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Benedictions



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BENEDICTIONS;

OR,

THE BLESSED LIFE.

BY THE

REV. JOHN CUMMING, D.D.,

MINISTER OF THE SCOTTISH NATIONAL CHURCH, CROWN-COURT, COVENT GARDEN

“It may be glorious to write
Thoughts that shall glad the two or three
High souls, like those far stars that come in sight
Once in a century ;
But better far it is to speak
One simple word, which now and then
Shall waken a new nature in the weak
And sinful sons of men.”

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P R E F A C E .

ALL are not agreed on the nature of the constituent elements of the Blessed Life. Several writers of the rationalistic school think it can be realized on earth, irrespective of, and even in direct opposition to, Christianity. The failure of Heathendom in the same pursuit, by such means, does not convince them of their inefficiency.

The truth is, no sharpening of the intellect, nor opiate administered to the conscience, nor accession to the weight and splendor of outward circumstances, can secure the enjoyment of this life. The seat of the disease, and therefore of the disquiet of humanity, lies deep in the unsanctified heart. The cure must begin where the parent evil lurks. The Benediction of God alone struck upon the heart will send forth a holy and happy influence, that will transform the whole nature, freshen life's parched places, and make its deserts blossom as the rose. There is no Blessed Life without Him who blesses, and we are blessed. There may be no worldly goods, or gay dwellings, or purple and fine linen; but, if there be the presence and the benediction of the Great High Priest, there will be felt a peace and joy far richer than wealth

can buy or power bestow. They who labor to inculcate the possibility of this happy life without Christianity do their best to quench or darken the pure fire from heaven that burns on the lighthouse, and to substitute that bale-fire which only deceives the voyager to his eternal ruin. If this volume teach any that the element of this Blessed Life descends from above, and can be collected from no earthly cistern, and touches the heart before it transforms the outward life, it will have fulfilled its mission.

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A
PEN AND INK SKETCH
OF THE
REV. JOHN CUMMING, D. D.,
OF THE SCOTCH CHURCH, CROWN-COURT, LONDON.
BY JOHN ROSS DIX.

Who does not know, either by repute or from personal observation, that enormous building which casts its broad shadow across Drury Lane, and which looms up like a Titan from among the dark, dingy buildings by which it is surrounded? Who, as he gazes upon it, does not call to mind that within its walls the greatest histrionic triumphs have been achieved, and that in its atmosphere the brightest constellations of the firmament of dramatic genius have arisen, shone with dazzling splendor, and have either gradually declined, or been suddenly quenched in darkness? The place is rich in associations. There Kemble charmed by his eloquence; there Kean revealed Shakspeare's conceptions by the lightning-flashes of his own genius. There Siddons startled, and O'Neill unsealed the fountains of tears; and there, too, a host of other great actors and actresses, who are now seen no more, have fretted their "hour upon the stage." Fire, more than once, has desolated this great temple of the Drama; but, phoenix-like, it has each time arisen from its ashes; and "Old Drury," shorn indeed of its ancient glories, still remains a home alike for the expositor of Shakspeare and the equestrian of the circle; a place

where on one night Hamlet soliloquizes, and on the next the clown elicits deafening applause by that "daring act of equestrianism," the riding on his horse's tail!

But, reader, we are not at present bound for the theatre. At the first glance it may seem strange that we should have commenced our sketch of a renowned minister of the gospel by a reference to a play-house; but, we have taken Drury Lane Theatre as a sort of landmark, which may indicate to those at a distance the precise locality of another building, to which we shall now more especially refer.

It is the morning of the Sabbath. From scores of church-towers sound forth the "church-going bells," and we, with thousands of others, hurry along the streets towards one of the many hundred places of worship, which deck, like oases, the great moral metropolitan desert. Leaving the Strand on our right, we enter Covent Garden — its market-place now silent, and almost forsaken; and, crossing that far-famed locality, we cross Bow-street pass under the colonnade of the theatre, and, when half-way through it, step over the narrow strip of road-way, and enter Crown-court. A stranger might pass the entrance to this obscure thoroughfare a hundred times, and never suspect that a building of any magnitude was within a dozen yards of him; but, were he to lift his eyes, he might perceive, overhead, an inscription informing him that *there* was situated Crown-court church.

We enter the court, and the Scotch church is on our left hand. As a building it has few claims to architectural consideration, being of no particular order, but rather of all the orders so blended that the distinctive features of no one can be made out. The gallery stairs are outside the front, presenting rather a curious appearance; but limited space, we presume, occasioned the unsightly arrangement. However that might be, we must not stay

to speculate upon it ; hundreds upon hundreds are passing up those stairs, and squeezing into the side doors ; and “ the cry is, still they come.” Carriage after carriage is setting down its freight of fashion ; cab after cab drives up, from which gentlemen hurriedly leap, and make their way to the doors of the edifice, and an unbroken stream of pedestrians flows in from either end of Crown-court. Watch for a moment the countenances of the church-goers ; there is as much curiosity and anxiety depicted upon them as might be witnessed in the faces of the impatient multitude who throng the doors of old Drury on the first night of a new piece. And well may such interest be evinced ; for this morning one of the most renowned preachers of the day is to preach on an all-absorbing topic. Cardinal Wiseman has sounded forth his trumpet-note of Romish defiance, and now the Protestant champion is about to enter the lists.

We are at length in the Scotch church. It is a large, oblong building ; a gallery deep and commodious running round one of the long and two of the short sides — the pulpit being placed in the centre of the other long side. The only national emblems to be seen are the thistle-shaped ground-glass shades of the gas-lights, and a thistle or two in the painted glass windows. In all other respects the place resembles an English dissenting chapel.

How densely the church is crowded ! — and how aristocratic appears the congregation ! We are prepared for the “ quality,” by the glimpse we just now had outside of luxurious-looking carriages, with strawberry-leaved coronets on their panels. Let us, before we speak of the minister, glance for a moment at his congregation ; for, sitting quietly in some of the pews, are men of mark.

Near the pulpit, on its left side, and in a secluded place under the gallery, sit a gentleman and lady, with two little children.

The gentleman is of diminutive stature ; his head is large, and thinly covered with dark-brown hair, which carelessly sweeps across his capacious forehead. His eyes are keen and cold, the nose longish and slightly turned up at its point, the mouth thin-lipped and compressed. Two apologies for whiskers appear just below the prominent cheek-bones. As a whole, the countenance is indicative of intellectual acquirements ; but it wants energy of expression, or rather the expression of energy. There is something of insignificance about it. But its owner is no insignificant personage ; for the little man who sits so quietly in that shaded pew is the Prime Minister of England, Lord John Russell, and those who sit beside him are his wife and children.

Not far from the premier is to be observed a gentleman tall and robust-looking. His face is florid and plump. He resembles a well-to-do country gentleman, rather than a member of the titled aristocracy. Nevertheless, he is a lord. It is Lord Ducie, an amiable nobleman enough, we believe, but who is not likely to rival Brougham. He is a regular attendant on Dr. Cumming's ministry. We might point out many other noticeable people, but that would be travelling out of the record, perhaps ; and, indeed, by the spontaneous rising of the congregation, and the sudden bursting forth of harmonious voices, we are reminded that the service has commenced.

“ Beautiful exceedingly ” is the singing at the Scotch church. There is no organ ; but it is evident that the choir requires not the aid of that king of musical instruments. Never have we heard better congregational singing than at Dr. Cumming's ; all may easily join in it, and indeed all present did, — at least, so it seemed to us. Clear and distinct in its silvery sweetness was one female voice, which reminded us of that of Jenny Lind ; and we have since heard that the lady to whom it belongs is generally

known as the nightingale of Crown-court church. Long, say we, may she warble thus deliciously, and in some humble measure prepare us, while on earth, for joining in the far more melodious and never-ceasing anthems of the skies !

The psalm of praise and thankfulness has ceased ; the congregation are seated, and the minister of the place ascends the stairs which lead to the pulpit. He is the observed of all observers. Every eye is fixed upon him ; but, on his assuming the attitude of prayer, each head is bowed, reverence banishes curiosity, and a deep, solemn hush pervades the place.

The prayer commences. It is an extemporaneous one, and, as all prayers should be, it is deeply fervent and devotional. We have, before now, been absolutely disgusted with some exercises of this kind ; for there are ministers whom we could name who have a vile habit of talking *at* God, instead of praying *to* him. They exhibit a familiarity when addressing the Deity which illustrates the fact that

“Fools rush in where angels fear to tread,”

and which painfully affects many who hear them. John Foster, one of the profoundest thinkers of the age, pointedly refers to this practice, and severely reprobates it, in his essay “On the Aversion of Men of Taste to Evangelical Religion.” Dr. Cumming’s prayer was a model of its kind ; there were no tiresome repetitions, no daring approaches to the Divine presence, no presumptuous requests. All was solemnity, humility and devotion, and the fervent aspirations of the creature to its Creator.

The prayer is ended. Another hymn has been sung, and the preacher rises to commence his discourse. But before he does so let us occupy a moment or two in sketching his portrait, faithfully as may be with pen and ink, as he now stands in the sacred desk.

The preacher is of the middle height, perhaps rather above it ; but, attired as he is in clerical robes, one is apt to be deceived in such a matter, which, after all, is not of any great importance, if we agree with Dr. Watts, that the "mind is the standard of the man." Dr. Cumming's face is a remarkably fine one. A glance at it might convince any ordinary observer that it belongs to one whose mind is not of the common stamp. Look at that high, broad forehead, across which dark, very dark hair sweeps, revealing the ample temples, and behind that barrier of bone you will feel assured is a brain of uncommon capacity. We are no great believers in the speculations of phrenology, and regard, without exception, those wisecracks who parcel out the brain-field as they would a potato-patch, as sumphs ; but we know that in a well-formed and capacious cranium may generally be found the true mental coin, which rings as well as shines. Such a head has Dr. Cumming, and sterling is the golden store which is coined in the cerebral mint. Two eyebrows, large, well-arched and black, overshadow a pair of dark eyes, of a serious and fearless expression. The nose is slightly aquiline, but not large, and on it perpetually rests a pair of spectacles, from which we may infer that much study has somewhat impaired his visual organs, however much it may have sharpened his critical perceptions. Some one has said, and I think with truth, that the mouth is a far more expressive feature than the eyes. In Dr. Cumming's case such is the fact ; the upper lip is thin, but well shaped, the lower one somewhat fuller than its fellow. This feature is very expressive ; at times a half-smile plays upon and around it, but it generally has a tinge of melancholy about it, and in repose it is indicative of deep thought. The complexion of the countenance is dark, and large black whiskers form the lateral boundaries of the face. Such is the personal appearance, so far as we can convey an idea of it, of the celebrated pastor of the Crown-court Scotch Church

Opening a little Bible which he holds with both hands, Dr. Cumming commences his discourse by reading from it his text. Very clear and musical is his voice. Although by no means loud, it can be heard with the utmost distinctness in the most distant part of the church; and consequently, as there is no shuffling and leaning forward to catch the sounds, the most perfect stillness reigns. Without a single preliminary "hem," or a moment's pause for the purpose of collecting his ideas, he at once commences the elucidation of his theme; and before he has uttered half a dozen sentences it is evident enough that all his matter has been carefully arranged beforehand. There is not the slightest hesitation; his words and ideas flow forth like a clear, continuous stream, and they are as transparent too. The eloquence of some ministers resembles the course of a mountain torrent; now with difficulty threading narrow ravines; now expanding in a calm, lake-like expanse, reflecting the loveliness of the skies; anon rushing and roaring over precipices and rocky barriers; and then dancing in sunlight through verdurous plains, and mossy-winding ways. Such orators startle by similes, attract by antitheses, and charm by variety. Not such is the character of Dr. Cumming's oratory. From the moment he commences his discourse, until the concluding sentence passes his lips, the current of his eloquence flows on calmly and untroubled. There are no passionate out-bursts, no succeeding passages of pathos; little to dazzle, less to startle, nothing to bewilder, — all is clear, calm, and convincing. With his little Bible in his hand, or more frequently in both hands, as we before intimated, he generally commences by plunging at once into his subject, not by making any lengthened introductory remarks. His voice, which but slightly informs us of his northern origin, is remarkably pleasant, and indeed musical. Seldom does it rise or sink above or below the

key in which he commences his discourse; yet, as might be expected by strangers, the effect is not monotonous, for every sentence is admirably balanced, each period carefully rounded, and almost every tone is admirably modulated. When hearing Dr. Cumming, one is reminded of the description of "Silver-tongued Smith," one of the celebrated preachers of Elizabeth's time. But, though the subject of our sketch is truly "silver-tongued," the solemnity, at times almost the severity, of his manner, preserves him from anything like tameness. Perhaps there is not a firmer or more fearless preacher than the doctor; a fact which has been proved over and over again of late, as his Romish antagonists have found, to their cost. Dr. Cumming's manner in the pulpit is pleasing. He seldom uses any other action than a gentle waving of the hand, or the turning from one part of his congregation to the other. He is no cushion-thumper, and depends for effect more upon what he says than on the graces of action. Not that he is ungraceful at all—far from that; what we mean is, that he is, in this respect, directly the opposite of those pulpit-fops who flourish their bordered pieces of inspiration-lawn in the pulpit, and throw themselves into such attitudes as compels one to believe that the looking-glass is almost as essential a preparation for the pulpit as the Bible itself.

Often have we heard Dr. Cumming, but never without having noticed that he referred either to the Apocalyptic mysteries or to Papacy. These are his two great topics. His "Sketches" on the former subject must be familiar to every reader of scriptural literature, and therefore it will be needless for me to add anything on this point, further than that by many able persons it is considered Dr. Cumming is mistaken in many of the predictions which he utters; and that his great abilities are wasted on mysteries which, after all, are unfathomable by mortal mind. With

respect to the Roman Catholic Church, he has long been known as one of its most vigorous, consistent, and uncompromising foes. As a controversialist he is truly great. No man can dissect Popery so fearlessly, so mercilessly, as can he. There is not a web of sophistry, however artfully woven, which he cannot disentangle; and his profound learning, great sagacity, and extensive acquaintance with his subject, render him the most dangerous enemy which Cardinal Wiseman has in these realms. We doubt not that his newly-fledged Eminence would rather encounter the whole bench of bishops, than the distinguished and bold polemic of Crown-court. Indeed, the doctor has actually bearded the lion of Popery in his den; for to his dingy palace in Golden-square he repaired, and there signally discomfited the emissary from the Vatican on his own ground. His lectures, delivered a short time since at the Hanover-square Rooms, on "The Teaching of Cardinal Wiseman," were masterpieces of argument; and they were listened to by as splendid an auditory as ever assembled in London, — men who are arbiters of taste and masters of opinion, — with the most profound satisfaction. To crown his pulpit triumphs, he has preached before the queen, at Balmoral; and his sermon on that occasion, entitled "Salvation," is now circulated by scores of thousands throughout the length and breadth of the kingdom.

Dr. Cumming is a very voluminous author, but we cannot in this place more than generally allude to his writings. His style as a writer resembles that of his oral productions. The sale of his works is prodigious, and is productive of large sums; so that, what with the salary derived from his rich congregation, and the profits of his literary productions, his income must be large; and he deserves it.

We have thus endeavored to convey to our readers, as graphic-

ally as may be, some idea of Dr. Cumming, both as regards his personal appearance, his manner, and his matter. At the present time he is the great pulpit "lion of London," just as Edward Irving was some twenty years since. But very different is the doctor to that strange, wonderfully eloquent, erratic founder of the sect who believe in the "unknown tongues." There could not by possibility be a greater contrast. The one all fire, enthusiasm, and semi-madness; the other, a man of chastened energy and convincing calmness. The one like a meteor flashing across a troubled sky, and then vanishing suddenly into the darkness, the other, like a silver star, shining serenely, and illuminating our pathway with its steady ray. But why pursue the parallel? The brilliant minister of the Regent-square Scotch church long since "passed within the veil," doubtless with unsealed eyes; and, though misled on earth, we doubt not that with the elders he now waves his palm and wears his crown. Long may it be ere it shall be said of the eloquent subject of the present article, "He too is gone!" for the church cannot spare him yet. Undazzled by popularity, unaffected by the breath of popular applause, he steadily pursues the duties of his calling; feeling, as we too feel, that a great work is before him. His humility is as genuine as is his piety; Scotland may well be proud of such a son. Hitherto his career has been a splendid one, but suddenly a new field for his exertions has appeared; he has boldly entered upon it, with an ardor which may be termed the chivalry of Protestantism; and on it, perhaps, his greatest triumphs have yet to be achieved.

CHAPTER I.

GLAD MUSIC.

“Salvation ! O, salvation !
The joyful sound proclaim,
Till earth’s remotest nation
Has learned Messiah’s name.”

“Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound : they shall walk,
O Lord, in the light of thy countenance.” — PSALM 89 : 15.

DAVID had oftentimes listened to the joyful sound of the golden bells on the high priest’s robe, announcing that the wearer was alive, and that his intercession was heard of God. But, though he had heard that sound very often, he well knew it was only a faint prelude to that glad sound now the privilege of the humblest, which saints and patriarchs longed to echo, and were not permitted. Happy are the people that have heard the bells of Aaron ; happy the people that have heard other sounds scarcely less sweet ; but emphatically blessed, “and I envy their blessedness,” says David, “is that people that know the joyful sound first struck on Calvary. Its echoes shall fill the wide world, and its reverberations shall not cease to be heard in deepening tones while the years of eternity continue to roll.” There were, no doubt, many sounds that David must have known, that were not joyful. There was the sound of war, the clarion and the trumpet, and the noise of garments rolled in blood, — these are not welcome, though often unavoidable. The voice of Sinai was another sound, but not a glad one. The

music of Sinai comes to us in crashes and in overwhelming majesty; its language is, "Thou shalt," and "Thou shalt not;" but so intolerable was its voice that Moses, the meekest man, quaked, and Israel begged that they might not hear "the voice of words" any more. There are various sounds in nature, all plaintive and sad; the voice of winds, the chime of waves, and the song of birds, are all in the minor key, as if all creation groaned, and travailed in pain, waiting for deliverance, that grand deliverance, which is the burden of prophecy, when the great Composer shall transpose all her strains from the minor into the major, and the wild wail of nature shall give way to the glad harmony of the everlasting jubilee, the joyous strains of which shall reverberate from heaven to earth, and the wide universe be as a whispering gallery, ever repeating its sweet music.

Above all sounds, and running like a sweet undertone in all, there is one called "The joyful sound." There is many a joyful sound, but there is one emphatically so. There is the chiefest Saviour for the chiefest of sinners. How joyful is this sound! To a man perishing of want, the sweetest word is "bread." What is the most joyful accent to a man on the brink of the grave? A cure for his disease. What is the joyful sound to a man living under bondage to death and in fear of eternal ruin? The sound that rings like sweet music from the skies, and awakens its echoes in the heart of every one that truly knows it, "Jesus died for our sins and rose again for our justification," and "by his stripes we are healed." It commenced in Paradise; it gladdened Abraham's heart; it rolled through the trumpet of Isaiah; it received a new impulse, and rose and swelled from Calvary, and Olivet, and Gethsemane; and now it is heard from the pine forests of the north to the palm groves of the east: there is no tongue where this word is not heard; there is no land where this voice is unknown. If any within the circuit of

the Queen's dominions live in ignorance of it, it is not want of opportunity, and therefore misfortune; but want of will, and therefore a crime.

Why is this sound called *the joyful sound*? Why is it emphatically *the joyful sound*? It is the sound of truth in the midst of a world of falsehoods and deceptions. It is the reply to millions of anxious spirits — the only reply that meets their inquiries. What was the great anxiety and ceaseless search of ancient philosophy? To find out what is truth. So hopeless of success, however, were the most gifted philosophers of old, that one school came to the conclusion that there was no such thing discoverable on earth as truth. Now, here we have the sound, not only of truth, but of the truth amidst a world of falsehood and of error. It is not weak men that are often perplexed by anxious inquiries what is to be the end of this wondrous drama called life, this unsounded mystery, which we feel and cannot comprehend, this tangled skein we cannot unravel. Is the grave the end of me? Is death the close of my existence upon earth? Do I cease to be when I cease to breathe? If so, the God who made man must be a cruel tyrant; and man, of all created beings, is, on such a supposition, the most wretched. The horse has no presentiment of death, and therefore no reluctance to face it; he has no yearning after immortality: man, on the contrary, instinctively recoils from death, and pants after immortality. God has made him with the conscious knowledge that he must one day die, and with the no less powerful yearning to live forever; and yet, if there be no hereafter, he has doomed him to annihilation. If this be so, I must infer, in spite of all around me, that the God who made me is a tyrant, and that of all animals, man is the most wretched. It is not weak minds that are perplexed with this; it is not poor and shallow minds that are anxious upon this subject. The ripest intellects have felt it the deepest,

and the profoundest thinkers have been perplexed by it; men have spent all they had, and searched the height and fathomed the depth for a solution; and the depth and the height, and the past and the present, have either been dumb, or said each, "It is not in me." How blessed to hear a sound, clear and loud as a trumpet's peal, the joyful sound of salvation, a God, a future, an eternity, a home, and Christ, the way, the truth, and the life! Here, too, is the advantage of this. It is not a discovery. It is a revelation. There is a very great difference between what is called a discovery and a revelation. A discovery is something that man makes, and that man can mend; a revelation is something that God gives, and that God alone can add to. Columbus discovered America; but a child in a Sunday-school knows more about America, in the year 1853, than Columbus knew some three centuries ago, when he first discovered it. What man discovers, another may further explore, and a third may greatly enlarge; but when God makes a revelation, it comes from a height to which created wing cannot soar, and it deals with things that the human mind cannot penetrate; and, therefore, we must and ought to rejoice to accept it, just as it is handed down to us from heaven, in all its completeness; we cannot add to it. The joyful sound is not a discovery which man has struck out as the result of investigation, but a revelation which God has made known in his sovereign grace. We now receive it just as God at first gave it.

It is the sound of truth in a world of falsehoods. We have no longer to ask now, "What is truth?" Pilate once put that question, but did not wait for an answer; many persons ask the question, in their case a plagiarism from Pontius Pilate, rather than a suggestion of their own minds, and, like him, wait not for a reply; but many ask it solemnly, seriously, and from the heart, and to these we answer, "We know what truth is." Christ is the truth, the Bible is the depository of

it, the minister is the preacher of it; present happiness is the blossom and eternal joy the fruitage of it. We can say what truth is; we need not speculate, because God has spoken; we need not guess, for we hear, "Thus saith the Lord," — the answer to all queries, the close of all disputes, the settlement of all difficulties.

It is joyful not only because the sound of truth, but also because that of forgiveness. When man has heard truth he wants to know how far that truth can benefit him. The very first feeling that stirs the conscience is that I am a sinner. There is not an individual on earth who does not feel more or less deeply that there is a quarrel between him and God. If not, why so frequent retreat from God? Why that shrinking from God's inspection? Why that half-suppressed, half-uttered, ill-defined, but still cherished wish, rather than feeling or conviction, "No God," — "I wish there were no intruder from heaven upon my transactions upon earth"? Why are there so many ledgers that they could bear any person to see except God? Why so many things in their history that they would suffer any one to scrutinize rather than God? Why does the week run swifter when they get rid of the idea of a present God? why would the day be overcast with clouds, if they had a consciousness that God was looking on? The reason is plain; there is a quarrel between them and God. Our own hearts condemn us, and God is greater than our own hearts. Man's conscience was once the vicegerent of Deity: what conscience spoke within was just the echo of what God said without; and, even now, conscience in its ruin has enough of its pristine eloquence and surviving affinity to God never to be altogether and always silent. The passions try to make conscience a sort of citizen-king, putting it up and down as they please; but it will not quietly submit; it resists the authority of the passions; it insists upon supremacy; it cannot forget its noble

lineage and its erst holy function derived from God, As long as man can gratify his passions, and give an opiate to conscience, so long it will be partially quiet. But a day comes when the passions must be laid, and when every beat of the heart, like the curfew-bell, will tell you that the time for extinguishing their fires is come; and then and there conscience will reassert its lost supremacy, grasp its broken sceptre, and, refusing to be put down, it will emit its true and eternal utterances; and reason of righteousness, and temperance and judgment; and prove that man may peradventure live without religion, but die without it he rarely can. A death-bed is that hour when conscience reasserts its supremacy, however stupefied it may have been with the opium of half a century, and reminds its possessor of all behind and before. In such a case there are two resources,—either the Romish priest, with a stronger opiate, under which man will die deluded and deceived; or the blood of Jesus, with pardon for the sin, and therefore peace for the conscience, which is the joyful sound of forgiveness.

