will our prayers and our praises be fervent and effectual !

2. But what would the child of God be likely to say to his own soul at the communion-table ? Do you think that the prodigal son, who had returned once more to his father's house, had no speech with himself that night, when he found his home again in his old chamber ? He had made all the words he could with his father below ; but now, alone in the room where his better years had been spent, had he nothing to say to his own heart ? It seems to me we should all agree, if we were to say he sat down a moment for reflection, and then arose to cry out : “ Oh, how good, how

A fresh start taken.

Chamber called "Peace."

patient, how generous my father has been to me !” But next to that, he would begin to make resolutions for all the future. He would congratulate himself on his safety, and on his welcome, and on his prospects. He would counsel his own soul as to the old besetting sins. He would warn himself against former associates whose influence had led him astray. He would plan ingeniously how he would make up lost time, and give comfort to his father. And I think he would seek some way to win back his brother who had been rebuked.

Thus the Christian at the communion-table will have words enough to say to himself, as well as to God. We remember another scene in “Pilgrim’s Progress ;” Christian was left in a large upper chamber, whose window opened toward the sun-rising. There he slept until the break of day ; then he awoke and sang :

“ Where am I now ? Is this the love and care
Of Jesus ; for the men that pilgrims are,
Thus to provide ? That I should be forgiven,
And dwell already the next door to heaven !”

It would be better for us if we talked more to ourselves, and made such melody in our hearts. We ought to speak to our own souls words of comfort, words of counsel, words of cheer, words of resolve, words of hope. And we shall help ourselves thus by our “ musing.”

3. Then, finally, the true Christian will have something to say to his fellow-men when he comes forth from the communion-table, provided he has

Let others know.

Let others share.

been musing aright. What the Psalmist said once seems always appropriate : " Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul."

The heart longs to have others *know* the love of God. Why are we ever reluctant to speak of what we have received? It is a most singular matter of observation, that persons of highest classical education are not offended when they hear the heroes of Homer attributing all their successes to the gods ; but when devout Christians do the same, and claim special providences as themes of grateful acknowledgment, they will call it cant. It is well for the New Testament believer to show himself always as religious at least as one of the pagans of the Iliad. Let him muse ; let the fire burn ; then let him speak with his tongue.

The heart longs more still to have others *share* the love of God. The spirit of Christianity is diffusive. No wish of any human heart is more solicitous than that which a Christian feels at the Lord's table for those who are outside of the guest-chamber. Our true relief is found in simply speaking out. Let the sweet, glad invitation of the gospel be pressed at the moment when the heart is full of desire. Let the tongue speak, when the fire burns ; let the fire burn when the heart muses, for love itself is a force.

The grand conclusion from all this discussion is simple enough, my Christian friends, but it is full

A grateful insanity.

“A man died for me.”

of meaning. Let all true believers talk constantly, talk openly, talk earnestly of the love of God. No matter how plain and direct the words may be, let no tongue consent to be silent, lest even the stones cry out.

I have read of a man who was saved from a wrecked vessel. But he had the unspeakable horror of seeing the very sailor who had dragged him ashore, swept—worn and spent as he was—back into the waves, and drowned before his eyes. His reason shook a little under the strain. After long months of care, of waiting, and of nursing, his sense returned so that he resumed his place among men. But he never forgot his obligation. He could say but little; but it was noticed that he always closed every conversation, whether of business or of friendliness, whether with stranger or with acquaintance, with the pathetic words, “A man died for me once!” He would come back, after he had closed the door, with a soft, gentle, wistful look on his face, and say, “A man died for me once!”

Oh, my friend, whoever you are, possibly you can say no more than that, but *that* you can say, “A man died for me once!” Take your fellow-man by the hand; tell him that Jesus Christ was crucified for you on Golgotha. Speak of it modestly; speak of it tenderly and lovingly; and so may God’s blessing help you sometimes to speak of it winningly, and thus lead another soul to salvation.

X.

THE RESERVED POWER OF GOD.

“ HE HAD HORNS COMING OUT OF HIS HAND : AND THERE WAS THE HIDING OF HIS POWER.”—*Habakkuk* 3 : 4.

THIS chapter is entitled : “ A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, set to Shigionoth.” And our English Bibles say in the margin : “ According to variable songs or tunes, called in Hebrew Shigionoth.”

A horn is the ancient symbol of strength. When here brought into use, the impression is for a moment gained that the divine attribute of omnipotence is to be put under process of exhibition.

But just at that point the inspired poet withdraws from the effort, and signifies he only desires to intimate what he does not aspire to reach. He thus describes almightiness most impressively by declining to describe it at all. He does not say, as we are expecting, “ He had horns coming out of his hand, and there was his power ;” but he says, “ There was the hiding of his power.”

Just as if some master-painter had limned upon his canvas the recognized and sinewy form of Samson, as the one type of giant violence and force ; and, while you were waiting curiously to

Rhetorical ingenuity.

God in nature.

discover the bold features of his countenance, and measure somewhat the muscles of the arm which upheld the brazen gates of Gaza, the cunning artist had surprised you by picturing the Hebrew champion with his face averted and his arm hidden behind the burly bulk of his frame.

So the prophet here presents omnipotence. By an ingenuity of rhetoric, he offers, concerning this truly indescribable attribute, a hint far more suggestive than any plain words could furnish.

Our theme of thought this morning is just this, thus dimly indicated—*the reserved power of God*. Power he has in display, but the power he possesses undisplayed is far greater. In the hand we gaze upon there is might in exercise ; this no one of us has intended to forget ; we all recognize and admire the almightiness of God. But while we are looking, we suddenly catch a glimpse of the horns that come out of the hand, and there is the hiding of his might in reserve. To illustrate this possession, and infer some practical good from the discovery of it, is our present aim.

I. And to show you in the outset how perfectly unambitious and unlabored is meant to be the tranquil development of our theme, let me ask you, in the first place, to enter the field of nature around us for a brief examination of what is familiar. Something, I feel sure, we shall find that we know ; more it is possible we shall find which is not so much seen as it is suggested.

The truth is, our knowledge of either what God

Earthquake in the Indies.Might hints at all-might.

can do or of what he does do is relative. More experience, wider range of educated acquaintance, always shows us that we have a great deal more yet to learn. A stranger in the Indies is startled one morning by the shaking of an earthquake. It is a mere jar of the planet, and is going to do no harm; but he imagines it one of the severest convulsions that ever rocked the universe. But some bronzed old planter there will smile at his trepidation, telling the story of that former occasion, when, amid the throes of writhing matter, the trembling of the hills, the crash of dwellings, the wild surges of the unseen waves of subterranean fire, it would have been well to grow alarmed for one's self, and awe-struck at the resistless danger.

So we all are accustomed to pass on up through the line of a personal and historic experience, finding always a degree beyond a degree—something to reach that was not expected. Hence it would be difficult to say whereabouts our sense of power ought to end or our conjecture of the hiding of power ought to begin. An infinite suggestiveness seems to pervade the universe. Might hints at more might, and advances toward all-might; potency proves omnipotence.

For we say to ourselves, If God can do all this which we see in the rushing of the torrents, the sweep of the hurricane, the upheaving of the ocean, and the swinging of the stars, what is there he cannot do? Could not he, who crushes a slip

Whispers and thunders.God in history.

so resistlessly between icebergs, crush a world just as well? Could not he, who uproots the tree so suddenly with his lightning in the summer storm, shiver a universe as swiftly with only the bright glancing of his eye? To a child there is in these sublime effects merely the evidence and the exhibition of a power before which he trembles. But to the mature man there is in them the hiding of power before the mystery of which he trembles much more. "Lo, these are but parts of his ways; how there is only a whisper heard of him; the thunder of his power, who can understand!" If the hand be so admirable to a thoughtful beholder, what shall we say concerning the horns within the hand, that show a reserve the limit of which is not known?

II. Rising a little higher in our thought, we find, in the second place, new illustrations of the theme in the wide economics of Divine Providence, which our God is continually managing.

All history now lies open before us. See how quickly and quietly the Almighty controls the generations of men. How easily, in that far beginning, he scattered the race to people the world with men and beasts! We talk about the strength of human governments abroad over the continents and along the ages; think how many of potent kings he has swept away with the breath of his nostril! Just try to recall how vast a number of princes have occupied any given territory since the crucifixion of Christ, Nowhere is there found

Sand in an elephant's eye.

Things foolish and base.

so plain and full a record of the reserved power God holds as has been written on the ruins of the dying dynasties he has overthrown.

Now, the one thing to notice in this particular is the strange fact that, in the accomplishment of such vast and revolutionary designs, the mighty God has not seen fit to employ ordinary means at all. The convulsions of empire by which the earth's history grows clear have always been brought about in some novel, some singular and unprecedented, way that gave a surprise when it arrived. For example, a grain of sand is drifted into the eye of an elephant in the lead of a cohort of soldiers ; this starts a panic ; the army is defeated, the kingdom is overthrown. So again : only the east wind drives down suddenly upon the English sea ; an armada is scattered ; a savage expedition against Protestantism is thwarted ; a free sovereignty is released from menace, and the Reformation is confirmed.

This is the rule : God does great things, not by his power only, as we see it in exercise, but more yet by his power in reserve. Evidently he is moving men and things always by resistless energy ; but his methods have oftentimes been obscure. He has had his will ; " but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise ; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty ; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not,

Coral and coal.Inventions and discoveries.

to bring to naught things that are ; that no flesh should glory in his presence.”

Hence, so far from believing Jehovah has exhausted his whole resources in these stupendous arrangements of the nations which he has managed, we are only the more forcibly impressed by the conclusion that greater power was hidden than was disclosed. Every now and then some new discovery comes out to view, showing that what amazed us so much was no unexpected thing to him. To-day it may be a fresh island, on the formation of which the coral insects have silently been toiling for unnoticed ages. To-morrow it may be a new sea, in which tribes of strange inhabitants have been maturing for fitful years. One season the coal-beds are opened, where the far-casting foresight of God, unwatched and unsuspected, had laid down supplies of solid fuel, myriads of generations before even one man had been born. Another season we discover fresh natural agencies going forth to supplement human industry, the most subtle elements of the air obediently bearing errands of ingenuity and need. More and more we are becoming convinced that there is no limit to these inventions and discoveries. Each successive disclosure of God's unique and surprising methods of working is only a sign that there is no end to the wisdom he has in employ. The moment we see where his hand is uplifted, we look instinctively to learn what the horn in the hand is going to do ; for there is the hiding of his power.

Some inferences.

Inadequate knowledge of God.

We need go no further in mere illustration. It is sufficiently clear that there is an infinite measure of power in the hand of God reserved for every exigency which may call it forth. A few inferences from this fact will make the whole subject now our own.

1. First of all, you see here, of course, the feebleness and inadequacy of many of our ordinary conceptions of our Maker.

We meditate often on omnipotence ; for it is perhaps the most striking in its manifestations of all the attributes of the divine Being. We are wont to tremble in the storm ; we hush our voices at the roar of the sea ; we are appalled by the hurricane ; we feel new alarm at each coming of a pestilence ; and we say confusedly, Only God is great ! But when we pass beyond the reach of sight, and suffer our minds to be touched by hints and suggestions alone, how is it possible for us to force ourselves up to that more exalted realization of him which is based upon the unseen and unknown ? If the notion of finite power be so subduing to human thought, what shall we venture to say concerning power which is infinite ?

Still, this is only one and the plainest of the Divine attributes. Omnipotence, with all its includings of power in exercise and power in reserve, with all its surroundings and implications, with all its stupendous inferences and possibilities, is only one element in the conception we are to have of our Maker. He has wisdom as well as

All attributes in reserve.

Moses in the rock-cleft.

power ; and he has, of course, reserved wisdom as absolutely as he has reserved power. He has goodness likewise, and so he must have reserved goodness also. God has reserved holiness, which we could not even comprehend now. So he has justice in exercise, and justice in reserve. Each one of his attributes, in like manner, doubles on our imagination. Beyond all we learn of it, an infinity of manifestation which none of our minds can wholly grasp stretches away out of sight. And just this offers us a hint as to the occupations of heaven ; there will be much yet to learn of Jehovah's excellence forever, when we stand in his revealed presence.

When, therefore, we have been straining our feeble faculties to their utmost tension, rising to the extreme exercise of our imaginations just to attain the one idea of almightiness, then comes a humiliating remembrance that we have only touched one single point in his perfections ; all the rest remain unexhausted and untouched. "Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is as high as heaven ; what canst thou do? deeper than hell ; what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea." The most we can hope to do is to hide in the cleft of the rock, as did Moses, and then feel we have discovered no more than the skirts of the train of the divine glory, while Jehovah passed majestically by !

Uncontrolled power frightens.

Unexhausted stores of love.

2. Hence, in the second place, you can mark here the comfort and the confirmation of every true believer in his time of need.

The essential notion of power is not an altogether welcome or agreeable one to the human soul—that is, power outside of itself, and not subject to its own control. The child is afraid of a panoplied soldier close by, even before it has any reason to apprehend danger. A passing train upon a track, the prodigious stroke of an engine-beam, the sharp plunge of a pile-driver, chills even a self-possessed bystander into discomfort. But let that power be understood to be controlled by sagacity, and to be marshaled in our own interest, and it becomes all the more welcome in proportion to its resistless force. Its very strength renders it valuable to us.

Hence, omnipotence is a most acceptable attribute in the estimation of any established child of God. The more resources gathered into the protection his Father throws over him, the safer his heart knows itself to be. “If God be for us, who can be against us?” So he rests in perfect tranquillity. “The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it, and is safe.”

Each believer lives in the conscious conviction that, if at any time he should be too much overcome, there will be a sudden revealing of help from the unexhausted stores of God’s love. It has always arrested the wonder of the world to see this confidence. A daring faith moves stead-

No help seen.Unseen help comes.

ily forward into uttermost peril. You can find sometimes a Christian standing out alone and aloof from other men. Villification is trying to wound him, detraction is seeking to bring him down. Human assistance forsakes his cause. His arms hang weary at his side, and yet he will not yield. The gibing community maligns and misrepresents him. The devil plies him with impudent temptation. You think he cannot bear these onsets. You imagine you see signs of his wavering now. You begin to whisper, "He is at his wits' end already, he will break before long!"

Not so : he will hold his own. "Why, how?" you ask ; "no conceivable power can reach him!" Well, perhaps so ; but *inconceivable* power can reach him. Unseen help will be disclosed when he needs it. If the hand of God fails, there are horns coming out of the hand.

Watch a moment longer, and you will see that mountain, which now appears so bleak and bare, full of horses and chariots of fire. And in due time that weak man will be found charging on his foes in all the majesty of success, with the high legions of God's host for his defence ! For they that be for him are more than they that be against him. All power in heaven and on earth shall be brought into the stubborn conflict, before one of God's children shall die.

Let this thought sink deep into the innermost heart of every distressed Christian. You fear trial coming ; you apprehend it may be too severe

Power enough for anything.

Giant and pigmy.

for you. Cease all that needless alarm. Moses will divide the Red Sea, Joshua will pile up the Jordan in walls, Elijah will wield fire from heaven, Paul will take the ship to land. If the well-known hand of God cannot do this, the unknown horns in the hand will do it. If power fails, the hiding of power will supplement it. For God is on the side of his people; he is sure to open his stores of deliverance when the stress arrives. Only remember one thing: "Ask, and ye shall receive." You will find yourself reaching the horns that come out of the hand, only when you are at the moment sure you are clinging to the horns of the altar!

3. And, finally, you see here the utter fruitlessness and folly of any rebellious sinner's further contending with God.

Let those who are boldly impenitent still remember that such a contest is between forces not at all equally matched. It is not a confronting of power with power, but simply of a will with limitless force with a will it keeps in being while it opposes its foolish violence. It is like a giant's fighting a pigmy who stands up in his hand; he has only to drop him to end the derision. Oh, my friend, you will certainly go down soon! No hand ever lifted here against God's hand has been known to prosper. He proffers amnesty: "See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away

Contending with horses.

“The part of the hand.”

from him that speaketh from heaven; whose voice then shook the earth; but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven.” “If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? and if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?”

Oh, a truce to this old wild warfare with the omnipotent God! Cease, O man, whose breath is in his nostrils! This power in exercise seems appalling enough; but what will be the energy of the omnipotence yet held in reserve! Belshazzar saw on the walls of his palace only “the part of the hand which wrote.” But it made his knees tremble. What must have been the Arm and the Form behind it!

XI.

THE "NUNC DIMITTIS" OF SIMEON.

"LORD, NOW LETTEST THOU THY SERVANT DEPART IN PEACE, ACCORDING TO THY WORD."—*Luke 2 : 29.*

THIS recital calls us back to a scene in the Temple at Jerusalem, more than eighteen hundred years ago.

The transient stay in the village of Bethlehem was over ; Joseph and Mary had taken the newborn child up to the sacred city in order to present him before the Lord. They stood in the court outside of the sanctuary. Their modest gift of two turtle-doves had been brought, and the smoke of the offering was curling aloft from the altar. There rises to our view a picture of humble devotion.

Our eyes seem to behold the linen-robed Levite, the stalwart form of the Nazarene carpenter, and the retiring figure of his modest young wife. We see the Holy Infant lying in the arms of its mother. No ring of light is around her head ; no luminous effulgence shines from the child's face. We need not be shocked at missing absolutely from this scriptural description all mention of either the *aurcole* or the *nimbus* of artistic tradition. The group are just human and real like

ourselves, quietly waiting until their proper sacrifice shall have been accomplished in an orderly way.

At this interesting moment an old man comes up to them. His bent form is venerable even in its feebleness. He takes the babe in his own arms. It seems singular to see those two faces resting so closely together. Infancy and old age are met; second childhood holds first childhood by the hand while it sings a wonderful song.

There is something more than mere curiosity in the feeling of interest with which we watch for the words we expect will be spoken by such a man as this Old Testament Christian Simeon. Like all the rest of those whose story passes before us in this record, he casts his language into poetry, and utters a chant that the church has in all ages loved, and to which it has given its Latin name from the opening words, "*Nunc dimittis*"—"Now thou lettest depart."

I. The first thing that strikes our notice here is *the singular illustration offered of the paradox of Christian life*. How extraordinary is the disparity between these two persons, and yet how absolutely the one seems to rest in the other! Jesus lies safely in Simeon's arms; Simeon reposes his life for all the untold future in Jesus' Messiahship. Imagine the contrasts: the many long years of the man—the brief entry upon life of the infant; the established reputation of the inspired singer—the low peasant history of the Galilean babe.

Faith in a mere infant.The "Everlasting Father."

And still this puny weakness is accepted implicitly by this mature strength. The contradictions and reversals of ordinary estimates are bewildering, as we attempt to measure and to match them. Yet "without all contradiction the less is blessed of the better." Simeon's soul is held up forever by the little child whose body he now holds in his hands !

We could not deal with this incident profitably if we had not in Christian history become somewhat accustomed to the wonderful paradoxes of believers' experience in Christ. "When I am weak, then am I strong." The words of the ancient father in the church, Tertullian, are suggestive : "The Son of God was born," says he ; "and that awakes no shame precisely because it is so shameful ; the Son of God died ; that is thoroughly credible, because it is absurd ; the Son of God was buried and rose again ; that is certain because it is impossible." For what else could we expect, when we read in Isaiah's prophecy that this child was the everlasting Father ? We can explain nothing in this strange scene without considering that Jesus was the true Messiah, and the Messiah was the incarnate God.

II. So this presents another lesson : here is a *satisfactory style of piety for an unwavering dependence*. There are faiths and religions, there are rituals and creeds, there are persuasions and experiences, enough almost to fill the world. Only some of them do not meet the end for which they

Managing a candle.Felix Neff's remark.

have been commended. "The candle of the wicked shall be put out," and the candle of the righteous, too, if it be an uncertain and untrustworthy sort of candle. Now, let us remember that it is no time to judge of a candle in the calm inclosure of a still room ; let it be taken out sometime into the violence of the wind. Many a man has what he calls his religion ; and it does very well when shielded and sheltered, but it goes out ignobly in darkness and betrayal under the wild rush of discipline, or the hurricane gusts of tempestuous passion.

It is evident that here in Simeon's case we find a perfectly settled rest for any human soul. His full content with it is edifying and unmistakable. We are told he had been "waiting for the consolation of Israel." It was "revealed unto him that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ." Hence, the moment he holds the infant Redeemer in his arms, he exclaims, "My eyes have seen thy salvation." He was willing to take his eternal life on Christ's own terms, and so he was perfectly satisfied. It mattered nothing to him that he was an old man, and this was a babe ; nor that he was a wise man, and this was only a peasant infant forty days old ; he expressed his entire contentment with the plan infinite wisdom had devised for human reliance.

Men may as well start with this ; they must begin by accepting terms already made, and cease trying to make new ones. Felix Neff once told

A religion worth having.

The purpose of the Gospel.

even a minister this : " There is much truth in your sermon, but it lacks one important thing : you still wish men to go to Jesus with lace sleeves, instead of going to him in rags as they are."

It seems best to kindle our imagination all it will bear, so as to picture the attitude and action of this old Jerusalem Christian vividly. Simeon takes that child in his arms, asking no questions whatever. He is happy enough to get Mary's infant near his heart ; just to look down fondly upon its forehead with an unspeakable awe and a reverent affection. The wise old patriarch held his divine Teacher in his tremulous embrace ; his immortal destiny was in a Redeemer whose small body he held poised upon the fingers of his hand. Could he go now and lay his gray hair in the grave, and trust this mere infant to work out for him a sure resurrection ?

Here, then, is a religion actually worth the having. For behold, in one flash of vast disclosure, the very summit of his devotion. He says he is satisfied to go now, ready to depart. Nay, more ; he does depart from history on the instant. The last sight we ever see of this venerable believer is here. No record is rendered further, how he lived, or when he died.

III. So again : we find here *an intelligent and exemplary appreciation of the exact purpose of the gospel*. It will be well to put alongside of this song Simeon's prophecy, which comes just after it. This good old man tells that young mother

precisely what her child was "set" for. Christ was appointed to prostrate men from self-dependence, and raise them again into full union with himself. His heart would be pierced in suffering, and so would Mary's, before the history should be finished. But Christ's sufferings would work out an atonement by which sinners might be saved. Here comes in the old figure of a robe, a removal and a substitution of garments; men are clothed in the righteousness of Christ.

"Oh, I want the fountain of Jesus' blood every day," once wrote pious John Berridge; "his intercession every moment; and I would not give a groat for the broadest fig-leaves to cover me! A robe I must have, of one whole piece, broad as the law, spotless as the light, and richer than an angel ever wore—the robe of Jesus himself. And when the Elder Brother's raiment is put on me, good Isaac will receive and bless for its sake the lying varlet Jacob."

It is because of this feature in Simeon's testimony to Jesus that the churches at large have for so many centuries accepted it as the part of the service most frequent and familiar. The evangelical recognition of the atonement is what gives it its value. It is because he has seen a salvation prepared "before the face of all people," that this old man says he is satisfied.

The ancient Evening Hymn, to which the name of the *Nunc Dimittis* has been given, appears thus in the Apostolical Constitutions:

 Note variations of phraseology.

 A lesson of trust.

" Praise, ye servants, the Lord ;
 Praise the name of the Lord.
 We praise thee, we sing hymns to thee, we bless thee
 For thy great glory.
 O Lord, King, the Father of the Christ, the spotless Lamb
 Who taketh away the sin of the world,
 Thee becometh praise, thee becometh hymn, thee glory becometh,
 The Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,
 Forever and ever. Amen.

" Now lettest thou thy servant depart, O Lord,
 According to thy word, in peace ;
 For mine eyes have seen thy salvation,
 Which thou didst prepare against the face of all the peoples,
 A light unto revelation of Gentiles and glory of thy people
 Israel."

Some few variations in the phraseology of this translation are noticeable ; but, like the *Gloria in Excelsis*, which serves as a Morning Hymn in many of the ancient liturgies, it introduces that significant and pathetic phrase concerning the " Lamb who taketh away the sin of the world." Here stands the unalterable witness of the ages that there can be salvation only through the merit of a sacrificial atonement for sin. And that was the end for which the Redeemer died.

IV. In the fourth place, we have here a *lesson of trust for New Testament Christians from an Old Testament believer*. It is a pity that scriptural biography is at times so poorly appreciated. Some of us are willing to compliment the faith, courage, or grace of the good that are gone ; and yet we do not appear to be much influenced by it.

Plutarch once said that Demosthenes was excellent in praising the acts of his ancestors, but not so good at imitating them. Such inconsistency did not die with the Greek orator, or exhaust itself among the classic heathen; it may be witnessed near by.

There are so-called Christians who commend Job's patience, and then fly into a passion; who admire David's dumbness under affliction, and then speak out fiercely in rebellion; who instance Eli's resignation, while they clamor with impatience under far less calamities. And it may be feared to-day that some will be found to admire the sweet, serene confidence of Simeon, without at all being disposed to accept for once and forever the Saviour he trusted.

Picture just that instant in which this old man stands gazing down upon the face of the infant for the first time. Was this all to which mighty generations had been looking during those thousands of years that were gone? Was it just this weak little peasant babe that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had seen afar off, and been glad to see? Was he what the ancient prophets had descried in the distance, as they stood peering off from the watch-towers of a militant Zion, the flashing seer-light in their eyes as they sang? Was this the King, whom King David had so celebrated in his psalms? Alas for the poor show the new Monarch now made! Yet Simeon accepts him!

Just remember that it was everything or noth-

Everything or nothing.

John Quincy Adams.

ing to this old man to make his decision. No half-way allegiance would do. Jesus was the Messiah or nothing. Surrender to him would carry time and eternity with it, and he surrendered. Christ is always to every human being just everything or nothing. It is useless to seek even the slightest compromise ; it is sober business to rest wholly in him.

V. So we reach our last lesson : here is *a beautiful picture of readiness for death*. We must note the language carefully. Simeon does not use a prayer in the *Nunc Dimittis* ; he only makes a declaration. He does not say—now *let* me depart ; he says—now thou *dost let* me depart. We feel certain that this man had been waiting a good while. Such unusual preparedness for departure was the gradual growth of years. It was no sudden explosion of experience, but must have had its increments of spiritual increase as many and as various as the rings of fibre in the trunk of a palm-tree.

Of one of the fathers of this republic, an “ old man eloquent,” it was once written in a verse of genial poetry :

“ His brow December, and his bosom May—
So should our hearts be, when our heads are gray.”

There is an old age full of querulous complaint and peevishness, under every on-coming of infirmity. It wears itself out in discontent ; it often vanishes at the last, and makes no sign. On the

Dean Alford's epitaph.

The martyr Ridley.

other hand, there is an old age like this of the illustrious Simeon in our lesson. The soul has leaned its all on God, and is perfectly satisfied because it knows it is perfectly safe. So George Herbert sings :

“ What have I left that I should stay and groan ?
 The most of me to heaven has fled ;
 My thoughts and joys are all packed up and gone ;
 And for their old acquaintance plead.”

Not even severe trial can alter the permanence of such trust. For heaven seems the only true thing in the universe, and death is nothing but a kind of rough way of going to it. Remember the beautiful inscription upon Dean Alford's tombstone ; how it describes a grave : “ The inn of a traveler on the way to Jerusalem ! ”

“ Charles, our people *die* well ! ” said John Wesley to his brother. Why is not that a proper test ? We take death-bed words without an oath in a court of justice ; a man is honest, if ever, in the moment when the great shadow is coming. Think of the martyr Ridley, the night before he was burned alive at the stake. One of his pitiful friends offered to sit up with him in the prison. “ Oh, no ! ” said the good man, “ what would you do with yourself ? I mean to go to bed, and sleep as quietly as ever I did in my life. My breakfast to-morrow will be sharp and painful ; but I am sure my supper will be right pleasant and sweet ! ”

Here, then, is that which removes all fear of

 Bondage to death.

 "Change—oh, wondrous change!"

death from the mind of those who may have been all their lives subject to bondage. Nothing frightful is left in it. It is only a transition, and salvation is beyond. Our fears of what is before us in the experience of death are intensified by our ignorance and our guilt. We count every unknown prospect as alarming, and we dread some possible arraignment of divine justice the moment we pass the veil. But when we find that "salvation" has come to lighten human souls, the future loses its hideous aspects. We rest in God, and a little child becomes our everlasting dependence. We are willing to go out of history, as a guest leaves a banquet; not despising the feast, but contented to move away from it, because all his hunger is satisfied. Hence, the mere act of death counts thereafter as nothing; Christ is beyond, and heaven is home. Perhaps one swift pang—then all is rest and peace forever.

