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ELISHA.

FROM THE GERMAN OF

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PART II.

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E L I S H A .

PART II.

I.—THE NEW ERECTION.

THE spirit of the times, my friends, is not an empty name. Most true Christians feel, more or less, the pernicious influence of the intellectual atmosphere, that at present pervades the world. The number of those in Zion, who are tempted and harassed with theoretical doubts, is greater now than formerly. Many present a spectacle, resembling that of the anxious, fluttering bird in the bush, fascinated by the serpent lying concealed in the luxuriant grass beneath; flutter and struggle as it may, it cannot resist the direful spell, but is irresistibly attracted, nearer and nearer, to the jaws opened for its destruction. The means of strengthening faith are now more requisite in Zion than ever. Such declarations as that of 2 Peter i. 16—19, are now peculiarly appropriate; and Peter, when he wrote those words, was conscious of the awful circumstances in which he was placed. He saw the close of his earthly career near at hand; and had a more distinct view of that cross, which his Master once pointed out to him at a distance. "Knowing," he says, "that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus hath showed me;" but he says it with the utmost composure. The body, which he must lay aside, is, in his estimation, merely a tabernacle; dying, the commencement of a journey; death, a departure to a most blissful home. O enviable state! since "all flesh is

as grass, and the glory of man as the flower of grass!"— Yes, to be able to leave the insecure ground of this life, and, with a steady hand, to cast anchor in a nobler life above; to find a refuge from the depressing conviction, "All is vanity!" in the elevating thought, "The best is yet to come!" to hear, in the rapid flight of time, only the rolling of the wheels, which convey us to our home; at the hour of dissolution to be able to say, with confidence and sincerity, "We meet again!" calmly to look upon the vicissitudes of this ever-changing world, upon its gains and its losses, its prosperity and adversity, its rising and falling, and, with a firm conviction, to say, "This is not my home, I am hastening to my Father's house—the eternal hills are my inheritance!" This is happiness—this is true prosperity and glory.

And such is Peter's state: he holds no covering before his eyes; he deludes himself with no vain fancy that his end is distant; he does not deceive himself as to the true form of the death that awaits him, neither does he attempt to disguise, or to cloak it. He looks at things soberly and clearly as they are; and yet he is tranquil. It is not the tranquillity of the grave, nor that of insensibility; neither is it the tranquillity of the bird that, upon the approach of the hunter, thrusts its head into a bush and fancies itself secure; it is a vigorous, animated, joyful tranquillity, founded on the clearest conviction. This elevated peace rests on a truth, which he knows; and this known truth is, as he himself declares, when he says, "We have not followed cunningly devised fables," not invented imaginary fictions, but infallible certainty! No rationalist, or philosopher, can make a similar declaration when speaking of supernatural things. They speak indeed of God, of immortality, and meeting again, but they do it with doubt; and were they honest, they would only say, "We imagine, we think, we hope;" never "We are certain." They preach doctrines, for the sake of which they would not consent to be crucified; they build systems, on which, if put to the

test, they would not risk a hundred dollars, much less their lives; they adopt the phraseology of consolation, at which, when offered to them as consolation, their countenances fall; they abound in arguments, which, under the pressure of calamity, and in the hour of death, they treat as chaff and stubble. Place no confidence in the frank countenances of these dealers in wisdom. They all, with their modicum of religion, are, eventually, like people, whose cause is bad. They offer this and that as consolation, but without trusting their own prescriptions; they are distressed with doubt. The only secure footing is in revelation.

It is scriptural truth on which our apostle so securely rests; the substance of which, as he himself testifies, is the power and coming, or the powerful and efficacious appearance, of Jesus Christ: of that Jesus, who passed with Divine glory over the earth, as a sun dispensing light and fruitfulness; before whom, misery fled, hell gave place, death drew back, the angels did homage, the devils trembled, the sinners fear, and anguish vanished; and whose appearance is the wonder of wonders, the source whence the miracles, in which he displayed such power, naturally flowed.

I know that the much esteemed theological tendency of our day, deems this ground unsound, and looks upon all believers in the Bible as entangled by a circle of phrases, in the formation of which, fancy has had more to do than fact. But Peter remonstrates, as we likewise do. "We have not followed," he says, "cunningly devised fables,—but were eye-witnesses of his majesty." And now he proceeds to mention the occurrence on Tabor. "For," he says, "he received from God the Father honour and glory; when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice, which came from heaven, we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount." So says the apostle: now imagine him opposed by our modern wisdom, with its philosophical objections. "Simon," it would say, "it is not credible that the Godhead should

personally and audibly converse with men ; that he should have a son, born God of God, and that events should occur, not founded on natural causes." Say, can you not imagine a smile of compassion overspread the apostle's countenance, and that you hear him, while pointing to his eyes, his ears and hands, calmly reply, "These, ye strange people, are my vouchers ; spare your empty objections ! We have seen his glory !" And our reply is like Peter's : experience is the armour, in which we are clad ; from which the sharpest shafts of reason must rebound. Jesus, in whom we believe, has enlightened us with his light, renewed us in the spirit of our minds, infused a paradise of peace into our hearts, loosened our attachment to this world, and transferred it to his heavenly kingdom ; has armed us with invincible strength, both for life and death ; has heard us when we cried to him, and consoled us when we wept. Jesus, to whom we bend the knee, supports, raises, protects, guides, and saves us ; replies to our requests ; bows down to us when we pray ; quickens us when we faint ; sustains us when we waver. We hear the sound of his footsteps, we experience the wonders of his hand, we feel his creative breath within us, and blissfully repose in his arms, like John. And shall we attach importance to the gainsayings of those, who have never inquired after him, never been united to him, never felt a want of him, never in their lives dedicated themselves to him ! Let them turn their critical artillery against us ; let their science, which is of the earth, demonstrate, with sneering confidence, who Jesus may have been, and who he was not ; what can they effect against us, who can boast with John, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled of the word of life—for the life was manifested—that declare we unto you." What can they effect against us ? So long as we are able to say, "We beheld his glory !" we can vanquish a world of sceptical subtilty, ridicule, and wit.

“We beheld his glory,” says the apostle. That he had seen it himself, is therefore the first ground of his invincible belief, that the subject of his faith is placed beyond all doubt. Another reason is contained in the words: “We have also a more sure word of prophecy.” He next refers to the Old Testament, in the canonical completeness of its books, to Moses and the prophets. Amongst the Christians in Israel, to whom Peter writes, there were still many, who adhered with a one-sided partiality to the Old Testament, to the prejudice of the apostolic mission. The apostle is far from blaming the noble, uncompromising veneration, which they entertained for the Old Testament. “Whereunto ye do well,” he says, “that ye take heed as unto a light.” But what sort of a light?—“A light that shone,” (not that shineth) “in a dark place.” The dark place is the world, before the appearance of Christ. The word is not *a* light, but *the* light, the only one. Every other, and consequently every departure from it of human wisdom, is darkness. The Old Testament word was a lamp; but the sun, when he rises, does not extinguish the lamp, he eclipses it with the superior brightness of his shining. “As to a light that shined, until the day dawned, and the day star arose in your hearts!” The day is the New Testament dispensation. The clearer light is the apostolic announcement; the morning star—which, when it rises in the heart with its deep red light, brings with it the full day of peace—is Christ, the end and substance of the apostolic announcement. “The day has now dawned,” the apostle means to say. Therefore it is above all things necessary, that ye walk and dwell in the light of that superior luminary, which the gospel has displayed.

Yes, the word on which we rest, is a sure word, and worthy of all acceptance. “But—” but what? “The miracles!” Which of them? “The ark,—Balaam’s ass,—the Red Sea!” Do you then stumble at the miracles? If indeed a living God exist, and if he reveal himself as Lord of all, wonders must necessarily take place, and acts be performed

calculated to exhibit the Eternal to us, as independent of the laws of nature, and as ruling over them with absolute sway. "But—" Well, what else? "But the language is so plain, so human!" So, then, you would have the Bible written in a supernatural style, more pathetically, more metaphysically abstract! Were that the case, I should doubt its claim to be considered a Divine communication; for it is precisely in its simple, and yet incomparably profound language, that I find the true impress of Divinity; and it is the adaptation of the Divine revelation to our capacity and modes of speech, that constitutes, in my estimation, its greatness and its glory. "But—" What, another objection? "Its irreconcilable contradictions!" Where are they? If they could really be found in the sacred writings, what a display of them our enemies would make! they would blazon them through the world as tokens of triumph! But where are Yea and Nay to be found respecting the same thing in this book? A semblance of contradiction there is, but only to the disgrace of superficial minds, is there even a semblance. "But the discordance between the Scripture representation of the appearance of the world with the results of natural science!" Discordance? Then do you not know, that the deeper the science of our day penetrates the mysteries of the universe, the more the statements of the Bible respecting natural things is confirmed; and that innumerable declarations of Scripture, which fifty or sixty years ago were deemed to be erroneous, have since proved to be perfectly well-founded, and their verification becomes stronger and stronger. "And all its mysteries and enigmas!" Oh, I crave your pardon! Everything in the Bible, it seems, must be transparent as water; it must contain nothing but what unaided reason might have arrived at by its own investigations. Were this the case, then I should say, it is a human book. The idea of a Divine revelation, comprehends the communication of something beyond the natural range of human wisdom, which divinely enriches the store of human knowledge.

Yes, we have a sure word : a word that flatters the human reason as little, as it does the unregenerate heart ; which, though it provides only spears and nails for the flesh, yet opens for itself a way, is triumphant, permanent, and penetrating. A word, persecuted on every hand, and in every way ; a thousand times devoted to destruction by the arm of civil authority, and by mental and scientific acumen ; and yet wonderfully sustained, protected, and preserved. A word, proved by its contents to be the word of God, and evidently an object of tender, providential care. A word, full of predictions of the most explicit and peculiar character ; and which of them has remained unfulfilled ? If we confine ourselves to those, which refer to Christ ; how have they become yea and amen, even to the minutest particulars, to the partition of his garments under the cross, and to his burial by the rich, etc. A word, so thoroughly worthy of the divinity, in its doctrines, and the facts which it narrates, so entirely corresponding with the perfections of the highest and holiest Being, that, if it be a human production, the man who wrote it must have known God, as God is known to himself. A word, speaking every where the same language, perfectly in unison in all its parts, although the writers of it lived at various periods, extending over sixteen hundred years. Numerous as were the writers, who, at far distant periods, contributed their portions, everywhere the same views, the same sentiments, the same doctrines throughout ! And what a depth of plan and connexion, what an unerring progressive development in the whole ! A work of human device it cannot be. It is a miracle, and it only remains to be determined, whether we will ascribe it to chance, or to God. A book, so adapted to the necessities of a heart awakened to the knowledge of itself, and in its entire contents so conformable to sound reason, that, even our reviling enemies are forced to admit, that, provided the foundation of the Bible system, the doctrine of human depravity, be admitted, then little can be objected to the doctrinal structure arising

from it, which is consistent and firmly constituted in all its parts. Yes, it must be ascribed to the heart, to the depraved will of man, and not, as they would rather have it, to their superior intellect, if they do not accept this Book as the word of God. There is, indeed, some truth in the remark of a learned rationalist in Paris, who, after long persuasion by a friend, consented to read that most infamous book of modern date, in which the entire contents of the Bible are summarily disposed of as invention and fable. "I thank you," he said, "that you have induced me to read this book. A more remarkable production I never met with; it has introduced me, for the first time in my life, to a writer totally devoid of all sense of the supernatural. A second instance of the kind, perhaps, can scarcely be met with."

Excuse this long introduction, which will not be without its use, if it enables us to tread again, with a firmer step, the miraculous ground of sacred history, to which our resumed meditations on the prophetic career of Elisha now reconduct us. Our present narrative relates an occurrence, at which the wise of this world will scarcely be able to withhold a shake of the head expressive of their doubt. We, however, still maintain, "We have not followed cunningly devised fables; here also is firm historical ground!" and in the strength of the words, "We have seen his glory!" we stand proof against all the shafts, that unenlightened reason can hurl against us.

2 KINGS VI. 1—7.

"And the sons of the prophets said unto Elisha, Behold now, the place where we dwell with thee is too strait for us. Let us go, we pray thee, unto Jordan, and take thence every man a beam, and let us make us a place there, where we may dwell. And he answered, Go ye. And one said, Be content, I pray thee, and go with thy servants; and he answered, I will go. So he went with them. And when they came to Jordan, they cut down wood. But as one was felling a beam, the ax fell into the water: and he cried, and said, Alas master! for it was borrowed. And the man of God said, Where fell it? And he shewed him the place. And he cut down a stick, and cast it in thither; and the iron did swim. Therefore said he, Take it up to thee. And he put out his hand, and took it."

Our path leads us along the banks of the Jordan. To a

resort of pleasure? Yes, if the place where the children of God assemble be so esteemed by you. We meet them, it is true, in their working, every-day attire; but so much the better. We seek not finery, but men. We require only truth, nature, and life; and all these are unfolded in our narrative. There are five points worthy of our consideration. I. The want of room. II. The new colony. III. The escort. IV. The embarrassment. V. The miraculous assistance.

I. We arrive at Jericho, just as the sons of the prophets appear before their master to announce to him, that the place in which they live, is become too small for them, and that a new one is needed. What refreshing intelligence for Elisha's ear! The children of the prophets constituted the flower of Israel, and their number has so increased, that the extensive settlements at Jericho and Gilgal are no longer able to contain them. Joyful events! Rain has fallen upon Israel—spiritual blessings in refreshing showers have descended from heaven. May not this be a new period of grace, coupled with Naaman's conversion? It is possible. But in the days of Elisha, there was generally more prosperity in the land, than during the stormy Sinai-like ministration of the Tishbite, whose operations resemble those of the plough, whilst the mission of Elisha, rich in promise, and attracting to the heart, like a genial sun, dispensed light and vitality over the field which had been ploughed by his predecessor; the germs of spiritual life, hitherto kept back, put forth fruit, and the time of harvest was at hand. How frequently are God's husbandmen divided into those who break up the soil, and those who bind up the sheaves! Every one doubtless would prefer the lot of Elisha; but how many are appointed merely to break the stones and prepare the furrows! Let them not become weary or disheartened, but think of the time when it is promised, that "he that soweth and he that reapeth" shall "rejoice together."

Want of room is felt, and a pressing necessity for enlarged accommodation. Enlargements of various kinds, we, too, have already experienced, and we hope for still greater ones to come. How circumscribed, for instance, was the former range of your Christian sympathies! The mountains that surround your valley, formed the limit both of your love and your activity. Now, upon the wings of the sincerest sympathy, you pass both mountains and seas, visiting in thought all the countries round the poles, giving and receiving brotherly salutations. Your love embraces the whole heathen world; you listen to the cries and to the hosannas of all who have been enlightened by the advent of Christ. To the deserts of Arabia you extend a helping hand; in Hindostan and Persia you perceive the early buddings of Christianity, and alight on every distant coast to assist in celebrating the triumphs of Divine grace. How confined was once the space which you allotted to the saints of the Lord! There were thousands for whom you could find no room in your fold, because they did not display certain marks of human invention, without which you imagined there could be no real Christianity. Now you have extended the limits of your fold. You inquire more after the life, and are less troubled about external appearances, believing that the same spirit may animate forms, which widely differ from each other. And how richly are you rewarded by this expansion of your ideas! Formerly, the kingdom of the Lord around you, had the appearance of an insignificant plantation; but your eye now expatiates over an unbounded forest. How miserably circumscribed was once your Christian life, when you viewed the gospel as a kind of new law, and Jesus as another, though milder Moses, not, indeed, exacting perfect obedience, but faith, repentance, and self-denial, as the meritorious ground of forgiveness! How sorrowfully you then pursued your course! your anxious, inquiring look, bent upon the narrow circle of your own feelings and conduct; your mind deprived of peace, and solely occupied

with the consideration, how you ought to demean yourselves under different circumstances. Now, the walls of your prison have been cast down. You perceive that the ground of your pardon must be sought, not in yourselves, but in Christ alone. Free, disburdened, and assured of your eternal safety in Him, your walk and conversation is in heaven. What a blessed enlargement has been experienced by many, at least, among you, within a longer, or shorter period! Your contemplations, once circumscribed by the narrow channels prescribed by human writings, now range at large over the wide expanse of the Word of God; and, descending below the surface, search into the rich beds concealed within its depths! How wonderfully your spiritual views have been enlarged! and what a prospect of new joys stands open to your view!

A wider space may likewise be assigned to Christianity, than is done by many, who, overlooking the leavening nature of the gospel, exclude so many things from the kingdom of God as profane, which are only profaned by being usurped by the world. Christianity does not, for instance, renounce the arts and sciences; but views them as territory fallen into hostile hands, which will be reclaimed in due time, and brought again under its sacred influence. To this territory belong music, painting, architecture, poetry, history, and even physics and politics. It is necessary to distinguish well between the things themselves, and their abuse, and not throw away the kernel with the shell. The kingdom of the Lord will one day extend over them its radiant wings, and infuse into them its spirit and life. A sacred and refining fire will then convert to ashes the last remains of heathenism in the arts and sciences, and consecrate an earthly state to the service of heaven.

II. The sons of the prophets communicate to their master their design of founding a new settlement. "Let us go," they say, "unto Jordan, and take thence every man

a beam, and let us make us a place there, where we may dwell." Say, who amongst us is not conscious of a desire to make one of them? How delightful is their plan! Remote from the distracting tumult of the world, to reside in peaceful habitations, on the banks of the quiet stream, where Israel, after their wanderings in the desert, first saluted the soil of the long-desired land of promise. The habitation of brethren, the banner over which is love! The dwelling of God among men! The plan has not its origin in a vain, arbitrary will; it is the offspring of necessity, the suggestion of the Lord. Similar erections of a spiritual character have often been attempted by others, but the materials were not obtained from the right quarter. They were collected on the hills of self-exultation; in the idolatrous groves of self-love; in the gloomy forest of extravagant misconception of Christian abstinence; or were broken from the barren, leafless fences of monkish fasts and penances. Surrounded with prejudice as with a wall, they distorted certain secondary doctrines of Scripture into the shibboleth of true Christianity; or with idle impatience, while they greatly overrated themselves, assumed that they represented the true church on earth.

To establish 'the pure church, is a work to which the Lord alone is equal, and which he has reserved expressly for himself. Besides, it lies in the very nature of the true church, that it should seek to separate itself more and more from the world, to realize and to perfect its ideal unity as it advances, till it becomes a pure spiritual community. That it is compelled to exist among the heterogeneous mass of those who are strangers to the life of God, it accounts a cross, and a trial; and consequently experiences an unextinguishable inward longing to break through, to be unswathed and perfected; a longing that will one day be gratified, though it must be patiently waited for. A hasty, violent attempt to anticipate the time may bring incongruities to light, but not truth. The "one Shepherd and one fold!" awaits the Father's time.

“Room!” This word describes a pressing want of all the children of God. They build their nest in the firmament, yea, they soar beyond the stars: this earth is too narrow for their bold flight. Whenever the light of the Spirit reveals to them their true position in Christ, they feel cramped; being conscious that this world, as it is, cannot be compared with the glory which is reserved for them.

“Room!” is their rallying cry, when they compare the great merits of Christ with the number really redeemed by his blood. “Room for his kingdom from pole to pole!” The Church resembles a pent-up stream, whose waves know no rest, till their waters have covered the whole earth. In virtue of her right in reversion to the possession of the world, a sacred desire of obtaining it has been implanted in her, in the strength of which she boldly encompasses the earth with her cords, and extends over the universe the peaceful sceptre and banner of her King.

“Room!” sigh the saints, as often as a view is opened to them of the grace of which they are made partakers. Language appears to them too weak to express, the breast too narrow to contain their emotions of gratitude and love. But room surpassing thought, conception, and desire, will one day be theirs.

The sons of the prophets desire to build. I recommend to you also the erection of a building, the most important and pleasant of all others. The materials of which the building must be erected, are to be found in the sacred volumé; they consist of truth and of Divine promises. Take for its foundation the assurance contained in the words, “By one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.” For its supporters and beams promises like these, “The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed!” “It is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.” Let it be covered in, and secured from rain and storms, with the admonition,

“ Casting all your care upon him, for he careth for you !” Let its light be the words, “ Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ !” Construct your closet for prayer from Heb. vii. 25 : “ He ever liveth to make intercession for them !”

III. The sons of the prophets, as our history informs us, wish to set to work without delay ; but they have one thing still at heart. They require a man to supply the place of architect, and they think that Elisha, who had already been of such utility to them, might be so in this instance also. The Holy Spirit, they believe, gives skill in all things : an opinion that is founded on experience. Who endowed a Bezaleel as a skilful artist, a David as a poet and harper, a Solomon as an architect, a Gibeon as a judge and captain, but the Spirit, who continually displays himself in an unlimited variety of operations, and not unfrequently exercises a wonderful influence on the mere human endowments of his people ? How often does it happen, that with a man's regeneration is coupled the development of mental qualities and powers, which till then had slumbered in him unknown ! how often, at the same time with conversion, is displayed an astonishing aptitude for all the active concerns of life ! How many, before they became the subjects of grace, were dull, unpliant, and rough, whose tact and intelligence is now admired ! Since their entrance into the kingdom of the Lord, they appear to be in all respects refined and mentally renewed. Oh, that men would at length believe, that vital Christianity is the only tree, which, besides the fruits of consolation and comfort, produces those of real, mental, and heart refinement, and that it is the leaves of this tree, which, both as it respects this life and the life to come, are appointed for the healing of the nations !

Elisha must go with them, and is invited in the name of them all to accompany them. “ Go with thy servants,” they say to him. And the master consents. “ I will go,” he replies. Besides the desire of having Elisha's counsel, the

request of the brethren is influenced by another consideration. In him, as it were, Providence itself was with them ; in him they see the pledge of their success — the steward of the treasury of God, and the channel to connect them with the fountain of every blessing. They ascribed to him the office of intercessor ; for, under the old covenant, the need of intercession by the promised great Original, in whom it was to be perfect, frequently induced them to resort to human types. A man, who bore the stamp of a favourite and a friend of God, was like a tree, under whose shelter thousands might find protection. The vicinity of such a man served as an asylum, and his favour was deemed a recommendation to the Almighty. This sentiment was not altogether without truth ; for it was designed that those worthies of the kingdom, should present to the eye, though in shadowy outline, an image of the future Saviour ; and on the other hand, it is really the case, that numbers who are estranged from God, are protected and blessed for the sake of one saint. That the confidence reposed in these chosen servants of God was sometimes carried to an extravagant length, even among the people of God, must not be too highly censured in an age, when the knowledge of sin greatly outweighed the knowledge of Divine grace.

We citizens of the New Testament Jerusalem have clearer views of this matter, though it may also occur to us, to attach great importance to the intercessions of particular persons, because we esteem them more devout, and more spiritually endowed than ourselves. But, in general, we are sensible that God is no respecter of persons, and that all his children are entitled, whatever may be the occasion, to say to the Lord himself, “ Beloved, go with us ! ” and we know the unbounded condescension with which he ever stands ready to afford us the blessing of his presence ; and were it in order to show him the scantiness of our store, or that we required his assistance in our business, he would attend us. He is with us, when we journey and when we rest ; both abroad and at home. We possess his heart, and not his

pardon only. "Father, thou hast loved them," Christ said, "as thou hast loved me!" Away, then, with all false humility, which derogates from the merits of the Saviour; and that unseasonable modesty which declines well-founded evangelical prerogatives.

Devotedness to God, proceeding from reconciliation; unbounded confidence in his love, as a love in Jesus Christ; undoubted assurance of being admitted to his blissful presence above, founded on justification; these form that inward constitution, which is pleasing in his sight.

IV. We will now proceed to the Jordan, where our friends are already at work. The wood resounds with the blows of the axe. Everywhere the utmost activity prevails. What a remarkable spectacle does this little community exhibit! Though habited as labourers, they are all priests and kings before the Lord. In the sweat of their brow, they are employed in erecting for themselves a few poor dwellings: and yet eternal mansions of peace stand prepared for them before the throne of God! How disguised are his people here below! Is it any wonder that reason should mistake these humble forms? reason, which only estimates and values what it sees, and which as little suspects the future transformation which awaits them, as it does the glory which they still possess, under every disadvantage of outward appearance. For the Lord dwells in the midst of these people, a Shepherd who never sleeps; a promoter of their work; a comforting and encouraging Friend; the angels of God encamp around them, a heavenly guard stands prepared to render them assistance and service. What splendour does the world afford, that is not empty and worthless compared with this!

But where is the Lord? Be patient, and you shall behold him. The extremity of his children calls him to the work. Our friends are all activity, particularly the one by the tree on the river's bank. The tree is to be cut down. How vigorously he plies the axe! Blow succeeds blow.

The forest trembles beneath the strokes. When, suddenly, the axe flies from the handle, and falls into the Jordan. "Is that all?" you are ready to exclaim. "An axe is a trifle." The axe is everything. With the wooden handle nothing can be accomplished. The iron—the force, the spiritual energy of the soul is lost. How painful for him who finds himself so affected; and what a distressing and distracting sight for the beholder! An assemblage of clouds, but clouds without water; gesticulation and the sound of words; better calculated, however, to excite a drowsy compassion in the hearers, than to gain and fix their attention. Alas, that there should be even among the promulgators of Christian truth, those who only make use of the wooden handle!

It is living faith, rooted in heartfelt experience, that affixes the axe; without this no mere storm of words, no rhetorical effort will be of any avail. "Alas, master!" our friend cries, as the axe fell into the Jordan—"for it was borrowed"—he mournfully adds. A double calamity; and, for the son of a prophet, not a small one. How to replace the borrowed axe, he knows not; while he not only sees his work interrupted, but may also apprehend disgrace in the sight of him, who in good faith had lent it to him. You perceive, we are in that region of human society, which, as the darkest and least poetical part of it, we willingly overlook, but which, nevertheless, is the one where the sea of human feeling and sensibility is most frequently agitated, and most constantly in motion, and where every new day brings with it a variety of new cares, wants, and difficulties, but at the same time a fulness of unexpected mercies, deliverances, and blessings; blessings discovered in every newly earned penny, and acknowledged with emotion as a feast, if exceeding necessary bread. Does the fear of the Lord prevail in this sphere of life? It is then, indeed, above others, holy land, eventful ground, where, for the smallest possession, the resources of heaven are required; where, without a succession of wonders, it is scarcely possible to exist

from day to day ; where, for this very reason, the heart is constantly deeply affected, and the prayer of distress ascends to heaven ; where one scene of sorrowful or joyful emotion presses upon another, and the whole scale of inward feeling is fathomed. For where is it so fully experienced as here, that God dwells with his people, and that the hairs of their heads are numbered ? Here the whole experience of Israel in the desert is renewed ; here the providential interposition of the Lord is matter of daily occurrence. The empty cruse is here continually presented to Him, and he is ever at hand to replenish it in a thousand ways. A poor, inglorious existence, yet rich with all its poverty ; a life set round with thorns, yet intertwined with unfading flowers of a gracious providence. A life, overcast by the shades of a dark and gloomy night ; but night calls forth the glory of the stars and makes home welcome ; worm-wood and tears in plenty, interspersed, at the same time, with quiet, heartfelt joys, such as the world neither knows, nor can take away.

V. Such a gratification is preparing for the brethren assembled by the Jordan. The cry, " Alas master !" has reached the ear of Elisha. He does not object to this cry of amazement being addressed directly to himself ; yet he knows that, properly considered, it is only addressed to Him, whose interpreter and herald he was. Elisha sighs to the Lord, and receives an answer, and his commission. He is inwardly certain of what will take place ; the power of God is placed at his command. What may he not now undertake ! A doubt of the possibility of the miracle amounts to nothing less than a denial of the existence and personality of the living God. If such a God exist, who shall stay his hand, or prescribe forms and limits to his power ? But you will point me to the order and laws assigned to nature. They exist, it is true, but not as prison walls, within which the Almighty has immured himself. They are not the way-marks and limits of his pre-

rogative. God, in the exercise of his eternal sovereignty in creation, did not relinquish the right of deviating from the common course of things, as often as the particular purposes of his wisdom might demand ; and all the miracles that ever did, or ever will take place in the world, were comprehended in the grand plan for its government, before the beginning of time. Let us not, therefore, be surprised, when we meet with what is wonderful. Let us rather view it, as it is, as the extraordinary interposition of the Deity.

“ Where fell it ? ” asks Elisha, with a tranquillity that excites expectation, and the son of the prophets points out to him the spot where the axe fell. The man of God immediately proceeds to cut a stick from the tree, which he casts, as the insignia of command, into the water. When, behold, the wood scarcely touches the stream, before the iron, in obedience, rises from the bottom, and swims upon the surface of the river, as if supported by an unseen hand ; and instead of being carried away by the stream, approaches the bank, so that Elisha is able to say to him, “ Take it up ! ” And the man puts up his hand and takes it. While reason seeks to explain this mystery—by imagining the axe sustained by a gigantic wooden handle, by converting the iron into a thin plate, or by the shorter process of solving the whole story into a fable—let us drink the water of life from the rock on which reason splits, and maintain ourselves erect by the stone on which it stumbles, without inquiring whether He, who has imparted the power of attraction to the magnet, can impart the same to wood ; or whether He, who has suspended the world upon nothing, is likewise able to sustain a piece of iron on the surface of the stream, without the intervention of any material substance. We behold this son of the prophets with pleasure, as he joyfully and reverently takes up the axe, and we are not surprised that he considers it as nothing less than a treasure received from heaven.

And it is really received immediately from the hand of

God, who in restoring it to him, affixes the seal of promised blessing to the work, and, at the same time, shows himself to him as a God, who does not esteem the omnipotence, which formed the universe, dishonoured by being placed at the service of his children to alleviate their wants; but who, on the contrary, accounts it His glory, and will appear pre-eminently great in his condescension to the humble. I can conceive that our friend knew no rest, till he had made this remarkable implement his own, although it should have cost him his whole possession. How much must its value have been increased by the miracle! It now possessed an importance far exceeding its material, and to the mind, yielded lessons of vast importance. How many important services may not this axe have subsequently rendered, how many a gloomy wood of care may it not have levelled, how many frightful doubts destroyed!

It not unfrequently happens, that the Lord deprives, or threatens to deprive us of a possession, in order, after a longer or shorter time, to restore it to us in some surprising way, by which he elevates it into a token of his love, a pledge of his favour. Then we possess it as associated with the most delightful recollections, and full of promises. As long as we possess it, it shines upon us with the superior lustre of a heavenly gift. Is it a friend—with what sacred delight we hang upon his image; is it any other blessing of life—with what sweet devotion do we contemplate it; for to us it appears beset with legible traces of eternal love. What must have been the feelings of Job, after the dark catastrophe which deprived him of his possessions, when he found himself again invested with them! Must it not have seemed to him, as though he had been translated into another world, where he was again surrounded by all the objects with which he had been formerly familiar; but they would all appear stript of the grossness of their earthly character, and clearly show forth the glory of God. An experience, it is true, that can only be purchased with the pains of death, but they are infi-

nately outweighed and rewarded by it. Be not, therefore, dismayed, should you likewise perceive your possessions shaken by the hand of God, but know it is you who are thus shaken. You are to be raised from worldly views and contemplations to those of a higher and more spiritual nature, The heat of the crucible, to which you are exposed, is that which refines, not that which consumes.

Apply this history, then, to yourselves, my beloved friends ; take home with you such parts of its treasures as will best suit you. Whoever would know with certainty, that, to the Almighty, the smallest necessities of his people are not beneath his notice,—whoever would possess the sweet consolation, that we may bring all our cares to Him, assured of His sympathy and relief,—whoever desires to be informed, why His people are exposed from time to time to such numerous difficulties,—let him investigate this history, which contains a solution of all these and of many other difficulties. Enrich yourselves with it ; number it among your most valuable possessions ; make it your everyday study. To you it belongs. It is entirely yours !

THE MOUNT OF CHARIOTS.

“ FEAR not little flock ; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” Such is the language of our Lord, Luke xii. 32, and where can more encouraging words be found? They may be compared to a vessel bearing a flag of divine promise. If, by faith, we enter it, it bears us above the oppressive atmosphere of the present life, sheds a light over the dark vale of death, and opens to us the prospect of happier regions beyond.

To His “ little flock,” and to his flock exclusively, these words are addressed. We are well aware, that there are many without the pale of spiritual Zion, who need consolation, particularly in times like the present, and we would willingly direct them to these consoling words; but how is it possible? O ye, of whom we think that your resolution is taken, and that ye are ready to fall with us at the feet of Jesus; whose eye, by a single look at the cross, is filled with the tear of sorrow for sin, and of earnest longing for the grace of God; yours is the Divine gift conveyed by these words; and in the name of the Lord we joyfully say to you: Fear not, but be at peace!

The “ little flock,” which Jesus greets with these words, is in fear. Fear is the bane of peace; a drop of wormwood that embitters every cup of joy. Proceeding from the soul, it invests the whole world as with a funeral pall, and deprives us of courage and capacity for action. Every cause of serious apprehension is removed from them. But faith does not always maintain its appropriate station; and they sometimes, before they are aware, step out of the light

of the Divine promises ; and, instead of looking upon the Lord, and relying upon his heart and arm, they behold only themselves and the storm, and are filled with anxiety. Yes, the world may at times appear even more courageous than the children of God ; but let not that surprise any one. The natural man sees everywhere beneath his feet, the supports of an imaginary self-sufficiency ; the Christian, conscious of his own want of strength, has nothing to sustain him when thrown back upon himself. The unconverted man relies upon the wisdom he thinks himself possessed of ; while the believer has renounced self and all self-dependence. To the former, his natural folly is of use, by concealing dangers from his view ; the latter, no longer a fool, sees things soberly as they are, and will not deceive himself. The first is blind to a thousand dangers that threaten him ; the Christian estimates the whole danger of his position on the scene of conflict in this world ; and, taking his stand on the prophetic word, his eye extends beyond the limits of time, and surveys the nearer and more distant horrors of futurity. What wonder, then, that the children of God, in moments when their faith is dark, should frequently discover more uneasiness than others who are entirely devoid of faith. The one traverses the dangerous road blindfolded, the other with his eyes open !

But the little flock acts foolishly, as often as it yields to fear. "Fear not !" cries a voice ; and whose is it ? The Faithful One, who has promised to sustain those that are His, and to keep them "as the apple of his eye ;" the All-powerful One, who, in times of the greatest confusion, holds the threads of every event in his hand, and guides them as they intertwine ; the all-seeing God, who numbers the hairs of our heads, and who has engaged, that he will lose none whom the Father has given him. It is he who greets us here ; and though it is 1800 years since those words were uttered, they retain all their freshness, and are as much addressed to us, as they were to the little circle that first heard them.

“Fear not!” he graciously calls to us in our distress. He knows how apt we are to fear, yet he is not angry. We have deserved that he should visit us, for our unbelief, with the rod, instead of the olive-branch. For how is it that we are not of good courage, we, who have seen his blood poured out for man’s redemption, and before whom his will lies open, with all its blissful provisions? All sorrow and fear are sinful, for they spring from a distrust of Him and his word. But the faithful High-priest has compassion on our weakness: though we tremble, he still owns us; when we stagger, his eye beams upon us with love. Weak or strong, we are never removed from his heart. To Him, who loved us even unto death, we ever remain in the same relation, whether we are courageous or timid.

He calls us, in this passage, a flock, not soldiers; for then it might appear as if he required service from us. A flock! how much that is delightful is comprehended in that term! He knows that we are helpless sheep, surrounded by wolves, needing his constant guidance and protection, and he has appointed himself our Shepherd. Though scattered throughout the world, we are united in his heart as a flock. That he calls us a little flock, is likewise consoling; for he thereby removes the apprehension so frequently occasioned by the smallness of our number. The fact, that the great majority of men turn aside into other paths, need not create any doubt in our minds of the truth of our cause; on the contrary, let the very smallness of our number convince us, that we really are the people of God.

But the words of the Lord, “Fear not,” do not stand alone; they are coupled with a great and blessed truth. “Fear not,” says our Lord; and he adds, “for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” What cheering words! They raise the humble from the dust, and reanimate the weary! The decree of the Father stands sure; our Lord intends to say, You shall inherit the kingdom, whatever it may cost; it is His will. He has pledged the

honour of his name, that it shall be yours. Whatever hinderances you may have to encounter, they are only temporary. You will overcome them and attain the prize. Blessed consciousness! Sweet assurance! And none in Zion were ever deceived by it. Is not the whole of sacred history a connected commentary, confirming the assurance contained in the words: "Fear not, little flock!" The event that forms the subject of our present meditations, will likewise furnish a glorious and exhilarating confirmation of the truth of this delightful promise. May they powerfully encourage us, and take deep root in our hearts!

2 KINGS VI. 2—17.

"Then the king of Syria warred against Israel, and took counsel with his servants, saying, In such and such a place shall be my camp. And the man of God sent unto the king of Israel, saying, Beware that thou pass not such a place; for thither the Syrians are come down. And the king of Israel sent to the place which the man of God told him and warned him of, and saved himself there, not once, nor twice. Therefore the heart of the king of Syria was sore troubled for this thing; and he called his servants, and said unto them, Will ye not show me which of us is for the king of Israel? And one of his servants said, None, my lord, O king; but Elisha, the prophet that is in Israel, telleth the king of Israel the words that thou speakest in thy bed-chamber. And he said, Go and spy where he is, that I may send and fetch him. And it was told him, saying, Behold he is in Dothan. Therefore sent he thither horses and chariots, and a great host; and they came by night, and compassed the city about. And when the servant of the man of God was risen early, and gone forth, behold, an host compassed the city both with horses and chariots. And his servant said unto him, Alas, my master! how shall we do? And he answered, Fear not; for they that be with us, are more than they that be with them. And Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and behold the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha."

What a noble field for delightful reflection does this history open before us! The most superficial survey of it, is sufficient to afford us exquisite enjoyment, which a closer investigation will abundantly increase. We have here a view of the glory, with which Israel is arrayed, and delineations of Zion that strengthen the heart to encounter every trouble. Let us resign ourselves entirely to their influence, and may they refresh our souls. We consider, I. The discovered plan; II. The campaign;

III. The peaceful camp; IV. The cry of alarm; V. The unveiled host.

I. War with all its horrors resounds through Israel. Their ancient, hereditary arch-enemies the Syrians, have again raised the shield, and have overrun the land with armies, and king Benhadad commands in person. The occasion of these hostilities we are not told; but it was, doubtless, more eagerly sought by the Syrians, than offered by the Israelites. Strong excitement, at least, was not required, in order to inflame Syria against the people of God. National hatred burned within them like a volcanic fire that only sought a vent; a hatred that, in its origin, may have resembled the rage with which an infuriated world, in the present day, stands hostilely arrayed against spiritual Israel, little as may be the injury the latter sustains from it. That great exasperation existed between Benhadad and king Jehoram is abundantly evinced by former scenes. The letter which the king of Syria sent to Jehoram, by the leper Naaman, excited in him the most gloomy distrust. "Consider, I pray you," he exclaims with great vehemence, "how he seeketh a quarrel against me!" Perhaps this very burst of rage, may have been one thing that rankled in the heart of Benhadad. At any rate, we have an insight into Benhadad's character. That this prince was capable of causelessly waging war against a people, that had the best founded claims to his gratitude, and even his respect, from their having restored to him the greatest and most indispensable man of his kingdom, cured of a deadly disease, and in him a living indisputable proof that Jehovah was the living God, shows a degree of moral depravity that leaves us little hope of his conversion; the less so, as it is evident, that, instead of being moved to acknowledge the glory of Israel, he is filled with mortification at the thought of owing to that nation even the smallest obligation. But do not imagine that anything surprising has happened. What we call an awakening,

always fails of its due impression, so long as the constraining force of almighty grace is wanting. Till then, we see mankind insanely convert the ropes, designed for their preservation, into halters for their own destruction; and with the very materials, that might have secured their escape from the kingdom of darkness, more strongly fortify themselves in it. Oh! unfathomable corruption of the human heart, which, viewed in the light of Divine truth, resembles not merely a gloomy echoless space, but the very laboratory of a magician, in whose chymical alembic, what is most wholesome is changed into suffocating gas or deadly poison. "Verily I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Let us now take a view of the Syrian army. In the centre of a band of chosen warriors, we behold the king; though there is one, whom we may well suppose to have been absent from the splendid group—the man who formerly never failed to head the Syrian legions. If so, we praise God that he is absent; for the sight of him would confound us. No; against the people of God, we presume, nothing can now induce him to take arms. Were he to draw the sword against Israel, he would appear to himself to be contending with the living God, and inflicting a wound on his own heart, that could never be healed. Whether only for this campaign he declined the command, or that he has withdrawn from the service of Benhadad, we are not told. It is possible that the king may have become weary of the presence of so serious and decided a servant of Jehovah's, or that to Naaman himself, the oppressive atmosphere of the house of Rimmon may have become insupportable. At any rate, if absent, his absence is an exhilarating and delightful proof of the reality of his conversion; for the first fruit produced by a real change of sentiment is, that the white flag is always held out to the people of God, and the same zeal displayed in their defence, when required, that was once employed against them.

The Syrian prince is in his tent, holding a council of war with his generals. The subject of their deliberation is, how Samaria, the residence of the monarch, may be most securely assailed, and quickly taken. After much discussion, it is at length determined to attack the place from that side, where a hollow way would conceal the assailants from the view of the enemy, almost to the very gates of the city. The plan is admirable, and must succeed. But in the book of the prophet Isaiah, it is said, "Take counsel together, and it shall come to nought." There is a spy in the tent, unsuspected by any one. It is no other than the Lord, who watches over all, takes cognizance of all, and makes the plans and actions, both of his friends and enemies, subservient to his government. How consoling! Whatever of anti-Christian writings and of hostility to the church, issues from the secret counsels of our opponents, though it may surprise us, cannot surprise Him; we may be dismayed, but he calmly looks on, for he has already marked out its course and prescribed its results, which must be wholesome and beneficial to his cause. If the storm rises, it is only to purge the threshing-floor. Does the tempest roar? it is only because the atmosphere of the church needs purification. Are fiery darts hurled against us? it is to prove the excellence of our shield. Is the foundation of the church assailed? it is to show that it is founded on the Rock of Ages. Does persecution rage? it is to display the splendour of that faith, which has overcome the world. Are fires lighted to burn the saints? they prove to them thrones of glory. Is their blood shed? their blood surpasses the fabled seed of the dragon's tooth, from which heroes sprung. Do their enemies revile and slander them? in so doing they brand themselves in the forehead, and place the origin and the reward of those they persecute beyond a doubt. Yes, continue your profanity, and thus give room to Him above, to show who bears the sword! Arm yourselves against his work, and thereby demonstrate its invincibility! Attack his kingdom with all your skill, that the oft-repeated cry, "Here is Immanuel," may again resound.

Take counsel against Him, with Satan himself at your head, and over your necks he shall triumphantly pass. Oh! who can accomplish anything against him? The experience of thousands of years has shown, who has ever been the last to quit the field. Prepare your looms, all ye his opponents, and you will unconsciously weave according to the pattern that he has designed. His counsels overcome and outlast all others; and all, whether willingly or otherwise, promote his glory and honour.

The Syrians have no sooner formed their plan of operations, than it is communicated to Elisha. The Shepherd of Israel, who never slumbers nor sleeps, has informed the man of God of the enemy's resolve, by which he evinces the tenderest care of his people, the kindest condescension to his servant. In what way the intelligence was imparted to Elisha, whether in a dream by the Spirit, or in a personal interview, is left to surmise. It is enough for us to know, that what the enemy designs to keep a profound secret, is immediately made public, and without the intervention of human means, as if the walls of the tent were endowed with hearing, and the surrounding air with intelligence and speech. Yes, be dejected and alarmed, ye lovers of darkness, at the thought, that everything is open and naked to His eye; and that the screen, behind which ye practise your iniquities, does not hide you from his view. What you design in a corner, is forthwith written in his book; and, secretly and artfully as your web may be spun, not a thread escapes his sight. But all ye, who may be numbered among his friends, rejoice that ye have an ally whose all-searching eye is employed in your service, and to whom it is a very little thing, without messengers or telegraphs, to make known to you, in a moment, the most secret machinations of your adversaries; yes, even without a battle, to cause your enemies to lay down their arms at your feet, and to give, to their best laid schemes, a result directly opposed to the one they had contemplated, conducive to the honour of His name, and the furtherance of your cause.

Elisha, divinely instructed of the state of affairs, sends to the king of Israel, saying, "Beware that thou pass not such a place; for thither the Syrians are come down." Note well, it is to the king of Israel he sends. He knew how to forget, in the king of Israel, the man Jehoram, and his injustice; in the chosen people of God, the ungrateful Jews. He knew neither of them any longer after the flesh; he regarded their calling "of God," their position in the kingdom, and it was this generous and high-minded mode of thinking that rendered it easy to him, under the most heart-chilling circumstances, to preserve his love for his people. Oh, that we also, my brethren, were able, towards those who, equally with ourselves, are born of God, to exercise the holy conduct adopted by Elisha, and could forget the sinner in the child of God, even when the last glimmer of spiritual life is obscured by the faults which we perceive in them. How much more richly would love then flow among us; and how many occasions for calumniating Christ and our cause, would be wanting to our enemies! But what is the state of things among us at present? A trifling offence, which we think we have received from this or that brother, has often so powerful an effect upon us, as to dispose us rather to confirm, than decidedly to resist, the condemning judgment passed upon them by the world. From others, it is not even requisite that any affront, or slight, should have been received; an unprepossessing exterior is sufficient to alienate our hearts from them. An air, either too strictly religious, or too worldly; an unpolished carriage, or affected manner; ingratitude for a service rendered to them, an error in doctrine or life, with which we think them chargeable. Oh, how often are such things deemed a sufficient ground for rejecting and treating a brother in the Lord as a stranger; when, instead of gazing upon the spotted covering in which he is enveloped, we ought steadily to behold the man beneath it, with the eye of faith, and hide the stains of the former with our joyful love to the latter. But we are our-

selves too carnal to be able, in our estimation of others, to penetrate, through the outward, to the spiritual and inner man; and our faith is too weak to rise superior to appearances, and what lies immediately exposed to sight. Oh that it would please God to quicken our perceptions to the same comprehensive view of things that enabled Paul, not only to embrace the "beloved of the Lord," in the Christians of temporising Corinth, judaizing Galatia, and enthusiastic Colosse, but likewise in those, who treated him with the most bitter injustice, and the most pointed neglect. How much room for unnecessary discord and vexation would then be removed; and how great would be our harvest of peace and joy!

Elisha sends to Jehoram, and makes known to him the Divine revelation. "The Syrians are advancing; be beforehand with them, and possess the pass, on which their plan of attack is based!" A short and business-like despatch, but rendered the more urgent and pointed by its very conciseness. A long attempt to prove the truth of any statement rather weakens than strengthens it, and generally excites a suspicion of the narrator's veracity. The prophet, deeply penetrated with the conviction that his communication is from above, and that his word is the word of God, employs a language, simple and concise, which at once arrests, overpowers, and inflames the mind. The king of Israel is advised to possess the pass. Similar counsel might be given to us, my brethren. Or does not the enemy find open, alas! in our day, too many approaches to Zion? Well then, let us also throw into them a sufficient force, and secure them. One avenue of this kind is worldly-mindedness, with which we are all more or less tainted. Let us possess it with that seriousness, which, if our eye be constantly fixed upon the cross of Christ and on eternity, will never leave us. A disposition to doubt, imbibed in the social and literary atmosphere in which we move, opens another breach for the assailants. Persevering prayer, for constancy of heart and mind, will close and fortify this approach. Another entrance is discordancy of

faith, under the influence of which, so many amongst us refuse to acknowledge the whole word of God. Oh, if we suffer ourselves to doubt the origin of a single sentence of the word of God, much more a whole book, the enemy is more than half victorious; while the firm conviction, that every syllable is divinely indited, puts him to flight. Another advantage afforded the enemy is, the unhappy desire of obtaining for our Christian opinions, the approbation of the rational and scientific, which has induced many, for the sake of a friendly intercourse with such people, to remove the hills and mountains that separate them, by renouncing the most peculiar and essential doctrines of the Scriptures, and reducing all to the most insipid generalities. Oh, let us again be convinced, that such a seeking of "honour from men," is a denial of God; and, before the enemy enters, let us throw into the dangerous breach the sentiment, under which a Paul exclaimed, "Let us go forth, therefore, unto Him without the camp, bearing his reproach. For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come." We ourselves can do nothing. May the Lord fill up the breaches in his church, perfect and establish Jerusalem, and make her the key-stone of the nations, that, whosoever would remove her, may himself be broken and dashed to pieces against her! May the Lord himself encamp around his church, that the destroyer may no longer pass over her, and as thieves are disgraced when detected, may they also who seek her ruin, be brought to shame!

II. The Syrians are on their march, confident of victory and plunder. In close order they enter the pass in the night; but they have advanced only a very short distance, when they meet with an interruption. By what can it be occasioned? Can it be the enemy? Yes; it is even so. The vanguard of the detachment encounters an armed force, that resists its progress. After a short conflict, the Syrians are driven back. What an unexpected event! They again make a fruitless attempt to carry the pass—they are a second time repulsed; a third effort is equally unsuccessful. The

enemy at length becomes sensible, he has not merely to do with a single outpost, as he may at first have imagined, but that the pass is held by a strong division of the Israelitish army. To force the pass, now seems impossible, and thus the whole plan of operations is defeated. "The Lord," it is said in the Scriptures, "taketh the wise in their own craftiness; and the counsel of the froward is carried headlong."

We see that Jehoram listened to the voice of Elisha. "And the king of Israel," the history tells us, "sent to the place, which the man of God told him and warned him of, and saved himself there." In days of adversity, even a Jehoram, notwithstanding his habitual estrangement from God, knew how to value the prophet and his advice; and if the Lord blessed him in so doing, it was less for the sake of Jehoram, than for the credit of his servant, and the good of his chosen people. Jehoram constituted the medium only, by which his mercy was reflected on his children, the channel through which the testimonies of his love flowed. It not unfrequently happens, that decided men of the world, when the horizon of their lives is troubled, are contented to seek counsel and advice from the word of God, which, till then, they have so little esteemed, and, in a certain way at least, to bow down and do reverence to God, either by an outward union with the quiet in the land, by a more serious observance of the sabbath, or by taking part in religious meetings and services; and the Lord requites them for it, with prosperity and benefits. But how lamentable is it, if, ensnared by this display of his universal kindness, they mistake what is only an intimation of the prosperity that attends submission to his word, for an evidence, that they are already His favoured children! Alas! it is to be feared, that many die in this delusion, mistaking what was only addressed to them as a letter of admonition, for a certificate of grace, for the seal of adoption and redemption. Regeneration is the only genuine pledge of true religion in the soul, which the experience

of the most extraordinary reliefs and preservations without it, is not. How many refreshing fruits and flowers does the narrative of the mercies and aids, vouchsafed to Jehoram, offer to our faith; but whether Jehoram was himself anything more than grass that withereth in the evening, and is then cast into the fire, is, to say the least, doubtful.