Another reason why this is called the joyful sound is its announcement of freedom,—that blessing which man longs for and pants after; yet not the liberty, or rather license, that some democrats would have, but true liberty. A Christian can never be a slave; you may bind his outward limbs in fetters, but you cannot bind his soul. My limbs do not constitute me; the presence of them is not essential to me, the absence of them is not the extinction of me. That which constitutes me is that which thinks, hopes, rejoices. There is one thing only that can chain the soul, namely, sin; and there is only one electric touch that can dissolve that chain,—the finger of Jesus. This sound is emphatically joyful; because, like the trumpet of Jubilee, it proclaims freedom to the slave, the opening of the prison doors to them that are bound, sal-

vation and acceptance for the guiltiest through him who died for us and rose again.

It is joyful, because it is the sound of peace. "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked." It is utterly impossible that one whose conscience retains any sensibility at all can enjoy anything like true peace till he is forgiven. I know quite well men may get rid of the inward disquiet by turning their attention to something outside; but this is not peace. The reason why we see so many men intensely absorbed in business is not that they are anxious to make more money, but that they are earnestly desirous of finding so entire and intense an absorption of their thoughts, that they shall have no anticipatory feelings, and therefore no tormenting fears, about death, and judgment and eternity to come. Such peace, however, as can be produced by such means, is "peace, peace, when there is no peace at all;" it is quiet, not peace. But this joyful sound is the sound of true peace; a peace that will go down into the depths of conscience, that will rise to the heights of judgment to come, and that will enable you, wherever and at whatever angle and in whatever light you look at self, at God, at judgment and eternity, to feel the peace that passeth understanding, with which a stranger intermeddleth not, and which no foe nor friend can possibly take away. Do we hear ringing in our hearts this sound of peace? Can we realize the thought that God is present, and yet feel perfect repose? Can we recollect that we are standing on the brink of the grave, and soon to enter the porch and vestibule of eternity, and yet feel peace? Let us realize a dying moment. There is not a face, however beautiful, that looks upon this page, that, in a very few years, shall not be mouldering beneath the green sod, "corruption its mother, and the worm its sister." Is that the end of us? We know it is not. We believe the word of God; we are immortal, yet responsible. What is our expectation in reference to another world?

Do we imitate the ostrich, that hides its head in the sand, and thinks, because it ceases to see the pursuer, the pursuer has ceased to follow? Are we crying, in spite of the reclamations of conscience, "Peace, peace, when there is no peace at all"? Or, can we say, in the language of the dying saint, the martyr and apostle, "I know in whom I have believed, and that he is able to keep what I have committed to him against that day. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing"? If so, blessed are we. We know the joyful sound; ours is the blessed life.

It is the sound of a home hereafter, falling on the ear. A home upon earth is but shadow, not substance; the brightest and the sweetest will soon be overcast with thick and impenetrable clouds. There is no home in which there is not one nook painfully empty that used to be gladdened by a dear presence; in which there is not one chair vacant that used to be beautifully occupied; in which there is not any more heard a footfall that used to be music to the ear, expectation and joy to the heart. There is no home in which death has not entered, and borne off spring flowers, that made him seem more beautiful to the parent because of the young blossoms he carried in his bosom to a better and a balmier clime. There is no memory that is not in some degree a picture-gallery of the dead, where are treasured up images that we do not worship, but cannot let go.

We well know, too, that even the brightest moments experienced in our home suggest the darkest. Often, when I have listened to that sweetest music by the fireside, the glad voices of happy children, I have felt in my own mind the solemn and painful presentiment of a day when these bright faces shall be pale, and these restless heads shall be fevered on the pillow, and these sweet sounds shall be hushed, and

that home, whose roof-tree now rings with their accents, shall be lonely, desolate, and sad. But we have recovered ourselves, and recollected, when this home shall pass away like the fabric of a vision, there is another beyond the stars, the meeting-place of long-lost and much-loved ones, where friend shall meet friend, and the mother shall embrace the child she lost in infancy, and the father the son, and the son the father; and circles that had been broken on earth shall be completed in glory; and ties snapped in sunder here shall be reunited, and all things shall be made new. This is the joyful sound of a home whose parent and presence is God; whose atmosphere is joy, whose companionship is the once lost, but now restored and ever loved, and never again lost.

Such is the joyful sound. "Blessed are the people that know the joyful sound." These are the sounds that lighten toil of its pressure, that sweeten human trials, and lessen life's long afflictions. Hush this sound, and the world would lose its richest music; silence these truths, and earth would be disenchanted of its greatest attraction. This sound heard in the humblest dwelling, in life's deepest sorrow, in the midst of the greatest trials, creates a peace, a happiness and a joy, that made the Psalmist say, what thousands in succession have experimentally reiterated, "Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound."

This leads us to notice what is a most important truth, that joy is an essential element in the Gospel of Christ. It is the first effect of the Gospel to make man happy; it is the second, but ever accompanying, to make man holy. The entertainment we give to good news creates happiness. Do I hear that some one has left me a fortune, — my first feeling is gladness, my second is gratitude to him who bequeathed it. When we hear good news of any sort, we respond in gladness or joy. Now, the Gospel is good news, and the very first response that man makes to it, when he heartily receives it, is joy; and that

joy becomes his strength, his holiness, and the spring of his progress onward from grace to grace, and from strength to strength, till at last he appears before God in Zion. The sermon that does not contribute to make happier now, or more remotely, has failed of one chief object of the Gospel of Christ. There is no one doctrine of Christianity that does not tend to make its subjects happier on earth. Take away from evangelical and spiritual religion any one essential doctrine, and you will find that you have taken away a spring of happiness. Deny the deity of Christ, and I can have little satisfaction in knowing or believing that Christ is mere man. He is thus to me but a more perfect example of that of which Sinai was already a perfect exponent; and to show me a holier, a purer, and a clearer law, is only to plunge me into a deeper condemnation, by showing more clearly my inability to fulfil it. In the same manner instruct me that I am to be justified by what I do myself, and I am so conscious of the weakness of my greatest strength, of the faults and failures of my holiest efforts, that to tell me that I can be justified only by what I can do is to drive me to despair, and to exhaust my heart of every element of joy, because of every ground of hope, within it. Or tell me, on the other hand, that I am elected to everlasting life, and therefore sin is no sin to me, — that I can commit sin, and yet be safe, — I shall have no joy in that. I want not only to be rid of the punishment of sin, but of the pollution of sin. A true Christian is not satisfied with escaping hell; he desires as much to escape that which leads to hell, — the power, the taint, and the presence of sin; and therefore to teach me that I can be delivered from the penal results of sin, but that there is no prospect of my emancipation from the present pollution of sin, is to give me what can never make me happy; for sin is as hateful to my renewed heart as punishment and penalty can be to human nature. And so, on the other hand, to tell me that I am to

lean for acceptance partly on Christ, and partly on the church, — partly on the righteousness of Jesus, and partly on the sacraments, — robs me in the degree in which I believe of my happiness, because it would be to have one foot consciously upon the rock, and the other upon the boat rocked in the surge, or upon the sinking sand; and, knowing this, I cannot have rest. In other words, we shall find that the more clear and full the exhibition of the doctrines of the Gospel of Christ, the greater and the richer will be the joy that men will derive in consequence. To sum up all in a single sentence, any interference with the purity of the doctrines of the Gospel is an interference not only with the absolute safety, but with the enjoyment, of the people of God.

David says, "Blessed are the people that *know* the joyful sound." This is a remarkable expression; to *know* a sound is a strange, and yet a very scriptural phrase. "The sheep *know* his voice, and a stranger they will not follow." We all recollect that beautiful incident in the Scripture where Jesus, after he rose from the dead, appeared to Mary, who, not expecting so holy, beautiful and desired a presence, did not recognize him at the first blush; but when he opened his lips, and said, in his own sweet tones, "Mary!" that instant her ear corrected the misapprehension of the eye, she knew the joyful sound, and she recognized Jesus the Son of God. So Rhoda, when Peter came and stood at the door, not recognizing his presence by sight, instantly knew him by his voice, and stated to those that were within that Peter was there. When Jesus walked upon the waves, and came to the disciples toiling in the storm at the third watch, they saw him, but thought he was a spirit; as soon, however, as he spoke, and said, "Fear not: it is I," they recognized his presence, and were sure it was the Lord Jesus Christ. I know many who cannot easily recollect faces, but the instant they hear the voice they distinguish the individual, and his history, too

Many correct by the ear the misapprehension into which they fall by the eye. The soldier knows the sound of the trumpet, and its significance, too; the sailor knows by the first whistling of the wind whether it indicates the tornado or the coming zephyr. The Mahometan knows the cry of the *muezzin* upon the minaret from afar. "Blessed are the people" that know amid all sounds, and can distinguish amid all voices, that which rings sweetest and loudest, and will ring last — the joyful sound of holiness, purity and peace; a Saviour for the chiefest and the oldest of sinners, and an everlasting home for the weary and way-worn. Blessed are the people that *know* it. There are persons who hear the sound, and yet do not know it. I dare say others might have heard Jesus speak to Mary, yet did not recognize it as the voice of Jesus. One might hear a person speak the most eloquent things, and yet hear only what would prove a very sweet strain of music, but not what would be of any practical value. Many hear sermons, but they do not know sermons. At the electric telegraph in action we may see two persons conveying from London to Edinburgh meaning of the greatest moment, while another person, standing by, sees the process, or manipulation, but does not know one syllable of the message. Not a few come to church, and are pleased with the preacher's sermons, and they say, "He has the voice of one playing well upon an instrument;" but no good do they derive. We are told by our blessed Lord, "The sheep know his voice, and a stranger they will not follow." I am one of those who believe that the Christian laity are perfectly capable of saying whether that sermon preached by this or that minister is the Gospel or not. A man who is truly converted knows what the Gospel is; and a stranger's voice, preaching another Gospel, he will not follow. There is not the least danger that a truly converted man will ever become a Papist; it is impossible. Men that profess loudly may become Ro

manists, but they whose hearts have been changed, whose minds have been illuminated with heavenly light, who have been taught to hear and to know the joyful sound, the music of a Saviour's voice, and the meaning and mystery of a Saviour's sacrifice, will not long listen to preaching that is not the echo of that voice, or recognize as a true shepherd him who preaches another gospel, which is not another, but a corruption and a perversion altogether. The apostle tells us in the Epistle to the Galatians, very decidedly, that if we hear an angel from heaven preach any other gospel to us, "let him be Anathema." I believe that the duty of the day is not to go to any church where the Gospel is not preached by one who knows it, and in his heart loves it. "If *we*," says the apostle, — Paul the apostle, — "or an angel coming down radiant with the glory of heaven, should preach to you, in angel eloquence and with angel strains, something different from that Gospel which ye have received in this book, let him be Anathema." That is, do not burn him, do not calumniate him, do not kill him, but have nothing to do with him. So I love the church I belong to; but if in that parish church, far distant, around whose walls the dust of my fathers sleeps in the hope of a blessed resurrection, the very stones of which are dear to me, and the chime of whose bells still recalls the thoughts, the sympathies and the recollections, of boyhood, — if in that church, so beloved, there were to be placed one who should preach another gospel than this blessed Gospel of the Son of God; and if, on the other side of the road, there were the humblest of preachers, proclaiming in its fulness the unsearchable riches of Christ, — with a broken heart and a staggering step, but stern to my purpose, I and mine would turn our backs upon the parish church, and worship in the dissenting chapel. I love the church not less, but the Gospel more. The candlestick is of no avail, unless it have light upon it. It may be chased, and of pure gold, but

if there is no candle in it, where is the use of it? The cup may be of very beautiful silver, but if there is poison in it, I cannot drink it. Give me pure water from earth's fountain in the earthenware cup, rather. I have no alternative. The truth in all its purity, the Gospel in all its simplicity, I must have; and, if I cannot have it in the formula I prefer, I will have it in the formula in which I can obtain it. Blessed, then, are the people that know this joyful sound, and so know it that they will give up any preference upon earth rather than miss it, and make every sacrifice of every prejudice rather than let it go, and will have recourse to the forms they least love, because the Gospel is there, while they reject error in the form that they prefer and love, when it is desecrated to the service of evil.

Such is the joyful sound, such the happiness of the people who know it; such is a leaf of the tree of the blessed life. We have next the fruits of it declared by David. To these I can very briefly allude: "They shall walk in the light of thy countenance. They *walk* because they have life; they *walk* because that life is progressive; and they walk, not in the light of sparks of their own kindling, but in the light of the countenance of God, which is sunshine and joy. The countenance is the dial-plate of the inner man. Hypocrisy may cloud it, management may alter it, but still in the long run the living inhabitant within discovers himself in the fugitive lights and shadows that sweep successively over the countenance without. When the soul within is happy, the countenance, being its index, has a beautiful play of light upon it. It is easy to know a happy man by the light that shines from his countenance, just as it is easy to know a sad man by the lines upon his face, the falling of his brow, and the shadows that seem to gather and cluster over it. Now, those people who know this joyful sound walk in the light of the countenance of God, — God their Father, — on which

mercy, and truth, and righteousness, and peace, have met together; and, just as children love to be with their father, so these walk in the light of God's countenance shining upon them, and they walk everywhere in this light. Sometimes they are called to walk through trials, afflictions, tribulation and distress; but the light of God's countenance shining upon them makes earth's dark places bright, and earth's rugged places smooth, and the cup that is filled with the bitterest ingredients to taste comparatively sweet. Sometimes they are called upon to walk by sick beds, and by the early graves of the beloved dead; but the light of God's countenance shining upon the grave turns the cypress into the palm, and, falling upon the face of the dead, reflects upon that pale, dear countenance the fore-thrown glories of the resurrection morn; and in their sorrows they feel a blessedness that the world knows not, who look upon all things in the light of a Father's face, and see all trials shining in the lustre of the skies all the day long. What dignity is here, — Christians walking before God! What safety is here, — walking in the light of a Father's countenance, never lost sight of by him, and he never lost sight of by them, — walking, not as slaves with a task-master, but as sons in the presence of a loving and affectionate father! Many associate with the acceptance of Christianity everything that is sorrowful. I have met with many, not certainly very decided Christians, who seem to have this notion of the Gospel. They think, "Christianity is very beautiful, nay, admirable for a sick bed, a capital thing for a grave-side; but in our bright and merry moments we would rather be without it." And, hence, when a great loss overtakes such a person, he sends to the minister, to request the prayers of the Christian congregation; but, if he be made an heir of a large fortune, he does not send to ask that the prayers of the congregation may be offered for one who has been suddenly blessed, or request that the praises and thanks

of the congregation may be mingled with his to the Giver. And so, if one is ill, he sends for a minister to pray with him, but if he is well and prosperous in the world he would rather go to the play-house to enjoy himself. Yet it is far more difficult to hold steadily a full cup than a half-filled one. The high places of the world are more slippery than the low places; and, if we need prayer when we suffer, we need prayer still more when we are prospered. But the unhappy thing is, that men think of religion as only for life's sad hours,—they do not regard it as a prescription for man's bright hours. This religion, nevertheless, is a happy religion, and it is meant for all the phases and for all the varieties of human experience. It will make life's sunshine more brilliant and beautiful than before; it will cast its radiance upon affliction's dark cloud, till you can trace upon it the glories of heaven itself. "Is any man afflicted, let him pray; is any man merry, let him sing psalms." Thus our tears and our sorrows, our trials and our joys, all bring us to God, in prayer or in praise, and all the day long we shall walk in the light of his countenance.

Not only shall they walk in the light of God's countenance, but they shall rejoice in his name all the day long; they shall be exalted in his righteousness, they shall glory in his strength. What bright prospects are these! and yet these are ours. God means that his people should be happy. Would it not be a strange thing if God were to make his enemies happy, but keep his own people always miserable? If there be a bounding heart anywhere, it is a response to the touch of the finger of Jesus; if there be a sad heart, or a broken heart, it is not because of the presence, but the absence, of Christianity. No man who knows the blessed Gospel need have an unhappy hour; no man who is a stranger to it ought to have a pleasant or a merry one. Religion is not a thing that speaks in sepulchral tones, amid trials and in sor-

rowful accents only, but in sunshine. It makes truly happy; it pronounces benedictions; its grand feature is, "Blessed are the people that know the joyful sound; they shall rejoice in God all the day long."

If this Gospel that we ourselves have been made acquainted with is thus fitted to make happy all that come under its influence, we shall ever be ready to transmit the glad sound from the river to the ends of the earth, and not to cease till the whole world is blessed in Jesus, and all generations shall call him blessed. It is the law of our experience that the man who has heard good news never can keep it to himself; few who have gathered good information can make a monopoly of it; and still less will he who has personally felt the Gospel in its sweetness, and its joy, and its power, fail to wish that every person may know it as well as he. If I have discovered a cure for an almost universal disease, the first thing I do is to publish it far and wide; I cannot rest until I have done it. We in this land have discovered a balm for the troubled soul, a home for the orphan, a husband for the widow, and a friend for the friendless; and if this revelation be precious to us, it will be the very first and most powerful impulse of our renovated nature to send it forth until the whole earth reverberates and reflects its glad music, and all men become as happy under its influence as we are. If the Gospel could be preached without our instrumentality, it would be useless to ask it; but there is no evidence that the winds chant the joyful sound, that the sunbeams write it on the sky, that the lightning flashes it upon the minds of men, or that the waves of the ocean, in their multitudinous chimes, announce that Jesus died for our sins. And if there is no one instrumentality besides ourselves, let us use it as we have opportunity.

CHAPTER II.

THE FAVORED PEOPLE.

“ How happy are our ears,
That hear the joyful sound,
Which kings and prophets waited for,
And sought, but never found !

“ How favored are our eyes,
That see this heavenly light !
Prophets and kings desired it long,
But died without the sight.”

“ But blessed are your eyes, for they see ; and your ears, for they hear. For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them ; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.” — MATTHEW 13 : 16, 17.

OUR responsibility rises exactly in the ratio of the privileges which we enjoy. “ The more we have, the more we have to answer for,” is a proverb that everybody gives utterance to, that the few and the far between only feel or follow as they ought. We are very apt to dream that privilege possessed by us commends us to God, and that it is in some respect to be regarded in the light of merit in his sight. It really is not so. Privilege is something God grants to us. It only commends him to us for his goodness ; and it does not add to our merit in his sight, or in any degree commend us to him, because of our possession of it. He gives us our privileges

not in the ratio of our merits, but in his own sovereignty, of which he gives no man living a reason. Privileges are given to whomsoever he pleases, and at whatsoever time he pleases. and as largely as to him seems fit. But we may learn, from God's giving these privileges, whether they be of birth, wealth, knowledge or influence, that he is God ever giving in his sovereignty, and that we are the mere and undeserving and too often unthankful recipients only, and have nothing but what he gives, original or communicated, to make us differ, or to commend us.

In the passage I have quoted from St. Matthew there are two characters mentioned — prophets, and righteous men; and we find that such and so exalted and so numerous were the privileges possessed by the hearers of our Lord, that prophets and righteous men desired to see them, and saw them not, and to hear them, and heard them not. If this was applicable to the generation that listened to the teaching of Jesus, it is *a fortiori* to that of the nineteenth century; for we have lights, and means, and facilities, and opportunities of knowing what is the truth, and of feeling its force and virtue in our own hearts, which those on whose dust we now tread had not; this makes us, therefore, responsible before God to a degree to which they of that generation were utter strangers.

These two classes of our predecessors, who had their measure of responsibility according to their circumstances, were “prophets” and “righteous men.” These are generic terms for two great divisions of mankind. The “prophet” is the symbol of gifts, the “righteous man” the symbol of graces. A prophet is one who has a special gift, the righteous man is one who has a saving grace. The prophet, as the representative of the gifted, may be taken to include genius, learning, wealth, rank, power of any sort or of any degree. The righteous man, as the representative of graces, may be taken to comprehend and represent all the children of God of every

name and measure, in the history or within the limits of the Christian church.

We have here, first, the prophets or the gifted men; we have next the righteous, or, if I may use the expression, the graced men. Righteous men are those who are true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, and who wear not their own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is of God through faith in him. In other words, they occupy, first, a definite state — they are righteous in the sight of God through Christ's righteousness; and, secondly, they possess a distinctive character — they are righteous by the operation of the Holy Spirit within them. In their first aspect, they are righteous by a righteousness upon them; in their second aspect, they are righteous by a righteousness within them: the first is Christ's righteousness imputed to them; the second is the Spirit's righteousness imparted to them: the one, their state; the other, their character: the two, however, never divorced; for wherever there is a change of state by Christ's righteousness being upon us, there is a change of character by the Spirit's work begun within us. These are two great classes of mankind.

We have to learn, what the Scripture so frequently inculcates, that these two, — the one of providence, that is, gifts; the other of grace, that is, righteousness — are not always and everywhere united in the same person. One may be a prophet, and not be a righteous man. One may have most distinguishing gifts, and may be destitute of the lowliest or the most precious graces. At the last day some will come to our blessed Lord, and say to him, as it is recorded in this very Gospel, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name?" that is, "Have we not been prophets, and in thy name done miracles, and cast out devils?" And what will he say unto them? "Then will I profess unto them, I never knew you," — not, "You once were Christians, and I cast you off," but,

“I never recognized you as Christians at all.” In other words, there may be gifts that shall lift to a prophet’s chair, and there may be combined therewith sin and depravity that shall sink to a fiend’s condition. There may be gifts that will make the world admire and applaud; there may be total destitution of that grace which teacheth to deny ungodliness, and to live soberly and righteously and godly in this present world. Balaam lived a prophet’s life; he died a sinner’s and a criminal’s death. Judas was an apostle, cast out devils, healed diseases; but it is written, “Judas went to his own place.” Privilege lifts us to a loftier position of responsibility; grace or character alone fits us for the enjoyment of the holy and happy life of the blessed. It is a very mysterious thing that God should arm with gifts a man to whom he imparts no grace; but is it not plainly illustrated in the experience of every day? We see one illustrious for his genius as a poet, but degraded as a man. We read of a Shelley, who could write poetry that would thrill the innermost chords of the human soul, but who professed to disbelieve in the existence of a God. There have been gifted and intellectual men who have had no affinity to God, no sympathy with Christ, no tokens of his signature and sonship at all. When we hear the sceptic say, “How can you account for this, that so great men do not believe in Christianity, while peasants do?” I answer, The very Christianity that they refuse tells us it is so; and, were it not so, a prophecy would remain unfulfilled. There will be to the end men of great gifts, “prophets,” but at the same time men of no graces, unrighteous and ungodly men.

Of these two classes so remarkable, which should we most desire? O, surely, surely, to be righteous men. But is this the desire of the world? Is there not many a man who would rather be called dishonest than stupid? Are there not thousands who, if they could only have the trumpet

of fame sound their names as men of genius, would not mind that an undertone in that trumpet, strictly true, should speak of the innocence they have wronged, of the debts they have left unpaid, and the honest and industrious tradesmen they have ruined by their mad and ungodly career? Gifts may be admired on earth, but righteousness alone will be recognized in heaven. Let us never forget that prophets may be applauded and surrounded by the hosannas of man, but righteous men alone will receive the approbation that cometh from God only. O, ten thousand times better be a lowly, humble, poor peasant, possessed of rich grace, than be an illustrious genius, merely dignified by great gifts. Pray that God may give or may not give gifts, as he thinks best; but that he may give grace, for without that we cannot live, and without it we cannot joyously die.

We are not responsible to God for the measure or the number of our gifts, but we are responsible to God for having or not having grace. If God has not made me a poet, a philosopher, a statesman, a noble, a prince, that is not my blame; I shall never be judged for that; but, if I am not at this moment a Christian, this is my blame, and the blame of nobody else upon earth. We are not answerable for our not having gifts, but we are answerable for our not having that grace which bringeth salvation. Few may be prophets; all may be righteous men. God will not condemn you because you had not great genius; but God will visit you, if at that day you are found destitute of saving and sanctifying grace.

Let me notice, as the second division of my subject, — for I would not dwell long upon each, — that these prophets, or gifted men, and these righteous men, or true Christians, looked forward to what we see and we hear, but only enjoyed the prospective look, not the actual and blessed possession. It is said, they looked forward to them. Unto us is born a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord; unto them was predicted a

Saviour, who was to be Christ the Lord. They had the Gospel in the shadowy outline; we have it in its brilliant manifestation. They had the Gospel in types; we have it in reality. They had the good thing in promise and prophecy; we have it in performance. They lived in the dim and misty twilight; we live in its bright noonday. They saw through a glass darkly what we now see clearly, just as our successors in a future dispensation will see clearly what we now see through a glass darkly. They were saved by a prospective hope in a Saviour that was to be; we are saved by a retrospective trust in a Saviour that has been, and now is, and reigns.