" Oh, change —oh, wondrous change !
 Burst are the prison bars ;
 This moment there—so low
 In mortal prayer—and now
 Beyond the stars !
 Oh, change—stupendous change !
 There lies the senseless clod ;
 The soul from bondage breaks,
 The new immortal wakes—
 Awakes with God !"

XII.

RESTING IN THE LORD.

“RETURN UNTO THY REST, O MY SOUL, FOR THE LORD HATH DEALT BOUNTIFULLY WITH THEE.”—*Psalm 116* : 7.

THE very first thought which arrests our minds in considering a verse like this is concerning its welcomeness. There is a confessed need in human history and life of some element to tranquilize it. These restless confusions around us must be calmed into composure. The world is at present in a lapsed and secondary state. It was once beautiful and serene. Sin found its way in through the crevice of free-will. Then all the race felt the retribution. Even the inanimate globe was cursed by the fiat of the Almighty. A wild erratic force has, ever since that, heaved the primal strata into rugged ridges, and made volcanic rents of ruin.

We are all conscious of this unrest. We wake every morning with a kind of vague misgiving in our anticipation. Something will be sure to happen before nightfall to shatter a hope or defeat a purpose. We wonder that things move on so perversely. And when real trouble falls, nobody seems to care anything for the catastrophe. Mourners frequently remark how incongruously

Robert Burns's song.N. P. Willis's poem.

brilliant seems the sunshine on the day of the funeral. Nature is vexatiously unsympathetic. You remember how the Scottish bard complained in his pathetic song that the "banks and braes" of the bonny river he loved could "bloom so fresh and fair," while his own heavy heart remained "so weary, full of care." We feel quite sure that all this disturbance is unnecessary and unnatural.

"How strikingly the course of nature tells,
By its light heed of human suffering,
That man was fashioned for a happier world."

But dull as the course of nature is to all else, there can be no possible doubting its supreme sensitivity to sin. The rocks rended and the ground opened when that awful ignominy of the cross on which was crucified the Son of God shocked the universe. All the world is suspicious of wickedness. The one mighty disturbing element in the wide creation is found in the setting of a will against the divine will. It is the swing of a loose chain, and, bereft of the anchor it carried, dashing in the sides of the vessel it was intended to protect. The moment justice is defied and law broken there will certainly come violence and vibration.

What we want, then, most of all, is some interposition from on high to arrest the rocking and hold us firm to an equipoise. We cannot sustain ourselves, much less each other. Our help must

Centre of a solid wheel.

God's moveless throne.

be given from without. And earliest of all, there will have to be disclosed some centre of reference, some steady standard of strength, security, and repose.

Scientific men tell us that in the exact middle of every solid wheel, no matter how rapidly it whirls on its axis, there is one slender line of iron, one little needle of particles which really never moves at all. You can easily see this must be so. The atoms on the outer rim of the circumference swing swiftly around in their career. Those lying next circle more slowly. And hence there must be reached finally one filament of finest metal fibre running from end to end of the arbor, which rests positively *still*, while every other atom revolves around it. This very conception gives the imagination a marvelous sense of peace. It calms one's mind to think of it; it rests one's sensibilities, like the pause of a long breath.

Here catch at least a figure. In this intricate, complicated, and uneasy world there certainly is one central spot of serene repose. The moveless throne of God stands undisturbed in the white light that falls over it. And in it sits the ineffable majesty of that Wisdom which planned and that Power which executed all the decrees of human existence clear back to the far beginning. To that all our unrest bears reference; to that all our rest bears relation, fixed and absolute: "Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever."

Of course, therefore, we understand that the

Condition of obtaining rest.The hand held.

condition of any sort of rest or peace for a human soul is as simple as it is clear. *That soul must in some way get back to God.* It must settle its internal discords by an external and overmastering harmony of obedience. It must counteract its sin with an atonement. The will which acts as pilot must out-sing the sirens with a new song of its own. The old balance of adjustment must be restored with fresh self-renunciation.

Just there our Maker has met us with his plan. His own announcement is this, "The work of *righteousness* shall be peace, and the effect of *righteousness*, quietness, and assurance forever." The heart surrenders its rebellion, and comes back, as a wandering star from the blackness of darkness is restored to the sun. For, in the moment of pardon, God's parentage is disclosed also. We look up into the face of our Maker and discover he is our Father. So a serene confidence settles into our minds. We grow perfectly sure that whatever happens will be all right in the end; nay, is all right now, if we could only see the whole of it. Very brief is the conversation which passes in this supreme act of reconciliation. God says but one thing, and then we say one. He says: "I, the Lord, have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee." And then we say: "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee."

Then instantly enters the experience of satisfac-

Everything left with God.The woman of Tekoa.

tion and relief. No possible repose can ever have been enjoyed like that which now the true believer feels when he accepts, in all its mighty fulness of meaning, that simple declaration of the Divine Master: "Thy sins be forgiven thee, go in peace." Infinite benevolence and grace have assumed all the responsibility of relieving and managing human need. Calmly one leaves his lot in the hands of him who is perfectly equal to the task of ordering it wisely and well. He settles back like one delivered from long anxiety and pain, saying to himself: "What time I am afraid, I will put my trust in thee. I will both lay me down in peace and sleep, for thou, Lord, only makest me dwell in safety."

Still no generous soul will permit the meditation to end here. We must bear in mind whence all the favor comes. No man has a right to say, "Return unto thy rest, O my soul," without adding, in grateful ascription, "for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee." Most Scripture readers recollect that King David, righteously incensed by the rebellion of Absalom, punished his recreant son with exclusion from his presence for a period of years. Yet not everybody seems to remember the shrewd argument employed to influence his clemency by the woman of Tekoa. She only quoted the divine example; but her words sound like a gospel sermon preached in the Old Testament time. She wanted the monarch to bring back Absalom to the palace, and this is

 God bringing back his "banished."

 The sinking Peter.

what she said : " The king doth speak this thing as one which is faulty, in that the king doth not fetch home again his banished. For we must needs die, and are as water spilt on the ground which cannot be gathered up again ; neither doth God respect any person, *yet doth he devise means that his banished be not expelled from him.*"

Oh, the amazing freeness, the inexhaustible fullness of the mercy of God ! He has devised means so that none of us banished ones be expelled from him. What we could not at all do for ourselves, he has done freely for us. " He hath dealt bountifully" with every soul. Just here, with every reach and reference, the Bible shows itself as our truest friend. It keeps reminding us that we owe everything to God. It is a treasury of inspired encouragement and warning. It meets us oftentimes, as Jesus did the sinking Peter, with a rebuke and a relief in the same breath. It says, " O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt !" and then offers the divine hand for deliverance. One who reads this blessed volume for the first time will surely be arrested with the conviction that it must have been written from the beginning to the end for a race of weak and suffering creatures. The promises of help, and comfort, and peace, and rest are so many in number, and so tenderly sympathetic in temper, that we read at once our limitless need and God's measureless grace. We ought to include the Bible also whenever we say,

 What practical purpose?

 Danger of sinning.

“Return unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee!”

It seems better for a moment now to gather up the threads of discourse, in order that we may see just whereabouts we are. We have considered the necessity of periods of rest in an excited and troubled world like ours, the condition of its reception, and the temper in which it should be enjoyed. There remains only for our further notice the value there is to be found in it. The question is: To what practical purpose may this text of ours be put?

Just two dangers there seem to be into which any child of God may consciously or unconsciously run—that is, if he gets rash or precipitate under pressure of his perplexities, or if he becomes impetuous or impatient in feeling. These are *sinning* and *sinking*. He may go too far, and he may not go far enough. In the one case, he will behave presumptuously; in the other case, he will continue anxious, and perhaps will doubt. The remedy proffered here is precisely the same.

1. God will be sure to keep his people from *sinning*, if they will only return unto their rest.

The soul of even the best believer may sometimes be worried into rashness. Embarrassed by even the common events of life, many a man resorts to uncalled-for and unlawful means of extrication. Whereas the special rule of the divine government is this: “He that believeth shall not make haste.” Out of this impetuosity naturally

Presumptuous demand.Cannon on merchantmen.

results transgression. The true barrier of faith is overleaped. The Christian rushes into presumptuous demand. He clamors for some new and extraordinary interposition of Providence. He insists that relief shall be sent in his own form. That is to say, he exhausts in one wild sweep his entire inventory of resources, and then prays for more.

It is true that the Bible contains some most wonderful engagements covenanted by our heavenly Father. The soul has magnificent promises laid up in solemn carefulness for its most awful experiences and its severest needs. But these are not to be dragged into frantic service on the first alarm. They resemble those pieces of heavy ordnance with which merchantmen are sometimes equipped, that they may defend themselves from cruisers. Any soul, which is so anxiously and evermore on the alert to *keep* its rest, will find that it is just its own extravagant efforts which are *breaking* its rest. Just as if the solicitous and timid officers of the ship should keep the men wheeling out the cannon, and exploding them all along the voyage. Anybody can see that the disturbance would be owing, not to pirates, but to the noisy and reckless discharges of reserved defences. The great war-promises of God need not be quoted in hours of mere meditative peace. No soul can *rest* that is so awfully careful to guard its rest. We are to settle reposefully back on the common covenant, and remain quiet.

Zadok and the ark.

Danger of sinking.

We are sometimes set to wait *on* God ; and sometimes told just to wait *for* him. When we are hedged all about with difficulties, a tranquil reliance upon divine help will be of essential service in holding us back from overstepping legitimate limits. You will remember that when David was lonely and desolate out upon the Mount of Olives, looking down over his lost capital, he perceived a train of Levites coming out of the eastern gate with some heavy load upon their shoulders. As they drew nearer, he discovered that the priest Zadok, still loyal to his king, had conceived the bold design of removing the ark of the covenant bodily from the temple, and taking it along with the fugitive royalists into exile. But no exigency seemed trying enough to the sovereign to apologize for so extraordinary a maneuver. So he checked his adherents with the memorable words : “ Carry back the ark of God into the city ; if I shall find favor in the eyes of the Lord, he will bring me again, and show me both it and his habitation ; but if he thus say, I have no delight in thee ; behold, here am I, let him do to me as seemeth good unto him.” He was willing to rest in God’s love already pledged to him.

2. Furthermore, God will keep his people from *sinking*, as well as from sinning, if they will only fasten their faith upon his promises.

One moment more of unfaltering confidence would have planted Simon Peter, as he walked on the water, close at the side of Jesus. Merely be-

Easy frames of feeling.Napoleon carried bodily.

cause he grew suddenly self-conscious, he wavered more than the waves. He began to sink ignominiously for no other reason than because he thought he should. No one will ever know, until he reads his whole biography from the heavenly volumes, how many fine historic moments he has missed, just through lack of steadiness in the supreme pressure. He has failed merely through the fitfulness of his easy frames of feeling. He might have held on an instant longer, and been safe.

There is one most beautiful engagement of help announced in the Scriptures, couched in a figure of even more significant aptness than usual: "The eternal God is thy refuge, and *underneath are the everlasting arms.*" You cannot have forgotten that most interesting incident in secular history, recorded of the French campaign in Russia. On the melancholy retreat from Moscow, the emperor was informed that the road his army must take had to pass through a defile lined on either side with the heaviest artillery. At once six of his bravest soldiers crowded around his beloved person, and took him bodily off his feet, carrying him quite through the dangerous ravine. At the same moment the band struck up the fine melody of the song, "Calm in the bosom of his family." Human, only human hands, therefore, can do much; what think you of the divine? How sweet seems the little verse we sing, to quote as a motto, and hold as an ejaculation of prayer:

“First pure, then peaceable.”

Faith and courage.

“Let me hear thy voice behind me, calming all these wild alarms ;
Let me, underneath my weakness, feel the everlasting arms !”

Surely, dear Christian friends, we must see by this time that the habit of resting in God is more than a mere privilege ; it is one of the highest of our duties. Fretting is ruinous to grace, as well as to gracefulness. We are bound to cultivate the patience of waiting. It is harder, to be sure, sometimes to stand and do nothing, than to charge and do much. Just to hold our own in the midst of difficulties, and put forth no effort at personal release, is a better test of obedience than valiantly to challenge a giant. We are to blame for much of our chronic disquiet and perturbation. Any anxiety on our part is a certain proof of some want of purity or of some want of faith. “First pure, then peaceable.”

There is no effeminacy in a temper of perfect repose, when the believing heart rests solely upon God. It may be childlike, but it cannot be called childish. One can always be filial without being foolish. Indeed, it would be well if rash and ribald men would accept this composure before they deride it. It would be to edification if anybody could be permitted to fasten his eyes upon one who, from sheer fortitude amidst wild confusions, such as we daily enter, can call his nights refreshing and his days quiet, while fortunes go to pieces, and fictions of wealth break and flash like bubbles on the sea-beach, “a moment white, then gone forever.” Faith always stands firmer

Wasted effort.A hand in a hand.

than mere courage. And down upon our excited perturbations, like the serene chimes of Trinity Church amid the roar of the Wall Street gold-room, comes this sweet verse : " Return unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee !"

It is sad to think how much patience is exhausted and how much valuable time is lost in mere effort to hold one's self steady, when a surrender would instantly end all the conflict. The English critic Ruskin, as he looks on the ocean, exclaims, " How shall we follow its eternal changefulness of feeling ! It is like trying to paint a soul." Yes, an unsaved and unhelped soul, that is said to resemble " a troubled sea which cannot rest." The first vessel built on this continent was named " The Unrest." But when a soul is saved, it is safe, and then it is calm.

For this peace of a Christian man, whose heart is kind, whose sins are pardoned, whose life is hid with Christ in God, is not that mere apathy of desperation, which a crag may be conceived to have in a tempest it defies ; it is just the quiet which a living hand has, when it lies in the true clasp of another hand, that it knows is stronger than itself.

XIII.

THE SINGERS IN PRISON.

“AND AT MIDNIGHT PAUL AND SILAS PRAYED, AND SANG PRAISES UNTO GOD.”—*Acts 16 : 25.*

IF you were carefully to examine the history of the church along the early years of its conflicts and establishment, you would find that it had not been brought directly into antagonism with organized heathen forces until this incident occurred to which allusion is made in the text. Hitherto the contest had been between Judaism and Christianity. But when the gospel had gained a foothold in Europe, it entered a new social and domestic form of life. The small band of four missionaries—Paul, Silas, Luke, and Timothy—entertained hospitably in the household of Lydia, an Asiatic tradeswoman, would not look very formidable as a revolutionary element in a large city like Philippi. But these were the men of whom it was said, they turned the world upside down wherever they went to work.

Already there was good doing in the Macedonian capital ; religious truth was passing from lip to lip ; and, without doubt, heart after heart received it which the Lord opened as he did Lydia's before. But while Paul was on his daily

A demoniac pythoness.

Dangerous indorsement.

rounds, he found himself decidedly annoyed by the pertinacity of a demoniac pythoness, who insisted on following him closely, uttering some nonsense behind him as he walked through the streets. The story is related to us thus :

“ And it came to pass as we went to prayer, a certain damsel, possessed with a spirit of divination, met us, who brought her masters much gain by soothsaying : the same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation. And this did she many days. But Paul being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour.”

This seems to have been a slave girl, possessed by an unclean spirit. She uttered nothing of any worth to anybody ; but people of uneducated and superstitious imagination had a sort of notion that a creature whose intellect was shattered might be under special visitation from the gods. So of the incoherent ravings of this damsel her masters were wont to make gain, selling her absurd predictions to those who were weak enough to seek them. It is probable that a fear arose in the apostle's mind lest the multitude should suppose he owned this maiden ; her delirious approval of him and his preaching rendered her presence embarrassing. Perhaps he dreaded the indorsement of so questionable and notorious a companion-

Paul's exorcism.The abrupt arrest.

ship ; at any rate, he resolved to silence forever its worst feature of outcry.

Turning abruptly upon his steps one day, he, by a word of inspired command, in the name of Jesus Christ exorcised the demon of possession, bidding him come out of the girl's mind. This at once restored her to sanity, and, of course, made her valueless for all exhibition to those who owned her and profited by her madness. Of the change in their property they became immediately aware, and angrily caused the arrest of Paul, and with him Silas, who most likely was in his company at the moment of the rencounter. The story runs on thus :

“ And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the market-place unto the rulers, and brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city, and teach customs which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans.”

In the haste of their indignation, these infamous charlatans appear not to have agreed beforehand as to the form which their accusation should take in the legal trial. Once on the ground, they became painfully conscious that the prætors would demand a reason for the abrupt apprehension of two persons upon the public highway, and they must be ready with a reply. But surely there was no possible Roman law which by any in-

Property in madness.

Scourging with "many stripes."

genuity could be made to include the healing of a demoniac among criminal offences, no matter what came of it. Property in mere madness could not be recognized.

Eventually the shape in which they put their complaint shifted its ground. They omitted the real personal issue, and asserted that these eastern people, foreigners, "being Jews," were injuriously stirring up the city by introducing manners and customs which were illegal for Roman citizens to observe. The expression "being Jews" loses its keen force in our rendering; it means "Jews, to begin with," and so contains a most subtle appeal to popular passion. We are not surprised at the result: "And the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat them."

The shaft instantly struck. The authorities waited for nothing more than this. Their prejudices converted such interferences from foreigners into insults and misdemeanors at once. The orders were given for stripping and scourging these innocent men. Now, under Jewish law the number of stripes was limited: thirty-nine at a time—"forty stripes save one"—was all that could be inflicted. But no such restriction was put on the Romans. Probably Silas and Paul were whipped with great severity; the expression here is very strong, "many stripes." And in one of the epistles to the Corinthian Church

Thrust into the common jail.

Feet in the stocks.

Paul speaks of having received "stripes above measure." Moreover, the Romans used rods; the order was given to the lictors, called here "sergeants," to beat them with their *fasces*, which consisted of a bundle of birch or elm withes, arranged around a sharpened axe in the middle, reserved for capital punishments, the whole bound together by a leather thong. This was not the only time the brave apostle to the Gentiles felt the Gentiles' wrath in this manner. He says afterward, "Thrice was I beaten with rods."

But the trouble did not end here. The bleeding men were now thrust ignominiously into the common jail. Something of alarm, or perhaps of extraordinary zeal to win favor with his masters, induced the keeper to rush his victims into the innermost cell, putting them in unusual ward, as if he thought they were a dangerous charge: "And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailer to keep them safely. Who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks."

A wooden machine, hinged with iron, separated the feet of the prisoners wide apart, closing across the ankles with a hollowed groove. Of course, any attempt to lie down could only result in bringing a fresh agony to the wounds inflicted by the rods, as the full weight of the body came directly down upon the flooring of stone. Such a night of suffering as this was one long to be

Singing in the midnight.

Scene at Lydia's house.

remembered. Just at its depth our text comes in : “ And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God, and the prisoners heard them.”

So, then, the picture rises upon our imagination. We can discover nothing more concerning the terrible history of that painful midnight. We must just take our stand outside of the prison where Luke and Timothy are lingering around the walls. Interference was perilous and succor was impossible ; but we can have no doubt as to the pitiful and tearful longings of heart with which these friends stood out under the stars until all hope had disappeared. How the sympathetic nature of the “ beloved physician ” must have been tried as he found himself shut away from even the privilege of attending to the wounds of his feeble friends !

We always think first of the men who were scourged, when we seem to hear the sound of the awful blows in the air ; but one silent thought of commiseration would be quite in order here concerning that whole company at Lydia's house, filled with sorrow and dismay at this catastrophe. When these two watchers came home that night late, and told the tale of the scourging, and the jail, and the stocks, it was a sad and troubled family which wept and prayed for their beloved leaders. It is not stated that they had any chance afterward of sending in even one word of pity or affection. But we all believe that when

An excellent prayer-meeting.

Familiarity with Scripture.

the two prisoners were singing in the suffering midnight, the small circle under the Christian roof of Lydia kept patiently on their knees for them.

It is time for us now to begin to seek out our spiritual lessons, for we can linger upon the actual history no longer. We may take up those which lie nearest to our hand, and yet find enough.

1. For example, see here *how easy it is to have an excellent prayer-meeting when only the heart is right*. The circumstances in this instance were, as we have noticed, most discouraging. But everybody knows now what an evident success was reached in this jail by the little prayer-meeting of three persons. *Three?* Yes, three: Paul, Silas, and Jesus Christ. Even the ancient Jews had a saying, "Where two persons meet, there are always three." They meant to intimate that God was ever-present in the counsels of men. But we have a more sure word of promise as Christians in Christ's words: "Again, I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth, as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

2. Then again: learn here *how fine a thing it is to be familiar with the Scriptures*. For what do we conjecture Paul and Silas sang *about* there in the dark, without any books and without any music? We know the Jews all loved the ancient Psalms,

What did they sing?The Hebrew Psalter.

and had in memory most of them for easy recall. It is a pleasing suggestion now that these tried men found the exact hymn they wanted in the well-remembered Psalter. Hebrew music is very wild, plaintive, and fascinating. You can hear it sometimes in our day as you pass the open door of a synagogue. Match one of those grand old lyrics to it, and it will move you like a strain from the sky. For really there is great strength and great fire in the inspired Jewish poems. In the village churchyards the Covenanters sang them as they affixed their names to the perilous parchments. Oliver Cromwell's legions of soldiers sang them as they plunged into battle. Paul and Silas sang psalms, we have not a doubt of it; many of them are fashioned precisely like prayers. There is no end to those which would have praised God with all emphasis, and yet have implored his interposition in the most effective and satisfactory way. Those about prisoners, those about the oppressed, those about iniquitous rulers, those about infinite goodness and divine mercy never to be exhausted toward God's chosen in their times of trouble, you will recollect them all. Some very fine pieces were written by Moses, and a few by Asaph also; but David seems to have had the most experience, and so has furnished for other tried people the most help. And so we feel very bold to say that he who has learned psalm after psalm by heart, and can sing them in the dark, has wonderful resources of in-

struction and promise for his comfort in the day of trouble.

3. Now add to this suggestion another concerning *the eminent fitness of music as the vehicle of spiritual enlivening and solace*. It cannot be doubted that singing has an extraordinary power in exorcising the demon of worry and discontent. Martin Luther used to say, "The devil cannot bear singing." This is what the psalmist himself means when he is singing a song for other people to sing :

"Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me? hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance. O my God, my soul is cast down within me: therefore will I remember thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar. Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy water-spouts: all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me. Yet the Lord will command his loving-kindness in the daytime, and in the night his song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life. Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God."

You will perhaps remember the words of the young Elihu, when he attempted to counsel and admonish the murmuring Job. He admitted to him that men were ready enough to cry out under

 "Songs in the night."

Uneasy Sundays.

sorrow ; "but none saith, Where is God, my Maker, who giveth me songs in the night?" Nobody has ever learned to sing, as he might and ought to sing, till his verses have come to be a positive help to him. These are "the songs in the night" about which we hear so much. And as long as a Christian's enjoyment of them is no more than a mere artistic or a simple æsthetic pleasure, he is certain to fall short of appreciating the highest office of poetry and music in this lonely world.

4. Suppose, then, we add another lesson to this : does it not offer *a helpful hint as to the way in which the vacant hours of an uneasy Sunday may be spent with young children?* The cynical moralist Dr. Johnson says in his autobiography : "Sunday was a heavy day to me when I was a boy. My mother confined me in the house as often as this came round, and made me read 'The Whole Duty of Man,' from a great part of which I could derive no instruction." It is no wonder that he grew up morose and sour in his estimate of Christian life. On the other hand, hear the pious George Herbert :

"The golden Sundays of man's life,
Threaded together on Time's string,
Make bracelets to adorn the wife
Of the eternal glorious King."

It is worth while for all well-ordered families to cultivate a joyous spirit of song in their hearts and homes. Set apart a portion of every Lord's Day for music. Teach your children to sing at

the family altar. For your own need and enjoyment commit to memory an extensive variety of psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs. It was a fine thing for Paul and Silas that they recollected a few things alike to sing together there in the dark without any books. A day may come when your minds, weakened by sickness or old age, will be helped just by the rhymes, when you can recollect nothing else for a solace. Take such pieces as, "Oh, for a closer walk with God," "I saw One hanging on a tree," "When I survey the wondrous cross," "There is a fountain filled with blood," "Jesus, I my cross have taken." Lay these up in your mind. They will furnish you food in times of trouble. If you ever happen to be watching beside a sick-bed, and feel at a loss what to say, you will find such a gleam of delight on the face of the one you watch, when you begin to say over—or what is better, to sing over softly—a verse or two, that your memory, though the poorest on record, will be amply recompensed for the outlay. Ill-humor among children, impatience at the tediousness of a Sunday silence, fretfulness from in-door life, will yield sooner before singing than anything else. I do believe that the harp of the young David, if he had persistently kept up his efforts of minstrelsy, would eventually have prevailed over the jealous madness of Saul, and put an end to his flinging of javelins.

5. Finally, let us learn here *what is the one con-*

Condition of Christian peace.Annals of the past.

dition of a sure success in reaching Christian peace : we must just make the very best we can out of the present posture of affairs. It seems an impossibility sometimes to keep up a brave heart in our trials. A great sense of failure must have settled upon the minds of those abused preachers in the Philippian prison. Why, what had they done? Paul had restored reason to a mad girl—a deed which, if he had advertised as a Macedonian philanthropist, would have given him a proud reputation all over Greece. He had wrought a notable miracle, too; and this, if one of their heathen priests had done it, would assuredly have gone to the credit of his deity and his personal acclaim.

But this was all the messengers of the true God got for their trouble. There they both sat in the dark; it was distressingly sad, it was unutterably lonesome and disheartening, it was chilly, damp, painful; it looked hopeless and forlorn for the future; they had certainly been treated shamefully, unjustly, and pitilessly. But all they did was to strike up a tune. Tradition says Paul could never have been much of a singer. He had a poor voice. But it is possible that he put in "the spirit and the understanding," while Silas took care of the melody. He knew that there was a new hope coming. The Saviour's presence was close beside them both; eventually each wrong would be righted, each sorrow assuaged. For all those grand annals of the past were familiar to them. Joseph was cast in prison, and had his

Paul's perfect "content."

Not "therewith," but "therein."

feet in the fetters ; but the stocks proved his footsteps to the throne. Daniel was thrust into the lions' den ; yet a day came when he was proclaimed ruler in Babylon. So they sang on. Their secret Paul reveals afterward : " I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content."

Be careful about that word " therewith ;" the one in the New Revision is better ; it says " therein." Paul did not mean to have the world understand that he was content to stay in a jail ; he would find instant release, if he could. He did not love poverty and pain and peril. He tried all he could in every instance to avert and escape from such things. Yet all the while he preserved a calm content, not " therewith," but " therein."

Content with what ? With his joys and his hopes, with his reminiscences and his anticipations, with his sonship in God and his communion with Christ. It was to this very group of believers in Philippi that he wrote about his perfect satisfaction with all he had endured in their town ; he was content " therewith," because Christ was preached thus ; " therein" he rejoiced. " Yea," he exclaims, " and will rejoice ; according to my earnest expectation and my hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life or by death."

XIV.

THE LATERAL FORCE OF PRAYER.

“AND THE PRISONERS HEARD THEM.”—*Acts 16 : 25.*

THERE used to be a legend told concerning one of the historic battle-fields of the East ; it was said that precisely at stroke of midnight, the heroes of the conflict were wont to come forth upon the plains of the fight, and there rehearse their deeds of prowess again ; hosts would charge hosts of shadowy beings, and phalanxes of disembodied spirits would plunge along on steeds of fire.

You will remember that one of the mightiest victories of history was obtained at Philippi. There the final stand was taken by the republicans of Rome. The world will always lay its meed of applause at the feet of Antony for his warlike courage and adroit advance of troops in subtle generalship by which he won his laurels. But how it would arrest one's imagination, if the old legends were true of this neighborhood, and we could stand by while the village clocks were striking twelve, and witness the weird combats on such a mysterious field between the spirits of men dead centuries ago !

