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# LIFE-PICTURES

OF

## “THE PRODIGAL SON.”

A

### GIFT-BOOK FOR THE MILLION:

GENIAL, SEARCHING, AND KIND.

BY

*aniel*  
*out*  
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“FATHERS OF THE GERMAN REFORMED CHURCH IN  
EUROPE AND AMERICA.”

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“Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they may have  
right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the  
city.”—REV. 22: 14.

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AUTHOR'S EDITION.

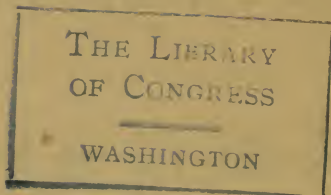
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PHILADELPHIA.

1877.



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TO MY  
BRETHREN IN THE MINISTRY,  
TEACHERS IN THE S. SCHOOL & OTHER LABORERS,  
SEEKING A QUIET, UNOBTRUSIVE HELPER;  
TO  
ANXIOUS FATHERS AND WEEPING MOTHERS,  
TREMULOUS FOR THE SAFETY OF THEIR CHILDREN;  
TO  
ALL EARTH'S ERRING, SINNING, AND WEARY ONES,  
NEEDING THE BALM OF LOVE AND WARNING;  
AND ESPECIALLY TO ALL  
EARNEST YOUNG MEN & YOUNG LADIES,  
LOVERS OF GOD, OF TRUTH, AND OF PURITY;  
THIS LITTLE VOLUME,  
WITNESS OF MANY TEARS AND PRAYERS,  
IS  
AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED.

## SONG OF THE CROSS.

---

Blest they who seek  
While in their youth,  
With spirit meek,  
The way of truth.

To them the sacred Scriptures now display,  
Christ as the only true and living way;  
His precious blood on Calvary was given  
To make them heirs of endless bliss in heaven,  
And e'en on earth the child of God can trace  
The glorious blessings of his Saviour's grace.

For them he bore  
His Father's frown;  
For them he wore  
The thorny crown;  
Nailed to the cross,  
Endured its pain,  
That his life's loss  
Might be their gain.  
Thou hast to choose  
That better part,  
Nor ever dare refuse  
The Lord your heart,  
Lest, haply, he declare  
"I know you not,"  
And deep despair  
For ever be your lot;

Now look to Jesus, who on Calvary died,  
And trust on Him alone who there was crucified.

## PREFACE.

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THE following pages are designed as a solemn call from God to the erring and weary ones of earth, especially to the young and inexperienced. They contain the substance of some ten or twelve Sunday Evening Lectures, delivered originally in Lewisburg, Pa., about twenty years ago. Subsequently, in 1859, they were repeated, substantially, in Bethlehem, Pa., during my pastorate there, in German.

These Lectures, having been attended with marked success when first delivered, would long since have been written out, arranged, and sent forth in book form, had every thing gone right; but, unfortunately, some of my stray thoughts—ingrate offspring of my laboring brain—gave me the slip, and have been, I think, wandering in masquerade, out in the “wide, wide world,” ever since. Hence, in writing out this little book, I have not referred, except in one or two cases, to any authorities, in prose, nor consulted even my own earlier “notes,” lest, in doing so, I should seem to have been making bargains in the absence of other parties. The Hymns and Sacred Poetry which I had occasion to introduce into these pages, I have carefully referred to their several sources, as far as it lay in my power

to do so. Undesigned omissions and inadvertencies, I hope, will be generously overlooked.

I now send forth this unpretending little volume on its sweet errand of mercy, hoping that it may meet with a kind and cordial reception from all lovers of truth and righteousness; and that, unwearied in its pilgrimage, it may accomplish a great and good work in the service of its Divine Lord and Master, gently and kindly leading earth's weary and way-worn wanderers back to Him who is the "bright and morning star"—the sweet, sparkling fountain of life, light, and love. "And the Spirit and the bride say—come; and let him that heareth say—come; and let him that is athirst,—come; and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

Sweet words of welcome these to the weary ones! Go forth, then, thou gentle little Worker in the Kingdom of God; and may the blessed Father of our Lord Jesus Christ go with thee, sustaining, aiding, and prospering thee in thy labor of love with His gracious presence and Fatherly benediction!

*THE AUTHOR.*

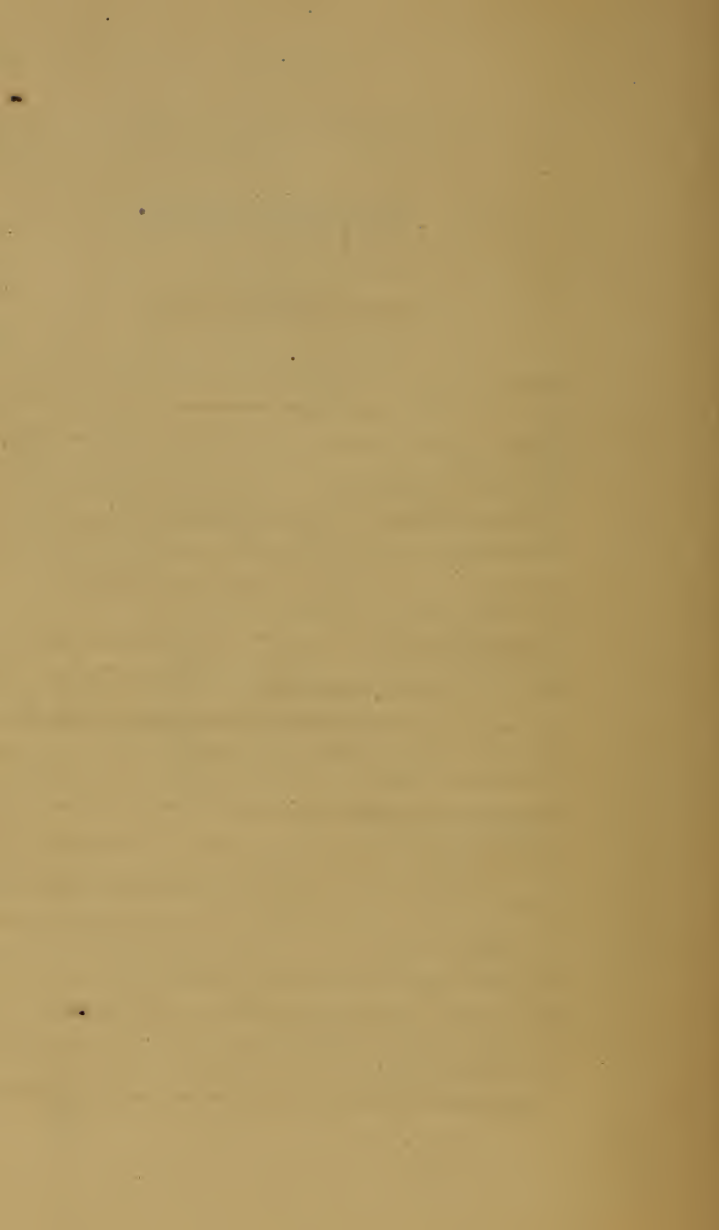
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# CONTENTS.

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	PAGE
DEDICATION.....	3
SONG OF THE CROSS.....	4
PREFACE.....	5
INTRODUCTION.....	9
THE FAMILY; OR HOME-LIFE.....	17
THE OMINOUS REQUEST, AND DIVISION OF PROPERTY.....	30
THE DEPARTURE; OR, AWAY INTO THE FAR COUNTRY.....	39
THE DISSIPATION, OR WASTING OF GOODS.....	49
THE FAMINE, AND ITS PRESSURE.....	59
THE UNNATURAL ALLIANCE.....	66
THE PAINFUL EXTREMITY, OR UTTER DESTITUTION.....	76
THE INTROVERSION; OR, PENITENT SELF-RECOLLECTION.....	86
THE MANLY RESOLUTION; OR, "I WILL ARISE AND GO TO MY FATHER"	96
THE PROMPT ACTION; OR, BACK TO THE FATHER'S HOUSE.....	110
THE GRACIOUS RECEPTION, AND RECONCILIATION.....	121
THE GENEROUS CONFESSION AND REHABILITATION.....	128
THE WELCOME-HOME FESTIVITIES.....	138
SAFELY HOUSED, OR "HOME AGAIN".....	149
THE REVERSE PICTURE.....	155
THE PUZZLE; OR PAINFUL SURPRISE.....	165
THE MYSTERY SOLVED.....	174
THE BITTER SCORN AND ACCUSATION.....	184
THE TRIUMPH OF GENTLENESS AND LOVE.....	195
THE HOME FESTIVITIES VINDICATED.....	205
CONCLUDING REMARKS.....	216
"FATHER, TAKE MY HAND".....	223



## INTRODUCTION.

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“As, lone, Life’s thorny path we tread,  
With danger fraught, beset with sin,  
Lord, may we, by Thy Spirit led,  
Have clear and certain light within.”

THE Parable of the Prodigal Son, is one of a circle of three, occurring in the same chapter, Lu. xv.—all of which are distinguished for their exquisite beauty, deep pathos, and thrilling interest. Of these, the last one is called, by an eloquent and popular author, the “crown and glory.” A very slight and cursory examination of this beautiful Parable, will fully convince any one of the correctness of this judgment. Both as regards beauty of arrangement, and fullness of detail, as well as its transcendently sweet and pathetic spirit, and that fascinating

power, which surrounds it like a halo of glory from the eternal world,—the Parable of the Prodigal Son stands unrivalled among the figurative discourses of our blessed Lord. No one can read it attentively without feeling, at once, that, in every line, and phrase, and word, and letter, it breathes forth in sweetest, deepest, tenderest accents, the subduing power, and entrancing spirit and magic of the divine love and compassion; which, unlike every other power, works so mysteriously upon the human heart, and gently subdues it into a state of sincere penitence and childlike faith. As we silently gaze upon the many chaste and pleasing images of beauty and tenderness that pass before our spiritual vision, while reading it, we are filled with wonder and amazement.

The magnificent and home-like mansion of the unfortunate youth,—fittest image of the heavenly home—so replete with domestic peace and love, and sweet contentment, so radiant with the bright and genial glow of mutual affection, and affording every wished-for blessing and comfort, instinctively awakens in our aching

hearts the ardent and earnest wish that it were *our* home; while the evident discontent of the unfortunate youth, as naturally fills us with a feeling of mingled sadness and sorrowing disapproval. We can scarcely realize to ourselves the strange fact, that, in a situation so favorable to virtue and happiness, and, in every respect, so desirable, any one *could* become dissatisfied and long for a change; and yet such is the fact. And what is stranger still, is, that the same sad experience is constantly made by thousands upon thousands of unfortunate young men and young women of the present day. Inmates of the most beautiful and attractive homes, surrounded with every comfort that heart could wish, and blessed with every privilege that life affords, they yet dream of more enchanting scenes and lovelier homes, of more refined and exquisite enjoyments, and of larger and more blessed privileges, and sweeter bliss, away out in the "wide, wide world." And, influenced and deluded by their distorted visions, elated and unsettled by their strangely excited and bewildering imaginations, and fascinated by their

fancied advantages, looming up in the dim distance, they hastily leave the paternal mansion; and, like the Prodigal Son, seek their fortune, and find their ruin, among loveless strangers, in a strange and unknown land, and in the midst of strange and perilous surroundings.

In this country, especially, where everything is in continual motion, and where the habits of the people are so fearfully unsettled, a subject like the present is invested with special interest, and bears an aspect of peculiar significance. And this view of the case is clothed with additional importance and solemnity, when it is remembered that Home or the domestic circle, in fact, constitutes the basis of both Church and State, and imparts character and coloring alike to both. Hence the importance of awakening and carefully fostering in the bosom of youth an ardent affection for, and strong attachment to, what may be regarded as the basis of all civil and religious prosperity—the domestic circle, and its mighty, far-reaching, and controlling influences.

Want of such love to home and home-life is

invariably associated with danger to the hapless victim. Discontent and alienation of heart are sure to follow, also, in the higher and holier sphere of religion; which, in fact, consists largely in love to God's house—the blessed home of the saints. To check and extinguish, if possible, this spirit of thoughtless discontent among the young and inexperienced portion of our people, and, more especially, to excite and cherish a spirit of generous love and regard for the Church of Christ, which is imaged forth by the earthly home, and forms the subject, under one point of view, of the present Parable, and, thus, to save the young from everlasting ruin, is the Author's sole aim and object in the composition of the following Treatise. The intrinsic importance of the subject, and its intimate connection with our present and future welfare, will be made to appear more evident and striking as we proceed in our discussion.

It is only necessary yet to say, that, in the prosecution of our work, we shall present the subject in the form of a lucid, running, and easy comment on the sacred text, enlivened with



ample illustrations, and enforced in the way of constant, solemn, and affectionate application of the subject to the hearts and consciences of the readers. With these preliminary remarks, and in earnest prayer for the blessing of God upon our well-meant efforts for the salvation of souls, we proceed to the main body of our subject—the faithful exposition of this most beautiful and exquisite Parable of the Prodigal Son—the “crown and glory” of the sacred trio. The Parable will be found to rest, throughout, on the idea of the family, and the blessed associations which cluster around that sweetest and most touching of all the dear names that are known, and loved, and cherished, here, on earth, namely—“Home.”

“THOU KNOWEST, LORD.”

Thou knowest, Lord, the weariness of sorrow  
 Of the sad heart that comes to thee for rest;  
 Cares of to-day, and burdens for to-morrow,  
 Blessings implored and sins to be confessed:  
 I come before thee at thy gracious word,  
 And lay them at thy feet; thou knowest, Lord.

Thou knowest all the past; how long and blindly  
 On the dark mountains the lost sheep had strayed;



How the good Shepherd followed, and how kindly  
He bore it home, upon his shoulders laid,  
And healed the bleeding wounds, and soothed the pain,  
And brought back life and hope and strength again.

Thou knowest all the present; each temptation,  
Each toilsome duty, each foreboding fear;  
All to myself assigned of tribulation,  
Or to beloved ones than self more dear;  
All pensive memories, as I journey on,  
Longings for vanished smiles and voices gone.

Thou knowest all the future; gleams of gladness,  
By stormy clouds too quickly overcast,  
Hours of sweet fellowship and parting sadness,  
And the dark river to be crossed at last.  
O what could hope and confidence afford  
To tread that path, but this, thou knowest, Lord?

Thou knowest, not alone as God, all knowing;  
As man, our mortal weakness thou hast proved;  
On earth, with purest sympathies o'erflowing,  
O Saviour, thou hast wept and thou hast loved!  
And love and sorrow still to thee may come,  
And find a hiding-place, a rest—a home!

Therefore I come, thy gentle call obeying,  
And lay my sins and sorrows at thy feet,  
On everlasting strength my weakness staying,  
Clothed in thy robe of righteousness complete;  
Then rising and refreshed I leave thy throne,  
And follow on to know as I am known.

—Selected.



# GIFT-BOOK FOR THE MILLION.

---

## I. THE FAMILY; OR HOME-LIFE.

“Home is the sphere of harmony and peace,  
The spot where angels find a resting place,  
When, bearing blessings, they descend to earth.”

HOME, or the family circle, involves in its conception the closest and tenderest ties. Of all the bright and cherished spots on earth, home is by far the brightest and the loveliest, and awakens in us feelings such as cannot be elicited by anything else on earth. Hence we naturally love home, and cling to it with a strength and tenacity of feeling, and an ardor of affection, which are exercised in connection with no other object. Even the most degraded and lawless among men, the most abandoned among women, and the most disorderly and worthless among children, generally retain some regard for the home of their early days—the

familiar scenes of their innocent sports; and many an outlaw has no doubt been reclaimed, many a fallen and dissolute one restored, and many an erring youth saved, temporally and eternally, by the power of home and of home associations.

Chief among these tender relations are those between parents and children, and between the children themselves, and partly, also, between these and the domestics—the faithful servants, so essential to the idea of a comfortable home.

Who can adequately describe the fervor and strength of a parent's love! How constantly and unremittingly does the faithful father labor and toil for the support and comfort of his loved ones! How earnestly are his early and late hours occupied in devising ways and means to provide for the diversified and ever-recurring wants of his faithful companion and beloved children! And how unspeakably pure, and deep, and angel-like, in all her acts and ways, does a faithful Christian mother appear! With strong and deathless affection, and unwavering fidelity, and ceaseless solicitude, she watches

over the interests, temporal and spiritual, of her little charge—her children. Nor is her care and anxiety for the welfare of her husband less conspicuous and praiseworthy. From day to day she labors, and toils, and worries along to keep the house tidy and pleasant, so as to minister to *his* comfort, who, in the evening twilight, returns weary and care-worn to his humble dwelling. This depth and ardor of affection comes out, especially, in seasons of sickness or other family afflictions. Hour after hour, day after day, and night after night, she, the loving wife and faithful mother, sits by the couch of the sick and suffering ones, gently soothing their sorrows, relieving their wants, and ministering, with the tenderness and disinterested affection of an angel, to the wants of the sick and the dying.

And here, too, mingling in the busy scenes of parental love and its ten thousand kindly and sympathetic offices, comes in the beautiful picture of filial affection. The strength and manliness of a brother's love, the grace and sweetness of a sister's deeper and warmer feel-

ing, and the combined influence and power of both brotherly and sisterly affection, as exercised towards parents, together form a picture, which, in point of beauty and sublimity, as also of subduing, elevating, and controlling power and influence, is absolutely unequalled on earth !

A family thus constituted, abounding in all the sweet and pleasing amenities of life, redolent with the purest and freest love, and characterized by the warmest and tenderest reciprocal affection, is in itself a place to be earnestly desired—a magic circle, wherein one might safely wish himself held in everlasting captivity. Such a home, with its pure, sparkling, perennial fountains of love, parental, filial, and fraternal, should be the object of our warmest, and truest, and most enduring affection ; and, to abide within its hallowed enclosure, and share in its rich and incomparable blessings, should be the object of our highest ambition !

Not alone the dear Christian family, however, nor its unfathomable depths of love and reciprocal affection, and offices of mutual kindness, and sympathetic services, are the chief attractions

in this family picture, which, at present, claims our attention. Above, we have already stated that the family constitutes the basis of civil and religious society—of Church and State. And we now wish to add, that the family, especially the Christian family, with its altar and its priest, with its morning and evening oblations, with its songs of praise, its penitent supplications, and its loving intercessions for all mankind, is a lively image and expressive type and prophecy of that family of “the redeemed from among men,” here on earth, and of that consummated family of the same redeemed ones, made perfect in heaven, of which it is our inestimable privilege to be living and active members. It is under this higher view, especially, that the family should be dear to every Christian heart, and that both parents and children should earnestly strive together to render it pleasant and attractive, and capable of exercising upon all its inmates an elevating and refining influence—a controlling, moulding, and saving power! Within its sacred precincts should be found nothing of a degrading, polluting, or



demoralizing nature. It should be to the weary wanderer of earth, who seeks shelter and repose there, a genuine "Elim," with its "twelve wells of water," and its "three-score and ten palm trees;" where the weary, way-worn pilgrim would instinctively wish to pitch his tent, and, as did the Israelites, encamp there.

Were all our families of such a character we would find them exerting a far greater and more salutary influence upon the destiny of the rising generation, and binding, with far stronger and more enduring bonds, our children to the dear homes of their early and comparatively innocent years. From the remotest corners of the busy world, they would, in after life, look lovingly back to the scenes of their childhood, still feeling themselves indissolubly bound to the dear old homestead, peeping out from among waving trees, and fragrant flowers, and sweet-scented shrubbery, and earnestly long to be once more back to the dear old cottage, or splendid palace, and join in acts of solemn praise and prayer around the family altar!

The dear home of our childhood and early



youth, with its sweet and blessed scenes of domestic peace, contentment, and joy, can never be wholly forgotten; especially, when that home is the residence of pious, Christian parents, and of well-trained children; when, in short, the family or home-life is characterized by the sweet spirit of love and mutual forbearance, and all its affairs are conducted on strictly Christian principles. The impressive force of a decidedly pious and consistent life—of parental love and fidelity—of genuine brotherly and sisterly affection—of united prayer and praise—the force, in short, of a truly Christian family-life, can never be radically effaced from the heart and mind.

How important is it, therefore, that we clothe the home-circle, and all its interesting and ever-recurring scenes of beauty and grace, with their full and legitimate power for good, by discharging all our duties faithfully and earnestly, especially, also by instilling into the minds of our children, sentiments of piety, founded on sound religious principles. Early impressions are generally the deepest and most lasting. They can never be wholly lost.

Permit me, by way of illustration, to adduce a few deeply interesting and well-authenticated facts. In Professor Day's "Historical Recollections of Pennsylvania," we are told, that, in concluding the war with England, it was stipulated, on the part of our government, that the children and others, who had been carried away captive by the savages, should be returned. Carlisle, Pa., was one of the places where these captives were brought together; and notice was, accordingly, given to all such as had lost children, to come and identify them. Among the rest came a poor distressed mother, who had lost a little boy many years before. She gazed eagerly at the mixed crowd before her, passing her eye back and forward, but could see no one resembling her own dear child. With a heavy heart she turned away ready to give up all in despair, when the person in charge of the children, asked her whether she had no sign or mark by which she could recognize her child. After a moment's pause, she said that she used to sing to the child a German Hymn, of which it seemed to be very fond, beginning thus:

“Allein und doch nicht ganz allein,  
Bin ich in meiner Einsamkeit.”

The gentleman then asked her whether she remembered the melody or tune, to which she used to sing these words. Being answered in the affirmative, he requested her to sing it; when, to her utter amazement and joy, a young man, in the back part of the house, sprang to his feet, came to her, and, tenderly embracing her, called her mother! The echo of that sweet song, which, like a vision of beauty, lingered in his heart, came back to the child with resistless power, and brought him to his mother's arms. The heart of the poor child may have been more than ordinarily impressed, and his memory aided by the appropriate sentiment of the lines, which may be rendered thus: “Alone, and yet not quite alone, am I in this my loneliness.” The incident furnishes a strong argument in favor of early religious instruction, and careful family training, by showing the permanent and ineffaceable character of these early or first impressions. They constitute the foundation stones in the future edifice.