We gather from this fact that there is, and has been, only one true religion in the world. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, were Christians; Luther, and Calvin, and Knox, and Ridley, and Latimer, were patriarchs. Both were believers in the one Lord Jesus Christ. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, looked forward to the Saviour; Latimer, and Calvin, and Knox, and Luther, looked back to the Saviour; but it was the same religion. The telescopes through which they looked varied; the bright Sun they looked at was the same. There is but one ocean, though we speak of Red Sea, and Black Sea, and German Sea, and Atlantic Sea. There is but one ocean deriving its name from the shores it touches. There is but one religion characterized by the ages against which it ceaselessly beats, — the Christian religion the first, the Christian religion the last. From the first promise that pealed amid the wrecks of Paradise, to the last jubilee that shall sound when the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our God and of his Christ, there has been, and is, and will be, but one true religion.

Every believer thirsts for more knowledge than he has. These righteous men and prophets desired to see a higher and clearer dispensation than that they lived in; and it is still

the characteristic of every child of God that he desires to see a clearer and brighter apocalypse than it is now his privilege to see. The dawn is so beautiful, that we long for the bright noonday. The bud of Sharon's rose is so fragrant, that we long for the summer that will reveal the full-blown blossom. David, after he had seen so much of God, still said, "My soul thirsteth for God." Moses, after he had been on the mount, and had his face tinged with the unutterable glory, yet cried still, "O Lord, show me thy glory!" And Paul saw so much in the future still to be revealed, that, "forgetting those things that are behind, and pressing onward to those that are before," he desired to "attain to the mark of his high calling." And Peter was so smitten and so charmed with the religion that he had, that he said, "Whom having not seen we love; and in whom, though now we see him not, yet believing, we rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory." And John, who saw more in Patmos than the apostles upon the Mount of Transfiguration, was so struck with the splendor and so interested in the glory of that Divine Saviour, that, as soon as the vision had passed away, and even before its parting wing had disappeared from his sight, he cried again, "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly!"

Wherever there is true grace, there is a feeling of desire for more. Who does not wish better to understand unfulfilled prophecy than he now understands it? and who does not desire to be spared till that day, in all probability not far distant, when earth shall undergo its second baptism, and genesis shall be regeneration, and all things shall be made new? There is no sin in this. There is no more sin in desiring to be spared till the Lord come, than there was sin in the righteous man desiring to see those things which the apostles saw. It only becomes sin when it frets and irritates, and ceases to mete and limit itself by the petition, "O Lord, thy will be done on earth, even as it is done in heaven!" Thus we see

the desire of progress inherent in the thirst of believers. The more they have, the more they still desire.

God's communications of Christian knowledge have been progressive. No one can shut his eyes to this great fact, that the patriarchs knew more than the antediluvians, and the Jews more than the patriarchs, and the prophets more than their predecessors; that the disciples of John knew more than the Scribes and the Pharisees, and the disciples of Jesus more than the disciples of John. The apostles after Pentecost knew more than before Pentecost; and I venture to assert, not without examination, that Luther, and Calvin, and Knox, and Ridley, and Latimer, understood more of the Gospel, and what they did know more clearly, than Augustine, and Chrysostom, and Jerome, and Tertullian, among the fathers. The truth is, there is prevalent a gross misconception of what are called the Christian fathers. We call them "fathers" because they chronologically preceded us; but it is not chronological nearness or distance that is of value, but intellectual, moral, and religious advantages. Now, there were fools in the days of Chrysostom, just as there are now; and therefore, because a man lived in Chrysostom's days, it does not prove that he was more enlightened than if he lived in the days of Luther, Ridley, or Latimer. I believe that the fathers, so called, are the children, and that the enlightened divines of the present age are the fathers of the Christian church.

Chrysostom had the same Bible that Dr. Chalmers had; he had the same promise of the Holy Spirit; he had the same intellect, for there is very little difference of intellect in different ages. And what else had he to make him superior to Dr. Chalmers? Nothing; but he had much to make him inferior; for the latter had all the discoveries of science, and the very blunders that Chrysostom made were like wrecks in the Downs,—the beacons for future interpreters to steer a

clearer course. I hold, that an enlightened divine in 1853 is more likely to be a sound and judicious interpreter of the Bible than the most eminent of all the fathers that ever lived, either in the Nicene age, or in the centuries that immediately succeeded it. The idea that the fathers, because they lived, as Chrysostom and Augustine did, upwards of three hundred years after our Lord's birth, should know more than we eighteen hundred years after it, is absurd. What more do we know of Martin Luther, three hundred years after his birth, than those who will live, were the world to last so long, a thousand years hence? If there be ten years between us and a man, unless he has lived within the compass of our lifetime, and we have come personally into contact with him, we know little more of him than persons who read his biography afterwards. Nay, it is more likely that those who live a thousand years after a man will know more of him, after impartial criticism has examined and sifted him, than those who lived a hundred years after him, when all the softening influence of human love is modifying and altering all the circumstances of his career. And, therefore, I contend that the true fathers of the church are those who live now, and that the beardless boys and babes of Christendom were what the Roman Catholic calls the fathers of the Nicene and Catholic church.

The desires of true believers are not always gratified according to their intensity. These prophets and righteous men desired to see and hear what they were not permitted to see and hear. Such desires, I have said, are not sinful, if moderated by God's will. It is possible that God will not give us privilege, though it is perfectly sure that he will give us grace. Because God does not give me a gift that I ask for, it does not follow that he does not hear prayer. Some people ask for gifts which would increase a responsibility they cannot now discharge; but when God refuses these gifts, they

foolishly argue, God is not the hearer of prayer. I answer, his refusal is no disproof that he is the hearer of prayer; he knows what you need, and will not give what you earnestly ask, which would be a load that would press you downward, not wings that would lift you nearer to himself.

God has had righteous men in every age. He had righteous men in ancient times, he has more now. There are stars in the sky, though we see them not; there are flowers on the earth, though we gather them not; there are righteous men where we do not see, or suspect them, or where we do positively deny they are. All God's sons are not now manifest, they are hidden; and we must not say that, because we can count the stars that appear within our horizon, the number we can count comprehends them all. All that we can see are but a few outposts and sentinels of the mighty multitude of that shining host outspread upon the plains of infinitude, the mere thin suburbs of which are all that man can discover in his dim and limited vision. There were not only "prophets and righteous men," but there were "*many* prophets and righteous men." In the end there will be far more than the Antinomian in his exclusiveness allows; far fewer than the Universalist in his latitudinarianism asserts; and yet there will be a great multitude that no man can number.

Comparison between our privileges and those of others ought not to make us proud, but thankful. That man who counts his privileges, and is puffed up by them, has never counted them right. He who sees and recognizes the gifts of God's providence, with which he is laden, but is humbled by a sense of his own unworthiness, while thankful for God's goodness, reads and weighs his mercies aright. And when we compare what we are with what others are, let us ever ask, after we have made the comparison, "Who maketh us to differ?" And let us remember that, if we, in this nineteenth century, have more numerous, richer, and greater

privileges, that God is not ignorant of them. He watches all the capital that he sets afloat among mankind; he takes cognizance of what he gives in providence, as truly as of what he bestows in grace. He came to the fig-tree three years seeking fruit, and he had so taken notice of it that he said, "These three years have I come seeking fruit, and found none." He takes account of the talents; for he gives to one one, to another five, to another ten. God sees exactly what each man has, and can do, and ought to do, in providence; and he will call each to a reckoning, — him that has five talents, for five talents more; him who has ten, for ten more; and him that has one, for the duplicate of that. We are not answerable for the number of the talents, but we are answerable for doubling those that God has given us.

We of this age ought to be eminently distinguished for every grace. The fifth chapter of Isaiah, where God records what he has done for his vineyard, is simply a proof of what God has done for us: "Now will I sing to my well-beloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My well-beloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill: and he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a wine-press therein: and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes. And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard. What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?"

The way to retain our privileges is to make use of them. Despised privileges are the most deadly judgments. Neglected and unthankful mercies always end in the sharpest judgments. God suffers no waste. If he sees mercies long given, but not used, or abused, he takes them away. Grace,

or privilege, is not an everlasting freehold. The candlestick, as represented in the history of the seven churches of Asia, is not a fixture, but a movable thing. England has no everlasting lease of Christianity. If England ceases to be true, and to respond to her magnificent privileges, her candlestick, like those of the seven churches of Asia, will be removed from its place also; wherever there are abused mercies, there are the greatest provocatives to awful and consuming judgments.

Let us feel in some degree our weight of responsibility, and seek, in the light that we have, to live that precious life, the life of God, which Christ is. "For," argues an apostle, in almost appalling language, "if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins;" that is, if we reject the only one, there is none other, "but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries." Then hear our responsibility. "He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses," where there was very little light: "of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?" May we deeply feel that, to sit in our accustomed pew, and to hear the glorious Gospel, is, in one respect, the most joyous place that man can occupy; but it is, in another, the most awfully solemn position on earth. Neglected calls are deadening influences. Duties ever heard and never done harden the heart more and more. He who hears what he knows to be obligation, and puts it off till to-morrow, when to-morrow comes will be more able and ready to put it off again. The truth faithfully preached ruins or restores. The same sun that melts one substance seems to harden

another. The same Gospel that is the savor of life to one is the savor of death to another. And, though a phrase used by the Puritans seems a very coarse expression, men become "gospel-hardened" when "they hear as God's people hear, while their hearts go after their covetousness."

Let us pray that, occupying a place almost bordering on the judgment bar, we, of this age, may so hear, and the preacher of the Gospel may so speak, that, while prophets and righteous men desired to see what we see, and hear what we hear, and were not permitted, we shall derive from our sight, and from our hearing, corresponding and increasing advantages, even grace and glory.

CHAPTER III.

THE HAPPY HEIRS OF THE KINGDOM.

“If poverty — a bitter medicine — cures
The soul’s distempers, blessed are the poor ;
Yea, if ye be Christ’s poor, thrice blessed men are ye.”

“Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” — MATTHEW 5 : 3.

How beautiful is the sermon delivered on the Mount ! The penman, Matthew, was originally a publican, or a Roman tax-gatherer, of equivocal repute and character amongst the Jews. If he composed this chapter by his own wisdom, he performed a greater miracle than any recorded in the New Testament. It is utterly improbable, not to say impossible, that any one, except by inspiration from on high, could have written a chapter that breathes so pure, so lofty, so comprehensive a morality. It bears upon its face the impress of its original ; it is transparently a transcript from on high ; it was worthy of the speaker ; it is clearly the teaching of him “who spake” (and how confirmatory of this is the chapter !) “as never man spake.”

What was the occasion of this sermon being spoken ? It was this : Jesus saw a great multitude gathered around him. Souls assembled ready to hear him was his reason for preaching, and it ought to be so still. God’s seedsmen should sow beside all waters ; God’s fishers, as fishers of men, should let down their net into all seas. We should not be excelled by

the children of the world, who seize the opportunities as they sweep past, and make them minister to the accomplishment of the ends, the plans, or the purposes, which they have in view.

The pulpit from which Jesus spake was a mountain. It is proper there should be places of public worship; it would be improper, notwithstanding, to pronounce any place common or unclean. When Jesus allied himself to our humanity, he consecrated all the earth; so that wherever there are souls to be taught, and lips eloquent with truth, in the height or in the depth, by the river side or on the bosom of the deep, there is a holy place for holy work; for all is sacred when it can be made fairly subservient to sacred and solemn ends.

The contrast between this sermon delivered from this mount, and the law, is striking. The law was thundered from Mount Sinai, amid lightnings that made Israel quake; the Gospel falls, here, in benedictions, softly and gently as the morning dew that comes from heaven, and spreads in rills from the mountain side to water all the parched places of the earth. The harsh trumpet introduced the law by "Thou shalt not;" the still, small, musical voice of Jesus introduces his law in such formulas as these, "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." The law commands, "Thou shalt," and "Thou shalt not;" but the Gospel sets the duty in the bosom of a benediction, and adds, over and above, the happy reward to which it points as a stimulus to the performance of the duty, and an explanation of the nature and fruits of the benediction in which it is embosomed. Jesus speaks from this mount as a teacher full of sympathy and love. He spoke from Mount Sinai as the great lawgiver. There he enunciated the naked law in the stern and hard terms of Sinai; but here he clothes his lesson with the colors of hope; he overarches the path of life with

the splendors of the heavenly bow, and sets duties, like beautiful gems, in the bosoms of bright benedictions, that man may be won to love under the Gospel, instead of being driven to duty as under the law.

There is, perhaps, in this chapter a connecting link or chain running through all the benedictions pronounced in it, and stringing them together as gems. Humility, or the poor in spirit, is the best preparation for that sorrow that laments the want of all that is holy and pure ; and this is not a passion, but a subdued and settled meekness, submissiveness, or quiet of soul, most beautiful before God, which hungers and thirsts after righteousness ; to which is added the promise, that it shall be filled.

Who are the truly happy ? "Blessed are the poor in spirit : for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." What is the pursuit of all mankind ? Happiness. What do we all constantly clutch at, and constantly miss, ever feeling that we are to be, but are not yet, blessed ? It is happiness. Every man indicates, by the pursuit which governs his ambition, that he has lost his aboriginal happiness ; and that he cherishes, what he has not lost, the hope of still obtaining it. But all experience proves that happiness grows not in earthly soil ; that it is not to be attained by any sublunary pursuit, or from any temporal possession. Man is no more satisfied with his enjoyments, when he has them, than he was when he pursued them. He thinks, if he could reach that object, he would be happy ; he reaches it, and he is not one whit more happy. What seemed a luxury in prospective becomes a necessity in possession ; and he still looks, and longs, and thirsts, and pants, for more. But our Lord says that, while man cannot be happy in the pursuit of earthly things, whilst it is written upon all the springs, fountains and cisterns of time, "Whoso drinketh of this water shall thirst again," it is inscribed and legible to faith, if not to sight,

upon the fountain of living waters, "He that drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst, but it shall be within him a well of water springing up unto everlasting life."

Happiness is to be had on earth; but it is not to be had from earth. The word "blessed" might just as well be translated "happy." "Happy are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven;" and the whole Bible indicates that there are blessings now in possession, — however few or far between, — as well as blessings in reversion. "Blessed is the man whose sins are forgiven." "Blessed, or happy, is the man whom thou choolest." "Blessed, or happy, are the people whose God is the Lord." "Blessed is the man who walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly;" and "Blessed are the mourners; blessed are the meek; blessed are they that hear the word of God, and do it." In other words, a Christian has a present, as well as a prospective, blessedness. A man who is a Christian must be happy, and the man who is not a Christian never can be really happy. He, surely, has ground to be happy who feels his sins are forgiven, that his body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, that his Intercessor beside the throne is the Lord of glory, that the everlasting God is his Father, that eternity is the measure of his ultimate lifetime, and infinitude the bounds of his illimitable and happy home. "Happy is the man who is in such a case; yea, blessed are the people whose God is the Lord."

Thus blessedness, or happiness, which is attached to every character in the Sermon on the Mount, is happiness tested and felt by the believer just in those circumstances in which it is needed. It is not when the cup runs over, and when sunshine surrounds us, that we need most the consolations, though we need most the directions, of the word of God; but it is when the sky is overcast above, and the earth is all

barrenness beneath, and our first-born is smitten, or the results of our industry are swept away, that man gropes and feels and yearns for a compensatory happiness, that he now learns earth cannot give, and that the Gospel tells him Christ has to bestow. Hence, Christianity sanctifies our joys, and sweetens our bitterest and deepest sorrows. It has springs that pour forth their refreshing waters in the winter; it has flowers that bloom in the darkest night; the Christian's harp-strings emit their sweetest music when swept by the winds of autumn and of winter. In affliction, he has joys that in its richest prosperity the world never tasted. This world's joys are like the streams fed by the thunder-shower, full and overflowing for a little, but soon evaporating or spent, and leaving their channels dry when the clouds that fed them are gone. But the Christian's joys are like the streams that come from the Alpine glaciers, flowing in winter, but fullest in summer, when all other streams are dry beside. Blessed is the man who has any, or all, of the features that are laid down here, not in prospect only, but in possession; it is a present, not merely a promised, happiness.

But we have, in the verse prefixed to this chapter, a character that is declared to be blessed. The blessing is pronounced upon a character, not on a state. "Blessed are the poor in spirit." What a shock to the proud Pharisee this first sentence of the Saviour's first sermon must have been! He thought, "Blessed is the man whose phylactery is longest, broadest and most legible. Blessed is the man who is hailed as Rabbi, and sits in Moses' seat, and expounds the law after the traditions of the elders." But Jesus says, "Nay; but blessed is the man, whether he be Pharisee, or layman, or scribe, or publican, or sinner, who has been brought to feel that poverty of spirit which is a preparation for the kingdom of heaven." It is surely a precious grace: let us inquire what is meant by it. It does not mean, as some have tried

to render it, being simply, literally poor. A poor man has special privileges assigned him in the Gospel; but his poverty is never stated as a merit, or a qualification for heaven. If the poor have special privileges, it only lays upon them special responsibility. Instead, therefore, of being proud because to the poor the Gospel was first preached, they ought to feel the more humbled under a sense of a deeper responsibility given by so great a privilege. Poverty may part with all except its pride; and riches may retain, amidst all its wealth, poverty of spirit. Mere physical poverty may be the result of crime; therefore it is not a grace. Riches may be the result of industry; therefore wealth cannot be a demerit. It is not the outward state that Christ speaks of, but the inward character. It is not wealth that makes truly rich, nor poverty that makes truly poor; it is poverty of spirit that is a preliminary to an entrance into the kingdom of heaven.

To be "poor in spirit" is not spiritual poverty. It is not a blessed thing to be spiritually poor. Spiritual poverty is the possession and the brand of every man who is a stranger to the Gospel. It was pronounced a sin in the church of Laodicea,—"Thou knowest not that thou art poor, and miserable, and naked, and blind." Spiritual poverty is the greatest of all calamities; it is not, by the very nature of the thing, a spiritual grace.

Nor is it voluntary poverty, as the Romish church interprets this passage. They say it is a blessed poverty to lay aside all possessions, sequester yourself from all society, give up all you have to the church, and live a life of poverty and want. Such poverty is not enjoined in the Scripture. On the contrary, it seems to me that it is leaving and quarrelling with that state in which it has pleased God to place us, and which we are not to renounce; but in which we are so to let our lights shine before men that they may glorify our Father who is in heaven.

The "poor in spirit" are not the poor-spirited; it does not mean that the mean and the cowardly are blessed. A Christian has an heroic heart; Christian martyrs have been the world's greatest and sublimest heroes; and, therefore, to suppose that it means poor-spirited and mean, is to misinterpret and pervert the meaning of the passage.

What, then, is being "poor in spirit"? It specially denotes those who renounce every claim to approbation or reward on the part of their Father who is in heaven; those who see in themselves nothing that entitles them to one atom of glory; who feel that, if dealt with according to their deserts, there would be found that in them which would sink them as would an ocean-load to the depths of misery. The poor in spirit are they who can pray, with the publican, "God be merciful to me a sinner," or, who can say, with the apostle, "I count all but loss, that I may be found in Christ, not having my own righteousness, which is of the law, but the righteousness which is of God in Christ Jesus." They who can so pray, who so feel, give clear and unequivocal evidence that they are in the category of the "poor in spirit."

This grace is put at the head and forefront of all the other graces enumerated in the Sermon on the Mount, because it is the meet and impressive introduction to all. It is he who feels most poignantly his need of all who will most heartily hail the promise of the free gift of all. They who feel that they are empty will ask most earnestly and heartily to be filled. It is the poor in spirit, the truly humble, whose hearts are emptied of every rival, who will appreciate most the glorious provision of the Gospel. It was the wounded Israelite, who feared the certainty of death, that looked most intently at the brass serpent, and was healed. It was not when the prodigal was in rags and was destitute of all, but when he felt that he was so, and recollected that there was enough in his father's home, that he came to the magnanimous resolu-

tion, "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." It is only the poor in spirit who are truly fit to enter into the kingdom of heaven. Our title to heaven is nothing in us, but Christ's righteousness without us; but our fitness for heaven is just that state of heart which is detailed at length in the successive beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount. The gate of heaven and the way to heaven are called strait and narrow; but they are so, not in themselves absolutely, but relatively to us. The gate of heaven is so wide, and the road that leads to it is so plain, that any "wayfaring man," even if the greatest sinner, who seeks admission by the righteousness of Christ, can have access; but we desire to take so much with us, that we find the gate strait and the road narrow, forgetting it is we who are faulty, because we are so loaded and encumbered with many things, and are not poor in spirit, flinging off all, and counting all but loss for the excellency of Jesus Christ.

This poverty of spirit is the greatest preparation for prayer. That man only prays well who feels deeply his own emptiness, nothingness, poverty, in the sight of God. Prayer is the expiration and breath of poverty of spirit. He who feels that he is rich asks for nothing; he who feels and knows that he is poor is humbled by a sense of his want, and animated only by the promise of God to give all that he needs, to appeal to him in prayer.

It is to the poor in spirit only that the Lord Jesus Christ is truly precious. When we feel that we have nothing that can justify us, that we can do nothing that can atone for our transgressions, and hear that God has provided a Saviour, in whom we are complete, wanting nothing, then Christ seems to us truly precious, and we flee to him as to the only Saviour, trust in him as the only foundation, and ask heaven in his

name, and for his sake only, and in no respect or degree for our own.

To those who are poor in spirit God will appear truly great; and, in proportion as they see God truly great, will they feel themselves truly poor. It was Abraham, the friend of God, who, witnessing his glory, exclaimed, "I am but dust and ashes." It was after Job beheld the majesty of God, that he said, "I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." It was after Jacob had seen and tasted God's goodness, that he said, "I am not worthy of the least of thy mercies." It is the truly humble who see God to be truly high; and this sight lays down every proud thought, and helps to make us more and more the poor in spirit, whose is the kingdom of heaven.

Wherever there exists this poverty of spirit, there will be contentment with that state in which God has been pleased to place us. What is the secret of discontent with our condition in life? An idea that we deserve more from God than he has given us. But, when we have this inner impression that we have lost all by sin, that in us there dwelleth no good thing, that "there is no health in us," we are satisfied with the cup of cold water, knowing that it is more than we deserve, and we begin to learn what it is to be content, and, more than that, to feel that we have all things necessary for life and godliness. There is no ambitious wing, ever soaring and never satisfied, where there is within true poverty of spirit.

The most eminent Christians in the Bible have been characterized by this grace. For instance, the Baptist said, I am not worthy to unloose his shoe-latchet. I must decrease; He must increase. I am not the Messiah; He cometh after me. I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness. I know not a more interesting specimen of this poverty of spirit than the Virgin Mary. When the archangel announced the Saviour's

birth, she said, in the meekness of her heart and the humility of her spirit, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord : be it unto me according to thy word."

Having thus noticed, very briefly, the outward fruits of poverty of spirit, let us study the promise, "theirs is the kingdom of heaven." This promise shows that poverty is wealth, lowliness is grandeur, emptiness is fulness, having nothing is possessing all, even a kingdom of glory that passeth not away. This kingdom is delineated in chapters that we have explained at length, the twenty-first and twenty-second chapters of Revelation. Its gates are pearl ; its foundations, precious stones ; its river, the river of life ; its tree, the tree of life ; its glory, neither sun nor moon, but the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb. It is a kingdom that endures forever. Persia, Macedonia, Greece and Rome, have all passed away, and left scarce a memorial behind ; but this kingdom advances still. It emerges into greater lustre every day ; it lasts as long as the sun, and they that are poor in spirit are more and more becoming dead to the attractions of the kingdoms of this world, and more and more alive to the glory, the attractions, and the influence of that dawning realm of order and of beauty, which is theirs in reversion.

The subjects of this kingdom are described as "kings and priests unto God," having palms as sceptres, crowns upon their heads, free, yet acting as the consecrated servants of God, hungering no more, thirsting no more, but serving him day and night in his temple, without ceasing.

Thus Christ's religion is the secret of the blessed life. There is true enjoyment in true religion. In the deepest sacrifice we make for it, there is a compensatory happiness within ; and at the close, the subject of promise, a kingdom, a crown, and an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled. In the deepest affliction a Christian may thus comfort himself ;

and, when all earth's consolations are gone, and when those of heaven seem few and far between, he can look beyond the visible horizon, and anticipate, when time and things temporal shall be no more, a kingdom of glory that fadeth not away. This is indeed a blessed life. It is heaven on earth.

CHAPTER IV.

SORROW SWEETENED.

“ Though the cause of evil prosper, yet 't is truth alone is strong,
And, albeit she wanders outcast now, I see around her throng
Troops of beautiful tall angels, to enshield her from all wrong.”