But the chapter in the New Testament now before us records a far greater victory, and one far

Antony's victory at Philippi.A greater conquest.

more important in the annals of a race like ours. The whole contest was between souls. And the battle is repeated not only on the same spot at midnight, but on every spot each day and hour over the whole world. A soul was plucked out of Satan's hand that day, and changed into a child of God. And when even the remembrance of the chaplet which that Roman general wore at his triumph shall have faded away forever, there will yet be one of the many crowns the Saviour is to wear, which will remind those who behold the King in his beauty of the bloodless waterside, outside of the gate of the city, where Europe was conquered for Christ's kingdom by the conversion of a woman, and also of the shattered prison in which a Roman officer was subdued by divine grace and made a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The history to which this fragment of a verse chosen as the text now introduces us, has already been rendered sufficiently familiar for all our present needs. Paul and Silas were in the ward of a Philippian jail, in pain from the scourging, and in jeopardy of their lives. But they spent their time in anything rather than in melancholy forebodings or petulant regrets. The whole verse reads thus: "And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God; and the prisoners heard them."

It was a most unusual *place* of prayer. Very likely this was the first occasion on which the

Place and posture of prayer.

“They prayed, hymning God.”

voice of Christian devotion had ever been heard in precincts so positively heathen as these. That complicated and smothering inclosure of Roman confinement certainly was the earliest dungeon in Europe which held a mercy-seat, although the awful history of many martyrs has shown that it had more than one wall-marked place of torment to succeed it.

It was a most unusual *posture* of prayer. For it was neither standing, nor reclining, nor kneeling, nor lying prone on one's face. Ah me! what a poor time of it these suffering creatures would have had if they had been compelled to use a formula or work themselves into an attitude. We have every reason to believe that our God does not care for such things when only the heart is right, and the spirit is true, and the want is pressing; he is not particular about forms and postures.

It was a most unusual *kind* of prayer. Much is missed by dividing the words here; they should read thus: “Praying, they sang.” The New Revision has rendered the passage thus: “But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns unto God, and the prisoners were listening to them.” The Greek is idiomatic to a fine degree: “They prayed, hymning God.” These apostles set their petitions to music. It is of some importance to know that true prayer is praise, and genuine praise is prayer. God is lauded when we plead with him, and is entreated when we celebrate his glory. Each doxology

The direction of prayer.

The triangle pictured.

pronounces a benediction ; he answers when we say " Hallelujah ;" he is praised when a sinner cries, " Save, or I perish !"

But now, in order to render the specific thought of this discourse prominent, " the lateral force of prayer," we need to remark that there was a most singular *direction* to this prayer. It will perhaps be helpful here, in order to make the meaning clear, to employ a figure : imagine a triangle, as if one were going to talk about what mathematicians call " the composition of forces." In this the perpendicular line represents what we commonly look upon as the direction of a Christian man's petition ; it goes up straight toward God. But the horizontal line represents the level pressure of the same force, but going out toward those within range who listen and are influenced by it. Those prisoners, no doubt, heard the singing and the praying of the two men in the inner ward of the prison ; it was not addressed to them, but it swept out toward them with an oblique or lateral force.

Such a point as this ought to have some illustration both for the sake of an unmistakable exhibition of its real helpfulness, and for the sake of its careful discrimination from what looks like it and yet is injurious in every instance.

There is something very impressive even in the mere sight of a praying Christian. I have read within a little while the story of a faithful worker in the ministry, who had been away from home

Prayer behind a tree.

The one condition.

for a week assisting in a revival. When he started to return, he was accompanied by the pastor and a young friend to the limits of the village. There on the hill-top, full of solemn feeling, they parted with a joint supplication. Climbing the fence, they were hidden from the road, and there knelt among the branches of a fallen tree, that no eye but the All-seeing might rest upon them. They all prayed and separated. A few weeks thereafter, among the converts, came a rough, honest farmer to join himself to the people of God. He told how he was ploughing in the field one day, and saw up by the roadside three men kneel to pray. The very thought of it moved him. And the more he pondered, the more his own prayerless life came in review. And he found no peace till he himself became a follower of the Saviour likewise.

This is the usual form which the thought takes as we find it reached in ordinary life. It will be seen that the one indispensable element of success is found in the artlessness and unconsciousness of those who are in the act of devotion. It is absurd folly to suppose that supplicating God with the view of influencing men is anything more than mockery or conceit. It is not safe to calculate deliberately upon affecting a bystander by our supplication ; preaching in prayers is never to be commended ; but a life of prayer, and an unconscious fervor of prayer in an individual instance, may be useful to one who watches it.

The murdered watchman.A prayer overheard.

Take another illustration, and we shall see how a Christian's spirit and words can become positively dramatic. It was published in the papers not long since, and I have read it in an English book, that there was a bridge-watchman on one of our Western roadways, in whose hands the toll-money was placed. He dwelt pretty much alone in a small structure erected for his ordinary shelter out over the water near the middle pier. This faithful man was murdered by a passing vagabond for the sake of the cash in his box ; the criminal was caught quite soon afterward. In the open court, on the occasion of his trial, he made this remarkable confession : " I knew that the keeper had received some tolls and also his month's wages that day ; I resolved to have the money. With a shot-gun I crept along across half of the silent bridge. I could see through the window only his head and shoulders ; I took aim and fired. Then I waited a few minutes to see if the sound of the gun had alarmed any one ; but all was still. Then I went up to the watch-house door, and there, down on his knees praying, I found the keeper I had shot. Very calmly and distinctly I heard him say : ' O God, have mercy on the man who did this, and spare him for Jesus' sake ! ' I could not bear to touch such a person's money ; I turned and ran away, nowhere, anywhere, I did not know whither I went ; his words rang in my ear, they have haunted me ever since. I was going back to give myself up when I was arrested."

Praying for effect.

A most unusual hour.

It is evident that the individual force of such an example of forgiveness and solicitude would have been not only lost, but perverted and reversed, if there had been the slightest reason for suspecting that the Christian man was praying for effect. But out there on the lonely river under the stars, with no one within call, with no strength for crying or crawling for help, with only the deep, passionate wish for the pardon and salvation of the misguided culprit who had shot him, to be his prompting in a few words that were left him to utter before the everlasting silence fell over his human lips, there could be no misunderstanding. It was the unpremeditated act of intercession, in that desperate moment, which swept itself out along the level of the platform, as well as aloft beyond the sky, and struck heavily upon the dull conscience of the murderer standing there among the shadows, and looking at the wreck of a life he had taken.

Two things in the action of Paul and Silas, shut in the jail, need to be noticed in order to show that the prayers they lifted possessed this element of artlessness. For one thing, remember the time was midnight. It was a most unusual hour for supplication. We all know how strict the Israelites were as to their stated seasons of devotion. This was not the time for either the evening or the morning oblation. These Hebrew Christians had been trained to such habits as would have influenced their subsequent years. But what

No audience expected.John Bunyan's Pilgrim.

they prayed for now was help in their sore need. They knew, as we know, that God neither sleeps nor slumbers ; he is alive to his children's wants even in what, with pathetic sobriety, we call " the dead of night." They could pray to God then ; but men, prisoners, jailers—everybody would be asleep ; we are told explicitly that the head man of the prison was awaked, not by the singing, but by the earthquake. Surely we have no suspicion that Paul and Silas were on parade when at the midnight hour they raised their voices out of the depth of their woe. They were praying to God, not to the prisoners outside.

And the other thing is this : they were singing their supplications ; and singing is more the instrument for expression of one's own heart than of impression upon the hearts of others. It is often singularly and overwhelmingly impressive ; but this is because the singer is himself so much lost in the exercise. In all the story of John Bunyan there is no one thing more true to nature than the account given of the passage of the pilgrim through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, and especially of the moment when he seemed to hear the voice of a man, as going before him and singing a psalm. He was glad, and the reasons of his gladness are given : he gathered from thence that some who feared God were in this valley as well as himself ; then also he saw that God was with them, though they were in that dark and dismal state ; and, more than all else, he hoped

Mere mockery of praise.

Praying "temperance."

(could he overtake them) to have company by and by. So he hurried along, and called to him that was before ; but he knew not what to answer, for that he also thought himself to be alone. He had been keeping up his spirits by his chant, and it confused him to be discovered as singing for others' delectation ; so he stopped.

In the light of these two considerations, that it was in the midnight, when no audience could be supposed to be listening, and that they were "hymning God," not for others but for themselves, we can see how inconsistent with the whole exercise would have been the purpose of making their own cell conspicuous by a mockery of praise and prayer addressed to the others around them out of sight all over the wards. When, some years ago, a crusade was started which had for its plan public praying assemblages along the highways, held in front of drinking-saloons for the sake of overawing the keepers and salesmen by the lateral force of the voices ostensibly and ostentatiously directed to high heaven, it was only the positive perversion of an excellent thing into an embarrassment and a mockery which in the end made the plan ridiculous. The curb-stone prayer-meeting was a joke and a jibe in the mouth of those whom it hoped to influence, and riot of exasperation was the quick defence returned. It is likely that not one in ten of the petitions went up straight to the Hearer of prayer ; when one closes his eyes for communion,

Shooting round a corner.

A world full of "prisoners."

with heaven, what does he see? Christ, the Intercessor. But in these instances what one saw was the rumseller, who heard himself argued with under guise of a mockery of God. And it was well for the decorum of God's people that those excellent although misguided Christians ceased trying to shoot arrows from their bows of supplication around the corner at an angle.

Let it, then, be understood that prayer, faithful and fervent, pressed directly and artlessly toward God, has also some appreciable, and available, and valuable lateral force; and now at once we see that here is a method of Christian usefulness almost limitless in its reach. A life of prayer is the most powerful instrument of efficiency which the Scripture reveals.

Oh, this poor world is full of "prisoners" all around us! They listen while our lives sing and pray. Just now there has been related to me the story of an adult girl in a Bible-class, going to witness a communion season for the first time in her life; in sheer curiosity she tried to find out what all those people were at. In the providence of God she happened to find a seat within observing distance of her own teacher. The unaffected and sincere manner of the woman told on the heart and conscience of the worldly scholar; she could not put the thought away, after she had sat there and seen for a whole hour the infinite depth of meaning in the countenance she knew. It was that honest teacher's face which converted her

Legh Richmond's mother.

A soldier's countersign.

pupil ; so we were made to see when we received her into the church, and the two sat side by side at communion.

Legh Richmond, the author of the "Dairyman's Daughter," has recorded the impression produced upon his mind, when he was six years of age, by the behavior of his mother on the occasion of his little brother's death, dropped by a nurse's carelessness through a window on the pavement ; he saw her praying frequently, and indeed she took him with her to pray for him several times ; and he recollected that she said in her sweet, gentle way : "If I stop praying even for a few minutes to-day, I am ready to sink under this unlooked-for disaster ; but when I pray, God comforts me and upholds me !" This prayerfulness drew so deep a line in his character that when he was almost an old man he recalled it.

Sometimes strange poses of life have been tested by this very process. A soldier came to the guard without the countersign ; he told his simple story how it happened ; the guard gave him five minutes for prayer before he should be shot ; then, when he kneeled down and lifted so gentle and so trustful a prayer, so unaffected and so brave, so simple and affectionate, it was hardly a surprise to him to find the guard on his knees beside him, and declaring, "Go your way, Christian brother ; no one can pray as you do and tell an untruth !"

Here, therefore, is the secret of usefulness.

Usefulness within reach.

Lives "shut in."

Some are shut in like Paul and Silas, and the midnight hangs heavily over them. They can do nothing for God? Nay, but they can live true, brave lives, simple-hearted and consistent. That is doing much for God. Other prisoners hear them, when they are dauntlessly praising with prayers that are worship, and singing with songs that are sermons.

“ Is it the Lord that shuts me in ?
Then I can bear to wait !
No place so dark, no place so poor,
So strong and fast, no prisoning door,
Though walled by grievous fate,
But out of it goes fair and broad
An unseen pathway, straight to God,
By which I mount to thee,
When the same Love that shut the door
Shall lift the heavy bar once more,
And set the prisoner free.”

XV.

SECRET SINS.

“THOU HAST SET OUR INIQUITIES BEFORE THEE, OUR SECRET SINS IN THE LIGHT OF THY COUNTENANCE.”—*Psalm 90* : 8.

THIS verse tranquilly reasserts the precise relation human behavior holds to the divine acquaintance, and human guilt holds to the divine displeasure. The all-seeing Monarch of heaven and earth knows everything, and abhors everything distinctively evil. He sets every secret iniquity “before him ;” then he registers its aggravations as they appear “in the light of his countenance.”

I. The moment we begin to apply the glass of divine omniscience to the examination of private conduct, we are tempted to do as the Hindoo prince is reported to have done, when he was shown by a microscope the foul creatures in the seemingly pure water he was drinking. He would not reject the cup, but he dashed the unoffending instrument on the floor.

Many men would wilfully surrender belief in the uncomfortable doctrine of omniscience if they could. But a voice speaks in our ears with tones of resolute calmness : “ Hell and destruction are before the Lord ; how much more, then, the hearts of the children of men !” In all our com-

Mere angles in the air.

Confessed "peccadillos."

mission of habitual wrong there is a conception of vagueness and distance. The white throne of judgment is not set yet. Heaven is out of sight. Retribution is remote. Our spiritual vision in one respect resembles our natural. It estimates poorly at long ranges. Our impressions of magnitude are always governed by mere angles in the air. So we unconsciously say, "Is not God in the height of heaven? And behold the height of the stars, how high they are! How doth God know? Can he judge through the dark cloud?"

More than one man can be found who would be startled if he imagined anybody but a minister, or any minister, save in a general way, suspected him of being an actual law-breaker. He would be seriously offended if he were told so anywhere out of a pulpit. He would assert his innocence of crime or violence. And, indeed, he may make quite a fair show in his astonishment. For no one of his offences may be scandalous or even extravagantly gross. No swearing; possibly he may never have uttered one profane word. No idolatry; surely he never worshiped any false God. He is neither vicious nor immoral. His purpose is to be honest. He really intends to be generous and manly. He proposes to be true.

To be sure, he does not set up for a model. He confesses inadvertences in action. He acknowledges peccadillos in life. He admits some general imperfections in character. But he resolutely asserts he has wronged no man intelligently or

The divine register.Montaigne's figure.

with evil intention. It seems to him a harsh judgment, and, not to put too fine a point on it, a little uncivil, to insist that he must personally be numbered among those blasphemers before God who need an atonement to keep them out of peril of a fiery hell.

It becomes evident, therefore, that there is a different register of reckoning kept somewhere, by which the number of human sins is to be counted, as well as by which the degrees of malignity and guilt are to be settled. For what does God himself say? These are not careless words of his, and we may not give them careless hearing: "Talk no more so exceeding proudly; let not arrogancy come out of your mouth; for the Lord God is a God of *knowledge*, and by him actions are *weighed*." Is it not possible that our Maker may have a way of searching out sin superior to ours? And is it not possible that, beneath the plausible exterior of even the most amiable and correct life we meet, there may be feelings, and purposes, and principles definitely cherished, which wilfully injure its virtue, and perhaps vitiate its entire worth?

In one of the fugitive essays of Montaigne there is found a very frank acknowledgment on this point; remarkable, likewise, for a figure of speech of intense energy in the expression. He says: "When I the most strictly and religiously confess myself, I find that the best virtue I have has in it some tincture of vice; and I am afraid that Plato,

A spiritual stethoscope.

The divine standard.

in his purest virtue, if he had listened and *laid his ear close to himself*, would have heard some jarring sound of human mixture." You have seen skilful surgeons covering the chest of a patient with a napkin, or touching it with a wooden stethoscope, that they might detect symptoms of hidden disease, while laying the ear heavily against the lungs. Every man may expect to make some fresh discoveries, if he will lay his ear of candor alongside of the innermost seat of thought, feeling, and behavior. It is better to make use of spiritual auscultation before any one pronounces himself healthily clean from all wrong. This heart of ours is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Profitable listening, in order to a cure, this might occasionally be to us all: humiliating, however, no doubt. It harasses the pride to do it much. It piques the vanity to do it often. But no man can righteously pronounce on his own case before God, unless he seeks to know it as God knows. And here in our text we are told that God sets all our "secret sins" before him.

II. This, then, is our first lesson to-day—God's knowledge of all our sins is thorough and exact. It adds, now, to the force of what has been said to learn from this verse a second particular. The Almighty intends to make men see what he sees, and ultimately render judgment upon themselves.

Hence he discloses clearly the standard he employs. He declares that all transgression of the

God's "countenance."

"Iron sharpeneth iron."

divine law must be estimated according to the purity of the God against whom it is committed. The scriptural admonition has here been cast into so striking a rhetorical form that no one can miss its force. "Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins *in the light of thy countenance.*"

The human face is worth a study by itself. It is the true placard of individual character. It announces by its rapid changes each fluctuation of feeling, each fitful flitting of emotion and sentiment. Its smile is life. Its frown is death. Its shadow is gloom. Its kindling is joy. The features have power and office to proclaim the inner purposes of the soul. There have been men who knew and feared this. They drilled their facial muscles, as they drilled their menials and their mutes, that they should simply serve and make no sign. But even the best discipline failed if the pressure grew heavy. You can read the hopes and despairs of the tempted—the knaveries of the hypocrite, and the sorrows of the pure—the maiden's love, and the mother's care—jealousies, greed, and malevolence—penitent pleading, and sorrowful regret—indeed, all the possible disclosures of our mysterious nature you can read in the lines of the countenance turned toward you.

Here, therefore, is where souls come in contact. They deal with each other at the face. "Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the *countenance* of his friend." Hence Scripture uses the figure often. When Cain was wroth "his counte-

God's countenance is God's character.

Chrysostom's remark.

nance fell." Jacob looked upon "the countenance of Laban, and behold, it was not toward him as before." Out of this come our common expressions in speech. We say we "set our *faces* as a flint" to resist evil. We say we will, or will not, "countenance" one another in a given behavior. And we mean by this to announce that we deliberately desire our features to be read, as expressing our silent opinion. When this same habit is in a trope transferred to God, we feel we shall reach a full understanding of the words by working up through our customary experiences, till we attain the height of the divine perfection. God's countenance is God's unmistakable character. Of course, then, the standard is supreme.

All of us are conscious of the salutary check we receive, when under the awe of some notable person's presence. "The very countenance of holy men," said old Chrysostom, "is full of spiritual power." Coarse people instinctively hush their voices when they enter the company of those who are gentle and refined. And in regard to most kinds of vice, it may be safely assumed that a wicked person will frequently be quite deterred for a time from words and deeds which he would hardly ever consider shameful before his fellows in sin, just by being put into the companionship of the good and the true, who he knows will despise them. We rightly estimate moral acts with a becoming reference to the presence we are in. What would be considered, possibly, a harmless

Circumstances fix moral quality.

A dignified "face."

little indulgence in free company, becomes boorishness unpardonable when we are on our best behavior in state. That which is a mere familiarity with our friend might be a dangerous presumption with a stranger. The manner we wear with our equals must be more sedate and respectful when we meet those who are our superiors in years or in merit. So a ribald song, or an indecent story, which raised an applause among roystering comrades, may give a young man a lifelong regret and shame, when he remembers how he was betrayed into repeating it in better and purer company, by the wild enthusiasm of an indiscreet hour. Especially if he recalls the sad and sorrowful face of some calm, venerable man, who looked down upon him with pity.

Let this simple process of illustration be carried on, and you will see that the higher the exaltation of character, the greater the guilt—that is, the baseness and wrong of a bad act are aggravated by the purity of the presence which condemns it. There are men and women whose dignity and nobleness always seem to be an encouragement to manliness and a rebuke to vile words and deeds. And our sense of shame tells us instinctively that a wrong done intentionally offensive to them is a wrong aggravated with an insult.

Now, if you would be at the pains of looking out those almost innumerable passages in the Bible which speak of the "countenance" of God, you would find that everywhere this is repre-

The help of a countenance."Exceeding sinful."

sented as being our choicest benediction. God's face has no frown upon it. He is never to be thought of as standing sternly by, to watch his children, and frighten them, as they try to be easy and cheerful. His presence is more like that of a mother, who comes into company to keep the children's courage up. You should accustom yourselves to regard God as ever with a sweet, grave smile on his face, looking upon you. Remember the prayer of the Psalmist: "Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us." Then remember his thanksgiving: "When thou saidst, Seek ye my face, my heart said unto thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek. O my soul, hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise him *for the help of his countenance*; I shall yet praise him who is the health of my countenance, and my God!"

So you can see at a glance the meaning of that singular expression in one of the epistles about the exceeding *sinfulness* of sin. The apostle tells us that sin became so "exceeding sinful," because it was so palpable a perversion of our mightiest benediction. It was presuming upon the very forbearance of divine love. To keep to our figure, it was as if the guilty man chose the chance, when God's countenance was before him for cheer and assistance, to offer gratuitous insult as return for favor. Thus when grace and justice presented themselves in the holy and good law given to men for any one to disobey it was—as the Greek phrase runs—"beyond hyperbole sinful;"

Sin's abominableness.God "hates" sin.

inexpressibly wicked ; inconceivably malignant and base.

From all these considerations it is evident we shall have to change a great many of our notions as to the nature of transgression and guilt. We are to look upon sin not as a mere offence against human enactment, not as a crime against social order, not as a culpable disregard of public sentiment, not as a mere blunder in good breeding—not as bad taste or coarse conduct. It may be all this, but its inherent abominableness lies in the fact that *it is the thing God hates*. He sees it all, no matter how secret it seems. "He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? He that formed the eye, shall he not see? There is no darkness nor shadow of death where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves."

Furthermore, we must bring all sin, for its register of quality and aggravation, directly up before God's countenance. We are to take into consideration the dignity and exaltation of his person. He never treats a sin as an abstraction or an accident. It is an individual act, and is leveled at him. Somebody is to blame for it. We must remember, likewise, the absolutely spotless character of God. He will not look upon iniquity with any degree of allowance. We are his creatures, his subjects, his dependents. His power rejects sin as weakness. His wisdom rejects sin as folly. His holiness rejects sin as foulness and defilement. His goodness rejects sin as an injury

Owen's remark.God's paternal attitude.

and harm. His truth is pledged that his justice will punish sin with horrible tempests and fire. His entire nature is set irrevocably against all kinds of wickedness. And we are to estimate its malignity by the register he furnishes. We are to set every iniquity in the light of his countenance. Well said the pious Owen: "He that has slight views of sin never yet has had great views of God."

Of course, then, we find ourselves all condemned without exception and beyond all hope. What remains? Just here divine clemency enters the field. God loads us with extraordinary benefits. He bids us instantly put away our sins, not by concealing and covering them, but by confession of them. Promises and admonitions hedge up the way to any further outbreak. Hopes and blessings adorn the path to holiness and peace. Christ the Son of God is sent to the earth to make an atonement.

And now to go on in sin is simply awful. It is an offence against redeeming love. The most wonderful picture in all the Bible seems to be that of a Being like God, stretching out both his hands in the gesture of imploring men to come to him and be forgiven. "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die?"

XVI.

THE "BENEDICTUS" OF ZACHARIAS.

"BLESSED BE THE LORD GOD OF ISRAEL ; FOR HE HATH VISITED AND REDEEMED HIS PEOPLE."—*Luke* I : 68.

ALMOST every old writer who has had occasion to comment upon this part of the New Testament has been arrested by the evident determination to join Luke to Malachi in the person of John the Baptist. We have already seen how Gabriel quotes the prediction concerning Elijah's return, and applies it directly here to this forerunner of Christ. And now after Zacharias has passed his discipline of dumb silence, he suddenly comes forth with a song, the meaning and the beauty of which he derives from that same final chapter of the Old Testament. "The dayspring from on high hath visited us," is only another form of saying what Malachi had said before : "The Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in his wings."

We now enter upon the detailed study of another New Testament psalm, the "Benedictus," so called from the first word in it which in Latin means *blessed*. Three points of notice are suggested as a sufficient analysis for use in the sermon : the strangeness of this song-making, the spirit of the exercise, and the brilliancy of the figure.

I. Let us recall the fact that Zacharias was not alone in his song-making on this extraordinary occasion. It is not wise to pass over with only the mention of it a strange incident so full of significance. All these people suddenly became imaginative and musical ; and what they produced is actually of the highest literary and devotional character. Mary sings the Magnificat, Zacharias sings the Benedictus, and Simeon sings the Nunc Dimittis. And these three songs are so fine that the churches at large have placed them in their liturgies for sixty generations.

No one can thoughtfully read the Old Testament and the New without observing that more was made of music and poetry than we in this day are wont to acknowledge. To a people trained to this habit of improvisation there would be nothing remarkable in the incident now under our study. That Zacharias did poetic work at all in this supreme moment of his existence would awake no such surprise as we attach to the circumstance ; and that he did it so well would be attributed (as it should be) to the presence of the Holy Ghost.

It is significant that when these persons had a fresh theme of the gospel to celebrate, they felt themselves perfectly free to sing a song which should exactly befit and express it, even if it had to be composed on the instant. This was the example David, the sweet singer of Israel, had set before them. When he was brought up out of the horrible pit of some convulsing experience, and

There must be new hymns always.

The Queen of Scots.

his feet were again set upon a rock, he said the Lord "hath put a new song in my mouth." So here : Simeon, and Zacharias, and Mary, having a wonderful experience of what was exalted and inspiring beyond anything ever before conceived, made a new song to sing, and the Holy Ghost gave acceptance and added inspiration.

One of the best of our modern commentators does not hesitate to say that the Song of Zacharias, like that of Mary, is a charming echo from the ancient lyrical minstrelsy of the Hebrews. It was uttered under the immediate inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and is marked by the priestly character of him who uttered it. That it was, like that of Mary, an actual, unpremeditated outburst of the rapt spirit of its author, is unquestionable. Preserved, doubtless, in the family archives, or in the family tradition, they became known to Luke in his minute inquiries into the events of this remarkable epoch. The two inspired hymns are among the most *natural* wonders of this wondrous period.

On the night before her execution Mary Queen of Scots composed a short prayer, and sang it over by herself because she could not sleep. The words are very musical in the Latin which she used :

" O domine Deus ! speravi in te !

O care mi Jesu ! nunc libera me !

In dura catena—in misera poena—

Desidero te !

Languendo, gemendo, et genu flectendo,

Adoro, imploro, ut liberes me !"

Madame Guyon.

Augustine's estimate.

Here appears to be the passionate wish of a captive to escape. Perhaps it will show its sense better in a free translation into English :

O Lord God Almighty ! my hope is in thee !
 O Jesus beloved, now liberate me !
 In durance the drearest, in bonds the severest—
 My desire is to thee !
 In sighing and crying, on bended knees lying,
 I adore—I implore thou wouldst liberate me !

When Madame Guyon and her faithful maid were imprisoned, she composed songs for her comfort. "And then," says she, "we sang them together, praises unto thee, O our God ! It sometimes seemed to me as if I were a little bird, whom the Lord had placed in a cage, and that I had nothing to do now but sing !"

It seems natural for any one to spring into song under the stress of deep feeling. And when the song is fine, we are eager to learn the circumstances under which it was composed. It is more than curiosity which prompts us to look up the experimental origin of certain favorite hymns. To a peculiarly high fitness for such an occasion Zacharias adds the gift of inspiration.

It seems appropriate to quote just here the testimony which the great Augustine bears to the excellence of Zacharias's work upon this occasion : "O blessed hymn of joy and praise ! divinely inspired by the Holy Ghost, and divinely pronounced by the venerable priest, and daily sung

The spirit of song-making.

Peter Martyr's letter.

in the Church of God ! Oh, may thy words be often in my mouth, and the sweetness of them always in my heart ! The expressions thou usest are the comfort of my life ; and the subject thou treatest of, the hope of all the world !”

II. In the second place, having seen that this song-making for a new experience is not so very strange, after all, let us try to enter into the spirit of the exercise. The enthusiasm of such an occasion is very bright and cheerful. “ Is any among you merry ? Let him sing psalms.” Would that the study of this lesson might set all the wide Christian world singing the Benedictus to-day !