Another equally interesting and striking case came partly under my own observation. A lady member of my church, eighty-four years of age, told me, that, when she was a child, on the banks of the beautiful Susquehanna, the Indians used to come near their home, and that her heart was filled with constant fear. Once, when her uncle, from one of the lower counties, came to their house, she begged to be permitted to go with him away from the dreaded Indians. She finally received the desired permission, and accompanied him to his home in the vicinity of Philadelphia. She had been religiously and very carefully instructed, in her early years, having committed many passages of Scripture, select Hymns, questions from the Catechism, and prayers, all in the German language. In her new home she forgot entirely her native tongue; but never learned to read, if my memory serves me right, the English language, which she constantly spoke, and in which, during her long life, she worshipped the God of her fathers. When old, and almost entirely confined to the house, as she was

towards the close of her pilgrimage, she sought comfort in the religion of the crucified One. But, what was most remarkable in her case, was this, that she read, and prayed, and meditated, exclusively, if I mistake not, in the language of her childhood—in German! Her whole inner life or religious consciousness appears to have moved in the element of this earliest and deepest experience. Her child-life became the stay of old age—the light of her declining years. Can we, then, doubt the far-reaching power, and controlling influence of careful family training, and early religious instruction? These early acquisitions of Christian knowledge, and incorporation of heavenly powers in the human soul, are the moving, moulding, and controlling forces, which, in after life, are to shape and determine our destiny. Strong, indeed, and influential are the links that bind us to the sweet home of our childhood and youth.

We wish to introduce, here, without being able to acknowledge their source, the following exquisite lines; wishing the unknown author

Heaven's richest blessing for singing to us so sweetly of that loveliest and brightest spot on earth—Home! Listen to the sweet musings of the happy poet:

## HOME.

Home! in that word how many hopes are hidden,  
 How many hours of joy serene and fair,  
 How many golden visions rise unbidden,  
 And blend their views into a rainbow there.

Round home what images of beauty cluster,  
 Links which unite the living with the dead,  
 Glimpses of most surpassing lustre,  
 Echoes of melody whose voice is fled.

Home is the place where we have ever blended  
 Our hopes and happiness, our tears and sighs,  
 Whence our united worship hath ascended,  
 As grateful incense to the listening skies;

Where we have nourished bright tho'ts while beholding  
 Some sun-eyed flower, the centre of our love;  
 And while we watched its gradual unfolding,  
 The angels came and carried it above.

Mankind, however fettered and benighted,  
 Howe'er oppressed by penury and care,  
 Have their existence by one beacon lighted,  
 Have still one bliss which all may freely share.

Home! cries the world-sick wanderer as he wendeth,  
 With baffled footsteps, o'er his weary way;  
 Home! sings the wretched outcast as he sendeth  
 A longing look whence once he longed to stray.



Home! says the toil-worn rustic when returning  
From daily labor at the fall of night;  
Home! sings the emancipated soul as, spurning  
This world of woe, it plumes its wings for flight.

Home! like the burning lens collects together  
Into one point affection's scattered rays,  
And in the sternest storm, the wildest weather,  
Kindles a bright and spirit-cheering blaze.

Home is the watch-word firing with emotion  
The patriot's heart, and nerving him to fight;  
Home is the pole star, o'er the storm-swept ocean  
Guiding the sailor through the stormy night.

Home is a boon to erring mortals given,  
To knit us closer in the bonds of love,  
To lead our spirits gently up to Heaven,  
To shadow forth the brighter home above!

—*Selected.*

## II. THE OMINOUS REQUEST, AND DIVISION OF PROPERTY.

Once the soul, in thought estranged,  
Frets in discontent at home,  
Soon it, then—all things arranged—  
Longs in distant lands to roam!

THE charms of home, and its refined and exquisite pleasures, in this case, did not wholly restrain and prevent absolutely the spirit of discontent and wild speculation from arising in the heart of the younger son. And no marvel; when once the affections are alienated, and so the silken cord, which binds men to the sweet and fascinating scenes of home, is broken, and the fervor of their early love expended, then indeed the way is fully open for the ingress of restless and open discontent, as well as the wish to be wholly free and independent, out in the wide world. So in the present case. The father had, indeed, but two sons to share his boundless love, and enjoy with him all the chaste and refining pleasures of the family circle; we might



suppose that under these circumstances there would be such fullness of joy, and such perfect satisfaction, that no room could be found for the entrance of any evil thought. Such, however, was not the case. Of the two favored sons, the younger, we are told, became early dissatisfied, meditated his escape from the paternal mansion, and soon began making the preparations necessary to accomplish his cherished purpose. He at once addressed himself to his kind and indulgent parent, thus: "Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me." The legal phrase, which, in making his request, the discontented youth employed, bears an ominous significance. It strongly testifies to the unnatural estrangement and total alienation of feeling which had already taken possession of his heart. The sweet perfume of his early love and filial affection had been utterly dissipated, and, in place of them, we have the cold and repulsive spirit of the stranger, the slave of lust. Is not this, also, the exact image and prototype of that mean and selfish spirit, which, at the present day, is so often found to possess and animate the hearts, and control the ac-

tions of men,—of children, even, and of Church members? How often do we not meet with families, in which formerly the spirit of purest and most fervent love prevailed, now utterly despoiled of this strong and enduring bond, and smitten as with a desolating curse! In our own age and country, especially, do we find this desolating spirit of discontent, recklessness, and insubordination to parents and superiors, largely in the ascendancy. In many families, otherwise respectable, filial love, reverence, and due regard, on the part of children, are utterly unknown; while in others only the last lingering remains of this filial love—the light and glory of the family circle—are to be found. Hence so many imitate the fatal example of the Prodigal Son. Hence, also, do we have so many distressed and heart-broken parents, and such multitudes of ruined sons and fallen daughters.

But here, again, the earthly is to serve only as a means of bringing prominently into view the spiritual and invisible. The fatal request and subsequent departure of the younger son, from his home, are but the advance images or

prophetic intimations of an inward estrangement of the soul from its chief good, on earth,—the house of God and its blessed privileges. Here, too, we find the poor soul, in strange and discordant sounds, speaking forth the unnatural request: “Father, give me the portion of goods which falleth to me.” And, no sooner is this request complied with by the insulted majesty of Heaven, than the hapless applicant, like the Prodigal Son, “gathers all together,” and takes his “journey into a far country”—the land of fancied freedom and unrestrained indulgence.

And what now of these dreamy visions of personal freedom, and independencé of parental authority? What estimate shall we form of the Prodigal’s early and evident dissatisfaction with the existing order of the family—the type and prophecy of the Church of God? What of his eager desire and rude request to have full and unlimited control of his portion of the family estate? Could the separate and independent possession of these “goods” really procure him the enlarged pleasures which he so fondly anticipated? Was it at all in the power

of those bright and fairy clouds, which, floating so majestically before his distorted vision, had promised him a copious shower of dainties, to bestow the good things hoped for? Is it, really, in the power of *any* "good gift," temporal or spiritual, to afford us pure and permanent bliss, independent of God Himself—the source of all life and blessedness?

If we are to be governed, in our decision, by the teachings of the Divine Word, then we must answer decidedly—no! In such case, we must insist that all these fond and fascinating hopes are intrinsically vain and delusive—baseless and ephemeral as a "morning cloud" and as the "early dew," which, with the first touches of the rising sun, "goeth away." This dreary, heartless selfishness, indeed, which seeks to enjoy things—blessings of providence and of grace—separate from and independent of God, the giver of all good and perfect gifts, is itself the very essence of sin and misery; and cannot, in the nature of things, yield us any pure and abiding bliss. "Whosoever drinketh of this water," the common water of earth, says our

blessed Saviour, "shall thirst again; but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him, shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him, shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." But, as our perennial springs and wells, in nature, are such, only, because they stand in real, living communication with the great ocean, the universal reservoir of water, so this welling up of eternal life, in the soul of man, is possible only in case of its real and living communion with God, the universal source of all spiritual life and salvation.

Why, then, it may be asked, did the good father, in the Parable, yield to the foolish wishes of his reckless and indiscreet son? Why did he grant him his fatal and apparently unnatural request? Why not positively refuse to make the fatal division of property, as requested by the discontented heir? And why does God Himself—represented by this earthly father—now, also, divide His "living" among His unwise and heedless children?

The reason, we think, is obvious. Man is essentially a free agent; and his destiny, both

here and hereafter, depends largely upon himself—upon his personal character—upon what he becomes by his own efforts, either in the proper use, or in the abuse of the Divine gifts, in the improvement or neglect of divinely ordained means and instrumentalities. Happiness, therefore, can be enjoyed only and exclusively on the ground of a personally good and holy character, acquired in the way of God's appointment. "This is the record," says St. John, "that God hath given to us eternal life; and this life is in His Son."

O how foolish and hazardous is it, then, to seek independence of God—to desire the possession of our portion of the Divine gifts separate from Himself, the source and fountain of all good! How ungrateful, at the same time, is such a request or desire! God does, indeed, commit to our own hands the rich gifts of His grace and Spirit, and requires us to use them for our spiritual and eternal welfare; but they are after all to be used only in constant and felt communion with Himself. Any desire to be independent of God, and enjoy His gifts



separate from His Person and His kingdom, the blessed communion of the saints, is an insult offered to the majesty of Heaven! Far otherwise felt and acted the saints of old—those heroes of faith. Listen to the sweet words of David: “One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple. For in the time of trouble He shall hide me in His pavilion: In the secret of His tabernacle shall He hide me; He shall set me up upon a rock.”

Contrast, now, with these beautiful words of the Psalmist, the heartless and supremely selfish request of the younger son: “Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me.” A most unfortunate and fatal demand this! We experience a feeling of sadness and secret sorrow, instinctively springing up in our bosom, as we read these ingrate and ominous words of the Prodigal. They awaken in us a kind of dark and dreamy presentiment of that coming moral desolation, in the case of the younger son,

which, for a long while, left his erring soul as barren and unfruitful as the mountains of Gilboa, where there was neither "dew" nor "rain"—the sad state of one "having no hope, and without God in the world." And why so God-forsaken?

Why will ye lavish out your years  
Amidst a thousand trifling cares,  
While, in this various range of thought,  
The one thing needful is forgot?

Why will ye chase the fleeting wind,  
And famish an immortal mind,  
While angels with regret look down,  
To see you spurn a heav'nly crown?

Not so your dying eyes shall view  
Those objects which you now pursue;  
Not so shall heav'n and hell appear,  
When the decisive hour is near!



### III. THE DEPARTURE ; OR, AWAY INTO THE FAR COUNTRY.

“ For he, not yet, had felt the pain  
That rankles in the wounded breast ;  
He waked to sin, then slept again,  
Forsook his God, yet took his rest.”

THE younger son boldly advanced his claim, on the father, for a division of property ; and, accordingly, “ he divided unto them his living” —that is to say, the family estate or patrimony was equitably divided between the two sons, the legal heirs of the coveted wealth or accumulated property. And this, then, was the signal for another and a more serious and unfortunate step in the downward history of the Prodigal. He now had everything in his own hands, and hastily made the necessary preparations for his contemplated journey, as he felt himself no longer at home in the paternal mansion. Hence the record : “ And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far

country." Every word and phrase of this terse and pregnant sentence is full of solemn import and far-reaching significance. The expression, "not many days after," points unmistakably to his unnatural haste and earnest solicitude to get away, as soon as possible, from the home of his childhood and early youth, and from under the restraining power and influence of parental love and authority. His interest in the family and its loved scenes, was already, apparently at least, wholly abated, and his attachment to home and home-life effectually broken. Hence, the sooner he gets away from the venerable homestead the better for him, and the more agreeable to his altered feelings. And so, also, the further he can go—even to the remotest bounds of earth—the safer he feels himself from the restraining and now harassing influence of home scenes and home-life. And is not this, also, precisely the course, so invariably pursued by the restless sinner of the present day, when once the gracious and heart-felt presence of God, and the restraining, and, in his case, irritating influences of the spiritual home,

the Church of Christ, become painfully burdensome to him? In his eagerness to get away from home, he "gathers all together," and then hastily takes his leave of the peaceful palaces and quiet retreats of God's house, and so hurries away off into a far country, where he is entirely unknown, and perfectly free to do just as he pleases. So, at least, the unfortunate one imagines himself to be; and revels in this sad delusion until he eventually comes to himself, and sees things aright again in the purer and fuller light of the unseen and eternal world. O how many victims of this fatal delusion are to be found in almost every community! What vast multitudes of deluded souls, estranged from God and His Church, are busily dreaming of a pleasant, free, and boundless range over fragrant hills, and flowery meads, and pebbled seas of pure, sweet, unmingled bliss, away out in the dim distance, while, in fact, Satan is holding them captive and spell-bound under a fit of the most fatal delusion!

Well might the compassionate Redeemer say even to His chosen and well-trained disciples:

“Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” Only in a ready and cheerful compliance with this solemn injunction can we hope to escape spiritual shipwreck.

Everywhere, and, under the most favorable circumstances, there is danger for the poor pilgrim of Earth; but especially so, when, like the insulted and pouting Cain, he goes out “from the presence of the Lord,” and makes his home among distant and unfeeling strangers. If, in the very presence chamber of the Almighty, and, as it were, under the very shadow of His wings, there is danger of sinning against the Divine majesty, how much more are we in danger of sinning, when away in the “land of Nod, east of Eden.” And this circumstance should not only affect the young and inexperienced, and put them on their guard; but it should, also, admonish Christian parents to make home as pleasant and attractive as possible to their dear children, so that they might feel no inclination to abandon it, and exchange its sweet and refining pleasures for the foul and

degrading scenes of dissipation and revelry abroad. And, besides this, the dangers of youth, when abroad, and their frequent want of sympathy, when in circumstances, where a little fellow-feeling and generous aid, and kindly interest in their behalf, might save them from dissipation, temptation, and ruin, loudly call for proper care and solicitude, on the part of Christian parents, in favor of the friendless and lonely stranger. Their own dear children may, in the end, be gainers by such assistance, extended to the lowly and indigent wanderer out in the "wide, wide world."

To illustrate my meaning and give point and application to the preceding remarks, I shall introduce here, an incident which was related to me by the late Rev. Richard A. Fisher, of blessed memory, as having occurred within the bounds of his pastoral charge. Many years ago, when there was as yet no Rail-road communication with the great West, a family from one of the eastern counties of Pennsylvania started for one of the Western States, as was then customary, with a wagon, containing the members of

the household, the little furniture which could be taken along, and such provisions and feed as were thought to be necessary for the journey. When they had proceeded on their pilgrimage as far as Shamokin Valley, in Northumberland county, some of the party were taken down with sickness, and their progress was arrested. In the meantime their little stock of provisions had become well-nigh exhausted, and their prospects assumed a gloomy and threatening aspect. When they were about ready to start, the gentleman, who, up to this time, had carefully shut up his sorrow in his own heart, called on a farmer, and stated to him frankly his destitute condition, and respectfully craved his kindly interposition. The farmer, satisfied with the honesty of the man's representation, requested his family to contribute whatever of bread and other provisions they could spare for the relief of the indigent stranger. With a glad heart and a bosom heaving with sentiments of warmest gratitude towards the noble and generous-hearted benefactor, the now re-enforced traveller started on his long and tedious journey over



hill and dale, and rivers and mountains, in the direction of his future home, in the great West. After reaching his chosen spot, and living there many years, he heard of a young man, a stranger, travelling in that section of country, laid up with sickness. Naturally reminded of his own desolate condition, when, in similar circumstances, he too was among strangers, he called to see the young man. On inquiry he found that he was from Eastern Pennsylvania—from Northumberland County—from Shamokin Valley. As these names were successively mentioned in answer to his inquiries, his heart leaped within him; and he yet once more inquired what was the name of the stranger before him, when, to his utter surprise, he learned that the lonely sufferer was the son of the very person, who, many years before, had relieved him, when on his way westward.

On making this discovery the grateful man at once took the youth to his own house, after telling him of the kindness of his distant father, and cared for him kindly and assiduously until he was fully restored, and ready to enter again

on his journey. Here, truly, was bread, having been cast upon the waters, found after "many days," according to the Divine assurance. Hospitality brought its rich reward. "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers," says St. Paul, "for thereby some have entertained angels unawares."

But, while we thus earnestly and most cheerfully bespeak for poor wanderers, universally, the pity and compassion of men, we must not forget, that, in treating of the genuine Prodigal, the wanderer from God's house and its blessed privileges, it becomes us, first of all, to sound the alarm, and, thus, call back again the erring one to the paths of righteousness and peace. Our sympathy with the poor sinner, in his exile, must not cause us to forget our duty to God, whose house the wretched wanderer has voluntarily forsaken. And who is this wanderer, whom we have hastily traced from the quiet and peaceful palaces in the father's house, away out into the wild woods and barren deserts of the world? It is you, the reader of these lines, possibly. If so, then you are affectionately



called back to your forsaken God, and to the sweet and blissful ways of His commandments. It is you who are asked to come from among the barren hills and sandy plains—the moral desolations of this present evil world, and enter upon the sweet and fragrant fields of the church—the blessed kingdom of God!

How solemn and soul-stirring is the call of the good Shepherd! “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” Listen to the sweet and blessed call of mercy!

Return, O wanderer, return,  
 And seek an injured Father's face;  
 Those warm desires that in thee burn,  
 Were kindled by reclaiming grace.

Return, O wanderer, return,  
 And seek a Father's melting heart;  
 His pitying eyes thy grief discern,  
 His hand shall heal thine inward smart.

Return, O wanderer, return,  
 Thy Saviour bids thy spirit live,  
 Go to His bleeding feet, and learn,  
 How freely Jesus can forgive.

Return, O wanderer, return,  
And wipe away the falling tear ;  
Tis God who says, "no longer mourn,"  
'Tis mercy's voice invites thee near.

#### IV. THE DISSIPATION, OR WASTING OF GOODS.

“ We give our souls the wounds they feel,  
We drink the pois'nous gall;  
And rush with fury down to hell,  
But grace prevents the fall.”

“ AND there he wasted his substance in riotous living.” Here we have another fine and delicate touch of the Master’s pencil. So perfectly natural and true to life, are these words of the Parable, that they set forth, as with a single stroke of the pen, the terrible consequences of this hasty and injudicious departure from the paternal mansion, and from under the salutary influences of hearth and home life. “ He wasted his substance.” How natural, and yet how overwhelmingly solemn and affecting! He “wasted”—that is, squandered them away in “riotous living”—in sensual indulgence. What a sad picture! The once happy son, the pride of his honored father, and a mother’s joy, surrounded with every comfort that parental love and devotion could

render—happy, unspeakably happy, too, in a brother's deathless affection, is now found far away among the poor and wretched outcasts of earth, the despised and utterly abhorred among the sons of men! But all this, again, is only the faint and imperfect image of a far sadder and more desperately hopeless spiritual state. The sinner, indeed, wastes his "substance"—his spiritual endowments—in a far higher and weightier sense, revelling in sin, and effectually extinguishing in his bosom every nobler and better sentiment. And who, now, cares for the wretched outcast? He is left to weep alone, and unpitied in his state of utter, hopeless, cheerless, desolation.

Some twenty years ago I was called upon to perform the sad funeral obsequies over the grave of an unfortunate prodigal who had breathed his last in a prison cell, "unwept and unsung." He was the son of pious parents; had no doubt been religiously raised and trained, and might have been honored and respected. But, like so many others, he frequented bad company; became intemperate in his habits; indulged in

petty larceny; was arrested, convicted, and imprisoned. Here, while suffering the penalty of the law, he fell sick and died. None, except a few of the prison officers and myself, attended his funeral. Even an only sister, yet living in the place, refused to come near. Sadly and silently we carried the poor fellow to his long home and lowered his body into the grave, over which the funeral service was tremblingly read. All was stern, cold, and silent as the grave itself. Not a tear was shed. Not the slightest sign of emotion, or sorrow, or regret, was to be seen on the frigid countenances of those present. Amid the most solemn silence and hopeless reserve we lowered the poor man's corpse into the grave, and committed his soul to the mercy of God. In a most charming spot on the banks of the beautiful Susquehanna sleeps the poor outcast in his lonely and flowerless grave, over which probably no tear has ever been shed. Surely, "the way of the transgressor is hard."

And, now, may I be permitted to say a few words directly to you, whether young or old, who are possibly living in the same riotous way;

or, if not already on the high-way to ruin, you are at least in great danger of getting out upon the broad and beaten road "which leadeth to destruction." You have perhaps, like the Prodigal Son, had beautiful and comfortable homes; but, like him, you were not contented there, and so you ventured out into the wide and treacherous world. Since you are away from home, and free from home influences, you forget the law of life and love, and follow in the wake of sinners. Do you know how much you are in danger? Look at the vast numbers of young men and young women that leave their comfortable homes in search of a fortune abroad, and see how few of them are able to stem the strong tide of worldly and demoralizing influences which they have to encounter. Very soon many are found in the places of public and fashionable resort; others in loathsome tippling houses, and around the card table: others in the company of scoffers; while others, not a few, are found in places whose very infamy forbids their mention. Your danger is imminent and appalling. "Wherefore, take unto you the

whole armor"—panoply—"of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day."

That I may not be thought wild and extravagant in my apprehensions of the danger which threatens the tender and inexperienced youth, whose lot may be cast among unfeeling strangers, let me briefly call your attention to a few interesting and well-known facts.