“ It hath caught a touch of sadness,
Yet it is not sad :
It hath tones of clearest gladness,
Yet it is not glad :
A dim sweet twilight voice it is,
When to-day's accustomed blue
Is over-grayed with memories,
With starry feelings guided through.”

“ Blessed are they that mourn : for they shall be comforted.”

MATTHEW 5 : 4.

WHAT is the sorrow that is blessed? What is the mourning that carries in its bosom a distinctive benediction? Surely it is not the mere vulgar sorrow that every man feels. There is no claim in it to a distinctive blessing. It is less the sorrow, and more the state of him who sorrows, on which the benediction is pronounced. There is a sorrow that is human, which even the beasts of the field feel; there is a sorrow that is demoniac, which chafed ambition or disappointed vanity writhes under; there is also a sorrow that is the evidence of a sanctified and renovated heart; upon such sorrow he has pronounced a benediction, whose words and fiat are yea and amen.

Sorrow such as this, however blessed it may be, has nothing in it in any sense expiatory. All the tears that weeper ever shed never yet cancelled a single sin. All the penitential sorrows that ever pierced the agonized heart never secured, by their merit, the forgiveness of one transgression. A humble and a broken heart is, indeed, a sacrifice, but it is not a propitiation; it is a spiritual offering, acceptable on the altar of God, through the merits of him who mercifully pierced it. His very sorrow springs from a sight of him who is exalted to give repentance and remission of sins. It is not, therefore, a cause, but an effect.

Having seen what this sorrow is not, let us try to ascertain what it really is. It is, in the first place, sorrow at the recollection and the sense of sin. A child grieves that he has offended a parent; a Christian son mourns not less that he should have sinned against a Father who so loved him that, as the expression, and the measure, and the channel, of that love, he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him might not perish, but have eternal life. This sorrow may not exhaust itself in tears; for there is a sorrow in the human heart too deep for tears, too intense to find outer expression. There is no grief like that which cannot weep. So there may be a sorrow in a Christian's heart invisible to the world, but deep and real; more a principle from its fixity than a passion for its fervor, and, in all its aspects, proving itself the godly sorrow that worketh repentance not to be repented of, and on which the beatitude is written, "Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted."

This sorrow is rather for sin than for the consequences of sin. There is a vital and very practical distinction here. Any man will feel deeply the consequences of his sin, when there is no help for it; but only a Christian feels poignantly the inherent bitterness of the sin, irrespective of the consequences of it. Judas mourned for his sin, but it was on

account of the effects of it. Peter mourned after his sin but it was not the effects of it, but the sin itself, that he deplored. Pharaoh repented not, though he wept, when he cried, in his agony, "Take away the frogs," that is, the judgment; but David mourned rightly when he said, "Take away my iniquities, I beseech thee." Where there is a sorrow sanctified by a Saviour's benediction, it exists in the heart, it may be invisible to man, often a principle, occasionally a passion, which mourns and grieves because of sin as a thing hateful in itself, rather than at the consequences of that sin, as injurious to his comfort and his peace.

The sorrow that is specially blessed extends not only to sins that are known or public, but to secret sins. I do not know a more striking or indisputable proof of a Christian heart than sorrow because of sins which the world knows nothing of. Wherever there is that sorrow which sees stain and defilement in sin, and reason for grief in that which no eye has seen, and no ear has heard, there is the truest exponent of a Christian heart, the clearest proof that the sorrow is the inspiration of the Spirit of God, and will have, and now has, the benediction that is here pronounced, "Blessed are they that mourn." David sorrowed for numbering the people, which the world did not see to be sin, as well as for the murder that he committed, which all men hated; and David, when he prayed most spiritually, most fervently, said, "Cleanse thou me from secret faults." That prayer or clause in David's litany would be to me irresistible proof of David's grace, and it is a specimen and instance of that true Christian sorrow which is pronounced by the Saviour blessed.

The sorrow that is truly blessed, and pronounced so by our blessed Master, is that which not only is felt as a passion, or has power as a principle, but which also shows itself long after in the tone, the temper, and the conduct of the whole man. When Pharaoh was under the judgments of God, we

are told that he owned and regretted his sin; but, as soon as the judgments passed away, he returned to his wickedness again. Saul persecuted David, and deplored what he had done; but, when there was no more sign of judgment, he commenced his sanguinary persecution again. But we read that when Job sorrowed over his sins, he said, "I have done iniquity, and I will do so no more." The sorrow that not only acknowledged bitterly the iniquity that was perpetrated, but was able to add, "I will do so no more," was a sorrow of a godly sort,—was a sorrow that the apostle describes when he says, "Godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of; but the sorrow of the world worketh death. For behold this self-same thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge! In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter." (2 Cor. 7: 10, 11.) Here is the sorrow that is the inspiration of grace, and on whose brow there is writ the benediction that cannot be effaced, "Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted."

The sorrow that is blessed arises from sin seen in the light of Christ's countenance. Sin seen in the flash and splendor of Sinai will make us perceive and feel that it is an awful and a perilous thing; but, seen in the light of that countenance that looked in agony from the cross, it will make us feel it poignantly, and as a bitter thing. Hence it is stated, as strikingly illustrating the sentiment before us, "They shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn." Again, it is said, "Christ is exalted a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance," that is, godly sorrow, "and remission of sins." A sorrow that drives us from Christ, or that is not begun by seeing Christ, will not be blessed.

Godly sorrow will bring us to the Lord Jesus Christ, to ask him to bless, to sanctify, to sweeten, and, if needs be, to heal it. A very touching illustration of this is given in the Gospel of St. Matthew, where we read that when Herod sent and beheaded John in prison, "the disciples took up the body of John, and buried it, and went and told Jesus." How expressive is that! They did the duty of the hour; they felt the deep sorrow that originated in their sense of their loss; but they did not let that sorrow corrode their hearts without comfort: they went and told Jesus. So the sisters acted in the case of Lazarus at Bethany. After he was ill, and they had tried the prescriptions of human skill, it is said, "They went to Jesus and said, He whom thou lovest is sick." Hezekiah says (Isa. 38: 14), "O Lord, I am oppressed: undertake for me!" Now, that sorrow for sin that drives to despair is from beneath; but that sorrow for sin that lays us at the feet of Jesus is an inspiration from above. As long as the heart beats, and the sun shines, and the day of grace lasts, there is no sorrow that should drive us from Christ. It is nearer to go to Jesus than to go away from him. We are surer of relief by bringing it to him than by taking it away from him. It is a proof of a sanctified sorrow, whether that sorrow be a principle or a passion, that it brings us to Christ, that it may be stanchèd by him, that the sin, its seed, may be pardoned, and that the affliction may be sweetened.

The sorrow that is blessed is sorrow because of the sins that we see around us in the world of mankind. There is a sorrow, not only for our own sins, but for the sins of others. Jeremiah, when he looked around him, said (9: 1), "O, that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people;" and David said (Psa. 119: 136), "Rivers of water run down mine eyes, because they," that is, the world, "keep not thy law." No man can come to the sanctuary without

seeing what must grieve him, and give him pain, and be to him a matter of deep and bitter regret that it should be so. No Christian can read the calendars of courts of justice, or the records of our prisons, penitentiaries and bridewells, without poignant sorrow. No one can hear of the awful slaughter of battle-fields, and sacked villages, and blazing homesteads, or of all the ills and aches that flesh is heir to, without deep sorrow. If we be human, we must be sorry. If we be Christians, we must in bitterness of heart mourn over alike the sin and suffering. The apostle Paul, who had so much the spirit of his blessed Master, when he visited Athens, if he had been a mere philosopher, would have been so charmed with the Parthenon, and the other monuments of that most magnificent city, that he would have written poetry, or pronounced an oration upon it; but we read that when there he had no eye for its statuary, no time to listen to its philosophers in the Academus, or on the banks of the Ilissus, — not that he had no taste, not that he was not a scholar, not that he had no æsthetic susceptibilities, as they are called, — but that he had a heart so charged with the grace of God, and with sympathy and sorrow for man's ruin, that he saw nothing but a city wholly given to idolatry. Read that one visit of Paul to Athens, and you will see how deeply he had drunk in the spirit of his Master, and what sorrow that is on which the benediction is pronounced, "Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted."

If we could only see all nature as it is, and if we had only a recollection of what it once was, or a deep prophetic presentiment of what it one day will be, our groans would mingle with creation's; for it groans and travails in pain, seeking deliverance, waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God. There is much outside the Christian to make him shed tears, only there is a bright sunshine within that makes him rejoice when all in the world is dark. A Christian, when he looks

around him, must be sad; when he looks within him, he cannot but see elements of sorrow; but when he looks above him, and learns what his destiny is, and what the price of it was, he must rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

But the sorrow of a Christian, which is thus blessed, is felt not only because of the sins of the world, but because of the sins of the church itself. It is not the world that has a disastrous monopoly of sin; alas! there is plenty of it in the professing church also. When a Christian sees the inconsistency of A, the indiscretion of B, the fall of C, the sin of D, and throughout the whole church professors smiting Christ in the house of his friends, and bringing discredit on the profession that they bear, he must grieve, and long and yearn for that blessed day, when they shall be all righteous, and when there shall be nothing to detract from the perfection, or to dim the splendor, of that bright and blessed time, in which the whole earth shall be filled with the glory of God, and all shall know him, even as they are known.

Another spring of sorrow to a Christian must be the little progress that Christianity has made in the world. When we count the population of the world, we are struck with the awful and appalling fact, that scarcely a twentieth of it seems to profess anything like pure Christianity; and we cannot but blame ourselves that we have not only done what we ought not to have done, but have left undone much that we ought to have done, in the matter of missionary exertion. When we see millions of Hindoos deeply demoralized, without God, without Christ, without hope, — millions of Chinese, though here the horizon brightens, sunk in the depths of the most wretched superstition, — millions of Romish idolaters, with more light, but scarcely more grace, than they, — and when we add to these millions of Protestants, who have but the name, and nothing more, — we are not only brought back to the

old belief, that Christ's true church is a much smaller thing than we sometimes in our latitudinarianism suppose; but we must also grieve and lament that so few are brought to the knowledge of the truth, and, still more, that we have done so little towards the spread of that Gospel which is the savor of life unto all them that truly know it.

We must often feel sorrowful — and it is a stream of that sorrow that is pronounced blessed — that we are able to do so little. Our possibilities of good are not equal to our wishes. We would that we had wealth equal to the requirements of the day that passes; but, perhaps, if we had it, we should not have a heart to give it. We should rather pray that we may have grace to give as God may bless us. At all events, when we look around us, and see so much to be done, and so little done, and feel how little we can do, even when we do our all, we must grieve and lament.

There is another sorrow that is blessed, — the sorrow that makes one sometimes long to be absent from the body, and present with the Lord. And yet that is a sorrow that needs to be defined: it may be in excess. It is natural that we should wish to be in a happier state; it is Christian that we should wish to see an end of all that grieves, irritates and vexes, here; but I question if it be Christian to wish to die; I doubt if it be right to wish to leave the world. We are here as soldiers, each placed by the Great Commander at his post; and, whenever our watch is finished, we may be sure that he will call us home: our duty is to remain where we are until he in his providence call to us, "Come up hither;" and then we shall no more grieve or lament, for our earthly sorrow shall be turned into celestial joy.

They who thus sorrow "shall be comforted." I may observe, in explanation of this, that there is a comfort in such sorrow, as well as beyond it. Is it not true that we have had weeping moments that have been our happiest on earth?

There is such a thing, it may be, in heaven, as tears from excess of joy, and thus tears may be incidental there; but this is, perhaps, imagination; for, we read, the fountains and springs of tears shall be dried up.

There are times in this life when our saddest moments have been our sweetest; when in life's bitterest cup we have found a sweetness that has made us count our light affliction, which is but for a moment, not worthy to be compared, not only with the glory that is to be revealed, but with the glory that we see. It is this phasis of Christian experience that explains the remark of the apostle, "sorrowing, and yet always rejoicing;" and again he says, "in much affliction ye took joyfully," as if joy and sorrow could be mixed together. Such interchange is the Christian's life; it is like the April day — sunshine and shower, smiles and tears blended into one, make up the day-life of every true Christian. Eve, however, when she wept, wept with her back upon Eden, and her face to the desert; but let us rejoice, that when we weep it is with our backs to the desert, and our faces towards a better Eden, to which we are rapidly hastening.

Such sorrow is blessed in its endurance, for God specially manifests himself to such: "I will allure her into the wilderness, and I will speak comfort to her." It was when Jerusalem was weeping in the dust that God commissioned the prophet to proclaim these thrilling and reviving words, "Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people, saith your God."

And, if there be comfort in such sorrow, there is also comfort at the close of it: "Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted." It is divine comfort, for God will bestow it: "I will wipe away all tears from all eyes." It is complete comfort, for they shall be perfectly and truly comforted: "there shall be no more tears, nor sorrow, nor crying;" it will be comfort without alloy. Here the fairest robe has a moth in it, the stateliest cedar has a worm in it, the

purest gold that Australia's and California's mines can yield has decay and rust and tarnish upon it; but in that land there is no alloy; there are "no more tears, nor sorrow, nor crying, for all former things are passed away." And, when we think of this, we must feel that our light affliction is not worthy to be compared with it, and that while "no tribulation for the present seemeth joyous, it afterwards worketh out the peaceable fruits of righteousness to them that are exercised thereby."

Reader, if you wish to know what the comfort is, not in the words that man's wisdom teacheth, but in the words which the Holy Ghost teacheth, I would give it you in words so poetical, so rich in thought, so suggestive of happiness, that the heart which has not a chord responding to them has never felt what this divine sorrow is, and gives no token now that it will ever feel what that rich consolation will be:—"And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God, and of the Lamb, shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him: and there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of that city: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honor into it. And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there. And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb."

Have we ever known what the sorrow is that I have tried to define? It is they that mourn that shall be comforted; it is such sorrow that shall be turned into joy.

May we have now that sorrow which the sight of Christ can suggest, which the presence of the Spirit can inspire, and then ours will be that rich reward which is in reversion, "They shall be comforted." Thus we shall taste the blessed life in this age, and share in its joys in the age to come.

CHAPTER V.

EARTH'S RIGHTFUL HEIRS.

“ There are in this loud, stunning tide
Of human care and crime,
With whom the melodies abide
Of the everlasting clime ;
Who carry music in their heart
Through dusky lane and wrangling mart,
Plying their daily task with busier feet,
Because their secret souls a holy strain repeat.”

“ Blessed are the meek : for they shall inherit the earth.”

MATTHEW 5 : 5.

THE grace of “ poor in spirit,” whose possessors are pronounced blessed, is not, certainly, popular, or universally admired. It wants the bulk, the glare and pretension, that constitute the greatest charm in the eyes of the world, that is unable to distinguish tinsel from the pure and sterling gold. It is that grace implanted by the Holy Spirit of God, which restrains impetuous passion, modifies, governs and directs, those feelings that are legitimate and proper. It is not insensibility, nor management, nor policy ; but the grace of God. Many men are cool, who are so from temperament ; many are self-possessed, but it is from policy ; many seem dispassionate, who are so from management ; but that meekness which restrains, and sanctifies while it restrains, is neither policy, nor management, nor practice, nor diplomacy ; it is the inspiration and the grace of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus, who pronounced a benediction upon the meek, said also, "Come unto me, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly of heart." Let any one read the character of Jesus, and see how it contrasts with his own. He not only spoke with authority; but he lived with a purity, a sublimity, a grandeur, an almost absolute contrast, certainly infinite superiority, to anything exhibited by the purest and the best of mankind in this present world. When the unkind treatment of the Samaritans provoked and grieved the apostles, John and James desired fire from heaven to consume them; but Jesus said, "Ye know not what spirit ye are of." When the rude band of soldiers laid hold upon him violently, Peter drew his sword, and smote one that was present; but Jesus, the personation of perfect meekness, bade him put his sword in his scabbard; for that was neither the meet temper of a Christian, nor the sublime duty of an apostle. When the officer who came to apprehend Jesus smote him, what was his reply? Just what meekness would be expected to give utterance to: "If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why smitest thou me?" Well did Rousseau, the sceptic, say, that if Socrates lived and died like a man, Jesus lived and died like a God. A prophet put into the mouth of Jesus these words: "Is there any sorrow like my sorrow?" and we may say of him, with equal truth, "Is there any meekness that can be compared to his?" He, therefore, who said "Blessed are the meek," exemplified in his character, his walk and conduct, the most beautiful and persistent meekness that ever shone on earth, or was developed in man.

While we thus see the model of what meekness is, we must take care not to confound it with apathy, indifference, or deadness to the sins of man, or to the claims of God. Many natural men, who are apathetic, get credit for meekness; while many Christian men, who have strong and impetuous tempers, incur discredit for this supposed want of meekness. The

indignation purely manifested against sin is perfectly compatible with the greatest meekness in the sight of God. Thus, Paul says of genuine repentance, "What revenge it wrought!" Moses was the meekest of men; but, when he saw the idolatry of his people, he burst into expressions of the deepest and most poignant indignation. Paul and Barnabas were the meekest servants of the Saviour; and yet, when the priests came to sacrifice oxen to them, as if they were gods, they expressed themselves in the language of stern rebuke, and exclaimed against the sacrifice as an offence against God. Eli's meekness degenerated into connivance at sin; but Jesus, when he came into the temple, — he who was meek and lowly, he who pronounced a benediction upon the meek, — showed such zeal, that he swept out the money-changers, and them that sold doves; that it might be fulfilled that was written, "The zeal of my Father's house hath eaten me up." We thus see that meekness of spirit is perfectly compatible with zeal and energy of character. Paul, who calls himself gentle as a nurse, yet appealed to Cæsar when his civil rights were assailed, and could speak in the language of rebuke even to Peter, when Peter dissembled in the sight of God. Christians display the greatest meekness when they are silent and patient under injuries inflicted on themselves; but speak forth with all the eloquence of Christian indignation when they behold insult, dishonor and reproach, heaped upon their blessed Master. As far as I can judge from the instances recorded in Scripture, the meekness of a Christian is exemplified in silence when he himself is the victim of the wrong-doer; but that meekness is perfectly compatible with the outbursts of a righteous and fervent indignation, when anything is done that calumniates the character or interferes with the cause of the Lord Jesus Christ. Our indignation, if we would retain the character of meekness, must be at sin as against God, not suffering as inflicted on ourselves. We are called upon to

love as brethren, to be pitiful, to be courteous, to show meekness towards all men, and yet not to suffer sin upon a brother; but to be zealous in the right cause, on the right occasion, and for a right and holy object. We must not suppose that the object and end of meekness is to root out anger. Anger is not sinful. There is no more sin in being angry than there is in being hungry. God implanted the passion in the human heart; its restraint and regulation is a Christian duty; its extirpation would be as foolish as to cut off literally the right hand, or pluck out literally the right eye. We are called upon to be meek while we are angry, not to let the sun go down upon our wrath, to be angry with the sin rather than with the sinner, according to that trait in our blessed Lord's character, which is thus referred to: "He was angry;" then anger cannot be sinful; but it is added, "being grieved at the hardness of their hearts." In other words, the anger of Jesus was less at the men, and more at the sin of which these men were the victims. And so our anger should be on right occasions, and for true and sanctified ends. The anger, for instance, of the Roman emperor was sinful. He was enraged, and burst into furious passion, because the heavens thundered while he was at his dinner. Cyrus was angry because the flood carried away a favorite and a beautiful charger. This is the nearest approach to blasphemy. But Jesus was angry, not at the poor sinner, — for him he pitied, — but when he thought what the poor sinner had been made by Satan, — the victim of a hard and a depraved heart.

To show where meekness may be exemplified, let me say that in all cases, personal, social, domestic, national, where a quarrel is provoked by the injustice of one, and is felt by the susceptible nature of another, there is the time and place for the exercise and development of the Christian grace of meekness. If, for instance, we are privately assailed in our name, our person or our home, retaliation is the last thing a

Christian should contemplate, as it is the worst thing a man can have recourse to. The world, when assailed, retaliates, and the duel — the maddest, the most foolish, the most Quixotic, of all ancient and modern absurdities, — has been too long the fashionable resort. It is now almost universally exploded in practice, except among fools, as it is universally reprobated in its principle by Christians. If, therefore, privately wronged, private and personal revenge is never to be desired, still less to be attempted, if a public vindication be possible, or a judge who judgeth righteously in the land can be accessible.

In the second place, if it relates to invasion of our property, retaliation then and there, if not prevented, must be mightily modified by the grace of meekness in a Christian's heart. Far better lose a pound than lose one's temper. Far better be content to suffer a great deal, than to inflict upon one's self the almost suicidal suffering of retaliation, hatred, and revenge. Better give the demand with both hands, than allow resistance to the demand to kindle in the human heart those feelings or passions, — revenge, retaliation and hate, — which corrode the subject of them far more than they do injury to the person who deserves to be punished. In case of an attack upon life, I think it is perfectly compatible with Christian meekness to repel it; and if, in repelling an attack which menaces your own life, the life of the aggressor should be sacrificed, it is not inconsistent with meekness on your part, and it never can be registered as murder or a crime before God. It is not incompatible with Christian meekness to defend life, as that which is dearest, even if the defence involves the peril or the destruction of the life of the guilty aggressor.

So, in the same manner, in the case of an invasion of our native land, I am sure it would not be meekness, but madness, in our government, to fold their hands, and sit still, and allow our homes to be burnt, our temples to be razed, our country to be laid waste. I cannot see that Christianity justifies this;

I cannot find that the meekness of the Gospel demands such quiescent apathy or indifference. It seems to me, on the contrary, perfectly compatible with that meekness on which a benediction is pronounced, to repel the violent aggressor by all the means that are placed in our power, in the providence of God; for next to life our national mercies should be valued; and if the aggressor suffers in the repulse, his, not ours, is the guilt, with all the consequences. At the same time, wherever the spirit of Christian meekness is, this retaliation, where retaliation is inevitable, or, rather, this defence, where forbearance would be treachery, cowardice and cruelty, will be modified, softened and subdued, as much as possible. It is by the indirect influence of Christianity that modern warfare has been shorn of half the horrors that it had in ancient days. In savage lands and pagan times, the conqueror became the destroyer of the vanquished. In modern times, the object to be attained is the defence of the land that we love; and when that object has been attained, the victor feels that his mission and his duty are completed, and to the vanquished he shows the meekness, charity and forbearance, that become those who know the more excellent way. At the same time, we ought also to add, that war, and such defence, are not in themselves desirable; they are not beautiful; they are necessitated by the effects of sin; they are simply tolerated under the Gospel of Jesus. Hence, we read that when God would have a glorious temple built for himself, he employed, not David, the soldier, to do it, but his son, Solomon, the peaceful king. It is in peace that nations prosper; it is in war that they retrograde, and go back. The greatest calamity a nation can come under is war; the greatest mercy a nation can be thankful for is, that it lives and breathes and prospers beneath the overshadowing pinions of a perpetual and universal peace.

Christian meekness was scarcely known in the heathen

schools; but in the Gospel, in the parables, in the precepts, in the sanctions, in the teaching of Jesus, it is repeatedly and most eloquently enforced. "Walk with all lowliness and meekness." Again, "Put on meekness and long-suffering." "Follow after meekness." "Showing meekness to all men." "I beseech you by the meekness of Christ." "The Lord shall beautify the meek with salvation." "He is come to preach glad tidings to the meek." "Receive with meekness the engrafted word;"—so often and so urgently is this grace inculcated upon a Christian! To return passion for passion is the instinct of resistance; to return good for good is the instinct of common and every-day sympathy; but to render good for evil, to pray for them that persecute you, and to bless them that spitefully use you,—this is the very noblest instinct, and the perfection of Christian character. It is man's way to exact the largest penance, and to give but half an absolution for a brother's offences; it is Christ's way to bestow frankly the complete forgiveness, and to ask us to exhibit that meek and quiet spirit which is of inestimable price. When Peter denied his blessed Master, what did Jesus do? Did he break forth in recrimination and reproach? Did he show the least feeling of angry or impetuous temper? The record is, "He looked on Peter;" and that beautiful, holy, and gentle look shot conviction into Peter's heart, so deep, so poignant, that he went forth, we are told, and wept bitterly.

This meekness, which is blessed by our Lord, personated in his example, commended so frequently by the apostles, is opposed to anything like moroseness of temper. A person must not suppose that to be morose, silent and sulky, is the same as being meek. A morose temper sheds around it a corrosive influence; it gives pain to others, and it takes no pleasure to itself. Better far is a violent spirit. An impetuous and hasty temper is like the sudden thunder-shower.

that fills the channels with its flood and is soon dried up ; but the morose temper is the stagnant marsh in the mid-day sun, exhaling poison and miasma on all that are around it. The violent passion may produce a fanatic ; the morose temper is the secret feeder of monks, ascetics, nuns, suicides, convents, and monasteries. Moroseness unquestionably is not meekness.