For there is value in a volume of voices, when singing with the spirit and understanding also. Bishop Jewell, writing to Peter Martyr, March, 1560, says : “ Religion is now somewhat more established than it was. The people are everywhere exceedingly inclined to the better part. Ecclesiastical and popular music has much conduced to this result. For as soon as they had once commenced to sing publicly in only one little church in London, immediately not only the other neighboring churches, but even the towns far distant, began to vie with each other in the same practice. At times you may see at Paul's Cross, after sermon, six thousand persons, old and young, of both sexes, singing together and praising God. This sadly annoys the priests and the devil ; for they see that by these means the sacred discourses sink more deeply into men's minds, and that their

kingdom is shaken and shattered at almost every note."

So instinctive and habitual was this exercise of singing when multitudes were gathered together, that all through the Old Testament we find the highest personifications of inspired Israelitish poets falling into musical form. Sometimes they offer to us the suggestion of the queerest kinds of choirs :

"Praise the Lord from the earth, ye dragons, and all deeps : fire, and hail ; snow, and vapor ; stormy wind fulfilling his word : mountains, and all hills ; fruitful trees, and all cedars : beasts, and all cattle ; creeping things, and flying fowl : kings of the earth, and all people ; princes, and all judges of the earth : both young men and maidens ; old men, and children : let them praise the name of the Lord : for his name alone is excellent ; his glory is above the earth and heaven."

It would appear that these ancient seers pictured all nature as on the alert, the moment God's praise was mentioned, to burst forth into melody. Now we may not go so far as to call upon trees to clap their hands, and fire and hail, dragons and deeps, to sing a doxology ; but we assuredly may catch the spirit of such poetry, and hold our own hearts ready for the summons when the hour of praise comes in.

Clemens Alexandrinus tells us that the early Christians, when the last acclamations of their prayers were reached in the public services,

William Cullen Bryant.

The Lord God "singing."

would raise themselves upon their tiptoes, as if they desired the word "Amen" should carry up their bodies as well as their souls to heaven. This makes us think of Bryant's exquisite lines :

" I look forth
Over the boundless blue ; where joyously
The bright crests of innumerable waves
Glance to the sun at once—as when the hands
Of a great multitude are upward flung
In acclamation !"

Two texts of Scripture there are which, put together, I think, are the most wonderful in the Bible. They do suggest a child lying in a cradle, and a loving face is bent over it, and a sweet voice is murmuring above its head. But I marvel with inexpressible surprise and adoration when I find who the Singer is and who is the child. The first verse is found in Isaiah 65 : 13 : "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you." The other verse I find in Zephaniah 3 : 17 : "The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty ; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy ; he will rest in his love ; he will joy over thee with singing." Oh, I have thought again and again, in my history, of this picture, and I am not too proud to say my eyes have filled with tears of emotion as I have tried to comprehend how the eternal Jehovah seems to *sing* beside one who loves him, as I remember my mother used to sing restful songs of comfort beside our bed on the old Sabbath nights !"

III. So now we come to the explicit theme of the Benedictus, and we have a little time left in which to speak of the matchless figure of speech in which this theme is cast. Zacharias once turns suddenly to address his song to the infant which his faith follows into the distance. Most pathetic are his words, as he imagines this little babe grown up, and leading the people to that Saviour of whom he is the appointed herald: "And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest." But he cannot keep far from his main subject, which is the coming of Mary's child, and not his own.

In describing the revelation of Christ as the Redeemer of men, he says: "The dayspring from on high hath visited us." This splendid figure of speech is taken from the dawn of morning on the night. And in order to understand fully the force of the rhetoric, we must bear in mind one of the natural phenomena of those eastern regions.

So pure is the atmosphere there, so far south, that clouds in the sky are not usual save in the rainy season. There seems really nothing to hinder the sun's going down, nothing to get in the way of his rising again. When he sets, he goes abruptly behind the adjacent hill; when he rises, he comes up unannounced, and in a quick moment is altogether on hand for his daily work—that is to say, there is positively no twilight, as we describe it, in those latitudes. The instant the day reaches its natural close, the sun appears to slide

No twilight in the East.

Richter's remark.

down the sky without any leave-taking. Just so when the dawn starts. When yesterday's monarch dismisses himself, and it is time for to-day's to succeed him, there he is, unheralded and serenely unhurried, calmly seated in his shining pavilion of clear air. Nothing surprises a tourist more than this sudden change.

Zacharias seizes this astonishing figure, and turns it to account. For four centuries it had been dark—dark with sin, dark with ignorance, dark with oppression—and now in one excited instant of disclosure the Sun of Righteousness had risen with healing in his wings. No wonder his heart was full; no wonder his dumbness gave way, and his glad voice lifted such a song!

It was long ago given as a remark of Jean Paul Richter that "mere music, without text, cannot reproduce anything immoral." Cannot we go a step farther to-day, and declare that music with a text like that given us here will produce only that which is spiritual in hope and love? Let us keep singing on, and always singing on about the day-spring from on high which has visited us. The light of the gospel is a gleam of the light of heaven. Oh, what will the full splendor of its noon be by and by? When the Gauls had tasted the wine of Italy, they began to ask where the grapes grew, and they would never be quiet till they came there.

XVII.

THE FIRST PSALM.

“FOR THE LORD KNOWETH THE WAY OF THE RIGHTEOUS : BUT THE WAY OF THE UNGODLY SHALL PERISH.”—*Psalm* I : 6.

ONE of the most interesting volumes lately issued is entitled “Gates into the Psalm Country.” I venture to borrow its title a moment. The truest theology, as well as the highest experience of spiritual life, finds its way most swiftly and most permanently into the hymns of the time ; and those periods in history which are most prolific of excellent hymns—hymns that stand use and continue through the ages—are what might be called the revival seasons of Christendom. And just so these old Psalms mark revival times.

For wisdom, pithiness, and force religious lyrics are to every church what proverbs are to every nation. They reach the high-water mark of pious intelligence and fervor of their generation as a record and register of what then could be done. And no one will ever go sweeping through the gates into the Psalm country, with an appreciative zest of feeling, until he has learned to bear in mind that even these inspired songs were revival songs. They were made slowly, and sifted severely. It is likely that many a poet thrust himself

 Psalms not in the Psalter.

 Two "nors" and a "not."

into notice who now is utterly forgotten ; and many a psalm made the Hebrew language ring sonorously which has now no place in the Psalter. Only these are retained that the Holy Ghost prompted. One hundred and fifty are given in the Old Testament, and remain a standing monument of the best life God's chosen people ever lived.

So much of general remark I have indulged in the hope of aiding a little in the external study of the book as a whole. But my main purpose to-day is the expository discussion of some points in the first Psalm, which is offered as the lesson for next Sabbath.

It is undoubtedly a sort of preface song, an introduction to what comes after. As in a fine overture the musician appears seeking to give us the key-strain of the work that follows, without anticipating and so exhausting it by an actual transcription of that melody on which he relies for his effect—so here the author has indicated what the whole Psalter has in charge—namely, to show an unfailing difference between two styles of character prevalent for all time among men ; the "godly" are "blessed," the "ungodly" are—by a singular turn of speech—"not so, not so."

The first surprise which will strike most readers here is undoubtedly the negative form of description employed. The whole instruction turns upon two "nors" and a "not." The righteous is rewarded for what he does *not* do : "Blessed is

“Oh, the blessednesses !”

Eight “nots” in the Decalogue.

the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.” All the characters mentioned here may have their excellences ; the ungodly have their *counsels*, the sinners have a pleasant *way* with them, the scornful have a proud *seat* to sit in. They will always invite unwary ones to *walk* with them, to *stand* with them, to *sit* with them. A wicked man may be witty ; a worldly man may be attractive ; a sinner may be brilliant. But this verse says distinctly, Blessed is the soul which utterly rejects all they have to proffer. The language is explosive and interjectional—even the word is in the plural : “Oh, the blessednesses of the man who has nothing whatever to do with such people ! But his delight is in the law of the Lord ; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.”

We shall lose much if we do not appreciate the exact force of this scriptural word “not.” Of the ten commandments in the Decalogue, eight are mere precepts with a “not” in them. This style of speech indicates a fallen and ruined nature, all the activities of which need sternly to be resisted. But the inspired Scriptures do not exhaust themselves in simple repression. They offer a positive life which is worth an acceptance. To be truly blessed, this man must delight in the law of God, and have it for his meditation.

Such expressions call us back, with almost the exact phraseology, to the day when the Lord

 Mere book-reading.

 God's thought of a tree.

gave charge to Joshua the new leader: "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success."

Let us understand that the picture here suggested does not demand for its centre figure a man sitting stiffly up with a book in his lap, engaged in perpetual reading. It is no business of an honest pulpit to waste time in rebuking caricature. The meaning a sober interpreter would find here is, that one shall see God in everything. Some sort of perusal of God's Word is necessary; but it is no counsel of this Psalm that a man shall bind himself down literally to letter-press in the night-time and through the day. The law of the Lord is in his providence, in his mountains and hills around about Jerusalem, in his rainfalls and sunshines, in his spiritual presence and his actual government, in his sacraments and in his people. God is in all one's thoughts when he keeps finding an idea of God suggested in everything he sees, or loves, or lives. "And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper."

Now, the poetry begins; for a more exquisite image can hardly be conceived. "What a thought was that," exclaims the great art critic Ruskin—

 Jeremiah's similar language.

Beside the Nile.

“ what a thought was that, when the Almighty first thought of a tree !” Most Bible-students will detect the similarity here, both of sentiment and phraseology, to that of Jeremiah : “ Thus saith the Lord ; Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord. For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh ; but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land and not inhabited. Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green ; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit.”

We saw this brilliant figure as a literal fact, on our way to the Pyramids in 1866. All along the journey from the banks of the Nile clear on, the eye ranged over reaches of sand, white and waveless, interminably, till it touched those masses of masonry on the Ghizeh ledge. Near the river the soil is wonderfully prolific, as the black mould is flung up by the annual inundation ; but before a great while the land begins to show the force of the fierce sun it scorches under. Deep seams and broad cracks are discovered in the surface. Along the banks tall palms shoot their stems up into the serene air. Most exquisitely have they been compared, knobbed and fluted as they are, to the

Knobbed and fluted.The heath in the desert.

shafts of Moorish architecture. From a distance they seem like pillars of some forest mosque gone to ruin, while from their summits droop the graceful green plumes of living foliage, hanging listlessly in the windless sunshine.

But now, looking in the other direction, and pushing our tedious beasts along, we found the sea of sand closing in around us entirely; and far as our vision could reach, only one stretch of verdureless and waste whiteness could be discerned. The last vestige of vegetation on the verge of the eternal sand is a little hard, wiry plant with a star-like radiate of yellow prickles all about its head, so horny and so keenly acute that not even the leanest kind of Pharaoh's kine would be persuaded by starvation itself to browse upon it. Our very donkeys passed it superciliously by. This weed is the loneliest, the most desolate, most lean and sorrowful caricature of a flower I ever saw. Yet that is the scriptural "heath in the desert;" and those glorious palms just behind us, indolently sweeping the sky with their luxuriant branches, are the "trees planted by the waters, that shall not see when the heat cometh."

Ah me, how fresh the palms seemed to us out there in the hot air! One can hardly realize how forcible these natural emblems become under the contrasted presence of them both; before his own open eyes the splendid plumes of the trees by the stream side, the emaciated meagreness of that heath out in the sand. I found myself quoting the

A talk to a tree."Not so—not so!"

Psalm, because it was more familiar than the words spoken by Jeremiah. I glided into a kind of dreamy conversation with the tree and the weed. I looked over at one particular palm—the one I have a photograph of at home now, entitled "Study of a Tree in Old Cairo"—and talked to it there by myself with my Bible open in my hand. I said, "You consider yourself well off here, set down in the richest meadow by the river; they keep you close, however, it seems; I wonder if you deem it a restriction; you cannot be permitted to *walk* out there in the hard paths of the desert; it is forbidden for you to *stand* in the hot spot where the heath is; you have no leave to go and *sit* on those bleak rocks with the Pyramids; but it appears as if you had the best chance of all; you are established safely—you have been *planted*; you are nourished plentifully—you are beside the *river*; you are fruitful, too—bringing to perfection your fruit *in the season*; you are perennial—I presume your *leaf* never withered since you began to grow; you are happy in all the splendor of joyous tree-life—whatsoever you do *prosper*."

And then I turned to the lonesome little heath in the sands, and I remembered that three versions of the Bible—the Septuagint, the Vulgate, and the Syriac—repeat these words of contrast, that the negative statement might have intensity: "Not so, the ungodly, *not so!*" Then I went on talking to the weed. And I said: "Whatsoever

the tree has, just that you never had ; you were not planted—you have no rights anywhere ; you are not nourished—you are out in a waterless waste ; you are not fruitful—you scarcely can live from season to season ; you are not welcome—your leaf is withered into a dryness that not a fly could find shadow under it ; you have no promise of a future—nothing about you seems to prosper ; there is no charm in the look of you, no comfort in staying where you belong ; the palm is good company—not so the heath, not so !”

Thus we reach the turn in the Psalm, and the turn of the description, and the turn of the figure also. From the consideration of the righteous man, the Psalmist passes to the description of another style and type of character : “ The ungodly are not so : but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away.”

The analogies of chaff, as a symbol of wicked men, are singularly striking. Of itself, chaff is totally valueless ; no service has ever been found to which it could be put. It is, in vegetable life, the mere envelope of each grain of wheat. It lies just next to the kernel ; but only the kernel is ever looked after. No thrifty farmer will even so much as leave it around. If it is not soon blown away from the threshing-floor, it is gathered to be burned idly in heaps ; and then it is the ashes which are blown away finally.

Moreover, it would be difficult to find a better simile than is offered here of such instability of

Inevitable drifting.Where does chaff go ?

character, that has no real foundation of good. There is a necessary drifting of this lawless stuff before the winds of passion, or the winds of popular opinion, or the winds of human prejudice. Outside forces carry away into a hopeless scattering the soul which has no force of its own. External companionships and internal lusts join to render it fickle.

Whither does the wind blow the chaff it finds in its way? Oh, who knows, and who cares? Anywhere—anywhere—out of your sight! But if you ask whither does the wind blow spiritual chaff, the New Testament gives answer, that they shall be punished with “everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.” No figure in the Bible is laid hold of oftener in the midst of impassioned descriptions than this; the suddenness of a sinner’s vanishing away, and the utterness of his disappearance, seem to be the two thoughts on which the inspired writers dwell repeatedly; and the simile they use is that of the tree and the chaff. “Wherefore do the wicked live, become old, yea, are mighty in power? Their seed is established in their sight with them, and their offspring before their eyes. They spend their days in wealth, and in a moment go down to the grave. Therefore they say unto God, Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. What is the Almighty, that we should serve him; and what profit should we have, if we pray unto him? Lo, their good is

The candle of the wicked.

A green bay-tree.

not in their hand : the counsel of the wicked is far from me. How oft is the candle of the wicked put out? and how oft cometh their destruction upon them? God distributeth sorrows in his anger. They are as stubble before the wind, and as chaff that the storm carrieth away."

Oh, why will not men ponder these things! How small a Bible David had, at the time when he wrote this psalm; and yet he talked about meditating upon it *day and night*. The truest style of piety is that which is Christ-like, and the most trustworthy religion is that which is Bible-grounded. And each of these is reached by study, and is rendered possible by grace. Only people refuse to give thought to what concerns them most; the tree grows in the night as well as in the day; *not so, the ungodly, not so!* How vividly such images are presented by these inspired poets in the other Psalms: "I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay-tree. Yet he passed away, and lo, he was not: yea, I sought him, but he could not be found. Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace. But the transgressors shall be destroyed together: the end of the wicked shall be cut off."

At this point the Psalm before us changes form. There is an excited and rapid urging forward of each thought. Over the bounds of this dispensation, across the line that separates two worlds of experience, we find ourselves hurried in order to

“The Lord knoweth.”

Carlyle's question.

reach results as they congeal into changeless destiny : “Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.” Here that word “judgment” falls on our ears ; and we learn all we need to know concerning the grand gathering of the elect of God in which no one else has any part. And in just that delineation of a final settlement comes the image of the chaff to view again ; the judge himself becomes a witness : “For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous : but the way of the ungodly shall perish.” We are told elsewhere that the Lord knoweth them that are his. It is plain, therefore, that he knows all the race at once. He makes us understand that he does not propose to wait through any tedious process of calling testimony to decide whether a heap of chaff may not possibly be a living tree, after all. No ; “The Lord knoweth.”

On the human side, then, the history of the wicked man comes to an end ; “the way of the ungodly” perishes, the trail is lost, the rivulet dries up, the channel grasses over, silence succeeds. The name of the righteous is held in everlasting remembrance, but not so, the ungodly, not so ; the name of the wicked shall rot !

But now, on the side which is not human, man dieth and wasteth away, and where is he ? Thomas Carlyle, not interested in some after-dinner speeches which were going on around the table where a great company of scholars sat,

Where do sinners go ?Chaff is burned up.

turned suddenly to a sceptical wiseacre sitting next to him, and asked in a rough whisper, "Will you be kind enough to tell me your opinion as to the exact place where wicked people really do go after death?" What the answer was is not given; but the question was sharp, and yet modest. Where *do* unconverted men and women go after they die? Might it not be quite interesting to read over what God's Word has to reply to this? "For behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of Righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall. And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith the Lord of hosts. Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

XVIII.

GETTING RID OF STRANGE CHILDREN.

“RID ME, AND DELIVER ME FROM THE HAND OF STRANGE CHILDREN, WHOSE MOUTH SPEAKETH VANITY, AND THEIR RIGHT HAND IS A RIGHT HAND OF FALSEHOOD : THAT OUR SONS MAY BE AS PLANTS GROWN UP IN THEIR YOUTH ; THAT OUR DAUGHTERS MAY BE AS CORNER-STONES, POLISHED AFTER THE SIMILITUDE OF A PALACE.”—*Psalm 144* : 11, 12.

JUST now we happen to hear much concerning the troublesomeness of children. They get the nickname of “responsibilities.” It may seem a poor, commonplace thought to introduce here, but it is frightfully practical ; how difficult it is to rent a house or to engage summer board for a family that contains boys and girls ! It is rather considered that they are quite in the way by some who expect to be counted as refined people, even by some who come regularly to communion as the followers of Jesus Christ. But what must one think of an incident like that recorded in the life of the Master ?

“And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, and said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is

Stumbling-stones and millstones.

Ancient usages.

greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name, receiveth me. But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.”

Perhaps it is as well for us to learn the lesson at once, so that we might accept the statement which the words of the Saviour would teach—namely, that little children are the true wards of the church, and ought to be welcomed, cherished, and valued highly.

I. No one while reading the Old Testament history can have failed to observe how carefully children were noticed, and how providentially their wants were forestalled.

Counsels without number are given with reference to all the younger members of the families. They were to be solemnly dedicated under a prescribed ordinance. They were to be trained in all the matters of the ceremonial law. Historical and commemorative festivals were to be explained to their understanding, so as to be fixed in their intelligent recollection. They were not allowed to come under the contaminating influences which nurses of a different religion might possibly exert. As soon as they could speak, they were taught to repeat sentences from the Scriptures. In the schools the law of Moses formed one of their common text-books. A sort of degree was to be

Putting on manhood.Jesus' childhood.

taken at thirteen years old, and they received thereafter the names of "sons of the commandment." And the settled rule in the Jewish nation was that as soon as they were able to walk up Mount Moriah by holding on to their fathers' hands, they were to go to Jerusalem to keep their first passover.

All along their growing years until they were mature, they were held under strictest guardianship ; and, at the last, when one had passed out of boyhood, he was brought officially before ten of the picked men, and by legal act was thrown on his own responsibility, his parents on that occasion soberly laying off the charge of their covenant, and thanking God that they had been spared to complete his education and now offer him to God and the nation.

II. Nor under the New Testament do we find that this definite care of the young was in any degree diminished. Jesus' early history in Nazareth affords a most pertinent example of parental faithfulness under many discouraging circumstances. And in his after life, when the burden of his ministry was upon him, over and over again he manifested publicly the interest he felt in all of tender years. Nowhere in his history does he commend himself and his gospel so much to our hearts as when we find him taking children in his arms to bless them. The apostles received from him an unmistakable teaching in this direction, and their epistles are crowded with counsels concerning the care of the young.

David's prayer.

Only a living cry.

Now, what does all this mean? Is it not God's own way of manifesting how much in earnest he was when he made his inspired servant of old say, "Children are an heritage from the Lord"? He has certainly intended that his people should cherish no more cordial wish, and utter no more tender prayer, than that of David in the best part of his history: "Rid me and deliver me from the hand of strange children, whose mouth speaketh vanity, and their right hand is a hand of falsehood; that our sons may be as plants grown up in their youth, that our daughters may be as corner-stones polished after the similitude of a palace."

III. So we reach the easy inference that every child is a gift from God; a valuable gift, a gift which the Giver himself prizes highly, and expects to be sincerely respected.

And why should he not? Think a moment: what is a child? It seems a feeble, miserable bundle of wants and wailings. For it has only one medium of communication with the external world. A single articulation remains as the sign of its wonderfully mysterious life and immortality; it can do nothing intelligible but *cry*. Its unappreciated voice has no cadence, no modulation, no varying mood. It can only weep, and moan, and murmur. Its entire gamut consists of notes of discomfort, and the scale of its music is minor. All its vocabulary is cast upon the registers of pain.

A child's possibilities.

Capabilities and susceptibilities.

But remember that child's possibilities. See how biography lies knotted up in that twisted little hand. See how history will work itself out from under the involutions of that insignificant forehead. Picture the revelations of the future ; for something of importance was added to the resources of the world on the day that small being was born. There are ten more fingers to weave in this planet's intricate work ; there are two more feet to be henceforth busily going on human errands ; there is one more tongue to fill the air with the accents of omnipotent speech.

Think also of each child's capabilities. There are undeveloped powers of mind now silent and dormant in that plastic brain. Perhaps, if one were to search, he would find somewhere an artistic skill with the pencil, or a musical success with the keys, in the muscles and the gifts now so far out of sight. It is wonderful to imagine how much one feeble infant will by and by be able to do of evil, or of good.

Recollect likewise that child's susceptibilities. The full measure of what any human being can suffer or can enjoy remains as yet locked in the secret issues of even a babe's existence. When the waves of the years come rocking on under it, and the surroundings of present home-life are broken up, then it must perforce advance into the toil and turmoil of the world ; and some of us know where the stings are which will reach it,

The martyr Ignatius.

Moses in the ark.

and where the sweet privileges lie which will give it a new song ; and some of us do not.

Once our Lord stood holding a little boy by the hand, while he preached to his disciples about humility. Ecclesiastical tradition has said that the lad grew up to be the martyr Ignatius, who was thrown to the wild beasts in the Coliseum at Rome. How glorious was the gladness he felt in his Saviour, and how terrible was the pain he experienced when the roar was heard, and the teeth of the ravenous creatures were tearing his limbs in pieces ! But who could have dreamed of such a thing when the fair child stood there unconsciously serving the Master for an exquisite text ?

IV. Hence, each infant is to be estimated, when one would rightly register its value, by its future, and not by its present show. The secret lies here : “ For of such is the kingdom of heaven.”

We have been just lately studying the transfiguration scene. One of the attendants of Jesus there, radiant with glistering glory, was within a remembered period down in the water of the river Nile, an outlaw slave-child in an ark of bulrushes. Our imagination pictures him when he was watched only by the eyes of one little Hebrew girl ; and it is still an undecided question whether Miriam or Moses was the most exposed to peril. But the lad went up to the king's palace ; learned all there was to know in Egyptian lore ; and became the leader and lawgiver of God's people.

“Ordering” a child.

Scraps of paper.

Afterward he marched through the wilderness, smiting rocks for water, and defeating foes with holding up his hands. Then he disappeared for fifteen centuries, until now he came down from heaven to talk with Elijah about the old story of the cross. So we know he still is alive, and will show himself again in the infinite ages after the world is burned, and when they sing Moses' song and the Lamb's.

It is wise to look thoughtfully upon each young child while it waits for its growth, and remember it is contemporaneous with God. If it be our child—ours to love, or ours to teach—let us ask the old question: “How shall we order the child?” If it be the child of another, then still let us ask the question how its future can be made valuable.

V. It must be very melancholy to lose a child, then, by simple neglect. We lose in the same moment all there might have been in its history.

When I was last in the East I asked my dragoon whether the saying I had heard quoted so often was true, that the Mohammedans gather carefully every scrap of paper, because possibly the name of God may be written upon it. He answered that no good Mussulman would ever set his foot on a flying slip or sheet, but would pick it up and examine it, if he had time. And if he found it to be without any inscription, I continued, would he have the same care about it? “Yes,” he replied, “for he would say to him-

The name of Immanuel.

The army on the Alps.

self, God's name can perhaps be written upon it now, or by and by."

I find myself thinking of this same thing many a time as these waifs of the street pass me in daily life. Who knows that the name of Immanuel is not written on any given child's forehead? And even, if confessedly not, who knows but it may be, with the divine blessing, written there hereafter? I confess I am surprised at the comparative success of mere humanitarian efforts over gospel efforts for the young. They are not always easier. I would not have the former less, but the latter more.

The great world around will give money in full measure for summer excursions up the river; but chapels languish, mission schools lie heavy, and real religious work goes hard. It seems as if some Christians could be moved to sympathy more easily over children's bodies than over their souls. The other day I read aloud just a little tale from French history, and half my listeners were in tears at the end.

It was only this: One time, when the army of Italy was crossing the Alps, threescore or more years ago, on that famous expedition with which all adventurous history rings, a nameless drummer-boy was swept from the ranks by the sudden dash of an avalanche, hurrying him down into a deep hollow, lined with never-dissolving snow, such as frequently lies along among those desolate mountains. Singularly enough, he was not seri-

A drummer-boy lost.What was one lad ?

ously injured by the plunge ; he had slipped and slid over the crust of ice, and his light body had met very few bruises, and no blows that were fatal.

He clambered up to the top of the mass, and waved his hand aloft to show that he was alive. Along the giddy brink, two hundred feet above, the advancing train slowly and wearily filed on. His drum still hung suspended from his neck. It could not be said just which he intended, to keep his blood warm or to attract the notice of the men, but he began to beat the military calls and changes to which he had been trained. In that clear, frosty air sound goes to an almost incredible distance. Every stroke of the tattoo, the reveille, the advance, the charge, was heard by every soldier that marched on ; they commented admiringly upon the pluck of the brave little musician, who patiently kept his sticks flying.

Of course the path up the mountain-side zig-zags, in order to rise over the immense acclivity. Thus it came to pass that for a while the whole army would be out of sight, and then return again, near in line, but farther up the steep. Clear and echoing floated up that rattling drum-beat on their ears. Hardy veterans there were, who wept as the hours passed and they perceived they were leaving the poor boy behind. No command seemed likely to come now for any effort to save his life. Word had already been sent to the emperor, but he had decided to leave the lad where

His own funeral march.The grave of ice.

he was. What was one single drummer-boy to the army of Napoleon Bonaparte? And before long it became evident that so the lad understood it likewise.

He redoubled his activity. Natural fear of freezing stimulated him for a short time to renewed exertions, and he vigorously plied his arms to keep his life-pulses warm. Far along the thin, bright ridge above him he saw the vanishing columns growing fainter. At last he knew they did not intend to give him rescue. Then, brave in the midst of absolute despair, he suddenly changed the brisk relief-call he had been beating to a strain sadder and of a deeper meaning. He paused a few moments, then began a funeral march. They all heard those sober strokes of death in the cold air, but could give no heed.

It can be well understood that every father of a son at home among that vast host yearned over the lad with deep suffering of agony that was almost stifling. For as he saw the courageous endurance, and finally the heroic surrender, when the tired boy at last decently composed his limbs on the snowy bank to die, with the frost for his shroud and the falling night for his pall, he shuddered to think this lost lad might have been his own.

Since that, for many a year—so the romancers of those days tell us—the veterans of the Italian campaign have hushed their voices at the camp-fires as they told the tale of the drummer-boy of

Only a child!

"Sons of aliens."

the Alps, and thought of the silent solitudes where now his slender body lay frozen beside his drum.

Only a child! yet children have souls. Souls are more than bodies. Immortal life is more than temporal. Yet the calm world marches on, as if empires hung on the balance of a moment, and even the drum-beat of a soul calling for help need not be heeded or heard.