When Benhadad finds his plans frustrated, he flies into a passion, in which astonishment and rage are pretty equally blended. "We are betrayed," is his first thought, and his suspicion naturally falls upon his generals. "Tell me, which of us is for the king of Israel," he exclaimed, with a look of fierce displeasure, and had the traitor been visible among them, he might have read his sentence of death in Benhadad's countenance. We are here presented with a scene, which, in a spiritual sense, is frequently renewed among us. How often does it happen, while you are securely pursuing the covered ways of sin, that you are unexpectedly encountered by the preached word. The word reaches and unmasks you to yourself, it suddenly presents to your view a perfect delineation of your heart and life, and exhibits you in all the nakedness of your deformity. Then the pews become too confined and inconvenient to you. "That is intended for me!" is murmured here and there, through your ranks. "I am the hypocrite, the miser, the secret adulterer, thus held up to view! We are watched, discovered, betrayed!" and of a truth, it is so, though not by those whom you suspect, but by the watchful eyes of Him above, in whose light your inmost thoughts stand exposed. It was they that detected you behind your concealment; it was their scrutinizing, penetrating glance, and not the eye of man. Oh, that at such moments, you would recollect this, that the torturing surprise with which you are then agonised, may produce more wholesome fruit than is generally the case. But, for the most part, you act like Benhadad, and seek the traitor in the preacher who unmasked you, or in the neighbourhood where you live; and instead of humility and

repentance before God, suspicion of your associates, or hatred of the man, through whom the great Searcher of hearts portrayed to you your character, remains the only melancholy fruit of a moment, which, if rightly understood and acted upon, might have proved a blessed turning-point in your existence.

Benhadad's rage is unabated. Whatever be the consequence, he will not rest till the traitor is discovered. His suspicion falls first upon one, then upon another, till, at length, one of his attendants offers a solution of the mystery. "Not so, my lord, O king," he says, "you are not betrayed by any of your servants; but Elisha, the prophet that is in Israel, telleth the king of Israel the words that thou speakest in thy bed-chamber!" How surprising and delightful! Surely, this servant must have been in the train of Naaman, when he was so wonderfully restored to health by Elisha; if so, it is easy to comprehend how the heathen came to entertain so high an opinion of Elisha's power. Whether the servant, like Naaman, had been won over by it to the Lord, does not appear. A lively perception of the Divine glory of the prophets and apostles, does not necessarily imply conversion. There is a kind of theoretical appreciation of the miraculous histories contained in the Scriptures, very much resembling true faith, with which, however, the heart remains spiritually dead; as in the present day, we now and then meet with a philosophical treatise, which likewise leaves them, for the most part unquestioned; but it renders them worthless, by impiously ascribing them, not to the power of a condescending God, but to a superior development and consciousness, in all their energy, of those powers of mind and will, which lie slumbering in man. A thirsting and longing after the living waters of grace, is the first unequivocal indication of the Spirit's work upon the heart. It is not by flights of animated excitement, that the followers of Christ are most safely recognised, but by the drooping wing of poverty of spirit. It is an error to suppose, that believing Christian

devotion and natural poetic excitement are only different vibrations of the same harp, moved by different impulses of the same air. The difference between them is not one of form merely, but of nature and origin.

“Elisha the prophet, that is in Israel, telleth the king of Israel, the words that thou speakest in thy bed-chamber!” An honourable testimonial for the prophet! and, in a certain sense, it should be applicable to every minister in the Christian church, who aspires to be effective as a preacher. For ability correctly to advance, to analyze, and scripturally to prove the doctrines of his church, will by no means suffice to constitute him one: he must likewise be able to declare what “thou speakest in thy bed-chamber;” that is, he must be familiar with the deep secrets of the heart; his words, like lightning, must penetrate the soul, and overwhelm it with astonishment at finding, that its inmost recesses are brought to light, and that its softest emotions are not hidden. This characterizes him as one, who is not only acquainted with the object of preaching, but, likewise, with the way to attain it. Hence it also appears, that he is himself alive, that the roots of his doctrines are green, that he lives up to his doctrines, and that his call to the cure of souls is Divine. A correct interpretation of the words of Scripture is, to a certain extent, attainable by study; but a striking exposition of the hidden workings of the natural, and of the regenerated heart, can only be taught by the Spirit from on high.

Benhadad no sooner hears the failure of his enterprise ascribed to Elisha, than he commands, the storm darkening on his brow, “Go, and spy where he is, that I may send and fetch him!” A campaign is to be undertaken against one man—a great compliment to the prophet, and a practical acknowledgment that it rests with him to turn the scale of war. When God designs to distinguish and to do honour to his people, even their enemies must weave for them wreaths of glory, though they imagine themselves preparing for them crowns of thorns. To this command of the Syrians,

may be compared the bitter contempt which a wicked, unbelieving world still continues to cast upon the quiet in the land. One must really suppose, that these people are deemed more formidable than it is willing to acknowledge, for if they be in truth—what they are, with so much complacency, said to be—a mere handful of insignificant, ignorant simpletons, why this everlasting hostility against them, this exertion of wit, and all the arts of contumely in order to suppress them? Leave them in peace, and let the world's judgment of them be declared, by politely overlooking and neglecting them. But by the manner in which they are at present treated, the suspicion is forcibly excited, that the world feels itself held in check by them, its carnal peace endangered, its forgetfulness of God reproved by their holy zeal; and that it sees in them accusers and witnesses, who may one day be to them more than troublesome.

“That I may send and fetch him!” Thus says Benhadad. A very royal determination, but one that evinces much folly and blindness. What a strange idea a heathen must have of a prophet, when he supposes that, with his person, he can also fetter his power. Can the living God be bound and imprisoned? What Elisha can accomplish, is through Him alone, and God is not confined in his actions to any one agent; thousands stand ready at command, should one desert him. How senseless is a war against the servants of the Most High! A war of straws against flames of fire; a dashing of waves against a rock of granite! He who wars against his people, wars with the Lord himself; and the end of such a war is sufficiently evidenced by our narrative, which is now more than 2000 years old. Nevertheless, the same insane hostility continues to this hour. Rage deprives our opponents of understanding, and renders them deaf to the voice of history. They hate the light that shines into their darkness, and are blindly hurried away to a gulf of fire. They seek the destruction of the heavenly kingdom, and they find it to be a gigantic rock, on which they suffer eternal shipwreck.

III. Let us now quit the enemy's camp. Another and more cheering scene is preparing for us. Our history transports us to Dothan, a little town situate on the mountains, at no great distance from Samaria. It is midnight, and stillness reigns over the surrounding country, except that in the lowlands, there appears to be a rustling in the woods. It is the Syrians, who have discovered that the prophet resides in Dothan. In silence they encompass the place, and await the morning, in order to demand the person of Elisha, and already, if necessary, to enforce their demand by an attack on the town. We will also await the morning, and we may do so without anxiety. Let us, in the mean time, endeavour to gain access to the house, where the persecuted and threatened man resides. The ground on which it stands, is high, and it rests with its upper story projecting towards the walls of the town, which it overlooks. From its windows, there is a view of the neighbouring hills, and of the distant landscape. It is possibly the hospitable dwelling of one of the faithful, of which there were still some to be found in every township of Israel. From its being situate near the walls, we may suppose that, like Rahab's in Jericho, it was not one of the most considerable of the place; but the church of God below is, for the most part, housed in humble habitations. Let us now enter the social dwelling. How pleasant is its interior! The walls are indeed naked and unadorned, and the furniture is poor; but our tastes agree, do they not, beloved friends? With me you prefer spiritual beauty above purple and gold, and this world's splendour. You love the hidden glory of this habitation of God among men; the imperishable memorials it contains of wonderful deliverances and providential care, which attend his daily visitations. And oh! how refreshing, how soothing to the soul, is the heavenly atmosphere of brotherly love that pervades it! Oh, here is Bethel and Bethany! The chimes of an eternal sabbath seem to murmur on the ear! Here we see a book—the Psalms of David; and there a scroll, on which is recorded the history of the kingdom—the history

of God's wonderful dealings with his people, indited by the Holy Spirit, by the hand of Moses and other prophets, for the consolation of believers! And, under this roof, the golden thread of this history is continued. We are in the midst of Divine manifestations, that flow together in the book of life, and which are designed for the healing of the nations. And should we not be happy and at ease here, where heaven is open, and life, moving in a higher sphere, affords us glimpses of our eternal home? On entering a small apartment, we behold the threatened man asleep upon his couch. Let us not awake him! How calm and sweet are his slumbers! disturbed by no anxious dream, no alarming visions. A more than earthly peace plays upon his countenance. Even in sleep, he rests in God, and the promises of his Lord murmur round his believing soul, like the tones of heavenly harps. We cast a hasty glance around the chamber; neither shield nor spear are there for his defence, a pilgrim's staff alone stands leaning against the wall. His sword is the word, and faith his shield. You, perhaps, are anxious to rouse him, and that without delay. No, let him rest, till the birds with their morning song awake him, and the beams of the rising sun penetrate his chamber. But, you say, let the door be securely fastened. Not so, my friends! He is already in safe keeping. Forget not, that over the man who now slumbers before you, the Divine words, "Fear not, for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine!" are suspended like a golden shield—that his head reposes on an arm of eternal love, and the presence of the Keeper, who neither slumbereth nor sleepeth, constitutes his sword and buckler. Kind, protecting angels, equipped for his defence, keep guard near his couch, and thousands of promises surround it as with a wall. Well, therefore, may he sleep in peace, despite the lances bristling beneath his windows, and the storm gathering above his head. Oh! what an elevating sight is this sleeping Elisha! How superior to a king slumbering in the midst of his

attendants; or a warrior sleeping on his sword! Come, let us now depart, or rather let us first salute him with the words of the Psalmist, "O taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him," Psa. xxxiv. 8.

IV. Just as the sun begins to gild the summits of the distant mountains, Elisha's servant awakes. He has some errand to perform for his master, that requires him to go forth early, and he hastens to the window, probably to see how far the day has advanced. But no sooner does he look out, than he starts back with surprise and terror; and pale with fear, hurries to the bed of his master, crying, as if the world were come to an end, "Alas, my master! how shall we do?" He has seen the array of horsemen and chariots encamped around the city, and the sight has well nigh killed him. What a contrast does this present to the peaceful sleep of Elisha, to his calm, unruffled awaking! The servant sees only as man sees, and against the thousands by whom he finds himself surrounded, weighs merely his own natural strength and that of Elisha, instead of the strength of the Almighty. No wonder, therefore, at his disquietude, and anxious cry of, "Alas, my master!"

"Alas, my master, how shall we do?" Foolish servant, thus to place yourself on a footing with Elisha! Though you fear for yourself, yet, be without alarm for this favoured one of God! But he has as little faith for Elisha as for himself. The eyes of his spiritual man are closed in sleep, and those only of the natural man awake. It sometimes happens to the children of God, while judging of their situation and circumstances, that they are suddenly transported back to their position, before they were enlightened by the Spirit, when they had no other medium but that of reason, by which to view and estimate the value of things. They oppose to the dangers which surround them, their own ability and skill, as if there were no other at their command, and should they find themselves unequal to the conflict, they throw away their arms, and give up all for lost.

The new man that recognises a helping and merciful God, is fettered for a time to the throne usurped by blind nature, and is then for the moment as little able to remonstrate as to act, and nature alone thinks, speaks, feels, and calculates within him; and her measures, like her wisdom, are, of course, human, earthly, carnal. Then some Abraham, to remove the fear of dying without issue, chooses Hagar: a Rebecca, to gain the birthright for Jacob, resorts to cunning and falsehood; an Aaron, instead of firmly relying on the Lord to quell the rebellion of the people, yields to their desire, and makes for them a golden calf; a Peter, when he fancies himself in danger, enters the slippery path of dissimulation, instead of the direct one of trust in God. These are affecting phenomena, which might induce the belief, that such persons differed in nothing from the great mass of the unconverted. But this revived supremacy of the flesh, is only a revolutionary movement, that will be suppressed. Our better self, thus tumultuously trampled down, will rise again. Reflection comes, and oh! what rich stores of blissful recollections, mixed with tears of repentance and shame, does reflection again bring to light, from the long forgotten mine of faith. We again clearly apprehend our relation as children, our privileges in Christ, and reposing in God, we soar above the world with a steady wing.

“O my soul, thou hast trodden down strength!” You will remember these words of victory and triumph. They form the counterpart to, “Alas, my master, how shall we do?” They are taken from the song of Deborah, who judged Israel. The Lord had again given up the disobedient Israelites to the chastisement of their enemies. For twenty years they had sighed under the iron rod of Jabin, king of Canaan, when the prophetess Deborah, promising victory, called them to the field, and, in the very first encounter, God spread terror amongst the numerous squadrons of the enemy, and thousands fell by the sword of their pursuer Barak. Sisera, the leader of the Canaanites, and the terror of Israel, took refuge in the tent of a Kenite; but

revenge pursued him thither. Jael's nail, driven through his temples, completed Israel's victory, and gave occasion for the song of triumph: "Praise ye the Lord for the avenging of Israel.—So let all thine enemies perish, O Lord; but let them that love him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might.—O my soul, thou hast trodden down strength!" Let the last words, my redeemed brethren, be our motto, whatever be the power that seeks to circumvent us.

Oppressed in spirit, you vow at the throne of grace never again to sin. You do well, and that which is indispensable in an heir of heaven. But I fear, that in the evening of many a day you will have to smite upon your breast and confess, "I have broken my vow; I have again incurred the guilt of denying the name of Christ." When new offences occur, remember it is the strong with whom you have to do, with whom there is no trifling. Do not esteem the forgetfulness of a moment a light matter. And beware of excusing your errors by pleading your, *good intentions* and your *weakness*. Otherwise, before you are aware, these strong ones will fasten on your conscience, destroy the foundations of your peace, become a canker in your heart, obstruct your intercourse with God, cripple your prayers, and sadden the childlike character of your connexion with the Lord. View not, therefore, your sins as snow that may be easily shaken off, but consider them in their true light—as an abomination in the sight of God, as infractions of his holy law, the penalty of which is eternal death. But be also on your guard, lest from this side an advantage be obtained over you; lest they fall upon you with the fierceness of hyenas, and drive you to despair with the vehemence of their accusations. Without delay, therefore, before these monsters, with their condemning power, seize upon your conscience, unfold the banner of the cross, and then exclaim: "Tread, O my soul—my blood-besprinkled soul—upon the mighty!" Retain the mastery over your sins, by a fresh recollection of the great ransom that was paid for them. Keep them

under subjection to your faith, and preserve a pure conscience. Your right to it is Divine, seeing that these and all your other transgressions lie buried under the cross, and that "There is therefore now no more condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus!"

Those gloomy guests, which we call cares, whether they respect food or raiment, or whatever else, are likewise powerful enemies, that commit frightful devastations wherever they gain a footing; they deprive us of peace, the best of our possessions. Arm yourselves against them, before you have experienced their malignity! Put them to flight with the cry of Deborah!—What, will you shrink before such phantoms, you who possess the assurance that "the very hairs of your head are all numbered;" you to whom it has been said: "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" You, who have an inexhaustible resource in an all-sufficient God, as is declared to you under the similitude of "the birds of the air," "the lilies of the field," and by the apostolic exhortation: "Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you!" Ye favoured children of the living God, objects of his eternal love, engraven on the palms of his hands, will ye, with dejection, ask, What shall we eat, what shall we drink, and wherewithal shall we be clothed? Will ye be troubled, how ye are to get through the world, and how ye are to be maintained? Do but reflect who you are, and what is your position, and chase these hornets from your threshold! Assail them with the cry of faith: "O, my soul, thou hast trodden down strength!" By thus doing, ye will offer to the Lord, the highest tribute of praise!

Happy would it be for us, were these our worst enemies, and that there were not a more subtle and terrific band, prowling around us! But there is the "roaring lion," who goeth "about seeking whom he may devour!" There are evil spirits, the angels of darkness, the princes of the air, bent upon our eternal ruin! Of a truth, strength may be

ascribed to them, surpassing that of all others! Alas, what fiery darts do they hurl! what snares do they lay! what chains do they forge! How, I ask, will ye encounter these foes? Will ye tremble and be alarmed, or will ye prepare for the combat, as if victory depended on yourselves? Far be this from you, my brethren! In either case, you would discredit the gospel, and bring a reproach upon the Lord your Saviour. No; at the very first onset, commence the song of victory and triumph; for these your mighty foes have long been disarmed, deprived of all power against you, and made a show of openly! With the eye of faith directed to Him who wounded the dragon, greet also the kingdom of hell with the cry: "Tread, O, my soul, on the mighty!" This cry makes the devils tremble, and frustrates their most artful devices.

Besides these formidable enemies there are others, against whom you will likewise do well to adopt the words of Deborah. Amongst these may be reckoned various prejudices, doubts, and scruples, that are mighty spiritual destroyers. Thus you doubt, whether or not it be right to offer unconditional prayers for such things as you desire, although the Scriptures answer the question decidedly in the affirmative; their language is, "All things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." You hesitate to appropriate to yourselves the promises contained in the Divine word, although your right is self-evident; for they are given to the "seed of Abraham," that is "Christ," and they that are in Christ are one with him. Is it ours, you anxiously inquire, to enjoy uninterrupted peace; when it is not only allowed and commanded, but scripturally enjoined: "Let the peace of God rule in your hearts!" that is, obtain a lasting sway. You give place to little-minded scruples, doubting whether constant joy in the Lord be consistent with the seriousness of sanctification; and yet it is written: "The joy of the Lord is your strength!" You doubt if inward Christianity be capable of continual increase and development; while the apostle says again and again,

“Abound in the work of the Lord! Let your inward-man be renewed day by day!” View all these anxious doubts in the light of the gospel; set your foot upon all things that embitter your life in Christ; let them also hear the word, “O, my soul, thou hast trodden down strength!” Let the hostility of spirits or of mortals, of thoughts or circumstances, terrify those who have no God and no promises; but let the consciousness of your superior position be your stay. An “Alas, master!” ill becomes those who sit under the protection of the Almighty. Maintain a carriage worthy of that gospel, which decorates your brow with the emblems of victory achieved by your king; and let your motto be: “O, my soul, thou hast trodden down strength!”

V. “Alas, my master!” the servant cries; but he is mistaken in expecting that his master will participate in his fear. The cry of alarm is broken, when it strikes against those mighty pillars, on which the peace of Elisha rests, and it only strengthens in him the consciousness of his security in God. If the soul be rightly strung, its tones, like those of the Eolian harp, will be as harmonious, when called forth by the storm, as when touched by the passing breeze. There are temples, in which every sound is changed into solemn harmony, and such a temple was the believing breast of Elisha. The prophet, indeed, is roused from his slumbers; but his awaking is like that of a child, serene, and free from care; or like the sun, when he rises in calm majesty above the mists of early day. When he joins his servant at the window, his countenance displays an equanimity that might have dispelled a world of anxiety and care. He also perceives the squadrons by which they are encompassed, and he knows well on whose account the place is invested; but his view takes in a wider range, and he says to his attendant, with a mild composure, “Fear not: for they that be with us, are more than they that be with them!” What a noble consciousness, what elevated faith, does this declaration evince! To Elisha the promises of

God are realities. With them he suppresses every contradictory experience, as a mere empty delusion. The Lord has said this and that, and thus it must come to pass, let what will oppose. He is not so foolish as to reject, with false humility, the secure position assigned to him in the Scriptures. He is contented that God, in the redundancy of his goodness, should surround him, a sinner, with heavenly guards. He willingly submits to be the object, and, at the same time, the reflector of eternal mercy and its acts; for in the measure that his glory is sustained, is the name of the Lord rendered great; and in his exaltation, the grace of the Lord is triumphant. "They that be with us are more than they that be with them!" This consciousness is the sacred spring of all true Christian heroism; it is the secret consecrated source of that quiet courage, which invested so many of the witnesses for Christ, of former times, with the appearance of beings of a higher, and almost supernatural order. What we so much admire in a Huss, a Luther, a Calvin, and other champions of the kingdom, sprang from the living and prolific roots of this faith. With the sword of this faith, the great victory of the Reformation was achieved and is still maintained; and were hundreds of thousands to oppose, the victory would be to him who is able to say with the prophet, "They that be with us, are more than they that be with them!"

After Elisha, with dignified composure, had addressed these words of encouragement to his trembling servant, he raises his eyes to heaven, and says, "Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see!" Scarcely had he uttered the words, when a most glorious sight is revealed to the eyes of the astonished servant. Forming an inner circle round the hill, he beholds a second encampment, intended both for protection and defence; but it is not of this world. A heavenly squadron encompasses the eminence, like a belt of light; radiant angelic forms, horses and chariots of fire; and though invisible to the Syrians, it was seen at once by Elisha, and is now plainly perceived by his servant. It is

no illusion, my beloved brethren, they are not unreal forms. No; it is truth, reality, a heavenly host; not merely made visible to the mental vision of the young man, but existing before he perceives it. How happened it, then, that he was not sooner sensible of it? The reason you have already heard; his eyes were not then opened. The eyes of his faith? you ask. Oh no; the question here is one of seeing, not of believing. Then it was his bodily eyes that were so wonderfully strengthened, or rather to which a momentary glorification was suddenly imparted, that enabled them to penetrate the veil, which shrouds the world of spirits from our view? Or have we within us other eyes than those that are outward in the flesh? Or do we possess an inward spiritual man, formed and provided like our outward man, though infinitely more ethereal, and surrounded by our corporeal one, as with a case? And is it perhaps this inner man, that is so active in what is called second sight, and, that in so many well attested apparition scenes, has come unfettered, and openly to view? May not the apostolic words point to such an inward man, 2 Cor. v. 1: "We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens?"

You ask more, my friends, than I can venture with confidence to answer. This is a field, whose mysteries are at present hidden from us. It must suffice to know, that it only requires the eyes to be opened in a certain way, for us to see spirits. And oh! how great would be the joy and surprise of many of you, were what surrounds you unobserved, suddenly to burst upon your view! While you weep in secret, and feel yourselves solitary and forsaken; behold the most faithful of friends is standing at your side, and is regarding you with a look of favour and of grace. You think you are thrown back upon yourselves, exposed to the caprice of blind chance; instead of which, you would then find yourselves sustained and guided by the hand of paternal love. You now complain of destitution,

and speak, with trembling and dejection, of lost ground, which you had conceived yourselves to be occupying; you would then at once perceive a wall of fire round about you, and your habitation guarded by superhuman and invincible champions. Your cries of distress would then be quickly changed into those of victory, and your desponding expressions of "Alas, my master! what shall we do?" into a bold and confident, "They that be with us, are more than they that be with them!" But your view would likewise comprehend those who are without the communion of God, and yet perpetually cry, "Peace! Peace! There is no danger!" Oh, on what fearful groups must they be prepared to look! Instead of angels they are surrounded by the powers of hell. Under the guidance of the prince of darkness, they are going the downward road, the way of cursing, error, and death, and, held captive by a revolting, contemptuous rabble, are reserved for a fearful catastrophe.

But were they realities that the servant saw? Undoubtedly they were. But what say you to a single man's being so high in favour with God, that the sending a heavenly host for his protection does not appear an extravagant display; to a whole town being divinely protected, because this single guest was within its walls? Does not the thought force itself upon your mind, that this unbounded kindness in Jehovah, must necessarily have been induced by something widely differing from the imperfect excellence of his personal character? Does not the surprising honour, which God confers on poor sinners, point to some ground of distinction independent of him, to the righteousness of another freely ascribed to him? It is justification by faith alone, that can solve the mystery of such exaltations of sinful man. From hence flows all the glory of which the children of God are made partakers; from hence arises the blissful confidence, that what the greatest in the kingdom of heaven have become, the least may also expect to be, for all are arrayed in the same ornaments; from hence, too, proceeds the calm serenity, with which we accept the most

splendid marks of kindness that God may deign to confer upon us, without objecting to them as unmerited and too munificent.

Justification in Christ makes a man truly great and courageous. He loves mankind, but he fears not their judgment. He serves the Lord in them; but their thanks he lays, with a pure mind, at the feet of Jesus. He knows himself in favour with the Most High; and in this confidence, he fears not the face of man, but is open and unrestrained before the world. Mindful of his divine dignity and honours, he is not ambitious of the idle vanities for which the world strives. His character and views rise superior to the cares and pursuits of this world, and he fears not death, for to him it is the gate of heaven, nor the destruction of the world, because he is for ever hid in God. He lives, in time, the life of eternity, which the death of the body neither shortens nor interrupts, but unfetters and sets free. His prayers are confiding, as a child's that knows its father; he receives joyfully and freely. He enters upon every conflict, as one certain of victory. He views every storm without apprehension; for he knows who dwells in it. He fears not for the stability of the church; for he is acquainted with the purpose and power of its Head. Still less is he distressed about his own steadfastness; for he is, both body and soul, no longer his own, but God's. Thus he stands a really free man; unsubdued by trouble; assured of the happiest issue out of every difficulty; not depressed by scorn and contempt, but calm and composed when wronged and slandered; careful for nothing, where all are troubled; firm and collected when dangers threaten; humble, though unterrified, while contemplating the judgment; stronger than death, and more victorious than hell. If there be anything on earth that deserves the name of human greatness, it can take root alone in a conscience perfected in the blood of Christ. A conscience so refined, exhibits a steadfastness and bearing that, even in a labourer, must be accounted royal. This inward liberty in the presence of

God and of the world, produces that wonderful personality which, wherever it appears, immediately exercises a quiet but triumphant influence over the mind, and, in timid souls, quickly revives the expiring flame of their confidence and trust in God. Such men are capable of supplying to us the angelic visits of former times. The deep-toned energy of their tranquillity acts miraculously upon us. Their nearness soothes and encourages, and raises us to their own level. This is what no mere words, phrases, or gesticulations can accomplish. Assume the appearance of whatever degree of animation and joy and believing you may, no effect is produced. The power proceeds alone from inward faith. Without this, though apparently equipped with the richest spiritual blessings, we remain "Clouds without water." Confide really in God, and, without uttering a word, you will be a desirable beacon to thousands!

III. ISRAEL AND THE HEATHEN.

“THE Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him,” says the Psalmist, “to all that call upon him in truth. He will fulfil the desire of them that fear him: he also will hear their cry, and will save them,” Psa. cxlv. 18, 19; How full of consolation and promise are these words! You speak of prayer as a duty; but away with the cold chilling expression! What you call “duty,” is, in the New Testament, denominated privilege, favour. It is not merely our duty, but our right to serve God, and to assist in the promotion of his cause; it is our delightful privilege to pray, not merely an obligation. Oh how offensive is the sentiment sometimes expressed amongst us: “I have no longer any need to pray, for Christ has accomplished everything for me.” No need! What ignorant misconception do these words betray! What a miserable separation from God and from his Spirit is here evinced, under the appearance of Christian liberty! Rejoice that it is no longer necessary to pray! Prayer, the delight of the children of God, a trouble! This bliss a yoke! This noble privilege a burden, to be rid of which is deemed a happiness! Poor people, you never knew what praying is; your experience extends not beyond your self-imposed, feudal service, your so called morning and evening devotions. These offerings presented in the spirit of bondage, the Scriptures designate by a very different appellation to that of prayer. They are not the sacrifices acceptable to God. Hear, now, what it is to pray. When I approach the Lord of glory, cast myself upon his breast, cry “Abba, Father!” and pour out my soul before him;

this is prayer. When I perceive his ear inclined to me, and can address him in the accents of a sorrowing or joyful child; this is prayer. "What ails thee?" the Lord inquires. "To Thee," I reply, "I must utter all my complaints; thou art my refuge, and thou alone my hope!" This is prayer. And while I thus pour out myself before him, and fall with my burden at his feet, I obtain relief; the weight is removed from my heart, and I am already blessed; this is prayer. Now say, if prayer be not a privilege? Oh! it is the greatest, sweetest, noblest, that exists. With prayer I enter the sphere of angels, and walk along starry paths. By prayer I rise on seraph's wings, when oppressed by the atmosphere of this lower world. By prayer I am united to the blessed, who at all times behold the face of their Father that is in heaven. In prayer I sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob at the heavenly board, and, on this side eternity, am already an inmate of God's house, have free access to his glorious dwelling with my petitions and my thanks, and converse with the Most High, as freely as a child with his father.

True prayer is a work of the Holy Spirit. Without the Spirit you may repeat prayers, but not pray. Prayer is the breath of the new creature, the opening blossom of Divine life, which must at least have commenced, before a true prayer can be poured out from the heart. The harp must be strung before it can produce sound. But where the Spirit of the Lord is, there prayer follows of itself, like vegetation on a fruitful field, and buds and leaves on a succulent plant. There prayer is offered without ceasing. Prayer is the desire, the inward necessity and impulse, the life of the soul. There are indeed times, when it is impossible properly to pray. Then we groan in spirit, and cry, "O Lord, how is it with me?" But this lament, this "O Lord!" is itself prayer. It will also sometimes happen, that our prayers are constrained and legal. Then, indeed, they deserve not the name of prayer; but if we listen attentively, we shall catch many a sorrowful and afflicted "ah!"

and "oh!" and in them is the breath of prayer. Yes, prayer, though it may consist only of broken sentences and involuntary sighs, is always found in the children of God. It is a bell that chimes amidst the greatest discord; a flower that grows in the most barren soil; a bird that sings in the coldest season, and soars above the din of every storm. It is no longer possible to abstain from communion with God. "Lord, to whom shall we go, thou hast the words of eternal life!" We must make known to Him all our complaints. The soul is as a poor helpless child, cast upon a desolate coast; the Lord is to it father, mother, and all besides.

Prayer opens our hearts to the Lord, and His heart to us. We cast it as a golden chain around his neck, and He willingly inclines himself towards us, and grants us our requests. What the fruit of the tree of life was in Paradise, that the experience of prayer, favourably received, is in the kingdom of grace. It feeds our inward life, refreshes our feelings of adoption, and keeps alive our consciousness of communion with God. It sheds a heavenly lustre over the poverty of our existence, and infuses a joy into the heart, of which the world has no conception.

2 KINGS VI., 18—23.

"And when they came down to him, Elisha prayed unto the Lord, and said, Smite this people, I pray thee, with blindness. And he smote them with blindness according to the word of Elisha. And Elisha said unto them, This is not the way, neither is this the city; follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom ye seek. But he led them to Samaria. And it came to pass, when they were come unto Samaria, that Elisha said, Lord open the eyes of these men, that they may see. And the Lord opened their eyes, and they saw; and behold they were in the midst of Samaria. And the king of Israel said unto Elisha, when he saw them, My father, shall I smite them? shall I smite them? And he answered, Thou shalt not smite them; wouldest thou smite those, whom thou hast taken captive with thy sword and with thy bow? Set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink, and go to their master. And he prepared great provision for them; and when they had eaten and drunk, he sent them away, and they went to their master. So the bands of Syria came no more into the land of Israel."

This narrative appears, at first sight, to be more surprising than edifying; but, as might be expected, it contains an ore, from which gold may be extracted; we have only to dig

and turn up the soil. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." The subject of our present meditations may be divided into three heads: I. Elisha's prayer. II. The Syrians in Samaria. III. The glory brought to Israel.

I. Let us return to Dothan, where a scene awaits us, that forms a remarkable contrast to the one we last considered. Then, as you will remember, eyes that were closed were wonderfully opened, and now, those that are open are as mysteriously blinded. Then we saw a timorous person suddenly surrounded by a barricade of fire; now we see an army fearing nothing, suddenly exposed to inevitable danger. Then we discovered a single unprotected individual, threatened by thousands of armed men; now we perceive these thousands in the power of this same defenceless individual.

Elisha, with his servant, has left his elevated dwelling, and is descending the mountain in a cheerful and animated spirit; and as he proceeds, sees beneath him the helmets and armour of his enemies, glittering in the morning sun. If the man of God be only concerned for his own safety and that of his servant, he has only to go forwards; the fiery chariots that attend him, can also secure for him a safe passage through this array of bristling spears. Elisha is in no doubt on this subject; but it was never his practice to make himself the centre point of the Divine miracles. His soul, dedicated to God, is steadily occupied by higher considerations and desires. The glory of the Lord was ever his inmost desire, the end of every action. On this occasion likewise, he is unmindful of himself; his sole consideration is, how the wonderful event he had just witnessed, might best be made subservient to the honour of his Lord amongst the heathen. What nobleness of sentiment under the circumstances which Elisha was placed, to be able thus to merge all

thought of self in anxiety for the honour of the Lord, and to make self-preservation subordinate to the nobler consideration, how a turn shall be given to the event, by which the name of Jehovah shall be rendered glorious and great. How ought we to blush in the presence of such a man! we, who in moments of threatened danger, usually consider our own safety, not only as the first, but as the only question worthy of consideration, and who, at such moments, can scarcely conceive a possibility of the poor heart of man, being occupied with any other than selfish claims for Divine assistance! But this is the reason why miraculous interferences are so rarely experienced among us. Did we, in our petitions, prefer the honour of God to our own interest, how much more frequently should we see his glory manifested!

Where there is sincerity of purpose, success is never wanting. While Elisha is reflecting how the miraculous deliverance extended to himself, can be made to reflect the greatest glory on the name of the Lord, he is inspired with the thought: "Lord," he sighs, "smite I pray thee, this people with blindness!" Should any one be disposed to look upon this prayer as one of self-glory or revenge, he would be greatly mistaken. It breathes of love, and contemplates the honour of Jehovah and the salvation of the Syrians, and therefore the Divine amen is not withheld. The Syrians are miraculously smitten with blindness. Why should this seem strange to you? Do you believe there is a God who formed the eye; why should he not then be also Lord of the eye, and act with it as pleaseth him? You would deem it great injustice, were we to accuse you of denying the existence and personality of a living God, of a Divine providence and government of the world; and yet you never meet with an historical instance of his direct and supernatural interference in human affairs, without rebellious thoughts rising within you. The miracles of Scripture, these outlets of providence, these natural indications of a living God, not only surprise, they

confound and stagger you. But this sceptical, doubting hesitation unequivocally pronounces your faith to be only superstitious and imaginary. Oh, there is infinitely more atheism in human nature, than, judging from appearances and ordinary modes of speech, may at first sight appear. Between the "theory," and what the Bible calls faith, there is a wide distinction. True faith, that childlike, unaffected, confiding principle, and in its consequent application to historical events, individual and particular, is not a product of nature. It is a Divine work, a gift of the Holy Spirit; it is the fruit of regeneration, and can be obtained in no other way.

The Syrians may have been just on the point of summoning Dothan to deliver up to them the prophet, when an elderly man, attended by his servant, is seen descending the mountain to their camp. What a wonderful scene! They are about to storm the town, and he, against whom the expedition is directed, defenceless, and yet most powerfully defended, is standing in the midst of them. How significant a picture, in many respects, of events taking place in our day! We are pursued by a host of bitter enemies; but with as little success, as was the prophet by the heathen! How often are we sought for in places, that we have long quitted! Our former life is attacked, as if we were thereby disgraced; but this, with all its errors, we willingly surrender to our calumniators; in it we no longer seek our reputation. Old things are passed away, behold all things are become new! They dispute the philosophical soundness of our opinions, and imagine, when they have proved this or that to be beyond the sphere of rational comprehension and natural development, that we are driven from the strong hold of our faith. Egregious folly, to suppose that we view the gospel, as a system of doctrines devised by any man, and not as proceeding from a higher source, beyond the range of human reason, and the ordinary laws of nature! Thus a Dothan is again assailed, but we are no longer there.

We willingly renounce any such philosophical defence of our belief, and can only feel surprise that our adversaries should deem it the keystone of our arch; but they are welcome to exhaust their strength in its subversion, while, from a very different position, unfettered and unharmed, we laugh at their useless efforts. The style and language of the sacred volume is employed against us. "See," they say, "how human, how puerile, how familiar, and how boyish its plan and descriptions!" and thus they imagine they have quite upset us, and our belief in a revelation. And did we really entertain the opinion, that a Divine revelation must be couched in abstract, bombastic, or lofty phraseology, it must be admitted that the attack is well directed; but as it is, they only waste their ammunition against an unoccupied position. We use other standards, by which to test the claims of the Divine word. The simplicity of its style, so far from weakening our faith, serves rather to strengthen it; and the objection of our opponents appears to us almost ridiculous. Not contented, however, with attacking the language of Scripture, they seek likewise to invalidate its historic accuracy. They labour to prove a discrepancy between many of its statements and the writings of profane authors, and thus to deprive them of their claim to be considered unerring Divine revelations. And this conclusion, they think sufficient to annihilate our religious pretensions. But this is again a vain attack upon a deserted Dothan. Did we need any other testimony to the truth of the Scriptures, than that furnished by the Spirit in our hearts, and the strong confirmation from the lips of the wonder-working ambassadors of God, and the King of truth himself, the attack would then, indeed, be well directed; but we stand in no such need. In thus assailing us, they only beat the air, and invest places, that we have long abandoned.

The Syrians would not neglect minutely to question the stranger respecting the prophet, whom they, no doubt, believe to be an inhabitant of Dothan; and he gives them

surprising intelligence. "This," he tells them, "is not the way, neither is this the city!" Stranger, they reply, is what you tell us truth? Undoubtedly it was; for Dothan was no longer the place where Elisha dwelt, and consequently the road that led to it, was to them a wrong way. "Follow me!" the stranger adds; and who will censure him for it? To say nothing of stratagem in war having the Divine sanction, their mysterious conductor had not the smallest intention of leading his blinded enemies into a snare. "I will bring you," he says, "to the man whom ye seek!" He would show them the true Elisha; with whose person they were unacquainted; him, against whom there was no contending, for God was with him; who so far from harbouring hostile sentiments towards them, was animated solely by the wish, that, through him, the ambassador of God, they might attain to a wholesome knowledge of Him who had sent him. Oh that we could at all times say to our revilers, with the same feeling and confidence as Elisha, "Follow us, that we may conduct you to those whom ye seek!" and that we were then able to oppose, to their injurious prejudices, the strength of our love, integrity, and kindness, both in domestic and in public life! But alas! it too frequently happens, that we have to depend upon words alone for our defence; and instead of a joyful assurance, have only a trembling conscience, that is more disposed to take part with our accusers, than to testify in our favour. How disgraceful is this! What a humiliating thought, but, at the same time, what an exalted conviction does it produce of the value of grace! But, if we really belong to the people of God we shall be, at such times of self-reproach and inward destitution, in no want of motives to animate us. We can imagine ourselves clothed in the likeness, in which we stand before God,—can call to mind what we have become through the righteousness so mysteriously imputed to us; we can point the accuser in our breast, if not our human accusers, the law and the prince of darkness, to the Priest according to "the order of

Melchisedec," who is our righteousness, and can ask them, wherein are we still deficient?

II. The stranger in the Syrian camp has succeeded. He has gained their confidence—they trust themselves to his guidance: and they may do so without hesitation. No one ever repented of having trod in the footsteps of a child of God. His path terminates in a world of heavenly glory. The followers of the saints are led into a miraculous region of Divine scenes, events, and activity, to Christ the centre of revelation. If you are disposed to grant me your attention, I hope to adduce from Scripture an example, that will make this great truth at least plain to your minds.

At Philippi, in Macedonia, an extraordinary event has taken place, and the whole city is in commotion. Strangers have arrived by sea, and have preached a new doctrine in the streets. For the first time on European ground, they proclaim that there is salvation alone in Jesus Christ the Son of God! An uproar is the consequence, which is the greater from the word preached having taken effect in many hearts, and having been the cause of another singular event. A sorceress, who brought her masters great gain by her impious art, followed these strangers, and ceased not to cry after them, "These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation." By what impulse she so cried, we are not told; but it appears, that one of the men whom she thus followed, was not well pleased with this equivocal kind of honour, and commanded, in the name of Jesus Christ, the spirit that possessed her to come out of her; and when he departed from her, there was an end of her soothsaying. Thus, the enmity of her masters was excited, as was afterwards the case in Rome, when Luther destroyed the craft of the dispensers of indulgences. They seized the strangers, dragged them to the market-place, before the magistrates, and, in order to excite the multitude

against them, cried, "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;" or, in the language of the present day, "These men, being priests, teach customs not suitable for us, in the nineteenth century, the friends of reason, the followers of Hegel, Strauss, etc., to receive"—"The thing that hath been," says Solomon, "is that which shall be; and there is no new thing under the sun!" The poor strangers were roughly treated by the incensed multitude. Their clothes were torn off, they were beaten and covered with wounds and stripes. And why were they thus treated? Had they any evil intentions? Did they despise the people? No, they sincerely loved them. Did they treat them with haughtiness? On the contrary, they approached them as brethren. But the truth, shining into the darkness, had condemned them. It breaks in upon so many comfortable prejudices; it constrains, disturbs, and incommodes in so many ways. Therefore let him who weds this daughter of heaven, who, though black, is still so comely, expect not to pass through the world unmolested. At one time he will be crowned with thorns, at another with a fool's cap; and thus, in one way or in another, he will be crucified with the Lord in whom he believes, and whom he confesses.

But to return to our history. It is midnight when we arrive at Philippi. In a quiet retired part of the city, we see a gloomy and strongly grated building; it is a prison. On entering its dismal passages, we discover, whichever way we turn, large doors, heavily barred and bolted, which shut in the sleeping prisoners. You shudder, and wish to turn back. But how do you know, that, even in a place like this, we may not meet with what is edifying and admirable? Has it never happened, that the kindness and love of Christ have descended to these abodes of wretchedness, to succour, comfort, and save? Have angels never silently collected tears of contrition there? or have sighs and looks, brighter and more pleasing to the Lord than

the stars of night, never yet sped their way through the gratings of a prison; or have the damp walls of a dungeon never testified of holy love, patience, and resignation? Oh, were it permitted us to inspect the records of the new Jerusalem, how many wonders of Divine condescension and mercy—how many cheering histories of Manassehs, Daniels, Magdalens, and Samaritans taken from dungeons and dens—should we find inscribed in them, as evidences, that to the great Friend of sinners, even the most horrible abysses of wretchedness are not too mean to become the consecrated theatres of his glory. Let us now explore these vaults a little further. A few steps lower, we discover a cell, more heavily barred than the rest, apparently designed for criminals of the worst order,—for rebels, incendiaries, and thieves. And here, you ask, in a place like this, are the people of the Lord to be found? Oh be not dismayed!—He is still a faithful God, who, if he lead his people into distress, will not leave them there. His kingdom is not of this world; and its splendours, its crowns, its dignities and titles are not promised to his people. Yes, even here we may find them, for to what horrors have not his beloved ones been exposed? They have been in deep waters, in furnaces of fire, in the bowels of the earth, but the Lord was at their side, and none ever had reason to regret having been so situated. And what, after all, does it signify how we have been housed, or where we have been placed, provided our career conduct us at last to that crowd of witnesses of which the world was not worthy. Oh how joyous will it then be to look down upon forsaken haunts of misery, delightful as the look, which those who have arisen to new life from the dead, will cast into their empty graves. Let us therefore hear with composure, that they who first brought the truth into our quarter of the world, in whose glorious light we now rejoice, are immured behind these doors. The apostles Paul and Silas are here confined—we might say buried alive—and could we but see them as they sit, their legs suspended and

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chained together over a sharp-edged board, so that they can neither stand nor lie. What cruelty! you are ready to exclaim. Yes, cruelty indeed. But they are awake and conversing together, and, if I mistake not, I hear detached parts of sentences first uttered by our Lord; but whether they are addressed to Him, or whether they console each other with them, I cannot tell. "In the world ye shall have tribulation, in me ye shall have peace—consolation,—overcome the world—if ye were of the world—the disciple is not greater than his master—if they have persecuted me, they—fear nothing! your reward is great in heaven."—But hark! although it is past midnight, two persons are singing in the dungeon; their voices, strong and clear, resound through the whole building; and what is it they sing? A lamentation? No; a song of praise: "Blessed be thou, O Lord!" "Hallelujah!" What! Hallelujah in such a situation?—In the probable expectation of a cruel death?—Is it possible? Yes; and it is affecting and surprising—not to be explained on natural grounds. They evidently live in a different world from other people; in a world, where the nature of things is changed, where a prison is not a prison, bonds are not bonds, death is not death: but where every thing assumes a different form, and aspect. And so it really is. They live in a world of new views and contemplations. All things wear to them a different appearance to what they do to others, a dungeon is to them a house of God, and the Lord is with them there. What the world calls dishonour, is their crown. Of ignominy in the service of such a king, they are proud. Bonds are to them a relief, not a burden—they are a consoling evidence to them, that, by the grace of God, they have an interest in Jesus, the author of life. A prison? To whom do the prisons belong? Not to men, but to Him, who numbers the hairs of the head, and opens and shuts prisons at his pleasure. In death, they recognise the ferryman that conveys them to their home; but of dying, faith knows nothing. Oh for

faith, a living faith in the word, and Christ its centre! Who can overcome those, in whom it lives and reigns? To such, all things become new; another, a superior world rises within them, and the world around them becomes brighter, richer, and more extended. You walk through woods and meadows; they through the garden of the Lord. You perceive only flowers and singing birds; they meet also with the God of nature, who clothes the one and feeds the other. You look upwards to the stars; they to the glimmering lights of their Father's house. You live under the government of destiny; they under the guidance of a kind Providence. In history, you read only of the actions of men; in the same narrative, they read the history of God's government of the world; they hear the sound of his footsteps, and the rustling of his garments. You consider your houses only as the places in which you dwell; they account theirs as the habitation of God among men. You think yourselves alone; they never do. You consider your possessions as self-acquired; they, as the gift of God. What is the extent of your acquaintance?—man; their world is not so limited. By whom are you attended?—by your shadow; while they are accompanied by the most powerful safeguard. What is it you experience in distress?—affliction; they, chastening love. What is it you look for in prosperity and benefits?—pleasure; but they discern in them, the kindness and affection of a paternal heart. Where is it you live?—in the world; they live elsewhere, and above it. Where is your house situated?—under the free heaven; over theirs, are spread the wings of mercy. What is your life?—a dream; theirs, a journey homewards in the most agreeable company. How delightful is a life of faith! how rich in blissful perspective and joyful hope! To all, who by the grace of God attain to it, how is the world enlarged, dignified, and enriched, and that without illusion! They are not enthusiasts and fanatics, they remain at their old occupations, they continue to live in the good old way; but to them, all things assume

of themselves, another aspect, when the eyes of the new man are opened ; and everywhere they behold God, Christ their king, and glimpses of that glorious world, which lies concealed behind the gross veil of visibility. And yet we are called narrow-minded people, whose views are circumscribed and limited, whose life is cheerless and miserable. Oh, what an erroneous opinion ! If there be a life that is cold, viewless, circumscribed, and wretched, it is the life of those, who see only with their bodily eyes. But the life of the meanest of believers is rich, I might almost say, perfectly intellectual and poetic. The light of the eternal hills sheds a lustre over it.

But to return to our subject. The song of praise has resounded through the prison, and has awakened the occupants of the neighbouring cells from their sleep. Robbers, murderers, and other prisoners sit listening in their chains, astonished that the repose of midnight should be disturbed by sounds so unusual within those dreary walls. Singing, in the most dismal dungeon of the prison-house, and such singing as was never before heard there ! Prayer and praise to God ; and ah, how peaceful and devout ! You are surprised at the circumstance ; the prisoners were astounded ; and who knows, but many of them may have been still more deeply affected. The Spirit of mercy may have accompanied the sounds through the prison, and may have awakened reflection in one and in another, which may have been the foundation of nobler sentiments at a future time. And, oh ! how delightful is the thought, that such impressions, though slight, may, for the first time, have been made on the minds of these miserable criminals. On a sudden, the building is shaken to its foundation, and a crackling noise is heard, as if the prison were falling together. The bolts start back, the doors fly open, the fetters of the prisoners burst asunder, and, in a moment, all are liberated and free. But how happy are Paul and Silas ! The Lord was evidently in the earthquake ; and it is something to his children, when he so discovers himself,

that it may be said, "Lo! God is' here!" It is something to them, when he thus proclaims his own praises, though it be in the storm; when he casts aside the veil, and openly displays himself to them in acts of omnipotence, or love. Oh, what fervent delight does it yield them! With what joy does the heart incline towards, and bow down before him! how it rejoices in Him, and how joyous the hosannas which it sings! Paul and Silas are in ecstasies. How wonderful is the experience of these two men! Yes, we here again see, that the world in which they live, is a different one to that which you inhabit. In yours, such things never occur. Of what is earthly, of eating, drinking, business, and I know not what besides, there is enough; but of what is spiritual, you must confess, there is nothing. Learn inwardly to believe on the Son of God, and you enter at once upon a world of new incidents. Even in the very outset, how great is our rejoicing, when, for the first time, He meets with us, and we can say with confidence, "He lives." When he so unites himself to us, that we see Him face to face, and when there is no more idea of evasion and escape; when he places our accumulated sins before us, and asks, and we feel that it is he himself who asks, "How we shall appear on the judgment-day?"—when our hearts and our eyes overflow, and we dare not lift up our heads before him. And what are our sensations, when he transforms our hearts into a temple, in which accents resound, never before heard there—"Lord Jesus, have mercy on us!" "Lord, remember me, when thou comest into thy kingdom!" "Be not a terror to me: thou art my hope in the day of evil!" And when He himself rises in this temple, to preach the efficacy and power of his blood; when, as a priest, he sprinkles the interior of the temple with his blood, and an eternal sabbath commences within us, and the sentiments of the 103d Psalm pervade the soul? But this is only the beginning. Our experience of Divine things now increases. He approaches us night and morning: he entangles the thread of our life,

but only to display his wisdom in unravelling it. He assists us in our distress, enables us to repel the assaults of the wicked one, consoles, refreshes, and strengthens us. He visits us in our waking and our sleeping hours. He surprises us with the sweetest consolations, and with the gifts and pledges of his love. For where do we not meet either with his watchful eye, his saving hand, or his ear inclined to our prayers? And oh! when we call upon him, and we hear the sound of his footsteps, and he grants our requests, and we repose upon his bosom, like John, and rejoice in the marvellous light of his countenance, unmindful alike both of heaven and earth, delighting in the confidence that he is ours—what incomparable happiness! Have you never experienced it? Does no invisible friend attend you, no God of mercy; is there no chain of Divine interpositions interwoven through your life? Is there for you no wreath of heavenly incidents and heavenly communion? Oh wretched, wretched existence! And yet you call the life of God's saints miserable! What unspeakable delusion! What perversion of ideas!

Let us once more return to the prison. The dreadful noise in the house has awakened also the jailor, who, almost frantic, starts from his bed, and hurries towards the cells; but when he sees all the dungeons open, and particularly the one he had been so especially charged to keep well guarded, he loses his presence of mind and his courage. Dark and threatening clouds of mischief lower upon his soul. "Woe is me," he inwardly cries, "I am lost! I shall be deprived of my office, of bread, of happiness, of liberty, of life, and everything!" That is too much to bear! And what will he do? His sword is already drawn, and not only his life, but the happiness of his soul is suspended on the moment. The serpent is threatening to inflict upon him the wound of eternal death. He is just about to fall upon his sword, when—now let who will doubt that grace is free!—God interposes his saving hand, rescues him on the brink of destruction, and has mercy on him; yes, mark it, at

the very moment, when his inward corruption had driven him to the verge of despair. Paul is made the instrument of mercy. "Do thyself no harm," he cries to the desperate man; "for we are all here!" These words at once dispel the jailor's gloom, and hope again revives within him. He hastens back to his apartment for lights; but God had already lighted a taper within him. He begins to think,—though as it were but in the twilight, and in the storm,—These men are what they profess to be; and their God, I perceive clearly, is the living and the true God! Before him I stand; and before him I must stand! But how shall I appear before him, miserable sinner that I am? The elements of the new creation are there; yet darkness still rests upon the deep; his new views, emotions, and desires, require a more perfect development. But the Divine work is a perfecting work, and light is not far distant. The jailor returns, hurries to the two men of God, leads them from their cell, falls trembling at their feet, and, in the utmost alarm, cries, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" The answer is prompt and decided; "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house!" How great and glorious do the two apostles appear! I admire Samson, who rent the lion; I admire the young shepherd, who slew the bear on the fields of Bethlehem, and overthrew the Philistine giant; but here was more than a lion, a bear, or a Goliath. Here raged the gnawing worm, despair, and the frightful spectre, a well grounded fear of eternal perdition; but Paul and Silas were able to vanquish these monsters. A simple word, but of immeasurable power, is the only weapon they employ, and with this sword, the dragons are subdued. The peace of God takes possession of the jailor's mind; he is liberated from the serpent-like folds of his gloomy fears, and the mortal wound of his soul is healed.