This meekness is opposed to anything like a spirit of revenge. This spirit seizes and misconstrues every act that a brother performs, and puts the worst construction on the best and most beneficent designs. Revenge is not pride, for it can afford to be generous, bad as it is ; but it is vanity, the meanest and the most contemptible of all passions ; and wherever this vanity and revenge are nursed and cherished in the bosom of a man, there a careless word is construed to be a deliberate insult, an accidental movement of the arm is understood to be a designed and premeditated stab. It pronounces meekness good enough for the millennium, but impracticable in this world. Notwithstanding, "Blessed are the meek : for they shall inherit the earth."

This spirit of meekness, too, is not to be confounded with, as indeed it is altogether opposed to, a spirit of endless discontentment. There are people who constantly whine, evermore complain, and who seem to think happiness a sin, and misery the very perfection of meekness. If they go forth into the fields of nature, they would rather look upon dead leaves than gather beautiful flowers. They would rather hear all that is melancholy in the voices of nature, than aught that is sweet and musical to the listening ear. They see no beauty in the height, or in the depth ; they hear no music in any sound ; and they can detect or taste a blessing nowhere. They see misery where it is not, and they exaggerate it where it exists. This is not meekness, this is not the grace on which a blessing is pronounced here ; it is an unholy, a rebellious,

an unfilial discontent. Meekness suffers, and is silent; it endures, and is patient; it labors to be happy, it is always thankful, and evermore sings its own sweet under-song; it will not tell bad tidings, if it can possibly tell good ones; it will not state what is evil, unless it be essentially necessary; it would endure the greatest agony, rather than inflict the least and most causeless pain. Meekness endures any wrong from man; patience endures any affliction from God: both are gems in the Christian's diadem,—bright, beautiful, and holy graces in the Christian's heart.

We are answerable for having this grace. A man may say, How can I call or conjure into my heart that which is not in it? I am master of outward acts; but, he says, I am not master of inward emotions. I answer, our inward feelings can be controlled to a very great extent, and some graces may be so far cultivated apparently without the aid of the Spirit of God. This truly rebukes and condemns those who, knowing where strength is, seek not that strength, and exhibit none of the grace it is fitted to impart. Much that is called courtesy in the world is not the extinction of a bad temper, but its suppression. To gain one's end, one can conceal much that one feels, cover much that one is, and repress and suppress emotions that burn and thirst for expression. Many of us know quite well that often in the house of business one would say the most severe, sarcastic, and bitter things, if it were not that it would be inexpedient, or productive of injury or loss. If, then, men by management can do this, surely a Christian by grace is competent to do more. Did the reader ever see a member of Parliament canvassing his constituents for their votes? What submission! How meekly he takes reproach! How interested he seems in the welfare of the children! What affectionate esteem he feels for the mother! How he admires little things he never saw before, and lauds hidden excellences that no eye sees but a candidate's! How

much he puts up with here that in other circumstances he would sternly rebuke; and how he stifles there the indignation that boils within him, and thirsts and longs for expression, just because he makes all things subserve the end he has in view,—the votes of the constituency, a seat in the House of Commons! If a candidate for earthly dignity can do this, surely a candidate for a crown of glory, by grace, can do much more. If policy has this power to adorn the outer man, principle surely has yet greater power to sanctify and change the inner man.

We are surely answerable for a grace that the world can put on, and that a Christian may have imparted. “If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit unto them that ask him?”

But whilst man may thus do much to correct outwardly what is wrong, he never can succeed in implanting what is right, except in that way and through those means that are prescribed by the Spirit of God. In the Romish church, fasting is proposed as one of the best prescriptions for subduing the heart, and rendering meek, gentle and lowly, the victim of proud and impetuous passions; but it is one of the most singular facts in the history of mankind, that the men who have been the severest anchorites, the greatest fasters, and who have denied themselves much that was necessary, as well as all that was delightful, have been men of the very sourest and worst of tempers, and have proved themselves the remotest in their nature from the meekness on which the benediction is pronounced. The Mahometans, during their fast Rhamadan, when they deny their appetites their accustomed food, lose their tempers apparently altogether. The Hindoos, during their seasons of fasting, are unusually passionate and violent. Jerome, the Latin father, who bitterly rebuked Vigilantius, a Protestant of the fourth century,

because Vigilantius said that it was not the stomach that was to be punished, but the heart that was to be sanctified, which was the true fasting, was a furious faster. He went into a desert to live what he called a spotless life, consisting in mortification, in wearing hair-clothing and chains, and having nettles and thorns for his bed and on his pillow. In these circumstances he was a man of the most sour and impetuous temper; and the very language in which he rebukes his adversary is evidence that fasting, instead of improving, seems to have corroded the temper of the unhappy monk. Policy will not give meekness, it may give the appearance of it; fasting will not create it, for, in fact, it has originated the very reverse; it is, first, the study of God's holy word. It is a light to our feet; it is a gallery of portraits; it contains models of meekness that we do well to imitate. It states the meekness of Moses, whose single, unadvised expression was an interdiction to his entrance into the promised land. It tells us of the meekness of David, who had Saul in his power, but yet did not touch him; and of Hezekiah, who, instead of retaliating on Rabshakeh, took the epistle and laid it meekly before the Lord; and, "seeing that we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin that doth so easily beset us, and run the race set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith."

Let us study the perfect embodiment of this grace, the Lord Jesus Christ. He was meek and lowly: learn of him, and imitate him. Every painter has a great model, conformity to which he regards as an approach to perfection. Every poet has his favorite poet, whose inspiration he regards as all but divine; and in this life every Christian should have his model; but the only model that has no flaw, the only character in which the lynx-eyes of Jew and Gentile, friend and foe, never detected yet a spot, a speck, or an imperfection, is

the Son of God. What a sublime exhibition of Christian meekness was given when he cried upon the cross, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do;" and he has left us this example, not that it may be admired, but that we may follow his steps.

And, in the next place, to obtain his grace, let us pray for it, or seek it. If it be so precious, so beautiful, so fit for and worthy of a Christian, pray for it. When Jesus said to the disciples, "Ye shall forgive such an one seventy times seven," what did they say? They instantly prayed for the meekness that was requisite: "Lord, increase our faith."

If you exemplify this grace, you say, "I shall be denounced as mean or dastard in spirit." Believers care less for the judgment of man; they love the praise of God before the praises of men. Do you say "I shall be trodden down;" who, I ask, will wrong you if you be followers of that which is good? "I shall be cast out of every possession I have;" I reply, "The meek shall inherit the land."

Such meekness is blessed. Why is it so? A meek and quiet spirit, says the apostle, is of great price. It is the badge of a Christian; it is the livery of our blessed Master; it has the superscription of Jesus; it is the reflection of his image; and whatever in us is like him so far has a benediction upon it.

Such a feeling is blessed; because it is a source of quiet, of calm and of sunshine, in the Christian heart. We all know quite well that the feeling of revenge is like a corrosive poison dropped upon the human heart; it eats into its peace; there is no quiet, no peace, no happiness, no repose, so long as that feeling exists. In most passions, satiety is the close, but in the passion of revenge satiety is the beginning, of sorrow. In ordinary passions, when they are gratified, we are at rest; but when we gratify the passion of revenge, conscience becomes the accuser, and pleads for the victim; and

a feeling of dissatisfaction, disquiet and pain, is the necessary and the growing consequence; whereas, when its meekness is implanted in the heart, "it droppeth like the gentle rain from heaven upon the place beneath; it is twice blessed, — it blesseth him that gives, and him that takes."

It is a grace that prepares the heart for other graces. Elisha lost his temper, and rebuked the applicant that was before him; it needed the minstrel's strain to reduce the temper of the prophet into quiet, before God would speak to him, and teach and tell him what to do.

Lastly, it is blessed, because it shall inherit the earth. It has the stamp and the mark of the hundred and forty and four thousand; they are sealed with the seal of the living God, and follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth.

"The earth" is equivalent to that expression of the apostle, "the age to come," or the habitable globe, in its resurrection, beauty, glory and perfection, when it shall have emerged from its baptism of fire, and be constituted a new heaven and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Even now, all things are yours by a charter obsolete in the courts of Cæsar, but real in the court of heaven; and having nothing, yet possessed of all, is our lot. This is a blessed life!

The meek, because they are meek, show that they are Christ's; and they that are Christ's, chosen in him, and by his Holy Spirit made like him, shall reign with him a thousand years, and find the twilight of millennial bliss merge in the noonday splendor of everlasting day, where there is no more unrighteousness, nor curse, nor suffering, but where all former things are passed away.

But the expression "inherit" denotes that meekness is a character that fits for the inheritance, not a title or a merit that gives us a right to it. A son may be a bad man; but, as the heir of his father, he inherits his father's estate. So Christians, in spite of their defects, their sins, their imper-

fections and their temper, clothed with the righteousness of Jesus, striving against sin, seeking the meekness that is so beautiful, and, in God's sight, of so great price, shall inherit — not because they are meek, but because they are sons — the glory that is to be revealed. Jesus died with nothing in him, nothing done by him, worthy of death. You and I shall live with nothing in us, nothing done by us, worthy of life. When Jesus died, it was because our sins were on him. When we shall be acquitted, it will be because of Christ's righteousness upon us. Meekness is our character; the merit of Christ, our title, our claim and our right.

This grace assumes that we are in the world. There can be no meekness in a place, except there be plurality in it; there can be no meekness in solitude. It implies that we are rubbing against society, that we are mingling with it, that we feel its rough edges, and come into contact with its sharp points. Christ prays that we may not be taken out of the world, but that, when in it, we may not be of it. And it is in the world that we may display that meekness of heart which is one of the best preparatives for the kingdom of glory.

CHAPTER VI.

THE HUNGRY FILLED WITH GOOD THINGS.

Thou who, when wandering Israel, parched and dying,
Unto the prophet cried in sore distress,
Heardst, and in mercy to their plaint replying,
Bade the flood gush amid the wilderness ;
Hear me ! To thee my soul in supplicance turneth :
Like the lorn pilgrim on the sands accursed,
For life's sweet waters, God, my spirit yearneth :
Give me to drink, I perish here of thirst.

“ Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness :
for they shall be filled.” — MATTHEW 5 : 6.

I HAVE shown, in my remarks on these beatitudes that precede the one I have selected as the subject of this chapter, that they are all linked in beautiful sequence together, so that Christian character is as clearly cumulative as it is divinely blessed. First, we have expressed a sense of spiritual destitution, that is, the condition “ poor in spirit ;” we find this deep sense of destitution leading to a sorrow to which is appended the promise that it shall be comforted ; we have this sorrow softening and subduing the spirit into meekness, or gentleness, humility before God, and charity towards all men ; and, lastly, we see this leading to that hungering and thirsting after righteousness which is pronounced to be blessed, and to which the promise is given, “ They shall be filled.”

This benediction seems to refer back to an ancient invita-

tion, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk, without money, and without price." Such phraseology is frequent. No impartial reader of the Bible can fail to see how often the blessings of the Gospel are represented by things that are to be eaten, and the desire to possess these blessings by the strongest appetites in our nature, — hunger for bread, and thirst for water.

The blessing pronounced on the hungering and thirsting for righteousness implies in such persons a deep instinctive desire, that can be satisfied with nothing short of that righteousness which is referred to.

But what is this righteousness? We are told in the eighth chapter of the epistle to the Romans. "What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh; that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." We have the same righteousness described by the same apostle in his epistle to the Corinthians, where he says, "Christ, who knew no sin, was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." I look upon it, therefore, as the instinctive desire or thirst of humanity, under the consciousness of feelings I shall proceed to enumerate, for that righteousness — though as yet they may not know it — which will bear the test of the Searcher of hearts, and justify the wearer of it in the sight of the great Legislator of heaven and earth.

The answer to the desire of human kind, which has been felt in every age, but gratified in none save where the Gospel is known, we are told, is, that Christ, who knew no sin, was made sin for us, that this hunger and thirst might be satisfied by our being made the righteousness of God in him. Jesus suffered, having done nothing worthy of death; we shall be

glorified, having done nothing worthy of life. Our sins were laid upon him, therefore he fell; his righteousness will be laid upon us, therefore we shall rise. When Jesus cried, upon the cross, "It is finished," he had done, said and felt, nothing before heaven or earth that deserved death; and when we shall be acquitted at the judgment-seat, we shall have done, said and thought, nothing that will be worthy of eternal life. Our sins were on, not in him; his righteousness is on, not in us. As it was just in God to let forth the expressions of his wrath upon the innocent sin-bearer, it will be but just in God to let forth the expressions of his love upon the guilty righteousness-wearers. As he was made sin for us, and in our stead, so we are made righteousness by him, or his righteousness is imputed unto us. This is primarily the righteousness for which they are said here to thirst and hunger, and on which a blessing is pronounced.

What is it that leads persons thus to hunger and thirst? What is it that constitutes this hunger and thirst? They have first a sense of insufficiency and dissatisfaction in all created things. No man feels he has enough, or derives perfect satisfaction from what he has. Every one has more happiness in the pursuit of earthly things than in the possession of them. What seemed just the thing that we wanted in the distant perspective, is found, when we have got it, not to be a satisfaction, but a new stimulus, that makes us long, and thirst, and hunger still for something more, till at last the man who pursues most eagerly, and possesses most largely, the best things of this world, learns eventually, amidst tears and bitter regrets, that he was spending his money for that which was not bread, and his labor for that which has satisfied not.

But this deep sense of the unsatisfactoriness of all human things does not make a person go out of the world, materially or actually, because the world cannot satisfy him. If his feeling of dissatisfaction be the commencement of the hunger

that is blessed, he neither becomes a monk nor dies a suicide ; two characters that are actuated by one principle, — they cannot or will not conquer the world by grace, and therefore they quit it, one to avoid its temptations, and the other its trials. He merely becomes more deeply conscious that there is no real satisfaction upon earth, that its most majestic cisterns are broken, or dry, or poisoned ; and that whoso tasteth of its bitter water thirsts again ; and therefore it makes him only the more intensely thirst for that living water, of which, if a man drink, he shall never thirst as the world does. He will have with him a well of water springing up unto everlasting life.

There is, secondly, an exciting element of this hunger and thirst after righteousness, or, what leads man to hunger and thirst after righteousness, a deep sense of guilt. Man feels he is miserable ; he knows, and needs not to be told, that he is sinful, and he is therefore unhappy. His heart makes him feel he is miserable ; his conscience tells him he is guilty ; and his want of happiness and want of holiness together make him hunger and thirst for something that will expiate the one, and allay the pangs and sorrows of the other. He soon discovers that, to take away his misery, there must be taken away his sin. This is a great and precious discovery. It is the dawn of glory. We begin to find out that sin is the bitter root, — that all the aches and miseries that flesh is heir to are only the apples of Sodom that grow upon this inveterate root. We discover that sin is as sound, and unhappiness the echo, the prolific parent ; and ills, and aches, and storms, and disquiet, the progeny that spring from it. We come to discover, partly by nature, chiefly by grace, that the misery which corrodes the heart never can be removed except by the expiation of the sin which cramps and fevers the conscience.

There follows, next, a perception of the utter inefficacy of all human prescriptions to remove the sin of which misery is the

stream, or to supply the righteousness which is the foundation of the joy and peace of the kingdom of heaven. Penance may take away the health of the body by its mortifications, but it cannot take away the sin of the soul; for it has no power to reach it. It may extinguish all that is pleasant to the eye; it may hush all that is musical to the ear; but no penitential exercises, or fastings, or flesh mortifications, or *misereres*, or *aves* frequently repeated, can reach the deep seat of man's misery, the real centre and spring of his unhappiness, — the sin that lies upon the conscience, the load that weighs down and depresses lost and fallen humanity.

Nor does a Christian feel that any absolution pronounced from the heights or the depths can lay his misery, or remove or mitigate the cause of that misery. The absolution of the priest may cast dust in the eye, or furnish an opiate for a day; but it cannot touch the accused at the judgment, it cannot cancel the transgression of the culprit at God's bar, or give real and lasting quiet.

There is, finally, a discovery of that righteousness which is unto all and upon all that believe, the characteristic perfection of which I have endeavored to delineate by referring to its beautiful announcement. Jesus, who knew no sin, was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

Thus, hunger and thirst are excited by these discoveries, and brought home to the conscience, and applied by the Spirit of God, — a hunger which one thing only can lay, a thirst which one fountain only can slake; — and just as the hunger of the body can only be removed by food, and as the thirst of the body can only be removed by water, so this sensation of spiritual hunger, and spiritual thirst, created in the soul, and produced under God by the thoughts, conclusions and considerations, we have intimated, can only be satisfied with that bread that cometh down from heaven, and that living water

which evermore wells from the fountain of life, the Lord Jesus Christ.

We have arrived at an idea of that hunger which is met by living bread; but there is produced beyond, and additional to this, a hunger for enjoyments, which the Spirit of God alone can satisfy. The first feeling of spiritual hunger is subdued and satisfied by an apprehension of that righteousness for which the sinner hungers; but a yet existing hunger is satisfied and removed, or mitigated, at least, by the supply of all those fruits of the Spirit which grow upon the tree of life, whose fruit is for food, and whose leaves are for the healing of the nations. When man is justified, he is at peace with God, and the hunger that longed for that righteousness which is unto all and upon all that believe is laid forever; but there is awakened instantly a hunger, and a thirst, or anxiety to taste the pleasures of the Gospel, by sitting down under that "banner which is love," and "eating of that pleasant fruit" which Christ has provided for all that believe; a basket-full of that fruit is given by an apostle, when he says, "Add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity." These are the fruits of the Spirit. Thus the hunger that is satisfied with a righteousness which is our title only originates another hunger, which can be satisfied only with perfection itself, by eating that pleasant fruit which is enumerated by the apostle Peter in his epistle.

Thus we see how the hunger which is here pronounced is blessed, and what is the food which can satisfy it. Wherever this hunger is felt, there will be no more apathy. Let a man feel the pangs of hunger, and instinctively he appeals for bread. Let a Christian feel the hunger of the soul, and instinctively he seeks that which can satisfy it. He will read

God's word, if peradventure he may discover it. He will hear the preaching of the Gospel, if peradventure he can hear of it; and the most delightful news which he can hail will be the declaration of that righteousness which satisfies all wants, overflows all desires, in which God's eyes can see no flaws, in which the sinner's heart can detect no imperfections.

Those who thus hunger and thirst are pronounced blessed. They have one of the elements of the blessed life. Such hunger, says Jesus, carries a benediction in its bosom. It is the evidence of a new nature: it is the instinctive characteristic of a soul which has been ushered into a new life. The babe, the moment it is born, seeks the nutriment provided for it; the sinner, who has been translated from darkness into light, seeks the living nutriment without which he must die; and the very hunger and thirst that he feels for it is to him the irrefragable proof that his heart has been quickened, that the life of God is in his soul, and that he is born again, and made one of the family of God.

If there be no appetites in the body, there can be no life; and if these appetites seek after unwholesome things, there can be no health. If we are satisfied with the bread which God has provided, it indicates health; if we are hungry for it, it indicates that we have life; but if we are seeking the tinsel of human rhetoric instead of the bread that nourishes the soul, if we cannot take the simple food without craving after artificial stimulants, if we prefer to feed on husks instead of the food of our Father's house, if we prefer the bright poppies to the corn, there is disease. We need to apply to the Great Physician, and ask him to pronounce over us, "I will, be thou healed."

This hunger and thirst is blessed, because in seasons of disquiet, despondency and doubt, to which every believer is more or less subject, there is, in the sensation that he feels, the inferential evidence that, notwithstanding all his doubts,

his despondency, his distrust, he is yet one of the accepted of God. An earnest hungering after righteousness, a wish to be what Christ requires us to be, a desire to be found in him, though not faith really, is faith in God's acceptance: for he accepts the desire for the thing, and satisfies the desire that he himself has implanted. There is not a heart that yearns for spiritual joy and spiritual righteousness which has not been touched by the transforming grace of the Spirit of God; and whilst the sensation of the want may be pain, yet that sensation, painful as it is, is inferentially pleasure: for it is the proof that God has begun that good work of which he is the author, and of which he will be the finisher also.

They are blessed who thus hunger and thirst after righteousness, because they are drawn off from the disappointing and perplexing pursuit of the things of this world. They cease, in proportion to the intensity of that feeling, to hunger after that which is not bread, and to labor for that which satisfieth not. In proportion as the next world grows in brightness, the present falls into the shadow. In proportion as the heart is absorbed with the unseen, it lets go its grasp of the seen and the temporal. The affections set upon Christ are withdrawn from lesser things. The greater light extinguishes the lesser; and thus we escape the disappointments, the pains and the perplexities, of pursuits that never gratify; and we start upon that race which is ascending progress, the goal of which is immortality and glory, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.

But such are blessed, primarily and chiefly, because they shall be filled: "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled." This is the star that cheers the believer in his darkest night; here is the rainbow that overarches the gulf of his deepest despondency; the bright light that bids him still hope on, faint, yet pursuing.

“Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.” It is God who says so; and, therefore, we are sure that we shall be filled. “He filleth the hungry with good things, but the rich he sendeth empty away.” He satisfieth the longing soul; and it is he who says, “If any man thirst, let him come to me and drink;” it is he who says, “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.” God satisfies the wants of all living things. The sparrow on the house-top looks to him, and he feeds it as carefully as the noble inhabitant within. The summer swallow on its wing chirps to him, and he hears it. The young lions no sooner lack food than he opens his hand, and satisfies the desire of every living thing. Are ye not much better than they? If God satisfies the beasts of the earth, the fowls of the air, the fishes of the deep, surely, surely, he will not leave desolate, and forever hungry, and never satisfied, his rational, fallen, but yet beloved and believing offspring.

God always gratifies the desire that he himself implants. Whatever Satan has implanted in the human heart, God extirpates; but whatever God himself has awakened in the human heart, that he nourishes. The passions of which Satan is the inspirer God will destroy; the appetites of which God is the author he himself will gratify. He has made us hunger and thirst after righteousness; he will fill us.

He is our Father, and we are his children. If your son ask you for bread, will you give him a stone? If he ask you for a fish, will you give him a serpent? If you, earthly fathers, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him! It is God’s happiness to give, and satisfy the wants of all flesh. It is one of those beautiful traits disclosed in the divine character, that God’s richest

glory and joy seem to be involved in the most munificent giving. Were we only to think of God more as the giver of blessings, and to think of him less as the exactor of duties, we should do duties better, and we should be more thankful for blessings. Nature's common idea of God is, that he is a great and sovereign tyrant, always exacting duties that nature is unable to discharge; the Gospel picture of God is, that he is a great and gracious Father, ever bestowing blessings, exacting nothing, but leaving the blessing to suggest the obligation that you owe, the gratitude that you should feel, and the duties which thereby devolve continually upon you. Wheresoever God is regarded as the giver of all, the exactor of nothing, there is the richest, noblest, purest obedience. Wherever God is regarded as the exactor of duties, but the giver of nothing, there is the suspicion of the slave, the miserable obedience of the subject to a tyrant, but not the joyful response of a son to a loving and affectionate father.

God will satisfy the believer, first of all, with righteousness. They who hunger and thirst after righteousness shall be filled. They shall be clothed with white robes. They shall appear in raiment white and clean, which is the righteousness of saints. All that we feel requisite to meet the demands of God's law will be supplied us. All that we feel needful to expiate the curse of his broken law will be given us. Our hearts will be inlaid with holiness, till holiness shall cease to be a duty, and become the very air that we breathe, the pulse of the heart, the joy and delight of the soul; and that beautiful image effaced at the fall shall be re-struck and re-stamped upon man, and a world that commenced with holiness and Eden shall end in the holiness and happiness of a yet grander Paradise restored.

We shall be filled, not only with righteousness, but also with that which is its spontaneous fruit, perfect happiness. The possession of perfect holiness is necessarily the posses-

sion of perfect happiness. Did men in national, social, political, municipal arrangements, only keep in mind this great principle, that will outlast the stars in its duration, and prove coëval with the existence of the throne of Deity, that sin is misery, that what promotes the first necessarily spreads the last, that holiness and righteousness are happiness, and that what promotes the one necessarily sustains and promotes the other, they would pursue better measures, and advocate better plans for benefiting mankind. We may rest assured that in proportion as righteousness flows down our streets, will the sunshine of happiness irradiate our roofs; that in proportion as righteousness exalts a people, will there bound and beat in the hearts of that people the joy that teacheth us to live righteously and godly, and that will culminate in a glory that is perfect; until, in the language of the psalmist, "We shall be satisfied when we awake with God's likeness."