VI. We are ready, therefore, to come straight to the prayer in the text. If any Christian parent wishes that his sons may be as plants grown up in their youth, that his daughters may be as corner-stones, polished after the similitude of a palace, he must make himself to be rid and delivered from the hand of strange children, whose mouth speaketh vanity, and whose right hand is a right hand of falsehood.

The real words of this verse are "the sons of aliens;" what is meant is, that those kept coming in among the children of God's people who were outsiders, uninstructed, coarse, and vicious.

David prayed to be rid of them so as to avoid their contaminating influence. Twice does he repeat his prayer in this same psalm. And it becomes serious now; how can we in our day accomplish the same purpose? There seem to be only three ways possible: we can let them die, we can deport them bodily out of the city, we can educate and convert them; which of these is best?

1. As for letting them die, that is easy enough. They have bad air in this great town of ours, not

A waif's fight for life.

Organized deportation.

much water, close lodgings, and hereditary vice to help along the slow processes of nature, and so they perish as fast as is safe without raising the cry of murder against officials in what are called the "charities" of the city. The fight which a poor infant has to make in New York for bare life would be pitiable if any one would stop long enough to see the thing through.

But is this the best way to be rid of strange children? Is it with street Arabs, as some say it is with the tribes of red men on the reserves of the Government—"the only good Indian is a dead Indian"? Why, there is vast value in children if they only grow up to be able-bodied men. And then, is it a very pleasant thing to think of, that at the day of judgment some one will be making inquisition for blood, and asking very solemnly, "Who slew all these?"

2. It is better to deport them out of the city, then, you answer; to send them bodily away where they can have a better chance, both physically and spiritually. There are Associations whose patrons would agree with you in that. They have sent thousands of boys and girls to Western homes and Eastern. Thus they have relieved the city, and saved the children for good.

But this will not do for every case. Some poor parents there are who love their offspring with a blind fondness very much resembling our own for our children. They are not willing to part with them. And then, also, some of the children are

A wise suggestion from "Lacon,"

Give the children a chance.

too young to go now, and the ruin will be consummated if we wait for them to get grown up.

3. Are you not ready now to say, in the third place, save those who can be kept alive, send off into Christian homes those who can and will go, and then take the rest in God's name into schools, and into refuges, and into hope and salvation by the grace of Christ?

It was a wise remark of the author of "Lacon," made long ago: "Subtract from a great man all that he owes to opportunity, and all that he owes to chance; all that he has gained by the wisdom of his friends, and the folly of his enemies; and our Brobdingnag will often become a Lilliputian." These "strange children" ought to have given to them some sort of chance in the world. Educate them, train them, care for them. It is not the children that we need to get rid of, but the strangeness of them; and that will be attained when Christ calls them "friends."

Oh, this does two of the finest things conceivable, and does them at once by the same supreme act. It rids us of the lies of the strange children, by stopping the lying, and it helps some poor troubled people, who could not do it without us, to raise their children up till they look like ours, and shine "as corner-stones polished after the similitude of a palace!"

XIX.

“ UNDER HIS SHADOW.”

“ I SAT DOWN UNDER HIS SHADOW WITH GREAT DELIGHT.”—*Solomon's Song* 2 : 3.

YOU know that in the figurative language of Solomon's Song, by the Spouse is to be understood the Church, or the Soul of each individual believer, and by the Beloved, the Saviour. So in the verse from which the text is taken are set forth the charms of Christ as the object of every obedient Christian's love. The Bride seems to be picturing herself as reclining in an orchard, surrounded by all which in that oriental land could enliven the senses. She presents her chosen Friend to our imagination as a tree, and says she found in him refreshment and regalement. She sings : “ As the apple-tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste.”

Shade is oriental luxury. That glowing climate renders some protection from the sun often necessary and always grateful. Very naturally under each of the wide-branching canopies there would be found a little circular carpet of verdure, rich, fresh, and green, though all else was arid

and parched beneath the blaze of the noon. Hither would intimate friends be likely to resort. And so such spots were easily made to symbolize the spiritual trysting-places of the Soul with Christ, the chief of its love.

This is the reason, probably, why it has always been so appropriate to pass over such language to our Communion exercises. Here in this spiritual garden we find no place of repose or satisfaction so welcome as the ordinance of the Lord's Supper furnishes. We see Christ in it, and we sit under his shadow with greatest delight. Even the words which follow this aid in transferring the thought: "He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love."

Now, personal experiences differ widely in all these matters according to our temperament. And yet we all are conscious of some yearning-desire for improvement and enjoyment in every recurrence of these festivals. It becomes a serious question as to the possibility, for every Christian, of such an attainment. What is it that we want, and how shall we get it?

The answer to these inquiries is by no means difficult. All great things are simple. Each true believer's delight under the tree of divine ordinances will bear an analysis. Its elements are all familiar.

1. Reminiscence is one part of it. Think of the old histories which this feast suggests. This is a time of reunions. The family of God has its

Pathetic reminiscence.

The citron-orange tree.

meetings at his board. And each one's religious record seems sent up for review. From the beginning of our union to Christ, on to the perfect completeness of the assurance we have reached in him, this ordinance journeys with its burden of significance. The early ransom paid to justice, the pardon bestowed so freely in grace, the hope shining in the distance, as the crisis and consummation of all that is grand or glorious out in an inexhaustible future—these are before us in the figures employed.

So we see why a young believer is quite satisfied with the Communion as a fixed order of the church, and why the aged believer desires no more. There is a singular elasticity in the institution which adapts it to each stage of the religious life. You should mark how exquisitely this simple point finds its illustration here in the text. What is called by the maiden in the Song an "apple-tree" is really a citron-tree, a sort of lemon or orange peculiar to that country; it is often mentioned in the Bible. Its foliage is perpetual, its flowers are profuse even in midwinter, and on its branches may be seen throughout the whole year a continual succession of blossoms and fruit—green fruit and ripe fruit on different boughs of the very same tree. You can see all stages and processes of growth at a glance. And so our figure turns very significantly; here is a spot for every degré of advancement in experience to find rest upon.

2. Hence, naturally, exhilaration would be another part of this delight of the Christian sitting under the shadow of ordinance. It is carefully to be borne in mind always that this is a feast and not in any case a fast. The Lord's Supper is just like every other festive occasion, designed to be lively, hospitable, and glad. So the burdened feeling, under pressure of which many approach the table, is altogether out of place. A prince has no reason to be sad of countenance in coming to a banquet in a kingly father's palace, unless he is conscious he is plotting wilful treason. Our ordinance is in “ the House Beautiful;” the chamber of its celebration is called “ Peace;” and the ministrants at the board to furnish food to the guests are by name “ Piety,” “ Prudence,” and “ Charity.”

Of course we admit that some of the scenes which the feast commemorates are exceedingly melancholy and sorrowful. But those particular circumstances in our Lord's career which are outfigured in the breaking fragments of bread are lingered upon only for the purpose of showing that the work of atonement is done. His pains are rehearsed to make it plain that they are now all over forever. The bread is torn in pieces not for a harrowing exhibition of Jesus' agony, but to exhibit how it comes about that our souls have it to feed upon. The wine is poured out not merely to picture our shame for the sins which made the shedding of Jesus' blood necessary, but also to

“ The cup of salvation.”

Agnes Beaumont.

remind us of the grand covenant it seals. Our emotions may be mixed, but the preponderant sensibility is that of ineffable peace.

3. Then, next to this—or rather with this—comes a fresh impulse of affection, as we sit under the shadow with great delight. We feel burdened with a sense of gratitude. Certainly, we remember that our sins demanded the Lord’s crucifixion; but we cannot ever forget that our Lord instantly met the demand. And we find ourselves quoting the old Psalm with a fresh and pathetic notion of its great meaning under the New Testament :

“ What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows unto the Lord now in the presence of all his people. Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints. O Lord, truly I am thy servant; I am thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid: thou hast loosed my bonds. I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the Lord. 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.”

You might find a very touching example and expression of this experience recorded in the biography of John Bunyan. On one occasion, when he had been administering Communion, a young woman—Agnes Beaumont by name—on

A feast of fat things.

Eager anticipations.

going away from the table wrote this entry in her journal: " Oh, this has been a feast of fat things ! I sat under his shadow with great delight. I found, while at the administration, such a return of prayer that I was scarcely able to bear up under it. I was, as it were, carried up to heaven, and had such a sight of my Saviour as even broke my heart into pieces. Oh, how I then longed to be with Christ ! How willingly would I have died in that place, and gone immediately to glory ! A sense of my sins and of his dying love made me love him and long to be with him. It was a remarkable visit which the Saviour made to my waiting soul that day."

4. Then, again, anticipation is one of the elements of that delight with which the Christian sits under the shadow of Communion. As yet, our hearts acknowledge the exposure, as they have to confess the conflict, of strife with the adversary over the infirmities which beset us in the way. But there is a shining of sweet light in the distance. Take for illustration any one of the familiar incidents of Scripture history. When the avenger was at the heels of a fleeing Hebrew, rushing for his life toward a City of Refuge, the frightened culprit could have thought of nothing so much as just the sight of those blessed walls, behind which—if he could only get there—he would be safe. The first gleam of sunshine on the open gate would be like the quickening of his soul from death.

Quickening out of death.An alabaster box.

Think of Naaman, coming up the final time from the Jordan, and suddenly discovering that his flesh had begun to return again like that of a little child, wholesome and clean from leprosy forever. Oh, how the fine, eager hope of free days yet to be lived and enjoyed would kindle a joy in his heart ! Picture a bitten Israelite looking at the image of brass that Moses had lifted up in the midst of the camp ; the invalid woman creeping nearer in the press just to touch the hem of Christ's garment ; the centurion receiving the news of his child's healing ; Zacchæus called down out of the tree at Jericho with gracious words proposing a visit at his house ; poor old Bartimeus trying his new eyes for the first time, with looking in the face of the Master who had opened them ; take any of these, or all of them together ; then imagine that each of them had some ceremony, or a recurring anniversary, or a positive institution, that would periodically bring his wonderful deliverance to mind, and would confirm it also, every time it came ; what would be his emotions when he made ready for its celebration ? How he would long for its arrival, and greet it with delight !

5. Next to this, as one of the elements of the delight of a believer at the Lord's Table, is consecration. The soul longs to break an alabaster box of perfumed offering upon the Saviour's head. Let me rehearse, as illustrating what I mean, the story of an individual in Scotland.

Janette Fraser.

"Not for a dukedom!"

Some years ago all the Christian world was full of interest in the name of Janette Fraser. It appears that this godly woman had her home upon an insignificant plot of land in Thornhill. The owner of that whole section of territory—the feudal proprietor—refused to allow free churches anywhere on his soil. In opinion he was hostile to the Disruption acts, and desired to thwart them everywhere he could. Application was made to this poor laboring woman, earning what would be less than twenty dollars of American money a year, to sell her garden enclosure on which she lived, for the purpose of putting up a house for worship. In order to head off this proposition, the duke likewise sent his offer of twenty-five hundred dollars for the patch of ground. Then came this answer, which I quote exactly, for it has become historic. The dialect you must read for yourselves, for I cannot pronounce broad Scotch so well as it deserves to be spoken.

"No," said this firm-hearted servant of God; "I have devoted my all to my Maker; and I would not take five hundred pounds sterling—no, nor all the dukedom, for my ground, if it is to be kept from the Almighty." And then she turned, and presented as her free gift the whole of it for a church building. And there it stands to-day; crooked and ill-shaped, for they fitted the structure to the entire plot, so as to have as much space as possible. It is the awkwardest monument in

An awkward monument.

The Free-church at Thornhill.

Scotland, but it commemorates an act of honorable zeal of piety never to be forgotten.

Now, I tell you this story because of one expression in the reply actually sent ; her account of the act by which she “devoted her all to her Maker,” she gives thus : “ I sat down at the Lord’s Table ; in the address before distributing the elements, the minister repeated these words : ‘ But now thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not ; for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name ; thou art mine.’ I thought they entered my soul and lifted it up in joy which I could hardly contain. But when the bread passed, such alarm came upon me as that I durst not lift it off the plate : I wished the cup might pass likewise, if I did not belong to God ; but observing I had missed, the minister sent an elder back with the bread, when I admitted I had not eaten ; I admired the providence as much as the promise, and I have now need of them both.”

Then she goes on to tell how her heart was kindled, and how suddenly the thought struck her to make her cottage-plot a free gift to God. Thus we see one, at first so humble as to be afraid to touch the elements, when she believed the good Lord had intended she should not be forgotten, come forth with her absolute all to lay in tears at his feet. She trembled as did Esther at the king’s door ; but when he held out his sceptre, her heart

Reverence and tranquillity.

Method of attainment.

broke into unutterable tenderness and consecration.

And now I was going on to speak of reverence and of tranquillity, as elements of this delight when one sits under the shadow of such an ordinance.

But I arrest the analysis. Let us put the question in closing, How is all this attained? Only a single sentence is needed to state the answer :

“ That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us : and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.”

“ He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me : and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him. Judas saith unto him (not Iscariot), Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world? Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words : and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.”

XX.

THE TEXT-BOOK IN AFFLICTION.

“IT IS GOOD FOR ME THAT I HAVE BEEN AFFLICTED ; THAT I MIGHT LEARN THY STATUTES.”—*Psalm 119 : 71.*

CERTAIN singularities have always marked this Psalm with a peculiar interest for the scholar. It is the lengthiest in the Bible, and some peculiar structural forms render it attractive. Yet it cannot be known who was its author. We only understand that some saint there has once been in history who was inspired to say what many a saint since his day has not needed inspiration to work out into life : “ Before I was afflicted I went astray : but now have I kept thy word. It is good for me that I have been afflicted ; that I might learn thy statutes.”

He does not mean mere personal bereavements ; he makes no restrictions whatsoever. And from other parts of the psalm we infer he intended to include all that is trying to any sensitive soul. He mentions reproaches and slanders ; he specifies enemies, and those who had dealt perversely with him ; he speaks also of spiritual desertions, and conscious uncleanness, loneliness and prostration of heart, fears and fightings, weariness and doubt. His forms of expression are exceedingly general.

A hundred and seventy-six verses.

Individuality recognized.

And it is not likely we shall err if, in making a proposition out of his extensive compend, we should say he really intended to offer the Bible—the whole word of God—as the text book for the afflicted ; and that this end, simple as it may appear, is his definite aim through all the hundred and seventy-six verses of which the psalm is composed.

It would be a profitable exercise for us if we could look down upon men once from the heaven-side. We should have a far better notion of this disciplinary existence of ours. The truth is, all of God's children are at school. Our place is still upon the primary forms, learning to read the alphabet of the redeemed. And our chief hindrance to improvement is that in our dulness we are wilfully set against hearing explanations, and worse set against obeying orders, as we are bound. We are over-wise, and often impatient, and do not want to have our teaching continued, no matter how kind is the voice that proffers it.

Still we need light deplorably, and in compassion for us God himself insists on being our instructor. The great thing for us to feel, and come joyously under, is the consciousness that he is dealing with each one of us face to face, and that he in turn recognizes the individual temperament and disposition of his entire round of pupils. An intense personality on his part, and an intense personality on ours, are the characteristics of the intercourse between us. We need, therefore, to

become acquainted with our Preceptor in order to success in our studies. Especially is this true when the particular difficulty of our lesson centres upon himself.

Now the process of our spiritual education might have been conducted, as it was with our first parents in the garden, by means of mere oral communication of truth and precept. But divine wisdom has seen fit to order it otherwise. He has given us the use of a plain text-book. And the primary object of God's dealings with us has been announced : it is to draw us to learn our lessons from the volume before us. He does not choose to make himself known to us in mere Nature, nor even in Nature and Providence combined. He has revealed himself in the Scriptures, and he desires us to be familiar with what is said in them. In this sense, "he hath magnified his Word above his Name."

Hence, the assertion is not by any means so startling as it would at first sight seem, that the main object of many of our worries and afflictions, little and large, is to drive us to an intelligent knowledge, and a fitting appreciation, of the Bible. The Almighty God has ordered it as the medium of intercourse with himself, and it is hardly too much to say that he chastises no sin of man more severely than neglect of its study.

This is, no doubt, the earliest meaning of our text. But I apprehend that it is meant to include more. Our trials are intended to force us to the

“The religion of the sorrowful.”

Rebellious questionings.

study of the Scriptures, and that for the sake of everything which those grand oracles of truth contain. But there can be no question that what the Psalmist would have us clearly understand is, that afflictions propose to introduce us to God's word, most of all, for the sake of the specific truth it contains concerning afflictions in particular. It was once urged as a reproach that “Christianity is the religion of the sorrowful.” Surely, a fact so patent need not be presented with any array of argument. The scheme of faith and hope and life which Jesus of Nazareth, the man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, came to publish and fulfil, is just the religion for the sorrowful; and one would think that, in a world like ours, there would be quite room enough for it. And the gospel, which contains the record of that system, is certainly just what a mourner or a sufferer from any cause desires.

Begin, if you will, with the one item of *explanation*. The chief source of our disquiet under trials is their mystery. We see no reason why the children of God should be wounded and bereaved. There is no solution of the rebellious questionings which arise, when our hearts are broken and stunned, outside of an immediate and authoritative revelation from heaven. When God sends us chastisement, only God can tell us what it is for. And he has been pleased to do this beforehand. The Bible discloses the entire purpose of the discipline.

God had one Son sinless.Not even one son sorrowless.

You will recall the words of the young Elihu in his address to the patriarch Job : “ Lo, all these things worketh God oftentimes with man, to bring back his soul from the pit, to be enlightened with the light of the living.”

Here is wisdom for ourselves found in what some consider the oldest book in the Bible. This is only one declaration, however, among many in God’s word, all of which avow as the grand pervading principle of the divine government that affliction is the chief instrument of spiritual education for every true believer. He is to be made perfect through suffering. That which was formerly the curse now becomes the means of removing the curse. Man suffers for his own sin, Christ suffers for man’s sin. Though God did have one Son who never sinned, he never had so much as one son who did not suffer.

There is now, however, this great reversal of the entire office of spiritual pain : whereas it was once penal, now it is purifying. The fire of affliction is no longer the hot, burning rain falling upon Sodom, or the fierce flashes of destruction sent at the prayer of Elijah on the fifties of Ahab ; indeed, it is not the flame-wreaths of the pit at all. It is the glowing of a furnace, the heat of which none can deny, but the purpose of which is to refine away dross, and bring pure gold out from its chance defilement. And even in the midst of the flames may always be seen the form of one like unto the Son of Man, sharing the fiercest

Chastening is teaching.Inexhaustible comfort.

fortunes of his chosen friends. "Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest him out of thy law." Chastening is just teaching.

This of itself would seem to be enough to render the Bible of immense value to any tired believer. If it explains his trouble it does more than anything else can for him. But it goes beyond this. There is in God's word an inexhaustible *comfort* as well as explanation.

It may seem singular, but it is indisputably true, that most afflicted Christians find their comfort in the doctrines of the Bible rather than in anything else. Sorrow, just of itself, seems to throw a flood of illumination upon those cardinal principles of divine revelation which lie at the very foundation of truth. Affliction, instead of making us impatient with the deep truths of God, those which compel us to intensity of thought, really leads us to them with unusual preference.

When earthly hopes fail, we long to come to a heavenly reliance. When our heart is overwhelmed, we are ready to cry: "Lead me to the rock that is higher than I." He who stands near the white throne expects, being under the shadow of the Almighty, to hear great revelations of wisdom. Then our reason forbears to speculate; we want authoritative and intelligent utterance; we grapple with the living realities of faith. A swimmer, heaved upon the sea-beach by the billows which have wrecked his boat, will not be likely to think much about geologic difficulties concerning

Not the strata but the rock,

Ararat and the ark.

the strata of the rock he clings to ; what he wants to find is some rock which will hold when he clings to it. So a Christian struggles after deep and stable truth.

The doctrine of Christ's incarnation seems as dear as it is mysterious ; for it tells us that our God has once been truly in man's form and understands man's sorrow. The doctrine of special providence is precious enough now to write its formulas in letters of fine gold ; for it assures us God knows who we are, and is acquainted with what we are undergoing. There is no likelihood ever that real mourners will carp at, or ridicule, that saying of Jesus concerning his note of the sparrow's fall, or his counting the hairs of our head. Even the doctrine of divine sovereignty has amazing consolation in it, for it gives us such certainty that this universe has not yet gone awreck fatally. Prodigious doctrine that is, and weak human nature does not know exactly what to do with it, except in hours like these. Its great base may be all out of sight, deep under the waves of mystery, as was Ararat's base under the deluging waters of the flood ; what we want to know, however, is not where the undiscoverable foundation is, but if the summit is untremulous where it now lies disclosed, and whether our poor, tossing ark of faith may rest with security upon it with the wild swirl of waters around us.

The fact is, affliction softens the heart, bends the will, humbles the intellect, quickens trust, and

Doctrines now preferred.Tholuck's motto.

so renders the whole proud nature more docile than before. It finds comfort easier by its own search after it. There is something in pain and disappointment which breaks opposition, hushes cavils, and turns the eye of the believer with wistful expectation to the cross. An indulged boy grows less dainty over his needed food when he has grown famished by some deprivation. The Christian whose heart aches welcomes what he finds in his old Bible. Then the grand central doctrines of redemption are his delight. Real mourners look to the crucified Immanuel. They do not want the poetry of religion, they want the experience of it; and that comes better through logic and argument. Men and women who turn from didactic discussion in health will, when they are ill, read elaborate treatises on the two covenants, and study deeply the adjustment of justice and mercy in the atonement. "It is the heart that makes the theologian," and even a broken heart sometimes gains firmest hold of truth.

Perhaps this is enough; there is a connection, thus you see, my Christian friends, between trial and truth. The Bible is the text-book for the afflicted. There is a spiritual philosophy, not a mere impulse, which forced this ancient, and to us unknown, believer to say: "It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes." Two mere remarks here in closing are all that is needed further.

A tear-drop for a lens.

The Bible is larger now.

The one is this : it requires a certain prostration of feeling, a certain suffusion of soul, thoroughly to appreciate and understand the Bible. Sometimes it seems a hard, dry volume ; it requires a sad heart, going to it honestly for help, to disclose all its tenderness. “ As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you, saith the Lord of Hosts.” We are told that a tear-drop is one of the most powerful of lenses. Surely it has a wonderful magnifying power when brought to bear on the Bible. Often a weeping mourner sees a whole world of beauty which dry eyes can hardly recognize when pointed out.

The other remark is this : when the text was written only the Old Testament was in existence, and perhaps not all of that. Now we have, besides, all the New. Oh, how full, then, for us is the measure of consolation ! “ Return unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee.”

XXI.

NATURE AND REVELATION.

“THE HEAVENS DECLARE THE GLORY OF GOD ; AND THE FIRMA-
MENT SHEWETH HIS HANDYWORK.”—*Psalms* 19 : 1.

THE eighth psalm seems to present a night-picture of Eastern skies, the nineteenth a day-picture, both of which must for many years have been familiar to David as he kept his father's flocks on Bethlehem hills. Most critics would say that, in construction, the psalm which we are to study to-day is perfect as a lyric hymn, exquisite in figure, sublime in thought, singularly analytic and logical in its form. It furnishes us these natural divisions for our convenience in consideration : Nature exhibits God's glory, Revelation shows God's grace.

I. What does nature exhibit concerning God's glory? Some attributes of the divine character come out into clear display.

1. For one thing, this material universe exhibits the *power* of God. The very existence of these orbs over our heads proposes the proofs of the divine omnipotence and godhead. It simply stuns our minds to assert that these were without any maker ; but whoever creates worlds, he it is that is our God. The undevout astronomer is

mad. Nature leads us up directly to its own Creator, and points him out : " The heavens declare the glory of God ; and the firmament sheweth his handywork."

One of the most interesting of historic illustrations has been given to us in the Confessions of the great Augustine : " I asked the earth, and it said, ' I am not he ;' and all that is upon it made the same admission. I asked the sea, and the depths, and the creeping things which have life, and they answered, ' We are not thy God ; look thou above us.' I asked the breezes, and the gales ; and the whole air, with its inhabitants, said to me, ' Anaximenes is in error ; I am not God.' I asked the heaven, the sun, the moon, the stars ; ' We, too,' said they, ' are not the God whom thou seekest.' And I said to all the creatures which surrounded the doors of my fleshly senses, ' Ye have declared to me of my God that ye are not he ; tell me somewhat about him.' And with a great voice they exclaimed, ' He made us.' "

2. Moreover, nature exhibits the *wisdom* of God. There is such a harmony in the movements, as there is between means and ends in the providences of God, that we cannot help discovering something almost musical in the thought which is suggested here in the declaration of this psalm. David seems to hear chimes in the heavens which possess meaning, but have no mortal tongue : " Day unto day uttereth speech, and

Bishop Horne's choirs.Pythagoras' solar system.

night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard." Bishop Horne comments upon the verses, with vivid conception of the poetry which offers day and night in such contrast; he says they resemble "two parts of a choir, chanting forth alternately the praises of God." They have no articulate language. Whatever communications they have to make must be given to the devout and intelligent heart; they sing with the spirit and understanding to the spirit that understands them through love and faith.

In all ages this representation of the stars as singing aloud in their courses the harmony of divine wisdom is found. In his astronomy Pythagoras taught that the heavenly bodies revolved in a series of crystalline spheres, at the supreme centre of which was placed our earth. In the outermost of these were set the thousands of fixed stars studding the firmament, while each of the seven planets had its own sphere to dwell in. The transparency of each crystal sphere was perfect, so that the orbs in all of the exterior spheres were visible plainly through all of the inner ones; and these spheres rolled round on each other in a daily revolution—thus causing the rising and setting of the heavenly bodies. And the old philosopher said further that the motion of this vast celestial mechanism was so sweet and beautiful that it made harmonic sounds, to which he gave the name of "the music of the spheres;" this

The "music of the spheres."

Plutarch's "divinity-school."

filled the firmament everywhere, but it was of too elevated a character to be heard by the souls of dull-eared mortals.

It really appears singular that an unenlightened heathen should have caught the same suggestion from a study of the skies that an inspired psalmist learned from them, as he prayed beneath their wordless songs. "Holy silence," Tholuck says, with exquisite appreciation of the teachings of stillness upon a devout soul, "Holy silence itself is a speech, provided there shall be the ear to listen to its meaning."

3. Next to this, nature exhibits the *supremacy* of God. Over the whole universe sits this one Sovereign, reigning at his will, and the stars sing his glory: "Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world." Their measuring-line reaches round the globe; their province or domain is co-extensive with the earth, and they speak with full authority to its remotest parts. Even the ancient heathen, Plutarch, used to say, "This world resembleth a divinity-school."

4. And then, likewise, nature teaches the *faithfulness* of God. In this remarkable psalm we are now introduced to one of the most brilliant figures of rhetoric conceivable. David sees the sunrise as he used to see it in the cool dawning of the day over the mountains of Moab when he was a child. With a magnificent stroke of imagination he conceives of the heavens as a tabernacle, or marriage

pavilion, forth from which marches the sun : " In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun, which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race. 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."

We can study the elements of this comparison by and by as we need them for our illustration of truth. But now let us for a moment consider the rising of the sun, and the circling of celestial bodies in their order, as a proof of the stability holding the universe safely beneath the bond of God's faithful covenant. Thousands of years drift swiftly away, but the bells God has swung in the towers of the ages still keep time wonderfully.

Once as I entered the observatory of Harvard College, at the close of the day, my friend who had led me there asked that I might be shown the new instrument which had just been introduced. The professor replied courteously, " Yes ; I think there may be time enough yet for him to see a star, if you will find one." My companion " found one" by looking in a worn little book of astronomical tables lying there on the desk, and replied quietly, " There is one at 5:20." So in a hurried instant the covering was stripped off from the great brass tube, and, prone upon his back under the eye-piece, lay the enthusiastic professor. While my friend stood by, with what

A clock-tick and a star.One of God's glorious worlds.

seemed a tack-hammer in his hand, I noticed that he kept his eye on a tall chronometer-clock near us. Suddenly two sounds broke the impressive stillness ; we had been waiting for the stars. One was the word " There ! " spoken by the professor, the other was the tap of the hammer on the stone top of the table by my companion. Both occurred at the same instant—the same particle of the instant—they were positively simultaneous. But the man who spoke the word could not see the clock ; he was looking at the star which came swinging along till it touched the spider-web line in his instrument ; and the other man who struck the hammer-stroke could not see the star ; he was looking at the second-hand on the dial-face. When the index in its simplicity of regular duty marked twenty minutes after five, there fell the click on the stone ; and then, too, there came on in the heavens, millions of miles away, one of God's stars, having no speech, but rolling in on time as he bade it ages ago !