We have now seen how faith unlocks a world of new phenomena and experience; it likewise conducts to a world of new and holy activity. "The works that I do, shall ye do also," saith the Lord, and he adds, "and

greater works than these shall ye do." Unbelievers can also accomplish much: they can banish hunger, by dealing their bread to the poor; they can alleviate worldly misery, clothe the naked, relieve the distressed; to those who despair of worldly success, they may secure a more prosperous future. But see, here is a poor trembling worm, whose incessant cry is, "God is just, and I am a sinner." He despairs of eternal happiness. Now let them procure for this man consolation and peace! Behold another, his soul is craving after light, more light! His thirst for truth has urged him to examine every system of human wisdom; but what is infallible and satisfying, he has nowhere found. Let them appease, if they can, the longings of his soul! Behold a man who is bound in sin; he has tried every means, in order to extricate himself from the disgraceful fetters, with which he feels himself entangled; but no good intentions, no resolve of moral amendment has been of avail; passion, that great levathan, scattered them like chaff. Let them unfetter this oppressed being! Behold a yet more piteous sight! See a dying man, racked upon his bed of pain, shut in, as it were, between two hot furnaces, the thought of eternal annihilation, and the fear of eternal perdition in hell. Let them point out to him a sure way of escape from this double horror. But they are incapable of relieving him, and their entire spiritual destitution is at once apparent. Impotent compassion is all the consolation that the oppressed have to expect from them: good counsel is scarce, their embarrassment infectious. Send now for the meanest of believers, conduct him to the house of mourning, and you will perceive that, instead of retiring in dismay, he approaches the scene of sorrow with calmness and composure; conjures with success the raging billows of despair; extinguishes the inward fire of the fear of death, and accomplishes other wonders. His appearance is plain and unpretending; but if the Spirit be with him, his path is marked by light, and fountains of heavenly consolation open beneath his feet. He can dispel the gloom

of death, break iron chains asunder, heal the bleeding wound, control the wildest passions; which, if attempted by human art and wisdom, only exposes their nothingness and impotence. And what is the weapon, with which he is thus enabled to burst their chains? what the torch, that dispels such gloom? what the wonder-working staff, at whose command such waters separate? It is a simple unostentatious word, but to which the promise of almighty grace is attached; a word that points to a sovereign remedy for all the ills of life and the pains of death, a word that has already made one new world, and will make another. God has enstamped this word on the pillars of the world, and the history of a thousand years has affixed to it the splendid seal of eternal confirmation. The word is, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ!" Yes, this is the spell! and if it lay hold of the heart, it not only unfolds to us at once a new world of Divine phenomena and experience, but we also enter with it upon a career of new and superhuman actions. Cast it as a rope into the abyss of despair, and it will raise those abandoned by the world, and their own hearts, to the light of hope. Send it, like the blast of the trumpet on the day of judgment, across the valley of the spiritually dead, and the signs of life will follow. The dead breathe afresh in God; the barren again put forth leaves and blossoms. Thus you appear endowed with creative powers, and prove the truth of our Lord's words, "He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do!"

III. But to return, from our digression, to the narrative in the text. The Syrians depart from Dothan with their horsemen and chariots; their unknown guide marching at their head. What a strange spectacle! With him, of whom they are in search, they converse on their march; and he whom they chase, as they would a wild animal, is himself their commander, and leads them as by a cord. The first place, at which they arrive, is Jezreel, the summer

residence of the king of Israel; but little do they suspect what place they are passing. Yes, my friends, it is necessary to believe in a living God, in a God, who is great even in his condescensions, for such a scene not to appear a mere fable. I know that the faith of believers is not unfrequently staggered by such extraordinary occurrences; but no, it is not faith, it is reason that shakes the head; reason, that is so ready to reject as impossible, whatever is out of the common course of things. We may, however, be permitted to remark, that when it enters upon Scripture history, it treads on holy ground, on the very theatre, where it becomes strikingly manifest, that God is not only a God in heaven, but also among the children of men, and that nature does not move by mechanical laws, but is immediately dependent on the unfettered hand of its Creator and Sovereign. It must therefore remember, that on this ground, the standard of daily experience will not suffice; it must bear in mind the profound and striking observation of an enlightened man: "This single fact, the appearance of a Christ such as Judaism describes and Christianity presents to us, is the wonder of all wonders; the source from whence they spring, and the end to which they point. It is the fundamental fact, from which all other wonders naturally flow, and assume the character of natural occurrences, just as creation is the fundamental fact from which the permanence, the variation, and continuance of things are denominated natural."

The Syrians arrive at the royal residence, and enter the place, never dreaming what gates they were that had opened to receive them. On a sign given by the guide, the assembling populace attends them in silent expectation. The Syrians advance without apprehension, till they reach a spacious place, when their conductor commands a halt, and announces to them, that they were in the place where they would find the prophet they so much hated; while making the communication, he prays in his heart to the Lord, "Lord open their eyes that they may see!" and the

blindness is removed, and they again see things as they are. But who can describe their astonishment! The undeceived troops stand confounded and amazed, and doubt if they are awake, or are deluded by the empty terrors of a dream. But they are soon convinced, that all they saw upon their march was deception; that the charm is now broken, and that the objects that surround them are naked realities. What an alarming discovery! Yet a more awful one awaits those, who join the standard of unbelief, and follow the anti-christian system of modern illumination. Your supposed enlightened opinions constitute the meshes of the delusive net, in which the prince of darkness holds you entangled; your refined views are but the gaudy snares with which he has secured you as his own. Oh how dreadful is the discovery, towards which you are hastening! You are dreaming of a delusive elysium, and will awake amidst dark forms, to whom the command will go forth, "Bind them hand and foot, and cast them into outer darkness!"

The heathens are thunderstruck, when they discern, in the person of their guide, the man whom they had designed to capture. The king of Israel, in person, presses through the crowd, and advancing towards the prophet with more than usual condescension, whilst intoxicated with delight at this triumph, says to him, "My father, shall I smite them?"—What gracious words from the lips of Jehoram! What condescension in a monarch! They weigh, however, but little in the estimation of Elisha; he easily sees through the motives of this surprising kindness. And what does the prince imagine? He supposes that Elisha had conducted the enemy thither, that he might make a cheap display of his courage. How greatly is he mistaken! "Smite them?"—the prophet replies, "this is not the time for smiting! Smite those, whom thou hast taken captive with thy sword and with thy bow;—on these let no man lay his hand,—not even the king!" Thus Elisha is at once firm and respectful, decided and submissive.

He feels himself standing in the place of God, and commands in the name of Jehovah. In what strong colours, in this scene, is the theocracy, depicted in the state affairs of ancient Israel, again presented to us. Prophets were divinely constituted the secret and public council of princes. Through them, God commanded, disposed, interdicted; and princes obeyed, or by disobedience drew down upon their heads the curse of the Eternal King, who suffered no infringement of his exclusive right of sovereignty in Israel. Rome, in following this model, forgot that priests are not prophets. Should it please God again to favour a country with men like the ancient seers, they would require no prescribed authority, but a pure theocratic element would make itself felt in the state. Prophets are authorities, that do not need, in order to entitle them to a seat in the council, to be first invested with diplomas and official characters. They exercise, without title or human instalment, a pervading and irresistible influence. By them the Spirit of God conceives, governs, and operates; he does not sue for a recognition, he commands it. The moment, to which Elisha had referred in his promise to the Syrians, is arrived. He now shows them the man whom they seek, and in how glorious a light! They already know that he has been their guide. The illusion is dispelled, and their astonishment surpasses all bounds. Of the design indeed, with which they had been brought thither, they have no suspicion; their expectations are the most dreadful; and if, at first, a slight ray of hope had beamed upon their minds, it was suddenly dissipated when the king appeared, in whose countenance they think the sentence of death is recorded against them. However, they were to be made sensible, that they had not fallen into the hands of a people like themselves; but into the hands of the people of God; and they were to learn to esteem and to distinguish them from the heathen. This was Elisha's plan; in pursuance of which, he requires the king in the name of the Lord, to "set bread and water before them,

that they may eat and drink, and go to their master." And Jehoram feels himself bound by the words of the prophet, and complies. But being thus forced to yield, he resolves to do so like a king; and not only commands bread and water, but a sumptuous entertainment to be provided for them.

The anxiety of the strangers, however, increases every moment. To Elisha's private conference with his prince, they give the most unfavourable interpretation. They think of their distant homes, and each one, in spirit, bids farewell to those he loves, convinced that, in a few moments, a bloody death will be his fate. But how shall I paint their astonishment, when, instead of instruments of death, they see tables placed before them, and afterwards a crowd of servants, covering the gigantic board with a sumptuous meal! They appear to be, on a sudden, transferred into a world of enchantment. "What!" they think, "an entertainment? For whom can it be intended?" That they are to be the guests, they never dream. They appear like men perfectly bewildered, when Elisha approaches them, and, with a countenance beaming with benevolence and kindness, invites them to eat. The heathens stare at him in silence, and seem to ask, how he can find in his heart to sport with their misery. But, on Elisha's repeating the invitation, with still greater cordiality, they perceive, to their great astonishment, that he is altogether in earnest, and accept the invitation. Yet when at table, they have no courage to eat. The banquet has to them the character of an executioner's feast. Elisha deems this the proper moment to relieve them from all further apprehension. He advances towards them—he against whom they had come forth with sword and spear—and with a countenance expressive of kindness and love, and addressing them as friends, urges them in the name of the King of kings, and in the name of Jehoram, to partake of the refreshments, assuring them that they were then at liberty to return with their arms, horses, and chariots, to

the standard of their master. With what feelings this announcement was received, you may easily imagine. I can fancy I see them, mute with joy, as before with terror, looking at each other in amazement, and, ashamed of their hostility to such a people, and to such a man of God—scarcely able to raise their eyes; and then, looking round for the prophet, in order to throw themselves, in a body, at his feet, to thank him, and to obtain his pardon; but Elisha has already disappeared. We, however, hear them saying to each other, Such generosity to enemies was never before exhibited; such another people as Israel is not to be found; and we hear them invoke blessings on the nation, on the man of God, on the country and its king. Their repast ended, they take their departure from Samaria, deeply affected, and overflowing with feelings of gratitude and admiration. Of a truth, Elisha has kept his word, and has shown them the man whom they sought, but whom they did not know before. They saw Elisha, and that in the effulgence of a love, of which till then, they had scarcely had a conception; and in Elisha, they had a slight manifestation of the glory of Him whom Elisha served, a manifestation that perhaps sufficed to destroy for ever, in the hearts of many of them, all faith in their false gods. This event terminated the Syrian war. May we not from hence infer the impression, which the report given of these transactions, by the Syrians, on their return, made upon the king and the nation? When the history says: "So the bands of Syria came no more into the land of Israel," we must either understand it to mean, that this particular band would not again fight against Israel, or we must enlarge the words of the text, by adding to it the expression "for some time;" or we must suppose the meaning to be, that single bands of the Syrian army, did not again venture into the land of Israel.

As it happened to the Syrians in Samaria, with Israel after the flesh, it has happened also to many with spiritual Israel. For years, the attitude they assumed towards the

people of God was that of bitter enmity. Viewing them at a distance, and in the deceptive light of the strongest prejudice, they accounted them hypocrites, who, although differing from others only by a mask of religion, were always sitting in judgment upon, and condemning their neighbours, and promising salvation to themselves exclusively. They imagined them to be a monkish fraternity, narrow-minded and incapable; as unsound in taste and judgment, as pertinacious in prescribing laws, and insisting on their own peculiar observances. The bare thought of them was like the cheerless contemplation of a dreary desert. They seemed, when near them, to breathe an unwholesome sepulchral atmosphere, in which life's cheerful colours faded; it appeared to them incredible, that any vigorous plant, be it love, or any other healthy emotion, original sentiment, or true feeling, could live within it. But the time at length came, when it was said also to them, "I will show you the people against whom you strive!" And the "shining light," that awakens men from their dream of self-love, penetrated their hearts, and discovered to them their own lost state, and the desirableness of Jesus as their only Saviour. In short, they arrived at Zion, before they were aware of it, and became incorporated, by similarity of nature, with the people whom they had looked upon as the darkest part of the picture of humanity. And how great was the disenchantment which they there experienced! In what a new and surprising light did the Israel of the Lord appear before them! What had become of the barren desert, on which they had previously gazed? A beautiful, verdant, and peaceful garden had sprung up in its place. Where is now the sepulchral atmosphere they fancied to have breathed? Ah! they felt themselves fanned by the breath of the most brotherly affection. Long after the Lord had wiped away the tears, which they had shed on account of sin, were they filled with sorrow for having so misunderstood such a fraternal community. And now, they are ready to testify to all who will listen, that whoever is desirous

of finding, in the world, true fidelity, whoever would enjoy a life, rich in heavenly treasures, and what is eternally beautiful, will never find it, till he enters the sacred gate, which bears the inscription, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." Yes, would you be loved with a pure affection? would you repose on hearts that thoroughly respond to your own? do you wish for friends in whom, under all circumstances, you can confide? do you long for enjoyments that never pall, nor dry up? would you deem an existence under the canopy of heaven, beautiful; a social intercourse like that of Paradise, delightful? do you esteem, as desirable, a pilgrimage through life, in the enjoyment of the most enchanting prospects, the sweetest promises? Oh! delay then no longer; come to Salem, and experience the truth of the prophetic declaration: "For the Lord shall comfort Zion:—and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord; joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody."

IV. THE ROYAL PENITENT.

WITH the parable in Luke xii. 35—38, you are all well acquainted. It contains particulars, which merit our serious attention. The first is, "The Lord cometh!" This assurance is the source of joy to many. It carries their thoughts forward to the time, when Christ shall come, perfectly to establish his kingdom upon earth, and they sigh, "Oh that thou wouldest come!" Yes, our hearts also participate in this longing, which has pervaded the church for eighteen hundred years, not as a water that gradually loses itself in the sand, but like a stream, which the nearer it approaches its end, rolls more majestically onwards. How many of the prophetic signs of this year of jubilee do we now witness! The gospel is preached in every part of the world; Mohammedanism is shaken to its foundation; the beast from the bottomless pit has again reared its head; the almost universal falling-away from Christ, and from his word; the existence of anti-christian errors, engendered by the prevailing spirit of the times; the worship paid to genius, the idolizing of men, and many other signs are now evident. No period of the church ever exhibited so many of the signs of Christ's second coming, as the present. The fig-tree "putteth forth leaves," the "summer is near." I am, indeed, not ignorant, that a part of the church, wearied by the long delay, has gradually given way to doubt. You shake your heads, and think "the latter times" have been long talked of, and by thinking thus, you add one more sign to the many already enumerated. Imitate the foolish virgins, who maintained till the

last moment, even just before midnight, that the Lord was not yet coming. Be like the contemporaries of Noah. They were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, and had "Peace, Peace! there is no danger!" inscribed upon the festal gates of their dwellings; when suddenly, "the fountains of the great deep" were "broken up," and the floods swelled, obedient to the mandate of eternal wrath. Only Noah and his family watched, and were saved; but sudden destruction came upon all else.

"The Lord cometh!"—Oh, that he were here! How do we long for his appearing in these troublous times! These words do not exclusively refer to the coming of Christ to judge his enemies; they have another reference, that comes home to us all. They refer to an event of daily occurrence, one that we may any hour experience, which is overshadowed by gloom, and is called "death" and "dying." The word of truth contemplates our earthly existence as a constant waiting for the Lord. In the light of Scripture, it is not so much our end on earth that approaches, but the "Judge;" we are not hastening to the grave, but to meet the "Son of Man;" it is not death that calls us, but "God" in death. Death is not a mere process of nature, from which God has withdrawn; but, according to the Scriptures, in our death, as in our life, the counsel, the government, and the hand of the great King under whom, both the pious and the godless, stand; from whose dominion no one, for a moment, escapes, to whom, whether we will acknowledge it or not, we must all render an account, and who, according to our works, has prepared for us mansions of eternal peace, or dungeons of eternal death. It is, you perceive, a noble visitor, whom we have to expect, one whose dignity surpasses that of a king, or an emperor. And whence does he come? "Be like unto men," it is said, "that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding." He is, therefore, at the wedding, where the grand hallelujah resounds, and the golden harps are struck, because the

bride is now for ever united to the bridegroom, and her brow adorned with the unfading crown of life. In this life, then, we are not yet admitted to the wedding. We ought not, therefore, to be too much surprised, that our feelings occasionally partake so little of a nuptial character; neither ought we immediately to conclude, because our love is at times so cold, our courage depressed, our joy so beclouded, that our adoption is a delusion, and that we have no part in the new covenant. Thus it appears, my friends, that we are not yet admitted to the wedding: the Lord has first entered with those who have quitted our ranks. We are still "in a strange land;" but our situation will one day be changed—the distance from hence to heaven is not so very great.

That the Lord comes to all, is certain; but whether with the insignia of a judge, or of a friend, must depend on the state in which he individually finds us. Therefore, "Let your loins be girded about," saith the Lord, "and your lights burning; and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord!" Observe how delicately and significantly is here pointed out to us, in what the true preparation for the reception of the Lord consists. We must be like the men described in our parable. "Well, I think," I hear some one say, "that I am already!" Indeed. "Yes," you reply, for I do my duty!" No, my friends, that is not the peculiarity in the state of those held up for our example. "I live uprightly." They may also do the same; but neither is that their prominent feature. "I give to every one his own, faithfully fulfil my engagements, attend church, and am religious; and no one can accuse me of evil speaking!" All this is excellent and praiseworthy; it is likewise characteristic of the servants mentioned in our parable. But what the Lord commends in them as particularly exemplary, is something differing widely from that cold, godless morality, in which a blind world is accustomed to place preparation for eternity. "Be like," it is said, "unto men that wait for their

lord." Observe! the first characteristic of these persons is, that they are not masters, who will know of themselves, what is good, and what is evil—they are servants; next, that they are under a living head, to whose service they are devoted, and not merely under a form of regulations; and, above all, that they attend upon their lord, and anxiously await his appearance. Under the figure of the lord in the parable, Jesus himself is represented, which renders it evident, what is the sort of preparation intended. It is devotion to Him, the love of those that are his, and a longing for perfect union with him. But as this longing can only arise in a heart humble and broken, it is unknown to the Pharisee, and the so called "worthy man." In this longing is included repentance, a breach with sin, faith, delight in godliness, and holy love. The Lord has, however, purposely omitted to enumerate these particulars, as belonging to the requisite preparation. He foresaw, had he pointed them out, that many of his beloved children, mis-judging themselves, would be ready to exclaim, "Woe is me! I am not prepared!" Although, with all their diffidence, they might truly say: "Lord Jesus, thou art my joy, my hope, my greatest treasure! Who is there but thee, in whom I place my trust? Thou art the light and glory of my life. There is nothing I so much desire, as to recline on thy bosom with John, constantly to behold thee, embrace thee, and hear thy voice!" When you examine your own hearts, can you not testify this of yourselves? If you can, then you are prepared, for you love the appearing of the Lord Jesus. This is the one thing needful; but it is indispensable, not to be replaced by any religious observances, rightmindedness, or moral purity. It is the test of every sentiment, that claims the title of divine; and faith and repentance can only be accounted genuine and true, when this holy longing constitutes their germ and life.

These remarks, my beloved hearers, will furnish you with the standard, by which to judge of the remarkable

event, now brought before us in the history of Elisha. May its consideration be blessed to us!

2 KINGS VI. 24—30.

And it came to pass after this, that Benhadad king of Syria gathered all his host, and went up, and besieged Samaria. And there was a great famine in Samaria: and behold, they besieged it, until an ass's head was sold for fourscore pieces of silver, and the fourth part of a cab of dove's dung for five pieces of silver. And as the king of Israel was passing by upon the wall, there cried a woman unto him, saying, Help, my lord, O king. And he said, If the Lord do not help thee, whence shall I help thee? out of the barn floor, or out of the wine press? And the king said unto her, What alleth thee? And she answered, This woman said unto me, Give thy son, that we may eat him to-day, and we will eat my son to-morrow. So we boiled my son, and did eat him: and I said unto her on the next day, Give thy son, that we may eat him: and she hath hid her son. And it came to pass, when the king heard the words of the woman, that he rent his clothes: and he passed by upon the wall, and the people looked, and, behold, he had sackcloth within upon his flesh.

What a dark shade here passes over the life of Elisha! But, in the experience of the children of God, the darkness of night terminates in the light of Divine grace, and the manifestations of Divine assistance. "The Lord knoweth them that are his," and he guards them as the apple of his eye. Our narrative unfolds to us, I. A severe judgment. II. The horrors of despair. III. A royal penitent. Let us dwell, for a short time, upon each of these particulars.

I. "After this," begins our narrative; as if the following occurrence had immediately succeeded the former. This was, however, by no means the case; and we are perfectly at liberty to imagine the two events separated by many intervening years. The wonderful manner in which the Syrian band had been conducted to Samaria, and the generous treatment they had experienced, had doubtless a conciliating effect on the mind of Benhadad; but the mind of the natural man is like a sieve, and there is nothing that passes more quickly through it, than such like better feelings. Thus, it seems that the superficial impression produced in the mind of the Syrian prince, by the noble conduct of the Israelites, and the resolution

he had formed to spare them in future, were soon dissipated. Deep rooted hatred of the Jewish nation, and the desire of possessing the beautiful provinces of Canaan resumed their previous force. Benhadad, under what pretext does not appear, again declared war against king Jehoram, and before this prince was sufficiently prepared, the enemy's bands had passed the frontiers, and were approaching Samaria.

It seems, then, that so long as Syria is Syria, and Israel Israel, there can be no thought of peace between them. Attempts have not unfrequently been made by believers, in modern times, and particularly by educated persons, to fill up the gap between themselves and the world, with a variety of self-chosen materials. One has endeavoured to accomplish it, and to conciliate the men of the world, by proving himself equal to them in learning and science. Another has courted their favour, by a purposed exhibition and display of fascinating talents and agreeable qualities. A third has hoped to succeed, by avoiding the appearance of pietistical narrow-mindedness, which is so offensive to unbelievers, and by freely conforming, as far at least as conscience would permit, to the forms and customs of the world. A fourth labours to show, that his faith does not rest on a feeling, of piety alone, but on a philosophic basis; and he hopes in this way to escape the offence of the cross, and again to be classed among the rational. Unhappily, lamentable efforts of this kind are not unfrequently met with, both in the world of letters, and of real life; but should any individual believer succeed in extorting from the world the admission that he is a well-bred, social, clever man, and even a man of spirit, talents, and varied knowledge, he will, nevertheless, soon be made sensible, that the enmity, established by God, between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman, is not to be removed by human efforts; and as soon as his weakness becomes apparent, he will find that, together with the hatred, he has drawn upon himself the contempt of

unbelievers; and this will not be the only fruit of his dissimulation. In a wounded conscience, crippled energies, and weakened activity, he will have still more painfully to suffer for such temporizing; and many a chastisement from above will certainly fall upon him; for the Lord requires the whole man, not one that is divided. God be thanked, that in our day, we again meet with many orthodox divines occupying the theological chairs in our German universities; but how few of them remind us, I will not say of the apostles, but of the mighty men that flourished in the age of the reformation! What is it constitutes the striking contrast between them? Why is their influence on the ecclesiastical affairs of their age so weak, so imperceptible? How does it happen that, opposed to them, the spirits of unbelief and libertinism are not even embarrassed, much less fettered; and that, if not in their banner, yet in their mouths, the two-edged sword is wanting; and that they possess not the energy of an all governing spirit? Alas! the reason is a divided heart. The pitiable disparagement of each other. The coveting of applause; even the applause of the enemy. The compromising struggle to obtain an honourable station among the champions of Christ's kingdom, and in the pantheon of human literary fame. They attach as much importance to the praises of those against whom they war, as to the triumph they are ambitious of obtaining over them. But with such indecision, how can any effective blow be struck, any decided game played? Before such unsteady lights, no enemy will retire. The reformers and apostles had only one object in view, the triumph of Christ and of his cause; and in this oneness of design lay their efficiency and their strength.

On entering the territory of Canaan, we find king Jehoram in the most critical situation. Pressed on all sides by the rapidly advancing columns of the enemy, he has been forced to retire, with his army, within the walls of his capital. He is there closely besieged by the Syrians,

and has time to reflect why Jehovah has left him, and forsaken his standard. Come, let us enter the city, that we may the better observe how it fares with the besieged. Alas, what misery and grief meet us on every hand! Owing to the sudden and rapid advance of the enemy, the city had not been sufficiently provisioned; the whole stock of food is already consumed; there is no hope of supplies from without, and a scarcity prevails, such as was never before heard of. They are driven to eat the flesh of horses and of asses, although the latter is leuitically unclean and forbidden. Already an ass's head is sold for eighty pieces of silver, or about twenty dollars; a quarter cab, or about six egg shells full of dove's dung, for five pieces of silver. In the dwellings of the poor, the most frightful famine prevails; and their dying children, already reduced to skeletons, cry in vain for bread. The rich, who with all their gold and silver are involved in the same calamity, tremble, likewise, for their personal safety, apprehensive, that despair may drive the populace to acts of outrage. All the barriers of authority, rank, and state, are broken down. In Samaria, every man cares solely for himself. Selfishness reigns the only lawgiver; and for the prolongation of life, the most desperate means are resorted to. Occurrences that excite the greatest horror and disgust, are perpetually taking place; and the thousands of emaciated forms, tottering about the streets, render it but too probable, that similar offensive scenes will soon be general throughout the place.

May God in mercy protect us from famine! Of all the judgments of his wrath in time, none is more terrible than this. It opens the depths of human corruption, and together with the monster despair, sets loose the darkest passions. Yes, would you see mankind transformed into demons, and hell exhibited by beings formed in the image of God, observe the times when the heavens were barred, and the earth had become as brass. Of a truth, the Lord cannot more effectively resume the honour of which he

has been robbed, than by depriving mankind of bread, and visiting their fields with the curse. How are they, at such times, brought to shame, who place their confidence in riches! What ridicule comes upon those, who say to their souls, with the rich man in the gospel, eat and drink, my soul, for thou hast much goods laid up for many years! How must they feel condemned, who, in their ignorance, imagine that in the skill of their hands they have a never failing source of prosperity; and how must all be confounded, who have persuaded themselves, that they have no need of blessing from on high, and that their sufficiency is of themselves! It not unfrequently happens, that God has recourse to this scourge, when, despite of his authority, the most manifold awakenings and warnings have been forgotten in the land; and defection, audacity, and impiety abound. This abomination had risen to a high degree in idolatrous Samaria; and neither the thundering call of an Elijah, nor the gentle invitations of an Elisha, had been able to induce the infatuated people to renounce the worship of the golden calf. That we are not visited by this iron rod of God's displeasure, must be ascribed alone to his great long-suffering and patience:—our sins cry loud enough to heaven. May the blood of reconciliation cry with a louder and more prevailing voice!

Are there, then, in Samaria only apostates and the children of Belial? Oh no! Elisha resides in the unhappy city, and with him, no insignificant number of saints and righteous persons. But for them there is no need to fear: they will not perish with the rest. A portion of the general distress will fall on them; but in their cup there is not a drop more than is consistent with the promise made to them, or than will contribute to their prosperity and peace. The promises of God retain their value at all times, and under all circumstances; and though, in the city, an ass's head may cost eighty pieces of silver, a quarter cab of dove's dung five; yet of declarations like these: "Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not,

neither do they reap; nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?"—"Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you;" not a tittle shall fall to the ground, but they shall be Yea and Amen; though it may happen, that their fulfilment shall take place in some more covert manner. The table of Elisha and his friends may, sometimes, have been sparingly provided: but it seldom remained so till evening, without supplies being sent to them by a raven, an angel, or in some other way; and when these days of sorrow had passed away, could it be said that they had known want? No, Lord, never! But even where the pressure of outward distress is the same, yet there will ever remain a great difference between the cup of suffering of those in Zion, and of those who are without. In the former there is not a drop of terror, nor of the curse, nor of God's wrath. It is mixed by grace, presented by love, and sweetened by hope. We take it with an undisturbed conscience; for we know that it is wholesome; and we empty it with the most delightful prospects of the future. Think of Paul the apostle. A poor exile in Rome, a prisoner in chains, and aware that he must soon be put to death,—yet these circumstances, so far from damping his ardour, seem rather to raise and ennoble it. He writes more joyfully than ever, to his beloved Timothy. "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day;" and he hereby evinces that rich delightful consciousness, on the wings of which all the children of God may soar above the storms and mists of this their earthly pilgrimage.

When all is dark around, look forward to a more cheerful future. This world is a vale of sorrow, in which happiness can be found alone in hope. He that does not know his anchor to be cast within the veil, and yet can be

contented, has a thick covering before his eyes. In every human breast there is, by nature, a slumbering lion, whose name is Dread. His sleep is often long ; but never longer than while we remain blind to our true character and state. Happy are they, in whom he is aroused before it is too late ! How should I rejoice, could I this day rouse the monster in each of you ! But perhaps I may succeed. Suffer me, then, to submit to you a few considerations. In the first place, let us, through the silence of night, look upwards to the stars. Observe their numbers, and reflect that they are worlds ! How boundless ! How stupendous ! What think you now ? Does the great Spirit, that presides over all, ever cast a furtive thought on you and me ? A thought on two drops of water in the ocean, on two mere atoms ? You are silent, in the consciousness, that you have no God. You feel yourself destitute and forgotten, and you shudder at the thought. Oh that you really were penetrated with it ! I could then point out a process by which such lost drops of water as we are, are converted into pearls, to decorate the crown of the Almighty. Take another view, and let your gaze be downwards. Do you hesitate ? Take courage ! It is the churchyard. How rank and luxuriant the grass ! Let us raise the green sod. See these mouldering, crumbling bones ! A short time since, and they were beings like yourself ; a short time hence, you will be like them. Here you, also, will be laid, moulder, and be forgotten ; ere long, your very name will be unknown. What a dreary prospect ! “ Son of man, can these bones live ? ” You are silent, not knowing what to answer. How awful, thus to be approaching such a desolation, uncertain if it be the end of all things ! Can joy be yours, so long as this point is undecided ? It is impossible, unless you resolutely close your eyes. Oh listen ! while we declare to you the truth. These bones shall live again ! There is indeed an eternity ! Yet what can there be in this thought for you, but causes of new terror ?—Who sleeps beneath this mound ?

turn aside, and weep. It is your father and mother! Yes, weep; and most of all, because you have so often caused their tears to flow. Ungrateful son, you perhaps planted a nail in their coffin! Now, how gladly would you obtain their forgiveness. The wish is useless. Your mother's ear is deaf, your father's lips are closed. Ah! how can you rest happy a moment, without obtaining the friendship of Him, who is able to pronounce your pardon in the name of those, whose lips have been long since closed in death? And are your offences confined to the breach of the fifth commandment? Look back, I will not say into your past life, but into the last year only; and, if viewed aright, it will afford new ground of terror to you. In every step you have taken, new guilt has been incurred; every hour testifies against you; even your virtues, corrupt at the core, are your accusers! Son of man, is the monster Dread now roused within you? If not; then look forward. And what is it you behold? A judge that tries the heart and reins, seated upon a throne of fire! Before him the law, which condemns, not only the commission of sin, but the mere inclination to it; and on his left, a crowd of wailing, despairing beings—beings like yourself—on whom we hear the sentence pronounced: "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire!" And see, they are departing! Eternal darkness receives them; fire that cannot be quenched envelopes them! Ah, what a dreadful back-ground is this to the picture of your life! Yet to this awful tribunal you are fast hastening. Son of man, can you still be joyful? But come: take one more look, and let it be into your own heart. What is it you behold there? Ruin and desolation. The temple is dismantled! Sin and insensibility are visible on every hand; but no love to God, no heavenly-mindedness, no peace! O wretched, miserable man, who, in order to be happy, must close your eyes, and forget yourself: for whom heaven and hell, the past and the future, present objects only of terror and despair! Of a truth, there is

nothing more wretched and pitiable than a man without Christ! But, in Christ, there is true peace and joy. Is the immediate prospect gloomy? the distant one is bright. Do present enjoyments fail? the hope of the future is cheering and delightful.

Do you ask, what hope? I reply: a crown awaits believers. Sinners and crowns! how can they be united? In Christ, it is easy. A crown is the inheritance of the saints in light, their future glory. Well may that be called a crown, whose excellence is so transcendent, under the weight of which we shall for ever bow down, and which we shall rightfully wear, as the children of a king. For are we not the seed of the eternal King, and, in a spiritual sense, "flesh of his flesh, and bone of his bone?" And may it not likewise be termed "a crown of righteousness," inasmuch as it comes to us of right, by the Son of God graciously given to us, and his merits made over to us as our treasure? Christ, who is worthy, is crowned; but we are his body, the inheritors of his kingdom. What says Paul? "Henceforth," he declares, "there is laid up for me a crown!" But what think you? Did Paul promise to himself the crown, because he was the apostle Paul? If such be your opinion, you are greatly mistaken in the man. It is true, he could testify of himself, "I have fought a good fight." But who was it fought the good fight? The Spirit that was with him. In what, then, consisted his glory? He was in Christ. What "is a good fight?" A fight that is maintained against the right enemy, and is crowned with success. You all fight this fight, if you belong to Christ. It is with the devil you contend; and you maintain the field against him. Paul, indeed, could boast, "I have kept the faith!" but do not all the children of grace keep the faith? Did the High Priest pray for one only that his faith might not fail; or did He not, in this prayer, extend the wing of grace over all his people? The faith of believers may waver, but it cannot die away;—it may be cast down, but it will ever rise

again. It is true Paul could say; "I have finished my course!" But the servants of Christ, when their hour is come, can one and all make the same declaration. No Christian dies too early. He has finished, when the Lord calls him, what he had to do. Undoubtedly Paul was able to witness of himself, "I have laboured more abundantly than they all!" But what does he add? "Yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me!" To grace he ascribes all the honour.

Paul the apostle, when he speaks boastingly of himself, desires only to magnify the grace of God. On the other hand, when he looks upon himself apart from grace, he has nothing better to declare, than that he is "the chief of sinners." None, therefore, need feel dispirited by St. Paul's declaration, "There is laid up for me a crown;" should any one, however, still feel discouraged, let him read Paul's declaration to the end: "And not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing!" How consoling! "Them also that love his appearing!" Oh, that will be a vast multitude! A multitude, not composed exclusively of those, who in the triumph of faith, shout their hallelujahs! who, by their God, leap over walls, and tread upon serpents and scorpions; it likewise comprehends the dove mourning in the valley, and the worm trodden in the earth. O ye, who mourn and weep under the conviction of sin, do ye not love the appearing of Jesus? Ye, who have sunk under the pressure of temptation, what is dearer to you, than the appearing of Jesus? Ye who mourn your barrenness, after what is it that ye languish? After Jesus! Ye who are fallen in Zion,—your eyes being opened to perceive your decline—can you rest till Jesus again appears? And ye, the weakest in the kingdom, who are fearfully inquiring, "Where makest thou thy flock to rest at noon?" who weep that ye love his appearing so little; Oh, how precious is he to you! Stand upon the shore, and look watchfully around, and you will soon discover the approach of him, who is your only Saviour. Oh!

with what confidence may you all exclaim with Paul, "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown!" Yes, it is indeed so! Rejoice in it with cheerful confidence! Should Satan strive to mislead you, should he address you, as king Saul once did his servants: "Will the son of Jesse give every one of you fields and vineyards, and make you all captains of thousands, and captains of hundreds?" Set him at naught, and reply: "Yes, should it please the son of Jesse so to do! Get thee behind us, Satan!"

It is said of this crown, that it is "laid up" for us. The expression is significant. Its primary meaning is, kept in store for us. Our crown hangs on the pillars of heaven, and is awaiting us. "Laid up" may also imply concealment, which requires the exercise of tranquillity and patience. The crown is in heaven, and not on earth. He, who should imagine, that perfect holiness must be attained here, would fall into self-delusion and despair. While here below, let us be satisfied with grace, and make our robes "white in the blood of the Lamb!" "Laid up" also signifies, secured, placed in safety. Oh! what consolation does the word, in this sense, afford to those, who cannot trust their own hearts; who, in their own name, can promise nothing; who are beset by all the powers of darkness, that seek their ruin. Whatever now befalls them, they may exclaim with the apostle, not only, "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown;" but also, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day!" Yes, the glorious day, when we shall receive the crown, will come; the day of triumph after the conflict, of sunshine after the storm. Happy day, to which no night will succeed, and whose peaceful length no discord will ever interrupt! Oh when will the day, that shall clothe us with white robes, and place palms in our hands, awake us with its beams! When will thy sweet light beam upon our countenance! O day of bliss, arise! Shine forth, and dispel our night!

And should the day be still distant, its prospect is in view, and affords us consolation in the midst of storms and darkness. Does the stream of time roll over us, our greatest treasure is not carried away by it; its waves but bear us to a crown. We are pilgrims, "as all our fathers were;" the afflictions that assail us, are many and varied. We have always something to distress and pain us. Our feet are wounded as we travel; the wreath we wear is composed of thorns; but the crown, that is laid up for us in heaven, makes every cross light, and sweetens every bitter cup. Are we poor? A piece of dry bread, with this crown in view, becomes a royal meal. Does the world misunderstand us? What matters it, if we do but perceive the crown in the distance? Are we oppressed by domestic embarrassments and cares? No sooner does the crown present itself to the eye of faith, than the heart is relieved, and we breathe freely. Are we encompassed by thick darkness? It at once becomes supportable, if, through the clouds, we obtain but a glimpse of that crown. It is our consolation in suffering, our companion in solitude, our honour when reviled, the ornament of our destitution. Yes, one thing alone is needful, the consciousness that this crown awaits us, in order to calm the mind, and to enable us to rise, as it were like eagles, above the mists of this vale of tears.

II. Our narrative transports us again to the streets of Samaria. Who is that approaching us, looking so dejected and disquieted? It is Jehoram, the king of Israel. How changed in his appearance! Where are his attendants? Where the insignia of his state? He advances like one of the meanest citizens, and seems no longer to require the homage of his people. Distress accomplishes great changes; and times of public calamity not unfrequently resemble those intervals of a masquerade, when the maskers lay aside their disguise. It breaks down all distinctions, and reduces men to the same level. Much

that was once most highly prized, appears now worthless and out of course. At such times, virtue alone can command consideration: titles lose their value; the decorations of rank and dignity no longer impose. A scene, somewhat resembling the judgment-day, presents itself, in which every other distinction, except that of inward worth, whether it be of birth, of office, or of education, is abolished. Poor Jehoram! if thy majesty be all that thou hast now to depend on for preserving the loyalty of thy people, then thou art vainly expecting them to strew flowers in thy path, as formerly. They who are fearing starvation, have little respect for mere external appearances. If, as the father of thy people, thou hast gained their love, this tie is indissoluble; and this only.

But where is the king going? Perhaps to the walls, to inspect the different posts; perhaps to reconnoitre the enemy, in order to determine upon the propriety of a sortie. Upon the surrender of the town, Jehoram could only reflect with terror, as upon the extremity of misfortune. He may have thought, as David thought, that it was better to fall into the hands of God, than into the hands of men. The surrender of Samaria, too, would be the abandonment of the only position, whence he could hope to recover his lost kingdom. And how difficult is it, how inexpressibly difficult, after suffering a variety of discomfitures, to give up a strong hold, between which, and utter destruction, there is no other refuge! Call to mind your first awakening from spiritual sleep, when one, then a stranger to you, dissolved the charm of self-delusion, deprived you of every ground of self-confidence, rent in pieces the thin texture of your supposed virtues, changed your confidence in duties, faithfully fulfilled, into a dread of the curse, and a consciousness of merited condemnation! One plea only remained to you in your distress. Your good intentions; your so called good heart was still your own. Oh, how tenaciously you clung to, and fortified yourself in this last hold! How resolved were you to

live and die in its defence, for you beheld the gulf of despair yawning beyond it! But the lying conflict ceased, and truth prevailed. You were overpowered, and compelled, though for your own good, to give up your heart as worthy of death. No sooner were you dead to self, than you arose to life in Christ. Now your strong hold is the blood of Christ; and to this you cling in spite of all the efforts of the devil to shake your confidence. It is your trust, though a thousand voices cry, "It was not shed for you!" Though your sins mount up to heaven; yes, though you can find within you neither faith, nor love, you still will not abandon it; for it is your last ground of hope, your last dependence.

As the king approaches the walls, near which, in large cities, the common people generally dwell, a scene presents itself to his view, which, while it excites a shudder, at once discovers to him the dreadful height to which misery had already risen in the capital. With dishevelled hair, and with the most frightful ferocity and despair, depicted in her countenance, a woman rushes before him, crying: "Help, my lord, O king!" The king, greatly shocked, looks at the frantic woman, and partly influenced by compassion, partly by vexation and rage, at the great distress that prevailed in his city, ungraciously replies: "If the Lord do not help thee, whence shall I help thee? out of the barn floor, or out of the wine press?" The king is therefore without resource, and so great is the existing distress, that he is forced to confess his inability to assist even a beggar! He refers the unhappy woman to God. "The Lord help thee," he says; and this wish is all he has to give her. "The king?" Yes, the king! "And he refers her to God?" To God, and not to Baal, or the golden calf. "But how does it happen that Jehoram does this?" Ah, the pressure of calamity has again revived within him, the long suppressed consciousness that Jehovah is God. Having no earthly fastening on which to fix his hope, he grasps, in despair, at heaven. Do not, however,

imagine, that this is the only example on record of the ungodly, and of atheists, when tortured by distress, suddenly acknowledging a God, although they had previously denied to the devil the existence of such a being. Monarchs, who trampled on religion, because it was opposed to their lusts, have, when calamity overtook them, appointed days of humiliation, and have confessed in their public proclamations, that the country was lost, if God did not help. Freethinkers, who have spent their lives in attempts to demonstrate the non-existence of a God, have cried to him in their anguish, and have vowed, I know not what, if he would but relieve them. Such examples are but faint representations of that awful scene, which the great day of account will reveal to us; that day, on which, every knee, even thine, Satan, shall bow "to Him that sitteth upon the throne," and every tongue, though paralysed with awe, shall confess, either with wailings from the pit of despair, or with acclamations of joy and rejoicing, that he is Lord, and his "the kingdom, and the power, and the glory." The consciousness that there is a God, is inextinguishable in every human breast; though the devil, fleshly lusts, and the love of fame, may induce men to deny, and, as it were, bind and imprison it; yet in due time, it breaks the strongest bands, and, not unfrequently, takes a fearful revenge on its adversary.

The woman, little appeased by the king's answer, continued to wring her hands and cry "Help, my lord, O king!" Then the king said unto her, "What aileth thee?" And now a story is unfolded, that might make one's hair stand on end. Excited almost to madness, she declares, "This woman and myself, tormented by hunger, made an agreement. She said unto me, Give me thy son, that we may eat him to day; and to-morrow we will eat my son! I agreed to this, and my son we have already killed, boiled, and eaten. The next day I said to her, Give thy son, that we may eat him: but her son has disappeared. She has concealed him, and now pretends that

she cannot find him." This is her horrible complaint, One vial of that dreadful curse, denounced from Mount Ebal on all in Israel who forsook God, is here poured out. One part of this curse was: "Thou shalt eat the fruit of thine own body, the flesh of thy sons and of thy daughters, which the Lord thy God hath given thee, in the siege, and in the straitness, wherewith thine enemies shall distress thee!" And thus it has come to pass in Samaria. Is there anything too horrible for man to perpetrate, when left to himself? What the most ferocious animal would scarcely do, he is capable of, if circumstances tempt. There is nothing that he will not offer to his self-love, should it demand the sacrifice. Under certain circumstances, he will offer the strongest and tenderest affections of his nature on the altar of this Moloch. He is his own god, his desires are supreme above all things, and heaven and earth must give way, if the interests of this idol require it. Alas! what unbelief, what distrust in the power and goodness of God! Nothing but the regenerating power of God's Spirit can subdue this leviathan in the human heart! See this woman! how much more easy is it to her to renounce the affections of a mother, than to give up this monster! Her son, the fruit of her body, she can sacrifice in her need; but not the erroneous opinion, that they, who cannot help themselves, are lost. Oh! it is impossible to estimate the degree in which man is estranged from God, and the extent in which all the divine lineaments of his original nature, have been changed into their contraries. Instead of living alone in God, as a branch does in the tree from which it springs, man has quitted the source of his being, and has struck root for himself. He has enthroned himself as his own god, and his selfish and flinty heart no longer emits a spark of true faith.

To render the horrors of the scene in Samaria complete, the frenzy of the woman does not arise so much from despair at the fate of her son, as from sorrow and vexation that she cannot again imbrue her hands in blood, and

satiate her appetite with human flesh, her neighbour having refused to fulfil her part of their compact. What deep depravity does this wretched woman display; and how debased does human nature appear in her! High as man once stood above the beasts that perish, he is now degraded beneath them, by his revolt from God; and though, with his mental endowments, it is impossible for him to become one of them, yet, in his degenerate state, he forms a pitiable link between them and devils. I am aware, that this assertion must sound harsh, and that general experience appears to contradict it. It is true, that this degeneracy of the former lord of the creation does not, uniformly, and at all times, exhibit itself in the same dark colours; yet this must not be ascribed to man, but to Him who, in the unseen fetters with which he keeps the ocean in subjection, presents to our view an emblem of the power, by which, whether we are sensible of it or not, he bridles and controls our degenerate race. It is impossible, under every pressure, to give that free scope to our evil propensities, which passion would dictate; God holds them in secret subjection, by his omnipotent word; he has encompassed them with the strong fence of civil magistracy, and with the still more effective safeguard of that indescrivable law, which we call public opinion, national morals, or custom.

There are times, when God permits this chain to be rent asunder, and the control imposed by habit and public opinion, to be dissolved. Man's true character then displays itself. These outbreaks of human corruption, however, cause the Scripture doctrines of redemption and reconciliation to emerge from the cloud of doubt, with which delusion and self love had obscured them, and to shine like stars in the night. These doctrines, so long considered as exploded, now appear with renovated splendour, being confirmed by experience; and, at their touch, the fanciful creations of a man-idolizing philosophy quickly vanish.

III. The king, shocked and greatly afflicted by the horrible tale of the distracted woman, rends his garment, and thus discovers to the assembled people a sight, that must create in us, also, no small degree of astonishment. Beneath this upper garment, the only one which the king has on, is seen a rough hair sackcloth next his skin. Sackcloth! Yes, and the sight is cheering; for it promises blessing to his people. It is more exhilarating than if he had appeared, in glittering armour, at the head of a powerful army. King of Israel, this garment forebodes a triumph! Thus attired, you will save Samaria! You never appeared so attractive to your people; what your purple could not accomplish, this garment of penitence has effected: it has drawn our hearts towards you!

Is Jehoram then penitent? In his way, he is so. It is not his person, merely, that is clothed in sackcloth, his soul likewise mourns under the consciousness, that the calamity which has befallen the city, is a judgment from God inflicted for his and his people's sins. He recognises in it, the chastisement of the Divine displeasure. The sackcloth is the sincere expression of his inward feeling; though this may partake less of that holy repentance, which contains the germ of the new birth, than of selfish alarm at the fearful consequences to which accumulated transgression has given rise. But how often has this sentiment turned aside the impending rod of Divine wrath! for it is always expressive of submission to God, an acknowledgment of guilt, and of the justice of the Divine visitation. Oh that we could see the many-headed man of sin, in this congregation and town, rending his garment, though it were only in the manner of Jehoram, and that we could perceive, through the rent, anything resembling sackcloth! But were his upper garment to be opened, what would appear but the gaudy vesture of an absurd self-sufficiency, or the flimsy covering of a total, God-forgetting frivolity. But know, if any thing can disperse the thunder-clouds collecting over your heads, it is not the Pharisaical cloak of

affected piety, nor the showy dress of moral virtue, but the sackcloth of contrition before the Lord. If you do not bend beneath the unsheathed sword, it will inflict upon you the wound of eternal death!

Was God, then, you ask, reconciled by repentance? Ah, nothing can reconcile man to God, but the blood of Christ. True repentance smooths the way for the communication of this blood, and is, in so far, the first step to eternal redemption. Although now and then, the threatenings denounced by the Almighty have been rescinded on the bare confession of guilt, it must not thence be concluded, that there was anything in this confession, as such, that could appease his righteous displeasure. Rather consider the Divine procedure in such cases, as an intimation of the way, in which alone salvation is to be obtained—the way of self-condemnation, humiliation, and grace. If there be any atoning quality in repentance, it is only at the bar of human judgment. To an offender, in whose eye the tear of penitence trembles, our whole heart immediately inclines. However deeply he may have fallen, he is from that moment reclaimed to us, and we to him; we cannot withhold from him our sympathy, or our attachment. But is not this a tacit admission, that the voice of true repentance is the first indication of the new birth? The sorrow which the Scriptures denominate godly, is, when the seed it bears within it is considered, something extremely significant and comprehensive. It is submission to the law; a tribute of praise to the holiness of the Lord; a separation from sin; a renunciation of the devil and his kingdom; an adhesion to the kingdom of light; resurrection from the dead. It is the most important change, that can take place in the life of man—the most unpretending, but most eventful subject that can engage the human mind. Can it, then, be matter of wonder, that the entire new covenant should appear to be dependent on repentance—that the Scriptures should deny the possibility of salvation

without it—and that there should even be joy “in heaven over one sinner that repenteth?” Surely not.