And, first, let me remind you of the important and ominous fact, that, in our day, and in our own country, especially, few young men and young women are sufficiently familiar with the doctrines and precepts of our holy religion to meet successfully the cavils of the world. The land is full of rank, bold, and unscrupulous infidels, who, in their intercourse with the young and inexperienced, are always ready to obtrude their skeptical principles upon the attention of the unsuspecting and unwary youth. They know very well, that, here, if anywhere, they can make an impression, and thus silently, and unsuspected, inculcate their evil and demoralizing principles.

And what makes this view of the matter still



more serious and important, is, that, owing to this very defect in the prevailing system of religious training of the young, they are not sufficiently fortified morally and spiritually to resist the seductive power of the wicked world. Where there is a strong and well-matured religious character for the young man or young lady to fall back upon, when thus tempted and tried, the case is quite different. In such circumstances they are likely to escape unharmed, God being their "sun and shield." But, in the case of the young, generally, we are bound to assume, that, in this essential element of safety, they are very seriously defective; and, therefore, need to be especially admonished, and put on their guard.

Even with the utmost care, however, there is great danger; and countless multitudes, who have gone out into the wide world with far less questionable preparation than "the younger son," have made shipwreck of their "faith," and of their souls. They had not the power, in themselves, to resist the temptations which they were called to encounter, nor had they any



friendly power at their side, to encourage them in the conflict, and help them on to victory and a crown. They were, in short, unsupported by the power of a divine faith, and, hence, foiled in the conflict of life. Christ only is our strength, and the source of victory to the tempted and tried soul. "For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?"

Here, precisely, lies the hope of the world—the hope of safety and success. "The name of Jehovah is a strong tower," says Solomon, "the righteous runneth into it, and is safe." But, alas, how few have power to acknowledge this strong and impregnable tower—the name of Jehovah Jésus—or feel inclined to run into it for safety and shelter in the hour of temptation! To most men, and women, too, the siren voice of sin is sweet as music, and as enticing as angels' food. It requires no special efforts, on the part of the world, to draw them aside, and

allure them into the forbidden paths of sin and folly. The merest hint, in the direction of sin, is sufficient to put them on the track, and engage them in the service of the wicked one. And, O, how many unfortunate ones—sons and daughters often of pious and earnest Christian parents—are out in the wide world at this very hour, while heart-broken fathers, and mothers, and brothers, and sisters, at home, are bitterly bewailing the erratic course of the darling ones at a distance, rapidly “wasting their substance in riotous living,” and utterly unmindful of themselves, or of their weeping friends!

To you, O ye wanderers in the dreary wilds of the world, surrounded by innumerable perils, and tempted to sin in ten thousand different ways,—to you, the dear children of weeping parents and sorrowing brothers and sisters, at home, we would sound forth, in sweetest tones, the kind and tender invitation of the merciful Saviour: “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden; and I will give you rest.” And, then, turning away from this to the Church herself—the spiritual home from which many

of these poor wanderers have gone out into the wide world, because they found not sufficient spiritual power and bliss at home, to bind them to its peaceful palaces, its precious Word of Life, its ordinances of salvation, its sweet communion, and its blessed worship,—we would speak, as with the voice of a trumpet, that other compassionate word of our Lord, so full of tender sympathy and sacred sorrow: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets,” the preachers of a living Gospel—“and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.”

For this reason, O faithless people of God,—for this criminal reason have so many of your sons and daughters gone out into the uncovenanted world—have “gathered all together,” and taken their “journey into a far country,” and “there wasted” their “substance with riotous living.” Go ye, also, to the feet of Jesus, and there confess your short-comings, with deep

penitence and heart-felt contrition! Go, seek forgiveness in the Divine compassion, making, each one, humble confession to your forsaken God and Saviour. Responding to this solemn call, you have the poet's beautiful words of mingled penitence and faith, put into your quivering lips :—

My crimes are great, but can't surpass  
The pow'r and glory of Thy grace ;  
Great God, Thy nature hath no bound,  
So let Thy pard'ning love be found.

My lips with shame my sins confess  
Against Thy law, against Thy grace  
Lord, should Thy judgment grow severe,  
I am condemned, but Thou art clear.

Should sudden vengeance seize my breath,  
I must pronounce Thee just in death ;  
And, if my soul were sent to hell,  
Thy righteous law approves it well.

Yet, save a trembling sinner, Lord,  
Whose hope, still hov'ring round Thy word,  
Would light on some sweet promise there,  
Some sure support against despair.

## V. THE FAMINE, AND ITS PRESSURE.

“My soul, with various tempests tossed,  
Her hopes o’erturned, her projects cross’d,  
Sees every day new straits attend,  
And wonders where the scene will end.”

THE distance between affluence and want is very small and easily passed over. In our own day, especially, we have had abundant opportunities of seeing the fickleness of fortune and the suddenness of the changes from one extreme in human society to another. In every department of business, and among every class of citizens, we have witnessed instances of this uncertainty in temporal affairs. So numerous have been the failures, among business men, and so unexpected, in many cases, have been the sudden reverses of fortune, that we have naturally come to regard the condition of every business man as more or less insecure. Such, alas, was the sad experience of the Prodigal Son. He went out from home, and entered the busy world with an ample fortune, as we may well

suppose, and had every prospect of getting along smoothly and prosperously in the world. But, alas, his flattering prospects were soon disappointed, and all his fond and cherished hopes blasted. Even in a temporal point of view, the experience of the Prodigal might be very profitably studied. We, in this age of wild and unscrupulous speculation, need the force and influence of every instance of such experience as that now under consideration.

The picture, however, is intended mainly, if not exclusively, to bring before us the uncertainty of our spiritual interests, and the ease and suddenness with which fatal reverses often take place in the kingdom of grace. The shipwreck, which the Prodigal experienced, is intended to teach us not to be high-minded, nor to despise and disregard the spiritual enemies by whom we are surrounded. And are we not able to call up many sad instances of persons, eminent for piety, and honored for their strength of character, who were suddenly and unexpectedly overwhelmed with temptation, and precipitated into sin? And no sooner do



men now-a-days, as well as in the time of the Prodigal, get away from the Church of God and her blessed worship, than their spiritual resources begin to fail them, and, even before they are fully aware of their downward course, there is felt the painful pressure of spiritual poverty—a famine in divine things. How can it be otherwise when the soul is essentially spiritual and made for communion with God?

Such was the experience of the Prodigal. He, no doubt, was very lavish with his “goods,” deeming the supply inexhaustible. He had no idea that these could ever wholly fail, and hence he “wasted his substance in riotous living;” and only by and by did he become conscious that his stores were exhausted; and, thus, “when he had spent all,” the truth probably for the first time flashed upon his mind, and made him conscious of his error, and the perilous nature of his situation. And as he looked around him for relief, and hoped to better his condition by a different course of conduct, he found to his utter amazement, that, in every direction, want and suffering stared

him in the face. To his confusion he found, that, just at that most critical moment, in his history, when he needed the advantages afforded by a state of public and general prosperity, "there arose a mighty famine in that land."

And is not this the experience of all men universally? At the very time when they discover their own spiritual need, and begin to look around them for help from abroad, they unexpectedly find that the world universally, as it now stands, is alike poverty-stricken—spiritually bankrupt. The general and wide-spread desolation around the poor wanderer, only serves to make his own case the more appalling. He sees himself to be a poor, helpless, miserable sinner; and every effort to seek relief in the world of sense around him, precipitates him only the more hopelessly into the deep and yawning abyss that opens up beneath his feet. Look where he will, and as long and earnestly as he pleases, yet, for all that, he finds himself alone and utterly forsaken; not alone as regards companions in his misery, but alone in that he finds no help, seeing that all are alike in need.



And, now, when the Prodigal had made this discovery of the mighty famine without, as well as the pressing need within, he "began to be in want." The stern fact of his spiritual poverty now stared him full in the face. He saw his truly needy and dependent condition, as he had never seen it before. As a traveller in the desert, surrounded on every side by fields of burning sand, may feel perfectly easy, and without the least apprehension of danger, while his reserved stores of water remain unexhausted; so the poor sinner, surrounded by wide-spread moral desolation, may also feel easy and unconcerned, while his original endowments—his spiritual stores—remain unexpended. When, however, once the gathered stores begin to fail, when the vessels are emptied, one by one, and the last draught is being taken, then, looking around upon the limitless plains of burning sand, and seeing no way of supply, the terrible reality of water-want flashes resistlessly upon the mind; and the incipient want or call for water at once rises to the point of a burning, gnawing, torturing thirst. This was

the case with the Prodigal. The first glimpse he had of his own exhausted supplies, caused him to look around for relief; but, finding himself in the midst of a universal famine, he "began to be in want"—began to realize his deplorable condition.

The first effectual step in the way of a cure is the clear discovery and full consciousness of our disease and the necessity for help. It proved so in the case of the Prodigal, as we shall see; and it will prove so in our case, also, if we obtain this knowledge of ourselves and of our spiritual wants by the aid of God's Spirit. Enlightened by the Comforter—the Holy Ghost—we will not fail to seek, in deep and heartfelt penitence and lively faith, the mercy of God. And we have the blessed assurance that "they that seek shall find;" and, that, to "them that knock, it shall be opened."

Ye dying sons of men,  
Immerg'd in sin and woe,  
The Gospel's voice attend,  
While Jesus sends to you:  
Ye perishing and guilty come,  
In Jesus' arms there yet is room.

No longer now delay,  
Nor vain excuses frame;  
He bids you come to-day,  
Tho' poor, and blind, and lame :  
All things are ready—sinners come,  
For ev'ry trembling soul there's room.

Compell'd by bleeding love,  
Ye wandering sheep draw near ;  
Christ calls you from above,  
His charming accents hear :  
Let whosoever will now come,  
In mercy's breast there still is room.

“Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways ;  
For why will ye die, O house of Israel?”

## VI. THE UNNATURAL ALLIANCE.

“ My watchful enemies combine  
To tempt my feet astray ;  
They flatter with a base design,  
To make my soul their prey.”

THE stubborn and perverse refusal to acknowledge lawful and legitimate authority, not unfrequently leads to the strange inconsistency of acknowledging that which is a bold, impudent, and illegal usurpation. The fact itself is strange enough, surely, and may lead to profitable reflection on the strange perverseness of the human heart. The very existence of such a fact in the history of our race, should be sufficient to establish, in the view of all reasonable men, the doctrine of human depravity—of apostasy from God!

A most striking and singularly instructive instance of this kind is furnished by the example of the Prodigal Son. He was uneasy and discontented under the mild and genial sway of a father's authority, as represented here in

order to set forth a supposed or supposable real case in the kingdom of God. The human picture of despised and rejected authority, within the range of the present world, is of sufficient interest to claim our earnest and serious attention. For, after all, the ready and loving acknowledgment of an earthly authority is closely, and, indeed, essentially connected with the higher obedience which we owe to the authority of Heaven. Where the one is deliberately and persistently refused, there the other will not be likely to find very much favor. A cheerful acknowledgment of parental authority, especially, is of the utmost importance towards securing obedience to the authority of Him who is the common "Father of all them that are called children in heaven and on earth." Hence the fitness of the earthly family and its own distinctive relations to set forth the Divine Economy and its several higher and holier relations.

The case of the Prodigal, then, illustrates a principle of universal significance and application. He, who could not brook the idea of being subject to the easy control of a kind and

indulgent father, readily contracted an alliance with a foreigner, and, as the event proved, with a heartless despot. In this singular instance of human perversity, viewing it simply in the light of the present world, we have an apt and telling illustration of human conduct in ten thousand separate instances occurring almost daily, and in every possible connection. And the fatal consequences of this wide-spread insubordination to parents and superiors, generally, are seen in every direction. How many a tender youth of great promise, excellent opportunities, and giving every indication of future eminence and usefulness, has by his discontent at home, and his eagerness to get out into the wide world, brought ruin upon himself, and sorrow upon his parents and kindred.

But the chief importance of this item in the history of the Prodigal Son lies in the fact that it sets forth in the most striking and impressive manner, the spiritual estrangement and folly of man in becoming restive under the mild and gentle authority of our Heavenly Father, and, then, after madly throwing off this legitimate

authority, heedlessly putting himself under the usurped authority and fatally oppressive power of a cruel tyrant. And, O, how sad is it to think that there are multitudes in every community, who, refusing homage and submission to the authority of Heaven, readily submit themselves, in soul and body, to the powers of hell; refusing to recognize God as their lawful sovereign, they become the willing subjects of Satan—the Prince of darkness! “And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country.” This phraseology intimates that the Prodigal put himself to special inconvenience to enter into this strange and unnatural alliance with one of the chief men of that distant country, to which he had unfortunately strayed. He “went” and sought the alliance. Alas, for the numberless cases of a similar nature continually occurring in the history of our fallen race! Slaves of lust—slaves of brutal passion—slaves of self, and slaves of the prince of selfishness, they are willing to become; but servants of God they cannot become—this would be servitude—intolerable servitude!



After what we have already said in reference to the subjection of the unfortunate Prodigal to a foreign power, it will not be difficult for us to believe what immediately follows in the narrative: "And he sent him into his fields to feed swine." To a Jew, whom we must recognize in the subject of the Parable, nothing could be more humiliating or insulting, even, than to be engaged in such an employment—absolutely abhorred among the Israelites. But it was precisely that which might reasonably be expected in the circumstances. And what a sad and appalling picture is here presented of the deep degradation to which the sinner stoops, or rather is forced to stoop, under his foreign master. Look abroad in any community, and see how many and how various are the ways in which Satan disgraces his self-enslaved subjects!

Look, for example, at the basely dishonest and unscrupulous business man, who, in the prosecution of an otherwise lawful traffic, seeks only his own aggrandizement, and, in the spirit of this low and unworthy object, bows to the idol of his heart, and zealously worships the

“golden calf.” Or take the poor miser, whose very name testifies to his “misery,” and see to what depths of degradation he will condescend in the gratification of his low and groveling passion! It would be degrading to human nature simply to recount the mean and disreputable stories told of some of these wretched beings. Look at the gay and light-hearted votaries of pleasure, whose strong passion for popular amusements will cause them to spend whole nights in the giddy mazes of the dance, or in witnessing low theatrical performances, or in feasting and play. See the professional gambler, how ready he is to sit down among and mingle with the lowest and filthiest of our fallen race, and, amid the fumes of whiskey and of tobacco, spend the golden hours which should be sacredly devoted to sleep and rest! Or, finally, take the drunkard, who is hopelessly wedded to his cup, and gladly pays out the last shilling he has in the world to gratify a vicious and depraved appetite, and secure the coveted stimulant. See how freely he sacrifices his own comfort, property, honor, and

life; and, leaping over all bounds, reduces to wretchedness, want, and endless disgrace even the innocent members of his family—the wife of his bosom, and the prattling babe that clings to her aching breast! And what does the miserable inebriate receive, in return, at the hands of those heartless creatures, who, in the service of Satan, have reduced him to poverty and disgrace? Absolutely nothing, except it be that he is heartily detested by them, and soundly abused, or possibly kicked out of the very house in which his money was spent and his character sacrificed!

But why should we deal only with these special cases, when every form of sin is notoriously degrading! The very thought of prostituting the immortal mind to the service of the devil is abhorrent to our better feelings. And then, too, the endless and unutterable wretchedness, which, in the eternal world, is entailed upon the sinner, the bond-slave of Satan. Who can picture to himself, or paint for the benefit of others, the horrors of that world of woe, “where their worm dieth not, and where their

fire is not quenched!"—Alas! pen and pencil are alike powerless, and fail to draw an adequate picture of the inexpressible anguish and unutterable torments of the damned. The adorable Redeemer Himself faltered when He came to the mighty task, and only asked: "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"

Pause then, dear reader, pause long and earnestly before you bind yourself in a covenant of malediction to the accursed prince of darkness. Flee from the wicked tempter, and seek shelter and protection beneath the bloody cross and the outstretched arms of Jehovah Jesus! He speaks to you in the sweet, soft, tender accents of redeeming mercy, saying: "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Among these "all" that are so lovingly invited to His presence, you, even YOU, my reader, are also included! Then hasten to the Refuge——

Draw nigh to the Holy,  
Bend low at His throne ;  
There, penitent, lowly,  
Thy sinfulness own.  
There, there, if thou yearnest  
For pardon and rest,  
There, fervent and earnest,  
Prefer thy request.

Confess thy backsliding,  
Thy weakness and fears ;  
In Jesus confiding,  
There pour out thy tears :  
Think not He will scorn thee,  
Though wretched thy case ;  
His hand will adorn thee  
With garments of grace.

More precious than treasure,  
More vast than the sea,  
His love has no measure  
Nor limit to thee.  
His easy yoke wearing,  
His pleasure abide ;  
In all thy cross-bearing,  
He'll walk by thy side.

Fear not the wild clangor  
That Satan may raise,  
So God's righteous anger  
But pass from thy ways.  
Whom Christ has forgiven  
Goes safely along,  
Till in the high heaven  
He sings the new song.

Then kneel to the Holy,  
Bend low at His throne;  
There, penitent, lowly,  
Thy sinfulness own:  
There, Soul! if thou yearnest  
For pardon and rest,  
There, fervent and earnest,  
Prefer thy request.

—THOS. MACKELLAR.

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“Clad in the armor from above,  
Of heav'nly truth, and heav'nly love;  
Come now, my soul, the charm repel,  
And pow'rs of earth, and pow'rs of hell.”

VII. THE PAINFUL EXTREMITY, OR UTTER  
DESTITUTION.

“When lowest sunk with grief and shame,  
Filled with affliction’s bitter cup,  
Lost to relations, friends, and fame,  
Thy pow’rful hand can raise us up.”

ONE of the most touching and mournfully unique pictures that ever pen or pencil drew, is this of the Prodigal Son in the bitterness of his self-imposed and galling servitude. Freedom from restraint and full liberty to do just as he pleased, was what he contemplated by his “journey into a far country.” His youthful and ardent spirit yearned for a wider range and freer play; and, in the fond hope of finding this fancied blessing, he abandoned home and all its sweet and cherished endearments, and ventured out cautiously, at first, by way of experiment, upon the great sea of life. His earlier experience, abroad, may possibly have been satisfactory, and so may have given him pleasing assurance as regards the special policy



pursued. Public life, in its first and untried stages, seemed bright and fair, and exhibited some soft and delicate touches of the beautiful and sublime. Indeed it may have secured for the Prodigal much in the way of refined and elevating enjoyment; but this pleasing vision or dream of bliss was soon dissipated, and the fancied sweets, exhaling from a thousand beautiful flowers, proved to be but the floating and nauseating vapors of wormwood and of gall.

The extremity of his lot—his bodily privations and mental anguish—is depicted in strong and vivid colors, and brought before us, with resistless power, in the sacred narrative. Listen to the sad story. “And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks which the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him.” What, we ask, could be more painfully touching, life-like, and singularly characteristic than this simple and unadorned picture of the poor wanderer! We seem, in fancy, to see the weary, way-worn pilgrim, now fully conscious of his error, pensively sitting beneath some spreading oak or pendant willow, pondering

over his past life and conduct, and sadly bewailing the unfortunate course that he had pursued, in so hastily leaving his father's house. And, as he now turned back, in imagination, to the loved scenes of his innocent childhood and early youth, and re-enacted, in fancy at least, the pleasant melodrame of his early life, he felt only the more keenly the terrible bleakness and desolation of his present lonely and painful situation. His heart sank within him as he realized for the first time, probably, the fearful mistake which he had made.

The poor unfortunate one, who, alienated in his affections, could no longer content himself in the magnificent and well-furnished palace, nor feel himself at ease in the friendly presence of father, and mother, and brother, and sister, now sits, lonely and forsaken, a hungry sentinel over the feeding swine. "He would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat." The lowest and filthiest denizens of the forest and the field fared better than the luckless son of a kind and amiable father—the child of a splendid home, deemed worthy to be

the representative of the kingdom of God—the home of the blessed saints! And, yet, what countless multitudes of poor, sinning, erring, and weary ones, who, by reason of their high birth and descent from Christian parents, are eminently entitled to a place and a name in God's house, are found in all parts of the world, hopeless and cheerless, "stumbling upon the dark mountains."

Professor Trench truly and beautifully remarks that the use, in this connection, of the word "belly" indicates the deep depths of degradation to which the poor Prodigal was now reduced. The higher and nobler pursuits of life, the dearest interests of the immortal soul, and the praiseworthy ambition of leading an honorable life, all seem to have been forgotten, in the keen sense of present distress, while the supply of his physical wants occupied his sole and undivided attention. In this fine and delicate touch of the Master's hand, the picture taken down and preserved by the pious care of the inspired pensman, we are brought, as it were, face to face with the Prodigal, and

see as in a divinely polished mirror the extremity of his sufferings—the unfathomable depth of his degradation. But the case of the Prodigal is not singular and exclusive in this regard. His case is but the mirror and reflected image of all the unhappy wanderers from God's house, and its sweet and blissful communion. He, who has once tasted the sweetness of God's love—the length, and breadth, and highth, and depth of the Divine compassion, can never again wholly forget what he once witnessed and enjoyed in connection with God's house. Such an one can neither live nor die as a poor, unenlightened, heathen. In all his reckless wanderings in the wide world, his thoughts will instinctively revert to the scenes of his earlier and more innocent life. Beautiful and entrancing images of the father's house—of brothers, sisters, and friends—of the family altar, and of the dear old church, in which he felt the first throbbings of a new-born soul, experienced the earliest acts of communion with the higher and holier world of life and light, in Christ Jesus, and gratefully lisped his

first "Abba, Father," in the sweet consciousness of pardon and peace,—images of all these things, sweet and charming beyond conception, will naturally loom up before the rapt vision of the once faithful, but now estranged and wandering child of the covenant!