The expression "fill" seems to denote a feast. We read of that feast in the twenty-second chapter of St. Matthew, "They shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God." It is called in the Apocalypse the marriage supper of the Lamb, where angels are our ministry, the glory of God and of the Lamb is our light, the tree of life, whose fruit is for food, is in our midst, with the river of life that proceedeth from the throne of God and of the Lamb evermore flowing past, proclaimed by Isaiah as a feast of fat things, in which, and by which, we shall be abundantly satisfied.

So much, then, for the explanation; first, of the appetite which has its origin in God, — spiritual hunger and spiritual thirst; secondly, the benediction pronounced upon it, showing that, however painful may be the sense of want, there is an element of joy in that very sense, because it is the evidence that we have received life from on high, and that our

hearts are, therefore, no longer dead in trespasses and in sins; and lastly and chiefly, the benediction is felt in the hope of its ultimate fulfilment, when all who now hunger and thirst after a righteousness, a perfection and a glory, that are aliens in a great degree to this fallen world, shall, when they awake, be satisfied with the likeness of God, with the joys that are at his right hand, and with the pleasures that are forevermore.

Earth is the place of want or desire. Perfect satisfaction is not reaped or realized below. "This is not our rest," is proclaimed by a thousand tongues. "There remaineth a rest for the people of God," is eloquently and emphatically announced by one, and that one the voice of the Holy Spirit of God. David describes the nature of the earth when he said, "There is none on earth I desire," showing that on earth we have a hunger not satisfied perfectly till we arrive in heaven, a desire that will not be completely subdued until we are where prayer is not, because there are no wants to fill, no hunger to remove. On earth the Christian's affections will aspire towards God, yet not reach him, as when the moon shines upon the sea, and the eager waves lift their gleaming heads, each anxious for her smiles.

The future is our rest. As the present is not, the future unquestionably is. There remaineth a rest for the people of God: "They shall be filled." "When I awake, I shall be satisfied with thy likeness." Or, as it is beautifully described by the seer in the Apocalypse, and by Isaiah in his prophecy, "They shall hunger no more, neither shall they thirst any more; and the inhabitant shall not say, I am sick; and there shall be no night, nor sorrow, nor tears, nor sighing, nor death; for the former things are all passed away."

We learn that real religion is a matter of personal experience. A man knows when he is hungry, he feels when he is thirsty. This is the instinct of nature. If there be real

religion, if we be Christians at all, we must be conscious of a hunger that will carry us to the sanctuary, to the Bible, to the throne of grace, to God for bread; and of a thirst which will be satisfied with nothing from this world's cisterns, which will only be met and removed by water from the fountain of life.

Though this earth be not our rest, and though hunger and thirst after righteousness be not perfectly removed and forever satiated in this world, yet there is a benediction even here on real religion. There is a blessedness in real religion even in the tears it sheds, in the sorrows it is pierced with, in the hunger it is conscious of, and in the wants of which it is the heir. It is the heart at peace with God that makes the whole universe seem at peace with us, and the stars of the sky and the flowers of the earth smile on us. It is not the house that makes the home; it is the heart of the inhabitant. Demas loved this world, went after its joys, and ceased to hunger for the bread of life. Paul clave to Christ, but was happy, notwithstanding strife, and bonds, and imprisonment.

Let us learn this blessed truth, that death is our departure from a state in which we hunger and thirst after righteousness, to that state in which we shall be filled. Death is not annihilation; it is only removal. It is not ceasing to be; it is beginning to be. It is not an exodus from life, but a departure for life. The believer dies physically; but morally, spiritually, truly, he lives a nobler and a more glorious life; and I doubt not that in the case of a dying Christian, before the last echoes of physical life have ceased to be heard in the chambers of the soul, the first beat of everlasting life is felt, and the tides of eternal joy begin to overflow and to make happy the emancipated spirit. Let us rejoice to believe that death, which so many fear, which all men more or less deprecate, is not what nature regards it, and justly regards it, but has become what grace enables us to see it, the kind angel that

breaks off the chains, and draws the bolts and the bars, and opens the prison doors, and lets the glad spirit go free from hungering and thirsting to that better and blessed land, where all our wants shall be satisfied, and all our desires shall be filled.

But this under-current of the blessed life is never altogether clear and still. It meets with obstructions; it is never wholly satisfied.

“ Although its heart is rich in pearls and ores,
The sea complains upon a thousand shores
Sea-like we moan forever. We are weak,
We ever hunger for diviner stores.”

CHAPTER VII.

THE TWICE BLESSED.

“The quality of mercy is not strained :
It droppeth as the gentle dew from heaven
Upon the place beneath. It is twice blessed ;
It blesses him that gives and him that takes.
’T is mightiest in the mighty ; it becomes
The throned monarch better than his crown.”

“Blessed are the merciful : for they shall obtain mercy.” — MATTHEW
5 : 7.

RIGHTEOUSNESS terminates one chain of beatitudes and begins another. The poor in spirit are the lowly in their own sight, and the humble in God’s; they that mourn grieve that they are destitute of that which alone makes holy or happy; the meek have that subduedness of spirit which results from a sense of emptiness, and poverty, and ignorance. Consciousness of these makes them hunger and thirst after righteousness; and God, according to his promise, satisfies them. Then all the graces that follow assume the possession of that righteousness. The graces that precede the sixth verse, in the Sermon on the Mount, are those of persons in whose hearts there is a deep and conscious sense of poverty, ignorance, error and ruin; the graces that succeed the sixth verse are those beautiful and adorning traits in the Christian character, which are peculiar to them that are justified by that righteousness which is unto all and upon all that believe.

The very first grace that grows, like a beautiful spring

flower, on the ground of righteousness now received, is the grace of mercy, or of compassion. In proportion as men are destitute of evangelical righteousness before God, are they strangers to tender compassion and mercy towards mankind. The scribes and the Pharisees had a righteousness which was their own, and it was only fit to be their own; they had, therefore, a hard-heartedness, a cruelty, and an indifference to the wrongs and the sufferings of others, which were notoriously and publicly their own also. None are so tender in their compassion to their brethren as they who have felt in their own hearts most richly and fully the compassion of God toward them. As a church ceases to be evangelical in its creed, and spiritual in its convictions, it comes to be bigoted, exclusive, and cruel. Hence, wherever the righteousness that is by faith is lost, as the load-star in a professing Christian church, there mercy to the souls and compassion to the bodies of men seem to be altogether quenched and extinguished. In the purest Protestant church there is most of missionary action, because there is most of tender compassion in the heart; in the corrupt and apostate church there is cruelty, proscription, bigotry, exclusiveness and bloodshed, because they have lost the light, and the softening influence of that salvation through faith in the atonement of the Lamb, which lies at the very foundation and root of all Christian character.

Our Lord selects mercy as the first grace exhibited by the justified believer, to pronounce a benediction on: "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled;" and then, "Blessed are those who, having that righteousness, exhibit mercy: for they also shall obtain mercy." To whom much is forgiven, by such much will be forgiven. They who have received the richest mercies will themselves exhibit, not for a reward, but as a grateful and instinctive response, the richest mercies to mankind. There

may be nothing in the hand, — this we cannot help; but there may be much in the heart, and this we are responsible for. God's grace puts mercy in the heart; God's providence puts the means of unfolding it in the hand. These are not always and everywhere joined. One has a full hand, who has an empty heart. Another has a compassionate heart, of whose compassion tears are the only available exponents, and whose good wishes, often more precious than the gold of others, are all they can give to denote how deeply they feel. If we have, mercy draws on it; if we have not, mercy expresses our sympathies, retires, and is silent.

What is mercy, or compassion? It is sorrow at the suffering of a fellow-creature, rational or irrational; and, along with that sorrow, an earnest desire, if possible, to relieve it. True mercy is deep compassion at the sufferings, the sorrows, or the wrongs of another, accompanied by an earnest desire to remove those wrongs, and to neutralize and still those sufferings. It does not ask the question, "Is the sufferer of my nation, sect, party or church? Does he speak my shibboleth, wear my robes, advocate my cause?" These are questions it never entertains. In its purest type it sees nothing but suffering; in its noblest exercise it recognizes nothing in the expressions of its liberality but a sufferer, wherever and whoever that sufferer may be.

This mercy, or compassion, not only overflows the puny distinctions of party, nation or tribe, but it even overflows the broad, lofty and awful wall of sin itself. It does not say of the sufferer, Does the man deserve relief? It simply asks the question, Does he suffer? In showing mercy, the merciful man looks less at the sins of the sufferer, and more at the depth of his want, and the agony of his heart. He leaves the suffering man's sins with God, for him to pardon, or to punish; he takes the suffering man's sorrows for himself, to pity, to compassionate, and relieve. When, therefore, an

applicant comes for pecuniary relief, we should not ask, as we are all so apt to do, "What are your antecedents?" we should rather look at his present sufferings. Do not, however, be imposed upon. If there be hypocrisy, sham and pretence, uncloak it, rebuke and dismiss it; but if there be real misery, the consequence even of real crimes, leave his crimes with God, and with his own conscience, and hasten to bind up his wounds, and to supply his wants, and to give relief as you are able. We are not only to show mercy in spite of the man being a foreigner, but in spite of the man being a sinner. If God were to show no mercy except to the innocent, where should we be? With what measure ye mete to others, it shall be meted to you.

We are to go a step further, and to pity the sufferer as a sinner, and to show mercy to him simply because he is a sinner. We are not only to show mercy to him by relieving his wants in spite of his being a sinner, but to show mercy to him just because he is a sinner. Who on earth is most to be pitied? Surely, surely, the man who has lost the way to heaven. None so much needs pity. We are all prone to anathematize the Roman Catholic, the Socinian, the sceptic, and the atheist; and we do well to try to undeceive them, and to express our deep abhorrence of the awful errors into which they have fallen; but that is easy and natural enough. We need also to feel, while we abhor the sins and the errors of him who has gone astray, that there is room for compassion at the awful position into which he has fallen. It is God's prerogative to ascend the judgment-throne, and to pronounce retributions; it is my privilege, and my duty too, to bow the knee at the throne of grace, and to pray for mercy and forgiveness. God decides on the character of the man; I, as a fellow-sinner, pity the misfortune of the man; and, because he is suffering, I must try to relieve him; he has gone astray, I will try to put him right; he is a sinner, I will seek

to lead him to the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world. When Jesus shed tears over Jerusalem, he wept over its great sins, as well as its approaching calamity. I do not believe that the slaughter of the innocents by Herod awoke so much feeling in the mind of Jesus as the approaching destruction of Jerusalem. The death of those innocents was but their translation to glory; the ruin of Jerusalem was awful beyond description, because at the day of judgment it would be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah than for such a capital, surrounded by such privileges.

Now, it is remarkable that mercy, which is so frequently enjoined in the Gospel on the followers of the cross, is one of those graces which ancient heathen philosophy repudiated as the attribute of weakness of character. The Stoic, as personated in Zeno, allowed you to relieve the suffering, but forbade you to feel the least compassion for the sufferer. Human nature, in the eyes of a Stoic, reached its culminating grandeur in proportion as it became petrified into ice, or consolidated into stone. You might relieve the needy, if such you met with; but to shed a tear, or to be penetrated by a deep and tender compassion, was denounced as unworthy of a great man and a good philosopher. And yet, when we relieve a poor, destitute, starving beggar, that appeals to us for aid, the shilling, the half-crown, the sovereign, that you give him, most precious in its place, are not so comforting to his heart as the spirit and the way in which you give it. Some seem to feel, when a needy applicant applies for relief, that when they have given a trifle they have given all that is really demanded. The way in which we give is more effectual than the sum that we give. Hence, not iron officials, but tender-hearted and merciful men, ought to sit at every board of relief, whether parochial, national or otherwise. The way to harden the poor into obduracy is to fling relief at them, and bid them begone. The way to touch a chord that will

vibrate sweet music in the heart of the forlorn, and awaken the elements of good, is to give with a compassionate expression, and to show that what you give is but a poor exponent of the depth of the compassion that you truly feel. Much, I fear, of our manner is stoical, if much of our real, inward feeling be eminently Christian. Wherever true mercy or compassion is, it should drop as the gentle rain upon the place beneath; and then it is twice blessed, — it blesseth him that gives, and him that takes.

Mercy is most frequently and eloquently enjoined in various portions of Scripture as one of the great evidences of Christian character. God himself is spoken of as “keeping mercy and judgment, and showing mercy to thousands.” “Blessed is he that considereth the poor.” Again, says our blessed Master, “Be ye merciful as your Father in heaven is merciful.” We cannot read the Bible without seeing frequent injunctions of mercy. And if it be thought right by the Holy Spirit so often to present this duty, it cannot be wrong in the evangelical minister most earnestly to preach and press it. On the other hand, the unmerciful man is spoken of in Scripture in terms of the strongest rebuke. “He shall have judgment without mercy, who hath showed no mercy.” In almost every page of the ancient prophets, unmercifulness is represented as a hideous vice. “Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips; whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness; their feet are swift to shed blood; destruction and misery are in their ways; and the way of peace have they not known.” It is represented as sowing discord among brethren, as creating Cains in society, as setting every man’s hand against his fellow. It is denounced by the apostle in the first chapter of the epistle to the Romans, in a catalogue of the blackest vices, as one of the blackest. He says, “Without understanding, covenant-breakers, without natural

affection, implacable, unmerciful." It is spoken of again by David, in the Psalms, as the source and cause of judgments falling upon mankind. "Set thou a wicked man over him: and let Satan stand at his right hand. When he shall be judged, let him be condemned: and let his prayer become sin. Let his days be few; and let another take his office. Let his children be fatherless, and his wife a widow. Because that he remembered not to show mercy, but persecuted the poor and needy man, that he might even slay the broken in heart."

Mercy is always represented in Scripture as the characteristic of the loftiest nature. "The Lord God, merciful," — the very first attribute, — "and gracious." "Be ye merciful." God is "rich in mercy," "plenteous in mercy," "abundant in mercy." Wherever there is the highest holiness, there seems to be the greatest mercy. Wherever the eye is filled with the purest light, there the tear of compassion seems least to be a stranger, as if the highest holiness ever had the deepest compassion. In the bosom of our blessed Master, the great model whom we are to imitate, mercy was one of the most beautiful and resplendent gems. In the ninth chapter of the Gospel of St. Matthew, we read that when he saw the multitudes, he was "moved with compassion on them." When he saw Lazarus resting in the cold grave and amid the chill damps of death, he wept. As he gazed upon Jerusalem, his deep and yearning compassion poured forth its current in the most tender and touching words: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" And when the apostle would present our blessed Lord in the most endearing and interesting aspect, he tells us, in the epistle to the Hebrews, that "we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.

Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." We shall find, too, that the most illustrious saints in the martyrology of the past were not the least distinguished for the deep and tender compassion that they showed to all mankind. When Stephen was hurried to the judgment-seat, amid the reproaches of his murderers, his deep compassion breathed itself in prayer, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." At the last day, some of the richest evidences of Christian character will be the mercy and compassion that has been shown by the people of God to those that stood in need of it. "I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat; I was naked, and ye clothed me. I was a stranger, and ye took me in. I was sick, and ye visited me. I was in prison, and ye came unto me." Mercy shows itself not necessarily in giving money. "I was in prison, and ye came unto me." That visit of sympathy was the evidence of Christian character, — the expression of true compassion. "I was sick, and ye visited me." That condoling sympathy, the utterance of a fellow feeling, was the expression of grace and of yearning mercy. When you visit the sick and the suffering, it is not always necessary that you should read the Scriptures, however desirable; it is not always necessary that you should pray, however beautiful and appropriate; but a word in season, how sweet it is! Do not utter the vulgar, commonplace expressions of compassion, "I hope you will get better." "How are you to-day?" But go into the sick chamber clothed in the radiant robe of Christian character; say some beautiful, deep, glorious truth from God's own blessed word, and it will ring in echoes of sweet music in the sufferer's heart; and he will feel that an exponent of mercy, who has obtained mercy, has come to gladden his sick chamber with his beautiful and healing presence. How many give consolation to the suffering just as a nurse gives medicine to the sick, — as something that they would not for the

world taste themselves, and never tasted in their own lifetime ! Let us express to the sick our own sympathies, and remind them of that thought so refreshing to a Christian sufferer, — Jesus was clothed with our humanity ; he knew what suffering was ; he tasted our cup ; we have a high priest who is passed into the heavens, who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and ever liveth to make intercession for us.

Having thus seen the repeated proofs of the excellence of this grace, and the esteem in which it is held in the sacred volume, let me inculcate the seasonable lesson, that mercy is a grace obligatory upon all, whether they be rich or poor, whether they have the power to express it in open charity, or not. The very reason that we are in the world is that we may be useful in our measure to the rest of mankind. Men are afflicted for me to pity them. They suffer just for me to relieve them ; they are in want for me to supply them. Men are in lowly circumstances for me to visit them. Wherever I see suffering, there I behold one who reminds me of a duty. Wherever I see want, there I hear, if my ear be circumcised, a summons to duty, — no, I will not say *to duty*, but to enjoyment and to privilege. Why is one man richer than another ? Not that he may live more luxuriously, but that he may be more helpful. Why was Solomon wiser than I ? That I may be benefited by his wisdom. Why is another man richer than I ? That my poverty may participate in his abundance. Why does one man suffer, and I remain in health ? That I may go and visit him. We are members one of another ; and, if one member suffer, all should sympathize. If one string in a harp be touched, all the other strings in the room will sound in harmony or unison with it.

In order to exercise this mercy, let us think of the mercy that we have received. There is not a breath that we draw that is not an inspiration of mercy ; there is not a bounding beat in a happy heart that is not a response to the

touch of infinite beneficence; and, to sum up all mercies in that which is the richest, the most glorious, the unutterable one, "Herein is love, not that we loved him, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." Pylades, in ancient story, laid down his life for Orestes; but Orestes was his friend. "God commended his love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us."

Scarcely for a righteous man will one dare to die, although for a righteous or a good man some would even dare to die; but show me, in all the ancient catalogues of suffering or sacrifice, a man laying down his life for the foe who hated him, and I will admit that Christianity has a parallel, and that there is a chapter in history that can be put in comparison with it; but there is none. We have instances in the Bible of great sufferings undergone by Christians in the exercise of mercy and sympathy for one another. There is a beautiful incident, which, if it were only in a heathen writer, would be sounded forth by every sceptic in Christendom; but which, because it is in an inspired epistle, is too purposely overlooked: "Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my helpers in Christ Jesus; who have for my life laid down their own necks," — an instance of female martyrdom for apostolic service, as beautiful in itself as it is encouraging to us. We find mercy towards others constantly enforced in Scripture by the great mercies that we have received in Christ. "We beseech you by the mercies of God," says the apostle. If we feel that we have received mercy, it is not that we may act like the barren sand, absorb it, but like the fertile soil that receives the dews and rains of heaven, and brings forth the fairest fruits and flowers that look upward to the sky.

I now pass from the consideration of the grace of mercy, to the benediction pronounced upon it, — "Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy." There is a conscious joy in the bosom of him who feels compassion to others, with

which every one must be in some degree acquainted. Selfishness corrodes the heart, and cankers the temper. There is a luxury in doing good which the Epicureans of this world have never tasted. There is a feeling of satisfaction, of repose, and of delight, in the recollection that you have done a good turn to a neighbor, that you have raised up a friend that was bowed down, that you have spoken a thought of truth or of comfort to a mourner, or that you have given, not a superfluity, as we all give often enough, but a necessity, in order that you might do a friend, a neighbor, an enemy, good.

God bestows special benedictions on the merciful. Not only does he say in one word "Blessed are the merciful," but in several passages of Scripture he states the special approbation that he feels towards them. He says (Isaiah 58:6), "Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh." Then hear the benediction on it, "Blessed are the merciful." — "Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the Lord shall be thy rereward." He who makes the earth more beautiful and happy around him ever sees the heaven more bright, holy and beautiful, above him. No man bestows a blessing on another, without the sensation in his own heart, not of merit, but of satisfaction and delight — a feeling as inseparable from it as sound is from echo, or as shadow is from light. They who are thus merciful are blessed because they are god-like. As we approach God in character, we approach him in happiness. Sin is essentially misery; holiness, of which compassion is one of the evidences, is essentially happiness; and,

as we become merciful as our Father in heaven is merciful, in the same proportion shall we approximate to him in the enjoyment of that happiness of which he is the fountain-head and the inexhaustible spring.

Such as are merciful are blessed in their persons; they are blessed in their name; they are blessed in their family; they are blessed in their estate; they are blessed with long life. These blessings are pronounced in various portions of God's word upon those who are merciful.

And they are blessed emphatically in this: "They shall obtain mercy." A promise in Scripture is partly a possession. Whatever God has promised, hope lays hold of; and in the heart of hope there is a present having, an earnest and a foretaste of the future full reward. When a person has a bank-note, he has five sovereigns, because he has confidence in its availableness and currency. When a Christian has a promise in Scripture, he has the "I promise to pay" of God, which is a currency of happiness available here. The man who is merciful is blessed, because, if a child of God, — and it is the children of God who are here spoken of as bringing forth these, the fruits of the Spirit, — he has a present earnest of the fulfilment of the promise, "They shall obtain mercy."

We shall find that those who are merciful obtain mercy from others in this world. There is a disposition, even in the minds of the unsanctified masses of mankind, to respect, revere and love, the merciful and the compassionate man. Let one who has shown, when he had property in his power, mercy and compassion to the poor, be deprived, in the providence of God, and by those changes and vicissitudes to which all society is liable every day, of the means of any more expressing that mercy in its wonted munificence, he will yet be loved by all who knew his generosity while he had; and society, which is not composed of demons, if not of angels, will show how true is the benediction in the text, "Blessed are the merciful: for," even in this life, "they shall obtain mercy."

They shall obtain mercy, not only among men, by being recognized and revered as the merciful who have moved through society as living benedictions, while they had the means, but they shall obtain mercy from God even in this world. They will get pardoning mercy, sustaining mercy. Grace is not judgment; but yet, in this world, there is enough of retribution to show that God reigns, while there is enough of confusion to make us long for a judgment-day, when what is wrong will be rectified. All must have noticed, in looking at the history of individuals on a larger scale, that men who have exercised mercy have thus given the proof of that state and character of heart which God loves; they are richly watered themselves.

Above all, they will obtain mercy "at that day." What day? The last day of just and final retribution. Death does not create character: it only fixes it forever. If mercy be an evidence of grace, the character it indicates is perpetuated by death. The waters of death are not waters of ablution; they simply carry him who is placed in their current to the judgment-seat, and leave him just as they found him. We all know that we need, not only that righteousness which is our title to heaven, but that purity of heart, peace-loving, peace-making, and meek temper, which are the constituent elements of our fitness for heaven. They who are merciful have one of those graces that qualify, not entitle, for the kingdom of heaven.

And we may argue from this that special blessings in the world to come are assigned to special characters, distinguished by special graces. These blessings in the world to come are not the rewards, according to desert, of graces we have developed here, but they are the assignment of spheres and fields for the exercise of these peculiar graces in their maturity, the seeds of which have been sown upon earth, and have been more or less developed in the growth of our character here

below. There may be a sphere in the future rest where the meek shall reign; another sphere where the peacemakers shall be manifested as the sons of God; another where the merciful shall shine in that beautiful light. Heaven is not one vast monotony; it is composed of varied characters, with varied degrees of development, of sanctification and expansion; each will have his place, a place contingent upon the peculiar character which, through the Spirit of God, he developed in his conduct in this present world; and thus, in the age to come, there may be benedictions fitted for each Christian, according to what he was, through grace, in the church below.

We here learn, what is very important, that the spring of a true happiness is within. Every benediction in the fifth chapter of St. Matthew is not upon an outer condition, but upon an inner character. The source of happiness is not the estate, nor the title, nor the wealth, but the heart. A holy heart must be a happy one; a sinful nature must be a miserable one. The joy that culminates in glory has its commencement below; the sorrow that has no measure, and that will have no end, begins here in the individual heart. The kingdom of God is an inner thing before it is outer. It must be within you before you shall be admitted as a subject within it.