Let me, however, caution you against viewing repentance in an erroneous light. How often, at the bed of sickness, when we point the anxious sinner to Jesus, is this the reply, “How can I venture to hope anything from the Lord? I have not yet complied even with the leading condition, on which he receives and blesses sinners; I have never sincerely repented.” Do we, then, urge them, instead of seeking the virtue of repentance, to fall at once at the feet of the sinner’s Friend, and to plead his infinite mercy, they look at us with surprise and doubt, as if we had given them erroneous counsel, and made too light of the subject of salvation. But are they, indeed, so very wrong in this? Is there acceptance without the certificate of repentance? Lo, here we have the error in our very midst, and the greater its resemblance to truth, the greater the danger to our peace of mind. It is true, that without repentance, there is no salvation; but neither is there without regeneration and sanctification. Must they, also, think you, be possessed, before the Saviour can be approached? Undoubtedly you think with me, that they are received from his fulness, after we have come to him. And is it different with repentance? Is repentance a condition that must be fulfilled, before we can venture to come to Jesus? Oh, do not convert what is a gift into a duty; do not account that legal, which is free grace! Show me a single passage of Scripture, in which it is said, that without perfect repentance, no one can indulge the hope of a kind reception from Jesus. Turn in whatever direction I will, nowhere do I see the throne of grace surrounded by a fence of requirements. I can only hear the King invite to his feast all that are hungry, for that all is ready. I hear him say: “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden,” that is, all that wish to be relieved of their burden. Everywhere, I find the freest promises of

mercy. To "sinners" glad tidings are addressed. He will not only grant them life, but repentance also. "He will give repentance to Israel." "I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh." Oh, how many, from whom the consciousness of guilt never extorted a tear, yet, under a vague feeling that Jesus was necessary to them in life and death, and encouraged by the condescension and kindness of the Friend of sinners, have, without hesitation, made him their refuge; and no sooner has the Divine Redeemer lifted upon them the light of his countenance, than they have shed the tears of a Publican, or a Magdalen. Away, then, with the legal notion, which worketh death, that admission into the house of the Lord requires, I know not what amount of grief and sorrow. Do not causelessly delay this joyful day, nor of your own choice, make that yoke heavy to yourselves, of which Christ himself testifies, that it is light and easy. Bid adieu to all legal ideas of repentance, and know that, although necessary, it is only the medium of reception, like the mouth, and not the procuring cause. It is only requisite, as rendering capable of enjoyment, and not as a legal work. The attempt must be made in faith, and not with scrupulous anxiety about title and qualification. Your right to an entrance depends upon free grace alone. The new covenant is opened to sinners, with the exhortation, "Fear not!" How then can you still dream of merit and reward? Learn to believe in God, who justifies the ungodly. Let not your thoughts dwell exclusively on the words, "Repent and believe!" but remember it is also said, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth!" Listen not only to the declaration, "Ye must be born again!" but also to the words, "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live!" and remember that these words immediately concern you.—"What," you ask, "must I come to Jesus without contrition, without tears, just as I now am?" Yes, come as best you can! and come in full

assurance that, naked as you are, he will not close the door against you. Without coming to Jesus, there is no salvation; but there is no condition attached to coming. Here all distinction ceases between the righteous and the unrighteous, between great and smaller offences. Here there is one privilege to all, one hope for those who weep for their transgressions, and for those who have to complain of the hardness of their hearts. All may approach, with confidence, whose desire is Christ and his salvation. Here the promise stands sure: "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out!" Observe, the Saviour does not say, "Him that cometh in this way, or that way," nor yet: "Him that cometh in this form, or in the other;" but he says, without limitation or condition, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." "But what," I hear some one inquire, "is meant by coming to him?" It is to desire him. "But does not this desire pre-suppose a heartfelt need of him?" Undoubtedly it does. "And this need implies a knowledge of sin?" Certainly, and sorrow for sin! "Then it still appears, that, without repentance, no one comes to Jesus!" No; no one comes to him without a certain degree of repentance. Observe, I say, No one comes without it; I also say, No one can come without it; and in so saying, I express the matter correctly: whilst he who says, "Without repentance no one must come," would speak of the subject inappropriately, because conditionally and legally. If you come to Jesus with an imploring, longing heart, you possess, though to yourself it may be unknown, a sufficient sense of sin to indicate one who is called of the Lord. Nothing further is required. Susceptibility for God's salvation is there; that is quite enough. Come, then, and hope all things. Say with the leper, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean!" Pray with the prophet, "We do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousness, but for thy great mercies." If he appear to repulse you, then plead with the Canaanitish woman: "True, Lord; yet

the dogs eat of the crumbs, which fall from their master's table;" and you will experience the entire truth of the blessed assurance: "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." May this be the experience of all of

V.—DIVINE PROTECTION.

“BLESSED is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!” This, according to Luke xiv. 15, was the saying of one who sat at meat with Jesus, and heard the words of life, as they fell from his lips. We can repeat the declaration, but with clearer perceptions. It is this kingdom, that gives value to existence; and its bread is the true bread of eternal life. Its sovereign and ruler is Christ. It is not a kingdom of this world; it can neither be subverted, nor extended, by the sword. Its boundaries are not confined to earth; and its wealth is of a heavenly character. The foundation of this kingdom was laid in the promise given in Paradise; it was typified in the theocratic constitution of the Divine government of Israel; the prophets foresaw and hailed its further development; with the incarnation of the Son, it entered upon a new period, the one in which it now stands; its next period will be that in which there shall be on earth, “one fold and one shepherd;” and its last and perfect state will commence on the day of general resurrection, of final separation, and the promised glorification of the world, when God shall be all in all.

Oh delightful kingdom of the King of Glory! If thou didst not interpose between the kingdom of this world, and the powers of darkness, how could I rejoice in my existence? I love the standard of my country; but under its banner, I cannot conquer death, the silent anguish of my heart, or the terrors of eternity. I value the blessings of a well-ordered civil economy; but in what do they promote our peace of mind, or our salvation? Our passage through this world is short; a span of time, and—we are no more; but I desire to be something beyond a mere

citizen of this world. Most of you, I am aware, belong only to the latter, and for the moment, you may be contented, and experience no want of any higher state. You have a sufficiency, a thriving family, and peaceful home; but wait and see! Evil days will come also upon you; and then how will it be? Sickness enters your hitherto happy dwelling; the physician looks doubtfully and shakes his head. Now alas! you need the great Physician to whom the sisters in Bethany once said, "Behold, he whom thou lovest is sick,"—for you belong only to the kingdom of this world; and how wretched does it now appear to you! Your worldly substance fails, and with it you lose your all. You cannot stand with composure on the ruins, and say, "Is this all my loss? If so, I still retain the best!" Alas, you are but a child of this world; and if its goods be withdrawn, you have nothing left. The world disowns you—confidence is no longer placed in you. Can you now say with Job, "My witness is in heaven, and my record is on high!" No, your habitations are only in the kingdom of this world. Men, not only misjudge you, but they forsake you. You are deserted by one and all. Had you now but a friend more faithful than man! One, on whose bosom you could weep when afflicted; and in whose embrace you could forget the painful desertion of mankind! But you belong only to the kingdom of this world, and are destitute of such a friend; and the worst is still to come. Death enters your dwelling, and tears from your arms your best beloved. Now all is gone; you stand alone; the world can offer you no consolation; and to Him who could, you are a stranger—you know him not; for you have no knowledge of any world but this. At length, your own turn comes—your days have passed away like a shadow. Sickness, or old age, has overtaken you. Shortly, you must bid adieu to all things—you see the time hastening on. The wreck is dreadful! And what of all will you be able to save? nothing; for all you possess is of this world, and must remain in it. You have no

country above, you know of no "everlasting habitations" prepared for you. God is unknown to you; Jesus is unknown to you; the holy angels and the company of the just made perfect are unknown to you. You stand poor and destitute, without prospects, without hope and peace; for ah! you belong only to this world. That kingdom is hid from your view, in which the poorest Lazarus is richer than you; the most forsaken less forlorn than you in the midst of your associates; the most dejected more joyous than you, though possessed of all your so called happiness; that kingdom, where, besides material bread, we are partakers of another; where we know ourselves in communion with others whom we love, besides those with whom we walk on earth; where the best is always in prospect, and the dying, as those who have their home in sight, are to be envied not pitied; that kingdom, in which a Simeon could say with joy, "Now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace"—a Jacob, "I have seen God, and my soul doth live!"—an Asaph, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee;"—a Paul, "Our conversation is in heaven;"—that kingdom, in which a thief upon the cross is blessed; a Stephen, while being stoned, is happy; that kingdom, over which the heavens stand open, and to which the angels of God ascend and descend: of all this you are ignorant; you live beyond its precincts. But to be excluded from this kingdom is the greatest misfortune.

Oh blessed kingdom! May thy dominion be enlarged—thy boundaries extended! And this will surely happen. The King is powerful; his kingdom eternal. "The kingdoms of this world" endure for a time, and then fall. But fall what may, though it be the world itself, the pillars of this kingdom will stand fast. Its enemies are powerful, fierce, and wild: and never were they arrayed against it with more hostility, than in the present day. But what then? Before they can attain their end, and root out this

kingdom from the world, they must be able to extinguish, in the human mind, the desire of eternal life, to banish sin from the heart, and, by their philosophizing, to quiet the awakened conscience ; they must be capable of proving to the terrified soul, that “there is no God,” or that he is not a holy God ; they must have power to make an end of death, which rends the closest ties, to destroy, in the mind, the irresistible desire of reunion, to soothe the affliction of those dissolved in tears, at the graves of departed friends, dearer to them, perhaps, than life itself, with something more consoling than the undeniable declaration, that their career does not terminate beneath the sods that cover their graves ; but that, for such sheaves of humanity, God has prepared eternal receptacles : to all this, they must be equal, before they can extirpate Christianity, or destroy the love of Christ’s kingdom. But so long as there is one human being upon earth that pants for heaven ;—so long as there is one to repeat the cry of the Psalmist, “When shall I come and appear before God ?” —so long as there is one heart wounded under a consciousness of sin ; one poor sinner mournfully to exclaim, “Who shall deliver me from the body of this death ?” one soul devoted to another, whom it would eternally love ; one mind that forebodes an eternal existence ;—so long as one eye looks upwards through the darkness, and with tears inquires, “Is there no better home than this vale of tears ? and where is it, and which is the way ?” —so long, O thou kingdom of Christ, there is nothing to fear for thee ! So long, blessed gospel, art thou sure of friends ! So long, bleeding Jesus, wilt thou be held in honour ! So long, despite the tumult in the hostile camp, will hosannas resound. In the hour of need—of real need—nothing stands the test, nothing remains to man, but thee, blessed Jesus ! and the consolations of thy kingdom.

A view of this kingdom, and of the security it affords to its children, is unfolded to us, in our present narrative. May it revive in those who are already numbered amongst

its citizens, the consciousness of their happy state ; and animate in those who are at present excluded from it, an earnest desire to be admitted through the merits of the Saviour Jesus Christ ! May God so order it, by his Holy Spirit !

2 KINGS VI. 31—33.

Then he (Jehoram) said, God do so and more also to me, if the head of Elisha the son of Shaphat shall stand on him this day. But Elisha sat in his house, and the elders sat with him ; and the king sent a man before him : but ere the messenger came to him, he said to the elders, See ye how this son of a murderer hath sent to take away mine head ? look when the messenger cometh, shut the door, and hold him fast at the door : is not the sound of his master's feet behind him ? And while he yet talked with them, behold the messenger came down unto him : and he said, Behold, this evil is of the Lord ; what should I wait for the Lord any longer ?

Our narrative presents to us an interesting and edifying subject, though it may appear amid flames of fire ! It is a new scene in that picture of misery and desire of relief ; which was commenced in the former part of this narrative. The points to which I shall now direct your attention are, I. Jehoram's oath. II. Elisha's distress. III. God's relief. Under these three heads, we shall discover a mass of Divine truth, worthy of most serious consideration.

I. Our narrative transports us again to Samaria ; to the spot where Jehoram, shocked at the tale of the unhappy woman who had killed her son, rends his garment and discovers the sackcloth beneath it. With inward satisfaction, we behold the king thus attired. He now appears to us like a hope-giving meteor, a bright star of promise, in the dark night of sorrow, which had settled on the city. We breathe more freely, and hail its appearance, in the heavy atmosphere of this awful judgment, as a glittering rod to conduct the lightning from our heads. Oh how vast a blessing might the monarchs of this earth be to their people, if they placed their chief glory in living

among their subjects, as those who from the heart fear God and walk before him! Were they successful in this, they might boldly lay aside the exterior pomp of majesty, which dazzles for the moment, but commands no lasting respect. God would give them another safeguard, one that should control the heart, and, by its secret energy, hold the godless in subjection, as with an iron band, and the just, by the sacred tie of devotion to law and order. Such princes would have no need of the imposing words, "We, by the grace of God," for before they could be uttered by the lips, their whole appearance would impress the fact upon our hearts. In prosperity they would be their people's joy; in adversity their consolation and support. Yes, they would occupy, in a manner, the office of mediator. It would be thought that, for their sakes, this and that threatening calamity would be averted from the state; and men would attach themselves to them, as if by so doing, they were received under the wings of Him, whom they honoured in return. The shield of God beams over their heads. We behold its splendour, and take courage. And what shall I say of their example, that silent but energetic power, which scarcely requires the prescriptive use of letters, but which writes its laws, without the aid of parchment, directly on the heart? What of the confidence inevitably placed in the upright intentions of such rulers, which forms the surest defence against the waves of political discontent, the firmest ground of true attachment and loyalty, on the part of the people? Yes, would a prince be secure in his elevated position, and make his government a blessing, let him establish his throne upon the word of God, his glory in the fear of the Lord; let him lay down his crown at the Almighty's feet, kneel before Jehovah day and night, and wear, beneath his purple, the garb of repentance and prayer. The discernment of the people will soon discover it, and "God bless and save the king!" would be the constant cry of their hearts.

Although Jehoram has been the immediate cause of

these reflections, it is not our intention to hold him up as an example to princes. Unhappily, the beautiful light in which he appears to stand, is little more than delusion. The sentiments of his heart form a striking contrast to the sackcloth that he wears. Not that, so attired, he is a mere hypocrite; still less is he a true penitent. Under the appearance of the lamb, the fierceness of the wolf is concealed. At the very moment that his rent garment discovers the sackcloth vest, the murderous oath bursts from his lips, "God do so, and more also to me, if the head of Elisha the son of Shaphat shall stand on him this day." Can a more striking contrast than this be imagined? The king, humbling himself before the Lord, and confessing that this calamity is justly inflicted for his sins, and, at the same moment, foaming with rage against the man whom he considers the instrument, employed by God, to bring the calamity upon him. These characteristics show him to be a man whose submission to God is but little better than that of the devils who tremble; it indicates nothing of tearful, holy contrition—of genuine love to God, called into existence by the breath of the Holy Spirit. In Jehoram, there is fear, but no love; no childlike sorrow for having offended the Almighty; there is only a slavish apprehension at having provoked him. He would destroy God, were it in his power; but that being impossible, his anger directs the dagger against his ambassador. For, while in the attitude of a penitent before the Almighty, he calls upon Him to let his curse alight upon his head, if before the evening of that day, he have not crushed Elisha, the instrument of God's anger. Thus, in the natural man, when he feels the rod of God's chastisement, the ancient fable of the Titans, storming heaven, becomes reality and truth. His impotence alone sets bounds to his passion; for could he follow his inclination, he would overthrow the eternal hills in his rage, and break in pieces the throne of God. If, on the one hand, it is not to be denied that there is something gigantic in this audacity of a miserable

earthworm : it may serve likewise, in some measure, to show the extent of the capability of human nature before its satanic change. A creature that, in the magnitude of its depravity and rage, can thus declare war against the Almighty, of what immeasurable love to God, what glowing zeal for his honour would it not have been capable, before its original excellencies and powers were transformed into their infernal opposites !

The son of Shaphat is doomed to die. Observe how Jehoram, whilst cursing him, ascribes to him the highest honour. For why does he seek his life, if not because, in him, he sees the man, who has called down this great calamity upon Samaria, or who, had he pleased, could by his intercession have averted it. In how elevated a position does he place the prophet ! Does he not, in his rage, unconsciously affix a flaming seal of recognition to his credentials as God's vicegerent ? Does he not tacitly raise him high above himself in power and influence, and invest him with incomparably greater glory, by his curse, than he would have done, had he heaped upon him titles, and ornamented his person with chains of gold, and other decorations of worldly greatness ? And indeed, believers in general are not dishonoured by the irreconcilable enmity of the world. The world thereby concedes to them no small degree of importance, however they may affect to despise them. They betray at least the fact, that the children of light are everywhere a reproach to them, and that their spiritual earnestness condemns their frivolous and worldly pursuits ; they feel themselves exposed in their carnal ease and doubtful security. Yes, they acknowledge, by their enmity, the essential difference between themselves and the disciples of the Lord ; and tacitly confess that they possess the truth and the law, which they hate, and of which they desire not to be reminded ; invest them with the office of accusers and silent witnesses against them before God, and justify, exalt, and crown them, as Jehoram did the prophet, while they design their degradation.

How gratified were we at meeting Jehoram in sackcloth and ashes ; and now these terrible words upon his lips, and in these words the unbroken heart, consumed with no other fire than that of despair and enmity to God, contemplating only murder and revenge, instead of reconciliation and the conquest of his sins ! Oh, can there be anything more painful to a Christian heart, than such delusions ? but, alas ! they are not unfrequent ! They are discoverable, however, for the most part, only in such persons as remarkably outshine others in sanctity of appearance, and who are not content, like Jehoram, to wear the badge of repentance beneath their upper garment, but expose it to view ; who are always anointed, always ready, always in a devout and prayerful spirit. In such persons, I own, my heart has no confidence. It is but seldom, that from under the outward appearance of such people, I have perceived an unmixed savour of heartfelt sincerity. If they were not whited sepulchres, they were strongly tingured with falsehood, and it was always doubtful, what was affected and unreal, and what was genuine and free. I love the brethren in their every day appearance, who, but little esteeming their own godliness, are more inclined to conceal their inward life, than to display it in the marketplace, yet, at the same time, cannot prevent their hidden light from shining through the covering of their plain and unpretending exterior ; who resemble the small dark clouds, from which we expect only the usual showers, but which, when the sun shines upon them, gladden our eyes and our hearts with the mild splendours of the peaceful rainbow. The more completely that any one finds in Christ his all in all, the more clearly will the impress of pure truth be stamped upon him. Christians, who think they must find in themselves a partial ground of acceptance with God, will always bear about them something formal and overcharged. Their hope of heaven, as they suppose, plainly requires them constantly to preserve a certain godly appearance, so that it must be of no little

importance to them to hear from others the agreeable opinion, that they are pious, anointed, and righteous persons. Alas! their anchor is cast in the sand of self-glorification; what wonder then, that they are always occupied in heaping it together! It is otherwise with those, who know what grace is. They are free and royal persons, raised far above the judgment of others, and of themselves, by the consciousness, that though their hearts condemn them, "God is greater than" their hearts, "and knoweth all things." They do not give themselves up to any petty considerations of their own works. Those whose virtues are the greatest in Christ, attach no value to them; in striking the grand balance rendered to the Lord, the merits of the Surety are alone required, or accepted. Assured of their interest in the righteousness of Christ, they are not anxious about their personal decoration and outward appearance. They possess the latter, but as things to which they attach no meritorious value, as they constitute, in no degree, the ground of their salvation and life. Rich as they are in spiritual practice and experience, they cling not to these treasures; their attention is directed to a different object; their dependence is not on themselves. In this they resemble true kings, who, in the consciousness of their unquestionable rank, appear with dignified simplicity and ease, leaving all gaudy trappings and formal gravity to the kings of the stage. The rest more closely resemble those who act the kingly part, and cannot therefore dispense with the tinsel of outward decoration.

II. The situation of Elisha is a difficult one, and attracts our attention afresh. The situation of the best beloved children of God, is not always one of delight; it more frequently resembles that of Him whom they love, when crowned with thorns. It evidently appears to be ordained by God, that so long as Christ himself waits for the full development of his kingly glory, so long the church shall remain in obscurity, and their own glory and the glory of

the Lord be matters of faith. The entrance into the kingdom of the Lord, is, according to the Scriptures, unavoidably through "tribulation." God calculates upon the elasticity of the renewed soul, which enables it to struggle upwards, with a vigour proportioned to the pressure laid upon it. We are generally inclined to persuade ourselves, that when the one great offering of a broken heart has been made to God, no further sacrifice will be required of us. What did it not cost us, before we could lay our hearts, so deeply sunk in sensuality and sin, at his feet! To what self-denial, what mortification were we not forced to submit! Now, we think he will lead us gently and smoothly, and strew our path with the flowers of joy. But how different do we find it! how soon are we called to new privations! One wound is scarcely healed, before another, perhaps, still more painful, is opened. Has a little paradise sprung up around us, either of domestic happiness, or on the field of public duty, or in any other quarter? How soon does it fade from our view! That we may not take root in these earthly Edens, but that the heavenly desire for Jerusalem may be kept bright and burning within us. We are not to grow to what is earthly; and should this happen, a storm quickly arises, again to loosen our roots. Our hopes and desires are to cling to what is imperishable. To live on this side the grave, as in eternity and its pleasures, is the great and distinguished calling of the people of God.

As I was this day passing along the road, a number of persons were employed in digging up a large lime-tree. The earth being dug away on every side from its roots, left them exposed to view; and the moment was not distant, when the giant, with its foliage, was destined to fall! A group of lively boys, were nevertheless playing around it. Some were heedlessly cutting their names in the bark; others attempting to climb the tottering stem: one had even seated himself among the branches, and seemed little inclined to listen to the warnings of the workmen beneath. When, behold,

a bird settled on the upper part of it, and commenced its merry song. This, I thought, is an emblem of the world, and of the pursuits and occupations of its children. Is it not deeply undermined, and doomed to destruction? And yet the fools who inscribe their names upon its bark, dream of immortality. They cling to the tottering structure, as though it could for ever sustain them, and settle themselves in the decaying foliage of its pleasures, at the very moment, perhaps, when it is giving way beneath their feet. The bird that alighted on its top, presents us with an emblem of the saints of the Lord. They, too, inhabit a perishing world, and if it please God to erect for them in it a tabernacle of temporal blessings, they are well pleased; but they sit ready for flight beneath the shadow of its branches. Does the tree fall? They mount upwards, singing as they fly. They are winged by a hope, that extends far beyond all that is transient and perishable; and when their tabernacle is taken down, they are borne on the wings of angels to the habitation of God. Oh, there is not a more exalted condition on earth, than that of a man who has eternity constantly in view, and is steadfastly looking for a future heaven! Such a man rides, as the prophet has said, "upon the high places of the earth," and he views all things in a different light from that in which they appear to others. What the world prizes as most excellent and worthy of attainment, he looks down upon as gaudy trifles; and the feelings with which he surveys them, are but little different from those, with which a man of mature years contemplates the toys of children. Magnanimous in forbearing, as in forgiving, equally removed from obsequious compliance and the weak fear of man, he is the really free man, bound by no ties but the word of his Lord. His earthly connexions, no more cling to him, than the snows of the north to the home-returning crane. Open, sincere, and without pretension, he appears among his brethren, like the shining summit of the Alps among its fellow mountains, which cheers

the traveller in the night, and, in the midst of darkness, wears upon its brow the ruddy glow of near approaching day.

But we were speaking of Elisha's situation, which was neither inviting nor agreeable. How afflicting it must have been to his affectionate heart, to see the Samaritans surrounded by the terrors of God! and yet this was far from being the bitterest cup he had to empty. Neither does the murderous plan of Jehoram point out, by any means, the extent of the difficulty and danger that threatened him. Death, instead of being to the children of God the greatest of evils, is rather to be considered their greatest gain, as leading to a crown. He who stands alone in this world, like Elisha, should not disgrace Christ, and do honour to death, by trembling at the grave. To him, who is bound to life by a wife and children, at whose dying bed helpless orphans weep, it may be, in some degree, more difficult to depart; but even then, the knowledge that Christ is his, should deprive death of his terrors. The announcement of the king's design against his person, would not greatly have alarmed Elisha, though it had not been accompanied by the Divine intimation that the murderer should not succeed. Elisha knew well the ground on which he stood, in whom he believed, and whither he was going. But other circumstances existed, and, undoubtedly, of painful import.

In the first place, when, as you will recollect, the Syrian detachment was caught in the net at Samaria, it was by his express advice, given in the name of Jehovah, that they were set free, and restored to their nation. No doubt it was accompanied by explicit intimations, that this act of generosity would be accompanied by no evil consequences to Israel—that, on the contrary, God would view their conduct with approbation, and would reward it. But how had Israel been rewarded! Misery had succeeded misery; and the existing calamity had been brought upon them by the very people, whom, with such compassion, they had

then delivered from the snare! Did not the whole blame seem to rest on the prophet's head? Must he not, at once, have appeared to them as a false counsellor, an impostor, who had no right to speak to them in Jehovah's name, or give himself out to be his ambassador and vicegerent? To appear to the people in such a light, could not have been otherwise than extremely painful to the man of God, for the honour of God was involved in it; but to see it compromised in ourselves, and exposed to the revilings of the impious, is the most acute suffering that can be experienced by a child of God. To compare great things with small: imagine that you advised a friend, for the honour of the Lord, and as little suitable to a Christian, to abstain from some profitable business, and cheerfully to expect, that God would richly indemnify him for it, in another occupation; suppose your friend to follow this advice, and to adopt a different branch of business; but that instead of the promised indemnity, want and misery assail the poor man's door, and one calamity is heaped upon another. Imagine this, and you will be able to enter into the feelings of Elisha. But, in all such cases, every thing depends upon having a clear conscience, that we have spoken and advised agreeable to the word of God; then we may calmly await the further development of the affair. God will, certainly, not desert us in the matter. He will, sooner or later, confirm what has been spoken in his name, in a degree proportioned to the trial of our faith.

It is also highly probable that, at the beginning of the siege, Jehoram discovered a disposition to surrender his capital, on account of the dreadful and increasing misery of the people; but that Elisha advised to the contrary, with the express assurance, that God would fight for them, and raise the siege in some wonderful manner. Now, however, it seemed as if the Keeper of Israel slept, and, in the mean time, distress had mounted to that fearful height, where despair alone can erect its gloomy banner. Thus

the prophet appears, for the second time, to the king and to the people, as a liar; and in this view, as the originating cause of the entire calamity. How distressing to Elisha! and yet he knew that what he had spoken was not of himself. And when, in such circumstances, we have this certainty, it is no time for hesitation. We have then only to cling to the word of promise that we have received, and courageously encounter all that happens, without being turned aside by the world. God dishonours no drafts upon his power and grace, that he himself has authorized, though it may sometimes appear as if he did. We seem to be thrown back upon our own resources, so that we are forced to declare ourselves bankrupt; our embarrassment is great, and we know not which way to turn. Before we are aware, however, the sun again rises silently and majestically from behind the clouds of distress, his faithfulness shines forth, and all that He ever promised us is fulfilled to the very letter. Sometimes, indeed, he suffers his people to come into great extremities, so great, that, like Paul, in the tumult at Ephesus, they may fear for their lives; to all human appearance, the threads of hope are severed, the waves of destruction beat over their heads, and there is not even a glimmer of probability that God is still mindful of them. But, at such times, He receives the most acceptable sacrifices from his children; then they inwardly shed the tears of a Jacob, which overcome even the Almighty; then the cry is wrung from their souls: "I will not let thee go! Upon thee I am cast! Whom have I besides thee!" Then the heart pours forth the accents of love, so acceptable to his ear: "Abba," "Eloi," "My God," "Beloved Saviour!" with many others; then, too, we fall upon his breast, embrace his knees with humility and the confidence most fitting for children. And, under such circumstances, what an appropriate theatre is prepared for his glory! How does he, then, display the wonders of his strength and might, above the brittleness of all human skill and power, that he may make his

faithfulness shine forth, and adorn his holy word with new and splendid seals! But in order to prepare the way for such manifestations of himself, he often leads his people in a way most strange, and apparently cruel; shrouding their lives in midnight darkness, and visiting them with storms, and tempests, and death-like horrors.

III. We meet the prophet, to-day, under a quiet, friendly roof, surrounded by the elders, who, with a few others in the city, had remained stedfast in the faith. Mutual want re-assembles the scattered lambs of God's fold. Far as they may have separated from each other, in the wantonness of prosperity, adversity removes the spirit of dissension about trifles, and drives the scattered members of Christ back upon their living centre, their point of union. And it is delightful, in times of difficulty, to be in the midst of brethren. In union, we feel ourselves strong against whatever assails us. Individual sparks of faith, when collected, form a bright and powerful flame, and a community of spiritual property takes place, much more significant than that of temporal, which existed in the first Christian churches. How consoling is the consciousness of mutual interests, objects, and desires; how elevating the thought, that, whatever may happen, either in this world or the next, our ties of brotherhood will remain indissoluble and eternal! Besides, to such a union there are special promises attached. Where two or three brethren are met together in the name of the Lord, there will He be in the midst of them; whatever they agree to ask in their prayers, it shall be granted them; and as the oil upon the head of Aaron, and the dew of Hermon on the mountains of Zion, so shall the blessings of their heavenly Friend, and of his grace, descend upon them. It is, therefore, no enthusiastic delusion, that such a union of brethren may exist, as to give the character of sanctity to the place where they are assembled, and constitute it a tabernacle, in the precincts of that eternal city, to which they

are going ; it is no delusion, that they are now penetrated with no other feeling than that of the deepest security ; for they are really seated in God's pavilion, under his paternal eye, with the protecting wing of his unchanging love and faithfulness extended over them.

When it is said that Elisha sat in his house, and the elders sat with him ; allusion is evidently made to the calm and sacred quiet of these holy men, notwithstanding the critical situation in which they found themselves placed. But how could Elisha, in particular, be otherwise than courageous ? He knew, and that with much greater certainty than many of his brethren, of the flaming guard, assigned for the protection of every child of God ; and he was, moreover, not such a novice in the ways of God, that the tardy fulfilment of his promise should very greatly surprise him. He would no doubt think, " I have thy word, O Lord !" and wait the event, though not without some conflict with the rising fears of his nature. The faith of the elders was kept alive by his ; and they were cheered by his steady equanimity.

But, as no one, who made the Lord his stay, was ever put to shame, neither was Elisha. Jehovah is already at hand, the difficulties have begun to loosen and give way. Jehovah, having made known to the prophet the murderous designs of Jehoram, and that he had already sent a soldier before him to execute the bloody work, next instructs him how to act. Elisha, sensible from whence the voice that speaks within him proceeds, reverently bows his head in gratitude to the Lord, and offers him his silent adoration ; then, turning to his friends with a cheerful countenance, he asks, " See ye how this son of a murderer hath sent to take away mine head ?" He then desires them, when the messenger comes, to " shut the door," and force him back with it : for, he adds, " Is not the sound of his master's feet behind him." His friends attend to his instructions, and immediately prepare to execute them.

No doubt you are astonished at the prophet's speech,

and the horrible title, with which he invests his king, will be particularly displeasing to you. He calls him "The son of a murderer;" such language, you think, ill becomes a prophet, and even borders on that evil speaking of "dignities," which the apostle Peter adduces as characteristic of a hardened and depraved man. It must be recollected, however, that the words "son of a murderer," as employed by Elisha, is not to be accounted a mere term of reviling, but simply as descriptive of Jehoram's resemblance to his sanguinary parents, Ahab and Jezebel; and further, that Elisha did not speak so much in his own name, as a private man,— "the son of Shaphat,"—as in the name of Him, whose mouth and instrument he was. It must, indeed, be galling to hear oneself designated, by a pious man, by this or any other similar epithet; and I imagine it must be difficult ever to shake off the impression. My soul trembles at the very thought of having a term of much milder reproach applied to me by a man of God. It would sound in my ears, like the trumpet of the last day. I once saw a man on his death-bed, who, in the agonies of despair, had rubbed his hands and forehead sore, because, in his early years, a pious man had called him a child of the devil, on account of some great offence that he had committed against his parents. He confessed, that he had never been able to forget the words, and that they then weighed upon his heart like a burning chain. Whenever he attempted to pray, he acknowledged, that these words stopped his breath; and he frequently inquired, with a fixed and anxious countenance, if the blood of Christ could also wash away this curse, this black stigma from his soul?

Scarcely had the prophet made his communication to the elders, when the armed executioner arrives; the door opens, but is as quickly closed again, and he is forced back with it, upon the threshold. Was such a resistance to a person, who came in the name of the magistrate, justifiable? According to the present order of things, certainly not,

It must not, however, be forgotten, that, in Samaria, we are in a theocratic state, where God alone wields the sceptre, where the king can only consider himself as his organ, and the prophets the interpreters of Jehovah. Through them, he dictates his will to the prince; but through them likewise, shows himself, as often as he pleases, to be the uncontrolled master of the laws he has given. At the very moment, in which the messenger is forced out of the door, for such we must suppose to have been the case, the king himself appears. To him, Elisha does not refuse admittance, and, followed by the messenger, Jehoram enters; but how does he enter? We were expecting a roaring lion, and behold—what cannot the Lord accomplish!—the blood-thirsty tyrant is altogether changed in his demeanour; his look is mild; his hand, without a weapon. God had chained the fury of his soul. Jehoram was not permitted to speak otherwise than mildly to Elisha. His plan of revenge was ripe; but suddenly—unable himself to account for it—he repents, and better emotions take possession of his mind. He hastens after his messenger, and Elisha is not a little astonished, when he appears, at hearing from him the conciliatory words: “Behold, this evil is of the Lord, what have I further to expect from the Lord?” (German version) His meaning is plain. In the first place, he gives the prophet to understand, that he now acknowledges the chastising hand of God in the calamity; he is desirous of knowing, if the anger of the Lord will soon be turned aside, and the city be speedily relieved. Observe, he does not hurt a hair of God’s anointed. What a cheering comment on the words, “He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye!” What a remarkable fulfilment of the Divine promise, “Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm,” Psa. cv. 15. Truly, that invisible protection, which is extended to the children of God, cannot be too highly appreciated. It is impossible too affectionately to bear in mind the maternal care with which eternal love attends us

step by step. Oh that we could for ever cease to consider ourselves as the outcasts of the world, and steadily view ourselves as we are—precious stones amongst his jewels; that we could contemplate, with earnest longing, the flight of Lazarus to his home, borne on the soft wings of angels; and know there is an angel, that is able, on this side the grave, to prepare for us a couch no less pleasant. The gracious messenger first meets with us under the ever verdant branches of the Divine promises; and he causes us to rest, not only in Abraham's bosom, but in the lap of Jehovah. He may be known by the bandage around his eyes, and by the firmness of his step. The name of this angel is Faith.

Our prophet confided in him, and he was not disappointed. Elisha is already, in some measure, relieved from his dilemma. He will escape from it entirely, and that gloriously. How serene the man of God appears! His every look seems to say, "See now, my friends, there was nothing to fear!" He would, now, on no account have been spared the embarrassment; for what a valuable addition has been made to his experience of God's saving and protecting care! But such heavenly ore is not found on the surface of daily life. It flashes upon us from the dark pits of temptation, and the waves of trouble cast it upon the shores of our life. It is only in the gloomy depths of the cross, that such pearl beds of inward light and experience are found; and which, however dearly purchased, will never afterwards be surrendered at any price; they form a capital, that will afford us the sweetest consolation and encouragement both in life and death.

Now observe the elders. What intense satisfaction they evince, at being thought worthy to assist in the wonderful preservation experienced by their friend! How is their faith also strengthened by it, their hearts encouraged! For "whether one member" of the spiritual body "suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it." The

communion of saints is a great and blessed mystery. When any one is sincerely converted to the Lord, his soul is not only received into a world of new contemplations, ideas, feelings and prospects; but he enters upon external relations that he never before dreamt of; and alliances are formed that shed upon his existence, on this side eternity, the glorious light of Paradise. He discovers a new country in the midst of this world of death. "O thou land of peace," he joyfully exclaims, as he strikes his tempest-beaten sails, "thou sweet, delightful land, on whose shores I am now at length landed!" An extensive circle of new friends, brethren, and sisters, bid him welcome; people whom he had till then passed with indifference, if not with contempt, from whom he had never dreamt that the breath of that pure, disinterested love could proceed, and of whose existence under heaven he had long despaired; and he now finds himself blessed in its possession. He everywhere meets with the purest sympathy. He has gained friends, on whose eternal fidelity he can count. Could he forget himself, he will never be forgotten before the Lord; for his life has lost its individuality, and is united by love in the community of many. Community, in the most enlarged sense of the word, is the essence of his new being. What others possess, is also his; whatever blooms for them, sheds its fragrance likewise upon him. In their experience, there is opened to him an everflowing fountain of unexpected refreshment; in their victories he likewise triumphs; the light that is vouchsafed to them, shines also upon his path; and his days pass in the sweetest exchange of the richest and most precious gifts of heaven. Verily, no thought can grasp the fulness of that joy and bliss, which proceed from the heavenly union of believing souls. Nor can any one conceive the sweetness of this delightful union, but he who has himself experienced it.

The elders were likewise happy in the thought, that their beloved prophet had escaped the threatened danger; and that there was no immediate cause to fear the loss of

this distinguished favourite of God. If there were anything calculated to delight them, it was this prospect. Wherever Elisha resided, he ever found persons affectionately attached to him. How could it be otherwise? This man, whose whole appearance bore the stamp of the purest benevolence and sincerest humility, must have vanquished and gained every heart. There are some great people, in whose vicinity every thing blooms but the flower of love; and who may, therefore, be compared to the proud, wide-spreading tree of tropical climates, within twenty paces of which no other plant can flourish, not even a green blade of grass. Such persons attract admirers around them; but friends cannot exist in the cold atmosphere of reserve and self-sufficiency. Elisha resembled a friendly elm, under whose hospitable branches peace and comfort dwell, and which willingly permits plants of weaker and tenderer growth to lean upon it for support. Wherever Elisha appeared, he obtained the esteem of the more noble amongst the people, with whose confidence he was decorated, as with a wreath of ivy; even his bitterest enemies often found it impossible to resist, without the most strenuous efforts, the fascination of that influence which he possessed over all hearts.

We must now take leave of Elisha for the present, and, as I think, strengthened and encouraged by his experience. For my own part, I feel as if I had been elevated to the light and tranquil top of a lofty mountain, had seen the troubles of life floating like mist in the valley beneath, and had heard the music of harps that charmed every trace of care from my soul. But on listening attentively, it proves to be the sweet harmony of the most cheering promises. "Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart." "The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth," to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him. His word is seven times purer than gold.

The Lord "executeth judgment for the oppressed." He

“raiseth them that are bowed down,” and “looseth the prisoners.” Jerusalem, rejoice! “shake thyself from the dust!—No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper.—The redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head: they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away.—Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God!—The Lord shall reign for ever, even thy God, O Zion, unto all generations. Praise ye the Lord!”

VI. THE CURSE OF UNBELIEF.

DOUBT on the subject of religion, in the present day, is epidemic; and not many, even of believers, pass through the world untainted by it. The subjugation of doubt, however, does not proceed from the mind, but from the heart. It is not to the subtilties of reason, but to the awakened necessities of the heart, that the difficulties on the subject of revelation yield. View yourself in the light of God's righteousness and holiness; acknowledge yourself to be—what you really are—a sinner; and reconciliation and mediation will soon appear to you the only means, by which the future peace of your soul can be secured. You will, perhaps, at first, seek the remedy in yourself, and endeavour, by your own exertions, to repair what is defective, and to reconcile Him whom you have offended; but you will soon become sensibly aware, that you are unable to pay to the eternal Judge your arrear of holiness, or, by any efforts you can make, repair what you have broken. Thus, helpless and destitute, you are without hope, till the book of revelation discovers to you the healing fountain, which eternal love has opened in the blood of a second Adam, the Divine substitute, our surety Jesus Christ. To recognise this mysterious work of God, earnestly to desire a participation in it, and freely to confess, "This meets my most ardent longings, this satisfies my inmost wants," will be simultaneous. You believe in the reconciliation of Christ, because you have inwardly experienced its heart-satisfying, love-awakening, and saving power.

Once firmly established in this fundamental point of revelation, you will then advance, with a steady step, over

the remaining territory. The wonders you there meet with, no longer astonish; they appear to you as the gentle preludes to that incomparably greater one, whose reality you have experienced in yourself. The adaptation of language, and of action, which God everywhere condescends to employ in his intercourse with us mortals, no longer surprises you; you perceive in it the mystery of his love. The deep things that still remain inexplicable, you will in faith receive; estimating them by those which, though once equally unintelligible, are now unsealed. The reconciliation of apparent contradictions you will confidently trust to the progressive workings of the Spirit, who has already harmonized so many things, that you had long looked upon as the most palpable contradictions. Should any one attempt to shake your confidence in any part of the sacred volume, you possess, in the living and undeniable consciousness that God intended by means of this book to bless the world with the knowledge of the only saving truth, the assurance that in thus causing light to shine upon a dark world, he will not withhold the smaller blessing of guarding his word from every admixture of strange and heterogeneous elements. But should any particular doctrine of the Scriptures refuse to accommodate itself to our, human understanding, you have still in your daily experience of their adaptation to your most inward wants, desires, and necessities, a stronger proof of their heavenly origin, than the most acute reasoning could afford. Thus seated in the citadel of your experience well protected and secure, you are certain of victory from the very commencement of every unbelieving contention. You may not immediately be able to refute every objection to the satisfaction of your opponent; yet they are refuted in your own mind; and though appropriate arguments may not be at your command, they will follow in due time.

Further, Christianity is not susceptible of demonstration. The only way in which that conviction of the truth

of revelation can be obtained, which the Scriptures denominate faith, is pointed out by our Lord, John vii. 17 : "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself." The sacred road that leads to the temple of eternal light, is practical, not speculative. Embrace the truth, with a sense of its necessity ; and you will soon become sensible, how consonant it is to reason. It was once observed by a great man, with as much truth as beauty, "earthly things must be known, in order to be loved ; heavenly things must be loved, in order to be known."

These remarks are intended as an introduction to a subject, which will unfold to us more fully the true nature of faith and unbelief. May God bless our meditations, and deeply impress our hearts with the conviction, that unbelief is the greatest of all sins, and leads to inevitable destruction.

2 KINGS VII. 1, 2.

Then Elisha said, Hear ye the word of the Lord ; thus saith the Lord, To-morrow about this time, shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria. Then a lord, on whose hand the king leaned, answered the man of God, and said, Behold, if the Lord would make windows in heaven, might this thing be ? And he said, Behold, thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof.

The scene is changed. The chimes of peace are ringing. The dark clouds are beginning to break, and the light of grace once more beams upon Samaria. I. Let us consider the prophet's announcement. II. The nobleman's unbelief. III. The anathema pronounced against him.

I. On this occasion, we meet Elisha in the full splendour of his prophetic office. Every trace of depression is banished from his countenance. He appears dignified and splendid—arrayed in the glorious vestments of an ambassador of God—Jehovah's representative on earth. Yes, the Lord is indeed able, when he pleases, to invest his

people with glory. Remember Stephen at the moment of his death—Luther before the diet at Worms—Wishart, who, at the stake, forced his executioner to sink upon his knees, by the silent influence of his heroic self-possession. Think of the majesty of Knox before the court of Scotland; of Beza, and his words, before the ruler of France. The church of Christ is, indeed, a lamb that before its “shearers is dumb;” but it is no less an anvil, against which the heaviest hammer is broken. Think of John Huss before the council of Constance. But why should I particularize? Think of the innumerable crowd of those, chosen by the Lord to be the standard-bearers of his kingdom, who for his sake have not held their lives dear to them! Oh, what is all the pomp that the world can display, when compared with the celestial brightness which rests upon them! A spiritual glory encircles them, on beholding which, the angels are filled with joy and admiration. A stream of light, of life, and of power is here poured out; and to inquire from whence it issues, would be to discover a total absence of all feeling for what is Divine. What now is only occasionally seen in individuals will one day, be experienced, in a still higher degree, by the whole kingdom. The Lord will, as the prophets declare, remove the veil that is cast over his people, and will show himself glorious in his saints, and admirable in them that believe. Then they will no longer be misunderstood; but heaven and earth will be astonished, that, under the unpretending appearance once exhibited by them, the germs of such angelic beauty should have been concealed. The prophetic symbol presented by nature, in the birth of the butterfly, will meet a most surprising accomplishment; and the important words of the Saviour, “I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one,” will no longer wait their fulfilment.

Elisha has quitted the security of the house, and again shows himself to the people in the open market-place. He

appears, as if charged with a commission from the Lord. He is now beginning to speak; and he cries with a loud and decisive voice, "Hear ye the word of the Lord!" All prophets announce themselves in this authoritative style; and, as the bearers of the infallible decrees of God, lay claim to the most unlimited confidence of the people. And are we to believe that they were all deceivers, or self-deceived, who falsely proclaimed the devices of their own minds as Divine revelations, or who had deluded themselves into the belief, that they really were so? Were this the case, they must have shown themselves, in other respects, to be weak-minded persons, or impostors. But their lives were distinguished by holiness, and their writings surpass all others in depth and wisdom. They contain nothing that is not, in the highest degree, worthy of God. Not a trace of that anxiety of purpose, which they, who are only acting a great part, can never shake off. On all occasions, the most unconstrained manner and the most unaffected simplicity mark their conduct. We feel that they possess an inward conviction of their being the ambassadors of God; and knowing this, they with confidence leave it to the Lord to establish their pretensions. Of a truth, it requires as much malignity as want of sense, to attempt, in any way, to cast suspicion upon these men of God. But what says the Lord? "For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind," John ix. 39. Yes, the disbelief in the Bible, avowed by modern people, fills us with indignation; but it fills us no less with horror, and fearful apprehension for themselves. For the perversity of these people, while it constitutes their guilt, is no less their condemnation, and the commencement of their eternal punishment and final rejection.

"Hear ye the word of the Lord!" God be praised that such a call has resounded through the world! Where had we now been, had no other voice been heard upon the earth, than that of our beclouded reason? The heathenism

of antiquity with its darkness, and the Babylonish confusion of language and ideas evinced by the ever-changing philosophy of modern times, indicate, plainly enough, the ground on which we should have been standing. Truth would not have existed beneath the sun, and the heart would pant in vain for certainty on the most important interests of life. For whatever of reality the wisdom of the wise, according to the flesh, may have to boast, it will be found, on careful examination, to be indebted to the communications made by God to the world, however strenuously it may deny, and even trample under foot, the source from whence it has derived its most valuable treasures. The possibility of a supernatural revelation can only be rationally questioned, either under the supposition that there is no God, or that God and the world are inseparably one. To believe that there is a God, and at the same time to think it incredible that he should condescend to converse with man, is, to me, so incomprehensible, that the opposite opinion of his having entirely withdrawn himself from his creatures, who stood so much in need of light, and of his having preserved a perpetual silence, appears to me, particularly as he is a God of love, impracticable and unreasonable. "Am I a God at hand, saith the Lord, and not a God afar off?—Do not I fill heaven and earth?" Yes, Lord! It is so, and we rejoice at it. Speak, Lord, thy servants hear! "Hear ye the word of the Lord!" Praise to eternal mercy! this rallying cry again resounds through the world. The most distant heathen tribes hear it, and listen, by means of Bible distribution and of missions. The work is his! What success has crowned it! and He is wise who promotes it. But, he who entirely withdraws from the work, errs either in one way or another, as the following parable may serve to demonstrate. A powerful nobleman had determined to build a large and beautiful mansion. To commence the erection of the walls, he instituted a feast, and invited all his friends. When they were assembled, he proposed

that each of them should, as a remembrance, add a stone to the wall. The suggestion was scarcely made, before the first of them stepped back, observing: "I am a gentleman, and not a mason!" Another said: "No, sir, I shall not lay a stone. I know that you are able to complete your building without my assistance, and I will not deprive you of that honour!" A third said: "All who work at these walls, are paid workmen. I hate the wages of servitude, and decline to affix a stone!" A fourth said: "Should the time ever arrive, when you seriously determine to complete the building, the necessary instruments will be ready at hand!" The fifth said: "Your power, sir, will undoubtedly be able to unite the stones that you have chosen for the formation of the walls; my assistance, therefore, is unnecessary." Thus they all spoke. Now the nobleman addressed himself to each of these his friends in turn, and to the first he said: "Thou fool, to account that as vassalage, by which I only proposed to do thee honour!" To the second he said: "Oh, what absurd vanity, in the guise of humility, thus to suppose, that, by thy laying a stone, my honour would be lessened! What idle fear!" To the third he said: "Thou wicked servant, for hire, one and another may assist to build my house; it is therefore the more incumbent on thee, to lay one stone out of pure love!" To the fourth he said: "What blindness do thy words, 'When the time comes,' evince; look round and see, the time for the erection of my building is already come!" And to the fifth he said: "Undoubtedly, I shall be at no loss, shouldst thou even withdraw, to join together the stones that I have chosen; but it pleased me to call thee also to the work." Thus spoke the nobleman. Think upon his words, if you find, in the excuses of his friends, your own thoughts reflected. For others, I have something different to relate. An English prince one day inquired of one of the ladies at court, after the health of a certain other lady, and why she so seldom appeared at court? "She is probably praying with her

paupers," was the sneering reply. "Ah," rejoined the prince with gravity, "I should esteem myself happy at death, could I take hold of the hem of Lady Huntingdon's garment, and enter heaven with her!" Now this was a well intended remark, and discovers a sense of religion. But should any imagine, that they have only to lay hold of the Bride's garment, in order to enter with her to the wedding, there may be something pleasing in the thought, but it is fraught, in a high degree, with error. It is only the skirt of thy garment, Lord Jesus, that will not rend. It is that only, which sustains the hand that cleaves to it, that saves and bears it upwards! Bear this also in mind: It once happened, that a German emperor, when surrounded by a party of noble and joyous guests, suddenly broke out into the following exclamation: "What, my friends, would become of the church on earth, if not sustained by God; for the pope is devoted to wine, and I to the chase!" This sentiment of the emperor's, spiritually considered, is of more value than that of the English prince; and we may in this sense apply it to ourselves. In so far as we do not prosecute the missionary work, with a consciousness similar to that of the emperor, we have not the true missionary spirit. "With a similar consciousness?" Undoubtedly, my beloved friends. Away with the prejudice of custom, within which some suppose the ark of the covenant must be confined! which says, What will become of the church, if not sustained by Him? For we, what are we? And you, and you, what are ye all?

"Hear ye the word of the Lord!" Oh that I could thunder these words into the ears of the multitude, and could conjure them not to suffer themselves to be confounded by the multiplicity of words, proceeding from those amongst whom they live! How many thousands in the present day, sit encircled by a wall of paper; by pamphlets, poems, novels, reviews, and travels; and oh! how difficult it is for the serious and sacred word of truth to break through this literary barricade! What an effort

does it not cost, before room can be found for the word of the Lord, in a place where fresh streams of human thoughts and glowing imagery are almost hourly flowing! And ah! of what value are all the treasures collected in the airy region of human fancy and wit? Is the green olive-branch of deep, heart-felt peace produced there? Does the fruit that for ever stills the hunger of the soul, that renders death desirable, ripen there? Alas! if any glory blossom there, it is only like that of the grass—"in the morning it flourisheth and groweth up; in the evening it is cut down, and withereth." And for this we can exchange the substantial, saving, enriching treasures of a word, which has planted in this valley of death a new and imperishable paradise! Let it not be said, that it is so difficult to believe in this word. It carries with it so many marks of its Divinity, that, to upright inquiry, it soon discovers its eternal character. On the other hand, its Divine origin is too unsusceptible of demonstration, according to human principles, to be unhesitatingly embraced by any, except those who are impelled by a sense of need, and a hungering after salvation and grace. It is not addressed to reason, but to the necessitous heart; and requires, in the first place, humility of mind, the consciousness of sin, and an earnest longing after reconciliation. To him, who comes in this way, it proves itself to be, not merely in a general sense, the word of God; but it gently raises him on the light wings of faith, above the difficulties which, to self-satisfied reason, for ever remain a stumbling-block.

"Hear ye the word of the Lord!" cries Elisha, and then declares his message. "Thus saith the Lord," he continues with a cheerful confidence, "To-morrow, about this time, shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria!" What joyful tidings for the suffering populace! and with what a splendid crown does it again encircle the head of the prophet! He suddenly rises, like a star of promise, in the midst of Samaria's gloom; and, as with

solar radiance, he breaks through the clouds of distress, illuminating the city with the cheerful light of joy. He who, but a moment before, was the object of the bitterest imprecations, has suddenly become the rock on which the hopes of thousands rest. He, against whom the murderous steel had just been drawn, now has the eyes of his enemies directed to him, as in a storm the eyes of the crew to the captain of their vessel, as to the only consolation that is left them. So wonderfully can God raise to eminence his oppressed people. "Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy," says the church by Micah, "when I fall, I shall arise." Yes, the church shall one day enjoy a similar distinction to that conferred upon Elisha, only in a much higher degree. They that have oppressed thee shall fall down unto thee, and "lick up the dust of thy feet," Isa. xlix. 23.

II. The word of promise has been given. We, who are of Zion, have also words at our command, that can banish night, and allay the storm. We possess the word that can remove the consciousness of guilt, and tame the passions; the word that can dispel the cares of life, and impart to the gloom of death a festal character. If there be a word that can unravel the mysteries of this world's history, that can remove the veil from the most distant future, that can open the gates of eternity, deprive the grave of its terrors, and teach the son of earth to walk upon the raging billows, then we possess it. Trample us underfoot, if you will; the glory of possessing this word you cannot deprive us of. Cover us with ignominy and contempt; yet the splendour of that crown with which this noble possession adorns us, cannot be tarnished. The world may have many things to boast of; but it can make no pretensions to such a word. The staff that can work greater wonders than the rod of Moses, rests in Israel's hand alone. That this is really so, experience has long since placed beyond a doubt.