Do we complain of this deep, durable, ineradicable in-burning of the Divine image in our souls? Do we regret that all the impressions of our earlier and more innocent life and experience, in connection with the blessed worship in our Father's house, are thus indelibly stamped upon the soul, and linger lovingly around us like so many radiant and sheltering visions of beauty and power? Nay, rather, we rejoice that it is so. We feel thankful to the bountiful giver of all good, that "the dew of our youth" remains thus permanently upon us, and serves us, in all our wanderings, as an ever-present and faithful monitor. This is that blessed "unction from the Holy One" which we have received; and, in the strength of which we can encourage each other, and each speak, in words of sweetest balm, to his fellows: "The

anointing, which ye have received of Him, abideth in you; and ye need not that any man teach you: but, as the same anointing teacheth you all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it *hath* taught you, ye shall abide in Him."

But it was evidently this lingering presence of the deserted father, and brother, and home with its endearments, that rendered the spiritual desolation of his exiled state the more sensibly painful and insufferable to the weary wanderer. Only in his present distress—in the overwhelming sense of his pressing physical wants, which, like a crushing incubus, lay with mountain weight upon his tortured soul, he had measurably forgotten the higher and holier interests of the spiritual, invisible, and eternal world. And the same sad experience, also, we often make. If affluence is fraught with danger, so also is poverty; and if the rich man, "clothed in purple and fine linen, and faring sumptuously every day," was tempted to forget God and neglect his fellow-men, so also was Lazarus, "full of sores, and desiring to be fed



with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table," in danger of becoming impatient, and sinning away the benefit of the severe but merciful trial, to which he was subjected. He, however, stood the test, and thus received the blessedness of the man that "endureth temptation."

Let us go back once more in imagination to the lonely fields, so bleak and barren, in which the greedy swine were feeding, and briefly review one other feature in this picture of wretchedness and woe. The poor captive—the slave of lust—earnestly desired to share the scanty and insipid fare of the hungry swine, "and no man gave unto him." Even a stern and heartless stoic could weep tears of blood, as he gazes upon this picture of utter destitution, which is here brought into view. Who can fathom the depth of pent-up anguish that struggled in the bleeding heart of the once delicate and happy son, leaning composedly upon the bosom of a fond and doting parent, but now homeless, friendless, desolate! Angels looked down upon that scene of extremity with unwonted ardor of feel-



ing and overpowering depth of compassion; and even the pitiless and scoffing aliens, among whom the Prodigal sojourned, must have felt a thrill of secret horror as they looked upon the helpless stranger, and experienced some tenderness towards the homeless and friendless wanderer. Over and above all, there sweetly lingered around the son that was "lost," a bright, soft, soothing image of an absent "father," which whispered to him, in accents of sweetest, tenderest love, reminding him, at times, of pity in the heart of the distant one, who, in the depth of his sorrow, sat there pensively watching and looking out for the early, penitent, permanent return of the poor Prodigal.

#### LOVE'S CALL.

"Acquaint thee, O mortal, acquaint thee with God,  
And joy like the sunshine shall beam on thy road,  
And peace, like the dew-drop, shall fall on thy head,  
And sleep, like an angel, shall visit thy bed.

Acquaint thee, O mortal, acquaint thee with God,  
And He shall be with thee when fears are abroad,  
Thy safe-guard in danger, that threatens thy path,  
Thy joy in the valley and shadow of death."

## RESPONSE.

Long unafflicted, undismayed,  
In pleasure's path, secure, I strayed :  
Thou mad'st me feel Thy chast'ning rod,  
And straight I turned unto my God.

What tho' it pierced my fainting heart,  
I bless Thine hand that caused the smart;  
It taught my tears awhile to flow,  
But saved me from eternal woe !

O hadst Thou left me unchastised,  
Thy precepts I had still despised ;  
And still the snare, in secret laid,  
Had my unwary feet betrayed.

I love Thee, therefore, O my God,  
And breathe toward Thy dear abode ;  
Where, in Thy presence fully blest,  
Thy chosen saints for ever rest.

VIII. THE INTROVERSION; OR, PENITENT  
SELF-RECOLLECTION.

“ Why should a living man complain  
Of deep distress within,  
Since every sigh and every pain  
Is but the fruit of sin ? ”

THE painfully trying ordeal through which the poor Prodigal had to pass, in his self-imposed servitude, wrought a salutary change in his views and feelings, and inclined him seriously to turn his attention to better and worthier objects. Indeed such is the natural effect of suffering, universally, upon the sensitive heart. The subduing power of physical want, as in the present case, generally comes into play, and shows itself in a willingness to acknowledge, at least, some kind of dependence on a higher power. In the present instance, the effect was singularly corrective and salutary. Hence the expression—“When he came to himself.” This language assumes, in the case of the hapless wanderer, a state bordering on moral insanity, of which he needs to be

effectually cured before he is able to retrace his steps. And is not this representation eminently just and fitting, as applied to all men universally?

When we bear in mind that our entire spiritual nature is constitutionally fitted, and, indeed, expressly designed for communion with God, the Father of our spirits; and that it can not possibly reach its final consummation, except as it stands in this normal relation to the fountain of all life and blessedness, we see, at once, how eminently true it is, that the poor wandering sinner is really and truly in a state of moral derangement—out of himself, thrown from the proper centre of his inner being. His spiritual nature being thus effectually unhinged, his mental vision distorted, and his life wicked and perverse, he, accordingly, needs, in the deepest and truest sense of the terms, a “coming to himself.” Without such a complete and radical inversion of his inner life, as is indicated by this coming to himself, the poor Prodigal could never have come to see things in the same light in which he finally did see them, just at

this point. And is it not virtually thus with us all? Are we not spiritually blind, yea, even dead in trespasses and in sins? Is not the mind by nature so completely warped and blinded, and the heart so strangely perverted, that, in the strong language of the sacred Scriptures, we must be divinely illuminated, renewed, and born again or regenerated? In wandering away from God we follow our own poor shadows, while the pure and blessed light of heaven is effectually excluded from the paths of our feet. O how true is it that we play the part of maniacs—of raving madmen—in reference to our spiritual and eternal interests! Objects of infinite importance are passed over and disposed of with scarcely a serious thought, while to the most trivial interests of earth, we readily and zealously devote our best energies, and, in their pursuit, put forth our greatest and most strenuous efforts. From these delusive reveries we must be aroused; and, emerging from the thick darkness, that naturally surrounds us, we must place ourselves in natural and normal relation to the Eternal Light. Like

the awakened Prodigal, we must thoughtfully come to ourselves, and, with altered views and altered feelings, we must begin a new life—a life of faith in the Son of God!

Such evidently was the case, in substance, with the Prodigal Son. “When he came to himself” he looked at things in an entirely new light, and contemplated entirely new and higher objects. His thoughts instinctively reverted to the scenes of his childhood and all its innocent sports—to the paternal mansion with its rich and abundant supplies of good things—to the humble domestics, even, in that once so dear and cherished home, with their more than needed supplies—to everything, in fact, which entered into the history of his early life, and its bright and pleasing associations. All the loved scenes of that distant home passed in quick succession and vivid review before his mental vision, and elicited a train of the most serious and important reflections. He very thoughtfully contrasted his present wretched and forlorn condition with that of the lowest menials in his forsaken home. “How many

hired servants in my father's house have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger."

Such an expression of painful recollection was exactly suited to his deplorable condition, and depicts in strong and vivid colors the ineffably wretched state in which the poor sinner, also, now finds himself, in a spiritual point of view—insanely "stumbling upon the dark mountains." O that men would consider! that every impenitent sinner could fully realize his true condition, and, like the Prodigal, penitently confess and bewail his lost and ruined state! When once men are brought thus far, in the way of divine illumination, then there is hope of their full and final recovery. But it is well known that the great difficulty in saving men lies precisely here—in their total insensibility to sin, and inability to see themselves in the true light. Only as we go out of ourselves, and view things in the light of eternity, do we come to a true knowledge of our spiritual condition. The poor Prodigal, enslaved to sense, and wholly at the mercy of these low and unworthy objects, had apparently no conscious-



ness of his degraded condition; and, only, when aroused from his fatal reverie and delivered from his foreign bondage, literally "coming to himself," did he have power to reflect calmly and dispassionately upon his unfortunate state. In the light and glory of this new position he raised himself above sense and sensual things, and estimated properly the home and home comforts which he had ingloriously forsaken!

If we look at ourselves, and the relation we sustain to the spirit world; and, then, call to mind how little we appreciate the things of God, have we not abundant reason to be alarmed, and, with the repentant Prodigal earnestly to retrace our steps? How little, as a general thing, do we appreciate our high and holy privileges, and order our conduct in a way at all worthy of these heavenly realities? Only when we come to ourselves, are we in a position to estimate our religious advantages at their just value. O that we might turn away from the low and groveling things of sense, and most earnestly seek "the things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God!"

Tell me, O sinner, what is it, that in this world of sense, so pleases you, and throws such a fatal spell around you? Are you sure that you are not degrading yourself immeasurably when you stoop to play the swine-herd in the fields of an alien? Is there any thing in the spiritual destitution of that world of sense which you have chosen, that really pleases you, or affords you any genuine satisfaction? Why do you continue in the service of a foreign tyrant, when this self-imposed servitude brings you nothing but wretchedness and want? Why should you be willing to famish the immortal mind, when heaven's richest treasures are freely offered to your acceptance? And think of what you thus lose in point of heavenly advantages—the rich and boundless provisions in your Father's house. But, alas, these gifts of the divine bounty are but a small portion of the actual loss you sustain. God Himself is the portion of His people. His boundless love is the source of our highest blessedness. And will you disregard Him, who is so kind, so patient, so long-suffering, and so ready to forgive?

Look up, poor wanderer of earth, and see in yonder world of light and glory the beautiful home, which, by your sins and misdeeds, you have forsaken and lost! But, look again, and, as you gaze with intense interest upon its massive walls, and pearly gates, and streets of solid gold, seek to revive in your callous heart the remembrance of that dear home, as the city of your God—your city—your eternal home! For has not God promised to admit to that blessed city all that penitently seek for admission there? “Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.” Here is hope; here is encouragement. To all that are “weary and heavy-laden” the benevolent Redeemer promises rest. He kindly invites them to His presence, and encourages them to hope in His mercy. Look, O sinner, with an eager, steady, hopeful eye upon the blessed home of the saints—“the city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.” Say to yourself this is the city of God—the home of my Father; and, as you carefully contrast the in-

effable glory and blessedness of its pure inhabitants, with the unutterable degradation and wretchedness of your own condition, join the repentant Prodigal in saying, "How many hired servants in my Father's house have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger;" and to this sad confession of your misery add the beautiful and touching prayer: "God be merciful to me, a sinner."

"COME TO ME."

With tearful eyes I look around,  
 Life seems a dark and stormy sea;  
 Yet, 'midst the gloom, I hear a sound,  
 A heavenly whisper—'Come to me.'

It tells me of a place of rest—  
 It tells me where my soul may flee;  
 Oh! to the weary, faint, opprest,  
 How sweet the bidding—'Come to me.'

When nature shudders, loth to part  
 From all I love, enjoy, and see;  
 When a faint chill steals o'er my heart,  
 A sweet voice utters—'Come to me.'

Come, for all else must fail and die,  
 Earth is no resting-place for thee;  
 Heavenward turn thy weeping eye,  
 I am thy portion—'Come to me.'

O voice of mercy! voice of love!  
In conflict, grief, and agony,  
Support me, cheer me from above,  
And gently whisper—' Come to me.'

—FROM THE SHAWM.



"Flee as a bird to your mountain,  
Thou who art weary of sin;  
Fly to the clear-flowing fountain,  
There thou mayst wash and be clean;  
Fly, for the avenger is near thee;  
Fly, for the Saviour will hear thee;  
He on his bosom will bear thee,  
Sheltered so tenderly there."

IX. THE MANLY RESOLUTION; OR, "I WILL  
ARISE AND GO TO MY FATHER."

"Bowed down beneath a load of sin,  
By Satan sorely prest;  
By war without, and fears within,  
I come to Thee for rest."

THE poor penitent, bewailing his exiled and forlorn state, did not stop short with his tears and his act of self-recollection, but piously added to his agonized confession the better and nobler part of an earnest and manly resolution. "I will arise, and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against Heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants."

Many good and well-meaning people, startled from their slumbers, make a fatal mistake just at this point. They go, in their experience of the world's vanity and inability to satisfy the heart, as far as did the Prodigal; but here they stop short, and suffer the salutary impressions, that have been made upon them, to pass away

without leaving any permanently good results behind. The painful experience of the Prodigal; his strong and overwhelming sense of the vanity of the outside world; the lively recollection he had of the paternal mansion and its abundant provisions; and the utterly hopeless nature of his present condition, all conspired to urge him forward in the course of penitence and faith on which he had entered. He must do more than simply lament his present misery. He must arise from his wretched state, and hasten into the presence of his injured father. He must freely and fully unbosom himself in the presence of his loving parent, and seek access to his benevolent heart. He must seek pardon and reconciliation, and re-admission to the paternal mansion. He must by all means have a name and a place in the old homestead, even if it be but among the hired servants. For his contrite and bleeding heart, the lowest and meanest place in the house of his father is far better than are the most splendid and fascinating places in the open and apostate world. In the power of this new and salutary expe-



rience and better knowledge, he says: "I will arise and go to my father."

What pathos, what beauty, what overwhelming and subduing power is found in these few and simple words of the penitent wanderer!

In pronouncing these sweet and blessed words of hope, his tongue, unused to such language, might well falter, and his repentant heart quiver and throb in his heaving bosom, as he raised his aching head, and manfully nerved his contrite spirit to utter the beautiful and touching words: "I will arise and go to my father." To speak forth this noble resolution required, in his case, an immense effort; but the "unction from the Holy One" lay like a healing balm, more softly and soothingly than that of Gilead, upon his wounded spirit. And, as he began to give utterance to the beautiful words of deep, penitent, heartfelt contrition, they ascended, like a radiant cloud of burning incense, slowly and calmly to the upper world, and served as a harbinger or preveining sentinel, to open and prepare the way for the presentation of the subsequent prayer. How pleasant

and soul-refreshing to contemplate the poor Prodigal at this interesting point in the history of his new and wonder-working experience. We are disposed to forget, and to cover up with the mantle of charity, all his previous offences and short-comings. We feel ourselves instinctively drawn to his person, as we gaze upon the beautiful sight, and our warmest sympathies are elicited in his behalf, as we hear him saying, in accents of deep and tender emotion, intermingled with sighs and tears, and struggling with fear: "I will arise, and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against Heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son."

The form and spirit of this generous confession, which he contemplated making, deserve our highest admiration. For subdued pathos, tenderness and delicacy of feeling, penitent grief, and heartfelt contrition, they are, in every respect, unparalleled—absolutely inapproachable!

Look again and again at the extraordinary scene, and listen attentively to the sweet,

beautiful, and charming words until they burn themselves indelibly upon your heart and mind; so that, in case of need, they may at any time spring up spontaneously in your own bosom, and serve you a like purpose with that of the repentant, sad, and heart-stricken Prodigal! "I will arise, and go to my father"—go to him with my burdens and my sins resting upon my weary heart; go to him with sighs and tears, confessing my shameful apostasy; go to him with a heart full of sorrow, and struggling with mingled emotions of hope and fear; go to him, humbly confessing my unworthiness to a place in that dear abandoned home of my childhood and youth; go to him deeply bewailing my shameless ingratitude, and yet, in the power of those lingering remains of an earlier love, seek admittance to his parental heart; go to him confidently, and submit myself, absolutely, and without any further conditions, to his merciful arbitration; go to him, finally, in prayer, and say, "Father, I have sinned against Heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son."

But, Oh! how can a repentant child, once more deeply sensible of the worth and preciousness of a parent, kind, tender-hearted, and compassionate, and fully conscious too, that, only in a parent's love, and with a parent's approbation, can peace and happiness be found,—how can a child, in such circumstances, bear the thought of being disowned, rejected, excluded from the paternal mansion, and denied the parental love and approbation! That, indeed, would be the bitterest ingredient in the cup of sorrow—the very essence of eternal death—the wormwood and the gall! And, yet, the poor Prodigal seems to have had a kind of dark presentiment that such, possibly, might be the case. Hence, in his contemplated confession, he wisely supplements his acknowledgment of unworthiness, with the prayer: “Make me as one of thy hired servants.” How very natural, and how perfectly accordant with our own feelings in similar circumstances! Have we not often come into the presence of God with similar feelings, and with exactly the same expressions? Have we not sometimes felt as though we could

hardly lift up our eyes to Heaven, because of the deep and overwhelming consciousness of our sin and guilt, and consequent unworthiness to be counted among "the sons of God?" And, if this be the case with us, even after we have experienced the sweet and blessed peace of pardoned sin and conscious reconciliation with God in the blood of the cross, much more must such feelings struggle in the bosom of the poor sinner, as he comes for the *first* time to seek, at the hand of God, the blessings of pardon and peace. The Prodigal had been a "son," probably, in the higher sense; and at one time, had his place in the father's house, and around the parental board. His experience, in such case, would rather be that of a delinquent church member, who, having been saved from the corruptions that are in the world, afterwards returned again to its "beggarly elements." But, whatever may have been the exact spiritual status of the Prodigal, his example is still of full force, even in the case of those, who for the first time, attracted by the dying Saviour, seek shelter and deliverance in His bloody cross.

“Him that cometh unto Me,” says the compassionate Redeemer, “I will in no wise cast out.” So the poor terror-stricken paralytic, brought to Him on a couch, and not even daring to ask for the temporal blessing which he craved, awakened His compassion, and obtained a blessing far beyond what he anticipated or even desired. “And Jesus, seeing their faith, said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee.” After this deeper and more malignant part of his ailment, and, possibly, the cause also of his physical malady, was removed, Jesus graciously added, also, the other and smaller blessing: “Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house.” And, in obedience to this challenge, he immediately “arose and departed to his house.” Or, as a still more illustrious example of the compassionate love and saving power of our great High Priest, look at the affecting scene which occurred in the house of Simon, the Pharisee. We shall give the incident in the beautiful and touching language of the Evangelist St. Luke (chap. vii. 36-47.) Having received an invitation, Jesus



“went into the Pharisee’s house, and sat down to meat. And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee’s house, brought an alabaster-box of ointment, and stood at His feet behind Him weeping; and began to wash His feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head; and kissed His feet, and anointed them with the ointment.” To this extraordinary conduct the Pharisee naturally enough objected, as derogatory to his illustrious guest—the prophet of God. But Jesus, mildly rebuking his over exacting and too ceremonious host, commended the deep contrition, and loving faith of the poor penitent at His feet, saying to Simon: “There was a certain creditor which had two debtors; the one owed him five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me, therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose that he to whom he forgave most. And He said unto him thou hast rightly judged. And He turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou



this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet; but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman, since the time I came in, hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. Wherefore I say unto thee, her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little. And He said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven. And they that sat at meat with Him, began to say within themselves, who is this that forgiveth sins also? And He said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace."

The poor penitent, whose case we have just recited, had no doubt her secret misgivings as she approached the pure and sinless Redeemer of the world; and, had not her case been so desperate, and her faith in the compassionate love of Christ so strong and overpowering, she might well have hesitated, and stood aghast at the terrible presumption of going into His

presence and touching His sacred person. But her victorious faith was fully equal to the mighty task, and, in the power of that love which surmounted every obstacle, she carried away with her the blessed assurance of pardon and peace. A like encouraging instance of success in the case of a poor penitent, we have in the heart-stricken publican, who, "standing afar off, did not so much as lift up his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying: God be merciful to me, a sinner;" and, in the power and efficacy of this short and unseemly prayer, "he went down to his house justified rather than the other"—the proud Pharisee, who "thanked God that he was not like other men." And justly so, according to the fixed and unalterable principles which govern the kingdom of God: "For every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

This, indeed, is good news to the awakened and trembling sinner, as he comes, in penitence and faith, to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, with the appropriate and touching

confession, "Father, I have sinned against Heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants." In view of the beautiful and instructive instances already adduced, we feel authorized to encourage any and every awakened sinner to imitate the example of the Prodigal. We feel sure that the same blessed results will invariably follow, in every such case; and, that, starting out in the spirit of genuine repentance, and making humble confession of his sins to the offended majesty of Heaven, every returning Prodigal shall find immediate pardon and acceptance with God, in Christ.

And, now, addressing myself once more to all such as are out on the highway of sin and transgression, let me affectionately urge and tenderly beseech you to go and do like the Prodigal. Realize to yourselves, clearly and vividly, the deep, unfathomable depths of degradation to which sin has reduced you—the painful and heart-rending privations to which you are subjected in your foreign and self-im-

posed servitude—the neglect which you have to endure, even at the hands of the very persons who have enticed you out into the by-paths of sin and folly; and, having brought these things in earnest review before your mental vision, contrast them with that “fullness of joy,” and those “pleasures for evermore,” which are found in the Church of Christ—the quiet, blessed, peaceful palaces, and “many mansions” in the house of your forsaken God and Father! Do as did the Prodigal, when, awakened from his fatal delusion, he said, “I will arise, and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against Heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.” While uttering this penitent prayer, you will hear, already in the dim distance, the sweet whispering of a Father’s heart, saying, “Be of good cheer, my son, my daughter, thy sins be forgiven thee.”

Having, then, before us the beautiful example of the Prodigal Son, contrite and heart-broken, and also the many encouraging promises of the

Divine Word, we may surely recommend to all weary wanderers—the erring and sinning ones of earth—the solemn challenge of the popular Hymn, addressed to the poor penitent, and, also, the generous and hearty response, which, by the same Hymn, is put into his quivering lips:—

## THE EFFORT.

Come, humble sinner, in whose breast  
 A thousand thoughts revolve ;  
 Come, with your guilt and fear opprest,  
 And make this last resolve :

“ I'll go to Jesus, though my sin  
 Hath like a mountain rose ;  
 I know his courts, I'll enter in,  
 Whatever may oppose.