Then I was invited to look in and see the world of light and beauty as it swept by the next fibre in the tube. But afterward I went curiously to the book, and found that it had been published ten years before, and that its calculations ran far away into the future, and that it had been based on calculations a thousand years old. And God's fidelity to the covenant of nature here now almost three thousand years after David had made this nineteenth psalm, had brought the glorious creat-

Nature exhibits God's character.

Revelation teaches God's grace.

ure of the sky into the field of Harvard College's instrument just as that patient clock reached the second needed for the truth of the ancient prediction. Need I say that those two professors almost wondered (so used to such things were they) at the awestruck devotion and the hushed reverence with which I left the room.

II. We are ready now to ask our second question: What has revelation to teach concerning God's grace? We shall only have to take up the verses of this wonderful psalm as we did before.

1. To begin with, revelation teaches the *efficacy* of God's grace. It restores the fallen nature of men, and brings them again into obedience and love: "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple." The "testimony of the Lord is sure," in that it witnesses to all the perfections of the Lord's character and ways. His commandments are the revelation of his sincere love of our souls. It is a curious fact that in the Hebrew of the psalm each of these three verses, the seventh, the eighth, and the ninth, consists of ten words—according to the number of the ten commandments concerning which they treat.

2. Revelation teaches the *intelligence* of God's grace also; his word converts and illumines: "The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes." One of the old stories, true or not it matters nothing, is recorded of

Bonaventura. Thomas Aquinas once, on a visit, requested him to point out those books which he used most in his studies. The tranquil scholar led him into an inner cell, and showed him a few of the common collections upon the seat ; but as his guest still insisted on seeing the volumes from which in particular he got so many wonders of learning, he drew aside a curtain and thus displayed an oratory and a crucifix. " These are my books," said the holy man ; " this is the principal one from which I am wont to gather what I teach and write ; here at the foot of that cross I make what progress I have attained in the knowledge of the will of God."

We may well return for a moment to the figure the psalmist uses in the earlier verses of this psalm. He compares truth to the rising of the sun ; and we must remember that in that almost cloudless land, and for many months of each year almost rainless, there is never in the sky at dawn anything like what we call twilight. When the sun rises he springs straight up above the horizon all at once, perfectly on hand, like a bridegroom to run a race ; and then, after he is about his business, the whole world is flooded with light ; there is no escape from his beams all the day. God's truth is symbolized in these particulars perfectly. Truth comes right up into exhibition ; there is no need of taking a dozen men with a farthing taper in each one's hand to look up the sun in the morning.

The straightest line in nature.

A preacher's private treasure.

3. Again : revelation teaches the *soundness* of God's grace. It abides all criticism of review : " The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever : the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether." In the rational reverence of a renewed soul everything is pure and holy ; there is nothing defiling or corrupting in the sincere service of God. The decisions of the gospel are in accordance with right reason, and satisfy good conscience. Truth is like sunlight in that it always must shine in a direct course. Artists tell us that the straightest line in nature is that which is drawn by the shadow of a rock across the foam of a cataract. The beams from above will endure no wavering or sinuousness. And so we say, that is *right* in morals which is straight ; a straight line is a *right* line ; a *right* angle is one which is held between two straight lines ; and that is wrong which is *wrung*, or distorted and twisted away from the right. " That which is crooked cannot be made straight."

4. Once more : revelation teaches the *value* of God's grace. Once, on a journey, a celebrated modern preacher was seen to put his hand mysteriously into his pocket and bring forth a number of packages carefully wrapped in tissue-paper. Hour after hour, as the travel continued, he remained apparently absorbed in the examination of what his packets contained. A friend coming suddenly near surprised him in the act of looking at a costly ruby, and contrasting its color with a

Jewels of truth.Honey more nutritious than gold.

sapphire. The clergyman quietly said, "I have friends who lend these expensive things to me when I am going off awhile; they know how much I enjoy them in the rough, as it were; I never like such jewels after they are set; the gold spoils them to my eye; but I can spend hours just in putting the bright stones alongside of the dark ones, and so turning them over and over, and seeing something better in each new combination; really, I grow attached to them."

Many a true Christian knows what this means with the jewels of God's truth: "More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb." Some there are who can understand what it is to prize them more than gold, but not so clearly what it is to find them sweeter than a honeycomb. This was the remark of one who was long beloved in the church, made just after he knew he was dying: "I wish I had a little more personal faith. I think, with the psalmist, that these things are more precious than gold, yea, than much fine gold; but I cannot go so well with him in that they are sweeter also than 'honey and the honeycomb.' I stick at that; that has often been a plague with me. The precious things were more as casketed jewels than as meat and drink. They delight the intellect; but oh, I wish I had the loving heart! I go mourning all the day now for the want of it."

5. Then, in the last place, revelation teaches

God's grace is just.A spirit-level in a car.

the *justice* of God's grace. These judgments and testimonies of the Lord establish, rather than destroy, the legal principle of reward and punishment in the lives of men: "Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward." The truth is, we need some absolute standard of reference by which to test our conduct, even while we are living on the divine bounty. We do not always see the tendency of our behavior, nor discern the ends to which certain indulgences may lead. Some of us have noticed the strange suggestions of a workman's spirit-level, brought perchance into the railway-car; now we are on a down-grade, now on an up-grade; we cannot look behind or before to know what is coming or what is left; but here is this little bubble creeping along unerringly under its glass like a thing of life; that shows our ups and downs with no exaggerations or mistake. Such is the law of God written on our consciences, but more plainly given in his word.

Can we wonder, as now we reach the conclusion of the psalm, after having duly considered the teachings of nature and grace, that David prays for the grace of God in his own soul, as being preferable to any mere contemplation of God's glory? It may be enough for us all, perhaps, that we note how earnestly he pleads for grace to enlighten him as to his needs, to cleanse him from his guilt, and to restore him unto communion with his Maker.

Provision for pardon of sin.Crosses in the Tyrol.

“ Who can understand his errors ? cleanse thou me from secret faults. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins ; let them not have dominion over me : then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression. Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer.”

No man can write human history without admitting and reckoning with the element of human depravity, exposure, and curse. The gospel has its place in the system of things as appropriately and as fixedly as a star.

Thus, then, does this matchless poem in the Psalter bear us up the heights of nature only to show us in a sudden tempest the fairer heights of grace. They say that shepherds in the Tyrol move forward up the mountains over sunny slopes in order to attain brilliant pastures for their flocks. But sometimes there falls suddenly over them a great storm of sleet and snow. Then it is that they leave the open fields, and seek the worn tracks of the highway. For there at every turn stands the emblem of crucifixion, and the drifts never overtop the shrines. With one glad cry—“ The cross ! the cross ! ”—they know they are safe from any further perilous straying, and are close to a refuge secure and serene.

XXII.

THE AVAILABleness OF PRAYER.

“ FROM THE END OF THE EARTH WILL I CRY UNTO THEE, WHEN MY HEART IS OVERWHELMED : LEAD ME TO THE ROCK THAT IS HIGHER THAN I.”—*Psalm 61 : 2.*

THE single thought to which your attention is directed when you repeat this text is concerning the real availableness of prayer as an instrument of help, when one is in undoubted straits of trouble. The analysis of the verse is quite suggestive.

I. The *reach* of efficacious prayer is announced in the words—“ From the end of the earth.”

II. The *occasion* of importunate prayer is indicated in the words—“ When my heart is overwhelmed.”

III. The *nature* of true prayer is pointed out in the words—“ Will I cry unto thee.”

IV. And even the general *subject-matter* of all prayer is given us in the words—“ Lead me to the rock that is higher than I.”

Let us note these in turn. For everybody can find a lesson here. This verse, as a whole, furnishes an excellent motto for all trying experience. God is near to all that call upon him in truth. He waits for no selected spot to be attained.

“The end of the earth.”

One's actual distance.

Hence his promise becomes unbounded without being extravagant, and grows at times transcendent without becoming vague.

I. First of all, we learn here that the *reach* of prayer, as an actual and efficacious instrument of good, is *literally limitless*.

The singularly chosen expression in this verse occurs likewise in the book of Deuteronomy: “The end of the earth, the end of the heavens.” That is to say, the line where the earth and the heavens come in contact—the outermost verge of what we call the visible horizon.

Prayer indeed takes no account of human measurements. David had reason to believe he should be hunted into the wildest refuges of the land. His outlaw experiences at the cave of Adullam may have been what suggested to him here the figure of a *rock*. The legions of his rebellious subjects would be eagerly in pursuit of him the moment the day dawned. Nor did he at all know if he should ever again be at rest. Of only this one thing was he certain—he could not get beyond “the end of the earth.” And anywhere inside of that was within ear-shot of heaven.

1. There is an *actual* distance, therefore, for which this text offers provision. One far away from his family altar, or absent from the sanctuary most beloved and familiar to him, feels the separation frequently with much acuteness of pain. But David was sure that what he wanted was God, more than the mere house of God. If we take the

Providential distance.

Spiritual distance.

wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the earth, even there the nearest thing in the universe to us is the mercy-seat.

Hence the sailor on the sea, the traveler on the mountain, the hastening courier outside of the borders, the remotest sentinel that paces his frontier round under the stars, is in no way conceivable so easily reached by the friends who watch and wait for him at home, as he can be away around by the throne of grace, where sits the good God, patient, prayer-hearing, and prayer-answering.

2. There is also a *providential* distance for which the text offers provision. Some of God's children always seem to themselves to live a separated existence. Cut off by the circumstances of a narrower lot, it is true they see little, and feel less, of the great related world of pulsing life around them.

Many a solitary man has come into this world, and grown up into maturity, with a pathetic sense of having never had any rights: "as for the mighty man, he had the earth; and the honorable man dwelt in it;" and between themselves these two appeared to have divided pretty much all there is. So the poor man often dwells apart, and wonders if any one except God regards him.

3. There is also a *spiritual* distance for which the text offers provision. Certain seasons to all of us there are when we feel secluded from all human fellowship. An experience lies upon our

A king's throne-room.

Calvin's word "tumbled."

souls which we are persuaded no one can understand. Our heavy secret remains unshared. We walk apart. You have been caught in a crowd sometimes when you were walking on unrecognized and unheeded. There is a spiritual loneliness, we all know, which grows deeper and more pensive among thronging multitudes of strangers. To be forced into personal contact with those with whom we have nothing in common augments this sense of distance.

In such moments there is sure relief in the suggestion of this verse. From the outermost reach of a conventional or spiritual seclusion we can speak to God, just as if we were kneeling in the throne-room of the palace, and before us, bending to hear, was the king's face.

II. The next lesson of our text has reference to particular *occasions* for prayer. There is intimation that when one's heart is overwhelmed, and fresh exigency arises, new measures of grace, or increased force of help, may be expected.

The term rendered *overwhelmed* is given by the commentator Calvin in these words—"When my spirit is tumbled." A rough rendering, he himself confesses; but surely not deficient in strength. The original Hebrew has in it a figure that seems more to my liking still. It reads—"When my heart is covered up." That is to say, covered as one in great sorrow covers his face with a mantle. And I take this clause to mean just two things—both worth remembering.

Some heart of our own.

But a limit reached.

1. One is this : let us understand in every case that *a real Christian is expected to keep up some heart by himself*. He must exhibit some available fortitude of his own, under the common grace of God. Some say that the word courage comes from *cor* and *ago*, and may mean keep-heart, or heart-action. I am not going to settle that ; but I know that many persons, not very courageous, are constitutionally apt to make mountains out of their mole-hills of trial. For this I am not at all certain the Bible has any sort of respect. I have never been able to discover any help whatever for a merely hypochondriac mind, cherished by a converted person. There is so much real trouble in the world that inspiration has not seemed willing to waste force in soothing what is only imaginary. Cheerful courage will enable us, under divine love, to meet most of the minor worries of life.

2. The other suggestion to be noted just here is this : *there is an actual limit to human endurance*. There is a point beyond which even the truest and bravest Christian is not expected to go without special succor. When our Lord rebuked the sea, as the frightened disciples waked him up with the absurd remark, " Master, carest thou not that we perish ? " he paused to rebuke them first. He seemed to think they ought to have stood the tempest longer before making such an ado about it. To the last extreme and strain of Christian endurance we are to hold on. But when the

“ Strong crying and tears.”

The Mount of Olives.

heart is overwhelmed, there is not an hour to be lost. Then God will certainly come in with an irresistible re-enforcement of grace and power, and will plant us up high out of peril, in an instant of sublime interposition.

III. But our text takes us forward a step beyond this. It gives us, in the third place, a lesson concerning the *nature* of true prayer. It is called explicitly here a *cry*.

1. We admit the word is a strong one. But it finds its parallel and explanation in our Saviour's history, as he exercised his priestly office. We are told that in the days of his flesh “ he 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.” Alas, how rarely is the stillness of this world's apathy broken nowadays by any wrestling of supplication which could be called a real *cry* of the soul—“ strong crying and tears” in the shadows !

2. It adds to this parallel of language to find that Christ, the second David, uttered his cry precisely on the same spot where the psalmist was now sitting. Jesus was a king ; but he went out from the capital across the same little ravine, into the same mountain, the night of his betrayal. He knelt in the midnight of a quite similar desertion. He suffered the fierce agony of treachery under the same olive-trees. He toiled up the same slope with but three chosen companions that clung to him. He looked off from the elevation

Both Davids prayed.John Knox's cry.

upon the same insurgent city that rejected him. He felt he was an outcast and a fugitive in the world where he had a right to reign. *But both the Davids prayed.* Each of these royal sufferers turned instinctively for succor to the same divine source, and each found it. When the human soul feels its real need, it does not wait to construct petitions in order ; it simply *cries*.

3. It is our opportunity that fails us in the hour of need. We do not cry unto God. None stirreth himself up to lay hold on God. When Britain was all in agitation, and the papacy conspired with the feudal lords to put down the Reformation, late one night John Knox was seen to leave his study, passing out into an apartment behind it. A friend followed him, listening at the door. The grand old man fell heavily on his knees, and waited for a few moments in utter silence. Soon a series of convulsive sobs alone, as his form swayed to and fro, broke upon the stillness. Then they began in deep murmuring accents to frame themselves into articulate form—"O God, give me Scotland, or I die!" And then that strong spirit was bowed to the very floor in wrestling. Once more the same cry burst forth from his lips—"Oh, give me Scotland, for thee and for thy glory!" Again the room was silent. And after another hush, anew and with intenser pathos, arose that unvarying petition, "O Lord, give me Scotland, or I die!"

Can anybody doubt that God eventually gave

The rock that is higher.

We go—the rock waits.

Scotland to John Knox's prayers? Such cries of the importunate soul are never turned back unanswered on its wishes.

IV. There remains only one other clause in our text; that is the actual petition with which it is closed—"Lead me to the rock that is higher than I!" This will suggest a lesson concerning the *subject-matter* of prayer.

We need not suppose King David was giving us anything like a fixed formula with which to approach God for help. Nor shall we gain anything by a cool analysis of the figure he employs. Of course we understand that the Rock is God himself. It is his help, his care, his protection, we implore. No doubt the chastened imagination of each spiritual believer will deal better with these words by simply saying them over and over. There are times when the heart rejects mere literary exposition, and revels in the hidden analogies of a trope. But we may call your attention to a few intimations in this prayer not exactly lying on its surface.

1. For instance, this: if a man prays, "Lead me to the Rock," *he admits that the rock is not to be led to him.*

He must be willing to go at once where the rock is. In all the allotments of divine providence it is our purposes, not God's, which are to change. We must adjust our will to his; he remains the same. We go—the rock waits. When we propose definitely to put ourselves under the

The rock is unalterable.

The rock is extensive.

protection of the Almighty, it will be necessary that we just enter into his entire counsel. And this may involve immediate surrender of some favorite plans.

2. Again : Observe carefully if a man prays, "Lead me to the Rock," *he must not expect to remodel the rock.*

It is the Rock of Ages, and cannot be constructed according to human counsel. We are never to venture on asserting before the all-wise God what particular form of defence, relief, or extrication we desire. Every rock throws just its own shape into the sheltering shadow it casts. It is enough if we may sit under it and be safe. We hide ourselves in it till our calamities be overpast. In the Song of Solomon the Spouse addresses the Bride—Christ speaks to the Church—the Saviour whispers to the soul, "Oh, my dove, thou art in the *clefts* of the rock." There is allusion in all such symbolism of the Scriptures to the suffering of our crucified Lord, by which the atonement was made. It must never be forgotten that it is only because the Rock of Ages has been cleft that any soul has safety in it. The shadow outside is providence ; anybody can be permitted a while to rest in that ; the security inside is grace. And the deeper the trouble, the further into the recess of love we may creep.

3. Understand, likewise, that if a man prays, "Lead me to the Rock that is higher than I," *he is not to expect he can see all around it at once.*

 Help to obtain help.

 Anonymous hymn.

God sometimes hides us in the secret of his pavilion, sometimes covers us with his hands. Our best repose will always be found in simple trust. We bend our will—then wait. We say, somewhat ostentatiously, Here we are! And God replies quietly, Well, remain there. The processes of providence will then move on undisturbedly over our heads. And possibly, under our secure retreat, we shall never even hear the intricate sounds of their tread.

4. And note, finally, from this exquisitely worded prayer, that if a man asks, "Lead me to the Rock," *he admits he cannot certainly find the way alone always.*

So he is imploring help to obtain help. It is a fine thing to do sometimes—to pray to be taught to pray. The prince-adversary of all good labors very hard to break our confidence. He begins afar off to ply us with temptation. He dulls our faith. He benumbs our anxiety. He undermines our hope. But every saint is permitted to pray for more liveliness in prayer. When we want most to go to the rock, we may pray, Lead me. And the moment we gain a little encouragement from being under its shadow, we may hurry into the cleft.

"So near—so very near—to God, nearer I cannot be ;
 For in the person of his Son I am as near as he !
 So dear—so very dear—to God, dearer I cannot be ;
 The love wherewith he loves his Son is the love he bears to
 me !"

XXIII.

GUIDANCE BY THE EYE.

“I WILL INSTRUCT THEE AND TEACH THEE IN THE WAY WHICH THOU SHALT GO ; I WILL GUIDE THEE WITH MINE EYE.”—*Psalm* 32 : 8.

IN the beginning of this psalm David seems to be bewailing the stress into which he had been brought by some calamities of his, intensified by some sins. He is tracing out his line of experience, from guilt to penitence, from penitence to prayer, from prayer to deliverance, from deliverance to praise.

Then God speaks. He says he is going hereafter to take his servant's case in hand. He promises unremitting care and guidance. This seems to cheer David almost unusually ; and so his spiritual song closes in strains of exuberant joy.

We can have no hesitancy in extending to all believers the engagement here proffered to David ; for the psalm is entitled *Maschil*, and is the earliest of a most interesting group which bear that name. The word means “to give instruction ;” and it cannot be doubted that its reach is wide enough for all ages, when we remember that the apostle Paul quotes it in the New Testament.

A remarkable figure.

A horse or a mule.

The main thought in the text is concerning the guidance, which is covenanted in difficult times, by the Almighty himself. And this attracts our notice specially by reason of a most delicate and remarkable figure of language under which the promise appears. It is not with the usual form of articulate speech ; it is not with the force of one leading by the extended hand ; it is not by mere mute guide-boards of enactment, like the upright posts on Jewish highways ; it is not by any ordinary methods at all that Jehovah proposes to bring his people forward in the way which they should go. He says he will do it with a *look*. The words are most singular : “ I will guide thee with mine eye ; I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way.”

If any one becomes discouraged at such an announcement, and apprehends that here is a form of expression so tenuous and poetic as to baffle his study, surely it needs only to be said to him that there is presented in the following verse a contrast in language, and an alternative in experience, not only quite unimaginative in detail, but possessed of a certain rude decisiveness of utterance, so as to render clear the meaning of the entire counsel. For when the engagement has been made the admonition is added. The Lord says he will give you delicate direction, unless you prefer to receive rough. “ I will guide thee with mine eye. Be ye not as the horse or as the mule, which have no understanding ; whose mouth

Two ways of guiding.

Alacrity of obedience.

must be held inⁿ with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee.” Of course the intimation is unmistakable. God offers to become our instructor if we will be his pupils. And then he declares he has two ways of guiding and governing ; one by the eye, and the other by the whip and curb, and that he prefers we would choose the first.

The relationship assumed in such a figure as this must surely be one of great intimacy. It cannot all be centred in the teacher, for it demands a certain carefulness of observation and alacrity of obedience which only the scholar can possess. If God spoke audibly, some inattention could be forgiven ; for a voice would break in upon listlessness, or even arouse from slumber. But an eye must be seen to be understood, and must be watched for its expressions whenever they shift.

We all know that whereas not a few parents there are who never seem able to govern even their own household without violence and noise, there are others who are accustomed to bend their children to obedience by a mere flitting mystery of countenance which they read. Part of the excellence of this beautiful discipline belongs to the skill of the father, part to the disposition of the child. Even the youngest in such a family becomes unconsciously trained to appreciate a note of warning or approval, without so much as waiting for any syllables to be spoken, a mere turn of the face, simply the gesture of a silent feature, sufficing quite as well as a command. So that

A proper family.

“ Eyes right ! Attention ! ”

almost all of us can remember some attractive instance of family association in which it verily seemed as if the children perused looks and expressions, as if they knew the eye quite as well as the tongue ; and in sweet mood of noiseless acquiescence and loving zeal hurried on their errands at hints of suggestion as unnoticed to others as they were final to them.

We have seen something of this also in military life. In the high ambition of excellence in arms many a regiment seems to become aware of its commander's orders by a kind of inarticulate instinct. The eyes of the platoons are constantly ordered to the full front ; yet do they almost miraculously manage to keep the captain's face before them, and read, in a flash of curious intelligence, what he would next have them produce in the intricacies of their evolutions. “ Eyes right ! Attention ! ”

Now I do not intend to reply to any one who comments upon the extreme difficulty of receiving guidance from an eye, that it can be done easily, carelessly, and off-hand. I am sure it demands not only the utmost attention, but even a strong solicitude to know what is in the inmost mind of him who guides. The men who prefer the bit and the bridle are those who possess something of the exquisite dulness of the horse and the mule, or they would not willingly choose their discipline.

You need not go any further for a fresh illus-

Signals from a baton.Wilfulness destructive.

tration of what is intended by this figure than to a choir of singers, or an orchestra of instrumentalists. The difficulties of the music may demand their utmost attention, and the unintelligent tubes and strings, upon which their best genius is bent, may require the arrest of every kind of diversion. And yet you shall mark with wonder how each performer in the whole band will manage to read, from a passing flash of a glance of the leader's eye, time and tone, whispering hush or mighty crescendo. A whole vocabulary of signals is in the rapid look which follows the baton.

I must needs press the point here of an instantaneous obedience to the direction which is found. We have no question as to the roughness of discipline that musician would receive whose wilfulness interposed objection, and whose hand interjected discord. He will be the best among the company whose alertness even anticipates the leader by knowing his tastes and becoming used to his habits beforehand. But one essential thing must be borne in mind: to all guidance by the eye immediate acquiescence is necessary. Questions of supremacy of *will* are decided by the bit and bridle.

It seems best to fall back upon the simple statement of the text. It appears that God is our instructor, and he is not only teaching us by his eye, but skilling us how to read his eye. We may have noticed in many of our well-trained academies these beautiful signals passing between the desk

So in a school.Delicate direction.

and the benches. Lessons were nowhere better learned, and yet study was never disturbed by boisterousness of request or command. Yet, if any one asks, How can a child study to advantage when he is compelled to keep watch of his teacher? the answer must be made thus : A coarse instructor might be expected to have a band of rude scholars. But a refined and gentle instructor will soon establish between himself and his classes a new and delicate instrumentality of communication. A hand uplifted, even a finger bent in beckoning, will in no instance pass unseen. Minds will grow acute under slight and tenuous lines of intercourse. Delicate hints refine the disposition and render the attention alert to quick appreciation : " Spirits are not finely touched save to fine issues."

The entire figure of our text receives its explanation in this principle. A full-hearted, solicitous, alert, obedient Christian, accustomed to inquire constantly of God for direction in the performance of his duty, will early find that the Holy Ghost responds with new means of communion. So certain is this answer, that any truly prayerful child of God may generally rely upon the exercise of his own affectionate judgment, his own right reason, to tell him whether he is going in the wrong or right course.

No affectionate father will be likely to visit with severe reproach even the mistakes of his children, if he sees they are trying with all their hearts to

 Habitual reference to God.

Where is God's eye?

understand him and obey him. And our Father in heaven will look leniently and lovingly on any one who habitually asks him for help, and then moves resolutely on doing the best he knows how. Nor will such a believer find himself forsaken. There will be hints of unexpected suggestion arising; the Holy Spirit will give him an inward witness, confirming him and informing him in every true conviction of duty.

I am sorrowfully aware just at this point that some who hear me will not be able at first to comprehend the reach of this promise. They will think that the expression in our text upon which we are laying so much stress is very pretty as a poetic conceit, but helps no one in hours of perplexity. Here, for example, is a discouraged Christian, who exclaims: "I pray, but I get no wiser; I seek, but I receive no answer; I have very vague notions about divine guidance any way; and surely this figure does not make it any clearer; *where is God's eye?*" To such inquiries there needs to be given an intelligible reply. It has pleased our Maker to reveal himself in two ways to bewildered men—by *Revelation* and *Providence*.

The Word comes first. "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." In a general way, we all see and admit this. It is reserved to God's intimate friends to discover that some of the finest things in the Bible do not lie on the surface at all. Some of the most helpful

Revelation comes first.

A mother's letter.

counsels come out sidewise, and indirectly, as if our heavenly Instructor had purposely meant to have us grow quick at inference. There is hardly a single promise in the Old or New Testament the significance of which is exhausted in one sitting. We are not to read the word in a chance or superstitious way, as if one were to say—Now I will obey the first text my eye catches: and then opens the book at random. Nothing can be foolisher than a consultation of the Bible like this. We happen to know that the not very edifying result was in one case reached thus: “Adam, Sheth, Enosh,” out of which came neither repose nor information.

I am so anxious that no one shall miss the meaning of a declaration so precious that I will attempt by an illustration, as accurate as it is homely, to render it plain. You may suppose a faithful mother, called upon to undergo extended absence from her family, leaves a long written series of directions for them how to proceed in daily duty. It is evident that these children, in the use of her letter, will pass through three stages or steps of experience.

They will have no difficulty with those specific counsels which answer their questions in direct terms. That is, they will be perfectly satisfied, when they are asking: “How shall we act in such or such a case?” to find her words replying, “In such a case you are to act thus.” This is perfectly easy.

The children's interpretation.Instinctive recognition.

The next step will have to be taken when they are in doubt concerning an exigency which in its own form they cannot find she has ever mentioned. They will have to draw an inference from something else. And we shall all agree in asserting that it will be—not necessarily the oldest or most intelligent child—but certainly the most affectionate and observing of them all, who will lead the way out of the dilemma by saying : “ I know that if she thought in that other case we ought to do thus and so, she would be sure to think, in this case, we ought to do thus and so.” Now this step is not so easy as the first, but it is not at all impossible.

Then comes a third. Here in the letter, as they read it over, they keep finding things that some of them cannot possibly understand. They comment a good deal ; but it generally turns out that one of them remembers a little hint of caution given long ago about a fault of hers ; or another of them perceives that in her case there is room for improvement ; or another of them finds tears of joy in her eyes, tears of unaffected joy, as she says, I know I do not deserve anything, but it would not be honest for me to deny that I think she meant *me* when she put in that sweet sentence of comfort and affection ; and I have not a doubt there is more than one for each of us, if we study for them.”

Is it not plain that those affectionate children will prefer to find their mother's face almost look-

 A prepared surprise.

 Then comes Providence.

ing up at them out of the letter—will love her the more, because she has put things a little out of sight ; will say now and then, as they read, “ Oh, how like her that seems,” because a slight turn of expression in the sentence shows like a twinkle in her eye ?