Elisha's announcement was sure to be welcomed. The cry of "Land! land!" after weeks of storm and danger, meets with willing ears. Presumptuous as the promise might appear, yet the people would naturally be disposed to ask, Why should he have hazarded it, if not authorized to do so? That it surpassed all human probability would rather facilitate its belief; the king, too, believed it, to whom Elisha's character was so well known. One only doubted—the nobleman on whose arm the king leaned—who was too wise to give credence to any thing that he could not account for. With a contemptuous mien, he replies to the "man of God"—which renders the wickedness of his unbelief the more conspicuous—"Behold, if the Lord would make windows in heaven, might this thing be?" In him we see a man, of whom we might imagine that he had imbibed the spirit of our age. There are many, in the present day, who would rather confess the commission of every sin and wickedness, than acknowledge their belief in a wonder-working God; who think it no disgrace to utter the lowest ribaldry, but who would blush to pronounce the name of the Lord with any thing like reverence; who joyfully avail themselves of such expressions as fate, nature, heaven, to avoid all necessity for pronouncing the name of the Lord, and who, had they no other choice, would rather sacrifice their character than have their so-called intellectual powers exposed to suspicion. It would seem, that nobleman laboured under a severe attack of this delusion; and he affords us a proof, that neology and rationalism are unjustly claimed as the product of modern cultivation. In their elements, they existed long since; their birth is coeval with the serpent's bite. This nobleman, however, does not deny the existence of a God. He calls Jehovah by name, and admits, that he can do many things; he only questions his power to accomplish a thing so unheard of, as the one Elisha has promised in his name. The expectation of a sudden and super-abundant supply, without the intervention of nature,

and in a way, too, differing from the ordinary one of ploughing, sowing, and reaping, appears to him ridiculous and absurd. He is a deist; he will not be thought an atheist; but he will know nothing of a God that is superior to the laws of nature, who has reserved to himself the right of deviating from them, as frequently as he may see fit, and who, without accounting the minutest thing beneath his notice and guidance, governs independently in his creation, departing from the established order of things when he pleases, and personally superintending all. He believes in a God; and yet, if strictly scrutinized, he does not. And, indeed, he who is determined, like Jehoram's courtier, to indulge his fleshly and worldly lusts, acts wisely in first reasoning himself out of the belief in an all-seeing, superintending God, and in substituting in his place, a puppet that stands aloof, neither seeing, hearing, nor interfering in any thing. Oh! be assured, that unbelief, however it may boast of being the fruit of deep penetration and research, is from first to last, nothing else than the mere invention of sinful man, acting under the influence of uneasy feelings, to enable him the better to pursue the broad road of vanity, undisturbed by the remonstrances of an upbraiding conscience. Enlightened reason is not, as so-called free-thinkers pretend, the immediate and primary source of unbelief; its origin is a corrupt heart, sold under sin. Rationalism has its root in a depraved will, not in the powers of thought.

It is possible that, before the accomplishment of the prophetic promise, the faith, even of the believing elders, may have been severely tried. It would appear inconceivable, that within four and twenty hours, so' delightful a turn should take place in the situation of the city. God had revealed to his prophet the fact, and not the manner, in which relief should be afforded; and this, under existing circumstances, was an enigma, beyond the powers of the most penetrating understanding to solve. It was not probable that corn would fall from heaven ready for use,

and still less that it should spring up from the pavement; and yet these were sooner to be expected than assistance from without; for they knew the implacability of their besiegers too well to hope that anything short of the destruction of the town, or its surrender, would appease their hatred. Although it may sometimes happen, that a man of God may be sceptically inclined with regard to one or other of the promises of the Lord, yet his scruples differ very widely from those with which unbelievers receive the word of God. Sceptics deny and reject it, and pride themselves in their scepticism. The man of God resists his doubts, condemns his want of faith as highly criminal, and, unhappy in its indulgence, admonishes himself repeatedly, that it is the word of God; that "with God all things are possible;" and he knows no rest, till, by wrestling and prayer, his rebellious spirit is subdued, and his stubborn neck bows to the letter of the word of God. To fleshly reason, there is an absence of probability in almost every thing that is promised in the Scriptures to the people of God. How, for instance, can it be that all things shall work together for our good?—That a sinner, in virtue of another's merit, shall be raised to the glory of heaven?—That the moment when the body dies, is the moment in which our sanctification shall be perfected?—That our mouldering dust shall not be lost, but rise again from the grave divinely glorified? Are not these things as presumptuous to expect as the promised relief for which Samaria is looking? To the natural mind they are. But, if we will enter the kingdom, this natural mind must be subdued, and brought to believe that the "foolishness of God" is infinitely wiser than all the wisdom of man, and that what he has promised He will also fulfil, for his arm is not fettered.

Of a truth, it is no small thing that God requires of those who desire to be admitted into Zion. Self must be crucified; and, to the disparagement of all that constitutes the glory of the flesh, a believing assent must be given to

things which the natural understanding rejects as fabulous. Amongst other things, they must believe that an ass once spoke with a human voice; that the progenitors of the present human family, together with animals of every species, were preserved from destruction in a single vessel, during a frightful deluge; that a prophet ascended to heaven in a chariot of fire; that, at the command of a Jewish soldier, the sun stood still; that, in obedience to another Hebrew, the shadow of the sun moved backwards ten degrees upon the sun-dial of Ahaz; that the touch of a staff sufficed to separate the waves of the sea, and cause them to stand as walls; that the bones of an Israelite, who had been long buried, restored another dead body to life; that the sound of trumpets caused the walls of a great city to fall. Yes, they must be able to believe that the Almighty, who created the ends of the earth, once, as a helpless infant, hung upon the breast, and grew up to manhood like any other boy; and, although himself the Source from whence all things proceeded, that he died the death of a martyr, to accomplish reconciliation. This wonder of all wonders, in comparison with which all others sink into insignificance, they must not only believe, but it must constitute their whole wisdom, their entire salvation, and they must consent to be accounted fools in this world for the sake of it. To those who consider these as hard sayings, the enquiry may be addressed, "Will ye also go away?" then go! Of what value to the Lord is the applause of the blind multitude? But if your reply be, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life!" then you have already taken the first step towards a perfect admission of these miracles, and, instead of doubting, you will soon apprehend their Divine character, and draw from them the water of life.

III. Our Samaritan nobleman receives an answer to his objection, such as he little anticipated. "The high and lofty One," who will not be mocked, resolves for his own honour,

and for that of his messenger, to make him an example. Scarcely has he given utterance to his sneer, "Behold, if the Lord would make windows in heaven," when Elisha, impelled by the Holy Spirit, and beholding him steadfastly, replies, "Behold, thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof!" This threat may have been as much disregarded as was the promised blessing; but what he refused to believe, he was compelled to experience, within the short space of twenty-four hours.

Ah, a similar course is suspended over the heads of all unbelievers. You will likewise experience, though in a more dreadful manner, the fate of this contemner of Jehovah and his word. What you now despise, you will behold accomplished; it will then be for ever too late; you will wring your hands in despair, and bitterly weep and lament your unbelief. You will see that the blood of Jesus Christ really cleanses from all sin; but you will perish in your iniquity; you will convince yourselves that the Man of Nazareth has, in reality, prepared mansions of peace for his followers, from which all others will be excluded. Those who are sealed with the Lamb's seal, you will behold glorified at his right hand; but unto you the words will not be addressed, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you!" You will see them in possession of the kingdom, while to you it will be said, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."

Think, ye doubters, of the rich man in the gospel. He was one like yourselves; he was not a sinner in the usual acceptation of the word; he was a man loved by the world, polite, hospitable, yea, liberal, and even splendid, where the honour of his house required it; but he was an egotist, a man who was himself the centre of all his thoughts and actions; a Sadducee, who made worldly enjoyments, though perhaps the more refined and lawful of them, the sole object of his life: he was, therefore, like yourselves, too enlightened, genteel, and fashionable to deem the words

repentance, and preparation for eternity, as more than empty sounds ; a man whose motto was, " Let us eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow we die!" In the sick beggar, on the contrary, who lay at the rich man's door, is represented those who lead a life of faith in Christ. It might perhaps have been more acceptable to us, my brethren, had another been contrasted with this man of the world ; one in whom the glories of the hidden life of faith would have been more fully displayed in word and deed, an Elisha, a John, or a Paul. But instead of such distinguished champions of the kingdom, our Lord purposely introduces into his picture, the quiet, unpretending form of this diseased beggar, in order the more distinctly to show, that heaven, with all its blessedness, is a gift, and the way to it more one of tranquillity, self-denial, and dependence, than of activity and exertion. And is it not really so? After having given up ourselves, we rejoice in the means of salvation which God has instituted ; we desire to be nothing in ourselves, but to be the objects on which grace shall display itself ; and we are contented to be washed and purified, clothed, ornamented, and guided by a heavenly hand. As of a sucking child little more can be said, than that it is no where better than at its mother's breast, that it is carried on her arm and finds its happiness in her smile ; that it knows nothing of itself, has no selfish desires, but reposes in the will of maternal love, as on a soft and secure couch ; so, in like manner, it is only necessary to transfer these few characteristics to the soul, in order to comprehend its relation to God, and to describe the inward state of every real child of God.

These two men in the gospel are represented to us as differing from each other as widely in outward circumstances as in sentiment. The man of the world lives in opulence and splendour ; the one who is heavenly-minded bears the beggar's staff, and a loathsome disease is consuming his life. But will the former ever be able to say, " My worldly circumstances were the cause of my un-

belief?" And with as little reason, will the other be able to ascribe to his poverty the change of sentiment that he underwent. Wherever there is anything, in the outward relations, to render conversion difficult, the equilibrium is always preserved by so many counteracting circumstances, that no excuse remains to those who are not converted. Thus in our day, for instance, conversion is difficult; but how many things are there to lighten the difficulties! It is difficult: for, in how many ways are we, the children of this age, rendered voluptuous and vitiated by the spirit of the times; how susceptible from our very childhood of every sinful temptation; how filled with every sensual imagination! It is easy: for what serious displeasure does Heaven, in our day, evince against sin; what judgments are beginning to visit our degenerate race, calling upon us with the voice of thunder to repent! Difficult it is, owing to the false notions of intellectual refinement, which we imbibe from our cradle—we, to whom, even as school-children, everything was suspicious that did not accord with our every day notions. It is easy: for, what signal defeats has not the system of antichrist, in modern times, sustained; how have the nakedness and inanities of rationalism been exposed! It is difficult: for, it has been instilled into most people from their infancy, that a gospel which speaks of a God becoming man, can be nothing but a fable. It is easy: for, how distinctly do we hear the footsteps of this incarnate God again resounding through the globe; and how wonderfully has his gospel proved itself to be the power and wisdom of the Most High in a thousand new and animating creations! It is difficult: for, how few are there who now believe in Christ; and the influence and power exercised by a vast majority, are indescribable! Yet, it is easy: for, in every place, persons again separate themselves from the mass, who are, not unfrequently, in every respect the ornament of the age in which they live, and distinguished above the unbelieving multitude by the superiority of their mental endowments;

who proclaim aloud, "The Lord he is God!" and enrol themselves under the banner of the cross. Thus it appears, that, in our day, conversion is difficult, and at the same time easy. It is so easy, that they who resist conversion, incur the guilt of the most wilful obduracy; it is so difficult, that where a conversion takes place, the honour is due to grace alone.

That the righteous man in the gospel should be so wretched, while the man of the world revels in every luxury, is one of those discordances of time, which it is reserved for eternity to harmonize. Besides, the dissonance is not so great as necessarily to shake our confidence in providence. When viewed in a spiritual light, it is impossible to deny, that the poor man, on his bed of thorns, is better off than the rich voluptuary in the midst of affluence. Though the former should for ever bear the beggar's staff, yet, barren as it may appear, it is twined around with a rich foliage of spiritual experience of the nearness and faithfulness of God, the smallest portion of which he would not change for all the rich man's gold and silver. Though forsaken by all the world, what matters it? The Lord does not forsake him. He calls him by name, and bears him on his heart. The solicitude, as of the tenderest mother, attends him at every step; and though human aid be withdrawn, yet, to the disgrace of man, dogs hasten to lick his sores, and give him an affectionate salutation. "Are dogs then," you ask, "his only comforters?" Wait a short time, and the scene will change. We will now suppose them both to have completed their pilgrimage through this earthly vale, each upon a different path. Their dwelling is no longer with man. Death has visited them both: to the one he came as an executioner; to the other, as a messenger of peace. One short breath, one faint struggle, and it is over. As their bodies lie before us, we ask, rich or poor, what does it now matter? The rich man has emptied his cup of joy, the poor man's affliction is ended. One mark of distinction still

remains between them, it is the last. The rich man is interred with pomp, and his funeral is splendidly attended. The other, obscurely buried in the twilight, is borne along unnoticed, unless it be here and there, from the window of some wretched habitation, by a kindred soul, that bids him farewell, as he passes, and hopes soon to meet again. As we stand by their graves, how can we think otherwise, than that here all distinctions have ceased? for no eye has penetrated the scene beyond the grave. But there is one whose look extends beyond this gloomy barrier, and fathoms the depths of eternity; it is Jesus Christ, the Lord of heaven. He, with a steady hand, can raise the curtain that shuts in the grave, and—he who has eyes to see, let him see! They are not mere visions that pass before us, but realities; for he who unveils them to us, is truth itself. The first view that we behold, is cheering and delightful. There is Lazarus, the poor beggar! but oh how changed! How could the wretched exterior of so miserable a worm have concealed a being so transcendently beautiful? See him ascending in light. Friendly angels bear him upwards, place him in Abraham's bosom, and break forth into rejoicings, as though, in the person of this poor beggar, a king had entered. Lazarus himself can scarce believe his transformation. His bliss seems to him but a dream. Oh, the glory that encircles him! the joy and delight that possess him! And when, from this glorious eminence, he looks down upon his earthly pilgrimage, ah! of what does he become sensible? That every drop in his cup of suffering, had been to him a healing balm. That on every step he had advanced upon his thorny path, he had been attended by eternal love. That every hour of his life—the darkest not excepted—had been under the superintendence of Divine mercy, and the whole web of his existence, so gloomy and mysterious, now appears to him to have been the skilful work of Eternal Wisdom. Oh, place in his hands the golden harp! His heart is a living psalter, inscribed with characters of fire, and every pulsation, every breath, a song of joy—a hallelujah!

But where is the man, that was clothed in purple and fine linen, who fared sumptuously every day? Another curtain rises, and what a spectacle is there! A dreary abyss yawns beneath us; the gloomy world of death, prepared for the devil and his angels; where the worm never dies, the fire is not quenched; where anguish and despair bear the sceptre; where a God of mercy, or a Saviour's love are never found; and from whence hope is for ever excluded. On my own authority, I should never have ventured to present to you such a picture as this. The assertion that such a place of torment existed in creation, I should have deemed injurious to the love of God. But behold, there is One, who was in the bosom of the Father, and it is he who has uncovered this abyss, and who shows to us its terrors—terrors more dreadful than the boldest imagination, in the wildest paroxysm of fever, could ever have depicted. For what is it we see? In the midst of the torments of that lake, we perceive the rich man, whom we once saw surrounded with delights. From the comforts of his dying pillow, he has descended into this place; and here we behold him overwhelmed with despair. "Father Abraham," he cries, "have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame!" Abraham replies, (for God condescends no longer to these people,) "Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented." This piteous request is then rejected! No comfort, no alleviation; not so much as a drop of water. How dreadful! And were there but a prospect, that what is refused to day, might be granted to morrow, or after the lapse of years, or even of centuries, it were some relief. But Abraham adds: "And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence!" Awful indeed are these words. Unutterable anguish, and no

hope of release! This is the summit of all imaginable horrors. And I cannot help repeating it again, that it is Jesus, who thus describes the condition of the lost; Jesus, "the faithful and true witness;" Jesus, who never exaggerates; it is kind and gentle Jesus, who gives us this picture of hell! Such therefore it must be; or—oh! what an alternative must follow, if this picture falsifies the reality. But let us attend to what further passes between Abraham and this lost one. "I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him (Lazarus) to my father's house; for I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment!" But what answer does he receive? Oh let none disregard it! Abraham's reply is: "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them!" You all understand? They have the word of God, is the reply. Not, they have reason—not, they have the assertions of philosophy—not, this or that book of devotion! No, God's word; the sure prophetic word! You have "Moses and the prophets" explained, unfolded, and ratified in the Gospels and Epistles. Hear ye them! And the tone of this word is from beginning to end the same: "'Repent ye therefore, and be converted!'"—Crucify 'the flesh with the affections and lusts!'—Lose thine own life, that thou mayest gain eternal life!—Die to thyself, to the world, and all that is therein, and live unto Christ!" And to those who refuse to listen to these words, its tone is likewise uniform: "Ye are 'accursed!'—Thou shalt 'not see life!—The wrath of God abideth on' thee!"—Its final sentence is: "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels!" Oh! take heed unto the word! Hear ye it! To those who refuse obedience, I have no further advice to give. "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed!" And those who do not believe what is promised to them that believe, shall one day, like the rich man, and the nobleman in Samaria, see it with their eyes, but not partake of it.

VII. THE BREAKING UP OF THE CAMP.

2 KINGS VII. 3—7.

“ And there were four leprous men at the entering in of the gate ; and they said one to another, *Why sit we here until we die ?* If we say, we will enter into the city, then the famine is in the city, and we shall die there ; and if we sit still here, we shall die also. Now therefore come, and let us fall unto the host of the Syrians : and if they kill us, we shall but die ; and if they save us, we shall live. And they rose up in the twilight, to go unto the camp of the Syrians ; and when they were come to the uttermost part of the camp of Syria, behold, there was no man there. For the Lord had made the host of the Syrians to hear a noise of chariots, and the noise of horses, even the noise of a great host ; and they said one to another, *Lo, the king of Israel has hired against us the kings of the Hittites, and the kings of the Egyptians, to come upon us.* Wherefore they arose and fled in the twilight, and left their tents, and their horses, and their asses, even the camp as it was, and fled for their life.”

The prophetic prediction respecting Samaria is near its accomplishment. The occurrence, which now offers itself to our contemplation, is the prelude to the promised relief. The arm of the Lord is not shortened that he cannot save ; and he is never in want of means. Our attention is called, —I. To the lepers at the gate ; II. To the victory achieved without arms.

I. The prophet, with cheerfulness and confidence, has announced the Divine promise, and the unbelieving nobleman has heard his doom. The multitude separates in silence ; but their hearts beat high with anxious expectation. The king retires thoughtfully to his palace, but Elisha and his friends prayerfully await the events about to take place. The people, assembled in each others' dwellings, wonder in what way the assurance given by the man of God will be brought about. A mysterious solemnity has overspread the city, as though a festival had been proclaimed by supernatural agency. Every counte-

nance wears the expression of something between hope and fear; and the brow of the most dejected has become less gloomy.

The present situation of the Samaritans is the one in which we at all times stand. Ours, my brethren, is always a time of hope! In every situation, the light of promise shines upon our path; and we are constantly cheered by deliverances and visitations from on high. Were we aware of our true situation, our state of mind would always resemble the present frame of the besieged in Samaria; it would be that of joyful expectation. We should then pass through life upon an elevated path, happy in the enjoyment of heavenly prospects, and raised, like the eagle, above all that is grovelling and mean.

Our narrative conducts us without the gates of the city, where we behold a spectacle that fills us with horror and dismay. In a wretched shed, that leans against the walls of the city, we perceive, crouching together, four spectre-like forms, covered with rags. They are lepers, on whom a trace of the human feature is scarcely discernible, who, in obedience to a Divine ordinance, were expelled the city, till indications of returning health appeared. The Samaritans in their apostasy, had not, it seems, entirely forgotten the regulations of Jehovah; but they appear to have acted by them, as many do in the present day, who, with criminal audacity, select for their own observance such of the commands of God as either do not interfere with their particular inclinations, or are favourable to their selfish purposes. The injunction of hospitality they readily acquiesce in; it is congenial to their nature; they are careful to observe the commandments, to abstain from theft and murder; the violation of them would be their ruin. They approve the law, "Pay what thou owest!" For they have more to receive than to pay. "Act justly and fear no one:" they are also willing to comply with this; it is consistent with the pharisaical ignorance and proud self-sufficiency with which they are puffed up. The Samaritans

also eagerly enforced the Divine law, which enabled them to get rid of persons infected with this dreadful disease ; but precepts such as, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart,—and thy neighbour as thyself"—"Agree with thine adversary quickly"—"Give to him that asketh thee"—"Being reviled, revile not again"—"Crucify 'the flesh with the affections and lusts!'" they take no notice of. What shameless presumption thus to trifle with and abridge the law of a holy God! Yet thousands are guilty of this treason against the Most High ; and many, even amongst those who wish to pass for religious and devout, but who rather resemble the Pharisee spoken of in the New Testament ; for although they do not pay tithes of mint and cummin, yet they act as if the whole law, and abstinence from the world, were comprised in the one point of carefully avoiding its resorts of pleasure. They forget the "weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith," and the awful woe denounced against all who act thus ; these they ought to do, "and not to leave the other undone." O fools and blind, thus to "strain at a gnat and swallow a camel!" "Whosoever therefore," saith the Lord, "shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven—For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled!"

Four lepers without the gate ; four starving individuals, smitten of God. What a dark escutcheon and device for the place! Does it not appear, as if they had been purposely placed there by God, that by their cry of "Unclean! unclean!" they might proclaim the state of the whole place ; that by their malady, as a judgment proceeding immediately from God, they might show the true character of the calamity with which the city was visited? For God not unfrequently makes known to the world his thoughts and admonitions, by living epistles and forms ; and that he sometimes resorts to a sacred irony for the

same purpose, cannot be doubted by any one who is acquainted with the Scriptures. These disfigured beings were likewise to answer another purpose, besides the disgraceful one we have already pointed out. God, it seems, had chosen them as the heralds of his merciful approach. If this be the case, it is the more strikingly evident, that the relief extended to the town was one of pure mercy, and perfectly irrespective of all personal worthiness or demerit. The peculiar situation occupied by these unhappy persons, between Samaria, the city of Israel, and the heathen camp, is emblematical of the position of very many in the present day, on whom Divine truth has made too strong an impression to permit them cordially to unite in the opposition of the world; but who, at the same time, are too much alive to its pleasures and its favour, to be able decidedly to join the ranks of those who have enlisted under the banner of Christ. O wretched state of indecision, as little productive of peace and consolation as of sanctification and life! But this divided state in no way compromises or halves the eternal destiny of such persons; eternal damnation is its fruit and consequence, and not, as some may suppose, an intermediate state between blessedness and misery. To obtain the crown, it is necessary to "count all things but loss," that we "may win Christ;" to give up all things and follow him; to renounce every other dependence, and to cling to the cross for safety. To him who does not make an entire surrender of himself to Christ, Christ is lost.

There are still other points of resemblance between many whom we see around us, and these four unhappy persons. Like them, they belong to Israel, but they are leprous. Their weaknesses, inconsistencies and deficiencies have exhausted our patience, and they are excluded from our society, and, as we suppose, are without the gates of Zion. But who knows, if these very persons may not some day return with the joyful intelligence that the enemy's camp is deserted? If we may not hear them

sing of God's free grace, and the power of Christ's blood, in fuller tones than we have ever yet heard? How unclean was Peter, as he stood without the gate, after the lamentable occurrence in the palace of the high priest! and how did he afterwards strengthen the brethren! Where shall we find a comforter, an evangelist, a harbinger of victory like Paul? And it was by means of the thorn in his flesh, that he was prepared and ripened for his office. It was under the buffetings of Satan he learned, that in Christ there was no room for care of any kind. It is indeed a dreadful thing, when the leprosy that lies at the root of our nature discovers itself outwardly; but the glory of redemption rises in our estimation, in the same proportion that we feel the need of it.

II. It was in the evening twilight, that the four lepers left their shed in order to deliver themselves up to the enemies of Israel, as they had agreed. But on approaching the camp, they find, to their indescribable astonishment, the tents empty, and not a Syrian anywhere to be seen. Scarcely trusting their eyes, they advance further into the camp, where they discover long lines of horses fastened to poles, but whichever way they look, not a human being presents himself. Even the magazines and stores of provisions are unguarded; and in many of the tents, food is lying either on the ground, or upon roughly constructed tables, as if hastily quitted before partaken of. So strange does the thing appear to them, that they are doubtful, if it be reality or a dream. The silence of the solitude is occasionally broken only by the impatient neighings of the unfed horses; and they feel almost as ill at ease as if the scene were one of enchantment. But no! it is not an empty vision; what they behold is reality; and the mystery, as explained to us in the sequel of the narrative, is both surprising and delightful.

We will now recur to what has happened. While the Syrians, perfectly divested of fear, are quietly reposing in

their camp—confident, no doubt, that a short time must put them in possession of the city, and afford them the gratification of seeing the Syrian flag waving on the battlements of the royal palace—a rushing noise is suddenly heard, resembling that of a distant tempest; yet the horizon is cloudless, and presents no indications of a storm. On listening more attentively, and as the sound draws nearer, it seems like the noise of numerous chariots, and of a mighty host. Astonished and alarmed, they conclude that the king of Israel had hired the kings of the Hittites, and the kings of the Egyptians to come up against them, and the cry of “The enemy! The enemy!” is heard throughout the camp. This idea takes possession of every mind, and strengthens into conviction as the sound appears to be advancing nearer. Consternation and confusion are now universal; all command has ceased; and escape is the only thing thought of. Whatever can encumber their flight is thrown aside; the fields are covered with arms, armour, and baggage; the camp, together with the horses, mules, tents, and magazines is abandoned in their haste. The alarm of the fugitives increases at every step, as the sound becomes more distinctly heard, as of chariots and horsemen in close pursuit. At length their strength fails, and they are compelled to halt, which they do with the less reluctance and apprehension, being already at a considerable distance from Samaria; and the stillness that has succeeded, seeming to indicate that their enemies, have given up the pursuit.

But what sort of a noise was it? The history informs us, that the Lord caused “the Syrians to hear a noise.” Was it then a mere empty sound? Had the heathen deemed it to be such, and boldly advanced towards it, they would have paid dearly for their temerity. Deadly lightnings would have darted against them; for, together with the commotion heard in the air, those mighty champions were present, who stand ever armed for the protection of God’s people, and the destruction of his enemies,

commands in it! What an uncomfortable bivouac does it afford! It is lighted neither by the sun nor by the moon, but threatening clouds of mischief are ever lowering over it. All are occupied in it, it is true; but every one is erecting a scaffold for himself. There is eating and drinking in this camp; but every one is swallowing destruction, and drinking in lies like water. Joy and mirth are in it; but their joy is like that of Haman at the banquet, while the gallows was being prepared for him. There is likewise repose in it, but the sentiments which constitute it, resemble a thin and loosely-woven covering, extended over a yawning and perilous abyss; there are also enemies, traitors, and murderers on every hand. You do not believe it, but your unbelief is your greatest misfortune. You are blinded, intoxicated, and bound in the snares of hell. What think you of the sins of your life? Have they, do you think, passed away with the years that you have devoted to them? I tell you, they stand around you in grim array, and cry to heaven for vengeance. What think you of the prince of darkness and his power? Do you persuade yourselves that the torch of modern illumination has chased him from the stage? Alas, he has his work in your heart, and his chains, though unseen, envelope you. For what do you account the threatenings of the Almighty, which are contained in his word? Perhaps you deem them mere scarecrows, an empty denunciation. But know that they are artillery, cast and loaded on Mount Ebal; though their thunder is at present reserved, yet their matches are lighted behind the clouds; and when they are discharged, they will pour upon you curses and eternal damnation. And what do you think of death? "Death!" you may be ready to exclaim, "oh, there is time enough to think of death." Yet we perceive the black-winged vulture hovering around your heads, and to all whom he finds without, he comes, not as a messenger of peace, but as the minister of a Judge whose throne is a consuming fire. Thus are you surrounded from with-

out: and say, have you peace within? Do sabbath bells vibrate in your soul; or does not the cry of "Woe, woe," better describe the emotions of your breast? Does not a feeling of anxiety creep over you now and then, as if you were not in perfect safety? Do you not sometimes experience, in your inmost soul, a gnawing, like that of a corroding worm? and are you not sometimes heavily oppressed with a foreboding, as though you were advancing towards some great but unknown misfortune? Oh be assured, this portentous feeling, which is so frequently able in a moment to embitter the cup of all your earthly pleasures, is indicative of the frailty and emptiness of your life, of the dangers brooding over you, of the assassins that lay in wait for you! Thus you occupy a camp invested both within and without, at once the assailants and the assailed. You stand opposed to the anointed of the Lord, the people of the Most High, and to truth, the daughter of heaven; opposed to you are God, and your violation of the law and justice, all are conspiring your destruction; heaven and hell, angels, and devils, and death. Such is thy state, poor blind world! Though, thou bear the crown and the sceptre we envy thee not. Repose upon thy mountains of gold and silver, we pity and think thee wretched. Though thy life may appear to be adorned with endless honours and pleasures, thy position is a lost one. I would not, for all thy glory, stand in thy place; therefore the trumpet sounds, "Go forth from this camp." Go forth all ye who are not concealed among the crowd, it is not safe where you are. Go forth before the storm bursts, which is now gathering over you; before that fire descends, which shall consume the adversary. But how "go forth?" "Must we look forth?" no, that will not do; "or desire to go forth?" this can accomplish nothing; "or reach forth?" no! it is impossible to remain in this camp, and at the same time gather fruit from "the tree of life." There must be a going forth, a separation. And not merely from the outward forms of life prevalent amongst the blind multitude,

from their vain amusements and modes of thought, from their systems of error and falsehood; but also from their nature, their spirit, and life. You must go forth with the whole heart, with the entire disposition of the soul; and, God be praised, it is possible. A door has been opened, by which we may escape the manifold dangers that exist within this camp. Of the truth of this, the herald who thus calls upon you to "go forth," is himself a proof. How firmly was he once settled in the midst of this throng; but he broke through. And now he calls to all sinners, "Follow me, the way is open." But what avails this cry? The people in the camp have drunk deeply of a most intoxicating liquor. They hear the alarm beaten by the watchman; but what is their reply? Some say, "Let us sleep on, watchman;" others, "Peace, peace! there is no danger; let to-morrow take thought for itself." Others say, "Paul, thou art beside thyself;" others, "Another time we will attend to thee." Some are partially roused, and seem disposed to follow; but no sooner do they perceive the dusty garments of the herald, on his person the marks of the Lord, his feet torn and bleeding, than they are deterred from entering on such a thorny path, and say in their hearts, "Leave us, thou gloomy messenger, we prefer our idols." But what voice can effectively and savingly call upon a dead world to "go forth" from this camp? It resides in no human breast. Let the persuasive voice of love, the alarming threatenings of holy zeal, the tears of a dying mother, the affectionate entreaties and representations of a departing father, the eloquent exhortations of an enlightened teacher, the earnest expostulations of friendship, together with adversity, want, and affliction; let all these, in themselves such powerful incentives, unite together with one voice, and call, as with the voice of a trumpet, "Son, daughter, friend, beloved, go forth from the camp of the uncircumcised, the spiritually dead." Ah! what would it avail? Human efforts are useless. Every warning and exhorta-

tion, addressed to the natural man, is like shaking a lifeless corpse, by which it is so far from being recovered to life, that its corruption is rather promoted by it, and the smell of death rendered the more perceptible. The only voice that can utter this call, "Go forth," with success, is the voice from above. This apostolic exhortation contains a word of most significant and weighty import—"Now!" It is said, "Let us now go forth without the camp." This word "now" refers to a most important point of time, and until it arrives, with regard to us, the apostle's words are as though they were addressed to the winds. This time comes, when God himself pronounces the word, "Go forth," and gives to it energy and effect, by extending his hand to the sinner whom he calls. Then an escape takes place, like that of persons from a falling house, or mariners from a sinking vessel, or a traveller from the hands of robbers, as though all we possess were lost.

What happened to the Syrians in our narrative, must happen to all men. God must cause them to hear a sound, the sound of his wrath, the surges of death, the thunder of his law and its curse, and the blast of that trumpet, which ushers in the day of general judgment. Yes, then we become eager to escape from this wretched encampment, we abandon the tents we have hitherto occupied; cast away the incumbrance of our own wisdom, righteousness, and strength; and seek in the wounds of Christ, the only city of refuge that stands open to us.

"Let us therefore go forth unto him without the camp!" But whither shall we go? We have already glanced at the object of this going forth, and that it can be acceptable to the taste of all the world, is not to be supposed. Were it to some device of human wisdom, we should not have to go forth alone; were it to a scene of sensual enjoyment, numbers would attend us; were it to a kingdom, in which we could become great, thousands would rush towards it; but we cannot hold out to you any such prospects. The road which conducts to the object which

the apostle had in view, was never one of the most frequented on earth, but the road to hell is thronged. It is more convenient and pleasant to traverse; and the horrors in which it terminates, are unseen. The object we behold on our first going forth, is a gloomy eminence; but which to us appears more beautiful than a mount of roses. Then we perceive an accursed tree standing upon the eminence between two others; this tree is in our estimation the tree of life. And lastly, we behold a bleeding man hanging upon this tree, with a crown of thorns upon his head. It is to Him the apostle exhorts us to go forth. The object then of our going forth is Christ crucified; "Let us go forth to him!" cries Paul; and the call is obeyed by all, who have escaped from the darkness of falsehood into the light of truth; by all, whose eyes God has opened, who have been freed by his "Ephata!" from the delusions of Satan. If you will not go with us; we will go alone. If you are righteous; we are sinners. Yours may be a God that winketh at iniquity; but ours is holy, holy, holy!—Though you may have obtained information that he accounteth sin as a very little thing; yet we believe with David, that "the wicked shall not stand in his sight!" You may feel sure that our Father in heaven cannot be angry; but we confess we are alarmed by the words, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." You may have discovered that the Eternal can supersede the threatenings he has once pronounced without scruple; but we, poor mortals, cannot shake off the conviction that by so doing, he would violate his truth, his justice, and his holiness. To you it may have been revealed that forgiveness with him is arbitrary, and dependent on his will; we cannot forget the Scripture declaration, "Without shedding of blood, there is no remission of sin." You may be sufficient in yourselves to be your own mediators and saviours; yet we, helpless beings, require another to interpose on our behalf. You may have discovered the art of ingratiating yourselves into the

favour of the Eternal Majesty in the varnish of your own external excellence ; but we think it necessary to be arrayed in the ornament of a perfect righteousness, in order to bear the scrutiny of such a Judge. Oh let us then depart ! You, the wise and prudent, to join the master spirits of the day ; we, who are weak and miserable, to unite with publicans, with the fishermen of Galilee, with Paul, Peter, and John. With them we will go forth to the cross ; and we not only confess our devotion to him who hangs bleeding upon it, but we acknowledge that he is our hope and righteousness, our strength and life, our sole dependence ; that he bore the curse for us, we avow to be the only reason that we are not eternally lost ; that he fulfilled the law in our stead, we deem the only ground of our acceptance with God ; that as a priest he appeared before God for us, we consider the exclusive source of that joy, with which we are enabled to approach the throne of grace ; and that his blood pleads for us there, oh ! this is our only consolation in life and death. Are we on this account offensive to you, who pursue a different path ? we regret it ; yet we assure you, it is easy to dispense with your applause. Nay, we even feel somewhat of that holy defiance, which prompted the apostle to exclaim : “ Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach ! ” We covet no honour that is denied to our Lord and King. We value not the favour of those who are not his adherents. We wish not to be exempted from their revilings, if they revile our Saviour. As an affectionate son will accept of no favour from those who revile his father or his mother, still less will we accept of any from the revilers of Jesus. That the world should invest us with a robe of derision, and a “ crown of thorns,” we do not object, as long as our Divine Head is decorated by them in a similar manner ; and had we, for the sake of Jesus, to bear something worse than reproach and contempt, what would it matter ? “ Here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come.” This is not our home. We are hastening through this land

of Mesech, like birds of passage, which build no nests on the shores over which they spread their wing, but fly joyfully through the air, alike unheeding the fogs beneath them, and the rude blasts by which they are assailed. These winds serve but to strengthen in them the blessed conviction, that this atmosphere is one in which they cannot abide; but that they are hastening to a warmer and more genial region. We, likewise, are sensible that whatever is pleasant in our lot, may be dissipated in the storm; but hope remains, which wings our course. Here we reside in tents that are quickly broken up, and easily removed, and we lay our hands, as it were, on the glories of that futurity, where our crowns are laid up. Of a truth, "The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us." In God's name, then, let us go joyfully forward! Jerusalem is in sight!

VIII. GOOD TIDINGS.

THE parable of the prodigal son is full of meaning, even in its minutest particulars. The smallest articles of dress and ornament, which the father presents to the son whom he had recovered, are emblematical of the treasures that are imperishable and divine. The meaning of the robe and the shoes is sufficiently obvious, but the ring, which the father caused to be placed on the finger of his beloved child, (Luke xv. 22,) merits particular attention. What then are we to think of it? A ring has ever been the sign and pledge of affection and love. When Pharaoh had formed an attachment to Joseph, and had entrusted to him the direction of public affairs, he conferred upon him a ring, in further token of the friendly sentiments he entertained towards him. Rings of affiance and marriage, what are they, but gifts symbolical of mutual constancy and love?

Now I can tell you of a ring, that makes its possessor truly happy. And were it his only possession, he would be rich enough to leave emperors and kings unenvied. This ring is not, indeed, of gold, or of any other earthly material. Neither is it the gift of an earthly bridegroom, nor of any potentate of this world, and it is of very wonderful and mysterious workmanship. The inscriptions that adorn it are indescribably pleasing and delightful. One is, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love;" another, "Go in peace, thy sins are forgiven thee;" a third, "The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed;" and

in the centre of the ring is a crucifix, surmounted with a radiant crown of glory. Paul possessed this ring, and was therefore enabled to exclaim with joy, "I obtained mercy!" Peter possessed it when he rejoiced, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope!" Oh, many, very many, have already possessed it; and all have been joyful, blessed, and divinely happy,—happy in the desert, in the scene of conflict, and even at the stake! This ring is miraculous.

It can no longer be doubtful to you what the ring is intended to describe. It signifies assurance, the testimony of God in the heart that we are his children in Christ. It is true, we may be accounted blessed, if we are the subjects of grace at all, no matter whether while we live we are sensible of it or not. But it is doubly blissful, while still in this valley of death, to experience the joyful assurance, that "neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord!" Yes, the ring merits that we should sacrifice all for its possession. There is no amulet so desirable. It opens for us a peaceful Eden on this side the grave.

Do you inquire, further, from whence the ring has been derived? the solution is mysterious. The ring has been dearly purchased! Not indeed by us to whom it has been given, but by him who presents it to us. It sounds, indeed, like a very easy matter, when the father in the parable says, "Put a ring upon his finger;" but how great a sacrifice he had made before he said this. God is undoubtedly rich, (who will question it?) and such a ring he might, perhaps, possess amongst his treasures for the hands of holy angels; but not for the fallen children of Adam. To sinners he could give no ring of affiance, nor assurance of his love. His righteousness enjoined separation from sinners; his justice and truth required their eternal rejection. One thing was indispensable—previous

mediation and reconciliation. This, as you are aware, God took upon himself to accomplish, and in order to do so "he spared not," but freely gave up, "his only begotten Son." Had not this mysterious interposition taken place, God, in resigning us to the powers of darkness, might have provided for us collars of iron, but rings of affiance and pledges of his grace he would not have had to give to us. In the passion of our Surety you see the laboratory, in which this jewel was acquired and prepared for us. The sacrifice of the cross presents to us the sure and unchanging ground, on which a holy God, without disparagement to his holiness, can say to sinners, "Ye have obtained mercy!" Dearly, indeed, has this ring been purchased. It is marked with the sweat and blood of the eternal Son! Is it further asked, who are the receivers of this beautiful ring? the answer is: only those who hunger after mercy. Should any one boast of possessing it, who is a Pharisee, a worldling, a slave of sin—such a one is a thief, and has stolen the ring. But the eyes of God are as a flame of fire, and discover all things. A terrible period awaits such a man, when he shall be deprived of the jewel he had so presumptuously appropriated, by the declaration of the Judge, "Verily, I say unto you, I never knew you!" But let not the thought, that he is a sinner, discourage him who thirsteth after Jesus; and were he distinguished as such above all others, let him remember that a Rahab, a David, a Manasseh, have all received the ring. Let him earnestly apply for this precious jewel at the throne of grace, not for the ring of virtue and of angels, but for that obtained by the publican, and he will receive it.

He must, it is true, be satisfied to wait till the hour of the Father is come. Before the Father awards the ring, it cannot be obtained. However much inclined to bestow it, no man can impart it. Neither can it be acquired by reading, singing, or reflection. Men do many things to obtain it. They compare themselves with other Christians, in order, from similarity of disposition, to derive the

comfortable assurance that they are in a state of grace. They "search the Scriptures" to discover the marks of grace unfolded in them, in the hope of finding one or other of them in themselves. But even should their search be successful, and they should be able to say, "Yes, I find in myself some of these traces; I mourn, I hunger and thirst after righteousness, I am poor in spirit;" yet still, before we can form the joyful conclusion, that we belong to the kingdom of heaven, one thing remains to be done, which of ourselves we cannot do; God's Spirit must place the ring upon our finger, and that he does, when and how he pleases. He suffers many to sigh for it long, but to others he imparts it on the first recognition, as was the case with the lost son. No wonder that the elder brother was envious.

Blessed is he who has obtained this ring! He to whom God has given it, rises superior to all difficulties. The conscience of such a person is no longer tormented by his sins, and the Spirit testifies with his, that he is born of God. The glory of this ring dispels all the mists of care; and if dipped into the bitter waters of Marah, they become sweet and pure. In possession of this ring, we can sing with joy, even amidst the storms of adversity. We can languish in the hottest furnace of affliction, unconsumed. It can soften the bed of anguish, and render the loss of all things light, and easy to bear. This ring inspires us with courage for every conflict, and renders us valiant and triumphant. It sweetens our hours of repose, and cheers us on our pilgrimage. It opens to us the gates of heaven, and we fly with it to the bosom of the Father, crying, "Abba, Father!" Nay, this ring deprives death of its terrors, and lights the dark valley with its cheering rays. What was it made the face of Stephen shine as it had been the face of an angel? It was this ring.

Yes, he to whom this ring pertains, has found the philosopher's stone, the wonder-working treasure. Whoever will strive and struggle for a substantial good, let him seek

to obtain this jewel. And he who has it, let him not again surrender it. Should Moses, or the accuser from the bottomless pit, or our own conscience, seek to deprive us of it, let us defy them one and all, tell them they are unauthorized, and put them to flight, by pointing to the cross. But let us entreat the Almighty to keep the ring bright and clear for us. A daily renewal of our assurance that we are in a state of grace, is the spring of all holiness. Fear oppresses, cripples, fetters, and renders us powerless. But joy in the Lord is our strength.

These remarks will, I hope, be acceptable to you, as an introduction to the reflections, to which the spoils this day presented to our view will give rise, and to the possession of which this ring constitutes the title. Good news is at hand, and it will be well for all who are entitled to participate in it.

2 KINGS VII. 8—11.

“And when these lepers came to the uttermost part of the camp, they went into one tent, and did eat and drink, and carried thence silver and gold and raiment, and went and hid it: and came again, and entered into another tent, and carried thence also, and went and hid it. Then they said one to another, We do not well: This day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace: if we tarry till the morning light, some mischief will come upon us: now therefore come that we may go and tell the king's household. So they came and called unto the porter of the city: and they told them saying, We came to the camp of the Syrians, and behold there was no man there, neither voice of man, but horses tied, and asses tied, and the tents as they were. And he called the porters, and they told it to the king's house within.”

We once more join company with the lepers before the gate of Samaria. Let us not be displeased at again meeting with these unhappy beings; they will serve as pilots to direct our thoughts to elevated subjects. Let us consider,—I. The plundering of the camp. II. The self-pronounced judgment. III. The good tidings.

I. The hunger of the four lepers has been abundantly appeased. Had they but waited for the Lord in their distress, how much greater, more holy and abundant, would

have been their satisfaction! They would then have had to rejoice, that God is a hearer of prayer, in a fresh evidence of the important truth, that their sighs were heard on high; it would have been a spiritual, and not a mere sensual delight. Oh! there is a vast difference between the feelings, with which a Christian and a worldling receives the same external blessings. While the latter estimates them only according to their earthly value, the former views them in the far superior light of a gift of eternal love, and in sweet connexion with unchangeable promises, in delightful association with their sighs and their petitions, as the result of their adoption. They perceive in it a salutation from the throne, and joy pervades their sanctuary. Oh, let no Christian complain of distresses, that leave no way open to him but a throne of grace! Let no one complain of being placed in circumstances that exclude every prospect of relief, except that opened to him in the Divine promises. Oh, it is a thousand times more desirable to be involved in every kind of distress, and only after many cries and tears to enjoy Divine deliverance, than to repose through life on roses, and not to know any thing of Peniels and Ebenezers, but by the experience of others! It is infinitely more profitable to obtain relief, after every human resource has failed, and we have been forced to exclaim, "My hope is in thee! Lord remember me!" than to walk always on a smooth path, or to have an immediate escape provided from every difficulty. Though the former is more agreeable to the flesh, yet the latter produces spiritual fruit, and calls into existence flowers of joy and peace that will never fade, and whose quickening fragrance sheds a balm over our whole existence.

The deserted Syrian camp presents to us an object worthy of consideration, extending, I might say, into a prophetic prospect. For what were these warlike tents erected, these well-stored magazines provided, if not for the destruction and starvation of Samaria? Now, however,

it appears, that all these hostile preparations were unconsciously made for the preservation of the people they were designed to destroy. Thus it is with all the operations undertaken against the kingdom of God ; they eventually contribute to its promotion and extension. Let the learned opponents of our faith devote their lives to the investigation of philology, history, and natural philosophy ; yet the hope of subverting Christianity in this way will disappoint them. The stores of knowledge, which they collect, serve in a thousand ways to confirm and unravel Biblical truth. Let worldlings, with their new inventions, continue their vain efforts to draw, as it were, heaven down to earth, and by converting this world into a paradise, to make us forget the one above. They are unconsciously working for the Lord, who, when the time comes that he will make his work short, will plant his banner upon these flying vessels, and cause his word to run. No ; we are not greatly afflicted when we contemplate the gigantic pursuits of this anti-christian age. The deserted camp at Samaria rises up before us like a consoling vision, and the words of our Lord afford us still greater consolation, "The gates of hell shall not prevail against my church ;" as likewise, "There is a river, the streams whereof make glad the city of God."

The first emotions of joy, experienced by the lepers, on finding the enemy really gone, having subsided, they proceed to enter the tents, and to feast themselves on the provisions they find. All the silver and gold, and the clothing they chance to meet with, they carry away and bury, reserving the division to a future time. Tent after tent has been cleared in this manner, and they have in a short time accumulated a considerable treasure. Of what does this scene remind us, my friends ? Of something great and inexpressedly glorious. In these leprous freebooters we see the position of the whole church of Christ after his resurrection, as it is briefly and vividly depicted to us by the spirit of prophecy, Psa. lxxviii. 12 : "Kings

of armies did flee apace: and she that tarried at home divided the spoil."

Here we have also the flight of a king. Before it occurred, who would have imagined it? Now call to mind the bloody scene exhibited on the day of our Lord's death, and the mournful sabbath that succeeded it. Then a triumph was celebrated, but not in Zion. The accents of joy resounded through other realms. The champion, that would have deprived him of his crown and sceptre, who had reigned till then upon the earth, is himself numbered with the dead, and his cause appears to be for ever lost. Therefore it is that there is weeping in one place, and rejoicing in the other. Oh what swellings of pride, what vaunting round his sepulchre! Five powers, it would seem, retained their sway, when the Lion of Judah sank. The first was, "The god of this world," to whose dreadful authority all the descendants of Adam were consigned by the eternal Judge. Against him in particular, the great deceased has raised his standard. His head, above all others, he thought to crush, and to strip him of his prey. The conflict was severe, and the dragon maintained the field. For was not Christ prostrated in the dust? And who will believe in a fallen Saviour? The second of these five powers is nearly related to the first. He sometimes indeed wears the prophetic mantle, sometimes the priestly robe, sometimes the philosopher's crown, but he is not the less a king, his name is Antichrist: he existed in essence then as now, although his fleshly personification may be still to come. How proudly he also conducts himself in Joseph's garden, and writes disdainfully on the tomb, "Thou art not he!" And alas! is it not confirmed by the event? Could he be the Son of God, who was vanquished and overthrown? The third of these potentates bears a scythe, and not a sceptre; is clothed in sable, and not in purple; his name is Death, and a host of alarms and terrors follow in his train. The mysterious departed dared him also to a trial

of strength. "Art thou capable," he said, "of binding me, then all flesh is thine to all eternity! But if I conquer thee, I do it for all my people!" The gloomy king of terrors accepted the challenge, seized the daring stranger, tore him bleeding to the earth, and bound him in the grave. Alas! alas! The fourth of these mighty powers is Moses. Moses a king? Jesus himself, as you know, speaks of Moses' seat and judicial office. Moses is undoubtedly a dignity. His attendants are curses, lightnings, and ministers of vengeance. The whole world is under his jurisdiction, and he declares with the authority of God, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them!" The Man from Bethlehem, and from heaven, came to introduce a new covenant of grace, and that by perfectly satisfying Moses on our behalf. Did he succeed? Ah, for two whole days he has been experiencing the fate, not of a just man, but that of a sinner under the curse of death. For how can this be regarded, but as a Divine testimony that he has not fulfilled all righteousness? Yes, Moses is triumphant, and to all appearance will continue as before to pronounce accursed him "that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." The fifth of these powers is sin. Or have you never read what the apostle says, "Sin hath reigned unto death?" Yes, in death it displays its whole power, in death its whole terrors are seen. Sin has also its attendants: an alarmed conscience, the worm that never dies, the fire that is not quenched. This terrific power established the thrones of death and hell, and made an enemy of Moses. The Lord from heaven would deprive it of its sting and of its power, by taking upon himself the wrath, the curse, and ruin that had devolved on us. Has he done so? Did he suffer it all righteously and without a murmur? Does he rise again from this humiliation? Then it is plain, that he has not sustained all that he undertook to sustain, or that he has not done it righteously. Alas! sin triumphs, and,

judging from appearances, will continue to reign and to destroy. Yes, this is what Zion believes; this is what the weeping women believe, who stand sorrowing by the sepulchre; Peter, Thomas, and John believe it, and give up all for lost. This is their lamentation on Friday, throughout the sabbath, and the succeeding night; but, with the dawn of the Lord's-day arose the eternal triumph of the church of God. The almighty call of the Eternal Father penetrates the sepulchre, our champion rises from the grave divinely glorified, and as he stands above it, we hear him say: "I am he that liveth and was dead,—and have the keys of hell and of death!" How suddenly has the enemy's victorious shout been silenced! How crest-fallen they appear! The reappearance of Jesus has transformed the theatre of their supposed victory into the scene of their complete overthrow. The leaders of the host fly! The prince of darkness gnashes his teeth as he hurries from the spot; all power is taken from him. The blasphemer, anti-christ, turns away confounded: even his epitaph, "Thou art not he," has disappeared. Death, before whom all trembled, now trembles himself, and flees disarmed. Moses himself abstains from cursing, drops his sword, and silently quits the field; for it is now evident that sin is atoned for. "It is Christ that died, yea, rather that is risen again!—Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect?—Who is he that condemneth?"