“ Prostrate I'll lie before His throne,  
 And there my guilt confess ;  
 I'll tell him, I'm a wretch undone,  
 Without His sov'reign grace.

“ Perhaps He will admit my plea,  
 Perhaps will hear my pray'r ;  
 But if I perish, I will pray,  
 And perish only there.

“ I can but perish if I go,  
 I am resolved to try ;  
 For, if I stay away, I know  
 I must for ever die !”

X. THE PROMPT ACTION; OR, BACK TO THE  
FATHER'S HOUSE.

"It is a weary way, and I am faint;  
I pant for purer air and fresher springs;  
O Father! take me home; there is a taint,  
A shadow on earth's purest, brightest things.  
This world is but a wilderness to me,  
There is no rest, my God, apart from Thee!"

FROM the deep and solemn earnestness of the resolution formed and enunciated by the repentant Prodigal, and brought to our notice in the preceding section, we were encouraged to hope for something still better in the future, namely, his penitent return to the home of his early youth. This better and nobler part we now have before us; we mean, as already intimated, his departure from the land of his late exile and bitter servitude, his return to his injured father, his confession, and his gracious reception, on the part of his loving and indulgent parent. The record is very brief, but beautiful: "And he arose, and came to his father." He did not act like so many delin-



quents now-a-days, who, when called to duty, imitate the bad example of the younger of two sons in another parable. He rather did as the elder son in that remarkable story. Here is the whole parable, which is well worthy of careful perusal and earnest study. "A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said—'Son, go work to-day in my vineyard.' He answered and said, 'I will not;' but afterwards he repented, and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, 'I go, Sir;' and went not."

Not basely and deceitfully, like this younger of the two sons, did the awakened Prodigal. His experience was the exact opposite. He had hastily and inconsiderately left his early home, and plunged headlong into a course of sensuality, and experienced all the evil consequences and bitter fruits of such a vile and unworthy course. When, however, the intensity of his sufferings once more brought him to his senses, he, in the strength of his earlier and better principles, firmly resolved to retrace his



truant steps; and, no sooner was this manly resolution formed, than "he arose, and came to his father."

What a beautiful example for our imitation does this noble conduct of the Prodigal afford! How natural was it in his case; and how natural, too, would it seem to be for us all to imitate his wise and salutary course. But, O, how seldom do we find the good feelings of the heart, which, at times, spring up in us, by a kind of divine impulse, properly husbanded, cherished, and practically improved! In most instances of the kind, these better feelings and nobler impulses are thoughtlessly treated, and suffered to pass away, without leaving even a trace of their presence in the heart. How inconsiderately do we often act in reference to these secret inspirations of the Almighty, so evidently designed to lead us to the mercy-seat! We trifle and sport with the highest and holiest things, as though they were of no use, while we often take the greatest pains to attend to our lower and perishable interests. Here, in the example of the returning Prodigal, are we

to learn a lesson of the highest wisdom; and, by imitating his deeply earnest and successful course, we shall find rest to our weary souls! We, too, must arise, and go to our Father—the blessed God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and seek for pardon and reconciliation in the blood of the everlasting covenant!

It is of infinite importance for us to see to it, that when a good resolution is formed, it be also faithfully carried out; otherwise it will do us little or no good. “For, if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer,” says St. James, “he is like a man beholding his natural face in a glass; for, he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he, being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.”

To show the practical bearing of these remarks, especially, the pregnant words of St. James, I will refer to several facts, which came under my own personal observation, and serve to illustrate and confirm the sentiments expressed.

Some twenty-five years ago I was called upon, very unexpectedly, to preach a sermon at Elizabethtown, in my native state. Having no preparation whatever, at the time, my mind was very much agitated; but, while thinking over the matter, the affecting words of the prophet Jeremiah, uttered in the name of the suffering church, came suddenly into my mind: "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of His fierce anger." In introducing my subject, I stated that this was the language of the church, in the deep afflictions which were then upon her; but that, in consequence of the intimate relation subsisting between Christ and His church, the words might be very justly applied to Him. Hence, we might conceive of Christ, as wounded and grieved by the sins and inconsistencies of men, even those of His own household—"crucified afresh and put to an open shame," as St. Paul says. Of these, the deepest and most galling afflictions, Jesus, the "man of sorrows and ac-

quainted with grief" was uttering His pathetic complaints, and appealing to those that were passing by for sympathy and compassion. In illustration of this appeal I referred to a painting on a tavern-sign, which I had often noticed, representing a deadly conflict between a white man and an Indian. The wounded savage lay upon his left side, propped up on his arm, while, with his right hand, he firmly grasped the bayonet of the white man's gun, deeply imbedded in his bosom, his upturned and glaring eyes, at the same time, intently fixed upon those of his superior antagonist, and, with an expression of intensest agony, upon his countenance, apparently pleading most earnestly for pity and compassion at the hands of his assailant.

Many years after the above incident occurred, I put up at a public house in the city of Harrisburg, when I noticed behind the counter a young man evidently uneasy and deeply agitated. After walking back and forward several times and casting his eyes upon me, he said, "Are you a preacher?" I told him I was. "Did you ever preach at Chambersburg?" I

answered that I did preach there once. "When?" I said it was during the Mexican war, when a number of soldiers were lying over, there, in their transit. After a short pause, he said, "That's not the time; did you ever preach at Elizabethtown?" I told him I did. "And did you refer to a certain picture on a tavern-sign?" I replied that I did refer to such a picture in illustration of the sufferings of Christ at the hands of sinners. "Well, I can never forget that," said he, "it has been sticking to me ever since." Such, as near as I can now remember, were the words of the youth. His countenance indicated irregular habits; otherwise he was perfectly respectful and gentlemanly. He had evidently been deeply affected by the sign-picture, which, from his habits of life, may have particularly arrested his attention. But, whatever impressions may have been made on his mind, and whatever resolutions he may have formed at the time, it is very evident, that, up to that time, he had not carried out his good resolutions, or improved his impressions. What became of him afterwards God only knows.



About the same time that I had this interview with the interesting young stranger, apparently so unfortunate, I was instructing a class of young persons preparatory to confirmation. One day there sat among these interesting youths an old lady—aged four-score years—who seemed very attentive to what was said. When the services were closed, she arose, and came tottering up the aisle to the chancel, and said, “Would you give me one of these little books?”—Catechisms—“Certainly,” said I; and, at the same time, handed her one. Next week, and next, and so on, regularly, she came and took her seat among the interesting group of young persons, that were accustomed to meet there week after week for religious instruction. When the time for Holy Communion arrived, she also made application for Church-membership, and was confirmed along with the remaining members of the class. Faithfully and lovingly did she serve her divine Lord and Master for about one year, when, amidst the tears and sorrows of many, she passed from the Church militant, on earth, to

the Church triumphant, in heaven. Her corpse we laid hopefully in the grave, as a precious seed, to be revived and raised up again at the last day.

These two cases, in some respects similar, and, yet, presenting a world-wide-difference, in another respect, are but specimens of like instances which are daily occurring in all parts of the Christian world. But, however common such cases may be, they are none the less instructive, but illustrate a great principle, and are, in the highest degree, suggestive. They show conclusively, that resolutions alone, however good and praiseworthy, are by no means sufficient. We must do more than this. The Prodigal "arose and came to his father." We also must arise and go to our Father—the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; go to Him with penitent and contrite hearts, and, in the deep agony of our souls, make confession of our sins, and, especially, our shameless ingratitude, in forsaking the giver of every good and perfect gift, and exchanging the blessed worship of God's house for the poor and "beggarly elements" of this fallen world!



But we need to be, especially, on our guard in case we have been divinely illuminated, and brought to experience, more or less, "the powers of the world to come," lest we sin against these highest and holiest manifestations of the Divine love and compassion. "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation," says the blessed Redeemer. "And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God," says the Apostle, "whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption." We must not only hear the words of eternal life and salvation, and, hearing, come to ourselves, and, in thought and feeling, turn back to our Father's house and worship; but we must, also, arise and go to our Father, actually and permanently, in the way of a full and everlasting surrender of ourselves to God, in Christ, who says "Come unto ME all ye that labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest."

To the Saviour's merciful invitation, so freely extended to all the "weary and heavy-laden," to come unto Him, the poor penitent most heartily responds:—

## "JUST AS I AM."

Just as I am—without one plea,  
But that Thy blood was shed for me,  
And that Thou bidd'st me come to Thee,  
O Lamb of God, I come!

Just as I am—and waiting not  
To rid my soul of one dark blot,  
To Thee, whose blood can cleanse each spot,  
O Lamb of God, I come!

Just as I am—though tossed about,  
With many a conflict, many a doubt,  
Fightings within, and fears without,  
O Lamb of God, I come!

Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind,—  
Sight, riches, healing of the mind,  
Yea, all I need, in Thee I find,  
O Lamb of God, I come!

Just as I am, Thou wilt receive,  
Wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve,  
Because Thy promise I believe,  
O Lamb of God, I come!

Just as I am, Thy love, unknown,  
Has broken every barrier down;  
Now to be Thine, yea, Thine alone,  
O Lamb of God, I come!

—CHARLOTTE ELLIOTT.

XI. THE GRACIOUS RECEPTION AND  
RECONCILIATION.

“Am I called?—O joy of joys!  
Earth, I spurn thy gilded toys!  
Washed, redeemed by precious blood,  
Heir of bliss—a child of God!”

THE poor Prodigal started on his painfully interesting and important mission, hoping soon to stand at the door of the dear old home; “but when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.” What a picture this for the hand of a skillful painter! What simplicity and beauty! What pathos and delicacy of feeling in these sublime and fascinating words! And what wondrous depths of love and compassion they reveal! Should we give reins to our fancy, we might easily imagine the heart-broken father, grieved at the absence of his beloved son, and deeply distressed on account of the misery which he knows he is enduring, sitting at the window of his now desolate home, silent

and pensive, looking out anxiously for the return of the lonely wanderer! Away off in the dim distance the eager eye of the father discerns a moving figure. As he gazes with intensest interest upon this strange object, coming still nearer and nearer, he at length recognizes in it the likeness of a man; and, as the possibility of its being his own erring son makes itself dimly felt, his swelling bosom heaves with alternate feelings of hope and fear. Ragged and covered with filth though he be, the poor pilgrim awakens in the heart of the anxious parent a strange feeling of sympathy, dim and undefined, indeed, yet sufficiently clear to suggest the possibility, likelihood, certainty, of its being his own son, passing in quick and thrilling flashes over his excited imagination. He goes out to meet the returning son, and in such haste as to encounter him while yet a "great way off." What an affecting scene this; and, yet, there are many such scenes continually witnessed in connection with the kingdom of God. Is not every case of repentance and genuine conversion the reflected image of this affecting scene? or,

rather, is not each successive instance of genuine repentance a true and substantial realization, in a higher form, of this return of the Prodigal, and his eager and joyous reception on the part of the father? Are we not informed in close connection with this very story of the Prodigal, that "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth?"

The beautiful and touching record proceeds: "but when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion on him, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him." These closing words or phrases give us an insight, as it were, into the father's benevolent heart, and disclose to us the deep fountains of his compassionate love and tenderness! Overpowered by the intensity of his feelings, and rushing into the presence of his son, he at once embraces him in token of his deathless affection, and imprints on his burning lips the kiss of peace. Every evidence of his boundless love and compassion must be brought to the notice of the abashed and trembling son, and

his quivering heart assured of an interest in the father's love. And what is this but an image and shadow-picture of that divine love, which, in all ages of the world, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ exercises towards His repentant children! Must we not all confess the sweet and blissful truth, that we too were met on our return, when yet a "great way off," and graciously embraced by our compassionate "Father in Heaven?" O what amazing depths of this same tender and compassionate love were disclosed to our wondering eyes, as we approached the blissful fountain of life and salvation, and stood in mute astonishment beneath the bloody cross! And as we gazed silently and adoringly upon that "marred" face, radiant with divinest love and compassion, and heard the sweet, soft, subduing voice of the dying Saviour, assuring us of an interest in His blood, did not we, also, feel the arms of eternal love around us, and the kiss of peace gently impressed upon our quivering lips by the now reconciled Father?

But why should we speak of that which



every child of grace has experienced to a greater or less extent? Should we not rather speak to the lowly and trembling sinner still out, indeed, on the public highway of the world, but, at the same time, deeply conscious of his need of mercy, and earnestly longing to get back to the Father's house? And, even though the reader should still be in the "far off country," feeding the filthy swine, and vainly desiring to "fill his belly with the husks which the swine did eat," we wish to speak to him of this tender love of the Eternal Father, and awaken in his bosom a feeling of home-sickness for that "house not made with hands, eternal, in the heavens—" the blessed home of the saints.

Hear, then, the voice of infinite love speaking to you—to all: "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" What sweet encouragement to the poor wanderer is found in this solemn declaration, on the part of God, that He has no pleasure in the death of



any of His creatures. Come, then, all ye that have been straying upon the barren mountains of sin, and seek forgiveness at the hands of your forsaken God and Father. Hear what the ascended Saviour says to strengthen and encourage you in the conflict: "Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out; and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God; and I will write upon him my new name."

The reader, it is hoped, will pardon us for introducing here the sweet and charming words of another familiar and favorite Hymn. They express exactly and very beautifully the feelings which, we may justly suppose, struggled in the bosom of the poor Prodigal at this particular stage of his experience; even as the poor sinner, pardoned, and re-admitted to communion with God, earnestly seeks, also, to be in the fellowship of His saints. Hence, the words of the Hymn:—

People of the living God,  
I have sought the world around ;  
Paths of sin and sorrow trod,  
Peace and comfort nowhere found ;  
Now to you my spirit turns,  
Turns—a fugitive unblest ;  
Brethren, where your altar burns,  
Oh! receive me into rest.

Lonely I no longer roam,  
Like the cloud, the wind, the wave ;  
Where you dwell shall be my home,  
Where you die shall be my grave ;  
Mine the God whom you adore—  
Your Redeemer shall be mine ;  
Earth can fill my soul no more,  
Every idol I resign !

## XII. THE GENEROUS CONFESSION AND REHABILITATION.

“O for this love, let rocks and hills  
Their lasting silence break,  
And all harmonious human tongues  
The Saviour’s praises speak.”

THE return of the Prodigal contemplated a full and honest confession. He, in fact, solemnly announced his purpose to make such a confession in the earliest stage of his contrition, when he said, “I will arise, and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against Heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.” In addition to this confession, he also designed offering up a special prayer. We have it in these humble and modest words: “Make me as one of thy hired servants.”

When, on his way to his father’s house, the Prodigal was unexpectedly met by his fond and indulgent parent, kindly embraced, and kissed, he nevertheless commenced making his confes-

sion, repeating it in nearly the same words in which it had been previously conceived. He had, at length, gone through with the confession, and was just on the point of following it up with the contemplated prayer, when he was suddenly interrupted by the extraordinary conduct of the father. He was going to say "make me as one of thy hired servants;" but that, says Archbishop Trench, would have been inappropriate, and not at all consonant with the merciful design of the father, or, rather, with the general tenor of the economy of grace, which, strictly speaking, does not admit of hired servants in God's house. The Prodigal, indeed, was going to utter the prayer; "but the father said to his servants, bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet."

What is the meaning of this language? What, for instance, shall we understand by the "robe," the "ring," and the "shoes," respectively? I think we may safely say, that, in these several articles of dress and ornament, we have what is so generally found to be

acknowledged, and referred to, in various ways, in the language of Christian devotion. The "robe" is that garment of salvation in which the blessed saints in heaven are represented as being clothed, thus fitting them for the pure and spotless life of the upper world. So St. John, in his splendid vision of the heavenly world, "saw a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, standing before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and they cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb." \* \* \* "And one of the elders answered, saying—What are these which are arrayed in white robes, and whence came they?" And being himself appealed to for an explanation the elder answered and said, "These are they, which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

This beautiful passage sufficiently indicates the nature and significance of the "robe," in

connection with this kindly reception of the poor Prodigal into favor, and his re-admittance to the paternal mansion. The nature of the place, and the character of the family there, required that he should be fitly clothed before re-entering the old homestead. This "robe" is also referred to in connection with the Parable of the marriage-feast, as the "wedding-garment," in the absence of which one of the guests was severely reprimanded by our Lord, and then ejected from the festive hall, and cast into outer darkness. This shows the absolute necessity of the happy guests—the heavenly inhabitants—being clothed in this festal garment or "white robe." The ascended Saviour, in His Epistle to the angel of the church in Sardis, warmly and encouragingly commends the few faithful ones, who had not "defiled their garments," but preserved them pure and unsullied; and then says of them: "They shall walk with me in white; for they are worthy." The white robe is, therefore, a necessary condition for admittance to the blessed home of the saints.

In the way of illustrating this item, I will



here relate, as it was told me, an incident which is said to have occurred in one of the interior counties of Pennsylvania, some years ago. A little child was taken down with a fatal disease. The parents had at one time been members of the Church, and their oldest children were, accordingly, baptized, and thus introduced into the church and covenant of God. In the course of time, however, the father for some reason became estranged from the church, and opposed to the ordinances of God's house. He became, in this way, a confirmed skeptic as regards infant baptism. Hence this sick child, one of the younger members of the family, had not been baptized. The little sufferer grew worse and worse; and, at length, drew near to the borderland. In some way, not explained, it got the impression that it ought to be baptized, and frequently spoke of it; but the father was inexorable, and would not listen to the simple and earnest pleadings of the child. At last, however, some of the friends interposed, and begged the father to send for a minister of the gospel to baptize the agonized child. But he still re-



fused. At length, the poor child, weary and exhausted, fell into a deep sleep, and was supposed to be dying. By and by, however, it awoke, opened its little eyes, and said, "I have been away off to a beautiful place, where there were a great many children all clothed in white robes, except myself; and, because I had not a clean garment, I could not remain there." Again and again, it begged piteously to be baptized, in order, as it said, that it also might have a white robe, and be admitted to that beautiful place. At length, through the interposition of friends, a minister was sent for, and the dying child baptized. It fell, a second time, into a deep sleep, and again appeared to be passing away. By and by, however, it once more opened its little eyes, and said, "I was again to that beautiful place, and had also a white garment like the rest of the children, and now I can go in and stay there." Soon after this it closed its weary eyes for the last time, on earth, and gently passed over the river, and took its place among the blessed ones in that beautiful home, which, in vision while here, it had been permitted to see.

This was only a dream, or a kind of dream-like vision of course; but dreams do sometimes indicate and foreshadow the realities of the waking and conscious state. This is especially the case in reference to things belonging to the spirit world. In this territory of the unseen and eternal, our senses, and even reason itself, are frequently at fault, and it is not impossible, nor even wholly improbable, that, in the sleeping state, when the eye is closed, and the outer world of sense is shut out from the soul, the power of communing with the things of the unseen and eternal world may be greater than in the waking state. At any rate, we need not wholly reject what in such circumstances comes within the experience of men. In the olden time the Lord frequently spake with and to men in dreams and visions; and, if it pleases Him, He may do so still, especially to confound the proud and skeptical!

But what of the "ring," and of the "shoes" that were put on his finger and on his feet? The former, I presume, was to be to the Prodigal a token of his full pardon, and re-adoption

into the family of which he had once been an acknowledged member, and from which he became separated by his departure, and residence in the "far-off country." The latter were intended to indicate his preparation for the Christian life—the obedient walk and conversation. So St. Paul exhorts the Ephesians to have their "feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace—" that is, to be qualified to walk in the way of God's commandments!

In making an application of these things to ourselves, we are especially reminded of the rich and abundant provision made for us in the Gospel of the grace of God. Not only does the good Lord pardon the poor penitent, as he retraces his steps, and seeks the face of his injured Father; but He also gives us such outward and sensible tokens of His forgiving love, that we cannot doubt of our acceptance and adoption. Such sacramental signs and seals of the invisible grace, bestowed on the humble penitent, are to be found in the Church of Christ as among her permanent arrangements. Wherefore "hear what the Spirit saith

unto the Churches: To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna; and I will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it." Here you have the appropriate and divinely designated outward tokens by which Jesus signifies and seals to us His eternal Love. And the weary wanderer himself, having just reached the turning point in his history—the all-important crisis, which had decided his fate, is now perfectly calm, and there is welling up in his reconciled and loving heart the sweet and soul-stirring prayer of the Christian poet:—

Jesus! lover of my soul,  
Let me to Thy bosom fly,  
While the raging billows roll,  
While the tempest still is high.  
Hide me, O my Saviour, hide,  
Till the storm of life is past  
Safe into the haven guide,  
O, receive my soul at last!

Other refuge have I none,  
Hangs my helpless soul on Thee  
Leave, ah! leave me not alone,  
Still support and comfort me.

All my trust on Thee is stayed,  
All my help from Thee I bring;  
Cover my defenceless head  
With the shadow of Thy wing!

Thou, O Christ, art all I want,  
All in all in Thee I find,  
Raise the fallen, cheer the faint,  
Heal the sick, and lead the blind.  
Just and holy is Thy name,  
I am all unrighteousness,  
Vile and full of sin I am,  
Thou art full of truth and grace.

Plenteous grace with Thee is found,  
Grace to pardon all my sin;  
Let the healing streams abound,  
Make and keep me pure within.  
Thou of life the fountain art,  
Freely let me take of Thee;  
Spring Thou up within my heart,  
Rise to all eternity!

—CHARLES WESLEY.

### XIII. THE WELCOME-HOME FESTIVITIES.

“ If 'tis sweet to mingle where  
Christians meet for social pray'r ;  
If 'tis sweet with them to raise  
Songs of holy joy and praise—  
Passing sweet that state must be,  
Where they meet eternally !