Every benediction in the fifth chapter of St. Matthew rebukes selfishness. "Blessed are the poor, the merciful, the meek, the hungry." Selfishness, not self-love, is the great sin of the world. It is the chief governor of thousands in the age we live in. And yet we feel that selfishness is corrosive to the heart as a poison; that mercy, charity, benevolence, spread a glow of beauty over the face, and create in the heart serenity, thanksgiving, and peace. If we could get rid of that selfishness which thinks of its own sufferings, however little, and nothing of a brother's, however great, — which is ever jealous lest it do not get what it deserves, and ever afraid lest you do not defer to it with all, and that not a little, which it

thinks is its due, — how calmly would your heart beat, how truly would you illustrate what all history is teaching, that, in proportion as Christianity spreads over the mass of mankind, does the desert begin to rejoice, and the wilderness to blossom even as the rose. But when we fall into that horrid state which some think the very perfection of common sense, “The world cares nothing for me, and I care nothing for the world,” we shall feel it sounds very grand, but it is very miserable. We know there is no happiness in any such feeling. There is no help for us but to love, if we would be happy. Hate men, and you will be more miserable than they; love men, and they will be blessed by your love, and its reflex operation will bless yourselves also. Look upon the world’s goodness with thankfulness to God; look upon the world’s sins with compassion and with prayer; look upon the world’s injuries with forgiveness; and pray that the spirit that builds up the Christian character with all that brightens and beautifies here below may make you merciful, and give the benediction now, and the fulfilment of the promise then; “for they shall obtain mercy.” Thus will you tread one of the fairest paths of the blessed life.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BEATITUDE OF THE PURE IN HEART.

“ Yet far beyond the clouds outspread,
Where soaring fancy oft hath been,
There is a land where thou hast said
The pure in heart shall enter in.
There, in those realms so calmly bright,
How many a loved and holy one
Bathe their pure souls in living light,
That sparkles from thy radiant throne ! ”

“ Blessed are the pure in heart : for they shall see God. ”

MATTHEW 5 : 8.

THIS is nearly the last of those beautiful benedictions pronounced by our Lord on special character, in the fifth chapter of St. Matthew. “ Blessed are the poor in spirit,” that is, the meek, the humble, the lowly, in their own sight. We had next the blessing on them who mourned for sin, or suffered for Christ’s sake. We heard next a blessing on those who hunger and thirst after that of which they have the conscious want, a righteousness by which they can be justified, and rendered fit for heaven. We have read the blessing on the merciful, a grace that follows righteousness ; and now, in the eighth verse, we read, “ Blessed are the pure in heart.”

Not “ Blessed are the rich in circumstance,” nor “ the prosperous in life,” but “ the pure in heart.” Jesus looks within, and from what he finds there decides whether there shall be a blessing or a curse ; and wherever he sees purity of heart, there comes from his lips the benediction, never

without its effect, "Blessed are these: for they shall see God." We have seen all along that happiness is not created by circumstance, but is generated by character. The benediction is not upon outward circumstance, but upon inward character; and wherever the holy character is, there the benediction rests; wherever the character is not, let the man who is destitute of it be clothed in purple and fine linen every day, he has no lot or share in the benedictions of Christ.

The heathen were satisfied with external character. To be right in the sight of men was all they wished; to be correct in the outer conduct was the very flower and perfection of heathen morality. The Pharisees, indeed, almost the whole nation of the Jews, were more anxious about the outside of the platter being clean than the inside. All excellence was conformity to the letter of the law: it mattered not that the spirit of it was violated ten times a day. It is of these that Christ speaks when he says, "Except your righteousness exceed," not only in degree, but in kind, "that of the scribes and Pharisees," — that is, righteousness of the letter; rigid, mechanical righteousness, instead of righteousness from the heart, — "ye cannot see the kingdom of heaven." And thus, speaking to the heathen, who regarded mere outer morality, and to the scribes and Pharisees, who only looked at the letter of the law, Jesus sends his lightning glance into the depths of the human heart, and declares that there alone is that purity of character which secures a benediction from heaven, in the absence of which, all exterior grandeur, however beautiful, is only like the whited sepulchre, all-beautiful without, but inside full of corruption and dead men's bones.

Let us try to ascertain what this purity is which is here so extolled. It was in Adam by nature; it is in us by grace. It was created in Adam; it is inspired in us. He received it when he was made; we receive it through faith in the Lord

Jesus Christ. In us it is as seed cast into the soil of the prepared heart, which germinates, and buds, and unfolds itself in all those things that are pure, and just, and honest, and lovely, and of good report. It is in us a light that shineth more and more within the lantern, till it burst through its limits, and reach the splendor of the perfect day. It is a living principle, ever powerful, ever resisted, yet never beaten; growing daily in aspirations and likeness, until it is made perfect by seeing Christ as he is, when we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.

This purity of heart is constantly enjoined in Scripture. "Be ye holy." "Chosen in Christ, that ye should be holy." "Christ gave himself for us, that he might purify us;" literally, "that he might make us pure in heart." Thus, the objection made to Christianity, that our being saved by something done for us must necessarily lead to our doing nothing ourselves, is wholly removed by the mere perusal of the benedictions in this chapter, which show that while we are justified by a righteousness without, we are, if so justified, ever inspired and characterized by meekness, purity, and hungering after righteousness, within.

This purity which is in the heart of the believer is true beauty: it is lasting ornament. It adds new grandeur to the prince, and royal beauty to the humblest peasant, till Solomon, in all his glory, is not to be compared with the meanest follower of the Lamb, who has purity of heart, and the promise of seeing God.

Such purity of heart is regarded in Scripture constantly as a qualification for heaven. It is said, "Nothing that defileth shall enter there." The inheritance is "incorruptible, undefiled;" therefore, incorruptible and undefiled characters shall remain possessors of it. Holiness is the delight of the heirs of heaven, the air of heaven, the sunshine of its courts, the

inspiration of every heart that beats and bounds amid the choirs of the blessed.

The Author of this purity of heart is the Holy Spirit of God. Christ's work is without us: the Spirit's work is within us. As soon as we are justified by a righteousness that Christ is, we instantly come under a process of sanctification, which the Holy Spirit gives. In that admirable formulary, the Shorter Catechism, we read, "Justification is an act of God's grace, but sanctification is a work of God's Spirit." The first is something done at once; the second is something that begins with little, and advances day by day, like the shining light, until the clean thing is brought out of the unclean, and the old man dies before the growing life of the new, and the eternal absorbs the present.

The seat of this purity is the heart. A pure heart seems to be in our moral economy what a healthy heart is in our physical economy. Let the heart be physically diseased, and the whole system is deranged. Let the heart be morally tainted, and the whole conduct will be tortuous, having lost its true polarity, its right momentum, and perfect balance. The seat of this purity is the heart; and as sure as it is in the heart, it will be in the life. As sure as the heart sends forth with gigantic force the blood that it receives through all the arteries of the human body, and effloresces in health on the countenance, and shows itself in vigor in the limbs, and cannot but be seen, felt, and known; so purity in the heart will send out its purifying tide into all the ducts and arteries of our moral economy, till men take notice of us, and see that we are the subjects of a power that is from above, and will give glory to our Father in heaven. Expediency, self-interest, and the praise of men, may help a person to restrain a great many of his bad propensities; but he will restrain them under such influences exactly as a man keeps in his breath under water, doing what is most unnatural, unpleasant, and what can only

last while the necessity requires it. But when a man's character is moulded by an influence *ab intra*, by a power whose seat is the heart, and whose field is the whole moral character, it is persistent and full of proportion; wherever he is seen, and under whatever circumstances, he is the same. A true Christian is like an anagram; whichever way you read him, — up, down, right, left, — you can always read one thing, the name of his blessed Master. See him at whatever angle, detect him in any circumstances, a Christian who has his heart right will have his conduct holy. Wherever the inner man is right, there will be seen great simplicity of character. Wherever you see the face elongated in order to seem serious, and hear in the voice a sort of whine, you must judge, if you venture to judge at all, unfavorably. True Christian character is simple, unaffected, sincere. A true Christian does not feel that there is any virtue in a sad countenance, and he does not believe there is any sin in a bright and merry one. He feels that it is at least as Christian to be joyful as to be sad; and certainly that it is not Christian to seem, or try to be, what he is not. He acts no part. He seems just what he is.

This purity of heart, thus inspired, will show itself always, as I have already stated, in the outer life. It will make good actions, that were done under other influences, to be nobler, purer, and grander; so that what the natural man is it will inspire and make more beautiful; and it will add to the natural man that which he has not, new and nobler graces, that blossom only upon the tree of life, and grow and ripen in the air, and amid the sunshine of the paradise of God. Purity within, there will be exemplariness without. The man is Christian in his heart; and, therefore, he cannot help appearing Christian in his life. His Christianity is not a coat put on, but an influence streaming from within. Herein is the difference between the hypocrite, or the worldly man, and the true Christian. The hypocrite puts on, as the word liter-

ally means, a mask ; and in that mask the old man looks new. The true Christian puts on no mask, but just lives exactly as a new and divine instinct prompts him, and he lives truly, and justly, and purely, before God and before man. The Christian abstains not only from dishonesty, but from covetousness ; not only from impure acts, but from impure thoughts ; not only from murder, but from letting the sun go down upon his wrath, or being angry with his brother without a cause.

This purity of heart will show itself in seeking to be governed by a sense of God's presence, of duty and obligation to him, and by nothing else. The care of such a one will be, How do I look in God's sight ? and he will not trouble himself about how he looks in man's sight ; because he is always sure that, if he be right in his heart in the sight of God, his conduct never can go very far wrong. The man who has no purity of heart, and yet desires the credit of having it, has a great deal of trouble, and, after all, very little success. He has to adjust his robes, to tune his words, to arrange the very features of his face : he is constantly tortured by adapting himself to circumstances ; fearing he may fail there, and be detected here, and thankful if he succeed at all. But the man who has his heart right does not trouble himself about all this : he just speaks out what is natural ; he lives and does what is perfectly unaffected ; and all these things, liable, it may be, to momentary misconstruction by men, are yet sure to turn out, in the long run, pure and beautiful and right ; because they are done from an inspiration in itself pure. He is pure in heart, and therefore his conduct will be pure in the sight of men.

This purity of heart—and I give this as a criterion by which we may test our own state—will ever be ready to disclose itself to God in prayer. The man who is not really in earnest to have a clean heart will never go into God's

presence, when there is no ear but God's to hear, and say, "Search me, O God, and know my thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." He who is not bent on the attainment of this grace will never venture to pray in private, "Create in me a clean heart, O God;" that is, "Make me pure in heart, that thy blessing may be on me, and that the sight of thee may be my reward." He does not want to see God. Such a one will never say, "Thou desirest truth in the inward parts; cleanse thou me from secret faults." He who can earnestly and truly, from the very depth of his soul, so pray, when no ear hears but God's, has what he prays for; for the desire in prayer — earnest and real — of purity of heart is already the possession, in fact, of purity of heart.

Such a one will not regard, in the language of the Psalmist, iniquity in his heart, — "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me;" — that is, he will not cherish in his heart a thought that ought not to be there. A lodger that belongs not to the sanctuary of God will intrude inadvertently into the purest heart; but the heart, like the sleepless Levite, the instant it detects this stranger, will expel him; whereas an impure heart, on receiving into it an impure imagination, will entertain it as a friend, give it hospitality and welcome, and find delight and enjoyment in turning it round and round, and meditating upon it. The pure heart will shrink from a sinful thought, just as the sensitive nerve will shrink from the prick of a pin. They cannot always avoid it, but they will not cherish it. The pure in heart will not regard — that is, cherish or keep — iniquity in their heart. It will never make provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof.

There is no heart so pure that sinful thoughts will not rise in it. Nay, it is just on the purest heart that the devil will make the strongest assault. When you have walked in a

garden, have you never noticed that it is always the choicest and most fragrant fruit that is first insect-stung? The wasp will only touch the ripest and most beautiful fruit. It is always the purest heart that will be the victim of the first assault of sin, Satan, and the world. But, because that heart is assailed by sin, or because it is even touched by it, or because, in an inadvertent moment, a sinful thought finds a lodgment in it, you do not therefore evince that you are not a child of God. The evidence of your sonship lies in the resistance of the evil that is alien, and in your thrusting out the impure thought, that, if cherished, would ultimately attain domination, and carry soul, body and spirit, with it. Such are some of the effects of this purity of heart, and such are some of the best criteria of its possession.

Now, such persons are blessed — “Blessed are the pure in heart.” That means, happy are the pure in heart. They are happy in having this blessed characteristic. In what sense can they be said to be happy in this respect? In the first place, they are freed from a great deal of trouble. They live and act as they feel and think. The hypocrite, who wishes to have an outside character to attain outside purposes, has a great deal of trouble in adjusting his robes, in always being on the watch, in always acting an artificial, a constrained, and mechanical part. There is a great deal of drudgery in such a life; but the person whose heart is right within has no such trouble. It is as natural for him to do justly as to breathe, or for grass to grow green. It is as natural for him to follow all things that are just, and honest, and lovely, and of good report, as to live. He takes no trouble about his outer walk: for he is sure it will be right, if he only take great trouble about his inner character, praying God to keep pure the flame that burns within, and to preserve him ever in the possession of a pure heart, which has as its fruitage and its flower a pure and a holy life.

Such a one has happiness, because he has one of the evidences of being amongst the people of God. "God is good to Israel, to such as are of a clean heart." I know no greater evidence that you belong to God, than that you hate what he hates, love what he loves, and that your heart gives hospitality to all that is pure, and rejects, the instant it detects it, the presence and the pollution of all that is impure.

The pure in heart are happy, because to them all things are pure. Not sin is pure, but all things that in themselves are innocent are to the pure in heart perfectly pure. Their estate and the loss of it, their prosperity and their adversity, their illness and their health, all that comes in providence, comes to them from God, is received by them as such, and is enjoyed by them,—if prosperity, thankfully, and if adversity, endured by them patiently,—for Christ's sake.

Such a one's heart is the temple of God. It has a consecration no episcopal hands can bestow, a sanction no human authority can communicate. It is made pure, not ceremonially, not ecclesiastically, not Levitically, but morally and spiritually,—that is, really by God himself,—and in such God dwells.

But the benediction is not only for the present; it is specially in the future. The present benediction is the earnest and foretaste of the full harvest of benediction that is to come. Such, it is said, "shall see God." "Faith," we are told, "is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Wherever, therefore, there is faith,—and it is faith that purifieth the heart; for faith "worketh by love," and, adds the apostle, it "purifieth the heart,"—there is the evidence of what the world does not see; for God no man hath seen, nor can see: and they shall therefore see God. They shall see him first in this life, and they shall see him perfectly and fully in the life to come. They shall see

God in life's trials. Truly it is consolation to see God in the hurricane that sweeps away all the property our industry has amassed! What consolation is it to see God in that sickness that befalls us, in that sorrow that breaks the heart, in the trial all of whose waves and billows pass over us! Is it no consolation to see that all these are from our Father,—are chastisement, not judgment, — not penal, but paternal, and are working for good to the subject of them? “Though no tribulation for the present seemeth joyous, but rather grievous, yet it worketh out the peaceable fruits of righteousness to them that are exercised thereby.” In other words, the pure in heart shall see that affliction comes not from the ground, but is the distribution of his Father who is in heaven.

The pure in heart shall see God also in life's prosperity. It is often more difficult to see God in prosperity than in adversity. It is a strange fact, and it indicates a disordered state on our part, that when God smites we see and recognize his hand, but when God blesses we are prone to see and recognize only our own fortunate exertions. But the pure in heart see God in their trials, and are patient, while they pray to him; they see God in the sunshine of their prosperity, thank him, and give him all the praise and glory.

The pure in heart also see God in all his providential dealings. Whatever happens to a nation, a dynasty, a capital, they see God in it. In other words, they have got out of the region of chance, where all is chaos, because all is accident; and they have got into the region of order, where God is working out his grand designs by means and mechanism often inexplicable to us, but ever successful, because wielded by him.

The pure in heart will also see God in all creation. When we go forth to the country, and look upon its varied magnificence and beauty, it is surely a delightful reflection that a

Christian's heart will not be a stranger to, "My Father made them all." The tendency of the scientific man is to investigate nature, and stop after he has found her laws. The tendency of the natural man, who is not a scientific man, is to look at nature, and merely admire, and be charmed and delighted. But the Christian, who is pure in heart, who has the film taken from his eyes and the distorting passion from his heart, will, in the least and the loftiest thing, — in the hyssop that groweth out of the wall, and in the oak that is centuries old, in the bee upon its wing, and in the leviathan that sports in the deep, in all things exquisitely minute, in all things magnificently great, in all heights and depths, in flower, fruit, field, star, sun, and moon, — trace the workmanship and see the footprints of his Father, and give him the praise as the creator and governor of all.

The pure in heart will also see God specially and primarily in the sacred page. When he opens his Bible, the natural man reads Paul's writing; the Christian sees through the veil, and reads God's mind. When the natural man opens the Bible, he sees eloquence, poetry, history; but the Christian penetrates all these, the mere wrappage, the outer and beautiful shell, and sees and hears God, and, standing in the Rock, he beholds all his glory sweep past him — "The Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin."

The pure in heart will also see God in ordinances. In baptism he will not see regeneration as a process accomplished by water, but he will see the pledge and the seal that God will regenerate its subject, on that subject exercising faith in Jesus Christ, and repentance towards God. At a communion-table the pure in heart will not see the bread turned into the flesh or the wine into the blood of the Son of man, but they will behold in these symbols the pledges,

seals and credentials, that Christ was; and the prophecies, or, rather, the prophets, that Christ will come again; for he who was slain for us, and by whose blood we are forgiven, will come to us in glory, and in great majesty, and on his throne we shall be seated, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

Thus, wherever there is purity of heart, the believer will see God in this life. Congeniality of character is requisite to enable one to appreciate character. The benevolent man alone can comprehend true benevolence. The patriot alone can appreciate true patriotism. The pure alone can have that delicate instinct which enables them to see purity. In other words, it requires not merely intellectual height, eminence and power, but, still more, purity of heart, to enable one to see a pure and holy God.

But, above all, the pure in heart shall see God in glory. "Now," says the apostle, "we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face." All that we can see of God now is mixed with imperfections, clouds and shadows. When astronomers look at the sun through a telescope, they are obliged to look through smoked glass, because the intense splendor of the meridian sun would destroy the eye that gazed upon it. At present we cannot see God as he is; we must look through a glass darkly; that is, through the sacred page, ordinances, promises, doctrines, all the means and media that he has appointed. But a day comes when the glass will be broken, and the smoke shall be removed, and we shall see God no longer through the darkened or shaded glass, but face to face. Then our purity of heart will be so perfect that we shall be able to gaze upon the noonday splendor of that unsetting Sun, and to continue to gaze on him with perfect joy, peace and repose.

This sight of God which we shall enjoy in the future will prove a transforming one. How expressive is that thought! 'We shall be like him.' Why? "Because we shall see

him as he is." Our justification is complete, and needs no augmentation; but our inner character is progressive; and in many of us it is far, far short of what it should be. But when we reach that "bourn from whence no traveller returns," when we appear in the presence of God, the first flash of the unutterable glory will transform by its touch our imperfect character into perfection, and we, who had been advancing slowly and with staggering steps towards Christ's likeness here below, shall then and there be transformed, in the twinkling of an eye, into his perfect image. "We shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is."

This sight will be perfectly satisfying. There is no satisfaction, everybody knows, to be gathered upon earth. After we have got the righteousness we hunger for, we hunger still. After we have drunk of the living water, we thirst yet more. There is no one attainment upon earth so complete that it will fill the almost infinite capacity of man's soul. It is the proof of man's fall that he gropes for satisfaction upon earth; it is the proof of man's grandeur that he can never find it. Nothing earthly can fill the vast capacities of that great soul which is in the very poorest, lowliest and humblest, of mankind. The Psalmist makes the distinction very beautifully, "Whom *have* I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth I *desire* beside thee." Earth is the place of desire; heaven is the place of having, or perfect possession. The Psalmist says prophetically, as if he had caught in all their fulness the rays of the future glory, "I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness." What a blessed thought is that, that those yearnings after perfection that every Christian is conscious of, those desires and longings after a beauty, a glory and a repose, that grow upon no earthly tree, and are thrown out by no earthly fountain, shall all be satisfied, and fully met, where there is no more want,

and therefore no more prayer, but full having, and therefore everlasting praise !

When we shall see God as he is, it will be a joyful sight. "We shall enter into joy." "Thou shalt make me glad with the light of thy countenance." "In thy presence is fulness of joy." "Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord." And if it be true of us, "Whom having not seen, we love ; in whom, though now we see him not, yet believing we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory ;" if the ebb-tide of our joy be so rich, what shall the rising tide be ? If the earnest be so delightful, what shall the full harvest be ? Blessed, indeed, are the pure in heart by what, and from what, they are able to see now ; but blessed especially are the pure in heart because they shall see God in all his glory, and, in the light of God, all things, the mere surface of which we see now, the very essence and hidden excellence and latent beauty of which we shall see then as clearly as we are now seen.

Let us pray, therefore, that our hearts may be made clean within us, that God would give us a pure heart, that we may drink from this fountain of true felicity ; that, seeing God upon earth through a glass darkly, we may see him in heaven, where we shall see him as he is, the glory and perfection of all !

CHAPTER IX.

THE HAPPY FAMILY.

“Soul, couldst thou while on earth remaining
A childlike frame be still retaining ?
With thee ever here, I know full well,
God and his Paradise would dwell.

“O childhood ! well beloved of heaven,
Whose mind to Christ alone is given,
How longs my heart to feel like thee !
O, Jesus ! form thyself in me.

“Lord, let me, while on earth remaining,
Such childlike frame be still retaining ;
With me then here, I know full well,
God and his paradise will dwell.”

“Blessed are the peacemakers : for they shall be called the children of God.”—MATTHEW 5 : 9.

I NOTICED, in the course of previous remarks, that the sixth verse of the fifth chapter of Matthew is the close of one series of features on each of which a benediction is pronounced by our Lord, and the commencement of another series of graces on which no less expressive benedictions are also pronounced, and that all are the successive links in one luminous chain. It is the “poor in spirit” who “mourn” because of their conscious loss of those things which constitute alike the repose and the beauty of the soul. It is such as “hunger and thirst after a righteousness” they feel the loss of, and desire to possess, that, having obtained that right-

eousness, bring forth the fruits developed in the succeeding verses. It is the righteous, who have found mercy to themselves, who are merciful to others. The merciful are also pure in heart. The pure in heart seek to promote peace between man and man; and are thus the peacemakers, who shall be called the children of God.

These are the words of the great Peacemaker of the universe. He who saw what its loss was—he who was able alone to restore it, who could appreciate its beauty, its excellence and its worth—has pronounced the benediction, that will not be exhausted till the reign of universal peace overtakes the world,—“Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.” Peace was proclaimed at his birth. He is called “the Prince of peace.” It is the purchase of his death.

What is this peace? It is not happiness—it is higher still. It is not joy—it is more enduring. Joy is the transient meteor, peace is the permanent light of noonday. Peace is the silent stream that comes from the fountain of Deity, that rolls broadening and deepening along its channels to the infinite main. Joy is a summer brook, or rather the beams that sparkle on the surface of the great stream, and reveal the silent, magnificent and peaceful depths that are far down below. It is defined by an apostle as “the peace that passeth understanding.”

In examining the character of the *peacemaker*, let us first see by contrast who are the *peacebreakers*; and when we learn who these are, we shall best appreciate the explanation who the other is. The peacebreakers are not individuals strictly so called, but rather the lusts and passions, appetites and desires, that take possession of individual hearts, and, like the winds that beat upon the vessel that has lost her helm, drive hither and thither, and whithersoever they will.

The first peacebreaker is Selfishness. A selfish man can

never be a peaceful man. He cares intensely and continually for his own wants, however minute, and nothing for the greatest distress of his brother, however pressing. He seeks his own advantage; and, if the way to it should lead through chaos, amid bloodshed, or universal disquiet, it matters not to him. His object is to gratify himself, and he is prepared to do it at any and at every sacrifice.

The next peacebreaker is the Covetous man. He thirsts to fill his coffers with the riches of the world. California is his Eden, and gold his god. He sets his heart upon these as being the chief distinction of mankind; and he is prepared and ready at any sacrifice to gratify the absorbing thirst for gold that ravins constantly within him. What fills our calendars with crime? What makes our courts of law echo with ceaseless law-suits? The love of money. What has made the most beautiful and fertile fields of the world battle-fields, and a large portion of the earth itself an Aceldama? That inordinate thirst after wealth, which is the most litigious of all the inmates of the human heart, and the greatest peacebreaker with which we are acquainted upon earth.