The kings being routed, a more agreeable vision presents itself to our view. It is the church; the true, the living church; the companion of his humiliation on earth, the sharer of his Father's love, and of his blessedness and glory in heaven. Let us hail her appearance at the empty grave! In the early part of this glorious day she mourned in Mary Magdalene, in Peter, and in all the others, but now her joy is reflected in the eyes of millions in heaven and on earth. Oh, she has good reason to wave her flag, and clap her hands in triumph, at the discomfiture of these powers, for she is herself the living prize of the risen

Saviour. He has conquered many crowns, but she is the choicest of them all ; many splendid ornaments has he acquired, but she is the brightest of the whole. It was for her sake he appeared on earth ; to redeem her from the effects of the curse, the power of Satan, and of death, was the object of his labours, and his dearest reward. The resurrection morning assures him of his victory, and that she is his. This constitutes his festal joy, and his delight. And her possession is indestructible as is the new life that he has acquired ; he has elevated her with himself above all things ; and has made her beautiful and glorious as his own image.

By Luther, in his translation, she is termed "The housewife." In the original text she is expressly designated as "She who tarried at home." The expression indicates the manner in which the church has acquired her glory. She has contributed nothing to it herself, nor was she required to do so ; the part assigned to her was to look on, and to enjoy, not to co-operate and acquire. There was one who took the whole upon himself. His command was, "Sit ye here, while I go !" "Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now !" Alone he trod the path of righteousness for us ; alone he undertook the dreadful conflict with hell and the devil. On our behalf he appeared alone before the tribunal of the Eternal Judge, he precipitated himself into the fire prepared for sinners, he rushed to meet the accursed death. We remained behind. Oh, what would have been our fate, had we been forced to encounter these horrors. And yet the apostles speak of the bride's being crucified, dead, and buried with him ; and they are justified in so speaking. It is only necessary to understand their meaning. We were present in all that he encountered ; through fire and water, in storm and tempest. We were with him in his fulfilment of the law, as really and truly as with Adam at the fall. He took us with him before the bar of justice, in like manner as Adam had dragged us thither with him. We passed with him through

all his agony ; suffered death with him on the cross, and descended with him into the grave. We were with him everywhere, as persons represented, are with their substitute, or debtors with their surety, who liquidates their debts, while they remain at home in peace. Neither have our feet become sore, nor our fingers weary, by our having thus participated with him. We tarried at home, and in so doing, the church finds her entire salvation. She receives it gratis, without contributing anything to it herself. Oh, let it not be told you in vain ; it is not she who will co-operate, she who will assist, and herself contribute to the work, but the Scriptures say : “ She that tarried at home divided the spoil.”

What are the spoils of Christ’s resurrection, you already know. Come, imitate the lepers in the Syrian camp ! Enrich yourselves ! What is there you covet ? Is it a splendid seal to your most holy faith in the divinity of Christ ? Is it an argument for immortality, that shall supersede every other, and abide the fiery trial ? Is it a demonstration, that in spite of corruption and the grave, your bodies also shall not be lost ? Or is it a Divine authority for planting, on your habitation, the standard of triumph over all the powers of darkness ? These you will find all collected here ; and if you desire still greater things than these, they also are at hand. Here is a discharge from all your debts ! At the sight of the document I tremble with delight. You know the mysterious transfer that has been made. All our sins have been divinely ascribed to Christ. He bore them “ in his own body on the tree.” Punishment was awarded to him in our stead ; the cup of sorrows was presented to him. But did he empty it ? This was the question—the question on which our lives depended. The decision was with God, and he has decided it. So long as our Surety lay bound in death, it was doubtful whether he had completely and worthily atoned for us. Had he continued in that doomed state, the fact itself would have affixed a

dreadful negative to the question. But behold the miracle in Joseph's garden! What has become of the afflicted one, the worm that lay prostrate in the dust? In his place stands an exalted personage, covered with crowns and glory. Who was it, that raised and exalted him, and crowned him thus with glory and honour? It was the Eternal Judge, the thrice holy God. And what is it he thus testifies to the Man of Sorrows? What can it be but this—"Son of my right hand," he says, "the sins, which thou hadst taken on thyself, are removed! Thou hast borne the utmost curse for them!" The glorious resurrection of our Surety is nothing less than a receipt from the hand of the Eternal Majesty, testifying that he had liquidated and paid all to the utmost farthing, and that the law was perfectly satisfied. To whom was this discharge in full addressed? To Him, as our Surety. Then were they not his own sins, for which he atoned? No, they were the sins of his people. These received their reward, and were cancelled; and hence it is that the testimony given by the Father at Christ's resurrection, that the Son was worthy of heaven, is essentially true of us also. On us, the lepers before the gate, the declaration of indemnity descended. "She that tarried at home divided the spoil!"

II. Our freebooters are still actively employed in securing the treasures they have found; but their work is not performed with a steady hand. Admitting their peculations to be allowable, as their consciences assure them they are, yet they are making a miracle that was designed for a higher purpose than their emolument, subservient to their avarice. By the dispersion of the Syrians the Lord had contemplated principally the honour and establishment of his prophet; and, indeed, it can only occur to sordid minds, that such omnipotent interpositions are merely mines for the gratification of their selfish interests. But how many instances of the same kind take place among ourselves! Extraordinary interpositions, preservations,

and blessings are experienced, in which none can be so blind as not to perceive the miraculous hand of the Almighty. On such occasions, we should be sensible that God acts thus towards us for the honour of his own name, and for the edification and strengthening of others; and we ought to testify of his goodness, that the brethren may profit by it in every possible way. Instead of which, we selfishly hoard up the blessing we have experienced, without even thinking of saying to the poor, "Come, the Lord has blessed me, but not for myself alone;" or of erecting some monument to the Lord, which, like the orphan house of Franke, and many similar Ebenezers, might tell of the kindness and goodness of the Lord to after generations, and that no one has ever been put to shame, who placed his trust in him.

These lepers, indeed, appear to entertain sentiments similar to those we have described; and to feel that, in burying the treasures of the camp, they are committing an act very like sacrilege. This better feeling happily takes possession of their minds; and they say one to another, "We do not well: this day is a day of good tidings." They presage the higher and more appropriate object of the day; and their conduct appears to themselves like that of a person to whom a golden harp has been sent from heaven, to be used in the praise of God, but who, instead of so employing it, carries it to the mint, to have it converted into the current coin. These people are by no means insensible to the indications of the Divine purpose; and in so far, they are spiritually elevated many degrees above thousands among us, who have no apprehension whatever, that the events, which transpire in the world, may be estimated by far other considerations than the mere influence, which they exercise on our carnal advantage or injury.

How vacant is a life, in which such days of "good tidings," as that which awaits Samaria are unknown! Oh miserable, threadbare existence, which has no glimpses of any other life than that reserved for destruction! Would

you hear what are days of good tidings? Such a day is that, on which the carnal man becomes clearly sensible of his eternal calling; on which the heart, awakened from the sleep of death, appreciates the words, "Believe, and be saved!" It is, in a higher degree, a day of good tidings, when the sinner hears the assurance, "Thy sins are forgiven thee!" When it is said to him, "Thou hast obtained mercy!" "In Christ thou art justified, and condemnation no more awaits thee!" Still sweeter tidings are connected with the day, in which the Eternal cheers the heart with the assurance, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love!" It is still more eminently a day of good tidings, when, like the lepers, we discover that our enemies have fled from the camp, and our faith embraces the great mystery of the gospel; that in Christ, our Head, we no longer doubtfully enter the field against the world and death, against sin, the devil, and hell; but that they have already been overthrown and vanquished. Yes, the day on which the light of grace shines upon us from above, and we learn what is meant by dying and rising with Christ, by passing the judgment, and being raised to a Divine life;—the day on which we are enabled to say from the heart, "As certainly as my Lord is enthroned above, shall I be enthroned with him; till my Surety is expelled from heaven, heaven is also mine!"—yes, the day when this sacred truth takes possession of the mind, and we feel ourselves inwardly one with Christ, is indeed a day of good tidings, a day of joy and rejoicing, above all others. Then we enter upon that rest, of which the prophet speaks; then we rest from our own works, as God rested from his.

The lepers are oppressed by their harvest. They begin to be disquieted at the thought of their secreted treasures. "We do not well," they say, one to another; "if we tarry till the morning light, mischief will come upon us!" We are glad to find that the monitor in their breasts is still awake. Oh, that he would awake in those among us who,

in a spiritual sense, are guilty of a similar crime ! Or are you ignorant, that there is an unlawful grasping after the treasures that are in Christ ; a thievish appropriation of evangelical consolation ; an unauthorized rest in the promises of God ? When this is the case, there is no experience of a contrite heart, though much inward uneasiness. There is no separation from sin, but merely a desire to be freed from its rankling sting. Nothing is less wished for than an antidote to sin, in which there is a delight ; but a cloak is sought, a licence for its committal. The secret, how to serve the world and the flesh, and yet retain a pure conscience, is the thing required ; and the Scripture doctrines of the blood of Christ and the grace of God, appearing to furnish it, the old nature of things arrogates to itself what belongs entirely to the new ; and an arbitrary will usurps the exclusive rights of faith. Like the reveller, who seizes for his debauch, the wine intended for the sick, do men act with the consolations of the gospel ; they take the life-boat provided for the salvation of sinners, for a gondola, in which they may sail in the greater security on every stream of iniquity. But with those, who thus venture to employ the balsam provided by God for the cure of sin, as a mere preventative to its pain, it fares, in general, as it did with the lepers in our history, who, while they rejoiced not a little in their discovery, were unable to execute their villany in peace. The monitor within, notwithstanding all attempts to bribe it, so tormented them, that they were soon forced to the conclusion, “ We do not well ; if we tarry till the morning light, some mischief will befall us ! ” Yes, let them confess it or not, a similar voice murmurs in the breast of every such pretended brother, who was never awakened to godly sorrow, never really converted, and who resorts to the message of reconciliation merely as a charm, in order to lull the tormenting spirit within, that disturbs him in the course of sin. But this concealed monitor does not permit them to succeed in their forced attempt at self-delusion. They are devoid of peace,

and thunder rolls heavily over them. "If we tarry till the morning light, some mischief will befall us! "Yes, the light of that morning will come, when every refuge of lies shall vanish—every veil be rent asunder. It will shine beneficially for those only, who cling to Jesus, because in him they found a Saviour from sin; but it will be a light of terror to those who sought in Jesus anything but a Saviour, even though they should be able boastfully to ask in their justification, "Have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?" Oh, ye who have wickedly, because without Divine authority, appropriated to yourselves the consolations of Christ, imitate the lepers in the Syrian camp, and, before the light of that morning breaks upon you, listen to the voice of conscience, and say this day with them, "We do not well: if we tarry till the morning light, some mischief will come upon us. Let us go to the King on high, and tell him that, without repentance, we have thought to seize, as our prey, what belongs to the penitent only, and to make Christ the servant of sin!" Yes, speak thus to each other, and pour out your hearts before God, and whatever you are, oh be sincere, upright, and humble! This is the only way of salvation, the only way in which the treasures of God can be obtained and possessed.

Let it not, however, be imagined, that unwarranted appropriations of the treasures of grace are peculiar only to those who are without. True believers are not unfrequently guilty of similar assumptions. Let them lay to heart the instruction, which the Lord designed to give his disciples, on the memorable occasion when he washed their feet, John .xiii. It was in Jerusalem, the solemn hour of evening. The Lord had ended his pilgrimage, and had assembled, for the last time, his beloved friends around him, before their separation. They were once again to experience the faithfulness of his heart, and to perceive, with still greater clearness, who it was that God had given

them in him. And never were they able to forget that evening; never was his wonderful appearance effaced from their minds. Oh, what dignified composure! what earnestness in every look and word! What indescribable peace pervaded his appearance! What implicit submission to the decrees of God! What condescension, and what profundity of consolation and mystery, in every word and sentiment that fell from his lips! They seemed to breathe the air of heaven, and their bliss would infinitely have surpassed the brightness of Tabor, had not the consciousness of near separation cast over them a veil of sorrow.

Before the feast of the passover, John states, "When Jesus knew that his hour was come, that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end." What peculiarity of style! Does it not seem as though we heard John's heart beat, whilst recording these words,—as though his feelings did not suffer him to study the construction of the sentence,—as if he poured tears of adoration upon the paper, and, overpowered by his subject, doubted the possibility of adequately conveying the feelings of his soul, which floated before his mind like visions from another world? Our apostle was more sensible than the rest, that Jesus, on that evening, knew with certainty that he was about to leave the world to go to the Father; that in spirit he was already above, and heard the distant sound of those songs of praise, in the midst of which he was soon to ascend the throne of his glory; and yet he did not forget his own, and could find room for them in his thoughts, his love, his solicitude for them, whom he was preparing to leave in this world, this valley of death; for them, the frail, the sinful, and the needy. How recently, too, had they afflicted him by their dispute, which of them should be greatest in the kingdom of heaven; and still more so when, infected by the spirit of the traitor, they joined in condemning the act of his affectionate follower Mary, as she anointed his feet; and were seduced to utter the

cold-blooded, heartless, supercilious remark, that it would have been better to sell the ointment, and give the money to the poor; and so far from being brought to shame and repentance by the mild, though serious reproof of our Lord, they were rather disposed by it to question his love, to close their hearts against him—nay, for a time, were alienated from him. All this had just occurred, and yet—well might John conceal his face with his hands, and shed tears of emotion and gratitude—and yet, oh! who has not experienced such faithfulness and mercy! and yet—“Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end!” It was for this, John will say, that he came into the world, that he bore them on his heart, and loved them more than his own life. And it was precisely at the end, that he loved them most truly!—Oh, how he loved them, when he was judged for their offences; when, in their stead, he was exposed to the fire that was prepared for the devil and his angels! how great was his love, when he shed his own blood for their redemption. And he continued to love them to the end, and under all circumstances!

Let us return to the apartment in Jerusalem, where the company is just assembled at table. At first, a solemn stillness prevails; and John opens to us the Lord's heart, into which we look, as into a holy sanctuary. He says, “And Jesus knew that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God.” What an extraordinary consciousness! Had such an idea taken possession of the mind of a mere man, he must either have been a madman, or a greater blasphemer than the world had ever seen. Jesus, while seated at the table, is perfectly conscious of his eternal Majesty and Godhead, and that he is the King of kings and Lord of lords; he is likewise perfectly conscious of his dignity as a Mediator, to whom, for his works' sake, with every other power, that of forgiving sins had been given by the Father, and whose way, viewing his blood as

already shed, was then open, to appear above as the Intercessor of his people. His soul impressed with this double, this exalted consciousness, he suddenly rises from table, and for what? To display his dignity? to unfold the splendour of his Divine glory, that his disciples might prostrate themselves in the dust before him? This might have been expected. But his designs were widely different. See, he lays aside his garment, girds himself with a towel, fills a basin with water, and begins "to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel" with which he has girded himself. What a sight! Is not all that is within us ready to cry out, "Lord, what is it thou doest? Does such condescension to sinners become the Holy One of God?" It would be impossible to comprehend the Lord's self-abasement, were we not aware that he no longer sees in them sinners according to the flesh. He sees in them those, whom the Father had given him; whom he had so loved, that he gave for them his only Son; he sees in them the objects of his paternal love, of God's eternal counsel; creatures who, with all their sinfulness, contain in their hearts, the seed of God, and the work of the Holy Spirit. Yes, he sees, in these his disciples, more than all this. They constitute the bride clothed with the sun; they stand covered with his righteousness; and thus enraptured with the splendour of his own glory, which he sees reflected in them as in a living mirror, and carried away by love, he stoops down and washes their feet. Oh! how great, how expressive, how emblematical! What a powerful commentary on the words, "I am not come to be ministered unto, but to minister!" What an important testimony to what is current in his kingdom, and to what is not! What a strong condemnation of egotism and self-aggrandizement, and what an affecting exhibition of that love, which ought to animate us! His act is more than all this; it speaks to us of what is most delightful, glorious, and exalted. It is a golden ornament, radiant with the pearls and jewels, the very pith and marrow of the gospel.

The disciples sit around, not knowing what to think. How can their feelings be described? Admiration, shame, delight, take possession of their souls. They are animated by all these feelings; and if any prejudice against Jesus had entered their hearts, it is dispelled in a moment, and consumed in the fire of repentance and contrition. In a kind of consternation, they quietly submit to the Lord's pleasure, and the transaction proceeds in silence, till the turn is Peter's. Then, as might have been supposed, resistance is made. His face becomes crimsoned; and then, as though he had been required to commit treason, he quickly withdraws his feet, and as upon a former occasion, he cried out, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" he now asks, in the greatest agitation, and almost reproachfully, "Lord, dost thou wash my feet?" as though he had said, "No, that shall never be!" How characteristic of Simon, and how pleasing the trait of character it presents to us! "*Thou wash my feet!*" He is at a loss to conceive how a thing so unprecedented can be proposed to him. In the words *thou* and *my* are contrasted the entire glory of the Lord, and the entire nothingness of the disciple. At what a distance does he place himself by the word *my*, and to what an elevation does the contrasted word *thou*, raise the Lord of Glory. "Thou, a saint; I, a sinner: thou, the Son of the living God; I, a poor worm of the dust." The feeling is undoubtedly beautiful, but it is nevertheless erroneous. O Simon, the Lord came to minister! Foolish disciple! this is his most peculiar office, his entire calling. Of what art thou thinking? Thou thinkest, no doubt, thou oughtest rather to wash his feet. Yes, do so unceasingly; bathe them in tears of repentance. For the rest, let him wash thee; how can it otherwise fare well with thee? But Simon is confounded; he can neither understand it, nor conceive it.

The Lord says to him in reply, "What I do, thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter." Yes, that was the point; he knew it not then. After this assurance,

does he implicitly submit to the Lord? By 'no means; he is still anxious that the dignity of his Master should be upheld. "Thou shalt never wash my feet," he exclaims. O Simon, Simon, didst thou but remember that obedience "is better than sacrifice!" The remark is still not unfrequently heard in Zion, "No, for the honour of Christ, I cannot believe that he thus accepts the sinner in all his nakedness." Oh, if you desire the honour of Christ, show it by submission to his own declarations: "I am come to seek and to save that which was lost." It is said by some, "I cannot imagine that the Majesty of heaven will notice my prayer—the prayer of a worm." What unenlightened zeal for the dignity of the Almighty! It is precisely in believing in him as a prayer-hearing God, that our praises are desired.

Far be it from thee, Simon, that thy emphatic "never" should prove prophetic. Hear what the Lord says: "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me." Cheering words! Oh that they were inscribed with living characters on every heart! The hidden meaning of our Lord's act is, as you perceive, here discovered; its most interesting and blessed import revealed. It manifestly refers to pardon through the blood of the Lamb, to justification and purification from sin. You are already acquainted with the full meaning of the words, every syllable of which has its peculiar importance, its sacred meaning: "If I wash thee not." Yes, it must be done by thee, Lord Jesus, for who can wash himself. "If I wash thee not." Yes, thou must wash us. Precept and example will not suffice. "If I wash thee not." Of a truth, it can avail me nothing that Peter, Paul, and John have been washed; I must likewise have pardon and the assurance of it. And it remains an eternal truth, that he who is not washed in the blood of Christ has no part in him, in his kingdom, or its possessions.

The effect that the Master's words had upon Simon may be imagined. "What," he thinks in a transport of

amazement, "no part in Jesus, my highest good, my all!" And then he breaks out in terms of the most unconditional submission, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head." Yes, when it comes to extremities, and he appears ready to depart from us, then we are willing to give up every thing, even life itself, rather than part with him. At such times we become conscious, that we have nothing so precious as He. Then the indissoluble nature of the bond, that unites us to him, is again made manifest; and how sweet is it, thus inwardly to feel the closeness of our union with Jesus! How greatly does such a renewed experience strengthen and cheer us on our pilgrimage, and what essential service may it render us on a future day! There are times, when the children of God find all the springs of present enjoyment dried up; how happy, then, if in well filled fountains of consolatory recollections, they can find safety from despondency! David says, "I call to remembrance my song in the night season." Not only the bright beams of the sun can illuminate the darkness, but also the evening glow of departing day. "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head." This is admirable, though again not right. At first, he rejects what was indispensable; now he desires what is superfluous. Simon is still in the dark as to the true nature of the transaction; and the concluding explanatory words of our Lord were probably also not immediately intelligible to him. "He that is washed, needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit; and ye are clean." Oh the blessed import of these words! He is washed, who, as a poor sinner, has entered into communion with Jesus. Such a one is indeed clean; the blood of the Lamb was shed for him. He is clean in the sight of God; compensation has been made for all his sins; for the righteousness of the Surety is imputed to him. Such a one is likewise for ever clean. Pardon, like justification, is an inalienable gift, and he may rejoice daily and hourly in his purified state. In his second Epistle,

Peter exhorts such not to forget that they have been purged from their old sins. But here it may be asked, what is the experience of every day? Alas! it not unfrequently happens that we again sin, either in thought, word, or deed. At one time we are unfaithful; at another we deny the Lord, of course against our will; for it is only the devil and his seed that sin wilfully. Nevertheless we have offended; our feet are soiled; and what is to be done? Three errors are here extremely prevalent: we either proclaim ourselves unclean! unclean! considering not our feet merely as soiled, but our hands and our head, and accounting our former washing as made void; but this is a mistake, and we thereby renounce a part of our most valuable privilege. Or, secondly, we pacify ourselves by pronouncing our transgression a trifling offence, not worth consideration: but this error is worse than the former; no sin is trifling. Take heed that this trifling offence do not fix itself like a canker in the soul, which, insignificant as it may appear, will destroy the vineyard, (your joy and peace,) like the little destroyers spoken of in the Canticles. Or, lastly, we think, this sin also was included in the great account that was settled on the cross. But neither is this the right course. This is an attempt to satisfy your conscience, not by a living faith, but by an easy process of your own contriving, and most likely it will not answer your purpose. A worm will gnaw at your heart, and all your filial joy and confidence in the Lord will be for a time tarnished. What then, you ask, is the right course of proceeding in such a case? I answer, Do not despair, but still less cloak your sins. Do not justify yourself by referring to the faults of others, nor by placing your offence to the account of "the old man," nor yet by treating it as of no account. No, in this way peace will not be obtained, but the heart will be oppressed before God. Let no sin be tolerated or indulged, but let it be confessed whosoever be the accuser, whether our conscience, our fellow men, or even the devil. We cannot offer to Satan

a greater mortification than by replying to his accusation, "Yes, I am guilty, but there stands the cross, there behold his blood! Get thee behind me; thou art judged!" Let sin pass for what it is; let it be felt in all its enormity; let it be sorrowfully and openly confessed before the Lord; not that this is all; but this is the appointed way. "Lord, I have again sinned; with a sorrowful heart I acknowledge my transgression, and desire to conceal nothing from thee: but do thou sprinkle my conscience anew with thy blood, and grant me a living faith, that I may again lay hold of thy atoning sacrifice." Verily, if we thus think, speak, and feel, God will then restore to us the consciousness that, through Christ, we are pure in his sight, and our souls will enjoy unbroken peace. And oh, how firmly do we feel ourselves again united to the Lord, when he has thus again spoken to us peace! How do we feel our strength renewed to contend with the world, the flesh, and the devil! How strong does the certainty become, that we indeed have an Intercessor. We discover another Peniel, and cry, "I have seen the Lord face to face, and my life is preserved." This is "to have our feet washed;" and oh what a blessed thing it is, how animating, how refreshing! And to him who views it with becoming simplicity of heart, it is not a legal act, as some suppose, but a purely evangelical one; a continued, free, and delightful exercise. The new man is thus renewed day by day; the Divine life in the heart is thus revived and freshened, like nature in spring. The same flowers of joy and peace daily spring up within us, and yet they are not the same, but new productions; and the happy disciple leaves it to others to regale themselves with flowers of a former year; for him they grow for ever new and fresh; he dwells in the sanctuary. No; Christianity knows nothing of life spent in vain, inoperative confidence in pardon once obtained, while present transgressions are overlooked and thought lightly of. Christianity is a life of perpetual struggle between faith and sin, and consequently

of constant need of support and encouragement from above. How easily is our faith darkened by the power of corruption reviving within us! and the sentiment, "That the blood of Christ has atoned for everything," is no substitute for such assurances. This self-confident reliance on the blood of Christ is as little capable of yielding true peace to those who resort to it for consolation, as were the reasonings of the lepers to remove the goading consciousness, that in plundering the camp before Samaria, they were guilty of a crime. The consolation of the gospel will only prove effective when administered by the Holy Spirit, not when the sinner arbitrarily infuses it into his own cup. Lord, wash thou our feet daily, that we may pursue the way of thy commandments in peace!

III. But to return to our narrative. The time may be about midnight. Stillness reigns in Samaria; but it is not that of sleep—it is the stillness of anxious expectation. The lamps are still burning, and but few of the citizens have retired to repose. The words, "To-morrow about this time," have unsettled the minds of all, not excepting those who affect to disregard them. In every house the inquiry, "What is to happen?" is discussed with varying emotions of pleasure and anxious doubt: when, suddenly, a loud and continued knocking is heard at the gate of the city. The porter, startled, demands the cause; and hollow voices from without, which at once announce the lepers, reply to his inquiry, with the cry of, "Good tidings! Good tidings!" But what are your tidings? "We have been," they rejoin, "to the Syrian camp, and behold there was no one there, neither voice of man; but horses tied, and asses tied, and the tents are as they were!" The gate-keeper, scarcely believing his ears, communicates the wonderful intelligence to the guard, and the guard immediately dispatches a messenger to the palace, in order to apprise the king of the extraordinary event.

Before the gates of our benighted world, similar heralds

have from time to time appeared, whose exterior was more pleasing, and their communication still sweeter ; and they have left behind them, in the dark night of our existence, consolatory traces of their footsteps. I do not allude to the blessed residence among us of the Lord from heaven ; nor yet to the visits, which angels have made to this valley of death. I here refer only to the two, who were transfigured on Mount Tabor. What a fulness of confirmation does their bare appearance afford to the power of that faith, which leads above, and to the reality and glory of the other world !

If the Spirit, of whom the Lord said, “ He shall testify of me ! ” do but appear before the gates of our hearts, and bring us the tidings, that our enemies are vanquished, and that we are secure in the lap of eternal mercy—if we do but obtain the Divine assurance, that the angels of the Lord encamp around us, that every hindrance is removed, and the entrance into our Father’s house opened to us—then we have all that is necessary for happiness, then we are in possession of the most glorious tidings that can reach the human ear ! In the night of life we shall be able to lift up our heads with sacred composure, and though our tears should flow, they will shine like the dew in the light of morning ; for the Divine light in our hearts will be mildly reflected in them.

IX. GOD IS FAITHFUL TO HIS WORD.

“ 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!” What cheering, what consoling words!

“ We are saved?” What incomparable news! Happy is he, who is justified in including himself in this word, “ We !” Be not alarmed about your right to employ it. Do not imagine it to comprehend too great a degree of personal excellence. “ We,” the apostle will say, who have come to Jesus, and will come to him to the last; “ we ” poor sinners, the necessities of whose hearts have forced us to the Lamb; “ we,” who, helpless in ourselves, cling to the cross as to our only refuge; whether we are only beginning to hunger after the fruits of the cross, or are already in their full enjoyment; whether only weeping for the favour of Jesus, or rejoicing on his breast; “ we,” the sheep of the Good Shepherd, and of the little flock, whether weak or strong; “ we,” his followers, whether, like Samuel and Timothy, fearing God from our youth, or publicans and thieves, first smiting upon our breasts, after years spent in error and sin. Whether, like Martha and Mary, irreproachable and blameless before the world, or like Magdalen, or involved in debt and sorrow, like those in the cave of Adullam; in this expression we have a most comprehensive meaning—“ We are saved ! ”

Hallelujah! Salvation is effected! See the thief ascends to heaven in triumph with Jesus. From the clouds he cries: “ We are saved!” See the angelic countenance of a Stephen, amidst the murderous shower of stones.

What does it proclaim? "Salvation!" And the heavens, opened above his head, affix to it their Amen! and the arms of the glorified Son of Man, stretched forth to receive him, likewise testify: "Salvation is accomplished!" "It is accomplished!" cry the apostles, and joyfully submit their heads to the executioner. "O death! where is thy sting?" The Scriptures confirm it: "By one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified!" The songs of the whole church have proclaimed for ages, that nothing remains to be done; that all is accomplished! and the seal of the covenant silently yet powerfully avers it, in palpable traces of Deity, "This blood was shed for the remission of sins!" We need be no longer troubled about our transgressions—they have been atoned for by another; we have no arrears to pay—our debts have all been discharged for us. To us there remains no more room for anxiety, whence that righteousness shall proceed, which prevails with God; obedience to the law has been rendered. There is no longer room for the inquiry, What are the personal qualifications requisite for heaven, and whence shall they be derived? The Holy Spirit has undertaken the work of our sanctification and glorification. For us the head of the serpent has been crushed, the powers of darkness disarmed, and the world overcome. To us their snares have become harmless, their hostile assaults have been repelled and foiled. Thus all things have been vanquished that threatened our destruction, every thing accomplished on which our salvation depended. On the pillars of the earth it is written in characters of blood: "Salvation is accomplished!" Let it also be inscribed on your hearts, and unite in triumphantly rejoicing that you also are saved! How much, in a scriptural sense, is comprehended in the word, "saved!" It is to be a pearl in God's crown, a favourite on his bosom, a jewel amongst his treasures. It is to be clothed in his sight, in garments of light; to be decorated with the choicest of all ornaments. Should we be

again contaminated, his blood will cleanse us; if wounded, his balm will heal us; if overcome, we rise again; nothing can hurt or destroy us, we remain invulnerable. We are given to Jesus, that he may sustain us, though all else should perish. We are assigned to the Spirit, that he may transform us into the image of Christ, though doubly dead. Seraphim watch by night around our bed, and bear us upon their hands by day; that our feet may not slip. We are victorious over dragons, and triumphantly demand of our enemies, who shall condemn? We can say to the present and to the future: "Of whatever else you may be capable, you cannot separate us from the love of God!" We wave the flag of victory over death and the devil; and we bear about with us the passport of the Lord Jesus as our own, and have access through him to the treasures of God. We penetrate the clouds, and inscribe our name on a mansion in Paradise; and can boast of a more glorious possession than could David, when he exclaimed: "Moab is my washpot; over Edom will I cast out my shoe!"

Behold, thus it is we are "saved." But you ask: "Where are our crowns? Where our splendid ornaments? Where is our Paradise? Where our glory?" Not, indeed, in sight, my beloved brethren; not exposed to view, like wares in a market. "We are saved by hope"—says the apostle; and we rejoice in this consolation. But understand the apostle aright. He does not say, "We hope, that at some future day our redemption will be worked out, our salvation effected." No, neither the one nor the other are any longer mere matters of expectation, standing unfulfilled on the records of promise, but things that have been accomplished, and inserted on the page of history. Salvation has been obtained for us, but its full enjoyment is reserved for futurity, and, God be thanked! I repeat it again, the apostle's words declare this. It is true, we do not enjoy its full possession here; but sweet foretastes of our inheritance are granted us. The Lord, for instance, whispers to us, that our sins are

forgiven ; and of a truth, it is a delightful thing to have a clear and perfect conscience. The Spirit likewise pours upon us the love of God, and our hearts dilate with heavenly pleasure. Sometimes we experience the pure enjoyment of the communion of saints, and we feel as if already transferred to Paradise. Sometimes we are cheered by the salutations of Immanuel in the hearing of our prayers, and in surprising deliverances ; and we are ready to say with Jacob : " How dreadful is this place ! Surely the Lord is in this place ! " The words of the apostle are true : " We are saved by hope . "

Were it simply said, " We are saved , " without any addition, I should be obliged to say, " Jesus has not accepted me ! " Were the declaration unlimited, " We are redeemed , " I must not only doubt of my being in a state of grace, but I must deny it ; for ah ! where is my separation from sin ? Oh, I feel my nature still completely infected with the disease ! The " law in my members " has not yet ceased to war against the " law of my mind ! " But when I hear the words, " Saved by hope ! " I again breathe freely and unoppressed. With my mind's eye, I behold at a distance, a liberated, holy, glorified form ; and this form, Jesus assures me, is to be my own at a future time. I know it, and, in this my body of death, feel myself " saved by hope . " How could I number myself with those who have escaped, were it simply written, " We are saved " ? I, who so often languish in the lion's den, and who have by no means placed my foot upon the neck of Satan ; I, who so far from triumphing over the world, as over a vanquished enemy, am so often bound in its fetters ? But, when I read, that the happy people are saved by " hope , " then I feel so certain of my one day standing victorious on the field, for Jesu's sake, that, renouncing self, I can already shout " Victory ! " And I shout it in hope. " Saved by hope ! " Oh, blessed assurance ! Without it, how could I believe myself Divinely adopted ? For how often does my Father again hide his face from me ! How

often do I bear all the marks of a deserted child! My prayers unheard—the deep distress which I often experience, with no one to save me—the hard blows that I frequently encounter! Even the children of the world are better off! The contempt to which I am exposed, as though I were of no value in the sight of God! And am I still his child? Yes, truly I am. My sonship may not be apparent, but it is certain, though concealed in the bosom of the Father. The hour of its manifestation will come. Wait, wait but a short time, and heaven and earth will see me reposing on the bosom of the Father. This I know; it is secured to me by covenant, and I glory in my Father; blessed in the “hope” of my adoption.

Follow this example, my beloved brethren. We walk “by faith,” and not “by sight.” Such is the present economy of the kingdom. “But hope that is seen is not hope; for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?” But if you are set upon possessing perfect sanctification and redemption in this life, you are perversely striving for what is beyond the Divine arrangement, and are departing from the sacred boundaries which God has fixed. Wait, therefore, with patience for that which you see not. Be not determined to anticipate what eternal wisdom has assigned to particular periods. Learn, in every conflict with sin, to bear up against your infirmities, and to rejoice in the future as though it were the present. By so doing, you will occupy a position consistent with the word, the economy of faith.

And you may be confident in your hope, and spread your wings with security and boldness. Your future bliss is firmly secured and guaranteed to you. God is a rock; he forgets not his promises, which are Yea, and Amen. In this confidence may we be strengthened by the event, which our narrative will bring before you, as a mirror, in which your own destiny is depicted, though it may be but faintly.

2 KINGS VII. 12—19.

“And the king arose in the night, and said unto his servants, I will now show you what the Syrians have done to us. They know that we be hungry; therefore are they gone out of the camp to hide themselves in the field, saying, When they come out of the city, we shall catch them alive, and get into the city. And one of his servants answered and said, Let some take, I pray thee, five of the horses that remain, which are left in the city, (behold, they are as all the multitude of Israel that are left in it: behold, I say, they are even as all the multitude of the Israelites that are consumed;) and let us send and see. They took therefore two chariot horses; and the king sent after the host of the Syrians, saying, Go and see. And they went after them unto Jordan; and, lo, all the way was full of garments and vessels, which the Syrians had cast away in their haste. And the messengers returned, and told the king. And the people went out, and spoiled the tents of the Syrians. So a measure of fine flour was sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, according to the word of the Lord. And the king appointed the lord on whose hand he leaned, to have the charge of the gate: and the people trode upon him in the gate, and he died, as the man of God had said, who spake when the king came down to him. And it came to pass as the man of God had spoken to the king, saying, Two measures of barley for a shekel, and a measure of fine flour for a shekel, shall be to-morrow about this time in the gate of Samaria; and that lord answered the man of God, and said, Now, behold, if the Lord should make windows in heaven, might such a thing be? And he said, Behold, thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof.”

The counsels of God regarding Samaria are beginning to unfold themselves; and gloomy and ominous as they at first appeared, they terminate in a superabundance of blessing. With Elisha and his friends we have struggled through many a scene of anguish and distress in this afflicted city; but how richly do we now see their hopes and our own rewarded and crowned. The long period of distress and sorrow terminates, as do all the afflictions of the children of God, in rejoicing and gladness. Let us now contemplate—I. The midnight scene in the king's palace. II. The pursuit. III. The fulfilment of God's word.

I. The messenger from the gate has just reached the palace. The king hears the news brought by the lepers with astonishment, but not without strong doubts of its indicating good. He immediately assembles, unusual as is the hour, the most faithful of his council, makes known to them the intelligence he has received, together with his

doubts and fears. "I will tell you," he says, "what the Syrians design: for do not imagine that they are really withdrawn. Knowing the state of starvation in which we languish, they make a show of deserting their camp, in the hope of inducing us to leave the city, that they may fall upon us unawares from behind the hedges and bushes, where they lie concealed, take us alive, and then, without striking a blow, enter the city, and plant their standard on the battlements."

The king, as it appears, although in the very land of wonders, is not at home. He is not unacquainted with the fact, but he does not entertain it. He cannot imagine the possibility of any thing extraordinary taking place, out of mere love to himself. He has no expectation of being the object of Divine regard, much less of his being the favourite of Jehovah. Does any thing mysterious occur in the lives of such people, they are much more ready to anticipate evil, than to indulge in the pleasing visions of hope. The unconverted resemble criminals, who succeed in stifling and laughing down the accusing voice of guilt within them, but which revives in horrid dreams, and they who will not see their sins, behold spectres in their stead. Such people have a sleeping lion within them, which the slightest sound, though it should be that of a coming blessing, is sufficient to awaken. They anticipate nothing good from the invisible powers, and how can they? for within them exists a secret, gloomy tribunal, although outwardly, perhaps, all is gaiety and smiles.

Jehoram's miserable reasoning, my brethren, may find its counterpart in ourselves. How often do we act as he did, and stand in a similar manner in our own light! Most of the cares that afflict our lives, and disturb our peace, may be assimilated to this fancy of Jehoram's. They are imaginative, empty shadows, creations of the brain, devoid of reality and substance, phantoms, which have their existence in a gloomy unscriptural, unbelieving

view of our real position. Through this deceptive medium we behold sights, such as those which Jehoram saw; ambushes, which have no existence; hostile bands, that vanish into air; dangers, that are in no way to be dreaded; hunger, distress, and ruin, where the bountiful hand of a protecting God has richly provided for our supply and preservation. Unreal as the phantasmagoria of dreams, these dark images collect around us; but it is we that clothe them with flesh and blood. Oh, may God destroy this gloomy mirror in our breasts, and replace it with the bright and light-giving glass of faith! This will present very different objects to our view: angelic forms, attending and protecting us; the hand of paternal love extended to us from the clouds; heavenly shields surrounding and covering us; and above, open for the supply of every want, treasures of salvation and blessing. The delights which this mirror reflects, are not, like the forms presented by the former, merely empty vapour, but reality and truth, resting on the declarations and promises of God. It is no delusion, that "all things work together for good to them that love God;" that nothing injurious can happen to them; that in every step they take, they are attended by a heavenly escort, and an Almighty Friend, who has taken them body and soul under his keeping, is ever mindful of their good, and ever ready to protect them. Whenever, therefore, any thing in our past or present experience appears to us adverse or distressing, it is unbelief which again presents to us, in its delusive mirror, lying and empty visions. If we turn from it to the glass of faith, the shadows vanish, our views are more cheerful, and we pursue our way in peace.

Jehoram considered the event, that had been announced to him, in the light of probability and natural reason; and in so doing, he only extracted apprehension and anxiety from a fact which, had he viewed it in the light of God's promise from the mouth of Elisha, would have afforded him the purest joy and the sweetest hope. But instead of believingly clinging to the promise, it appears to be

forgotten, or to occupy a very distant place in his recollection; otherwise, how could he have refrained from coupling the sudden evacuation of the enemy's camp with the prophetic assurance, or from supposing that its accomplishment might arise from some extraordinary dispersion of the Syrians, and their deserted stores falling into the hands of the Samaritans? So far, however, from this, the glorious interposition of heaven dwindles at once, in his estimation, into a common-place occurrence and idle alarm. Let us also from this, my brethren, learn wisdom and caution. Let our conduct be always opposed to that of king Jehoram. Let us never estimate the leadings and occurrences of our lives from their outward forms and appearances. Instead of contemplating them in the false, deceptive light of reason, let us view them in the truer and steadier light of the prophetic word, and a thousand things in our lives will wear a very different aspect to what they do at present, and the sting will be extracted from a thousand sorrows. Instead of lamenting, as we now sometimes do, that the Lord hath forsaken us, we should then say, he loves us, for he chasteneth us according to his word. Instead of being, as now, doubtful and apprehensive, lest we should not be in the right way, because so many afflictions distress us, we should then pursue the sacred road with confidence; for the Scriptures assure us, that through much tribulation we must enter the kingdom of God. Instead of being fearful, as we now sometimes are, that we shall come short of any one of the promises of God, our confidence of its fulfilment, founded on the experience of every saint, would then be strong in proportion to the severity of the trial and conflict through which it leads us. Yes, the more entangled the mazes of our course, the stronger would be our hope; knowing that God's thoughts are not as our thoughts, and that his ways, though mysterious, conduct to a glorious end. When our embarrassment has attained its highest point, we should then expect a change; for the Scriptures show that it

GOD IS FAITHFUL TO HIS WORD.

has ever been the Lord's way to suffer his children to be straitened beyond the hope of human help, before he displays his power and interferes to save. Yes, a thousand occurrences that trouble our lives, assume the most friendly aspect, as soon as the heavenly light of the Divine word falls upon them; and a thousand times, if this word be our guide, instead of imitating the language of Jehoram, "They have hidden themselves in the fields, that they may take us alive!" we should say with Jacob: "How awful is this place. Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not."

II. The king having expressed his pusillanimous opinion, his counsellors venture to declare theirs; and one of them, of sounder judgment than the prince, deems the subject worthy of further investigation, as the sudden disappearance of the enemy might originate in something very different from a mere stratagem. He therefore suggests the propriety of selecting five of the unfamished horses that remained, and of sending some trusty persons to examine the country, and ascertain the truth of the intelligence received. A reasonable proposal! Let those amongst us mark it well, whose spiritual state resembles that of Jehoram; who sit, year after year, on the burning coals of uncertainty, whether sin be really atoned for, the Judge appeased, death disarmed, the grave vanquished, and eternal life purchased and secured. What folly, thus voluntarily to place yourselves upon the rack, to dream away your lives in idle doubt, and by a thousand vain terrors to embitter your existence, instead of courageously obtaining certainty at all hazards; instead of acting in your sphere, as this counsellor advised in his, and thoroughly examining the Scriptures, and resolutely investigating the light region of Divine revelation and sacred history! O ye unaccountable dreamers, would ye but resolve on this, you would quickly find a thousand phantoms vanish, and would acquire greater riches than did Samaria.

The king follows the advice of his servant. Two war chariots were immediately equipped, and where all appeared devoted to destruction, there was no want of persons bold enough to undertake the enterprise. They issue from the gates in the stillness of night, approach the camp without perceiving a watchfire in any direction, or being challenged by a single outpost. The camp is deserted by the enemy, but the tents, magazines, and horses are all left behind. The scouts venture to advance still further: and how wonderful the discovery which they make! The whole way to the Jordan is covered with garments and vessels, and the further they advance, the more thickly is the ground covered with baggage and armour. There is no longer room for doubt; Jehoram's suspicions are unfounded. Stratagem, they clearly see, is out of the question; God must have caused the enemy to be seized with a panic. Rejoicing that the country is free, the capital saved, the charioteers, when near the Jordan, determine to return; the very horses seem animated by the sight of the deserted camp, and fly across the plain. It was long since such welcome messengers had arrived at Samaria.

But we have infinitely better tidings to bring to you, ye tremblers in Zion, than they brought to the Samaritans. The road between Samaria and the Jordan, strongly resembles the one which you have to traverse. A much more dangerous encampment that once surrounded you has been abandoned, and the whole way to the Jordan, the last hour of your life, appears covered with weapons that once threatened your eternal destruction. The monster sin has been deprived of its power to destroy, by a sacrifice of blood. Though it may still stir within you, it cannot destroy: before God it has no existence. Moses has assumed a different attitude towards you—the curses expire on Calvary; his demands were there satisfied. "Christ is the end of the law. He that believeth in him is justified!" The sting of death was left in Him who was wounded for you. You have now only to do

with the angel of peace, not with the king of terrors. "Death is swallowed up in victory. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." For advantage, the power of the world has been crippled! "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world!" It may again indeed gain the mastery over you; but even Solomon in his time, whom it seduced to commit the detestable sin of idolatry, was again constrained to forsake it. And what can the devil now accomplish against you? Has he not been triumphed over, and made a show of openly? He dare not so much as touch you. Never will he be able to tear the sheep, that have been given to the Son, out of his hand. Such is the tenor of the report that we bring you, of our march through the hostile encampment, by which Salem is invested. The principalities and powers, that so hardly pressed us, are for ever fled. Their armour covers the plains, and, like the scouts sent forth from Samaria, we drive in chariots of faith and joy over their broken weapons, and triumphantly ask, "Who shall lay anything to our charge? Who is he that condemneth?" Here is Christ! Here is Immanuel! The route from the gates of Samaria reminds us also of a scene, that we should rejoice to see repeated in the midst of us. I mean the one that rejoiced the apostles at the first New Testament pentecost. You will recollect, that they were surrounded by three thousand slaves of sin, three thousand enemies of Christ, armed with the bitterest hatred. Peter addressed them in words of fire, when a scene ensued, perfectly in harmony with this, in the land of Israel. The three thousand are filled with the terrors of the Lord, and they instantly cast aside their garments of self-righteousness, in which they were till then arrayed, and cry, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" They next throw away the weapons, with which they opposed the Lord of glory. Their cry of "Crucify him!" is now changed into, "Lord Jesus have mercy upon me!" Instead of, "We will not have this man to reign over us!" their cry now

is, "Lord, remember us in thy kingdom!" The standard, which they have hitherto followed, is forsaken; the camp utensils of the world, and the lusts of the flesh, sink down like a heavy burden, and the way pursued by the fugitives, appears like that in Israel, covered with the equipments and implements of war, that they have cast from them; covered even unto Jordan, till they have been baptized with water in the name of the Lord Jesus, and with the fire of the Holy Ghost. That this may be renewed among us, is the fervent wish of our hearts. In a spiritual sense, we daily make sorties and excursions, in the hope of discovering the path of the unconverted amongst us, strewed with their garments of imaginary virtue, their breast-plates of insensibility and obduracy, and their weapons of hostility to the cross: but alas! we do not yet perceive the terrors of God in their ranks; they still maintain their miserable camp; and instead of exchanging their spotted garments for a better one, they roll themselves more closely up in the one they possess, so that we are seldom permitted to return with tidings like those brought by the scouts sent out by Jehoram.

The time, however, will certainly come, when we shall behold a road that bears a fearful resemblance to the one pursued by the Syrians. God forbid that any of us should then be found among the fugitives! The terrors of God will one day fasten upon his enemies, unattended by the slightest indication of mercy. Then also there will be a casting away of armour and hostile weapons; but it will be too late; the day of grace will be past. Then the command will be given: "Bring forth those mine enemies, who would not that I should reign over them, and slay them before me!" How will the Israel of God then rejoice, that the kingdom of Anti-Christ is at length judged, and the year of jubilee commenced, which will restore to the Lord all that his enemies have usurped, and dedicate it, as originally designed, to the service of the sanctuary! But his enemies will call upon the mountains to fall upon

them, and the hills to cover them, and will in vain indulge the hope of further forbearance. They may now, in despair, fling away the weapons of that war of reviling, which they have waged against Jesus, and may be willing to acknowledge that he is the Lord, and that to him belongs the sceptre; but it is too late, the hour of grace is past. Therefore flee for refuge, while the doors of mercy are still open to those who awake to reflection; lay aside to-day the arms of Belial; quit the camp of the enemy; for the day is near when, if you knock at the gate of mercy, the only reply returned will be the awful one: "Depart from me! I never knew you;" when the exhortations from God's word, that have been so lavishly expended on you, without producing fruit, will be closed for ever.

III. Return with me, my friends, for a few moments, to Samaria. The day is just beginning to dawn, and the inhabitants are already in motion. The events of the night are known in every dwelling. They have heard the extraordinary communication made by the lepers, and that the king had sent out a party to scour the country round; and the time, fixed by Elisha for the miraculous interposition he had announced, being near at hand, it is easy to imagine the excitement prevalent amongst the populace, whose desire of succour was so vehement. Some have stationed themselves upon the roofs of houses, from whence they can overlook the plain, while others ascend the trees that tower above the city walls. The bulk of the population, however, stand crowded together near the gate, through which the scouts were expected to return. Suddenly the cry is heard: "They come! they come!" The most awful stillness succeeds. Their countenances change, their knees tremble, as if a lot were about to be drawn, that was to decide their fate. With trembling lips they inquire each other's expectation, but scarcely any one dares indulge a cheering thought, lest disappointment should await him. The gates are thrown open, the chariots

enter with shouts of joy: "Victory! Victory! The enemy is fled! Tents, magazines, horses, all are left behind!"

Who shall describe the tumult of joy that now takes possession of the people? or the tranquil felicity which, like the bliss of heaven, pervades the heart of Elisha and his friends? or the enthusiastic acclamations with which the prophet is now universally greeted and distinguished? The astonishing event even dispels the unbelief of the suspicious tyrant himself. Oh, it must have been a thrilling moment, when the prospect of relief broke on the distressed city, in this wonderful and unexpected manner. Joy re-animates the dying, and those who a moment before were stupefied with anguish, shed tears of delight. Such times of general preservation and rejoicing discover fallen humanity in a brighter light. Selfishness for a while—and this is all that can be said—retires into the back ground, and a kind of family feeling and consciousness of brotherhood fills every mind, from having attained together the object all had wished for. But this amalgamation in the tumult of earthly joys bears but a faint resemblance to that community of brotherly feeling which takes place, when sinners, oppressed under a sense of sin, are permitted to rejoice together under the banner of the cross, that they have found eternal salvation. Then a union of rejoicing is formed so heavenly in its nature, so intense, so deep and lasting, that it surpasses every other. Then we embrace each other under the blissful conviction, that we are incorporated into a family which, springing from a Divine root, and animated by a love differing widely from that of earth, will endure and flourish to all eternity.

The king having been apprised of the report made by the scouts, it was thought advisable not to lose a moment in obtaining ocular demonstration of God's interposition, and of reaping its advantage. The populace proceed by thousands to the deserted camp, and find every thing as related; but so deep is the impression made on them by

the miracle, and such the holy state of mind it has produced, that not an individual is found capable of appropriating the smallest trifle to his own use. Hence the exemplary order, and the unexampled fidelity with which the booty is conveyed to the gates of the city. Buying and selling now commences, and the narrative informs us, that a measure of fine flour is sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, according to the word of the Lord; exactly as the prophet had promised in the name of Jehovah:

Let no one undervalue the promises of our covenant God; however remote the antiquity from which they descend to us, their virtue is not dried up, nor their force expired; on the contrary, being rooted in the source of all life, they blossom and bear fruit through thousands of years. He realises them, sometimes with temporal, sometimes with spiritual blessings. As circumstances require, they are redeemed at one time with bread and flour; at another, with consolations and peace. His promises are sure, though he should move heaven and earth for their accomplishment. But in their fulfilment, he not only sometimes, but always, appears to us as a God whose name is "Wonderful," the "Amen." Oh, confide in him implicitly, and while reading his promises, believe that you are reading the history of your future life; for such they really are. Entangled as may be your life, you will one day stand upon an eminence of light, as did Moses when he had crossed the desert, from whence you will behold all that eternal love ever promised, not in the pages of an old book, but fulfilled in the occurrences of your own life; and will see that not one word has fallen to the ground. "I will take away my hand," Jehovah said to his servant, "and thou shalt see my back parts!" The same is likewise said to us. Our experience will one day also constitute a part of sacred history.