FREELY and without a single word of reproach, struggling with deepest emotion, did the injured father receive the poor, heart-broken, contrite Prodigal. In order to save his feelings, he even fore-stalled his humiliating prayer by hurriedly embracing him, and imprinting on his parched lips the kiss of peace. And he still further indicated the boundlessness of his compassion and the overflowing exuberance of his joy, by requesting the servants to bring forth the “best,” or, as it might be rendered, the “first robe”—that robe, which, by his sad departure, he had forfeited, but was now restored to him again. The “ring,” also, the token of reconciliation and peace, had to be put on his



finger; and the "shoes"—the significant symbol or "preparation of the gospel of peace"—must be put on his feet. Thus far the testimonials of his reconciliation were most ample and assuring; but, still, something more was necessary to complete this picture of gladness and joyous exultation. Hence the delighted father added: "And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat and be merry."

In these simple and unadorned expressions we have the beautiful welcome-home festivities brought to our notice. The extraordinary nature of these festivities required that the very best, which the now re-established and joyous home afforded, should be brought forth to give dignity and eclat to the solemn occasion. Here, indeed, we have in earthly form, what, in similar circumstances, is said to take place in the sphere of the spirit-world. "Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." Indeed, this idea of extraordinary rejoicing over the return of a poor sinner, runs through the whole course of divine revelation.



Everywhere the same representations are given in connection with the recovery of the lost and erring ones of earth. In the beautiful Parable of the "lost sheep," which is found in close connection with that of the Prodigal Son, we are informed, that, when the good shepherd, having found his straying sheep, "cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbors, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost." And then Jesus goes on to say, "that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons which need no repentance." The same thing precisely is said in connection with the Parable of the "ten pieces of silver." When the "lost" piece, after the most intense anxiety and the greatest efforts, was at length found, the good woman of the house, to whom these pieces had been entrusted, in like manner, called together *her* "friends and neighbors," saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost." Then immediately follows the explicit declaration of the Saviour, which we

have already cited, that "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."

These two cognate Parables bear a very strong resemblance to each other; and, yet, they differ, in some minor respects, very materially. The former—that of the "lost sheep" being brought home, and causing joy in heaven—refers more immediately to the final ingathering and future salvation of the sinner. Hence the scene of the rejoicing is above—in heaven. The latter—that of the "lost" piece being found, and causing "joy in the presence of the angels of God"—refers to the recovery of an erring one, stamped with the image of its sovereign, brought back to the communion of the Church militant. Hence the scene of the rejoicing is in the house of the woman, where the piece was lost—on earth. The angels, in whose presence the rejoicing takes place, are those blessed ones, "sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation." This two-fold joy—that in the Church militant, on earth, and that of the Church

triumphant, in heaven, is fitly represented by the beautiful and touching picture of the joyous festivities in the home of the now restored and re-adopted Prodigal. And why should there not have been this grand jubilee in the house of the once more reconciled, re-united, and happy family? And, now, transferring these thrilling scenes of an earthly transaction to the spiritual and eternal world, with what unspeakable joy and wondrous exultation will not the happy saints be finally welcomed and greeted, as they "enter in through the gates into the city," to take their allotted places around the eternal throne! In view of this glorious reception we are exhorted to make our "calling and election" sure. "For so," says the Apostle, "an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

The reasons for this extraordinary rejoicing were, in the opinion of the delighted father, amply sufficient to justify all that had been contemplated. "For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found."

It has been truly said that the recovery of anything which has been lost, occasions far greater satisfaction and more intense pleasure than what the simple possession of the same object naturally affords. Why it is so, it may not be easy for us to explain; but the fact itself is well-known and universally acknowledged. In the Parables of the "lost sheep," and of the "ten pieces of silver," this idea is brought out very strongly. The joy over one "sinner," who repented, and thus came back again to the deserted home, was greater, we are told, than that experienced over the "ninety and nine just persons," who needed no repentance, and, consequently, were not recovered from peril or loss. Thus the Parable of the "lost sheep," and that of the Prodigal Son mutually illustrate and explain each other; and, at the same time, furnish a key for the just appreciation of those extraordinary scenes which shall characterize the final ingathering of the saints, in Heaven. Isaiah, after speaking of the way of salvation by which the saints are to be brought onward and upward in their

spiritual course, says very beautifully: "And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away." So, also, those myriads of blessed ones, whom St. John saw, in vision, "standing before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands," he tells us, "shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat: for the Lamb, which is in the midst of the throne, shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of water; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

This particular description of the exuberant joy that is experienced in the heavenly world, is understood to refer *mainly*, if not exclusively, to the saints themselves, who have been redeemed from among men, and "have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." But these exulting saints are mentioned in close proximity with the other inhabitants of the heavenly world. St. John,

speaking of the victorious and now ingathered saints, "clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands," saying, "Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb," immediately adds—"and all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts,—the living ones—and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honor, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever: Amen."

A still more beautiful and sublime picture of the united and joyous worship in heaven is drawn by the same hand: "The four beasts and four and twenty elders," he tells us, "fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odors, which are the prayers of saints. And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book,"—containing the mysteries of Providence—"and to open the seals thereof: for Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and



people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth. And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne, and the beasts, and the elders, and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing. And every creature which was in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever. And the four beasts"—representatives of universal nature—"said, Amen. And the four and twenty elders fell down and worshipped Him that liveth for ever and ever."

In this sublime and touching description of the heavenly worship, we have a faint and imperfect glimpse afforded us into the eternal world, and, in imagination, are made to hear



the united songs of the redeemed from among men, and of the angels, and of the universal living world, above and beneath,—all mingling together in one overpowering flood of adoring praise and exultation over the redemption of men, in Christ Jesus our Lord!

The feelings of the poor Prodigal, now fully reconciled and restored to his forfeited privileges, had undergone great and radical changes. He had, finally, emerged from the darkness and confusion of the past, and come into broad day-light—the sweet and blessed dawn of a new and better life. In view of this gracious change and present peace, and in view, also, of what it promised him in the future, when all his painful wanderings should cease finally in heaven, he could not well find language, in which to express his feelings and wishes more appropriately than that furnished by one of our most genial and popular Hymns, which, in part, we here append, for the comfort and encouragement of all such as are in like circumstances.

The charm of this beautiful composition, and its power to comfort the weary wanderer, con-

sist in its positive promise and glowing description of that future "rest" which remaineth for the people of God—the sweet and blessed rest of Heaven. Listen to the gentle, soothing, fascinating strains of the sorrowing bard:—

There is an hour of peaceful rest  
 To mourning wanderers giv'n ;  
 There is a tear for souls distrest,  
 A balm for every wounded breast,  
 'Tis found alone—in heaven.

There is a home for weary souls,  
 By sin and sorrow driv'n ;  
 When tossed on life's tempestuous shoals,  
 Where storms arise and ocean rolls,  
 And all is drear—but heaven.

There faith lifts up the tearless eye,  
 The heart with anguish riv'n ;  
 It views the tempest passing by,  
 The evening shadows quickly fly,  
 And all serene—in heav'n.

There fragrant flow'rs immortal bloom,  
 And joys supreme are giv'n ;  
 There joys divine disperse the gloom,  
 Beyond the dark and narrow tomb  
 Appears the dawn—of heav'n.

#### XIV. SAFELY HOUSED, OR "HOME AGAIN."

"Now safely moor'd, my perils o'er,  
I'll sing first in night's diadem,  
For ever and for evermore,  
The star—the Star of Bethlehem!"

AFTER many strange adventures abroad, and much physical suffering, accompanied with deep and prolonged mental anguish, the poor, homeless, and weary wanderer, at length, finds himself back again to the sweet home of his childhood and early youth. Many things, indeed, had changed since he had last seen that much-loved and cherished spot. Among the inmates of the house were many that had not been there when he left for the far off country; but assuredly one thing was not changed. The dear old home was the very same to him now, as it was, when, in childish glee and innocent sports, he there enjoyed himself, and also made all others glad around that hallowed spot. And what was of far more account to him now, was, that the sweet spirit of love and meek-

eyed charity was still in full force there. Hence his own warm and joyous reception; hence, also, that stirring scene of hearty and universal rejoicing, which signalized his return and re-admission to the paternal mansion.

With all the sad evidences of his guilt and of his deep degradation upon him, he was most cordially received and cheerfully recognized as one of the happy household. Every one seemed eager to show him some special act of kindness and respect, in order to assure him of his perfect welcome. To this universal rejoicing, and generous emulation among the members of the dear old home, to excel in kindness and friendly offices towards the re-admitted Prodigal, there was but one exception; and even that one sad exception may, perhaps, have been necessary in order to exhibit in the strongest possible light the many good and noble qualities of heart and mind which came to the surface in connection with this joyous event.

Leaving out of view, for the moment, the strange and unaccountable behavior of the elder

son, let us look in upon the delighted company inside of the happy home. We have already seen with what feelings of sacred transport and ecstatic joy the father had met and welcomed his son back again to his heart and to his home. The same feeling prevailed, also, among all the inmates of the house. What a beautiful and encouraging example of united feeling and action is here shown! How worthy of imitation! But the earthly home, and the human virtues and graces, here displayed, were intended mainly to represent things heavenly and divine. And that wondrous love, especially, which could overlook the failings of the Prodigal, and rejoice in the opportunity of pardoning his many sins and infirmities, is but a faint image of that boundless love, which, in furnishing us a Saviour, now also exults in the pardon of our sins, and in the full restoration of our souls to the divine favor and benediction.

In the mysterious depths of this same forgiving love, as humanly exercised in favor of the Prodigal, does he also now feel himself happy and unabashed in the very home which

he once so ingloriously abandoned, as unworthy of his presence. In the freeness and fullness of his pardon, and amidst the manifold displays of this precious grace, he feels no shame, experiences no strangeness, and dreads no displeasure from his father.

And, in this happy circumstance or series of circumstances, we have an expressive image and prophecy of that diviner love, and larger mercy, which we were, in our day, to experience in connection with the Church of Christ and its blessed communion of Saints. Here already, accordingly, we are made "to sit together in heavenly places, in Christ." But the fullness of this love, and the perfect bliss which it inspires, are reserved for that consummated communion of the saints, which awaits us in the world to come. Of this, however, we have already spoken, in the preceding section, when reviewing the vision of St. John—beholding through the open heavens those countless millions of blessed saints "arrayed in white robes," emblems of purity and bliss, "with palms in their hands," expressive signs of conflict and of victory!



What a contrast between these "shining ones" in glory, with their snowy garments and waving palms, and the same shining ones, when, contending with sin, and struggling manfully with the powers of evil, they were still "strangers and pilgrims" on earth—weary wanderers in this valley of tears. All these things, however, are beautifully brought out in a familiar Hymn for which I beg to make room here.

"SWEET HOME."

An alien from God, and a stranger to grace,  
I wandered thro' earth, its gay pleasures to trace;  
In the path-way of sin I continued to roam,  
Unmindful, alas! that it led me from home.  
Home, home, sweet, sweet home;  
O Saviour, direct me to heaven, my home.

The pleasures of earth I have seen fade away,  
They bloom for a season, but soon they decay;  
But pleasures more lasting, in Jesus are given,  
Salvation on earth, and a mansion in heaven.  
Home, home, sweet, sweet home;  
The saints in those mansions are ever at home.

Allure me no longer, ye false-glowing charms,  
The Saviour invites me, I'll go to His arms;  
At the banquet of mercy I hear there is room,  
O there may I feast with His children at home!  
Home, home, sweet, sweet home;  
O Jesus, conduct me to heaven, my home!



Farewell, vain amusements, my follies adieu,  
While Jesus, and heaven, and glory I view ;  
I feast on the pleasures that flow from his throne,  
The foretastes of heaven, sweet heaven, my home !  
Home, home, sweet, sweet home,  
O when shall I share the fruition of home !

The days of my exile are passing away,  
The time is approaching, when Jesus will say,  
"Well done, faithful servant, sit down on my throne,  
And dwell in my presence for ever at home."  
Home, home, sweet, sweet home,  
O there shall I rest with the Saviour at home !

Affliction, and sorrow, and death shall be o'er,  
The saints shall unite to be parted no more ;  
There, loud hallelujahs fill heaven's high dome,  
They dwell with the Saviour for ever at home.  
Home, home, sweet, sweet home ;  
They dwell with the Saviour for ever at home !

## XV. THE REVERSE PICTURE.

"I love to know that not alone  
I meet the battle's angry tide;  
That sainted myriads from the throne  
Descend to combat at my side."

WE now enter upon a new and somewhat peculiar part of our general subject. We have, here, a kind of codicil or supplement, super-added to the main body of the Parable, and bringing into view a class of ideas, in some respects, entirely different from those which enter into the former part of the story. It might appear, at first sight, as if this additional item threw a dark and ominous cloud over the entire picture, and effectually marred its beauty and integrity. The envious and unamiable spirit of the elder son, as this is brought out very strongly in the several images, or different parts of the same general image, which are now in review before us, appears so unseemly in itself, and so utterly inconsistent and at variance

with the genial and transcendently beautiful and charming spirit, that pervades the former part of the Parable, that it makes a very unfavorable impression upon the mind of the reader.

There is, however, another view of the case, which, as we proceed with our remarks, will conduct us to wholly different and more cheering results. For, as a dark and moonless night exhibits the starry firmament with an effulgence of light and beauty which does not belong to it under any other circumstances, so this dark back-ground, in the Parable of the Prodigal Son, only serves to bring out and exhibit the exquisite beauties of the earlier portion of it with a splendor and power which could be seen in no other way. In this view of the case, as we shall see, that dark shadow, which, at first sight, seems so unnatural and perfectly incongruous, proves to be one of the best and most effectual means of setting before us in proper light the hidden and incomparable beauties of the Parable. Hence we do not blame our blessed Saviour for making this addition ;

but rather admire the infinite wisdom that could so effectually bring light from darkness, and beauty from deformity—that could teach us lessons of the highest importance by means of the most unlovely pictures.

Or, look at the subject in another and different point of view. The younger son had his good and his bad qualities—his virtues and his vices. Both of these peculiarities come out strikingly in the progress of the story, which, with such singular power and effect, recounts the several items that enter into his eventful history. The unseemly discontent and hasty recklessness which characterize the earlier part of his life; the hasty eagerness to get possession of his portion of the paternal estate; his determination soon after permanently to leave the old home with its endearments, “gathering all together,” and going into a far country; his dissipated course of life in that new and distant home; and even his desperate expedient of binding himself unconditionally to a citizen of that strange country;—all these several items bear testimony, strong and convincing, to that ardent

temperament and deep feeling which gave such wonderful decision and power to his actions, and imparted such beauty and fascination to the story of his subsequent penitence, and return to the home of his youth. The earlier and later portions of his erratic life mutually explain and illustrate each other. With all his good qualities, which appear especially in connection with his deep contrition, his firm and generous resolution to return again to the home of his injured father, and make confession unto him of his crying sin, humbly begging for a place among his hired-servants; and, finally, his prompt execution of this noble resolve;—with all these good things, it must be confessed, there were connected some very bad and dangerous elements.

So in the case of the elder son, there were also some few very good and praise-worthy qualities found connected with what was low and disreputable in his character and conduct; and the supplement, with which we are now concerned, will serve to bring out these peculiarities, and, thus exhibit in *his* two-fold character, as well

as in that of the younger son, our fallen nature in all its elements of deep degradation and woeful deformity.

In this view of the case, we shall find our meditations on this portion of the Parable to be equally as interesting and profitable as those on the main body of the story. What we especially want is an enlightened eye, in order to see the wise and gracious design of our Saviour in thus forming so dark and dismal a background, on which to exhibit in clearer light and brighter glory the matchless grace and beauty of the Divine love and compassion. We shall see that the humble and subdued spirit of the contrite Prodigal stands out in broad and striking contrast with the proud and envious spirit of the elder son. And this same unamiable spirit serves, also, as an occasion for the exercise of the meek and gentle spirit of the injured father—for his long-suffering and forbearance.

The two parts of the Parable will, thus, complete each other, and bring out the wondrous power and charms of the story in the strongest conceivable colors. Indeed one of the most



beautiful traits in the character and conduct of the father could not possibly have been brought out, had not the selfishness and impertinence of the elder son furnished the occasion; we mean the patience, long-suffering, and forbearance, which the bitter and reproachful language, and unjust accusation of the elder son called forth.

It was this particular feature in the conduct of the ingrate son, that, in the first instance, elicited that beautiful answer of the hired servant to the suspicious inquiry as to "what these things meant;" namely, "thy brother is come, and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound." But for the coming in of the elder son, these words would, probably, never have been spoken. And then, too, we must carefully note the fact, that, after hearing this statement, accounting for the extraordinary scenes of rejoicing within, the elder son "was angry, and would not go in." This brought about another scene, which, in our further discussion, will come before us; namely this, that, when this

strange and unnatural conduct was reported within, it caused the greatest surprise; "therefore came his father out and entreated him."

What a world of rich and profitable instruction would have been lost to us, had not the elder son been thus introduced to our notice. In that case, we would not have had that striking exhibition of the paternal goodness, and patience, and long-suffering, which are brought out in the subsequent part of the history. And, inasmuch as this whole history, and, indeed, all historical representations of the sacred Scriptures, whether real or assumed, are intended to bring up and exhibit our own character and conduct, we have here a powerful weapon put into our hands—a strong base on which to found an appeal to ourselves and to others. Hear the Apostle: "And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God? Or, despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?"

Aside from what has just been said, we may also state, that, owing to the envious spirit of the elder son, the sympathy and kindly interest of the hired servants, and other guests, then present, as well as the deeper, purer, and holier love and sympathy of the devoted father, were brought to the full consciousness of the reclaimed Prodigal. This circumstance, at once, inspired him with confidence, in view of his conflicts, as expressed in the lines at the head of this section; and, also, incited him to earnest, humble, and persevering prayer, as this comes out in the beautiful lines, which, without knowing who is their author, we here append. They are exactly what the poor Prodigal may be supposed to have needed, to sustain him in the terrible shock which he was to receive in that unexpected explosion of the proud and scornful spirit of his elder brother. They are, also, exactly what we need, in similar circumstances, to address to our God and Father in Christ.—

I cannot let Thee go without Thy blessing!  
My heart is heavy with its weight of care,

And unbelief, a myriad fears suggesting,  
 Makes the burden more than I can bear.  
 But as Thy servant in the ancient story,  
 Strove with the angel until break of day,  
 So will I agonize, my God, before Thee :  
 So 'mid the darkness, will I strive and pray !

My heart is sinful ; but I plead the merit  
 Of Him who on the cross of Calvary died ;  
 My strength is weakness, but my weary spirit  
 Flies to its refuge, Christ the crucified.  
 My foes are strong, but my dear Lord hath risen,  
 And liveth now to intercede for me ;  
 My faith grows bolder, as I claim Thy promise ;  
 I can do all things, *if Thou strengthen me !*

Yes, while I plead, the gloomy shadows vanish :  
 The clouds uplift ; the day begins to break !  
 O, weary heart, the joyous morning cometh ;  
 Thy God hath blessed thee, for thy Saviour's sake !  
 My quiet chamber hath become a Bethel ;  
 The spot whereon I kneel is holy ground ;  
 For 'mid the darkness and the Spirit's conflict,  
 A very present help, my God I've found.

—*Watchman & Reflector.*

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What a beautiful complement of these words of penitence and faith do we find in the following exquisite lines on suffering and sorrow, in the case of God's children, and "the glory that shall be revealed" in them at the last day.—

“The heavier cross, the heartier prayer;  
The bruised herbs most fragrant are;  
If wind and sky were always fair,  
The sailor would not watch the star;  
And David’s Psalms had ne’er been sung,  
If grief his heart had never wrung.”



Deem not that they are blessed alone,  
Whose days a peaceful tenor keep;  
The God, who loves our race, has shown  
A blessing for the eyes that weep;  
For God hath marked each sorrowing day,  
And numbered every secret tear,  
And heaven’s long age of bliss shall pay  
For all his children suffer here.

—BRYANT.

## XVI. THE PUZZLE; OR, PAINFUL SURPRISE.

“When man grows bold in sin,  
My heart within me cries  
He hath no faith of God within,  
Nor fear before his eyes.”

THE significant story of the elder son, and the cause of his painful surprise and subsequent displeasure at what was transpiring in the house, are related in very simple and expressive terms. “Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came, and drew nigh to the house, he heard music and dancing.”

What strikes us, first, in connection with this account, as worthy of notice, is the fact that the elder son had been spending the day in the field—in honorable industry. This is one of the good and praiseworthy things in his history, the absence of which in the case of the younger son, may possibly explain his early discontent, and subsequent desertion of the paternal mansion; and it may, also, at the same time, explain the



cause of the elder son's extreme virulence of feeling and serious dissatisfaction with what he found was going on at the house—the welcome-home festivities!

That industry, and an honorable and lucrative calling, are among the greatest of earthly blessings, and among the most effectual causes for preventing a sinful discontent, and the temptation to forsake home, and lead a roving and unsettled life abroad, I think, needs no extended proof. It is not only the common experience of all idle men universally, but also the uniform testimony of history, that where industry and constant employment are wanting, there the way is open for the ready intrusion of a restless, discontented, and soured spirit, which, unless checked by some very efficient force, will sooner or later break out in some form or other of open sin and transgression. Hence, the peculiar stress laid upon industry in the oracles of Divine truth, and their severe reprehension of idleness and waste of time. In the decalogue itself this fact comes out very prominently. “Remember the Sabbath day to

keep it holy," says the fourth commandment, "six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work."