Now we have God once saying to us in exact terms : “ As one whom his *mother* comforteth, so will I comfort you.” And I have no hesitancy at all in asserting that the unfailing promises of this dear old Bible are the nearest things in the world to a mother’s letters any desolate heart can find. And really the sweetest thing about them is often their indirection—their hints of helpful sympathy—their mere suggestions of care and confidence. For they seem to show God in a light so delicately kind and thoughtful, because he comes toward us with a prepared surprise and in a round-about way.

Providence comes next. Put with the Word now the general providential arrangements of our life beneath God’s care. These all seem commonplace, until we learn that they have a lesson to teach. When rehearsing some histories of good people, the Apostle once said : “ These things happened unto *them* for *our* examples.” Many of us are very dull pupils ; and, singularly enough, God sometimes teaches us by making us monitors for a day. We learn our lessons better by trying to teach other people to learn theirs. It may require much penetration to see how cutting down ad-

vances ; how hindrances help ; how defeat inspires ; how captivity forces ; how humiliation uplifts ; how heavily loading hastens human pace. These we learn actually more quickly out of others' discipline than our own. Still they are all in our own, and many other lessons than these.

Let me restate the three unalterable conditions of understanding God : 1. Watch him attentively ; 2. Study him affectionately ; 3. Obey him immediately.

This is the meaning of that wonderful verse, " Then shall we know, if we *follow on* to know the Lord." Providence will frequently open a way most mysteriously and unexpectedly, if we rely upon him to do it. Nay, more ; oftentimes there is a way wide open already, only we perversely will not see it. Some Christians never seem to catch any information from experience. They do not conceive of God as being present and revealing himself in the ordinary events of their lives. Others, again, know instantly and intuitively whether a way is hedged up or open. And the difference is only in the habit of looking for what God would say to them. Our duty is to push on straight toward what seems to us is God's will.

It is related of Michael Angelo that when he came down from the scaffolding, from which for some weeks he had been painting the frescoes on a high ceiling, he had become so accustomed to looking upward that it was with real pain he forced himself to turn his eyes to the ground. Oh,

Earthly education.Heavenly fruition.

blessed entanglement of these spiritual orbs of ours! Would that they might evermore be so arrested, habituated, held by the guiding Eye of divine love, that we could never be satisfied to turn them from his face! "My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise. My heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord."

And now we shall all do well to remember that it is thus and thus alone that the true believer makes the disciplines of this life most serviceable in fitting him for the delights of the life to come. It is reckoned among the choice felicities of heaven that all the members of Christ's household are to be gathered into his immediate presence: "they shall see his face." No longer will warning be needed concerning a bit or a bridle. The communions of that blessed existence are to be conducted by glances of intelligent love. Hence, when the Lord says, "I will guide thee with mine eye," we can be content to answer, "Thou shalt guide me by thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory."

XXIV.

THE EUCHARIST HYMN.

“AND WHEN THEY HAD SUNG AN HYMN, THEY WENT OUT INTO THE MOUNT OF OLIVES.”—*Mark* 14 : 26.

STRANGE thought is this which is forced in upon our minds by the continuous record of the last week of our Lord's life. He seems to be singing very much of the time. He quotes one of the psalms in the very act of dying. And now we find that he starts out upon his journey to Gethsemane with a hymn upon his lips. We should like to know more of this experience ; let us take up our questions one by one.

1. The scene would be more picturesque if we could settle a few of the particulars. For example, *where was this singing done ?*

Some expositors say that on the walk to the garden where Jesus foreknew he was to be apprehended, out in the air as the company moved down the path toward the Kidron, this hymn from the passover service received its new birth and baptism as a Christian institution. Hardly had they passed through the door, over which may have trailed the vine which had given Jesus a figure of speech when he said, “ Arise, let us go hence,” just as they were leaving the Upper

Where did they sing?

Nature unconsciously favoring crime.

Chamber in which he had with his disciples kept the feast, so it has been conjectured, the Master began to murmur this strain of music ; and then all the band of his friends took it up with him, and sang it through to the end ; in responsive strains, it may have been. Thus some very devout people in modern times interpret the text ; they really like the thought that the march to the passion was so commenced, and they look upon this singing as a kind of solemn processional on the way to the cross.

One thing is clear : they had moonlight that night to guide them, as they entered the garden, and passed along under the shadows of the venerable olives. For the Passover was always celebrated at the full of the moon. Sad as the reflection may be, we have to admit that the same clear shining pointed out the path for another train, the one led by a traitorous disciple toward the same serene spot hallowed already, as Judas well knew, by the memory of many a prayer. How unconscious nature seems ever to be of evil plans that are formed by the wicked, and how innocently sometimes her very best favors are lent for the consummation of crime ! This world was fashioned for a better life than it is living now, and men might be happier than they are.

But still most of us prefer to think, with the larger part of the church in all time, that this hymn was at least started at the table itself, before the company went forth from the room. We

Why did they sing then ?David's parallel experience.

think it essential that it should be considered as the end of the Passover service and the beginning of the gospel feast which took its place.

2. But now it must be confessed that such an exercise appears in some measure incongruous : *why was this hymn to be sung then ?*

Probably our Saviour felt that there would be along the ages the same need for believers to encourage their hearts that there had previously been. Certainly, at the time when this singing took place, the weight of a great sorrow was on the spirits of the disciples. None of that company was ignorant now of the trial which was just at hand. The supreme suffering of the Saviour was at the moment impending. Singing kindles. Music is at once the expression and the awakening of emotion.

The Scriptures furnish us with another vivid illustration of the same thought, some of the circumstances of which are almost parallel. You remember that David, king at once and father of the rebel Absalom, who with armed bands forced him to flee from his throne in this very city of Jerusalem, went out into the Mount of Olives as he retreated. Possibly he passed through this same gate, over this slender rill Kidron, into the same deep shadows which lay in weird forms along the terraces and up the slopes of the hill. Jesus, the second David, sang his hymn before he went out ; but David, his ancestor, composed the one he sang on the spot. It will be worth while to read over

The fifty-fifth Psalm.The Jesuits' dread of hymns.

the fifty-fifth psalm some time, and remember that it was made on the summit of Mount Olivet as the royal poet sat there waiting in the midnight. It gives significance to the words to know that both of these sufferers found their solace in song after betrayal. For we instinctively lay one strain beside the other, and then we find they both had a single purpose and meaning. For the sovereign said, "Cast thy burden on the Lord, and he will sustain thee;" and the Saviour said, "Not my will, but thine, be done." To this height of submission each in turn seems to have come through the very singing of his own song of trust.

And so we easily learn our lesson. I am sorry for those Christians who do not know how much comfort there is in singing when the excited heart stands under the shadow of some great pain, just coming or just gone. It refreshes the drooping spirits, and strengthens the wavering courage. In the days of the Reformation the monks forbade the people the use of the grand old German music. "Why," exclaimed one of the shrewdest of the Jesuits, "the hymns of Luther have enticed away more souls than all his writings and sermons!" Especially did these wily ecclesiastics reprobate that choral beginning, "My God, be gracious to us now," that which Gustavus Adolphus sang with all his army on the morning of the battle of Lutzen. So the Puritans used to rush into conflict with the psalms of the temple-service ringing forth

The song at the guillotine.

The closed instrument.

from their lips. Such heroes lit the fires of their military ardor with the flames of the ancient inspiration which flashed along the ages.

You have not forgotten, possibly, while you were standing beside the Obelisk in the centre of Paris, the story of some martyr women in the Revolution who marched from their prison to the guillotine chanting the old hymn, "*Veni, Creator.*" The voices were strong and full at the start. Over and over again went the solemn music, as they kept the step through the streets; by and by they reached the open space where the knife hung in the air. One after another the rapidly thinning band ascended the scaffold; and the undaunted choir held on to the chosen strain. And the song did not cease until only a single singer remained; and even then that one clear voice pealed forth its notes till it was silenced by the dropping over it of the eternal shadow.

Sing on, then, ye who are sad, or apprehensive, or bereaved! It is not wise to refuse help so graciously vouchsafed to melancholy mortals. Open the closed instrument as usual; even funeral associations you can afford to break up gently; let the sense of loss be healed with dear old home songs taken up again into life. They will often refine the heart, mitigate the sorrow, keep alive the affections, awake the soul to duty, set it looking forward, and become the foretaste of that hour in which all will be surely restored.

3. Yet another question. We have seen where

What did they sing?The Great Hallel.

Christ and his disciples sang, and why they sang :
let us try to find out what they sang.

I wish I could prove what I imagine, when I seem to look in upon the gathering in the upper room. This was the last time that Christians ever celebrated the Passover, and the first time they ever celebrated the Lord's Supper. That closing hymn marked the transition forever from one dispensation over into another. The law now gave place to the gospel. All the institutions of the Jewish ritual were henceforth to be supplanted by the simpler forms of obedience of the New Testament church. The Hebrew Moses now yielded to the Messiah who had actually come. Right here, on the dividing line, the two economies seem to have met and recognized each other as being one and the same in substance and in spirit. And I can almost be willing to persuade myself that the song the disciples sang might, not unfittingly, bear the name which one of their number afterward gave to that which he heard when he saw in a sublime vision at Patmos the real feast that this only typed ; for, in one grand sense, it was " the Song of Moses and the Lamb."

It is likely that we all know now that the Jews were wont at the Passover to chant what they called the " Great Hallel," a long canticle made up of those psalms which in our Scriptures are numbered from the one hundred and thirteenth to the one hundred and eighteenth. There is no doubt, I suppose, concerning the statement that

Some original songs.Communion a fresh institution.

the first communion song was that, or part of that. Surely, if you will read it over, you will find it exceedingly appropriate under the circumstances. But it does not follow that they had nothing else on this occasion. It is not an inconceivable thing, if any one prefers to hazard the conjecture, that a hymn was composed for their use at this earliest communion.

Hannah made one, you remember, when Samuel was born. Mary broke forth into the *Magnificat* after her greeting from her kinswoman Elisabeth. Zacharias sang a new song at the naming of the infant John the moment his dumbness was removed. Simeon gave us an exquisite strain in commemoration of his sight of Jesus in the temple. And, not long subsequent to this day, some one of these very disciples composed an actual poem, and they all sang it together as they came out of prison. These believers, under the Old Testament and the New, did not seem to think that they were shut up to the psalms of David. Finding nothing just fitting to their case, they had no scruples whatsoever in seeking elsewhere, or in fashioning a lyric of praise for themselves.

Let us be frank in admitting that there are moods of evangelical feeling for which no precise psalm can be found in the Psalter as we now have it. Communion service is a fresh institution in the church. We see here that our Lord himself accepted the fact of singing ; it may be, if any one really wishes to think so, that there was a new

Hymns outside of the Bible.

Who was it that sang then?

hymn sung just before the company started for the Mount of Olives, although none of us can pretend there is found any record of it. At all events, believers would be deprived of some of the most efficient means of Christian edification, if they should refuse to sing anything outside of the Bible. The sacramental lyrics of the church at large are in all tongues the very wealth of gospel teaching and comfort. It does seem as if Christians would be quite safe in obeying what an inspired apostle took such pains to say in two instances :

“ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom ; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.”
 “ Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.”

4. Once more : it will serve our present purpose if we ask also *who it was that sang the hymn* at this first communion service.

The record says simply “ they.” It is natural to suppose that the entire company joined in it. Can we imagine that a select body of choristers did the singing for all the rest ? It seems more befitting to insist that each person did what he could to help the song along in such an instance as this. There was John, you remember, so gentle and affectionate that some called him “ the disciple whom Jesus loved,” and yet so manly withal that Christ called him a “ son of thunder.” James was there

Only the eleven sang.Did Jesus sing?

too ; we conceive of him as a somewhat solemn and venerable man ; it hardly strikes us that one so benignant and sober, so practical and unenthusiastic, could have been much of a musician. Simon Peter was there also, and no doubt foremost, as usual, in everything, moving on with the impulses of a great, brave heart. There must have been a good deal of energy in his style, and somewhat of explosiveness, if the tune was a strong one. It is likely the eleven all sang then.

The eleven—Judas was gone. You can never help being glad that the traitor was dismissed before the sacrament. It is a pleasant thing to think he did not sing the hymn ; he was off on his way now to meet the chief priests at the rendezvous. He had “ no music in himself ;” he was engaged in what he was fit for, “ treasons, stratagems and spoils.” There was another Judas present ; how pathetic is the description given of him long afterward in the discrimination, “ *not* Iscariot.”

But did Jesus sing ? Doubtless he did ; why not ? It really seems a precious thought that those disciples heard his voice. We have never been told that our divine Lord loved music ; but he loved everything always that was beautiful and true—lilies, and streams, and faithful men and little children. The Jews said of him once : “ never man spake like this man ;” we think we might add to that, never man sang like this Saviour. Christ surely knew all the words which had been put as a prediction in the mouth of the

“ Jesus wept, but never smiled.”

The songs of dying believers.

Messiah, for he was the Messiah himself. He could sing, as once he talked with Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration, “ of the decease he should accomplish at Jerusalem.”

There are some who love to repeat the saying that, although we read of Jesus as being often in tears, we never find the record asserting that he laughed or smiled. I think religious people can afford to admit this statement as a fact, while we brace ourselves with rigid stubbornness and repellency against the coarse inference which is slyly insinuated as following from it, namely, that Christian sedateness requires nothing of emotion but its sadness, and tolerates nothing of sensibility except its solicitude. It better meets my form of spiritual experience to believe, as I do most sincerely, that our Lord was human and sympathetic in everything which belongs to any one else as a man. I like to think of him as gentle and cheerful and happy. It gives me gladness to feel that he sometimes was glad. I am not ready to say that this communion hymn was doleful and heavy ; I would rather believe that he sang that night strain of rejoicing in jubilant anticipation of his work accomplished and a speedy entrance into glory.

We have been told, and we believe, that dying persons sometimes sing with a generous freeness of exquisite emotion, just because nature is yielding, the world is in full retreat, and grace sweeps into sway. And I find myself thinking often

Who listened to this hymn ?Impressions for good.

that, while there was no weakness of dissolution in our Saviour's experience, there must have been a matchless sweetness and exhilaration in the final song that he sang, for a festival so significant rehearsed his whole purpose and triumph.

5. Yet another question : *who listened when this hymn was sung ?* The disciples heard each other ; was any one else present with them ?

In the story as it runs on there is no hint of an audience ; but it seems quite likely, when we look in upon the picture, that the man in whose guest-chamber the Passover feast was prepared might have entered the assembly for awhile. He had seen too much of this Jesus of Nazareth already to suppose he was a mere common personage. And that man-servant likewise whom the disciples met, bearing his pitcher of water in from the fountain, must have been struck with the authoritative way in which they asked for an apartment. Perhaps he was there, and some of his fellow-servants may have been with him. When the company began to sing the music must have sounded through the rooms around them. The Jews were not very quiet when they shouted forth their grand old Passover anthems. Paul and Silas, you remember, once sang so loud in the jail at Philippi that all the prisoners heard them.

Suppose this communion hymn was heard within and without the apartment, would it not be very impressive for good ? It is true that we never hear of any of these persons again ; but

 Power of communion hymns.

 Will that hymn be sung again ?

may we not hope that at least a few of them became the friends of the Redeemer? There is a great power in a true hymn, and people say that Christians never sing so well as when they are sitting at the Lord's Table; then it is that they think of the past mercy, they realize the present grace, they anticipate the future glory. Each communicant seems ready to repeat the old words of the psalmist: "I waited patiently for the Lord; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the Lord."

6. And now we reach the last question we need to ask: *will that hymn which Jesus and his disciples sang ever be sung again?*

This inquiry is interesting to us because of certain peculiarities of experience of Christians at the Lord's Supper. Communion hymns are wonderfully suggestive of the memory of those who used to love and sing them. And what we would like to know is whether the voices, which keep dropping away at each celebration while the years drift along, are by and by going to renew the strain. Shall the poet really find again her "lost chord" in heaven? Yes: all this, yes. "The children of God," said a pious man to his friend at parting, "never meet for exactly the last time."

Such songs foretastes of heaven.

Not the "Creation," but the "Messiah."

Christ told his disciples that he should no more drink of the wine they used that day till he should drink it new with them in the kingdom of God. And he might have added that he should never sing another hymn with them till he should have returned to his place in his Father's throne. But this would assume that he certainly expected to meet them again, and keep his promises which he had made to them.

To me communion songs seem the surest thing we shall have in the fruitions of heaven. There will be no preaching there; prayer will be no longer needed; reading the Scriptures will have reached its end. Only praise, and that will be done by singing, will be perpetual. Still, communion songs can be sung only by redeemed men and women and children. Angels can sing the "Creation," but saints alone can sing the "Messiah." Even the seraphim never knew the joys of redemption; Christians are to have their chance to render the song of Moses and the Lamb while every voice beside theirs will be silent, and the universe will listen.

Try to picture that scene now for a moment. Room will be made in the highest courts of God's celestial temple for a new choir coming, for a fresh anthem to be heard. Clear, loud and strong, like the supreme voice of many waters, will those thousands and tens of thousands of singers pour forth the strains of wondrous harmony as they make the heavens ring with the communion hymn

Christ's coronation song.

Jeremy Taylor's prayer.

which will then be recognized as the coronation song for their King, now wearing his many crowns.

So, when we sing our closing piece to-day, let us try to feel how glad we shall be when we sing it on the golden floor! Dear voices, evermore silent here on the earth, will be ready to join in it again there: the same, perhaps, which sang Bethlehem songs by your cradle, are going to sing the Calvary song by your throne; for we all shall be kings and priests unto God, and shall reign forever and ever.

“O God, whose days are without end, and whose mercies cannot be numbered; make us, we beseech thee, deeply sensible of the shortness and uncertainty of human life; and let thy Holy Spirit lead us through this vale of misery, in holiness and righteousness, all the days of our lives: that, when we shall have served thee in our generation, we may be gathered unto our fathers, having the testimony of a good conscience; in the communion of the invisible Church; in the confidence of a certain faith; in the comfort of a reasonable, religious, and holy hope; in favor with thee, our God, and in perfect charity with the world. All which we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

XXV.

GOD'S THOUGHTS OF US.

“ BUT I AM POOR AND NEEDY ; YET THE LORD THINKETH UPON ME : THOU ART MY HELP AND MY DELIVERER ; MAKE NO TARRYING, O MY GOD.”—*Psalm 40 : 17.*

WHEN we study the fortieth psalm we are to remember that it has no special incident upon which it is founded. It records the permanent experiences of its inspired author ; it is applicable to the whole stormy period of his career. And, beyond all this, we are to recollect that it does not record David's experiences alone ; it is a song for the ages ; it is plainly evangelical and Messianic, and is quoted concerning Christ in the Epistle to the Hebrews. Hence, we may expect to find grace and help from it as it proffers the love of God to all his children. The great force of it, as is the case in many of the most spiritual psalms, is crowded into the closing verse. This will supply us now with a very welcome analysis. First, there is a pathetic description of human experience ; then, there is a comforting disclosure of divine providence ; then, there is a legitimate ground for full assurance of aid ; then, there is an affectionate prayer for the faith of appropriation in ourselves.

I. “ But I am poor and needy :” this is the

 Ignorance, impotence, guilt.

 The common element.

description given us of our human nature under its ordinary conditions of life.

1. Some are poor and needy through *ignorance*. We cannot understand ourselves : we often pray for what would be our ruin if God granted it just as we asked for it ; we cannot understand others : we toil to make our minds acquainted with those nearest to us, and still they manage to elude our penetration ; we never can understand God : his providences are an unceasing mystery.

2. Some are poor and needy through *impotence*. That is to say, we are surrounded by difficulties, and find we are not masters of the position ; our perplexing cares master us. The ordinary matters of commonplace support are out of our control ; our children try our patience beyond our strength ; the most willing and industrious man cannot always find remunerative work to do.

3. Some are poor and needy through *guilt*. Conscience has been on the alert, and has discovered sin crouching at the door. Human sinfulness is like a check on the bank ; it may go far and remain in circulation long ; but it will come back eventually to the man who is responsible for it, and will be presented for immediate payment. And then, when the guilty soul sits thinking away from help and confidence, and knows not what to do, it will be willing to say at the least, " I am poor and needy," under an uneasy fear, and a solemn sense of condemnation before God.

Now the one common element in all these

troubles is found in the loneliness into which the soul settles under them. When such feeling of desolation comes over us it really seems as if the whole universe had given us the go-by. We are certain that we must have help from outside somewhere, or we shall perish in our hunger and weakness. Human instincts, in such a case, look upward for aid. Our souls can neither fly nor go. Duke Albert of Polanda, so runs the old story, bore on his armor the emblem of entire trust: just the hull of a ship, having only the mainmast and its top-piece, without any tackling or canvas whatever. But there was this motto underneath: *Deus dabit vela*: "God will furnish the sails." Thus he claimed that heavenly forces would be supplied with divine instrumentality when need should arrive.

II. "I am poor and needy; yet the Lord thinketh upon me:" here, in the second place, is the comforting assurance of divine aid. On the heavy background of this universal need shines out the full revelation of God's forethought and carefulness.

I. God *thinks about us*. We are not at all forgotten then. "Many, O Lord my God, are thy wonderful works which thou hast done, and thy thoughts which are to us-ward: they cannot be reckoned up in order unto thee: if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered." It would seem as if we ought to have remembered this. The high and holy One

God thinks about us.

"Pain du bon Dieu."

of Israel never sleeps nor slumbers. The Lord has always been mindful of his own. He created us ; he has fed, sustained, clothed us.

Simpler minds than ours are often more truly devotional : the Savoyards have the beautiful name for one of their finest mountain-flowers, "*Pain du bon Dieu*:" "the bread of the good God ;" for they say it reminds them by its white and delicate blossoms of the manna feeding Israel in the wilderness.

2. *God thinks a great deal about us.* His thoughts are so many that "they cannot be reckoned up in order." He thought of the poor widow in Elisha's time when she had nothing in the famine-struck house but her little cruse of oil. He thought of Simon Peter in the prison, of Daniel in the lions' den, of the infant Moses in the bulrush ark, as well as of David in the great stress of his trouble, whatever it was, when he wrote this psalm : "I waited patiently for the Lord ; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God : many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the Lord. Blessed is that man that maketh the Lord his trust, and respecteth not the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies."

There are two verses in another psalm which tell us this again :

“Sums” in the plural.

Promises are thoughts stored up.

“How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with thee.” This acknowledgment is unusually strong. For the word “sum” is in the plural in the Hebrew; “how great are the sums of them.”

3. God *thinks about us always very kindly*. David gives a significant name to the thoughts he is receiving; he calls them “tender mercies,” given by God’s “lovingkindness” and “truth:” “Withhold not thou thy tender mercies from me, O Lord: let thy lovingkindness and thy truth continually preserve me. For innumerable evils have compassed me about: mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of mine head: therefore my heart faileth me.”

God’s thoughts are not at all as our thoughts, any more than his ways are as our ways; “for as the heavens are higher than the earth,” so are his ways higher than our ways, and his thoughts than our thoughts. Promises are just God’s thoughts stored up for men.

“One blessed word of holy meaning cometh to me o’er and o’er,
And the echoes of its music linger ever—evermore:
Trust—no other word we utter can so sweet and precious be,
Tuning all life’s discords into heavenly harmony.”

III. “I am poor and needy; yet the Lord thinketh upon me: thou art my help and my

Assurance of aid.

God not so far away.

deliverer :” here, in the third place, is a legitimate ground for full assurance of aid.

David turns suddenly from addressing believers to a direct address unto God in person ; he takes occasion to speak confidentially and confidently to his heavenly Friend. We cannot help thinking that he had in mind some in this world who habitually make vast mistakes in reasoning, whose want of logic shows the heart’s perversity.

1. Some say that God is *too far away* to think of us here. Once, when a sailor had come in, saved from shipwreck, he said to those who asked him about his days and nights out on the waters of the lonely sea that their greatest alarm was that God could not be made to hear up so high in the sky, beyond even the stars. Now, it is of no use to reason about this. We must just let the Lord tell us the truth in the matter ; he knows, and he declares :

“ The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth. Surely his salvation is nigh them that fear him ; that glory may dwell in our land. This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.”

One of the boldest and strongest figures of speech in the Bible has been given us to show how close God’s children are to him : “ The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart ;

Is God too great ?

Is God too holy ?

and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit. He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.”

2. Then, again, some say that God is *too great* to think of us here on his footstool. We conceive of him as the Monarch on the throne of the universe. Needy petitioners like us must not expect to have an audience with him. We are abashed at the suggestion of intruding our petty cares upon his notice. It might do perhaps in the case of a kingdom going to pieces, or a ship driving on the rocks, or a dynasty breaking ; but not in our vexations, not in our daily disquiets.

Here, as before, our logic is utterly at fault. The argument goes exactly in the other direction. God is great ; indeed, he is so great that he can look placidly down upon each one of us, as we keep coming to him, ever kindly bidding us a morning and evening welcome ; no more forgetful, no more impatient, no more worried, than are we when our own boys approach us with their questions or their difficulties. Now, when we think of it, it seems as if we conceived of God in a most mean and contemptuous manner, if we begin to assert that he is hurried or fatigued, displeased or burdened, by our affectionate inquiries of him what we are to do. God is so great in his patience that it does not fret him to see his children.

3. So again : some say that God is *too holy* to think of us here. We are sinners and full of defilement ; it is almost natural for us to conclude

God never indifferent.Is God too happy ?

he could not want to have anything to do with such a class of his creatures. When we think of him as residing in the shadowless purity of heaven itself we are hardly willing to believe he cherishes any thought for rebels like men.

But then we certainly know that he hates sin : that is one point gained, at all events ; for if we are sinners, God cannot possibly be indifferent to us. He will strike at sin, for its own offensive sake. He cannot bear to have one speck of moral defilement anywhere within the borders of his realm. So he is gently and tenderly on the side of every man who wishes to be pure. A mere look upward to him attracts attention ; and when one speaks, saying, " See, here is a sinner struggling with sin," that will not fail to be the surest way of securing instantaneous succor.

4. Once more : some say that God is *too happy* to think of us here. He does not need us. Why should he bestir himself or disturb himself in any way in our behalf ? And least of all, if our excellences are of no account, how can our troubles hope to interest him ?

Such questions show how poorly we reason. It is true that God is happy ; but something makes him happy ; he is infinitely and constantly happy, but not unintelligently happy in any case. His enjoyment has grounds for its exercise ; it has a society of companions to share it and contribute to it. And because he desires it to continue and to increase he is always among the

God joys "with singing."Daily harassments.

worlds beneficent and active, making himself happy, everywhere sowing sunlight that he may harvest gladness from each field of the wide universe. We are told by one of the prophets, "The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love; he will joy over thee with singing."

IV. "I am poor and needy; yet the Lord thinketh upon me: thou art my help and my deliverer; make no tarrying, O my God." Here, in the fourth place, is the prayer for the faith of appropriation in ourselves. If God really wishes to help us, and we wish to be helped, why should there be any delay on either side?

I. Why should we not now, at once, trust God to take away all our *daily harassments*? He has said that we are to have "no thought for the morrow," because he has all the "thoughts" that belong to it in our behalf. One day, when the young lad Goethe came from church, where he had listened to a sermon in which an attempt was made to justify the divine goodness, his father asked him what he thought of the explanation. "Why," said this extraordinary youth, "the matter may be much simpler than the minister thinks; God knows very well that an immortal soul can never receive any injury from a mortal accident." Why do we not open our hearts to such a conviction? These frets will not harm us; our Father in heaven will see us through them into peace in his time. We

Unnecessary apprehensions.

Spiritual conflicts.

have only to pray, "Make no tarrying, O my God."

2. Then again: why do we not trust our heavenly Friend to banish all our *unnecessary apprehensions* at once? What has rendered the world more unhappy than anything else has always been some great worry anticipated which never happened after all. A misgiving that we shall not be able to hold our own under these pressures only unfits us for steadiness. It is said that Shakespeare once thought himself no poet, and Raphael's heart grew silent and discouraged, so that he was overheard to say he should never be a successful painter. He who has an all-powerful helper above needs only to look to him for the help he has engaged. We have only to keep praying, "Make no tarrying, O my God."