Let us remember, likewise, that the threatenings of God

bear his seal, equally with his promises, as is fearfully proved by the termination of this narrative. Or have you forgotten what was said to the king's shield and sword-bearer, when he so contemptuously replied to the promise made by Elisha in God's name, "Behold, if the Lord would make windows in heaven, might 'this thing be?" God did not forget it. Look at the gate of Samaria. There, in the midst of the general joy, a dreadful event is occurring. The nobleman, on whose arm the king leaned, is approaching the gate, appointed to guard it; and now he sees that, without opening windows in heaven, God can abundantly supply their need. Perhaps at this moment, he repents his impious remark; but if he really be conscious of shame, it is only before the people, not before God. The fear of God was not in him. Whatever may have been the immediate cause of the event that has taken place at the gate; whether the nobleman, reproached by the people with his impious remark, provoked them in their rage to active hostility, or whether the misfortune resolves itself into one of those occurrences usually termed accidents, and was occasioned by the immense pressure of the crowd—let it suffice, that in a moment, the proud man is pressed to the earth, and trampled upon by the populace. Thus he saw with his eyes, that the Lord's arm was not shortened, but he did not partake of his rich bounty. His body was quietly removed, and thus a bloody testimonial was affixed to the words of Jehovah and his prophet. A voice speaks to all from his grave, "Be not deceived, God is not mocked!" Let it be our fervent prayer, my beloved friends, "Be not a terror to me; thou art my hope in the day of evil!" Let us give it free scope; for we know to what we have attained. The sign of the Son of man, the arch of peace, shines above our heads. Let us embrace the cross, and sing aloud for joy.

X.—THE RESTITUTION.

How delightful, and how full of consolation is the narrative we meet with, Gen. xxviii. 10—19. It is as a tree of life in the desert, not only for Jacob, but for all who are travelling the same road with him. And how suitable is the event there narrated, to the melancholy of the present hour, which may be numbered, amongst the last pulsations of the departing year! How powerfully does it remind us of the darkness of our earthly life; at the same time how clear the light it sheds upon the path, by which we are to escape this darkness; and with what heavenly glory does it invest even the present world!

It is not a cultivated territory, to which our narrative transports us, but a desert, uninhabited by man, whose vast steppes are but faintly lighted by the last rays of the setting sun. Such a scene is well adapted to our present feelings. Advancing from the westward, we behold a solitary pilgrim, supporting himself on a staff, and working his way with difficulty through the deep and burning sands, and as it seems, lost in the pathless wilds. It is Jacob, on his journey to Haran. A man on whom vast promises rest, but who has seen little of their fulfilment. His appearance is dejected and melancholy, as though he were disposed complainingly to ask, "Lord, dost thou not dwell also in this desert?" Or to sigh with Moses: "Show me thy glory!" But what does he see beyond the empty, frightful, desolate world around him? What is it he hears, but the distant roar of beasts of prey? And what are his feelings, but those of extreme bodily fatigue and mental anxiety, arising from his bewildered situation,

and the uncertainty of his ever escaping from the wilderness in which he is entangled; heightened, perhaps, by doubts like these: "Am I really a child of God? Has he really made to me a promise? Is he with me on the way I am going?" And these doubts he may be seeking to solve, not by faith, or by the word of God, but from the circumstances in which he finds himself placed.

And are our feelings, at this day, very unlike those of our wanderer? Is there no resemblance between our position and his? Many of us, at least, are standing footsore on the verge of another year. Let us likewise lay down our travelling-bag, and rest awhile. "But not," you say, "in a desert." "Nor yet," I reply, "in a paradise." Oh, this wretched life! Here we stand; one year's journey nearer the grave. How near is the going down of one year's sun to the rising of another, and how rapidly are we hastening towards our last hour! If the months we have spent have had their delights, they have likewise been full of labour and trouble. And what are the trophies we bring away with us? The withered leaves of a few flowers, which once constituted the glories in which we delighted; and, alas, how many wounds! Oh what a fulness of misery in one year! What a suffusion of tears! What sighs and lamentations! Say, why art *thou* afflicted? "Alas, all the sweet hopes with which I set out!" What of them? They have deceived me—they have been blasted, and borne no fruit. Why dost *thou* sigh? "Alas! my dearest plans!" Have they not answered? "No, all have failed!" And why art *thou* cast down? "Ah, happier ties, than those with which I was bound, never existed! But all are broken, and happiness will never again be mine!" But tell me, what has happened to thee? "My domestic happiness, that fruitful tree, has been assailed by storms, and now stands leafless!" Thus, my friends, you see assembled around us a choir, all joining in the song of him that cried in the wilderness, "All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the

flower of the field!" And to what an extent would this choir be increased, would every one openly confess his griefs, and give vent to the sighs he now suppresses! Oh what havoc, what ruin, what accumulated sorrows pervade the history of a single year! In this small parish alone, how numerous the instances of decayed hopes, blasted prospects, and ruined temples of human joy! See those houses, lately the abodes of splendour and opulence, how melancholy they now obtrude upon our streets, with the well known inscription on their gables: "To God it is an easy thing to make the rich man poor and mean." Let us visit the churchyard. What an addition to the graves has one year made! What tears, what lamentations, what wringing of hands have they witnessed! How many orphans have here deposited their all! How many sorrowing friends, bereaved husbands and wives, have here interred hearts, to them more faithful than any they have left behind! Of what have not these graves deprived us! Ah, what a fond object here sank from our view! What a beloved brother there! And here it was thought he could not be so soon called away; but alas! the grave has nevertheless covered him. And see this hillock. You all know it! The earth is still fresh. The garlands are not yet withered, nor the tears dried with which affection bedewed it,—he who sleeps here will never be forgotten! So young, and yet called away! So amiable, and yet torn from our arms! So earnestly desired, so indispensable to us! But our prayers were unanswered. We were forced to carry him out, and bear our sorrow as we could. Oh, how strikingly is the darkness of our earthly existence thus depicted to us in a single year; and yet with the gloomiest feature of this wretched life, many of you are quite unacquainted. You, whose inward perceptions are not yet awakened, are indeed capable of hearing and seeing much. But although you also may perceive, in all things, the gnawing of the worm, which we call decay, and may be in a measure alive to the solemn warning of the passing bell,

and may tremble like a startled deer, as the falling earth resounds upon the descending coffin; yet, the most dreadful of all, you have not yet heard. The clock that ushers in eternity has never vibrated on your ear; nor the trumpet of the approaching judgment; nor the cry of your misdeeds calling down wrath and vengeance upon you. Did you once hear 'these you would say, "Here is more than a weary traveller! More than a mere desert! More than the want of secure quarters for the night!" You would then, with us, long for a sight of heavenly glory amid all the darkness of earth; of stability amidst its instability; of perfection amidst its imperfection; of light in the midst of its profound night; of consolation amidst all its afflictions; of peace in the midst of its fearful warfare; and something of heaven, amidst the gloom of this vale of tears.

"But what," say you, "would such desires avail?" Much, very much. To them another, a more delightful world would discover itself. "Beyond this life?" No, here below. "But on this world, night has settled?" The world I speak of, exists within its shade. You shall have a view of it. The way into it, Jacob will point out. Look back to him once more. There he stands, alone, dejected, and embarrassed. The sun is gone down, the grey of evening has overspread the landscape. He can proceed no further; and whither should he go? Far and wide the desert is unpeopled; and were human beings to be found, it might not be prudent to take refuge with them. One thing only can be done. He discovers a stone; that must be his pillow. Hard or soft, there is no alternative; he lays himself down, purposing thus to rest. Let us follow his example. You are all acquainted with the living stone, called the rock of salvation; the "chief corner-stone, elect, precious—which the builders rejected," but which God has "made the head of the corner:" let us regard it as the antitype of that stone in the desert; and let us make a similar use of it, to that which the patriarch there makes of his, deprived of

everything else. Driven from the proud eminence of self-confidence, exposed and destitute in the wilderness of sin, terrified from the soft security of self-delusion, deprived of every other pillow, Christ crucified is the only resting-place that remains for you: embrace him, saying, "Lord Jesus, have mercy on me!" Repose your weary head on his wounded, interceding heart, and you shall behold the glory of the Lord, equally with Jacob.

See where the pilgrim lies, sleeping on his stone; his staff and bundle are laid aside; he is solitary, but not alone. Sleep on in peace, dear stranger! Neither beast of prey, nor venomous serpent will disturb thee. How calmly he sleeps, as if he were sensible of the invisible guardians that watch around him! How placid his countenance, as though he heard the delightful melodies of heaven! He never rested more sweetly than on this stone in the desert.

The heavens above him are arrayed in all their glory, and as delightful a vision presents itself to his mind, as was ever vouchsafed to man. It is, indeed, only a vision, but it is presented to him by the eternal God, and is therefore, in all its features, reality and truth. Oh, what is it Jacob sees, in the solitary, dreary desert? While he lies adoring in the dust, his heart overflows with pleasure and delight. He sees the light of the world, that rises for every one, who lays his heart and hand at rest upon the corner-stone of salvation, and into which it is not only permitted to look, but to enter. "Is Jacob's dream, then, a reality?" Yes, my friends, thank God! it is.

The patriarch sees a ladder, that reaches from earth to heaven. This ladder is standing, to the present hour, over the gulf—heaven is opened—our hearts enlarged. The words, "It is finished!" uttered on the cross, have burst the gates of the heavenly Jerusalem. The angels of God come familiarly down to us; our hopes, our desires mount up with joy and confidence; and the day will soon arrive, when we ourselves shall ascend likewise! This earth is

the entrance to paradise ; our life is a pilgrimage ; our home above ; and the light of a blissful eternity shines upon our path. At the top of this wonderful ladder, God the Lord is seen—but how is he seen ? In the rainbow splendour of mercy ! “ I am the Lord God of Abraham, thy father, and the God of Isaac ! ” Oh hear it, hear it ! A God of poor sinners, a reconciled God, a God that pardons, loves, and blesses. “ The land,” the Almighty says, “ whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed ! ” The poor wanderer in the desert then is a king ; and not he alone, but all his people are the same ; they are elevated to a royal priesthood, destined to eternal dominion, appointed to possess the earth ; great is the extent of their dominions, and the earth shall again become a paradise ! Hear one of them exultingly exclaim, “ All things are yours ; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come ; all are yours ; and ye are Christ’s ; and Christ is God’s ! ” And what is there left for us to wish for more ? Is it the increase of our people and brethren ? The Eternal declares : “ I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth—and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed ! ” Is it the Lord himself, his nearness, his safeguard ? Hear what he declares : “ Behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest ! ” Is it a guide to conduct us safely to our journey’s end ? Hear what he says : “ I will bring thee again into this land ! ” Or is it a friend who is faithful, when we ourselves are unfaithful ? “ I will not leave thee,” he says to us, “ until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of ! ” See, then, all is granted that we desire. Oh, beautiful world ! Thrice happy they who have entered it, and walk in its benign light !

Jacob is awake. “ Surely,” he cries, in blissful emotion, “ the Lord is in this place ; and I knew it not ! ” Yes, beloved pilgrim, it is really so ; and oh, if we did but know it, how glorious is the position of many of us ! “ How

dreadful is this place!" he continues; "this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." Yes, it is so! "And Jacob," so the narrative continues, "rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put for his pillow, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it!" and this act is renewed with increased solemnity, as often as a poor sinner finds the Lord Jesus in the wilderness of this life. Oh, how art thou then anointed with tears of joy, thou living foundation, and corner-stone of all salvation. How art thou embraced, how overwhelmed with thanks! The place where thou art met with is thenceforth called "Bethel—the house of God," for in thee the heart of God is displayed to us, overflowing with love and mercy, and in communion with thee, Jacob's vision becomes reality and truth.

Oh, may the entrance to this illumined region, where heaven and earth unite, and God again converses with man, as once in paradise, be opened to us! We have often, indeed, had distant views of this tranquil world of heavenly incidents and Divine salutations. Elisha lived in it the year round, and to-day it will again be opened to us. God grant that it may be the prayer of many of you, Discover to me also, O Lord, this goodly land, these delightful hills!

2 KINGS VIII. 1—6.

"Then spake Elisha unto the woman whose son he had restored to life, saying, Arise, and go thou and thine household, and sojourn wheresoever thou canst sojourn; for the Lord hath called for a famine; and it shall also come upon the land seven years. And the woman arose, and did after the saying of the man of God: and she went with her household, and sojourned in the land of the Philistines seven years. And it came to pass at the seven years' end, that the woman returned out of the land of the Philistines; and she went forth to cry unto the king for her house and for her land. And the king talked with Gehazi the servant of the man of God, saying, Tell me, I pray thee, all the great things that Elisha hath done. And it came to pass, as he was telling the king how he had restored a dead body to life, that, behold, the woman, whose son he had restored to life, cried to the king for her house and for her land. And Gehazi said, My lord, O king, this is the woman, and this is her son, whom Elisha restored to life. And when the king asked the woman, she told him. So the king appointed unto her a certain officer, saying, Restore all that was her's, and all the fruits of the field since the day that she left the land, even until now."

It is not a miracle that we have now to contemplate, and yet in what respect is it less, if the immediate interference of God in the affairs of nature and of human life is to be designated as such. The several events occur unostentatiously, and, as it were, by accident; but they are so wisely ordered and combined, that the design and government of God are strikingly evident. And are not events like the one before us, which discover to us the golden thread of providence, even in the smallest turns of our lives, more consolatory and impressive than the most splendid miracle, whose application to ourselves is less obvious? May our subject then shed many a ray of light upon our path! Let us consider—I. The stranger in the land of the Philistines. II. The invisible hand of God. III. The restoration.

I. Our narrative carries us back to the commencement of that period of distress and misery, in which the occurrence took place, that is related at the end of the fourth chapter of this book of Kings, to the period of the seven years' dearth. The emigration, referred to in our text, happened at the very beginning of the famine, which has now reached its termination; a more genial sun now smiles upon the afflicted land, and has enticed many, who had left it, back to their beloved home. Amongst the latter is a female, whom we recognise as an old acquaintance; and whom we therefore rejoice to see re-appear in our history, as the most agreeable recollections are associated with her and her friendly habitation.

You cannot have forgotten the noble-minded woman, under whose charitable roof a comfortable chamber was provided for Elisha, to which he repaired as to his home, whenever his prophetic excursions led him to the neighbourhood where she lived, and to whom he promised in the name of the Lord, the son that, at a subsequent period God presented to her a second time, by restoring him to life, when dead. She was one of the chosen of God, cradled

on his lap, but not on that account always reposing on a bed of roses. She also experienced affliction, and knew what it was to eat her bread with tears. No doubt, she likewise enjoyed extraordinary seasons of Divine blessing, which would force even casual observers to say, as the Philistines once said to Isaac, "We see that God is with you!" nevertheless, there were times, when the clouds of adversity darkened her path, and when there was scarcely any perceptible difference, judging from outward appearances, between her and the children of the world, whom God had forsaken. Such a period was the one brought upon her by this famine, of which the Scriptures say, "The Lord called for a famine." This is the Scripture mode of representing those heavy calamities brought upon a land or a single habitation, and which sheds upon the sorrows and distresses of life a peculiar light, that is highly consolatory to the children of God. Viewed in this light, famine, pestilence, and war, and every other calamity, constitute an army, ever ready to come and go, to advance and retreat, at the Almighty's command, but which, without his permission, can assail none. Whatever may be the extent of the calamity, whatever it may accomplish, all is exactly prescribed. Sometimes they are employed to punish, and are the instruments of Divine justice; sometimes to awaken, and to restore sobriety to the intoxicated; sometimes to embitter sin, and to force sinners to a throne of grace; sometimes for the trial of the saints, and to kindle around them a refining fire; whatever may be the purpose for which they are employed, they never return, till, like the word of God, they have accomplished the thing whereunto they were sent. No one, therefore, when afflicted, has simply to do with his afflictions, but, above all, with Him, who has appointed them; he is not to content himself with complaining, and thinking how they can be removed; but is to consider why they have been sent, and to decipher the obscure handwriting. Pain is not the only attendant of distress; it is the vehicle of Divine

admonition, and happy are they, who have eyes to discover it, and hearts to receive it.

The famine, with its thousand attendant evils, that visited the land of Israel, did not spare the dwelling of our Shunammite. It might be supposed that, as one of the chosen of the Lord, she would have been exempted from the general calamity, and that from her fields the blessing would not have departed. But such an opinion could only be well founded, on the supposition that the existence of the children of God is limited to this life. Then, indeed, those who have ceased from the ways of sin might expect to be better off than others, and the miracle of Goshen be perpetually renewed on their behalf; but, as it is, they are only hastily passing through this world, and, properly speaking, only begin to live in eternity. This life is a pilgrimage, a preparation for the eternal home which is before them. Their crowns are laid up for them above; there, also, is their sabbath, and their inheritance! And what an inheritance! Angels are amazed at it. Are, then, the trifling wounds inflicted on their feet, while traversing the thorny road of their short pilgrimage, worth mentioning? And how different do the people of God appear situated, even amidst the difficulties of the way, to those that are without! Are the elect conducted into the desert? it is only to collect heavenly manna, and drink water from the solid rock. The waters, which beat upon the shores of their existence, cast up pearls which they retain to eternity. God, in suffering his people to pass through the Red Sea, does so, that he may find scope for the fulfilment of his word:—"When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee!" If he suffer them to be surrounded with fire, it is, because he desires an opportunity of appearing as their deliverer, and of displaying his greatness and glory in their deliverance. Times of adversity are to true Christians, what the time of wandering in the desert, the time of miraculous and Divine manifestations, was to Israel. At such times

indeed, it is night; but night unveils the splendour of the firmament, presents the stars to our view, and renders us more alive to the voice of spirits. O blessed night of affliction of the children of God, pervaded by the footsteps of that Keeper, who neither slumbereth nor sleepeth, cheered by the light of the most encouraging promises interwoven with Divine assurances, and through which the consoling accents of Almighty love perpetually resound!

The way in which the Lord deals with his people, does, it is true, sometimes appear strange. Hear what Paul says of himself in the first chapter of the second Epistle to the Corinthians:—"For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength." Above human endurance, he means to say. But to what extent then did it attain? "In so much," he adds, "that we despaired even of life;" that we scarcely ventured any longer to hope for it. "But we had the sentence of death in ourselves." He means, there was but one idea present to our minds; and that was, "We are lost!" Why must his distress rise to such a height? "That we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead;" that we should learn to trust in him for what is apparently impossible. We did so; we cast the anchor of our hope on his almighty power, for there was no other anchor-ground at hand. And see, the apostle adds, he "delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver; in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us."

There was nothing wonderful nor extraordinary in the method, chosen by the Lord, for the preservation of the Shunammite woman. It was similar to the one adopted by thousands of their own accord, only that it was entered upon in the name of God, and at his express command; a circumstance which constitutes a difference between two ways, to all appearance the same, resembling that of two travellers on a dangerous road; the one solitary and

unprotected, the other safely escorted to the place of destination. The Lord sent his prophet to the woman, saying, "Arise, and go thou, and thy household, and sojourn wheresoever thou canst sojourn: for the Lord hath called for a famine; and it shall also come upon the land seven years." In these words, she recognised an express injunction; and she quitted house and home, and departed with her family into the land of the Philistines. As she accounted it one of her greatest privileges to "dwell among her people," this command was somewhat unpalatable; perhaps a more painful necessity could not have been laid upon her, than that of leaving her beloved home to reside in the inhospitable, benighted regions of the heathen world. But she had, in the end, no reason to regret the step; nor would she have had any, had the experience, that wherever the Lord's people erect their tents, he is with them, been all that she brought back with her. Such, however, was not the case; she collected many other blessed fruits, on the sterile field of her exile. Banishment, amongst the rude inhabitants of this world, has usually, upon the children of God, an effect similar to that produced by flat countries upon the inhabitants of mountainous regions. No sooner are they removed from the verdant garden of the Lord, than many an ardent longing and dormant reminiscence are awakened, by which the inward man is refreshed. Then they first become conscious where their home really is, and whither they really belong. They had never before imagined that it would be so difficult to live separated from the communion of saints, as they have found it in the cold atmosphere without. How intensely does their love now burn towards their distant brethren! How does the recollection of the intercourse they once enjoyed with those who were like-minded, remind them of a lost paradise, or glow into heavenly visions! How does their longing after the social circles of those kindred spirits convert them almost into enthusiasts, and musing visionaries! Their Zion, with its intimate

fellowships, social converse, and heart-felt intercourse, its revelations and songs, appears to them in the light of that blessed city, already descended from heaven to earth. Such moments of inward consciousness and feeling show to them the state of their hearts in a light that removes every shade of doubt of their not belonging to the world. And it is really a desirable and delightful thing, thus at once to perceive in ourselves traces of the Divine nature so strikingly manifested. Never was the heart of a Paul more openly revealed, never was the beauty of his love more clearly manifested to himself and others, than when he was detained prisoner in a foreign land; and never was he more thoroughly convinced that Christ was his life, than when he had nothing left but Christ.

II. The seven years of want and misery in Israel have come to an end. With what joy the exiled family received the news, may be imagined. They pack up their effects without delay, bid adieu to the land of exile, and set out upon their march homewards. See, there they are, the father and mother, and between them their only son, whom God had twice bestowed upon them. That they are on the way to Canaan, we need not to be informed; the fact is plainly legible in the delighted expression of their countenances. Oh, what inexpressible happiness thus to find ourselves, with our whole family, on the way to the heavenly Canaan! What a glorious position to occupy! How blessed beyond all others! And there are many amongst us, who quietly possess this paradise concealed in their hearts. How then does it happen, that our destination, as we are pursuing the same road, is not equally evinced by our whole carriage? Why is it, that the object of our journey is so seldom legible in our countenances? Why do we, in general, more resemble the settlers in this world of death, than pilgrims travelling towards Salem? Let the traces of sorrow then be banished from our countenances, and sighing, complaining, and lamentation cease!

If the full light of day cannot shine upon our brow, let it be the tranquil moonlight of calm desire and longing after our home, of holy joyful hope! Then let the trembling knee be firm, the unsteady step relinquished! A doubtful deportment ill becomes those, who have before them prospects like ours. The elastic movement, and cheerful song, would better characterize our walk. "But," you say, "there are still many things that grieve and annoy." True, but they belong only to this world, to this desolate land, through which we are hastening. "But the road, how steep, how rough, how thorny!" It is so; but remember, it is only the road. Here we are not at home. Our habitations are beyond the sparkling canopy on high. Oh, it is amidst storms and floods, that our souls, imitating the lively flight of the swallow, should soar above the earth, and look down upon the shadows beneath; whatever here is earthly and perishable, whether it be afflictive or joyous, we should not value more than does the mariner the objects on the coasts along which he sails, which pass by in quick succession, but to which he neither can nor ought to attach himself, for he is bound on a voyage. And, oh what a voyage is ours! Onwards! then my brethren, onwards!

Our friend has reached Canaan, and is among the objects of her affection; but it is not long before she is made painfully aware, that it is not the true Canaan, that had been promised to her as her peculiar home. You will imagine the feelings with which she arrives at Shunem, and hastens towards her former pleasant dwelling, which she finds, indeed, standing where she had left it; but who shall describe her astonishment on finding it occupied by strangers, who, when she claims the property as hers, ridicule, or treat her as an insane person. During her absence, the despotic Jehoram seems to have taken possession of the deserted estate, and to have let it, as a fief, for his own advantage; and the real owners were forced to seek a shelter wherever they could find one. Into what distressing situations do even the dearest of God's children sometimes fall!

How obscured does the nobility of sonship of these three again appear, as they stand before the dwelling, of which they have been deprived, the objects of laughter and ridicule, and not knowing where to lay their heads! But the Lord is never at any time far distant from his people. He says to them, "Fear not; for I am with thee: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will keep thee; I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness!" Yes, He is to his people, under all circumstances, exactly what they must wish him to be; a Physician when sick, a Protector when threatened, an Ally when assailed, a watchful Shepherd when they have strayed, a Father to provide for them when in need, a Mother to wipe away their tears, a Counsellor to guide them when in difficulties, and, when justice is required, a Judge and Advocate, above all others.

In the latter character he now appears, in favour of the little family that have been deprived of their house and lands at Shunem; and it affords no small degree of pleasure to observe the relief prepared by Providence for these his favoured children, which is surprising and delightful in the degree that their situation appeared gloomy and difficult. What, then, are they to do? The first idea that presents itself to the Shunammite is, to go with her son, and seek of the king, in person, the restoration of their property. No sooner said than done. Behold her already on the way, hastening with winged steps towards Samaria; and there is one whom she sees not, but in whom she believes, that is already in advance of her, preparing the way for her reception. Observe, now, the turn that the affair takes. Things are happening that, at first sight, appear fortuitous and irrelevant, but which, nevertheless, are skillfully arranged threads, upon which our judgment must be suspended till the shuttle has completed its work.

About the time that the Shunammite arrives at Samaria, the king providentially meets with Gehazi, the former servant of Elisha. "Gehazi?" This meeting does indeed appear extraordinary! That the king would enter into

conversation with the leprous servant, does not appear probable, even though he had been one of the distinguished four, who first brought to the distressed city, the joyful intelligence of the desertion of the Syrian camp. That Gehazi, at a subsequent period, had been cured of his leprosy, does not appear from the history, though it seems probable. Be this as it may, the king no sooner recognises the man, than he is seized with the desire of hearing from him an account of the wonderful acts performed by his former master. He is therefore called, and the king spoke to him, and said, "Tell me, I pray thee, all the great things that Elisha hath done." We are surprised at the circumstance, and feel desirous of knowing what can have given rise to such a wish. Is it that his conscience smites him? Does he entertain a sort of superstitious dread of Elisha, as Herod did of John at a subsequent period? or is it mere amusement and diversion that he expects from the narration? The latter is possible; for there is no want of persons in the present day, who, although entirely estranged from a life in God, are enthusiastic in their admiration of the wonders related in the Scriptures, and read them with real pleasure. They are delighted with their pithiness, or picturesque grandeur. They discover in them also admirable materials for the display of their own penetration, their acumen, eloquence, and wit. I could name to you more than one religious writer in proof of this assertion. They evince a certain degree of zeal, but a total absence of the broken and contrite heart of a poor sinner. Oh, it is a dangerous thing to be sensible of the beauty of the gospel, nay, to be even enthusiastic admirers of it, and yet to feel no need of its consolations and redeeming power! Its avowed enemies and opponents may be nearer to the kingdom than such trifling and enraptured friends.

Gehazi willingly complies with the wishes of the king, and begins his narration with the healing of the waters of Jericho, just as the Shunammite woman is approaching Samaria. As he is speaking of the judgment that befel

the forty young men at Bethel, she is entering the gates of the city, and as he describes the wonderful increase of oil in the house of the poor widow, she enters the street that leads to the king's palace. Just as he is proceeding to tell of the son promised to the Shunammite, she ascends the steps of the palace, and as he speaks of the death of this son, the mother is below requesting an audience of the king. Gehazi proceeds with his narration, tells how Elisha restores the boy to life, and gives him back to his astonished mother. Then how, overpowered with admiration and joy, she throws herself at the prophet's feet, and pours forth her soul in praise and thanksgiving to the Lord. The king, who had listened throughout the whole narrative with the most lively interest, is deeply affected by this last account; and is animated by a strong desire, to see the youth who had been raised to life, and his happy mother. At this moment, a servant announces a woman with her son, who importunately begs to be admitted into the presence of the king. The king permits it, and a woman enters, attended by a young and blooming boy. She relates her story with simplicity and brevity; informs the king that, owing to the famine, she had taken refuge in the country of the Philistines, where she had resided for several years with her family; that on her return, she had found, to her no small astonishment, her little estate in the possession of strangers; and she earnestly and respectfully entreats the king to interfere on her behalf, to order the restitution of her property, and thus to dry the tears of a distressed and afflicted family. While she is giving this account of herself, Gehazi, scarcely believing what he sees, looks with an emotion of pleasure and surprise, first at the mother, and then at her son, till, no longer able to suppress his feelings, he exclaims, "My lord, O king! this is the mother, and this is her son whom Elisha restored to life." The king eagerly asks her if she is from Shunem, and if the boy at her side is the one that was so

miraculously restored to life. She replies in the affirmative; and observing, with some surprise, the deep interest the king appears to take in the circumstance, she again repeats the particulars, as narrated by Gehazi. You are now, I presume, under no uneasiness respecting the answer that will be given to her petition. The king, visibly affected, immediately gives the necessary orders to an officer, saying, "Restore all that was hers, and all the fruits of the field since the day she left the land, even until now."

What do you say to this narrative, my friends? Though at first sight, it may have the appearance of a mere concurrence of accidental circumstances, is it possible, on a closer observation, not to see in the seemingly natural course of events, the hand of the Lord, the silent working of Him who is a helper in time of need? Whether the Shunammite woman was sensible of it or not, it was of the Lord that she determined on this journey to Samaria; it was his doing that the king encountered Gehazi at the precise moment that he did; it was the Lord's doing that this ungodly prince felt a desire to hear all the wonderful acts of Elisha, and that this account of the Shunammite woman and her son had so great an effect upon him. Up to this point of the narrative, it would not occur to any one to suppose that these particulars had been specially ordered and arranged by the Lord; but when we see that, at the very moment when the king's heart is so greatly affected, the woman, with her son, enters the apartment, even the blindest must be forced to confess, "This is the Lord's doing, for the secret of his gracious guidance is manifestly revealed."

To many of the afflicted among us, Divine assistance, although unsuspected, may likewise be as near as it was to this Shunammite woman, when ascending the steps leading to the palace in Samaria. Many circumstances have doubtless occurred in their lives, that to all appearance are of little or no importance; but perhaps nothing more is necessary than for the shuttle to pass through these

assembled threads in order to elicit from them also the astonished cry, "See, the Lord has relieved my distress; my bonds are loosened, and I am free!"

God, it is true, does not always interfere miraculously, but his hands are never bound. He much more usually disguises his deliverances under the more or less transparent veil of daily occurrences, or even apparent accidents. One event and another takes place, which at first is scarcely deemed worthy of notice; but no sooner have all the smaller filaments been arranged and the last thread inserted in the curiously wrought tissue, than we become feelingly and joyfully sensible, that the promise given to his children, and which is applicable in all possible cases—"I will never leave thee nor forsake thee"—was not given to the winds, and we praise Him who is "mighty to save."

III. What Jehoram, impelled by Him who "turns the hearts of kings like rivers of water," had commanded, was executed without delay. An officer, appointed by the king, accompanies the Shunammite back to her home; the strangers, who were in possession of her property, are ejected; and the happy family again enter their comfortable dwelling, with hearts overflowing with love to God; and it is not long before they receive the value of the produce, which their garden and land had yielded in their absence. They were then again in full possession of their rightful property, and that too by order of Jehoram. God is indeed great in counsel as in working; and his enemies, what are they but instruments, from which redound praises to his name?

How greatly was the little inheritance of this family enhanced to them in value by its repossession! The inscription, "He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep," must now shine brighter than ever over their portal. Their whole habitation appears as a glorious monument of the loving kindness of the Lord, covered with the most animating and cheering mottos; and that which

was spoken in reference to Job, was now fully accomplished in the experience of this happy domestic circle: "Hast thou not made a hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side?" See here an earthly possession turned into a spiritual and Divine memento! House, homestead, and property all raised to a Tabor. Do you not see now, why the Lord so often suddenly removes our dearest earthly possessions, and then, contrary to our expectations, and by the most remarkable interpositions, restores them to us again? He does it to fill them with matter for Divine contemplation; to consecrate them as memorials, mirrors, and seals of his power and love; to convert that which is perishable into an imperishable blessing for our hearts; yea to remodel and refine the new man. Do not then be terrified, when it appears to you that your dearest possessions are again to be shaken; but think, rather, that by this reducing, purifying process, the Lord is about to improve them. That our hearts should for a while go with them into the flame, is quite natural; but this fire does not consume, it only melts; it does not destroy, but brightens and purifies.

The restoration, over which the family at Shunem were enabled to rejoice, involves, in its general import, much that is exceedingly rich in promise. If we are really the children of the kingdom, we may, in more respects than one, anticipate similar restitutions. Many things, which have been withdrawn from us in times past, have only been alienated for a short time; and those which may be taken away in future, will only be removed for a limited period. For instance, if we see entire portions of our past life behind us, like fallow ground usurped by hostile powers, they will be restored to us again, at least as matter of meditation, with all the precious fruits which they must yield in blessings and Divine manifestations. Do we see the influence requisite to legislation and national education, which has been promised to our kingdom, for ages withheld; a period is approaching, testified by the

prophetic word, when “ the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him.” The bright model exhibited in the assembly at Jerusalem, is that to which the church shall see herself restored, when the Lord’s hour is come. Do we see that our present earnest endeavours after holiness yield not the fruits we intensely desire; even in this field we shall reap a joyful harvest, when that truth shall be accomplished, “ Their works do follow them;” and when the Holy Spirit shall cause all that is Divine in our hearts and lives to flourish, strip off the veil, and bring it to the light of day. Are we, in the present age, deprived of the pleasure we wish to take in many of our brethren in the communion of the church, sometimes by the prevalency of party-spirit and conflicting opinions, and at others by the offence, which we take at the spiritual deformity observable in one or another: the day is approaching, when all who truly belong to Christ shall be brought together, and united in the tenderest bonds of Christian affection. Will death, the last enemy which shall be destroyed, break down the earthly house of your tabernacle, place it in the grave, and deliver it to corruption—even our mortal body shall not remain under the dominion of death. The King, to whom belong both our body and soul, will send forth his archangel with the sound of a trumpet exceeding loud, and that which was sown in weakness and dishonour, shall be raised in power and glory.

Now say, then, whether more cheering prospects do not present themselves beyond the darkness of our present condition? The circumnavigator does not regard the dangers of the deep, while animated with the hope of discovering some new portion of the globe; and shall we, who are sailing directly to the harbour of everlasting joy, be less bold and courageous in facing the momentary

storms of this mortal life? We do not direct our course by the uncertain twinkling of the stars; we have a "sure word of prophecy" to enlighten and guide our passage; we do not follow the trembling compass-needle of an uncertain conjecture; we spread out the sails of our hope before the true saying of God. We do not commit our all to the mortal hands of a dying helmsman; we know One infinitely superior, who manages our bark, and we breathe already, on our passage, the atmosphere of the blessed haven we are approaching. And shall we be unnerved and tremble, if we meet with storms, which may indeed rock our frail bark, but never can drive it out of its direct course? God forbid! that would be to walk unworthy of the gospel of Christ. Let us conduct ourselves, in all things, as those who belong to another order of things than this, which is now before our eyes, and who know that here we have no continuing city, but who, under the direction of an Almighty Guide, are hastening, with sure steps, to "a city which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God."

"Sure steps!" Do you doubt that? Does the anti-Christian spirit of the times, with respect to your faith, "eat as doth a canker?" Will you allow yourselves to be spoiled "through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ?" No, my friends; I say to you, with the apostle John, "Abide in Christ." Whatever the world may say, you have the truth, and it will not yield to falsehood. Do not permit yourselves to be ensnared by its delusions; hold fast that which ye have, "let no man take your crown."

It is true, the kingdom of God is besieged; it is assailed on all sides by the powerful arms of learning, talent, and wit. The Bible, according to many, is not the word of God, and the doctrine of Christianity is superannuated; nay, the existence of a personal Godhead, of a future judgment, of a heaven beyond the grave is denied; while a

thousand quills, in various forms, are in motion to propagate and defend these comfortless and horrible negations. But let us not be afraid, brethren, "no weapon formed against us shall prosper." In this attack against Zion, there is more vain boasting than real power and tried strength. It is a conflict, like that of boasting Goliath against Israel; a strife, like that of the citizens of Ephesus against Paul, when they cried out, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians," when the apostle, in the strength of God, was successful in planting a church, notwithstanding.

It is not true that modern opposers have new objections to make against our cause; they can bring forward nothing that has not been refuted centuries ago, and that more than once. It is not true that the Bible, as they have the boldness to assert, is full of contradictions; the word of God contains no contradictions that may not be easily and without constraint reconciled to an enlightened mind. It is not true that the scriptural views of nature and of the world are at variance with the discoveries of modern science; on the contrary, science is continually furnishing fresh proofs, which fix the seal of truth on the statements of Scripture. It is not true that this or that sacred book is spurious, not having for its author the one ascribed to it in the Divine word. The grounds for such assertions appear upon closer investigation to be false, and can be refuted by the most striking arguments. Neither is it true that the Scriptures contain much that involves in itself an opposition to the general dictates of reason; they certainly do carry us far beyond the narrow confines of natural reason, but to sound and convalescent reason all is harmonized and clear. Nor, finally, is it true that the master-spirits of our day renounce the Bible: we learn far otherwise from daily experience; we find that men of deep thinking, possessing the most distinguished and cultivated minds, return from the comfortless wastes of rationalism to the living fountain of Divine revelation. Thus these "established facts" made

out against the Bible, are all a lie, an empty hollow sound ; let us not be led astray by them, ours is the gospel, we will adhere to Jesus.

What kind of people are they, who are guilty of this unbelief? Consider them more closely, and ask yourselves, if you are willing to enlist under their banner. They are men whose heart and soul is fixed upon one object. On the discovery of truth, think you? on enjoying the peace of God and communion with him? No; an immortal name in this world is all they seek; temporary honour is their god, a fading laurel their heavenly crown. They require no redemption; for they have no inward conviction of the existence of sin. Without inclination to prove the gospel by the rule laid down by Christ—"If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself"—they are as incompetent to form a judgment in this case, as the blind are to distinguish colours, or the incurably deaf to feel the harmony of music. They are egotists insensible to love, and therefore capable of sacrificing the hope of eternal existence and reunion beyond the grave to the miserable ambition of immortalizing their name in some manual of literary history; cold, heartless spirits, estranged from God, and centered in themselves, whose longings never go forth beyond the boundaries of time. And shall we suffer the unbelief of such as these to lead us astray? Shall their words and their views have any weight with us, when cast into the balance? No, indeed, by no means. We abide in Christ, and if you desire anything else of us, if you require us to renounce the gospel, then produce those who, heartily thirsting after truth, still deny that the Bible is a light from God; those who, having become sensible of their true state by the light of the Divine law, still reject the gospel as the erring word of man; those who, weeping, and laden with sin, having fled to it for refuge, confess that the gospel has deceived them and falsified their hopes; those who, striving earnestly after

holiness before God, still maintain that Christianity must fall before reason; prove to me that sober, prudent, heavenly-minded men, ardently longing for deliverance from sin, reject Christianity and its truths as contrary to reason, and as unsuitable to the inward necessities of the human mind; then will I doubt and be irresolute; but such characters you will not be able to bring forward, and therefore I abide in Jesus. Do ye likewise.

If the objections, made in the present day against the Bible, wear the gloss of plausibility, we must herein perceive the fulfilment of the Divine prophecy, that, in the latter times, "strong delusions" should be sent. If Satan has "great wrath" in these days, let it prove to us, that the Lord is working powerfully, and achieving great things. If many fall away from the truth, their foreheads wearing the mark of the reigning spirit of the times, let us remember, that this "falling away" must come, that the Scripture may be fulfilled. Does the old phantom of the Seven Hills rise up again to contend for victory, let this remind us of the beast spoken of in the Revelation, which "was not, and yet is;" and thus the Bible receives a new and glorious seal. Are there even those in our day, who do homage to human intellect, and acknowledge no other God; in these blasphemers, we may recognise the precursors of that "son of perdition" who, according to the Scriptures, shall sit in the temple to receive Divine worship. Far from contemplating the hostile operations of the present day against Christianity with uneasiness and doubt, our faith should, on the contrary, be strengthened, that the Lord liveth, and is hastening on his cause for the last great victory, and our encouragement to abide in Jesus increased, "that when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming."

But the attacks of opposers form by no means the only stumbling-block in the way of many; the state of the church of Christ itself causes much hesitation. We inquire for the kingdom of the Son of God, and are directed hither

and thither to a small number of insignificant professors, a few isolated lights, scarcely visible in the immensity of darkness spread around. "What! and is this the kingdom of the King of kings? Can he be a King, and Christianity of Divine origin, with a kingdom so insignificant as this upon earth?" Questions, like these, fix, like vampires upon our hearts, and suck out the blood of faith. But, let us see—what would become of the Scriptures, if those in the narrow way were not "the few," but "the many;" if Christ's flock were not a "little one," but a large one, and his church, not like "a lodge in a garden of cucumbers," but appeared before our eyes in the pomp of a royal encampment?

His followers must be a "little band"—Jacob "a worm," for such they are designated in his word, during the present period. And yet the number of his worshippers may not be so inconsiderable as many are inclined to imagine. When "the few" shall one day be collected together, they will form a multitude that no man can number; and even at present, who can form an estimate of their number in all lands? How many praise God in secret! How many are quietly ripening for heaven, through the Bibles disseminated by hundreds of thousands throughout the world! How many are still in the first stage of awakening grace, who do not yet venture to number themselves with the true followers of Christ, or are indeed still walking according to the course of this world, who nevertheless are already entangled in the gospel net, by which, to-day or to-morrow, they shall be drawn out of the depths of corruption!

But perhaps you are offended with the meanness of the kingdom. I must again ask, what grounds have you to expect anything more glorious? Does not the Scripture again declare, "Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called?" It may be that you have many a perplexing thought about the spiritual infirmities of the church. Alas! it is true,

they are a people, who are very far from having reached the standard of perfect sanctity, which is not to be attained on earth. But consider, God, according to the Scriptures, has formed them for himself, that they may show forth his, not their own praise. Consider, they are at war with principalities and powers, and are not yet retired from the conflict. This dear bought people live not in themselves, but in the righteousness of Christ, and perpetually receive grace from him, that they may be conscious of their own weakness. But notwithstanding their weakness, they are a holy people, yea, the only holy people; because, in their inmost soul, they love God and the things of God. The Scripture ascribes the sanctification of believers to their vital union with Christ their Head; as the vine flourishes in its branches, unfolding and bringing to light its inward excellency in the rich and juicy grape. In this scriptural view, the doctrine of sanctification not merely loses all its legal tincture, but appears perfectly consistent and evangelical. It is only when it is thus understood, that the inward desire of the spirit is induced, that the Lord Jesus may glorify himself in us, and that the prayer, "O thou altogether lovely, really dwell in me," is preserved as an eternal flame on the altar of our hearts. In this way, the church will know more and more of the connexion which subsists between sanctification and justification; and this deep evangelical view of one of the most glorious mysteries of the gospel, will be productive of precious fruit in its time. But even now, if fruits of holiness are found, which are acceptable to God, whether it be perfect love, true humility, faithfulness unto death, or whatever it may be, we do not meet with them in the unbelieving world, but only in the "little flock of Christ," of whom it is said, they are all "glorious within," although there may be shades of outward imperfection. This garden of the Lord, however much it is now hid in the shade, is the finest and noblest which the earth bears on its bosom. Though in many respects sullied, it

is still a living mirror of Christ; yea, to use the words of an apostle, it is the "fulness of Him that filleth all in all!"

Let no man, therefore, trouble us again with the strange proposition, to renounce the living fountain for wells without water. No man can make it clear to the natural understanding, that it is wiser to embrace the evanescent banners of the prevailing (so called) enlightened systems, than the banner of the cross. The heart, which has been brought to a consciousness of its inward necessities, sees clearly, that the boast of moving along with the general current, is a miserable equivalent for the sacrifice of all that constitutes a ground of consolation in life and death. That which we have chosen, remains still the "good part;" that which you offer us, appears excellent only till brought to the test. Let us, then, alone. Were we to follow your suggestions in going hither or thither, and embracing your dubious theories, we know that at the end we should with downcast look, and heavy heart, accompanied with deeper impressions than ever, only renew our watchword, "Lord, whither shall we go, for thou alone hast the words of eternal life!"

XI. THE WALK TO DAMASCUS.

WE read in Heb. ix. 27, 28, the following most important and weighty apostolic declaration : " And as it is appointed unto all men once to die, but after this the judgment : so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many : and unto them that look for him, shall he appear the second time without sin, unto salvation." An awakening voice sounds from this solemn truth, a voice of instruction and of consolation.

The apostle here surprises the child of dust amidst the trifling vanities and the delusive dreams of his earthly pursuits, his hopes, and plans, arrests him as with a voice of thunder, urges upon his forgetful heart the command : " Sinner, stop ! Man, consider !" bears him away from the deafening bustle of the world, and places him, as it were, upon some peaceful eminence, in order to give him a view of his whole life, and to lift the veil, which conceals the dark termination and final catastrophe of his present existence. He declares that a fixed destiny awaits every man ; that an irresistible Divine decree has gone forth, concerning him in a threefold respect : " He shall die ; he shall die but once ; and after death the judgment." This is the end of the short and cloudy day of our earthly life.

" To die !" This is the first thing mentioned as appointed to us. An angel of darkness sang to each the same cradle song : " Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." But the dissolution of the body does not exhaust the whole import of that fearful sentence ; it includes in it something more awful. The apostle has a

death in view, not like that of Simeon, or Stephen, or John; but that death, which is mentioned as the curse of sin; that death, in which no mediator stands by the side of the gasping sufferer, no tender hand is reached from the clouds to wipe the sweat of anguish from the brow, no angel choir surrounds the struggler whilst engaged with the king of terrors—but he “who has the power of death,” performs his office there alone. This sentence of death hangs suspended over us all, and but for Christ, I think there is nothing more certain than that it would be executed unsparingly on all.

This death is appointed to us sinners, and he who dies, the apostle says, dies but once. There is, after our departure, no new school for heaven but death, and after death the “crisis,” as the Greek text reads; the final decision, the judgment. Fearful thought! Who does not tremble? Tremble, indeed, we may, to the very heart, but—not despair!

The declaration of the text sends forth an instructing, as well as an awakening voice. Although the decree of God is such as we have been considering, a great transaction has taken place, which cannot indeed alter or shake the fearful destiny, but which averts what is injurious from all who are willing to escape, by following a way divinely prescribed. “As,” says the apostle, that is, in the same sense, in the same way, as—“it is appointed unto all men once to die, but after this the judgment: so,” or in like manner, “Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many.” Now say, whether the doctrine of Christ, our substitute, can be plainer or more unequivocally taught than it is in this passage. He is mentioned as having been “offered,” and thus represented as the great original anti-type of the Levitical victims, to whom really and essentially, as to those typically, the sins of his people were imputed. And that there may be no possible doubt as to the true meaning of his words, the apostle adds, that it was Christ who bore our sins on the cross, and gives us, at

the same time, this most significant assurance, that "unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation," from which it must incontrovertibly follow, that at his first appearing in the days of his flesh, he was not without sin, but though personally pure, holy, and unblemished, he was loaded with guilt—guilt not his own. But Christ is set before us in our text, not only as the bearer of, but as the sufferer for our sins, the sufferer of that punishment threatened by the law, as the apostle expressly says, "As it is appointed unto all men once to die, but after this the judgment: so"—that is, in the same sense and manner—"was Christ delivered to death. Upon him now fell the judgment denounced against sinners, and the sinners' death, both of which had been appointed by Divine justice." We perceive from this, that what had been "appointed" of God, to fallen man, was in no way abrogated, disannulled, or recalled, but was executed to its full extent, as Jehovah required, upon man's great substitute, so that in consequence of this bloody sacrifice, the infinitely holy God could exercise mercy towards accursed transgressors, without injury to his truth and holiness, and pardon the condemned criminal, and bless him with eternal life.

Thus the voice of instruction has become to us, at the same time, a voice of the most blissful consolation. To those who "love his appearing," there is henceforth "no condemnation," because the condemnation has passed upon the Surety. Nothing is now required of those, who wish to be among the happy number to whom it is "appointed" to live in the present enjoyment of a spiritual sabbath, and the hope of eternal glory, but a faithful surrender of themselves to the Lord Jesus. As to the unconverted, the law will take its course; those who have sinned must die; after death the judgment, and finally, eternal damnation.

In considering the prophetic efficacy of Elisha's career, we shall enter upon a history much calculated to inspire us with interest for such passages as the one we have just

explained. We shall see, once more, what sin is, in the sight of God ; those who have become acquainted with its nature, are easily taught the value and efficacy of the blood of Christ.

2 KINGS VIII. 7—9.

“ And Elisha came to Damascus ; and Ben-hadad the king of Syria was sick ; and and it was told him, saying, The man of God is come hither. And the king said unto Hazael, Take a present in thine hand, and go, meet the man of God, and inquire of the Lord by him, saying, Shall I recover of this disease ? So Hazael went to meet him, and took a present with him, even of every good thing of Damascus, forty camels' burden, and came and stood before him, and said, Thy son Ben-hadad, king of Syria, hath sent me to thee, saying, Shall I recover of this disease ?”

We are gradually approaching the termination of Elisha's life. His sun will not set like that of the Tishbite, in the peaceful calm of a summer's evening : storm and tempest attend the last steps of his earthly path. The event, now before us, leads us as through a portal to a scene of the most fearful horror, dismay, and confusion ; and although the man of God passes through it unhurt, not a hair of his head being touched, he does not escape inward suffering. In other respects, we shall witness the fall only of his enemies, and the enemies of his God, whilst he and his holy cause appear in triumph and clothed with victory. Elisha's entrance into Damascus, and Ben-hadad's message are the two points, which severally deserve our closer consideration.

I. The sun smiles again upon Samaria. The enemy has quitted the land, the seven years of dearth have come to a close, and the people, beginning to breathe more freely, forget their complaints and their sufferings. When, in the sultry heat of summer, a storm has burst over some district, no sooner does it begin to abate, the thunder rolling at a greater distance, and the sun darting his first rays through the tempestuous clouds, than the husbandman hastens out to his crops, flattering himself with the hope, that the boisterous elements have left no traces of desola-

tion upon his fields, but rather spread fruitfulness and prosperity around. Thus it was with Elisha, as he wandered through his spiritual garden, after the storm of God's wrath over Israel had abated; and he was not left without some few cheering manifestations. Many a rose was found blooming more freshly in this sacred soil, and the weak and tender twig had taken firm root, and was flourishing in its strength. Here and there, even an entire bed of these spiritual flowers met his eye, of which he had not till then been aware; trouble had impelled the people to God; had taught them to look upward in their night of sorrow; and had taught them to pray. But with thousands of others, as is usually the case, these striking occurrences had only increased their hardness of heart, deciding them to remain obdurate, and unsubdued by the most solemn events. Alas, it was like striking a block of granite; the ploughshare had passed traceless over brass and iron. Too rebellious to be subdued by God's judgments, they neither acknowledged his saving hand, nor were won by the blessings it scattered. There was, indeed, no want of joy and exultation amongst the people; but they only rejoiced that the return of happier times enabled them to return with renewed zest to their former sins. Here and there, indeed, the words might be heard, "The Lord's help has been wonderfully manifested!" but they were mere empty sounds, or hypocritical expressions, uttered in the exuberance of their fleshly delight; the gratitude of heart and life was paid—but not to Him, to whom alone it was due. We find the root of the royal family producing, as heretofore, the thorn and the briar, which now raised its head more boldly, and spread out its branches with greater luxuriance than before. Had not Jehoram, so to speak, beheld, with his eyes, the Lord of sabaoth? And yet Jehoram would not have the Lord to reign over him, but wantonly flung from him the hand stretched out for his deliverance. The example of the king, like that of Jezebel of old, that monster of shame and profligacy, having thus spread its poison around, his

people, too, found in the carnal abominations of idolatry, a far more pleasurable service than in the self-denying worship of the living God. Such was now the state of affairs; we must tremble for Israel. "Wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together." Alas! already we may fancy we hear a voice from heaven, crying: "What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it?" and may imagine the declaration of the invisible keeper to have gone forth, "Put in the sickle! The iniquity of the Amorites is full! The long-suffering of God is exhausted!" Yes, the sword of vengeance flashes again from the clouds, and is whetted for the day of battle. Woe to thee, Israel! Unhappy Samaria, woe to thee, woe!