To keep the Sabbath day "holy" is more a great deal than to abstain from labor, and avoid profane and common employments. If such abstinence from labor alone were required in that commandment, it would, in our estimation, subserve but a very poor purpose, and possibly occasion much more evil than good; idleness being immeasurably worse than honorable labor, even on the Sabbath day. But neither the one nor the other alternative will answer the requirements of the law, as distinctly expressed in this fourth commandment. The day is to be kept "holy," or to be spent in the exercises of religion and piety, in the service of God and to His honor. And so of the *other* days: especially, in the light of the clear and explicit declaration immediately following this principal expression, does this duty of laboring come out distinctly. "Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work." This is equally as positive and peremptory, and, we may add, equally as important,

as that portion of the command which requires us to abstain from labor on the seventh day; and, if we are bound to keep the one part, then we are equally bound to keep the other part also. If it is our solemn duty to lay aside all our worldly cares and every-day employments, one day in seven, because God so commands it, then we are also equally bound to take up and faithfully perform the labor, which, in our several circumstances, falls to our lot, because God just as decidedly commands this as the former.

That the elder son is said to have been in the field, therefore, was not done simply to make room for his coming home, ignorant of what had been transpiring, and so being taken by surprise, but, also, in order that ordinary labor and industry might be commended to us by the example of this son of an honorable and wealthy family. For such, assuredly, the family required to be, in order to serve, in all respects, fitly to represent the kingdom of God, and its blessed economy. And can we despise labor ourselves, or discourage it in others by

treating it with secret scorn, or possibly with open contempt? Can we innocently depreciate and openly neglect that which is so clearly enjoined upon us in the decalogue, and warmly commended to our hearts and minds by the example of our adorable Redeemer? By His example, in working with His reputed parent, at Nazareth, He put the highest conceivable honor upon honest and useful labor; and thus virtually pronounced a silent benediction upon the weary sons of toil. He, therefore, who conscientiously improves his time, in working day by day, and thus seeks to make an honest and honorable living for himself and family, is to be counted among God's truest and fairest noblemen. On the other hand, we must condemn, unconditionally and without mercy, those who wilfully and deliberately waste their precious hours in ignoble and degrading idleness! They are among the most dishonorable of the sons of men, and also among the most unfortunate—generally the unhappy victims of discontent, or the helpless slaves of lust and passion; while habits of industry always bring

the spirit of sweet peace and contentment into the heart of the laborer, and shed beauty and loveliness over his sun-burnt countenance!

Despise not, then, the elder son, nor judge too harshly of him, who, as "he came, and drew nigh to the house," heard, with momentary surprise and dissatisfaction, the "music and dancing" within. It was something to which he was evidently not accustomed. His error in this instance, though highly censurable and blameworthy, was not altogether unnatural. How often is the same mistake repeated at the present day, and under far less excusable circumstances! How many, otherwise good and honest people, immediately fly into a passion, and are filled with bitter prejudice, when they meet with anything, that, in the least degree, deviates from the old and beaten track to which they have been accustomed!

What practical lesson, then, can we learn from this unfortunate conduct in the case of the elder son? Clearly this; that we learn to exercise prudence and moderation—that we guard against hasty and intemperate action in

every respect, and especially in things pertaining to the kingdom of God. "Prove all things," says the Apostle St. Paul, "hold fast that which is good." And, O, how much shame and regret we might save ourselves, and pain and heart-burnings among our fellow-men, by following this simple, just, and equitable rule! How much more smoothly and pleasantly we might get along in the world, if, in every instance of doubt or uncertainty, we would calmly and dispassionately consider the whole subject—even repeatedly if need be—before coming to a decision, and committing ourselves to what is wrong and ruinous! In the light of our own past experience, and in the light of the experience of other men, let us learn to be cautious—to exercise modesty and care in forming an opinion, and insisting upon having it adopted by others. Let us, especially, deprecate harsh and uncharitable judgments in reference to the highest and holiest interests of life—the interests of religion!

The conduct of the elder son, however, contains another element of great practical



value and power in our intercourse with our fellow-men. Although taken by surprise, and overcome with a feeling of strangeness and secret suspicion, he, yet, acted rationally in that "he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant." In this particular, his conduct is admirable, and deserving of our highest praise. He evidently restrained his rising suspicions, and so far controlled his excited feelings, as to be able to ask calmly and intelligently, what these extraordinary scenes and strange proceedings indicated. This conduct is in strong and favorable contrast with what we frequently have to witness in the conduct of men now-a-days, and even in the conduct of Christians. Diligently and modestly to inquire into the meaning and intention of any strange and unusual conduct, is the best possible way to avoid conflict with our fellow-men, on the one hand, and the adoption of false and dangerous principles and maxims of life, for ourselves, on the other hand. In the sphere of religion, especially, should we exercise the greatest and most unremitting caution. Here

error is fatal. Interests of infinite value and unutterable solemnity are here at stake; and a single wrong step in the beginning may prove fatal to our best interests for time and eternity. Seek, then, to avoid the fatal rock on which so many have already suffered shipwreck. "For what shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul; or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"

"WATCH AND PRAY."

My soul, be on thy guard,  
Ten thousand foes arise;  
And hosts of sins are pressing hard,  
To draw thee from the skies.

O watch, and fight, and pray,  
The battle ne'er give o'er;  
Renew it boldly every day,  
And help divine implore.

Ne'er think the vict'ry won,  
Nor once at ease sit down;  
Thy arduous work will not be done  
Till thou hast got thy crown.

Fight on, my soul, till death  
Shall bring thee to thy God;  
He'll take thee at thy parting breath  
Up to His blest abode.

## XVII. THE MYSTERY SOLVED.

“O may we feel each brother's sigh,  
And with him bear a part ;  
May sorrow flow from eye to eye,  
And joy from heart to heart.”

THE inquiry made of the servant, as to what was the meaning of this extraordinary rejoicing in the house, was dictated, partly, by the honest desire to ascertain the cause of this strange and unwonted proceeding, and, partly by a kind of secret and instinctive suspicion that something wrong and unjustifiable was going on within. Hence, as Professor Trench remarks, he called one of the servants, instead of going right into the house, and taking it for granted that whatever the father did was right and proper. There certainly is some ground for this remark, as is sufficiently shown by the subsequent conduct of the elder son ; which was in the highest degree unbecoming and criminal, and led to the most serious consequences.

The history of the elder son—the representa-

tive of a numerous and influential class of persons—is intimately associated with a certain measure of infamy, which will be perpetuated to the end of time. But, as we have already spoken of his dubious conduct, we shall not pursue this line of remark any farther, than simply to call attention to the fact, that, in certain circumstances, the most trivial acts of men may lead to consequences the most far-reaching and important in their ultimate results. If it be true, what philosophers assert, that a force, once put in motion, can never wholly cease being felt, then it follows, that, by a single act, which, at the time, may appear of very little consequence, we may continue to work for weal or for woe, not only in this life, but also throughout the endless ages of eternity. “Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth,” says St. James. Upon the incarnation of the Son of God, and His brief ministry, and atoning work upon the Cross, is suspended the blessedness of countless myriads of souls, down even to the ages of ages! On such wondrous influences no mere man may ever count; and, yet, in some

measure, our life and history will also be found to go down to the ages, fraught with their necessary and legitimate fruits! In view of this fact, so important in itself, and of such deep and thrilling interest in its relation to our life and actions, we should exercise the utmost care and circumspection in the regulation of our conduct. "It must needs be that offences come; but woe unto that man by whom the offence cometh!"

To the suspicious, and, yet, rational inquiry of the elder son, the servant promptly and most beautifully replied: "Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound."

What perfect honesty and admirable simplicity are seen to characterize this reply of the servant! His words, independent of their connection with this special history, deserve to be treasured up in our hearts, and thoroughly studied. If, as is altogether likely, the servant saw the drift of the question, and, perhaps, correctly opined the excited and angry feelings which rankled in the bosom of the elder son,

and were betrayed by his ruffled and distorted countenance, he certainly exhibited great self-possession, and evenness of temper, in the reply which he made. From them we may learn a valuable lesson of candor, politeness, and condescension. They set before the exasperated questioner, in beautiful and conciliating terms, the cause of the unwonted rejoicings; and, though they failed to accomplish the object contemplated, they, at least, served to try the spirit of which the elder son was possessed, and to bring to the surface the hidden evil that lurked in his heart. In this respect they served an important purpose; and, by the ill-tempered speech which they elicited, brought into the foreground the unfathomable depths of the Divine love and compassion, as these are imaged forth, and strikingly exhibited in the meek and patient reply of the indulgent father.

The language of the servant, in regard to the younger son, that he was received "safe and sound," differs materially from that employed by the father, to set forth the same general truth, as a cause of rejoicing: "For



this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found." On this characteristic difference in the two accounts, Archbishop Trench, with his usual care, remarks: "How nice is the observance of all the lesser proprieties of the narration. The father, in the midst of all his natural affection, is yet full of the moral significance of his son's return—that he has come back another person from what he was when he went, or while he tarried in that far land; he sees into the deep of his joy, that he is receiving him indeed as a son, once dead but now alive, once lost to him and to God, but now found alike by both. But the servant confines himself to the more external features of the case, to the fact, that after all he has gone through of excess and hardship, his father has yet received him 'safe and sound.' Even if he could enter deeper into the matter, yet with a suitable discretion he confines himself to that which falls plainly under his and *every* one's eye." But though these words of the servant are less deeply significant than those of the father, still they are sufficiently beautiful

and touching to excite in any one's bosom the most pleasurable sensations. And, yet, in the case of the elder son, they had exactly the opposite effect. They excited in him the most intensely bitter feelings, or, rather, served as an outward occasion to bring to the surface what had already been rankling in the heart, and struggling for expression.

What a picture this of the depth of human depravity, and of malice in the unregenerate heart! Even the tender story of a lost and unfortunate brother's rescue and safe return could not awaken in that callous heart and unfeeling bosom the common sentiments of fraternal love and affection. The very greatness of that Providential mercy which brought back the poor wanderer from a life of reckless dissipation, seems to have served only the more to exasperate the unnatural brother and render him the less susceptible of generous and brotherly feelings. We shall soon see how this ugly and utterly unjustifiable spirit manifested itself in harsh, and even reproachful, language towards his benevolent parent. Such a spirit

of bitterness towards God and man is universally characteristic of our fallen race; and how utterly unfit are we, then, by nature to enter into the kingdom of God! Whether, therefore, we are still out in the wide world and on the public high-way of sin, or whether we are in the church, externally, like this elder son, we are equally unfit for the Master's service, unless we be thoroughly "renewed in the spirit and temper of our minds," and thus conformed to the image and likeness of Jesus Christ.

The Apostle, speaking to the Corinthians in regard to the fearful wickedness which prevailed in his day, and charging this hopeless depravity, and consequent corruption, upon all men universally, in so far as they are out of Christ, says—"And such were some of you: but ye are washed, ye are sanctified, ye are justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." Only when renewed by the Divine Spirit, therefore, and made new creatures in Christ, can we escape the unseemly and ugly spirit which we shall now be obliged to bring to your notice. Before doing so,

however, we shall briefly refer to one other little circumstance which served still further to exasperate the already highly excited feelings of the unnatural son. "He was angry," we are told, "and would not go in: therefore came his father out and entreated him." Nothing could exhibit more strongly the bitter feelings of the son, on the one hand, and the meek and patient spirit of the father, on the other, than these expressive words. And do we not, in this little incident, discern the perversity of our own hearts, as well as the boundless love and deep compassion of our Heavenly Father! How often have we, also, stood without, refusing to come into the banqueting hall, because this or that thing in the conduct of our brethren, or even in the dealings of our Heavenly Father displeased us!

And, now, what can you, my brethren, say for yourselves, who, even to this very hour, are standing without and quarrelling with the ways of God—possibly with the sweet and subduing love of the Father, that has brought a poor, weeping prodigal from the highways of sin into

the House of God! Why should you be dissatisfied with the good Lord for exercising His eternal love so freely towards a poor broken-hearted penitent, returning from his criminal wanderings, and seeking pardon and reconciliation with his God? Do you not know that this same eternal love is also the sole cause of your own continuance in the land of hope? Were it not for this boundless compassion that fills the bosom of the Father, and flows out in ceaseless streams towards all His fallen creatures, judgment would be speedily executed upon you, and an end put to your criminal insubordination. Why, then, will you continue to weary the Almighty by your sinful and unnatural conduct? Why continue to refuse the kind and merciful invitation of the Saviour, speaking in accents of tenderest love, saying: "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest?" Why will you grieve that blessed Spirit, that so sweetly seeks to draw you to the cross, and fix your dying eyes upon Him whom you have pierced by your sins,—why, O, why will you grieve this blessed Spirit of God?

“THEY WOULD NOT COME.”

And is it true, that many fly  
The sound that bids my soul rejoice,  
And rather choose in sin to die,  
Than turn an ear to mercy's voice ?

Alas, for them—the day is near,  
When mercy will be heard no more ;  
Then will they ask in vain to hear  
The voice they would not hear before !

With such, I own, I once appeared,  
But now I know how great their loss,  
For sweeter sounds were never heard,  
Than mercy utters from the cross !



## XVIII. THE BITTER SCORN AND ACCUSATION.

“Free us from envy, scorn, and pride,  
Our wishes fix above ;  
May each his brother's failings hide,  
And show a brother's love.”

WHEN the heart is once fairly under the influence of passion, and fully resolved to be dissatisfied, it is hard, indeed, and often next to impossible to divert it from its perverse and arbitrary course. Every new effort to appease the anger and allay the excited feelings of the passionate man is only an additional spur to his ungovernable temper, and serves to cause additional out-bursts of the pent-up fires within. It was thus in the present case. The gentle and kindly entreaty of the father excited and roused the angry spirit of the unnatural son to the highest pitch. The injured father, anxiously desirous to conciliate the son, exercised towards him the tenderest love ; but it touched not his callous heart. “And he, answering,

said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee ; neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment ; and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends : but as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf."

"These many years do I serve thee." That, we think, was true so far as the simple fact of laboring in connection with the paternal home was concerned ; but, as to the spirit and temper in which this service was rendered, we cannot judge so favorably. The likelihood is, that, in this work, he served in the spirit of a crouching slave rather than in that of an affectionate and obedient son. His own words, in fact, say so much. He did not seem to suspect, at all, that the true relation of a son to his father is that of love, and of the most willing and cheerful obedience ; and, in no sense, simply an outward service, or series of acts, as he appeared to think.

Let us see in this slavish service the image and type of that unwilling and groveling ser-

vice which men so often render to God now-a-days. Influenced only by this low and degrading servitude, such men look upon their religious duties as a burdensome task, and piety itself only as a means to the attainment of something else beyond itself. Hence they speak of their religious duties and pious exercises, not as the pleasant and spontaneous service of the heart, but as an imposition, rather, which is unjustly laid upon them. By far too much of this low and unworthy kind of piety is found in the world, at the present day, and even in the ranks of the professed followers of the meek and lowly Jesus!

When the elder son passes on from the simple claim of having served the beloved father for "many years," to the additional assertion: "neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment," he likely goes beyond the bounds of strict and sober truth. Here, in all likelihood, comes out the true spirit of the self-righteous and boasting Pharisee, who, in his own eyes, doubtless felt himself perfectly in accord with the Divine commands. But such

self-righteous boasting is of little account at any time; and, especially so, when the storm of passion, which dictated the boastful statement, gave the lie to his profession. How singularly like that sadly interesting scene, described by our Saviour, as having taken place in the temple: "Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee that I am not as other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week; I give tithes of all I possess." In broad and striking contrast with this lofty and boasting prayer, or self-gratulation, rather, appears the humble and self-condemning prayer of the guilt-stricken publican, deeming himself unworthy of the Divine favor. "And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me, a sinner." This, in comparison with the other, seems to be but a very poor and insipid prayer; and, yet, "this man went down to his house justified

rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." Compared with the proud and boastful spirit of the Pharisee, how divinely fair and pleasing appears the gentle, unassuming, and subdued spirit of the true child of God, in whose swelling bosom dwells the spirit and power of a grateful recognition of God's pardoning love! How like the sweet and fragrant incense that burned upon the altar of God's ancient people, ascending, in radiant and perfumed clouds, to the eternal throne!

But, from the foul and unnatural spirit of boasting and self-gratulation, the ungrateful son passed on to the use of words of bitter scorn and accusation: "And, yet, thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: but as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf."

We can hardly conceive of anything more perfectly unnatural and repulsive than this impudent and insulting address to the kind-

hearted father, whose benevolent heart was just then overflowing with grateful love and boundless delight, in view of the safety of his beloved son. He charges his honored parent, in the first place, with heartless cruelty and penuriousness. "Thou never gavest me a kid." And this low and impertinent charge appears to be based upon another one, equally unwarranted and wicked, though not openly expressed; it is the charge of injustice—a non-recognition of his "many years" of meritorious service! "Neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment; and *yet* thou never gavest me a kid." Just as if his great merits had been wholly overlooked, and his eminent services left unrewarded. And, we now ask, is not this the spirit that universally prevails among unregenerate men? They estimate very extravagantly their own deeds, while the divine goodness is but poorly appreciated, and still more poorly requited. If this unworthy and self-elating spirit were confined, wholly, or mainly even, to the uncovenanted world without, we might be disposed to pass it over slightly, as being per-



fectly in harmony with the perverse and ingrate spirit that predominates among the "sons of men." But the matter becomes far more serious, when, as in the present case, this base and cowardly spirit is found within the sacred precincts of the Church of God, and among those who glory in the name of sons and daughters of the Most High!

"That I might make merry with my friends," says the ungrateful and embittered son. The object would have been well enough in itself; but the acrid spirit which is here manifested would not be likely either to gain many friends, or to realize much pleasure in the company of such, even if they were gained. And was he, indeed, never in the company of such friends, as were now holding a jubilee in the paternal mansion? Was he never in the society of that kind and gentle father, who formed the most prominent figure in that happy company? And, we may further ask, was he not in continual and freest communication with those genial spirits who were now rejoicing with the happy father, jubilant over the return of the

Prodigal? Alas! the spirit of genuine merry-making was altogether wanting in him, and it is not likely that such an idea would ever have entered into his dreamy head, had it not served him such an admirable purpose, in the matter of reviling and insulting his parent, in this hour of his exultant joy. And how many of those who presume to insult the majesty of Heaven really *do* carry in them the elements of that blessedness, the felt absence of which they improve for the abuse of their Maker! Alas! their complaints are a mere sham—excuses for their own want of fidelity!

“But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf.” This is a two-fold insult, aimed, indeed, principally at the father, but striking, also, with terrible force the unhappy brother, whom he charges, without any further inquiry, or the slightest sign of compassionate sympathy or regret, with having “devoured” the father’s living, in the company of harlots. The charge may possibly have been true, and it may not; for it is not likely,

that, in his blind fury, the unnatural brother would take much pains to inquire into the true state of the case. All he wanted was to have a gnarled and heavy cudgel with which to strike his already injured father a telling blow; and this he found most readily in magnifying the crime of his brother, and then charging upon the benevolent father the crime of excessive indulgence towards this unworthy object!

What a mean and dastardly spirit is this! and, yet, it is comparatively insignificant, when brought up along side of the base ingratitude and cruel scorn which men often exhibit towards Him who is the true and universal "Father of all them that are called children in heaven and on earth." How much better it would be for all such to say with the poor Prodigal, "Father, I have sinned against Heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son."

Penitence and faith, however, are not characteristic of such as the elder son. They deal in wormwood and in gall much more freely than in myrrh and frankincense—in bitter invectives and unjust accusations far more liberally than

in love and charity. From the impiety and heartless cruelty of such the children of God, like the younger son, seek refuge under the sheltering wing of the Almighty.

“THE MERCY-SEAT.”

From every stormy wind that blows,  
From every swelling tide of woes—  
There is a calm—a sure retreat,  
’Tis found beneath the MERCY-SEAT.

There is a place, where Jesus sheds  
The oil of gladness on our heads;  
A place than all besides more sweet,  
It is the blood-bought MERCY-SEAT.

There is a scene, where spirits blend—  
Where friend holds fellowship with friend;  
Though sundered far, by faith they meet  
Around one common MERCY-SEAT.

Ah! whither could we flee for aid,  
When tempted, desolate, dismayed?  
Or how the hosts of hell defeat,  
Had suffering saints no MERCY-SEAT?

There, there, on eagle wings we soar,  
And sin, and sense, seem all no more;  
And heav’n comes down our souls to greet,  
And glory crowns the MERCY-SEAT.

Oh! let my hand forget her skill,  
My tongue be silent, cold, and still;  
This bounding heart forget to beat,  
If I forget—the MERCY-SEAT!

But, while the saints find shelter beneath the outstretched arm of the Almighty, what shall be the fate of the poor sinner, who stoutly resists the sweet and gentle voice of Divine love and compassion? Shall we not, also, address a word of solemn warning and admonition to him?

Sinner, art thou still secure?  
Wilt thou still refuse to pray?  
Can thy heart or hands endure  
In the Lord's avenging day?

See, His mighty arm is bared,  
Awful terrors clothe His brow!  
For his judgment stand prepared,  
Thou must either break or bow.

At His presence nature shakes,  
Earth, affrighted, hastes to flee;  
Solid mountains melt like wax,  
What will, then, become of thee?

Who His advent may abide?  
You that glory in your shame,  
Will you find a place to hide,  
When the world is wrapt in flame?

XIX. THE TRIUMPH OF GENTLENESS AND  
LOVE.

“Love suffers long with patient eye,  
Nor is provoked in haste;  
She lets the present injury die,  
And long forgets the past.”

IN entering upon the second part of our general subject, we had occasion to remark that the ominous appearance of the latter portion of the Parable would serve a good purpose in the way of helping to set off in stronger colors the beauty and grandeur of the earlier portion. In explaining and illustrating our subject, therefore, we have constantly had this feature of the matter in view. But, only at the point, to which we have now arrived, is it possible to bring out this contrast fully, and thus exhibit the sweet, pleasing, and subduing power of the Divine Love. Here, only, are the deep fountains of the father's kind and loving heart fully unsealed, and its sweet waters permitted to flow forth in all their healing power and transcendent glory. Here only do we see distinctly the free-



ness and fulness of the Divine compassion triumphing over the disorder and selfishness of the human heart, in its deep depravity.