"Who would be God's must trust, not see, not murmur, fear,
demand;

Must wholly by him guided be, lost in that loving hand;

Must turn where'er he leads, nor say—

'Whither, oh, whither points the way?'"

3. Once more: why do we not trust God to hush all our *spiritual conflicts*? Without are fightings, and within are fears; but these might be composed in an instant if we would only cast our cares on him who cares for us. God seems sometimes to put before the defeated faith the end which it has been listlessly seeking, as a city to be besieged, which city has been lost hitherto through

Send back spent arrows.One essential condition.

indolence. And now the prize seems unutterably valuable, simply because it has to be reached by a series of regular approaches. Prone on the sward the industrious soul lies digging in the low trenches ; there even the Almighty God appears to fire at it, as Christ did at the Syrophenician woman. But now notice ; this is his way of supplying ammunition to the archer. We have only to pick up the spent arrows and send them back in our prayers. A thoroughly alert Christian will sometimes discover that all the fightings he really has are with himself ; he is resisting a God, who is on his side all the time trying to aid him. Let him surrender to a friend, and pray, " Make no tarrying, O my God ! "

Only one condition lies behind all this : " *the sign of the cross is the countersign to night.*" Do you know the story ? It was in the war twenty years ago. The sentry challenged one who was creeping within the lines : " Who goes there ? " rang out sharp and strong in the midnight, and a feeble voice answered : " A tired friend." " Advance, then, and give the countersign," was next heard in the air. Now came the necessity of closer explanation. A worn-out man slowly drew near, unarmed, and almost staggering in unmistakable weakness. He said he was a Union soldier, just escaped from prison ; he had threaded the woods in the night, and been swimming the rivers in the day, until he was well-nigh in the depths of exhaustion. There was no need of

The soldier's countersign.Penitence and faith before pardon.

doubting his pathetic tale, but the sentinel could only reply : " The orders are peremptory to-night that every man coming to the line without the countersign must be shot in his tracks ; you must die within a few minutes ; you know the rules," he added, sorrowfully ; " men must do their duty." The man hesitated : " I did not expect this ; I am not ready to die ; I must have time to pray." And the soldier answered that he might have five minutes' respite. A Christian himself, he hoped much from the delay. Would not God interpose, if this was a true man and good ? Then the fugitive knelt on the sward, and began to talk quietly to his Father in heaven. But, while he was praying, he made *the sign of the cross* in the air, as if strengthening himself with the thought of a dying Saviour. The sentry saw it, and with a cry of gladness clasped a brother in his arms : " You are saved, and so am I," he exclaimed ; " the sign of the cross is the countersign to-night !"

Oh, ye men and brethren who hear me ! listen only to this open secret ; the condition of all peace in God is found in atonement ; reconciliation before favor ; penitent faith before graces of protection ; " the sign of the cross is the countersign to-night !"

XXVI.

OFF AND ON.

“ I HAVE PUT OFF MY COAT ; HOW SHALL I PUT IT ON ? ”—*Solomon's Song* 5 : 3.

NOT long since, coming home from a sea-side trip, during the days of which I had chanced upon a camp-meeting, I came in contact upon the boat with a somewhat loud-speaking and busy exhorter. He wanted to keep singing, and managed to do so most of the way. His manner was exceedingly fresh and open with every one on deck. All of us were questioned in turn about our souls. At last I said to him : “ You have had long experience in attendance on such meetings as these in the grove ? ” He mentioned a number of occasions so very high in the reckoning that I assumed he was habitually there in the season ; so I continued : “ You must have been a Christian for a long time ? ” And he answered : “ Why, yes—*off and on*, now, about eleven years, I should say, since I was first converted ! ”

Such expressions are valuable for their frankness, to say the least ; and their oddness makes them easy to remember. So I choose the phraseology for a moment in order to remark that there is altogether too much of this “ off and on ” re-

“Off and on for eleven years.”

The Bride in the song.

ligion in the churches at this present day. And I am afraid it is not because it happens so by reason of some extraordinary ingathering of hypocrites into the gospel-net, but because it is conceived by many that this is exactly the normal way of procedure in the divine life. The theory may not be strange to all people that personal piety consists in a series of ups and downs, offs and ons, revivals and backslidings, in which every Christian must be allowed to take his turn. It is often deemed quite unnecessary that pastors should grow anxious about their hearers; for these periodic moods are only like the local phenomena of malaria in a district where he is more or less a stranger. He is considered to be over-much concerned when the heats and chills come on; these are the ordinary manifestations, and do not really harm anybody.

1. Let us come now straight to the phraseology of the text I have chosen. Its figure is also quaint and sharp, and can readily be fastened in one's mind. And our first question will naturally be this: What is it to have taken one's religious coat off?

The context shows that it is the person called the Bride here in Solomon's Song who is represented as speaking. She is awakened in the night-time by the sound of her lover's voice at the doorway. He asks her to open to him, that he may come in. But she is plainly no more than half-aroused. She lingers listlessly on her

A stupid inquiry.

The practical exhibition.

couch, for her garments have been laid aside ; so she stupidly inquires of herself how she can get up, put them on again, and go to the door.

The great advantage of having Christ at the portal ready now to enter is unappreciated, because the heart is dull, and hates to take the trouble of rising to duty. An opportunity, which may never occur so clearly again, is declined for the sake of personal indulgence of ease. So the upshot is that God is daringly asked to wait upon mere human convenience for his admission to one's heart.

Let us bring the whole experience to a plain and practical exhibition. It might almost be said that there are few members of the visible church who do not, at some periods of their lives, find themselves secretly questioning the existence of divine grace in their souls. It is a shame that any of us should even for a moment fall into such a folly of confusion ; but the fact cannot be denied that many more persons than ever publicly confess it do actually begin to doubt whether it was a wise thing for them to have openly stood before the community to connect themselves with the people of God at the time when they did so. Now that affections are dulled, and duties become irksome, it is one of our unhealthy impulses to seek to break out from under the orderly restrictions of our church membership. And very likely there might be discovered a somewhat astonishing, and even formidable number in every com-

Throwing up one's profession.

Does this prove unregeneration?

munion, who, if they only had their way, would abruptly and joyously dissolve this relationship, and throw up their entire profession for good.

If they had their way—thus I choose my words carefully ; for they certainly perceive that they cannot have their own way in covenant engagements where there are two parties engaged. As affairs now stand, there is a positive church law in the path : in every denomination of Christians public membership is thoroughly respected and heavily sanctioned : in most cases our theory admits of no withdrawal without a process of actual discipline. One cannot get his name off the roll except by trial for crime and consequent excommunication. Thus held by unwilling bonds, it becomes a serious question—What is a person to do in order honestly to relieve the vexatious embarrassments of his position? Shall he *tear* his coat off?

Now, let me say just at this point, to avoid any misconception, it does not necessarily follow, in every case of irresolution like this, that those who are so harassed by such agitating doubts and painful suspicions of themselves must have been hypocrites during the past history they deplore, or that they are hypocrites now because they keep their perplexities a secret, and remain tranquil where they are. It is no more a proof that one is unregenerate because he desires to be out of the church when he is in it, than it is a proof that one is regenerate because he desires to be in the

Painful and perilous searchings.

Morbid conscientiousness.

church when he is out of it. Such painful and perilous searchings need sometimes themselves to be searched. They may possibly be nothing more than mere wiles of the devil aimed against God's saints.

For these people may possibly be only morbidly conscientious. Sometimes health fails, and one's entire being is under an unnatural depression. Sometimes circumstances of exterior domestic or social life may have combined to bewilder the judgment, or to benumb the heart. Sometimes a wrong counsel from the pulpit or an enthusiastic book, understood or misunderstood, sways the emotion into a sudden violence, and awakes a mis-giving, which Satan perverts into conviction and urges into an outbreak. There are histories in every-day life of sons who have been estranged from their parents for years, and have burst all family bonds, and left the home roof for wild wandering over the earth, and yet whose mistake has been that of the head and not that of the heart. An explanation of just one misunderstanding, which has been carried painfully for half a lifetime, has made all right again; and then it has been seen that the affectionate soul has been loyal from the start. And it is not impossible that many a true Christian has been beguiled in just this way. He imagines it is his church-membership which is gall-ing him, when perhaps it is only one of a hundred matter-of-fact things, belonging to daily existence, which has destroyed his comfort.

 Wherein lies the wrong?

 Jeremiah's figure.

But though this must be admitted, so as not to work any injustice, I cannot go so far as to acknowledge that it would change elementally the moral character of such wicked attempts to rid one's self of the covenant ; for the difficulty lies below the surface.

II. So, then, we reach a second question, which as before I prefer to cast into the phraseology of the text : Wherein rests the wrong of taking one's religious coat off and laying it aside?

Suppose the inquiry assumes this shape : admit that a man thinks he made a mistake in joining the church at all ; and that now, even although he is reckoned as a professor of religion in good and regular standing, he is not a truly regenerate person : is he under obligation to perform the duties of membership? Is he bound to come to the ordinances, just as if all were clear in his own heart? That question is not to be trifled with. And I will say for a general answer that there must be always times of indecision and self-searching in reference to any relationship which involves the two particulars of internal experience and external contract. Let us just turn for a moment to a passage in the prophecy of Jeremiah : " My covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord. Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord ; for I am married unto you."

The Word of God here parallels one perplexity by another ; and it happens that this other is

Husband and wife.

Paul's expostulation.

familiar to almost every mind. Jehovah is plainly addressing his ancient people, and charging them abruptly with unfaithfulness to him. Nevertheless, he avows himself solicitous for their recovery ; and in the course of his appeal and argument he introduces the similitude of a wedding covenant, showing that he has claims as well as anxieties ; he is a *husband*, they are bound to him as a wife to her lord.

Once this figure has been taken up, it is curious to note how rapidly and extensively it hurries into the phraseology of the Old and New Testaments alike. We find it in one of the epistles drawn out with greatest care. Paul, as if to show us that such forms of expression were not merely Jewish and national, uses the same intense illustration with the name of the parties ; he speaks " concerning Christ and the Church : " admitting both relations to be a mystery, he yet claims that in each case illumination is flung upon the one relationship by the other :

" Would to God ye could bear with me a little in my folly ! And indeed bear with me. For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy : for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. "

Such language may seem extravagant ; but really, the Christian apostle does no more than

Marriage is consent.No release admissible.

echo and repeat the promise of God himself, spoken by one of the ancient prophets :

“ And I will betroth thee unto me for ever ; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies. I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness : and thou shalt know the Lord.”

Accepting these forms of representation, it will not be difficult to give an answer to the questions with which we set out just now. The soul of every professor of religion is *married* to Christ its Saviour. Here are the two elements of relationship : the internal experience and the external bond. The definition admitted under our laws is —marriage is *consent*. When, therefore, parties of proper age and intelligence are voluntarily married, they are firmly bound to each other as long as they both shall live ; neither of them has any release save by a legal process which assumes, proves, and punishes *crime*.

There is no need of entering upon an argument on such a point. I feel quite certain that a sufficient reply to this inquiry which we are considering will be exactly what it would be if it were put into words thus : What shall a wife do who is thoroughly convinced that she married under a mistake, and who now esteems her legal relationship an annoyance and a burden ? Persons of candor would say in answer to this : “ Why, the woman is *married* to the man ; that is the end of it. If she has lost her love for her husband she

Marrying in haste.

No change in God.

must not also lose her sense of duty, or her sense of shame : she cannot leave him. She must adjust her purposes to her lot. She swore on the wedding-day that she did love him, and she gave consent before the altar. She also swore that she would live and die, and wanted to live and die, bearing his name. Certainly, she cannot retreat a step out of that without breaking an oath. The likelihood is, she will learn a lesson that she ought to be wise enough to pass on to her children—that they do not marry in haste, and then be compelled, like herself, to find time for repentance at their sorrowful leisure.

But, you urge, the man may have changed since those promises were made ; he may have become unmanly and unworthy. Still, all we can say is—so much the worse for her ; there is no relief at hand.

But now, I take it that just there is the only point at which this figure does not hold in its present application. It is not a possible thing that God, as an object of love and desire for every human soul, should ever become less attractive and less worthy. A Christian, who has professed to love him, and then in the lapse of months and years has ceased so to do, has evidently undergone some change in himself ; he is a backslider, but God is the same.

III. Thus we reach the third question, indeed, the main question, suggested in the text : “ I have put off my coat ; how shall I put it on ? ”

How put on the coat ?

It must be put on again.

Yes indeed : that is the question—"How shall I put it on?" For there can be no release from his perplexities to any one who feels his religious responsibilities and duties to be a burden, except in going straight back to the love which made every yoke easy and every burden light. I have said enough already to render this assumption clear and legitimate—that the coat must go on again.

Shall such a church-member continue to attend services as usual on the Lord's Day? Certainly; why not? Shall he lead in ordinary meetings for public prayer? Yes, if he has been accustomed openly to do so, if he be called upon, and can do it to edification. Shall he persist in keeping up his family altar? No sort of doubt about that. Shall he come to the Lord's Table at communion? That is clear, too; he is to come just the same as ever. So of each duty in turn. It makes no difference whatever what his feelings are. He is to find release from his perplexities by a return and not by a departure: he must not make a dereliction at one point apologize for a dereliction at another. If his heart is chilled, then thrusting off his outward profession is the very last thing to do in order to warm it. He must get back somehow, and the way to get back into Christian life is just to turn sharply around and go back.

For the end of this "off and on" religion is simply—*death*. I do not know any pictures of the Scriptures more vivid or more violent than

Ezekiel and Paul.A lost professor.

those which assert the utter ruin of an apostate, thus :

“ When the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and doeth according to all the abominations that the wicked man doeth, shall he live? All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned : in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die.” “ For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance ; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame. For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God : but that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing ; whose end is to be burned.”

The very conception of hell as a place of retribution is awfully alarming. But the worst feature of it all is found in the thought of a professor of religion finally lost—a church-member in among the demons who will forego no chance to taunt him beyond the rest. “ Oh, yes ! you are the fluent man who used to make such nice talks ! You recommended religion as such a good thing ! Oh, we love such an honest hypocrite as you have

The ruin is needless.

God stands pleading.

shown yourself to be ! This is exactly the place for you ! Such salt never loses its sweetness for us !”

Meantime all this wreck and ruin seems so needless and so sad ! Oftentimes it is just this stubborn fidelity to duty which, persisted in, avails most in restoring the heart-life. One who prays meekly for form's sake is, at least, in the best posture for praying for love's sake. One who is willing to be honest in confession is the nearest like one who is getting pardon for wrongs he is confessing. Sometimes the gracious Spirit of God makes use of such considerate moods of mind in renewing his help ; he is like some thoughtful man who tries to make it easy for his friend to come back after a long estrangement ; and his kindness wins more than ever. The worst mistake possible is that of one wildly rushing away from a covenant.

For look—there stands God waiting to be gracious ! Oh, the picture is wonderful in that verse I quoted awhile ago ! Like some magnanimous, affectionate husband, infinite Love in the presence of the dull and stony Soul—Psyche pleaded with by Amor—God stands kindly entreating : “ Surely, as a wife treacherously departeth, so have ye dealt with me : turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord ; for I am married unto you.”

XXVII.

THE ARGUMENT OF EXPERIENCE.

“BE THOU MY STRONG ROCK . . . FOR THOU ART MY ROCK.”—
Psalm 31 : 2, 3.

BY his generous prowess David had delivered the city of Keilah from the Philistines. For a little while he was permitted to find sanctuary, and catch rest within its walls. But his indefatigable pursuer, Saul, ever on the alert to entrap him, soon discovered his temporary retreat, and so David knew he must once more enter upon the wild chases of his venturous life.

But before he went out into new exposures he somehow found time to pen a new psalm. He reminded himself of his former history. He recalled a series of deliverances which he had had in seasons of equal peril. Hence, when he puts on his armor again, he takes his harp also in hand. If he must be a soldier, he can nevertheless sing. And while we, in our New Testament age of the world, have no heart to say we are glad that this wonderful man suffered, we may rejoice that out of his dangers there came so often these anthems of acknowledgment and praise. They are like some jewels which a bride wears on her fingers; she will not deny that she is glad to receive them,

A bride's rings.Off-look at Hebron.

even though she knows that there was a wound in some living creature for each distinct pearl.

The one peculiarity about this psalm is its forcefulness of logic. More than one commentator has called our attention to the fact of David's pressing God all the time with his "fors" and his "therefores." He argues like a polemic. He insists on conclusions issuing out from premises. He lights his helpful torch of hope from the old camp-fires of conflict. "Be thou my rock, for thou art my rock." He writes this exquisite song while his whole heart is pitifully mournful in its lonely depression; but in itself it is one of the most exhilarant he furnished for the Psalter, fairly crowded with thankfulness and joy.

Why does David talk so much about a rock? You remember where, at the time, he was lingering. The situation he was in was singularly fortunate for such picturesque meditations. From the elevated outlook all around Hebron, off from the high country along the ridge, he could quite possibly see the precipitous banks of that awful ravine, down at the bottom of which the turbid rainfall of the Kidron forced its tortuous way. He could distinguish many a lonesome, but unfortunately familiar spot near the Dead Sea. That thin line of emaciated hills had become a home sight with him. More than once, with the half-mad king on his track, he had taken shelter in the craggy cliffs of Engedi. It was his grateful recognition of help rendered that made him say "rock."

Weary vicissitudes.Changeless verities of divine love.

Now, as he goes forth to weary vicissitudes again, it seems perfectly natural for him to think of his former retreats. And if at any time he speaks of aid from Almighty God, we should expect him to cast the forms of his phraseology into the figures of his experience, reasoning out from nature into grace. So he petitions and asserts in the same breath and with the same symbols : " Bow down thine ear to me ; deliver me speedily : be thou my strong rock, for a house of defence to save me. For thou art my rock and my fortress ; therefore for thy name's sake lead me, and guide me."

1. Of course the very earliest and best thought we can catch, in so swift an utterance, is concerning the absolute unchangeableness of God.

If our Maker, infinite and eternal as he is, has ever helped us once, we may confidently expect him to help us again. If he has already been to us a rock of refuge, we may reason with exact logic that he will be a rock of refuge continually. For he has no frames of feeling as we have. The argument of experience is simply unalterable and irrefragable. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever.

We have our spiritual elations and depressions ; but, really, neither of them have anything to do with the changeless verities of divine love. And no safety is so certain for any menaced and distressed believer as that of the soul which has surrendered everything to Christ. Our foolish diffi-

Children in dark recesses.

Closer intimacy inside the rock.

culty lies in our own want of trust. Most of us can recall some childish years of sport, when we were wont to hide ourselves in a dark recess, leaving our pursuers standing in the narrow door, peering into the shadows after us. It did seem as if they must see our very faces, we could see theirs so perfectly. And we found it impossible to keep quiet, and just silently trust the dusk we were in.

“No man hath seen God at any time.” To tell a timid Christian that he must hold his confidence implicitly in his Saviour seems sometimes little more or less than mockery. For we insist that we ought to have something more around us than an impalpable presence. We can appreciate our dangers so clearly that we imagine we must certainly be fully exposed. But let any child of God once pass a season of real peril, and learn in delightful experience how he has been watched and at last delivered; then his cheerful song will be like David's: “Be thou my rock . . . for thou art my rock.”

2. Then comes another thought from the text, which gives a fresh delight: he who is shut up to God is the one who learns most of God.

The moment any little child feels real safety in the presence and protection of its parent, after a time of terror, it falls instinctively into expressions of affection. It begins to caress the hand it holds. And, very much in the same way, the filial believer, finding himself safe in Christ, is moved toward intimate communion. He loves the more, the more

Paul's ladder.Patience, experience, hope.

he trusts. "Tribulation worketh patience ; and patience, experience." He wonders how he could ever have been frightened ; he will not again ; "experience worketh hope."

Meantime, to every utterance of tenderness the Holy Spirit responds. A voice may be heard in the stillness of the soul like that of the Spouse to the Bride in the Song of Songs ; indeed, the Saviour seems to come near to seek his own : "O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice ; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely."

There can be no doubt at all that every true Christian learns of Jesus his Redeemer in the hours of such communion more than anywhere else in the world. Let me feel, in some day of deep depression, that I am poor, and shall fall into want ; that I am ill, and shall never be well again ; that I am maligned, and shall never be able to make my righteousness appear ; or that my temper has got the better of me, and I can never control it ; that my loose tongue has spoken reckless idleness of words, and I shall be unable to put on its bridle in all the long years ; no matter what may be my trial ; let me be borne upon, and borne down, till I am alarmed, desolate, demoralized and forlorn. Then let me, in one supreme act of trust, with a mighty and masterful faith, call upon God, and rest in him. Let me creep into the shadow of the rock. Let me see my calamities go

Hounds rushing by.

The instinct of seeking.

harmlessly by, like rushing hounds in full pursuit, with the sight and the scent lost. Now I know I am free and safe.

In the mysterious economy of redemption these are the moments chosen by the Holy Ghost for his most striking disclosures of truth to each soul. Theology is learned in spiritual conflict far better than in comfortable peace. The deepest experiences of gospel help are invariably taught in war-fortresses. Shut up to God's companionship, we begin to strive after closer communion with him. He meets us more than half-way. There is a genuine palpable experience of his nearness to us. We find we can understand things we considered inexplicable before, that we are interested in promises we used to deem wearisome and dry. The Bible appears like a new revelation to a Christian who is driven into some narrowness or darkness with God. This must have been what old Thomas à Kempis meant when he said once so simply : " I have no rest except in a nook with the Book."

Furthermore : all our emotions and sensibilities are awakened to a fresh instinct of seeking after him whom our soul loves. We may not be precisely certain where he is going to be found nearest at hand ; but we push out the tendrils of our affection in each direction—

" Like plants or vines, which never see the sun,
But dream of him, and guess where he may be,
And do their best to climb and get to him."

Moist and gloomy times.God is managing affairs.

Thus it comes to pass that moist and gloomy times are often growing and fruit-bearing times. Each disciplinary worry of life constitutes a sort of soul's college. There is a marvelous educating power to be found in overcast skies. Gifts and graces flourish among damp shadows as they do not always out in dry sunshines. And, indeed, we ought to remember that this is really a low level to live upon, which we deem oftentimes the most important—that of mere activity and conspicuous duty-doing. Advancement, in knowledge of God and experience of grace, is much higher. That surely was an excellent counsel once given by an aged divine when he said: "One of the most unequivocal signs of ripeness in Christian character is a growing fondness for the doctrines of the gospel, as distinguished from the mere perfunctory obedience to precepts." It is not successes a true believer needs, it is thoughts; it is not opinions, it is truth; it is not philosophy, it is revelation; it is not even religion, it is God-likeness; it is not achievement, it is Christ!

3. Beside these two lessons suggested in the text, there is another: seasons of uttermost apparent peril are generally the safest.

After all, it is a great comfort to recollect that God is managing the universe, even when the sky is full of thunder. And the one indispensable condition of repose is found in an instant surrender to the management of God. He seeks no counsel of ours, and we are always very weak and foolish

The ended voyage.

Noah in the deluge.

to keep offering him help. When the sea-captain has brought the ship fairly and finely into the haven we have generally found that our sleeping-chamber was saved with the rest of it, and we were in a comfortable condition, unless we had grown ill through anxiety.

Here among these verses occurs one which seems very familiar to our ears : " Into thine hand I commit my spirit : thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth." At least three persons in Bible history are known to have repeated it in seasons of utmost extremity—David, Stephen, and Jesus of Nazareth on the cross. It is the unequivocal language of uttermost relinquishment of self-preservation. Saul flings javelins at David. The mad populace pelt Stephen with missiles of stone. The soldiers drive nails through the limbs of Christ. Apparently without any release or refuge, each of these sufferers in his extremity exclaims that he puts his case out of his own hands, soul and body. With one vast letting go of personal effort, they fall upon the everlasting arms underneath. In the supreme moment of being lost they are safe.

There are other instances like these. Think of Noah in the deluge. A very slight imagination would draw the picture of him at the instant when, having shut him in the ark, the Almighty sent the rains and rivers pouring around and under the huge vessel with its awkward freight. Remember those human beings inside with the dumb beasts could not look out upon the hills and plains

Safe on Ararat.Daniel, Peter, Jonah.

to see what was going on. There was only one window in the structure ; that was overhead, and opened on the sky straight upward. When the wooden world began to writhe and creak through all its seams and planks, to totter and sway as it rose from the solid earth ; when they felt themselves cut loose from bearings and moorings, and lifted up, hour after hour, on the awful swirls of the water ; it might possibly be that they grew solemn and thoughtful, all of them, in the extremity of their admitted exposure. But we know now, and they themselves believed then, that they were the only secure persons in the whole world. They were held in the hollow of their Father's hand. God shut them in the ark, then set the ark high up on Ararat.

Think of Daniel : there was no spot so safe for him on earth as was that den of lions ; not an enemy could get at him all the night of peace. Think of Simon Peter : a whole platoon of soldiers, and the four walls of a prison, protected him from Herod ; he was absolutely secure. Think of Jonah : how utterly impossible it was to shipwreck him again while the Lord was bringing him ashore, fathoms under the waves. It is always the same story : he is the safest of us all whom the Lord cares for. When one is driven into the rock he finds God is himself the rock.

4. So we reach our final lesson : our duty is to urge the argument of experience constantly against the onsets of the devil's distrust.

“The palace of Christ.”

Divine interpositions remembered.

That is, we must keep repeating such a text as this : “Be thou my strong rock . . . for thou art my rock.” This settled rest of a soul in God is what Augustine calls “the palace of Christ, the temple of the Holy Ghost, the paradise of delight, the standing Sabbath of the saints.” Nowhere else can any believer find tranquillity or serene repose.

If, instead of brooding and repining over sad prospects, instead of imagining pains to come, instead of foreseeing and predicting dismay and disappointment, instead of always looking on the dark side, we would only count up our mercies which we have received, and argue logically from them fresh deliverances sure to be vouchsafed by God from on high, we should be happier and far more useful. There has been no man or woman living in this world, among really believing people, whose history can possibly be barren of divine interpositions. Providence and grace are alike full of instances of God’s love. Once there was sickness in our home ; then came loss ; then came abuse or misrepresentation ; we seemed just going into wreck and ruin. Suddenly a hand seemed actually stretched out from the sky overhead, and all was right and clear again. Once there was fire, and then there was flood ; but strange helps and succors showed themselves at the critical instants, and the accidents were warded off marvelously. Then there were pestilences in the air, and awful temptations in the business world, and

The text a fine motto.

Cowper's hymn.

bereavements in the family. But always, always, God showed himself our strong rock.

Why cannot we keep saying so? Is there any one in all the world who cannot remember some matchless providence of his Maker which molded, aided, and swayed his entire career? These supreme deliverances it is our duty to rehearse over and over again to ourselves and to our neighbors. They are our arguments. Do you remember that quaint little stanza in one of our familiar hymns, with which the singer rebukes faint-hearted and complaining believers for their doubts and misgivings? He seems to think it a great waste of time, and a tedious use of profitless words, to wail forth our cries, as if we had a case against God :

“ Were half the breath thus vainly spent
To heaven in supplication sent,
Our cheerful song would oftener be,
Hear what the Lord hath done for me !”

My Christian friends, suffer me now, in closing the sermon, to suggest this text as your motto of religious life to meet your sudden wants and needs. I soberly propose to you, as a habitual repetition of prayer, this one request with the plea to back it : “ Be thou my strong rock . . . for thou art my rock.” Every experience in your history hitherto logically bears on the history that remains. Consider under this simple figure each disclosure of divine love in interposition. Call it your “ rock.” If God ever gave you a comfort

Not your old troubles.

But your old mercies.

in sorrow, a relief in illness, a rescue in danger, or a help in feebleness, think it over, and argue from it that you will have others like it. Be habitually recalling, not your old troubles, but your old mercies. Choose out of your remembrance at this moment, now as we separate, your most striking and illustrious instance of God's watchful love that was ever shown to you. Let it rise up before your imagination, where you can actually seem to see it as David could see the great rifted rock of Engedi; and then, in view of it say to your covenant-keeping Maker: "Be thou my strong rock . . . for thou art my rock."

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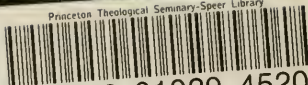
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