The history places us to-day on the highway leading upwards from Samaria to Damascus. On this road, not far from the capital of Syria, we are met by a solitary wanderer, barefoot, wrapped in a coarse mantle, and bearing a pilgrim's staff. His head sunk on his bosom, as if lost in deep contemplation, and insensible to all that is passing around, he pursues his silent way, looking neither to the right hand nor to the left. His countenance, at other times bright and serene as a summer's sky, is now heavy and clouded with care, depicting inward grief of no common kind. How expressive an hieroglyphic, how significant a sign is this man! Oh that Israel could understand and decipher it! But Israel does not understand. Behold, he who has hitherto appeared in Samaria's troubles like the peaceful rainbow, now appears like the storm bird, that flits across the ocean foretelling evil. He who for years has been accustomed to open the sluices of the Divine goodness and benevolence to his people, now approaches to let loose a roaring lion upon them, to remove the embankment that keeps back the surges of God's wrath, that they may come in upon them like a flood. We need not be told that this man is Elisha. A dark secret is concealed within his bosom. Alas, that messengers of peace

should be obliged to transform themselves into fiery signs and heralds of judgments, on account of the hard-heartedness of the people; to change the palm-branch for the sword and the rod, and to return from the bright hills of the gospel to the awful summits of Sinai and Ebal! You remember the Divine commission, which Elijah received at Mount Horeb: "Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus: and when thou comest, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria: and Jehu, the son of Nimshi, shalt thou anoint to be king over Israel; and Elisha, the son of Shaphat of Abel-Meholah, shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room!" The latter of these commissions Elijah had only been enabled to execute in person; the two former had descended to his successor Elisha. Up to this time, the Lord had deferred the performance of these instructions. Again he was willing to show his kindness upon this sinful people. But now—oh awful word!—now, the former decree was to be enforced. Elisha, Divinely apprised of it, is, as we have seen, on his way, in order to execute the Divine commission, first, on the heathen Hazael, and to place the sword in the hand of this servant of the wicked one, for Hazael was no other, that he might desolate Israel. What an errand for a man of Elisha's benevolent disposition, whose soul was affectionately devoted to his country and his people; how much rather than perform this bidding would he have dissolved himself in tears, and become a sacrifice for Israel! But the Lord had commanded, and "to obey," says the Scripture, "is better than sacrifice."

Scarcely had Elisha reached the precincts of Damascus, than the report of his approach was spread abroad. He had long been well known in Syria. The healing of Naaman had made him, in former days, the topic of general conversation, and the interest respecting him had risen to the highest pitch, from the reports of the army lately returned from Canaan, who told of his benign and lovely character, and of the great signs and wonders God had

wrought by his hand. "The man of God is come!" was suddenly circulated in Damascus. We see that his due title was not withheld. After all that had passed, a certain reverence was felt for him, and with many of those, upon whose dark minds Israel's light of revelation had dawned, the words "man of God" had a meaning beyond a mere name, or a partially understood phraseology. But forebodings and misgivings are not faith, and every flash of lightning has not the power of kindling fire; solitary sparks do not make daylight, but the sun. There are many who possess just sufficient religion to increase their condemnation, but not sufficient to avert it. Among Protestants, there exists a kind of reverence for sacred things, under which, pious as it may appear, the essence of Christianity is nevertheless denied, and which differs in no other way from unbelief, than that it appears clothed in a more pious garb. It is the worship of genius, a predilection for great men, even for those of the kingdom of God, in whom the glory of human intellect is exhibited in an uncommon degree, and whose human nature stands, as it were, on the mount of transfiguration. The worthies thus highly honoured are a Moses, a Joshua, an Elisha, a Daniel, a Paul, a Luther, a Knox, and spirits of such a cast; no worthier subjects for science and poetry can be found. Pantheons are erected for a Frederick the Great, a Bonaparte, a Rousseau, a Schiller, a Göethe; but at their side must piously be placed a chapel for all saints; and we look down with contempt upon minds, which, though enlightened, are too superficial and insensible to be competent to form a judicious estimate of the sublimity of these Biblical characters. How holy this worship appears—how pious this predilection, especially when it overflows in poetic strains of homage or adoration, or is embodied in a portrait, hanging out to view, enchased in golden frame! Say, what is it that is here worshipped—to whom is this homage paid? Is it the Eternal Spirit, whose power knew how to form such characters out of miserable, sinful

creatures? Is it grace, exhibited so powerfully in the weakness of humanity? Is it the mighty God, in so far as he was glorified in the prophets, whose father he calls himself, and by whom, as with living characters, he inscribed his great name upon the earth? Alas, no! In the solemn reverence paid to these men, upon closer examination, self alone is exalted; they adore in them the germ of intellectual superiority amongst our species; in a word, totally mistaking the work of Divine regeneration, they only place the ideal human excellence, "the liberated son of earth," crowned with laurels, upon their altar; and thus, under the semblance of Christian piety and devotion, perform their idolatrous worship, which differs only from any other by its more spiritual colouring. Doubt not that this is a very common error in our day, in this age of "intellectual refinement;" and beware of placing confidence in every warm effusion of praise and honour bestowed on Biblical characters, as if denoting an approach to the kingdom of God, or perhaps even more. Beneath it may lurk the most refined anti-Christian spirit; and a pure denial of the gospel should appear less dubious than this species of Biblical enthusiasm, which apparently approaches the truth, but in reality conduces to the most dangerous religious self-deception.

II. Whilst Elisha is entering the city of Damascus, an astonishing scene takes place in the centre of the palace. Ben-hadad, the well-known Syrian prince, lies on a bed of sickness, and the report of the arrival of the man of God has already reached his couch. But what impression does the news make upon the suffering monarch? In Canaan, he had himself become sufficiently convinced of the super-human endowments of this man, and had witnessed his wonderful deeds in more than one striking instance. If, thought he, there is any one able to show me the issue of this affliction, it is Elisha. And no sooner was this idea

conceived, than, summoning one of his superior attendants, he charged him with a message to the approaching seer. "Take a present in thine hand," says the king, "and go, meet the man of God, and inquire of the Lord by him, saying, Shall I recover of this disease?" Mark the change that has taken place in the position of the high and potent Ben-hadad with Elisha. Formerly, you will remember, he had only sent bands of mercenaries towards him, conveying death and destruction; now, he scarcely knows how sufficiently to testify his reverence, and meets him with a courtesy, and expressions of humility, amounting to little less than homage. He styles him in plain terms, a "man of God," nor does he think himself dishonoured by being called "Elisha's son." As if he were a crowned guest, he presents him with gifts of honour, and does not conceal that he regards him as a true prophet, admitted to the Divine counsels. Is, then, the Syrian king converted to the living God? Oh, that he were so! How should we rejoice for him, and likewise for Elisha! Had an essential change taken place in Ben-hadad's heart, surely his first inquiry of Elisha would have been of a different nature to this:—"Shall I recover of this disease?" He is converted, but only in so far as many are amongst us, who, convinced in their understandings of the truth of Christianity, respect the children of God, and whose doubts as to the existence of a living and all-controlling Providence, grow weaker, as each striking event in their own life and experience transpires to prove its truth. Thus, at times, they seek consolation in God, and hope in him; but he is not much more to them than a God for their daily bread,—a God for the flesh. They run to him only occasionally, for bodily help, and the supply of earthly wants. A God for their souls, in whom grace and pardon is to be found, they feel no need of. Alas! there are many religious people of this class, who would convert the great God into the servant of a carnal man, and not a carnal man into a

servant of God. But this godliness, growing in the bad soil of our sinful nature, has not even the "promise of the life that now is," much less "of that which is to come."

Now let us learn in what manner we are taught to come. The parable in Luke xi. represents it to us in a clear and palpable light. The Lord conducts us into a town, where, in an abode of the ignoble after the flesh, a man resides, who, as it appears, can with difficulty make his way respectably through the world. It is among this class of men that God still finds the widest field of operation; and it may be remarked, that the kingdom of God is neither too exalted and dignified to dwell in a cottage, nor too humble to force its way into a palace. The man, with whom we are now engaged, we find, upon approaching his dwelling, has withdrawn to repose. It is the dead of night, and every where around the lights are extinguished. All is still—when suddenly the door is assailed from without with loud and repeated knocking. The master of the house rises from his bed, to open to his benighted guest; a praiseworthy example for us! Follow it, my friends, when, in a spiritual sense, as may often be the case, a similar incident takes place with you. On the return, for instance, of a new-year's day, a birth-day, when you stand before the hillocks in the churchyard, or when, in other ways, the storm of destruction which will at last carry all away, passes over the earth;—then your door is assailed—a knocking is heard. Various guests seek admittance. Solemn reflection—a mourning desire after God—the thought of conversion—a due estimate of this world, and its concerns. But how do we act in such moments? The clamour, indeed, enters the ear; the knocking continues—the bell is sounded;—but the door!—Alas! it is held shut with a convulsive force, instead of being opened;—fastened with the bolt of obduracy, locked with self-deception, and from within the cry is heard, "Another time!—not to-day! at a more convenient season." But the case is serious.—The door is closed still more firmly; the bolts are

rusted. The heart becomes increasingly blunt and unsusceptible, and is not far from final obduracy and strong delusion.

When the master of the house, in our parable, has opened the door, who enters?—an old acquaintance, faint and weary, who salutes him, and begs for refreshments and a night's lodging. Who is this guest?—At night-time, as you know, various kinds of unbidden guests will often intrude. Gloomy care approaches, in truth unbidden, and mounts guard, discharging balmy sleep. Remorse, that gnawing worm, steals in, and the unsmoothed pillow affords no rest; or the awful man of Sinai draws near, demanding payment; or the ghost of the departed day comes up and asks, as the blood runs cold, "What hast thou done?" And, against our will, we almost believe in the appearance of departed spirits. But the guest, intended in our parable, is none of these: it is the inward man of the master of the house—his own soul. What! had he been on a journey? Yes, indeed, he had; and if you ask, where? a wide field of conjecture lies before us. Perhaps his reflections had conveyed him forward to the shadows of those days, in which it will be said, "I have no pleasure in them;" and surrounded him with the horrors of the dark grave that await him. Perhaps, upon the wings of thought, he had been carried further, beyond the grave, and had stood before the throne, which burns with living fire, where, at the great day of revelation, all that is secret shall be brought to light. Perhaps they had borne him through the pleasurable parts of the earth, where he had learned with pain, that all its gay splendour is a deception—a nonentity; like the glory of the flowers, which spring up in the morning, and in the evening wither away; or he had directed his steps to the empty wells of human art and science, and held converse with philosophers and poets; but had sought in vain after infallible light, or for secure and certain consolation that would abide the test; or he had returned from the work of sanctification, and harassing himself about the

law, had sought to render the righteousness which is efficacious before God ; but this steep road was only entered upon to complete his desperate situation. Such, perhaps, were the excursions which the guest, the soul of the man in question, had been making.

Now he returns from the journey, and, alas ! it is midnight. The sun of his well-being is set,—the light of peace and joy is extinguished ; and he complains, “ I am sinking ; uphold me, I am faint ; refresh me, I am weary ;—give me a resting-place ! ” Yes, this is as it should be. Poor and needy, your soul too must appear before you ; now her only converse with you is of this world’s affairs,—your possessions, commerce, the delightful novel ; but of a thirst, which cannot be satisfied with the stagnant waters of this world, she never has to tell you. Relate the history of your soul. Alas ! it has none ; you have lived only for the flesh. Poor miserable man ! how blind to the true end of thine existence ! Whether, for the first time, the subject of our parable is thus visited by his inward man, or whether his visit is now repeated, after he had once been refreshed with the heavenly manna, is of little consequence. For it may happen, that those who have already sat at the rich banquet of the Lord, suddenly become faint, and, sinking down, complain that their faith is dead, their love extinguished ;—that consolations fail, and neither strength nor courage are to be found. Then, perhaps, they endeavour to refresh themselves. Recourse is had to sermons, hymn-books, religious exercises, and the like ; but it is found that another must refresh and nourish, and not we ourselves ; till then we must be empty and suffer want.

How does the master of the house act on receiving this nightly visitor ? His stores are empty ; the shops are shut ; and were they not, he possesses no means wherewith to buy. What now is to be done ? The sensible host knows one way of obtaining help, and he resorts to it. Mark well what follows. How full of meaning, how sig-

nificant and finely drawn are even the faintest lineaments we can discover in this parable of our Lord. First, Jesus bestows a friend on the man in need, a friend possessed of all things; and with the power to forgive sins, unites the ability to supply every want, and afford relief in every trouble. Oh! this friend is not unknown to us. It is he who relates the history. How consolatory, that he should place himself in the portrait, when depicting our troubles, and present to our notice the kindness and goodwill he bears towards his poor, needy creatures! How comforting, that he should call himself the Friend of the poor and miserable, and with his heart, offer them his hand, encouraging them to come to him with all their cares and sorrows! There is therefore one, who has a balm for every wound, a light for all who sit in darkness, comfort for those who mourn, encouragement for the fearful, and prospects of delight for those who have no hope. Ah, he has wiped the tears from the eyes of millions, smoothed the troubled brow, and strengthened the feeble knees! And take notice, he portrays himself in our parable, as the neighbour of the needy. How lovely is the light, which this feature throws upon our earthly path! Wherever our tent is pitched, at its 'side stands his; in whichever room we dwell, he is still the nearest to us. Thus, our way to him is never long, his ear is close to our lips, and our inmost desires are open to him. O ye lonely ones, how consolatory is this for you! Here you have a companion, wherever you may weep in solitude; and what does not the nearness of this friend procure for you?

The Lord sends the distressed individual to his neighbour at "midnight," kindly indicating to us by this, that we may come to him at any time, unconcerned whether in season or out of season, because, for those that beg, he is always at hand, and is the "Keeper of Israel," who never slumbers nor sleeps. The master of the house goes to the door of his friend, and begins to "knock." This is sufficient—no great strength is required; even a sigh, a silent tear, is

enough ; quickly the bell is heard, and his gate opens with a gentle touch. "My friend," is the address which Jesus puts into the mouth of the petitioner. How much tenderness is expressed in this ! To what confidence towards God does it embolden us ! We may call him our friend who sits upon the throne of power and honour ! Oh, unspeakable privilege ! In what a relation must he stand to us ! The Lord lets the distressed man thus proceed : "A friend of mine, on his journey, is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him !" You see, a confidential disclosure of his domestic embarrassment ; an unreserved avowal of his poverty and want. Another indication, this, of the privileges to which we are entitled, and of the manner in which we, under similar circumstances, ought to act. It reveals to us a compassion more tender than that of father or mother, and contains the hidden encouragement, "Pour out before me all that oppresses you ; discharge every care from your heart !" Oh, happy are we in possessing such a Friend, from whom we need keep no secret, but to whom all may be laid open ! "A friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him." Whatever is the distress, small or great, for every one his door stands open—to every sorrow he lends an ear. We are happy in having such a friend, to whom we can come with all our complaints, and weep on his bosom. What comfort—what relief does it afford ! How it lightens the heart and disposes it to hope ! Have you never yourselves experienced, when once the seal of secrecy has been broken in his presence, and when, even with streams of tears, you have carried your load of grief before him, how the steepest path has become easy, and the sun seemed to smile through the clouds ?

At length the Lord brings to notice the request of the petitioner in his parable. "Lend me," says he to his neighbour, "three loaves !" What, "Lend ?" Yes, so he says. What a discovery of our deep inward experience is there in this word ! In our petitions to God, is there not

sometimes something similar, if not upon our lips, upon our hearts? Do we not ask rather for a loan than for a gift, promising to return with interest, in some way or other, what we may receive? Without money and without price, it is so difficult to come. Our disposition to perform meritorious works will never be entirely eradicated, so long as we are in the flesh. The Lord, our compassionate high priest, knows how we are constituted, and in the first place, represents the beggar in our parable, speaking exactly as we think; not indeed as an example to us, but as a proof how accurately he is acquainted with us; and then listens to his request, notwithstanding it was for a loan, in order to show us how willing he ever is to lend us an ear, although our natural self-righteousness is thus interwoven in all our performances; therefore how comforting is even this expression "lend me!" But what was to be lent? "Three loaves," says the petitioner. And wherefore three, instead of one? One, we must suppose, he desired for himself; the second for his guest; and the third for the honour of his table. Yes, thus it is with us. We are as little inclined to poverty, in a spiritual sense, as with regard to our temporal estate. The petition, which Paul once brought before the Lord, refers equally to a "third loaf." What he needed, he possessed, after he had been called out from the world, justified by Christ, and made a subject of adoption into the family of heaven. But, besides this, he desired to be delivered from a "thorn in the flesh," exempted from the buffetings to which he was exposed, and to be so strengthened and qualified from above, that it should no longer be said of him: "His letters are weighty and powerful, but his bodily presence is weak." But what was the Lord's reply? "My grace is sufficient for thee!" We, with difficulty, find it sufficient; but the Lord does not reject us on that account. The distressed man, in our parable, begs likewise for the third loaf, the shewbread, and he receives it, so kind and condescending is this neighbour.

Having now presented his request, the petitioner waits and listens for an answer. What takes place? Remarkable features are drawn out; attend to them closely. The Lord skilfully exhibits what is often the experience of those, who come to him in prayer, by passing before our view, in a short and pithy, but at the same time deeply striking manner, the temptations which assail us, whilst taking refuge with God. Instead of the Divine "Amen," we often imagine we receive from the mouth of our heavenly Friend answers and rebukes, which are in no way to be attributed to Him, but rather to our own unbelief, or even to the father of lies. In the parable, our Lord puts these answers into the mouth of the neighbour; and what are we taught, on perceiving that the petitioner is not discouraged! How cheering and comforting! "Trouble me not," cries the neighbour from his room, upon hearing the knocking at his gate. Often we imagine we hear a similar answer from the throne of God. "Trouble me not!" But that cannot be thy voice, my Lord and my God! "Trouble me not?" Ah, surely thy words are, "Look unto me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth." Thou sayest rather: "Oh that they had a heart to fear and draw near to me!" The neighbour continues: "The door is now shut!" How dreadful to receive such an answer! But no, Lord, thy door cannot be closed. The day of judgment has not yet arrived, and till then, thy words shine on the pillars of the earth: "Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out!" "My children are with me in bed!" cries the neighbour. Ah, "My children,"—yes, for them he lives; I am not sealed in his love!—the thought is like a dagger to the heart. But what of that? I hear thy words, O Lord: "The Son of man is come to seek and to save." Whom? the elect? No, "that which was lost." And I, Lord, am lost! I hold thee to thy word. Thou wilt be faithful in all things! The neighbour says, "I cannot rise!" Again, "I cannot!" This is often a great cause of doubt. Can he? Is he there? Does his throne really exist; and does he reign

upon earth? But, Lord, I have thy assurance, "Behold, I am with thee always!" and thy miracle of miracles, the great event of Pentecost; thy church, this living monument of thy reigning power; and in my own existence, as in that of others, I see thy footsteps, oh thou Hearer of prayer! I see the eyes which thou hast dried, the hearts which thou hast healed, the sinners whom thou hast renewed. Yes, Lord Jesus, thou canst! thou canst! But "I cannot rise and give thee," cries the friend from his chamber. "To thee!" Ah, here is a new trouble. No surely, how couldst thou give to me? Who am I, that I should hope in thee? But wait! Although, before God, I dare not stand otherwise than just, before thee, O Lord, I may appear, thy word assures me of it, as a sinner seeking to be justified. To the Father, I can only approach in confidence, as a member of his beloved Son; to thee, O Jesus, I may come, as a child of the wicked one, claiming thy redemption. The Eternal Father, indeed, admits none but the holy and the pure; but thou, Lord Jesus, art ever at hand to wash the unclean, and prepare for the Father a people without spot or blemish. Let it please thee, thus to make me thy own, and nothing shall drive me from thy threshold!

The subject of our parable regards not the objections of his neighbour, but continues to knock and to entreat. At length, he within, weary of the importunity, starts from his couch, and gives the petitioner what he desires. "I say unto you," says our Lord in conclusion, "Though he will not rise and give him because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity, he will rise and give him as many as he needeth!" Oh, what consolation is conveyed in these words! What condescension of the Lord to our weakness! "Persevere in prayer," he will say, "even when there seems no hope, still persevere!" You shall receive at length, because he loves you, and is your Friend. But granting even that he were not—granting that, as you falsely imagine, he were your enemy, still, only knock,

and doubt not your sighs will be heard. His own lips tell us, that for his love's sake he will bless us; but even supposing it is not for love, at length he will bless notwithstanding.

In consequence of your importunity, your unceasing begging and entreating, he will open his benevolent hand to you. This is what Jesus intends to teach us. Could he condescend deeper to our weakness? Could he remove every doubt, and console with greater power? Whether, therefore, we are beloved of God or not, we may unquestionably converse with Jesus, as man with man. To the urgent, whom nothing can drive away or affright, will be granted what they require. "And I say unto you," says our Lord, "ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened!"

Take advantage, then, of the great privileges you possess; pitch your camp before the gate of the rich Lord, and give him no rest till he bless you, and put into your mouth the song of liberty and peace.

XII. HAZAEL.

“WHEN thou goest with thine adversary to the magistrate,” says the Lord, Luke xii. 58, 59, “as thou art in the way, give diligence that thou mayest be delivered from him; lest he hale thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and the officer cast thee into prison. I tell thee, thou shalt not depart thence, till thou hast paid the very last mite.” How deep a meaning is concealed under the plainness of this simple parable! It represents the greatest and most important question that can be proposed for our solution on earth; and through the awful terrors it exhibits, the sweetest truths of the gospel cast their mild and consoling rays.

We are on our way to the “magistrate.” The magistrate, or ruler, is God. We are all hastening, hastening towards his judgment-seat—enemies of God and children of God, without exception. Whether you remain where you are, or take the “wings of the morning” and flee into the uttermost parts of the earth, we shall meet again. Be it to-morrow, or after the lapse of years, in the presence of Him who holds the sceptre and the balance, we shall all one day be assembled. Now we are on “the way.” An adversary walks at our side, and the case to be considered is, how we may really be delivered from him. The adversary is the Divine law; I say Divine, requiring a sanctification of heart and life, which is spotless and unblemished. This law is against you, whatever else may be for you; moral, so called, human, civil, or political. Say, does it not accuse you on approaching it? Yes, its accusations are heard, louder or fainter, in your conscience,

in the uneasiness that gnaws at your heart, in your fear of death, in your aversion to the word "Sin," for with regard to yourself, "faults" only may be mentioned; in your hypocrisy, which with and without your knowledge is ever striving to make you appear another, and not yourself as you really are. And why another? Because you are compelled to reject your true form. Or could you endure that the walls of your room should find utterance, or your heart for one single day be laid open to the gaze of the world? You shrink back with affright from the very thought. But to be agreed, now, with this "adversary," is the work which is worthy of engaging all our thoughts and attention. It is the greatest and most important work of our life. Behold those miserable beings, their cruel scourgings, their bloody chastisements! You suspect their object; they have a great end in view, but thus they will not accomplish it. Behold these penitents; they fast and say prayers, by night and day; the prize they contend for is worthy the effort, but thus it will not be gained. See those who arise every morning with the sacred intention, this day to love God perfectly, entirely to deny the world, and to keep their hearts unspotted; and certainly the desire is good; but visit them in the evening, and ask what has been their success? You will find them lamenting in sorrow, or even lying prostrate in despair. Take notice of others yonder—they have rid themselves of their adversary; they have a law which declares itself satisfied; when no gross sins are committed, and the outward walk is upright, this law praises and flatters them. Were it but acknowledged before God! but He rejects it as worthless. And close by this self-enacted law, attends the Divine law, following them step by step; how that will affect them judiciously, the last great sentence of the Judge will prove. Ah, what toil and labour has the world been at to make peace with the law, to be agreed with the adversary! What sorrow and misery have been endured—what sighs and groans expended! And no wonder. For unless

we are really rid of this adversary, we shall be delivered to the Judge, and the Judge will deliver us to the officer, (who he is, you know,) and the officer will cast us into prison, from whence we shall not depart till we have paid the very last mite, which is in other words:—From this gulf of perdition there is no escape. Those who have not kept the law in the bright season of grace, how shall they be able to keep it in the furnace of God's wrath?

How, then, can we rid ourselves of this adversary? Not, my friends, by declaring, in wilful wickedness, that which is beautiful to be good; civil integrity and uprightness as sufficient to satisfy the demands of the Creator; by exalting ideal beauty to the Divine law; cultivated taste to virtue; or a well-strung mind to conformity with God; or refinement and good breeding to sanctity of heart. In this way, the adversary will only find fresh cause of accusation, by our committing the additional crime of altering and perverting the will of him who is a "rock," and whose works are as immutable as they are irreprehensible. By the gospel alone we can accomplish the great work of a legal deliverance from the adversary. And this is the gospel: that one came into the world to fulfil the law in our stead; and that he who believes in this Mediator, is just, and no longer condemned by the law. From the moment we cast anchor in the firm ground of this truth, we cease to fear the law, to hate it, and to deny it; we reflect ourselves in it with delight; we love it as the will of him, to whom we owe eternal salvation; and joyfully embracing Moses, we say, "Oh, declare to us, what the Father will have us to do!" Thus, by being associated with the law through Christ, and the law associated with us through Christ, we are rid of the law as an adversary. The Surety has paid for us "the very last mite," and the paternal discharge is cast into our lap.

This, my friends, serves as an introduction to a history, which will afford an awful exhibition of the fearful situation of those, who have diligently pursued every object but

the riddance of this "adversary by the way." May the event impress us, not only with solemn awe towards the Most High Judge, but with the urgent necessity of postponing everything, till we have escaped the curse of Sinai, saved our souls, and are prepared to stand justified before God in the great day of manifestation.

2 KINGS VIII. 9—15.

"So Hazael went to meet him, and took a present with him, even of every good thing of Damascus, forty camels' burden, and came and stood before him and said, Thy son Ben-hadad king of Syria hath sent me to thee, saying, shall I recover of this disease? And Elisha said unto him, Go, say unto him, Thou mayest certainly recover: howbeit the Lord hath showed me that he shall surely die. And he settled his countenance stedfastly, until he was ashamed: and the man of God wept. And Hazael said, Why weepeth my lord? And he answered, Because I know the evil that thou wilt do unto the children of Israel: their strong holds wilt thou set on fire, and their young men wilt thou slay with the sword, and wilt dash their children, and rip up their women with child. And Hazael said, But what, is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing? And Elisha answered: The Lord hath showed me that thou shalt be king over Syria. So he departed from Elisha, and came to his master; who said to him, What said Elisha to thee? And he answered, He told me that thou shouldst surely recover. And it came to pass on the morrow, that he took a thick cloth, and dipped it in water, and spread it on his face, so that he died: and Hazael reigned in his stead."

Turn your thoughts, then, again to the course of events which we were considering when last together. Elisha, as you will remember, was inwardly directed by the Spirit to go to Damascus, and there do as he was commissioned, He had scarcely reached the Syrian town, before the report of his arrival, spreading from mouth to mouth, had reached the ear of the sick king. Ben-hadad, convinced that this man was able to reveal to him the issue of his disease, charges his chamberlain with this order:—"Take a present in thine hand, and go, meet the man of God, and inquire of the Lord by him, saying, Shall I recover of this disease?" Thus far we have considered the history, as it proceeds; we shall now be called to witness shedding of blood and of tears; may they produce salutary reflections, and thus become to us as precious pearls. A volcano will again send forth its flames over Israel; let us endeavour

to profit by the explosion, and gather wholesome fruit from its bed of lava. The principal points of consideration at present are, Hazael's departure; the meeting with Elisha; the prophet's tears; the disclosed decree; and Benhadad's death;—five representations, marked with significant hieroglyphics!

I. The man, with whom we have now to do, is Hazael, a person of similar description to the judge in the Gospel, who neither feared God nor regarded man; heartless as a stone, but not without courage; ambitious and grasping beyond measure, and, uniting coolness to cunning, in every respect well calculated to make what the world calls a great man. His natural strength of heart, however, could not prevent his being under the control of God, who held him as by a chain, guiding and employing him to whatever purpose he saw fit. Yes, the "vessels of wrath" are likewise made subservient to the designs of his providence, whether as a scourge for the chastisement and defeat of his enemies, or as a storm to sweep through the garden of his church, that its plants may be invigorated, and its trees take deeper root; or they are chosen, so to speak, as the living stage, on which, before the eyes of the world, his retributive justice is triumphantly displayed. Even the most powerful of his enemies can do nothing to the prejudice of his kingdom, but, on the contrary, all will tend to its furtherance; and it will hereafter be one of the bitterest drops in the cup of wrath, prepared for "the devil and his angels," to perceive, that in spite of every effort to the contrary, and after the storms of many thousand years against the cause of God, they have been the instruments of promoting instead of retarding it. Amongst us, too, there are many who say, "We will not have this man to reign over us!" these serve him, whether they intend it and know it or not, and their reward is—the second death. If they were wise, seeing they must, at any rate, be under his control, they would submit voluntarily, and inherit, through his

favour, eternal life. But there is a wide difference between knowing what is the one thing needful, and doing it; and human resolution has not strength sufficient to carry us across this difference; the lever of grace is required, the grace of the Holy Spirit, and regeneration here forms the path that leads from the knowledge of the truth to its performance.

It happened, probably more by accident than premeditated choice, that Ben-hadad selected Hazael from amongst his numerous attendants, and charged him with the message to Elisha; and yet this apparent casualty was a veil, behind which, a direct dispensation and providence of God was concealed. For Hazael's sake, Elisha was sent to Damascus; and therefore circumstances must so combine, that at the moment the idea of the mission entered the mind of the king, Hazael alone should be at hand, and therefore another could not be sent. It seems, indeed, a melancholy coincident, that in the person of Hazael, the unsuspecting king should seal his own fate, and by him, as it were, unsheath the dagger which was to pierce his heart. But no blind fatuity actuates his will! it is his judgment, and he must act thus. The feet of the wicked "go down to death," their "steps take hold on hell." Divine justice may disguise itself in awful providences, and often, in crushing the offender, seems to sport in derision with its victim.

The prophet had scarcely reached the suburbs of Damascus, before he finds his anxiety concerning the execution of his mission removed in the most surprising manner. God, who had sent him forth into the wild and foreign land, had gone before, to introduce and make way for him. Before he is aware, Elisha perceives the man whom he came to seek, led by an invisible cord into his presence. Oh, let none shrink back and be afraid, who tread the paths of God! If we are shod in the name of the Lord, the way is made smooth before us. The Lord reigns, in secrecy and silence; but at the end of all his ways, a pillar

rises with the inscription, "El Elohe Israel;" that is, "The mighty God of Israel!"

II. Ben-hadad's ambassador appears in great pomp before Elisha, followed by a caravan of forty camels, laden with the most costly presents, and intended, probably, for the schools of the prophets. Bestow royally, thought Ben-hadad, or not at all. When, on one occasion, Alexander presented a gift of unusual value to one of his servants, whose astonishment was so great, that he could only ask by his looks, "How have I deserved it?" The monarch replied, "Take what I offer thee, and know that Alexander is the donor!" Let this anecdote remind us of a greater, even of the King of kings, and consider the folly you are continually guilty of, in imagining it impossible that he should have called sinners like you to such a fulness of riches and glory. Oh that you likewise would remember who is the donor, and who it is that has called you! It is Jesus Christ, the King of all earthly kings, and not one who penuriously dispenses his gifts according to merit and dignity. "Open thy mouth wide," he says, "and I will fill it!" He, too, knows our frame; from him it is not hid how prone we are to "believe not for joy," to be faint-hearted, and even to return to the covenant of works; therefore, in consideration of those timid ones amongst us, who, conscious of their unworthiness, cannot believe him when he says, "To him that cometh I will give righteousness, a new heart, and a crown of everlasting life," the Lord kindly veils the description of that overflowing bounty, which in reality awaits all who flee to him for refuge, and says, "Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out!"

Ben-hadad appears to have profited little by the wonders formerly wrought for Naaman, and to know little of what is becoming the kingdom of God, or he would no doubt have left behind the presents intended for Elisha. But how

often do believers err in a similar way, by not taking in their full extent, the words, "Come, buy—without money and without price!" when, for instance, you rise from your knees, doubting whether your prayer has been sufficiently imbued with zeal, fervour, and devotion, to penetrate the clouds. Why do you doubt? Because you imagine gifts have been wanting. When at other times, on the contrary, you flatter yourselves with the hope that your petitions shall not vanish or disappear like a vapour, but really reach the throne;—on what grounds do you hope it? Because you have not appeared empty before the throne of God, but with gifts; with feeling, with unction, devotion, and what more. Alas, that you should lower the bountiful God to a bargaining master, and convert the open tent of his grace to the house of a money-changer! Away with this concern about gifts! You require no other recommendation to the Father than the one you possess in the sufficiency of your Surety. One thing only remember, "The upright shall live before him." See to it, therefore, that, in your prayers, your heart do not condemn you! Draw near only in sincerity and truth, without deceit, and you may hope everything from the Lord, who, to the hypocrite alone, is not accessible.

With all possible reverence, Hazael stands before the man of God, and directing his attention to the laden camels, begins to unfold his royal errand. "Thy son Benhadad," he says, laying the homage of his sovereign at his feet, "the king of Syria, hath sent me to thee, saying, Shall I recover of this disease?" Here is condescension on the part of the mighty ruler! What humble and supplicating language to a man, who was lately crowned only with contempt, and who possessed nothing of what the world calls rank or grandeur! We might rejoice in this royal humiliation, did it proceed from faith, or from a desire to honour God in the person of his servant; but, as it was only forced from him in a fit of despair, in the

hope of flattering the despised and hated prophet into a favourable answer respecting the king's disease, we can merely regard it as a miserable cringing—a despicable lie. No, the object so dear to the Syrian prince is his life, and he who loves his life above all things, is not calculated to become a great man. His greatness, if he possess any, is but as a bubble, which bursts before the first danger that threatens to approach his person. He obtains the earthly price for which he casts himself away—his life. But the first essential requisite to the possession of true greatness, is a disregard of this price, which requisite, faith alone can confer. He alone is a great man, whose view is not bounded by the limits of time, but whose “conversation,” according to the apostle, “is in heaven,” and who, by this life of faith, is raised above all the changes of this transitory world. Nothing earthly will have the power to turn him aside from the path of his high calling, in which he has been placed by grace, nor to put him at variance with his inmost purpose. His soul is enthroned too high to be affected by the world; the allurements of the world may surround him as with a flood, but no breaker shall overwhelm him.

Behold Elisha. He stands in a position dangerous, indeed, for the weak and unstable heart of man; but to him it brings no danger. Ben-hadad's condescending demeanour, in the person of his messenger, surprises, but does not dazzle him, and pleases without elating. He knows in what light to view it. Whatever there may be of honour in the royal courtesy, he acknowledges, and places it where it is due; but he does not overvalue it, knowing well the motives which have induced Ben-hadad to change his conduct so much toward him. You do not perceive that the address, “Thy son Ben-hadad,” has produced any extraordinary cheerfulness in the prophet's demeanour, or called forth any pleasing confusion. Calmness and equanimity are depicted in his features, and what honour cannot effect, much less can presents. Few beside

Elisha would have escaped from a scene like this, without a strong tincture of self-sufficiency; but Elisha appears steeled against its flattering influences, unmoved as is a rock by the passing breeze. Any other would unquestionably have sent home a pompous report of the wonders being performed in the heathen world,—how Ben-hadad and his whole court had been converted, and who knows what greater things besides; but Elisha, more sober, and at the same time more richly furnished with the gift of discernment, than many of the messengers and apostles of the present day, could not look upon an expression wrung from the king in a moment of bodily distress, and uttered as a bribe, “Thou man of God, inquire of the Lord,” as a sure token of true conversion. Thus we behold the holy prophet unmoved, calm, and dignified, as if he had been the prince, Hazael his servant, and Ben-hadad his vassal, giving command, by a wink, forthwith to lead off the camels and their burdens. This glittering array could by no means affect one, who was accustomed to view all things in the light of eternity. An acceptable offering it would have been to him, had the sick king saluted him with the words, “What shall I do to be saved?” instead of “Shall I recover?” It was far from the wish of Elisha to withhold one tittle of the reverence due to the Syrian king; but nearer to his heart was the wish that nothing should becloud the honour of his God. Besides which, he was accustomed to weigh mankind, not in the balance of appearances and popular opinion, but in that of holiness; and to esteem them good and great according to their value in the sight of God.

III. When Hazael has finished speaking, the prophet, moved by the Holy Spirit, replies; “Go, say unto him, Thou mayest certainly recover: howbeit the Lord hath showed me that he shall surely die.” A remarkable answer, apparently untrue and contradictory; but understood rightly by the man of God, and no doubt by Hazael too.

The meaning of his words is this: The sickness of thy master is not fatal, nor will it bring him to his grave; nevertheless the Lord has revealed to me, that Ben-hadad will arise from his bed no more. He will die, but his death-blow will not proceed from this sickness. After Elisha had delivered his message, "he settled his countenance stedfastly," we read in the 11th verse, "until he was ashamed," and then, "the man of God wept." The meaning of this is plain. "Dost thou hear," Elisha's piercing look would say, "thy king will recover, and yet he will die! Canst thou understand this riddle?—Yes, miserable wretch that thou art, know that thy murderous plan lies open and discovered to the eye of God!" Oh yes, Hazael understood well the meaning of that look; the monitor within was its interpreter; and it was not without cause, that the mere silent look confounded and made him ashamed. An evil conscience is like a magazine, which requires but a tiny spark, one piercing look, to cause an explosion. It is like a deer amidst the rustling foliage, which betrays itself to the hunter by its very endeavours to escape. So it was with Hazael. Elisha's look was sufficient to give his conscience the alarm; but as it attempts to escape and conceal itself, its countenance betrays him and brings the culprit to light. The man is in the most painful embarrassment. What can he do to divert the prophet from his discomfiting gaze? The only thing that strikes him, is, quickly to inquire the cause of the tears, which are fast gathering in the prophet's eyes, and with pretended candour he asks: "Why weepeth my lord?" thinking to divert him to another subject.

Elisha weeps. His soul is melted with grief. He tells us the cause of his sorrow. Oh! they are sacred tears that flow from his eyes, tears that have not their source in every heart. In Hazael, he sees the scourge that will mangle his people Israel; the dreadful sword of execution, which, ere long, will reek with the blood of his brethren after the flesh. Fearful images rise up before him, of

smoking ruins, and slaughtered men, women, and children ; but still deeper sorrow pierces his soul on realizing the thought of the many thousand souls, surprised by the murderous steel of Hazael, in the midst of their ungodliness, and plunged, alas ! into the gulf of eternal perdition. Whilst thinking thus, his heart swells, and trembles to its very core ; he can bear no more ; unable to struggle against such sorrow, a flood of tears bursts from his eyes, whilst every feature depicts the painful scene that is passing within. As a consequence of regeneration, a wider field is opened for our sorrows as well as for our joys ; and in proportion as it widens, it likewise deepens. Our love includes the world ; its arm embraces a whole kingdom, a kingdom whose boundaries are the world, nay, they extend even to the invisible world. But the more extended the circle of our tenderness, the larger is the sphere, upon which we enter, of communion with sorrow as well as with joy, for “ whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it ; ” the more numerous are those, with whom we have grown together as to one body, the broader of course has become the mark for the arrows of sorrow ; for whichever member they pierce, we too are wounded. And as in a life of faith, we are become partakers of one joy, infinitely surpassing in glory all that can delight us belonging to time and sense, we have also become alive to one sorrow, of which the world indeed dreams not, but in comparison with which, all that the world calls disaster, misfortune, or misery, is scarcely to be considered, nay even counted as nothing. We have seen from afar, the judgment-seat burning with living fire ; and know how fearful a thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God ! We know what is the loss of a soul, and ah ! in a thousand instances, where the world laments over temporal losses and separations, we see far other precipices yawning, and the waves of eternal perdition closing over the heads of the lost. Eternity has raised its veil before us ; our eye scans a heaven of unutterable bliss, but likewise a hell of interminable woe. We know

there are a thousand roads leading to the latter; whilst to the former there leads but one; and ah! how many who are dear to us by the ties of blood or of friendship, do we see taking the path to death! None can tell, but those who are on the same ground with ourselves, what streams of sorrow and anxiety flow to us from this source, which is bitter as the waters of Marah.

As Elisha stands and weeps, methinks I see a crowd of people gather round him, asking him with great composure: "Elisha, wherefore sorrow thus for a sinful people, whom God, in his holy zeal, has determined to destroy? Submit to circumstances and let the Almighty govern!" But Elisha turns silently away, and his tears continue to flow. Towards whom, my friends, do your hearts go out: to the weeping prophet, or to these without a tear, who say: "Submit to circumstances?" For my part, I confess, were I called upon to make choice of a friend, I should not take long to consider. Further, I can imagine these stout-hearted ones to say: "Elisha, God's justice is glorified in the 'vessels of wrath;' and if the Almighty magnify his name, be it in wrath or in mercy, it must be equally welcome to us, equally a cause of rejoicing!" But Elisha, as if he hears not what is so valiantly spoken, surveys with a hasty glance these tearless people, and continues to weep. Say, had you to choose a preacher from among their number, whose name would you inscribe upon your tablet? That of these lofty reasoners, or of the seer? I know who, by unanimous vote, would become your shepherd. But is it not true then, you ask, that God's name shall be glorified even in those who are crushed by his wrath? Certainly, my friends, but that pure and exalted desire for the glory of the Lord, by which all grief for the victims of his vengeance shall be absorbed in holy acquiescence, and even in Divine joy, is not to be attained here below, although it is often affected; and those, who pretend to have reached here that pure and exalted zeal for the honour of God, are hypocritically endeavouring to spread

a gaudy covering over the icy coldness of their insensible hearts. Nor do I meet with one, among the men of God recorded in the Bible, who could so easily find comfort in the perdition of those who appeared to have been rejected of God; far differently do we hear Moses say: "Lord, forgive their sin; if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written!" and Paul, "For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh!" and the Lord from heaven we behold looking down upon impenitent Jerusalem, from the mount of Olives, and weeping over it, saying: "If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong to thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes." And the tears of the holy Son of God are such as those shed by our prophet in the presence of Hazael. Tears of love and of the tenderest sympathy; tears of a man whose heart bleeds, when he remembers the judgments threatened against the ungodly amongst a people whom he loves, although he bows submissively to the decrees of God. And lovely in the sight of God and man are such tears; they are the sweetest fruits of a regenerate mind, a mind conformed to the image of Christ.

IV. "Why weepeth my lord?" inquires Hazael. And Elisha replies, concealing indeed the deepest source of his woe, which the heathen would not have comprehended: "Because I know the evil that thou wilt do unto the children of Israel; their strong holds wilt thou set on fire, and their young men wilt thou slay with the sword, and wilt dash their children, and rip up their women with child." Horrible! And to all this Elisha, commissioned from above, must appoint this scourge of God—Elisha, the man of tenderness and love, who had only been accustomed to bring tidings of joy, and whose disposition qualified him so entirely for such errands. But whoever enlists under the banner of the Lord, is bound to place upon his altar, not

only all that he has, but likewise his whole heart, and to be prepared to understand the words: "He that will be my disciple must deny himself," to an extent, of which he had no idea upon his first entrance on the new and sacred path. He will be placed in circumstances, in which he will be required, not only to bind a wreath to the Lord, of the most tender and sacred feelings of his soul, but to offer them up as a burnt-offering. He will be charged with commissions requiring him, not only to crucify the lusts of the flesh, but in obedience to a bare command of his eternal king, to disregard for a time, what, according to his idea, was the fairest fruit of his new life, and submit it to the Divine pleasure. God will have us entirely and without reserve, and demands unconditional subjection to his will, even if we ourselves become victims to it. We must be blind, having eyes but for his will; walk by faith, and know that "to obey is better than sacrifice."

When Hazael has heard the prophet's disclosure, he completely discovers his villainy. We might have supposed, that Elisha's words would have blighted his soul, like a destroying flash; but on the contrary, they were in accordance with his inward lusts, and worked upon him like the invigorating rays of the sun. "Indeed?" thought he, "are such the heroic deeds I shall perform? Surely, then, I am chosen to great power, and to hold the reins of government!" and instead of shuddering at the thought of his conscience being laden with such abominations, he only burns with impatient desire after a nearer disclosure, as to how and in what manner he should perform such "great things," as he calls these crimes, betraying the blackness of his heart. In the hope that the prophet would now confirm the plan he had so long cherished, of seating himself upon the Syrian throne, and that he would at length succeed, he replies, apparently in the most innocent and unpretending manner, but with deep and well-studied design, and the basest hypocrisy, "How, should my hand commit such deeds? What! is thy servant a dog, that he

should do this gr^eat thing?" " Oh, listen to the hypocrite ! What is his object, but to draw from Elisha a more circumstantial and decided communication ; and the hypocritical words, " Thy servant a dog !" —that is, that contemptible, unworthy creature—were intended as a bait to lure the man of God to openness and confidence. Can there be anything more disgusting and discordant than the language of humility and self-abasement, when it bears upon its forehead the stamp of affectation and falsehood ? But how often is our ear offended by such language, particularly in places, where real Christianity is known, and somewhat held in honour. I have often observed, that those who desire to be thought Christians, but are not so, imagine, that the surest way of attaining this object is, to represent their sinfulness to us in the most exaggerated terms. But here they entirely fail. This harsh language, " Thy servant a dog !" is so little calculated to bribe us, that it rather disposes us most decidedly to suspect the uprightness of those who make use of it. Are we not aware, that a self-knowledge, which can force from the lips a condemnation, in truth so deeply humiliating to ourselves, is not possessed by every one, but is a pearl of great rarity ; and that where it is really possessed, it goes hand in hand with a sorrow and mortification, which leaves us indeed little relish to make our feelings a subject of gossip ? A David once spoke, with the utmost sincerity, to his persecutor : " After whom is the king of Israel come out ? After a dead dog ? " We are none of us anything better than this by nature ; but who sincerely believes it ? Few only arrive at such a depth of self-knowledge, although it would appear otherwise, according to the language and expressions of many.

When Hazeal has uttered his cringing words, Elisha communicates to him, in plain terms, the message of Jehovah, and says : " The Lord hath showed me that thou shalt be king over Syria ! " You will remark how Elisha weighs his words, not saying, " I anoint thee in the name of the Lord," but only, " The Lord hath showed me

that thou shalt be king!" and you will perceive a great distinction to be observed in these expressions. There are many amongst us, to whom it may be said, "The Lord hath permitted you to become rich," but not, "He hath blessed you with riches." A regular coronation of Hazael was not implied in Elisha's message; he was only to reveal to him, what God had determined to permit; and for this purpose, that Israel might hereafter know for a certainty, that it was Jehovah, who had prepared this rod for them; and that it was his hand, that wielded this awful scourge against the apostates.

V. Hazael has no sooner heard the communication of the prophet, than he hastens back to his monarch upon the wings of joy. "What said Elisha to thee?" eagerly inquires the sick prince, as he enters. Hazael, to put him off his guard, and to avert from him any idea of regulating the succession to the throne, imparts to him not half the truth, and says, "He told me that thou shouldest surely recover!" not—"thou mayest surely recover." But on the morrow, as Ben-hadad is reclining upon his pillow, rejoicing in hope and expecting his recovery, the villain again approaches, stealing towards him under the mask of the kindest sympathy, and the sincerest attachment. Oh, woe to thee, Ben-hadad! a dangerous lightning will flash from under the soft veil of the bright morning cloud; a blood-thirsty hyena draws near, in the garb of the gentle lamb! The murderous plan is ripe in Hazael's soul. Do not the glories of a throne shine upon him over the corpse of Ben-hadad? Does not a crown smile on him at the side of his coffin? See, there he approaches. Yes, yes, his villany will succeed. God has abandoned him to his own way, which leads to eternal perdition. Now he may accomplish his wickedness. No thundering word from on high arrests him on his murderous path; no mercy sets the bounds for him at the last hour; no discipline of the Spirit hedges up his way with thorns. He may heap upon himself the horrible load of blood-guiltiness; the opportunity is granted to him; God has with-

drawn from him even his common grace! Oh, his is a fearful position! An awful fate! No, Lord, rather place me in the hottest furnace of affliction, rather let me be sunk in the depths of the ocean, or loaded with ignominy and contempt, or endure all the tortures this world can inflict, than be thus abandoned, given up, and cast away!

The sick king suspects nothing. When Hazael enters his apartment, he supposes he comes to attend upon him, and inquire after his health. Poor mistaken prince! Did he but know what a viper he cherished in his bosom, what a devil he had honoured with his unlimited confidence, in this highly esteemed man, Hazael! What does the murderer do? Oh! who can witness it without revolting? Under pretence of rendering him a service, Hazael takes the fly net from the bed of his master, steps aside with it for a moment, dips it into water in order to close it, and spreads it with a skilful hand over the face of the weakened king, and after a few moments, Ben-hadad is a victim to the dreadful death of suffocation. Oh, horrible! horrible! The dawn of his earthly hopes of recovery vanished in an instant; the laurel faded from his brow, the crown torn from his head, and he himself has plunged, from his bed of state and the glory of his ostentatious apartments, for evermore into the darkness of the damned! "What!" you ask, "there?" We cannot assert it; but it is to be feared. But if he went the gloomy path, he to this day acknowledges, amidst howlings and despair: "I have received what I have deserved!" For what manifestations of the Lord had not this man experienced! How often had he heard a voice of warning and invitation! But he would not bend, and therefore he must break; he scorned to spread his sails before the wind of truth; and the rock of salvation became to him a rock of destruction, whereon he suffered shipwreck.

There is a death in death; may God in his mercy preserve us from this greatest, yea only calamity! This death not only separates the soul from the body, but from God and his holy dwelling-place, and that for ever! It extin-

guishes for ever that sun, which, as long as we walk here below, sheds its mild rays upon the just and upon the unjust, reminding the sinner, every night, of that fearful darkness, into which no star of hope will gleam, which no morning dawn of promise shall chase away. No one can be called "happy," whatever joys may bloom around him at present, until he has escaped this dreadful death, and sees his path secure beyond that gulf. But no human merit can save us from this pit of destruction, no earthly crown of honour; the only way that can conduct across is Christ, our righteousness, our life; and to give ourselves up to him with all the confidence of our soul, all the strength of our love, to sit at his feet like Mary, who chose herein the "good part," that she embraced with childlike simplicity the Saviour, who "came not to be ministered unto, but to minister;"—this is the one thing needful, this alone is the wisdom of the just. "Verily, verily I say unto you," says the Lord from heaven, "He that heareth my word and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life."

Oh the blessed security of a life hid in Christ! No storm can arise, which can prevail against us; no affliction that in him is not changed to a blessing. Across every chasm, he casts for us the bridge of his almighty protection; he bears us, upon eagles' wings, over floods and mountains. The stones of stumbling are cleared from our path; the threatening enemy in the rear, is either arrested or disarmed. Oh, happy they, who have escaped the error of the world, and cast anchor on the bright shore of the everlasting gospel, where, leaning upon the friend who undertakes all for them, they travel onward to the city of golden streets! Amongst these pilgrims, and here alone, the mighty song of victory can resound with confidence, "Death, where is thy sting? Grave, where is thy victory?"