To the heartless complaints, and the bitter and insulting accusations of the unnatural son, the benevolent father answered in the very mildest and most conciliatory terms: "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine." Had the elder son been at all able to recognize the fact of his being always with the father, as the highest conceivable good, he would not have been tempted to insult and abuse the parental love. For, is not our free union and communion with the eternal fountain of life and bliss, the perfection of our happiness? Can we, in fact, find happiness in anything else, except only as we enjoy it in union and fellowship with the Father of our spirits? The apostle St. John, standing in the blessed communion of saints, says: "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ."

How many of those highly favored persons,

who stand externally in union with the church, and enjoy its precious privileges and life-giving ordinances, yet fail to see, that, only in living communion with God, do we enjoy true and substantial happiness! How many such fail to understand that all divine ordinances and institutions—Word and Sacraments—can be of value to us only in so far as we heartily respond to the solemn challenge they present, and thus look through the outward and material shell to the inner heart and core of these Divine arrangements! Multitudes, in the church, as well as outside of it, need greatly to learn this essential lesson of seeking happiness only in God. Here, truly, the words of the great Augustine hold good: “Thou, O God, hast created us for Thyself, and our hearts are without rest until they rest in Thee.”

So also, evidently, thought the father in the Parable; and, hence, he said: “Son, thou art ever with me: and all that I have is thine.” In union with the “Father of our spirits” we enjoy free and uninterrupted access to all the rich and boundless treasures of Divine grace;

a fact, which, in his writings, is frequently adverted to by St. Paul. Indeed, he seems to have had distinctly in view the beautiful words of the injured father to his son, when he wrote that most beautiful and sublime passage concerning our filial relation to God: "For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together." O how many of those unfortunate Christians, who, weak in faith, go about mourning all their days, or, what is worse, complaining of the dealings of the Lord with themselves and others, might be happy in God's love, if only they would seek communion with Him in the way which He has ordained!

"All that I have is thine." Is it thus with you, my friend? Have you free access to the fountain of that rich and abounding grace

wherein it is your privilege to stand? Are you in felt sympathy with the mind and heart of the Everlasting Father—the inexhaustible fountain of life and salvation? Are you, in the power of a living faith, one with Jesus Christ, as He is one with the Father? Are you walking in the Spirit, so as not to fulfil the lusts of the flesh? Is God, indeed, your highest—your everlasting portion? How does your heart feel towards all these higher and holier interests of the spiritual and eternal world? If you are inside of the Church of Christ you are clearly entitled to all the blessed things which have just been brought to your notice; and, if you do not enjoy them in all their fulness, it is your own most criminal fault. If you, who are now reading these pages, are still out in the uncovenanted world, which, according to the sure word of prophecy, is destined to perish, then I solemnly call upon you instantly to flee to the cross of Christ for pardon and reconciliation; that, being rescued from the power of the wicked one, you may live in sweet and blessed fellowship with the Lord

of life and glory. In Him we are perfectly safe. "For, if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son; much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life."

All this we conceive to be implied in the kindly words of the father: "Son, thou art ever with me; and all that I have is thine." And here he might well have stopped short. He had said enough, surely, to satisfy completely, not only his own son who then stood before him, but also all men everywhere, and in all ages of the world, standing in a similar relation to the blessed God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ—"the elder brother." But the overflowing fountain of a father's love could not be restrained. He had just come out from the fairy scenes of the festive hall, his parental heart still bounding in the gushing tide of that exuberant joy which filled every bosom in the presence of the repentant and reconciled son. The sacred fire burned furiously in his agitated bosom, and his tongue spake forth the glowing love-thoughts in words most beautiful and

touching. "It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again: and was lost, and is found."

In these beautiful words, the heart-broken father gently and lovingly chides his unnatural son, and reminds him of his near and endearing relation to the reclaimed and now happy Prodigal. "For this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found!" On this ground he justifies his own conduct, and that of his guests. The return of the lost one was so singularly accordant with the benevolent feelings that struggled in the bosom of the father, and yet so surprisingly strange in the eyes of his guests, that neither he nor they could do otherwise than rejoice. "It was meet that we should make merry and be glad," says the delighted father. And our own hearts, animated by the sympathetic spirit of the gospel, instinctively respond to this rational and kindly sentiment.

But our present purpose is to insist upon the importance of the words going before. "Son,



thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine." In communion with him in the family circle everything was at the service of the elder son, as also of every other member of the sweet and happy group that gathered, night and morning, around the family altar, and there offered up in blissful experiences their sacrifices of prayer and praise! And shall we, who are still more highly favored, and endued with yet larger measures of divine grace, than those in the earlier dispensation, here represented,—shall we despise our Christian birth-right, and refuse to enjoy its rich blessings, because they must be enjoyed in communion with God, and in the sweet fellowship of the saints—in the Father's house? Nay, rather let us rejoice, that, when the soul is weary and oppressed, we have a resting-place to go to—the quiet and peaceful palaces of God's house. "In all places where I record my name," saith the Lord, there "will I come unto thee, and I will bless thee." Or, as we have it still more beautifully and more encouragingly said, in connection with the dedication of the temple, "And the Lord said

unto him," Solomon, "I have heard thy prayer and thy supplication that thou hast made before me: I have hallowed this house, which thou hast built, to put my name there forever; and mine eyes and my heart shall be there perpetually." While, with this assurance resting, like a healing balm, upon our hearts, we draw near to our Father's house, to seek a place there, we may also, in the sweet and blissful words of the Poet, invoke the gracious presence of our God and Father, "in whom we live, and move, and have our being."

DESIRE FOR GOD'S PRESENCE.

Wilt Thou not visit me?

The plant beside me feels Thy gentle dew;  
 Each blade of grass, I see,  
 From Thy deep earth its quickening moisture drew.  
 Wilt Thou not visit me?

Wilt Thou not visit me?

The morning calls on me with cheering tone;  
 And every hill and tree  
 Lends but one voice, the voice of Thee alone.  
 Wilt Thou not visit me?

Wilt Thou not visit me?

I need Thy gentle love  
 More than the flower the dew, or grass the rain;  
 Come, like Thy holy dove,

And let me in Thy sight rejoice to live again.

Wilt Thou not visit me?

Yes. Thou wilt visit me;

Nor plant, nor tree, Thine eye delights so well,

As, when, from sin set free,

Man's spirit comes with Thine in peace to dwell.

Yes! Thou wilt visit me.

—FROM THE SHAWM.

## XX. THE HOME FESTIVITIES VINDICATED.

“Great is Thy mercy, and my tongue  
Shall those sweet wonders tell,  
How by Thy grace my sinking soul  
Rose from the deeps of hell.”

THE injured father, patient and gentle though he was, could not consistently suffer the unjust accusation of his elder son to pass unnoticed. His own character must, by all means, be vindicated. Sweet and charming, indeed, as angel voices, are the blessed words of vindication. “It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.”

Thus spake the loving and enthusiastic father—spake from the overflowing fulness of his heart. And it was, truly, meet and right for the happy father and his no less happy guests to “make merry and be glad,” when the lost one came back as from the regions of the dead. If, according to the Parable of the

“lost sheep,” there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth,” and if, also, according to the closely related Parable of the ten pieces of silver, “there is joy in the presence of the angels of God,” here on earth, why then should there not have been joy in the father’s house—symbolizing the Church both in heaven and on earth—when one that was dead, came to life, and the lost one was found?

Some thirty-five years ago a little girl was sent to a store, in which we then stood as clerk, for a few small articles. In returning to its mother’s residence, in an obscure and remote section of the town, the child unfortunately lost its way, became bewildered, and wandered, lonely and distressed, all that day over hill and dale without finding its way back. Night came on, and the child was still absent. Search was made for the lonely wanderer in every direction, but all in vain. The poor little creature had gotten into the hemlock swamps; and not being able to get to any human habitation, it slept that night alone in the gloomy forest. Next day, about noon, it

was found sitting on the railroad track, and, amidst shouts of joy, was carried back to the arms of its widowed mother. We may well imagine the deep and lively interest which the loss of the dear little one had excited in that whole community, and the still deeper interest, and the exuberant joy, which its discovery and safe return to the embrace of its almost distracted mother occasioned. Had it caused less excitement in the community, and less of keen suffering and crushing anguish in the mother's heart, the case would have been considered unnatural, and the conduct of the community universally condemned.

And shall we acknowledge the presence and legitimate operation of so mighty a principle, —a principle of deep and heart-felt sympathy with the erring and the lost, and of sincere joy at their safe return, among men, generally, and not confess its propriety, also, in connection with the kingdom of God? If, in the lower forms of human society, we feel the presence of such a power, binding together in strong and enduring bonds, its several members, shall



we not, also, acknowledge the presence of this same power, greatly intensified, in that highest form of human society—the communion of the blessed saints? If among men, in the exercise of their natural feelings, simply, there is such intense joy exhibited in the finding of that which was lost, and in the recovery of that which was on the very borders of death, shall we deem it strange and unnatural that men, in the exercise of a diviner love and deeper feeling, should rejoice in the redemption of men from a far sadder loss and an infinitely more terrible fate? And, if, in the Church on earth, “there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth,” why should there not be much rather “joy in heaven,” prophetically indicated by the father’s house, when, as in the person of the Prodigal Son, a sinner penitently returns to his forsaken God and Father? Heaven is the blessed home of the angels and of “the spirits of just men made perfect,” and, accordingly, exhibits in the highest possible form and greatest power this sympathetic love of God. And, as this was to be imaged forth by the love

of the earthly father to his straying child, as seen in this joy of heart over the son's repentance and return home, so it was "meet," indeed, that all those in the house along with the father "should make merry, and be glad," when the rescued wanderer stood, pardoned and reconciled, in their midst!

Who can fully estimate and picture to himself, in all their dread import, the several terms used in this description of the returning Prodigal—"dead" and "alive"—"lost" and "found?" Come with me to the solemn task of bringing up before the inquisitive mind some adequate conception of what these pregnant words mean. The first of these terms "dead" instinctively leads the imagination back to the primal scenes in the history of our race. When the original pair, beautiful and pure as the blessed angels, stood before God to receive His first and lasting benediction, they understood to some extent, and felt in their innocent hearts, in a way now unknown, the deep meaning and hidden power of the word "life;" and, as death was the dread penalty and threatened forfeiture of life, in case

of transgression, it is natural to suppose, that, after their sad apostacy, and while yet lingering in the border-land of a lost innocence, they also felt, as no one likely now can feel, the dread import of the word "death." The sparkling dew and freshness of life's early morning still rested upon them, when the terrible blow of sin and conscious guilt came with overwhelming force and crushing weight upon the smitten heart. In the shady bower, and amid the fairy and fascinating scenes—luscious fruits, and fragrant flowers, and waving trees, and soft, sweet, balmy air—of the lovely Eden, which, in His kindness, God had planted for them, they were at first permitted to roam in perfect bliss. "Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat," said the Eternal Father to His new-born son; "but of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die."

This commandment, or permission, rather, and grant of privilege, was to govern and regulate the conduct of the happy pair; and, in the observance of this life-rule, they were to

enjoy the conscious presence and perpetual benediction of the Lord; in the disregard of it, they were to forfeit these inestimable privileges and blessings. "In the day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die," extended, in its divine power and dread reality, to the whole race of Adam, as well as to himself. When this law of life was transgressed by the happy pair, all its fearful contents, in the way of curse and penalty, came instantaneously upon them, and lay, in conscious malediction, upon their bleeding hearts. "Dying, thou shalt die," or doubly die, as it might, perhaps, be legitimately rendered, was the divinely appointed penalty affixed to this original rule of righteousness and life. In its transgression the dread penalty was incurred, and death, spiritual, temporal, and eternal, at once took the place of that sweet and blessed sense of innocence, life, and free intercourse with God, which, until now, had been within, and over and around them, as the overshadowing and blissful presence of Jehovah!

And, in the loss of this innocence and purity, the precious gift of God, and the indispensable

condition of free communion with Him, they also lost God Himself. The sense of this infinite loss comes out in a singularly striking and impressive way, in that, "when they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day," the guilt-stricken pair, instinctively concealed "themselves from the presence of the Lord amongst the trees of the garden." Next followed the fatal and significant *expulsion* from the garden, and the sad lot of the man, to "till the ground from whence he was taken." And then, lest he should turn back again to the forfeited home, the Lord "placed at the east of the garden of Eden cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life." All these sad and painful elements, which mark the successive steps in the fall of man, enter, also, in intensified and higher form, into the words "death" and "loss," as found in connection with our Parable. And all these things speak in the way of prophecy and warning of that final expulsion, "when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven

with His mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power."

And what shall we understand by the words, "alive again" and "found," as employed by the delighted father, in reference to his erring, yet now recovered son? They are used in contrast with the words "dead" and "lost," and, consequently, are designed to bring before us things precisely the *opposite* of those suggested by the use of these terms. They naturally suggest that gracious restoration of the soul to the favor and blessing of God, which the Lord Jesus, by His obedient life and atoning death upon the cross, has made possible for us. "These things I write unto you that ye sin not," says St. John, "and if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and He is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." We may not be able



fully to describe this redemption from sin, and restoration of man to the image and likeness of God, nor may we be able to paint adequately the glories of that upper world, which, according to the sure word of prophecy, is to be the future home of the saints. These things we shall know better hereafter. We know, however, that our future home shall be unspeakably glorious and transcendently beautiful—the blessed “inheritance of the saints in light.” We know, also, that our future condition will infinitely surpass in beauty, and blessedness, and glory, all that ever eye hath seen, or ear hath heard, or that the human heart, in its best and loftiest aspirations, even, hath ever conceived. “Beloved, now are we the sons of God,” says St. John, “and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know, that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as He is pure.” And this naturally reminds us of what the dear Lord Himself says: “Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God.”

“HEAVEN.”

High in yonder realms of light,  
Dwell the raptur'd saints above;  
Far beyond our feeble sight,  
Happy in Immanuel's love.

Pilgrims in this vale of tears,  
Once they knew, like us below,  
Gloomy doubts, distressing fears,  
Tort'ring pain and heavy woe.

Oft the big unbidden tear,  
Stealing down the furrow'd cheek,  
Told in eloquence sincere,  
Tales of woe they could not speak.

But these days of weeping o'er,  
Past this scene of toil and pain,  
They shall feel distress no more,  
Never—never weep again!

## XXI. CONCLUDING REMARKS.

“There is an hour of peaceful rest,  
To mourning wanderers given :  
There is a tear for souls distrest,  
A balm for every wounded breast,  
'Tis found alone—in heaven.”

WE have now nearly finished our pleasant task—our sweet labor of love. We have faithfully and affectionately discharged our duty so far as our utmost ability and sincerest efforts have enabled us to do so. We first met with the two sons apparently happy and contented in the father's house. We have carefully traced and pointed out the first motions and incipient risings of discontent in the bosom of the younger son. We have shown how this rising discontent came to a fatal crisis in the ominous request for his portion of the paternal estate. We have described the division of the property or “living,” among the two sons; and, how, “not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey

into a far country." We also watched his dissipation there, and the sinful wasting of his substance in the way of "riotous living;" and have related, how, "when he had spent all," and was looking around for other sources of supply, "there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want." We have shown how "he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country," and how this new master "sent him into the fields to feed swine;" and, also, how, in this unnatural alliance, he was reduced to the greatest extremity, and "would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat; and no man gave unto him." We, also, traced, with intense interest and hearty sympathy, the first risings of contrition in his heaving bosom; how, "when he came to himself, he said, how many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger." We likewise brought in review before you his manly resolution to retrace his steps, and make open and honest confession of his wanderings, saying, "I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no

more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants." We showed how, in obedience to his solemn resolution, "he arose and came to his father;" and how, that, being "yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion on him, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him;" and how, being overpowered by the compassionate love of the father, he feelingly said unto him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son." We also remarked, how, at this point, the father mercifully interrupted the son, and thus spared him his excessive humiliation, by preventing the addition of the prayer, which he had contemplated offering, namely, that the father should make him as one of his "hired servants." We also had occasion to notice his rehabilitation, by having the "best robe" put on him, also a "ring on his hand," and "shoes on his feet." We gratefully referred to his joyous reception into the paternal mansion, and to the welcome-home festivities in honor of his return; how the servants were commanded to "bring hither the

fatted calf," and prepare it for the festal occasion, that so they might "eat and be merry," and how the whole company responded in joyous exultation to the saying of the father: "This, my son, was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found."

Having thus traced the course of the younger son, and followed him, with compassionate interest, through all his painful wanderings, and degradation, and sorrow, until, heart-broken and penitent, he returned again to the forsaken home, and found pardon and peace in the arms of his father; we then found another picture coming into the foreground, that of his elder brother, returning from the field. We saw, how, hearing the "music and dancing" within, he was struck with astonishment, and at once began to grow dark with suspicion; and how, refusing to enter the house, "he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant." We saw how circumstantially the faithful and unsuspecting servant related to him the cause of the wonderful rejoicing in the palace: "Thy brother is come; and thy father



hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound." We found, that, notwithstanding this touching and pathetic picture, the elder son grew "angry, and would not go in;" and, how, in consequence of this refusal to go into the house and take part in the festivities, the "father came out and entreated him." And, then, in the discharge of our duty, we had to perform the painful task of recounting the bitter reproaches and unjust accusations of the elder son against his kind and indulgent parent; how, with words of veriest wormwood and of gall, he said to his heart-stricken father, "Lo, these many years do I serve thee; neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment; and, yet, thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends;" and, how, flinging a shameless imputation at his unfortunate brother, and openly reviling him, he continued his bitter and cutting invective against the injured father; "but as soon as this thy son"—not my brother—"was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted

calf." And, finally, we found, in the calm and kindly answer of the insulted parent, the full and triumphant vindication of Divine love and compassion. Calmly and patiently overlooking the heartless accusation and bitter invective of his elder son, he meekly, and with evident emotion, said, "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother"—yes, *thy* brother—"was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found."

Amid the sweet fragrance and spreading perfume exhaling from this most beautiful and pathetic saying, we feel like laying down our weary pen, while exclaiming with the holy Apostle St. Peter: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to His abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last

time; \* \* \* of which salvation the prophets have inquired, and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you; searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ, which was in them, did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow."

"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh, will I give to eat of the hidden manna; and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it."

"Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown."  
—"Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city."

The following beautiful poem we found on a slip cut from an old newspaper. We have lately met with it in one of our Religious Papers, with the appended response, but without

any reference to its source. We are not able to say who is its genial and happy author; hence we cannot give the writer credit by name, nor ask permission for its insertion. But we must have it for our lone and weary pilgrims, and cannot do without it; and we feel sure that the sweet and gentle spirit that breathed forth these beautiful and tender lines, whether still in the body, or already "beyond the river," will kindly forgive us for inserting them here for the use of earth's erring, sinning, and sorrowing ones, penitently returning to the Father's house, and begging there for pardon and re-admission! May God bless these beautiful lines to their spiritual good, and, thus, help them to come into His presence with acceptance, through Jesus Christ our Lord!

"FATHER, TAKE MY HAND."

The way is dark, my Father! Cloud on cloud  
 Is gathering thickly o'er my head and loud  
 The thunders roar above me. See, I stand  
 Like one bewildered! Father, take my hand,  
     And through the gloom  
     Lead safely home  
     Thy child!

The day goes fast, my Father! And the night  
 Is drawing darkly down. My faithless sight

Sees ghostly visions. Fears, a spectral band,  
Encompass me. O Father! take my hand,  
    And from the night  
    Lead up to light  
        Thy child!

The way is long, my Father! And my soul  
Longs for the rest and quiet of the goal:  
While yet I journey through this weary land,  
Keep me from wandering. Father, take my hand;  
    Quickly and straight  
    Lead to heaven's gate  
        Thy child!

The path is rough, my Father! Many a thorn  
Has pierced me; and my weary feet, all torn  
And bleeding, mark the way. Yet Thy command  
Bids me press forward. Father, take my hand;  
    Then, safe and blest,  
    Lead up to rest  
        Thy child!

The throng is great, my Father! Many a doubt  
And fear and danger compass me about;  
And foes oppress me sore. I cannot stand  
Or go alone. O Father! take my hand,  
    And thro' the throng  
    Lead safe along  
        Thy child!

The cross is heavy, Father! I have borne  
It long, and still do bear it. Let my worn  
And fainting spirit rise to that blest land  
Where crowns are given. Father, take my hand;  
    And, reaching down,  
    Lead to the crown  
        Thy child!

## RESPONSE.

The way is dark, my child, but leads to light ;  
 I would not always have thee walk by sight ;  
 My dealings now thou canst not understand ;  
 I meant it so, but I will take thy hand,  
     And thro' the gloom  
     Lead safely home  
     My child.

The way is long, my child, but it shall be  
 Not one step longer than is best for thee ;  
 And thou shalt know at last, when thou shalt stand  
 Safe at the goal, how I did take thy hand,  
     And quick and straight  
     Led to heaven's gate  
     My child.

The path is rough, my child, but oh ! how sweet  
 Will be the rest, for weary pilgrims meet,  
 When thou shalt reach the borders of that land,  
 To which I lead thee as I take thy hand ;  
     And safe and blest,  
     With me shall rest  
     My child.

The throng is great, my child, but at thy side  
 Thy Father walks. Then be not terrified,  
 For I am with thee—will thy foes command  
 To let thee freely pass—will take thy hand  
     And thro' the throng  
     Safe lead along  
     My child.

The cross is heavy, child, yet there was One  
 Who bore a heavier for thee—my Son,  
 My well-beloved. For Him bear thine and stand  
 With Him at last, and from thy Father's hand,  
     Thy cross laid down,  
     Receive a crown,  
     My child.

















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