Perhaps this peacebreaker is eclipsed, at least equalled, by another, — Ambition. What is Ambition? It is not a thirst for gold, but for glory; still a thirst reprobated and condemned in every page of the Gospel. Ambition was personated in Napoleon, when he swept through broad Europe on untiring pinion, the feature of all whose proclamations, in contrast with those of a hero whose dust has been recently committed to the house appointed for all living, was "Glory, Glory," from beginning to end; whereas it was noticed by a foreigner that in all Wellington's dispatches the word "Duty" occurs almost in every page, the word "Glory" rarely or never. What has caused so many battles? Ambition on one side, very frequently on both. The thirst for power, for

aggrandizement and renown, has been one of the greatest peacebreakers in the history of mankind.

Another peacebreaker is Revenge. Anger is not sinful; but when it degenerates, or rather kindles into revenge, then it becomes one of the most hateful occupants of the human heart. It is letting the sun go down upon its wrath. It supposes it meets with insult where insult may not have been designed; and, if it burn in an individual soul, it challenges to a duel; if in a nation's bosom, it instantly provokes or challenges to battle. Hence, revenge, in the history of individuals and of nations, becomes one of the great peacebreakers. It also is branded in every page of the word of God as giving unequivocal evidence that such are not meet for the kingdom of heaven.

Another peacebreaker is Envy. Wherever envy reigns, there is a man prepared to quarrel; and, of all passions, it is the most contemptible. Envy is not a desire that I should be blessed or benefited; but that my brother should be dragged down from his eminence, even if I should remain on the same dead level to which I would reduce him. And, when this passion gets full possession of the human heart, its corroding pain within and its calamitous consequences without are too frequently seen; they are written in some of the darkest pages of history.

These are the great peacebreakers in the midst of the world. They are inmates of almost every heart, in lesser or greater intensity. We can only feel a thirst for universal peace, and delight in radiating peace around every sphere over which our influence extends, in proportion as all the evil lusts and passions of our nature—self-love, covetousness, envy, and ambition—are extirpated, and all the graces that build up and beautify the new man are planted in their place.

But it is important not to omit that every man who attempts to secure peace by a wrong process is, perhaps, uncon-

sciously to himself, a peacebreaker. There is no peace that is real, except it be based on principle. There is no true peace separate from the truth as it is in Jesus. "The wisdom that is from above is first pure;" next, or, as it might be justly translated, "afterwards, it is peaceable." The first benediction is, "Blessed are the pure in heart;" the next benediction, as if peace were the blossom that grows upon the stem of purity, is, "Blessed are the peacemakers." A peace, therefore, based upon untruth, like comfort that rises from a lie, is "Peace, peace, when there is no peace" at all. Better the disturbance and the convulsions of our social system, than a peace that is radically deceptive, and, therefore, not enduring. In the case of nations, whoever attempts to secure universal peace by any unjust, unscriptural, or even politically improper means, may secure a temporary truce, but not a substantial and permanent peace. We may argue the passions into quiet, or coërcé them to silence, but in neither case do we create peace. That man would not be the great and true advocate of a lasting national peace who should propose to burn the navy, and to disband the army. Were such a proposition mooted even by the most gifted and eloquent in the land, nothing but the rarest charity would help one to believe that such an advocate were other than a traitor to his country, or the partisan and fomenter of war. The true way to prevent national war is to be prepared for it. War is a stern and a terrible necessity, but still often a necessity; and, until that time when nations shall be leavened by universal truth, and their hearts shall beat under the influence of universal love, there will be spears, swords, war; and the first nation that lays aside the means of its defence, and breaks up the battlements that surround it, will first fall a victim to the more powerful, ambitious and revengeful, that may happen to be nearest. Let us seek to promote national peace by promoting and

spreading in all hearts and homes, beyond the waters and on this side of them, the great principles that generate peace ; but let us, while doing so, be ready to repel by force the aggressive thief who would steal our national blessings, or snatch from our people their national rights. So acting, we conduct ourselves according to common sense, and, surely, not inconsistently with the Gospel of Jesus. Our religion is the message of peace, but a peace not to be secured by sinful diplomacy, or by breaking up all that defends society. It is to spread, grow and deepen, in the ratio in which the Christianity out of whose bosom it rises is spread and deepened among the nations of the earth. Let us never forget that there can be no peace amid nations or individuals, except it be preceded by, and based on, the truth, the love, the belief, of the Gospel of Jesus.

He, however, I notice in the next place, is not to be called a peacebreaker, who contends, and that earnestly, for the truth as it is in Christ Jesus. Many think that the man who advocates controversy against error cannot be the advocate of peace, or have his name recorded amid the peacemakers of the earth. It is not so. He who contends for truth may have the most loving heart ; and the very zeal with which he beats back the error that would betray the truth, and with which he advocates the truth that leads to peace, may be just the measure of the deep and fervid attachment that he feels to the maintenance of real and enduring peace. There can be no peace unless there be truth. A peace based upon a falsehood is no peace. The Spirit of God is first the spirit of truth ; then he is the spirit of peace. He is first the teacher ; he is next the comforter. And the quiet that the advocate of truth breaks is more than compensated by the peace that the establishment of truth secures. Truth blossoms into peace, as a tree leafs itself in April. It is its nature. The real peacebreakers are the lusts and pas-

sions of the human heart. The apostle has explained it when he says, "From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war?" These passions within are the seedsmen of discord, the true disturbers of society; and, until we hear that all surrounding nations have in their hearts the peace that passeth understanding, we cannot expect that they will cease to envy superior blessings, or fail, when they have the power, to assail their possessors, and try to rob them of them.

Having seen who are the peacebreakers, let me notice, in the next place, who are the peacemakers. The statement I have made will already have suggested the obvious contrast. The first peacemaker of all, in the human heart, is Love. Wherever there is love to God and man, not feigned, but fervent, there will be a desire to promote the reign of universal peace. This love "seeketh not her own;" is, therefore, not selfish; "beareth all things; believeth all things; hopeth all things; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; envieth not; doth not behave itself unseemly; suffereth long, and is kind; is not puffed up." Where such love dwells in the human heart, there embosoms it an atmosphere of peace, and the heart becomes, like the inhabitant that is within it, a peacemaker.

Another peacemaker upon earth is Humility. This is one of the very first graces that the grace of God inspires in a Christian's heart. When we know ourselves as we are, and see ourselves in the light of God, we learn to lie low in the dust, to think others better than ourselves, and to wonder that so great grace has been manifested by God to us so unworthy. When one thus feels humbled in the sight of God, he will show himself most tender, most unselfish, in the sight of, and in his relationships to, man. He feels that his own place is larger than he deserves; his own fame much louder than he merits; his own blessings far richer than he ever

dreamed of; and he will be so overwhelmed by the sight of the good things that he has, and a sense of the demerit that was before and is still under them, that he will have no time to pick quarrels with a brother. He rejoices at the prosperity of every one who he thinks is better than himself, and of whom he can only entertain the most charitable and kindly apprehensions.

Another peacemaker is Liberality and generosity of heart, partly the inheritance of nature, partly the implantation of grace. There are some men born with noble, warm and generous hearts, who would not think a mean thing, and would not dare to do a little thing, — men who feel joy in doing what is good, liberal and kind; and such a grace we appreciate. All we say is, that it is not enough to qualify for the kingdom of heaven. Except even such a one “be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” But when the grace of God has inspired the human heart, and revealed the distance of realms above, and shown the depths of peril below, we learn to have that deep and comprehensive charity, which indulges not in gratifying itself, but expends its energies in making happy all that are around us. It never ventures to think meanly of any; it hopes the best of all; it refuses to put a bad construction upon an action that can, seen at any angle, or in any light, be thought capable of a good, kind, and generous one.

Another peacemaker is a Forgiving Spirit; and, wherever this forgiving spirit is, there is that which nips a quarrel in its bud, which quenches anger just before it bursts into the blaze of revenge. We feel how much the Master has forgiven us, and we cannot take our fellow-servant by the throat, and say, “Pay that thou owest.” It is in proportion as we feel much has been forgiven, that we love much; and, seeing how little we deserve ourselves, that we are ever ready and prepared to make excuses for the offences of others, and

to forgive them their trespasses, even as our Father in heaven hath forgiven us ours.

Having thus noticed who are the peacebreakers, and, secondly, who are the peacemakers, let me recount some of the blessings of peace, or rather those characteristic excellences of it which are inducements to our pursuit of it. The prescription of an apostle is, "As much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men;" — "If it be possible, follow peace with all men." There must be something beautiful in a grace that the apostle commands us to follow, and, if it be possible, with all men, and with all our might.

This peace of the Gospel is social strength. In solitude man needs assistance; in a disorganized society man exercises resistance; but in a Christian state peace is earnestly cultivated, and by a Christian heart it is instantly pursued. When possessed, it keeps the heart and mind continually, and binds all the affections into one happy bundle. "A kingdom divided against itself bristles at all points with antagonisms, and must come to naught; but a kingdom at peace with itself has the element of enduring strength, and the prospect of a ceaseless and glorious progress. There must, however, be in this consolidation of a kingdom at peace the basis of the all-pervading element of truth. Union without truth is conspiracy, union only in truth is a definition of the kingdom of God. Exhaust a body knit together of the elements of truth, and it remains a grand conspiracy; but let peace evolve from the possession of truth, and then you have the type and likeness upon earth of the kingdom of the blessed in glory.

In the second place, wherever there is peace in a church, for instance, there is always missionary strength. Wherever a church is rent and torn by intestine feuds, much of its energy is dissipated in its own quarrels, and it has little to spare for foreign successful missionary aggression. There-

fore much of the state of the heathen that are around us, much of the obstinate unbelief of the Jew, much of the bigoted and exclusive superstition of the Romanist, are owing, not to the inveteracy of their own errors, but to the disputes, divisions and distractions, of Christendom itself. If Christians were what they should be, brethren feeling to each love, as we hope they are in another relationship, children feeling to God as a Father, then the world would receive an impression from the spectacle, that, under God, would be overruled to the conversion of thousands who are in darkness and in the shadow of death. But let the church of Christ know that peace is not to be promoted in it by management—that has been tried; nor by committee-room diplomacy; nor by a sort of effort to conceal or momentarily merge our differences. There can be secured lasting peace only by each Christian looking less and less at the microscopic points in which we differ, and more and more at the majestic ones that constitute the harmony of the kingdom of heaven. Our real agreement is overwhelmingly great; the reasons of our differences are exceedingly microscopic; and if we had less ill-will, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness, we should not so magnify them as we are commonly very apt to do. Let the church know that to be insuperable it must be inseparable. The bundle of arrows could not be broken whilst they were held all together; but when the thread was cut, they were soon singly broken to pieces. What a pity that there is not a little of the wisdom of the world mingled with the feeling and the conduct of the church of Christ; and that the fear of ruin does not in some measure increase that harmony and good-will which the grace of God in the heart ought richly to produce!

Peace is not only missionary strength, but it is in itself beautiful. There is something in a state of peace picturesque and lovely. Men are so constituted that they derive sensations of delight from the harmony of sweet sounds, from the

blending together of exquisite coloring, from the steam-ship moving quietly on its track, from machinery in full and harmonious play, and yet without noise. All these things, which are harmony, or unison, or whatever they may be called, and so indicate peace and order, create sensations of delight, and an apprehension or sense of beauty in the spectator. Hence, the Psalmist, actuated by such feelings, exclaims, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments; as the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there" — where such peace and unity exist — "the Lord commands his blessing, even life forevermore."

Whenever there is peace in the Christian church, there is put forth an attraction to Christ, that the most thoughtless must admire, if they can withstand. Our best missionary efforts are not so much what we directly do, as what we indirectly are. The most effective missionary is a holy and a Christian life. He who lives as Christ lived sends forth an influence on his home, his servants, his friends, his neighborhood, that is proselyting when he sleeps, and that will proselyte when his dead dust lies beneath the green sod. It is character that is contagious. Life is more missionary than lips. It is an exemplification of the peace, the purity, the piety of the Gospel, that makes most rapidly converts. A quarrelsome man repels from self, and all he touches. A man of peace, and the peace, above all, that is based on truth, attracts others to him, and makes them also inquire from what fountain this stream is fed, from what source he fills his urn; and, at last, on discovering it, they go and hear Jesus, and believe, not because of his testimony, but because they have heard themselves.

God—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—is represented as the

God of peace. It is a singular and suggestive contrast, that in the Old Testament God is most frequently represented in the imagery of war, in the New Testament Scriptures he is most frequently set forth in the imagery of peace—the sword superseded by the olive-branch; not that there is a change in God, but that there is progress in the revelation of his character. In the former dispensation, he is spoken of most frequently as the “Lord of hosts;” in the New Testament economy, he is most frequently alluded to as “the Father,” “the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ.” Again, Jesus is spoken of as “the Prince of peace.” He came to ratify peace by his blood; he is our peace. The Holy Spirit is “the dove;” the symbol of what he bestows is “the olive-branch;” one of the fruits of the Spirit is peace. The Gospel is the mission of peace,—“peace on earth, glory to God, good-will to men;” wisdom that is pure, and instantly after peaceable. A millennium of truth must precede a millenium of peace. First, the storm that purifies the air, though it disturbs the quiet; next, the calm sunshine that lights up the peace that passeth understanding surrounds the world like a zone, and keeps the hearts of God’s people continually.

Peace is predicted ultimately to prevail, in spite of the peacebreakers, and often notwithstanding the defects of the peacemakers. The spear shall be beaten into the ploughshare, the sword into the pruning-hook, the clarion shall be hung up in the hall, garments rolled in blood shall be exchanged for bridal dresses and coronation robes, and the nations shall learn war no more.

As much as lieth in us, let us live peaceably with all men. Speak evil of none; defraud not one another; avoid the springs of quarrel, and thus you hasten the reign of sweet peace.

Be slow to take up evil reports about yourselves or others.

When men speak ill of you, unless it be something that demands instant and public reply, let it alone. Those insect-like rumors, that creep about and enter into men's ears, are not worth noticing; the blight wind that brings them will also sweep them away. Be slow to listen to rumors, above all, about a brother; and when these reach you prophesying evil, when they only look at the bad side or evil aspect of his conduct, reject all at once, until irrefragably demonstrated to be true. Do not, as humanity is prone, open your ear full to the evil report, and suspect the possibility of the good one.

And, for the sake of this peace, let us recede from much we might justly demand, and concede much we might justly withhold. Pay a debt twice over rather than go to law, is a common-sense paraphrase of the nineteenth century upon the injunction of our Lord, "If any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also." Rather pay with both hands; for you will find it cheaper than breaking peace, and contributing to the maintenance of lawyers. Surrender what you might justly demand, and freely give what you might justly withhold, for the sake of peace. Look at Abraham and Lot. How perfect was Abraham's conduct,—how miserable was Lot's! Abraham, the elder, who might have exacted all, conceded all. He said, "Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren. Is not the whole land before thee? separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or, if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left." And Lot, with the selfishness that is the peace-breaker, in awful contrast to the love that was in Abraham the peacemaker, made his election, and saw that the plain of Sodom was well watered and abundant; and he pitched his tent there. But he learned that the peace-breaker never can be on earth the peace-enjoyer; and Abraham learned by ex-

perience what he held in principle, that a peacemaker was not only a child of God, but was honored also by being called "the father of the faithful." For the sake of peace let us not retaliate; and even when we gain the victory, let that victory be meekly enjoyed. Forbear in speech, when a word is ready to escape from the lips that would kindle a conflagration. Forbear in hand, when your action might be violent and destructive. Forbear in thought, when your thought might prompt to revenge. Forbear with the sinner; his own sins will find him out soonest, his own conscience will scourge him sorest. And, depend upon it, of two men, the one who robs the other is the most to be pitied, and the victim of the robber is, in comparison, to be envied than otherwise. No man sins except amid the warning protests of his own conscience; and, even in this world, it is learned and felt by bitter experience, and amid tears of blood, that the victory, as it seems, of to-day, is the poignant defeat of to-morrow. Therefore, in order to secure peace, recede and concede; bear all things, hope all things. How truly and justly was it said, two thousand years ago (Prov. 17 : 1), "Better is a dry morsel, and quietness therewith, than a houseful of sacrifices, with strife." And most philosophically was it said, "A soft answer turneth away wrath."

Such "shall be called," as their reward, "the children of God." It would take too long time were I to dilate upon the adoption of the sons of God. It is not said that they shall be made the children of God by being peacemakers; but that, by being peacemakers, they shall be called and recognized by the church below as the children of God. Throughout the Gospels men are constantly called the children of him whose character they imitate. "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do;" that is, their character determined their relationship. So again it is said: "Be followers of God, as dear children;" "Love your ene-

mies, and ye shall be the children of the Highest." All this indicates that peacemaking is a reflection from the Great Peacemaker; and that, in proportion as we exhibit a peacemaking character, do we indicate affinity with him who is the Great Peacemaker, our Elder Brother, and, therefore, manifest ourselves as the children of God. We are the children of God, if we be Christians. We are so by election, "having predestinated us to the adoption of children." We are made so by faith. "Ye are the children of God," says the apostle, "by faith in Christ Jesus;" not by baptism administered by a minister, but by faith in Christ Jesus, the instrument. And this change, wherever it is, is a new nature. We are adopted from the old family into the new family of the Lord Jesus Christ. Because we are the children of God upon earth, all things will benefit and bless us. Wind, wave, storm, affliction, trial, will aid us. "All things are yours, Paul, Apollos, Cephas, life or death, things present or things to come: for ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's." "I give unto them," says the Saviour, "eternal life, and they shall never perish." And then, says the apostle, "All creation groans and travails, waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God;" waiting for that day when all God's scattered children found in every denomination, not a few of them even in the Church of Rome; some, it may be, even amid the ancient and the weary-footed tribes of Israel, who may have found the Saviour in Isaiah, though they never read of him in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John;—from every section of the globe, from every portion of the church universal, shall be collected in one blessed group, and constitute the bride for the bridegroom, the New Jerusalem that cometh down from heaven, and so be manifested as the children of the Highest, and God the Lord shall dwell forever in the midst of them.

Such is another page of the blessed life!

CHAPTER X.

THE NOBLE ARMY OF MARTYRS.

“ These severe afflictions
Not from the ground arise ;
But oftentimes celestial benedictions
Assume this dark disguise.

“ We see but dimly through the mists and vapors,
Amid these earthly damps ;
What seem to us but sad funeral tapers
May be heaven’s distant lamps.”

“ Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake : for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad : for great is your reward in heaven : for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.” — MATTHEW 5 : 10—12.

THERE are countless perplexing questions in the world. It is perplexing that sin should be in it at all ; it is perplexing that any should be doomed to suffer here or hereafter ; it is all but inexplicable that good men should suffer ; it is more so that good men should suffer just because of their goodness ; and that moral excellency, not crime, should so often provoke the persecution of the world, and that all these things should be permitted by that God who reigns and rules over all, and who has omnipotence, as well as love, for his attributes, equal to the greatest conceivable occasion. We can only say there are more questions suggested in the Bible than the Bible

answers; — on many of these we may give satisfaction, while we cannot solve them; and of the most difficult it is true, “What we know not now, we shall know hereafter.”

To “persecute” is the same word translated elsewhere to “pursue,” or to “follow.” For instance, “Follow that which is good” is the rendering of the very same word that is here translated “persecute.” “Follow peace with all men” is also the translation of the very same word. But, in the case of a lion in pursuit of a lamb, “following” suggests a very different meaning from its usual one; and in the case of a persecutor or opponent of the truth pursuing with his vengeance its advocate, the word “to follow” has a very definite and unmistakable import. It is best defined and explained by the apostle in the epistle to the Hebrews, where he says that they had “trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover, of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheep-skins and goat-skins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented.” That is the practical definition of “persecuting,” or “following.”

“Righteousness,” again, is the generic term for conformity to the whole of the religion of Jesus, in word and work. I explained its nature, in my remarks on the beatitude “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness,” chiefly as that by which we are justified. But here “righteousness” is used in its general sense, and includes the belief of all that is true, and conformity to all that is morally right, and for all this braving, while thereby incurring, the persecutions of the world.

This beatitude — the last of those pronounced on the mount — gave comfort principally to those who in the early ages of the Christian church were oftenest the victims of a cruel, relentless persecution. It opened its bosom to receive them, consecrated their sufferings, and revealed the blessed

truth, that what the world regarded as their opprobrious brand was, in the estimate of God, the evidence of their sonship and of their heirship of the kingdom of heaven.

Let us try to ascertain what is meant by being persecuted for righteousness' sake. All suffering is not necessarily persecution. Great criminals have greatly suffered, but they have not therefore been persecuted. It is not suffering that makes this persecution, it is the ground of the suffering. It is not the breath he gives forth, but the soul he gives up, that constitutes the martyr. He is not a martyr who suffers, but he who suffers because of his attachment to Christ's cause, and his devotedness to Christ's commands. "For thy sake we are killed all the day long."

Mere suffering for conscience' sake does not constitute persecution for righteousness' sake. To suffer for conscience' sake, as many have done, is to prove that we are perfectly sincere in our attachment to what we suffer for. But even a Mahometan may conscientiously believe what is wrong, and suffer for that conscientious belief. A Hindoo believes conscientiously his creed, and he is prepared to suffer for his attachment to that creed. But, in both cases, the conscience is wrong,—it is misinformed. It may, in other cases, be attached to a crotchet, and suffer for it, and not for righteousness' sake. In such a case we respect the man because he is sincere, but we do not hold his religion to be true because he suffers for it. His suffering, for which we condemn the persecutor, is the evidence that he is sincere; it is no proof that the sufferer is right, or suffers for righteousness' sake.

To be imprisoned, fined and put to death, for confessing and upholding the truths of the Gospel, is not always and everywhere an evidence that we are persecuted for righteousness' sake. Many an excellent Christian incurs reproach, not from the truth he believes, or the principles he has accepted, but because of the bad temper with which he states them, or the

indiscretions into which he falls in maintaining them. We have often noticed that many a true Christian has come to believe he is persecuted for Christ's sake, when he is really persecuted for his own indiscretions. He has provoked, however unintentionally, the cruel retributions that have been inflicted upon him. It is, therefore, possible to suffer apparently for righteousness' sake, and yet to be enduring sufferings that we have incurred by our own indiscretion, or unwise mismanagement of otherwise good and holy convictions.

To suffer for righteousness' sake is, first of all, to suffer because of our maintenance of truth,—that truth being firmly, purely and persistently, asserted and held. The world hates the truth; the darkness shrinks from the light. It rebukes the wicked man's sins; and he, rather than part with these sins, will, like Herod, if he has the power, behead the preacher, that the preacher's testimony may be thereby suppressed.

In such a case, persecution is of all things the most cowardly. It is evidence that the argument of the Christian cannot be replied to, when the sword and the fagot are invoked to put him down. But it is a glad fact, that all the persecutions ever levelled against the truth have vindicated, not darkened, its splendor. Truth has not died with its professors. God is not dethroned when his saints and his advocates fall. The ashes of the martyrs have been the seed-corn scattered over many a land, that has grown into golden harvests, and has attested in after ages how invincible is truth, and how faithfully its martyrs held it, and how truly they loved not their lives, even unto the death.

To be persecuted for righteousness' sake is to be persecuted, not only for holding persistently and firmly the truth, but, also, for obedience to the commands of Christ, when these commands go right across the commands of an earthly superior. An apostle said, "Whether we should obey God, or obey

man, judge ye." If Cæsar the beloved should give a command which Christ the more beloved has contradicted by an unequivocal command to the contrary, the Christian has no choice; he must accept Cæsar's persecution, if he is so misguided as to inflict it, in order to maintain his allegiance to Christ, who is Lord of the conscience.

These, then, are the two forms in which a Christian becomes obnoxious to the wrath of the persecutor, and of the last we have instances and specimens in every page of Christian history, and not a few in the pages of the word of God. Nebuchadnezzar commanded Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, to fall down and worship the golden image which he had set up in the plain of Dura. They could not, because they were worshippers of the true God; and they said, with courtesy, but with firmness, that they would not. The consequence was, they had to suffer for it. The early Christians were commanded by the Roman emperors to offer incense to the statue of Jupiter, and to swear by the name of the emperor. They refused to do so, and the consequence was, they were thrown to the wild beasts. The Waldenses, amid the mountain fastnesses of Europe, determined that they would not give adoration to a wafer as God, or worship to the Virgin Mary as the queen of heaven; and therefore they suffered. There is not a cave in the Alps in which their dead dust is not; there is not a valley in Piedmont which does not to the Christian ear still reverberate with the moans of those who loved not their lives unto the death, who died victims and martyrs to their enemies rather than be renegades to their Lord. In such instances disobedience to Cæsar seems to be a crime; it is really none. Obedience to Christ is the loftier duty, before which the lesser must give way. We must, however, see the contradiction and the antagonism to be so obvious that there can be no possible, or, at least, reasonable mistake.

Thus, when a Christian holds the truth which he knows to

be from God, and will not deny it ; or, when he persists in a course the momentum and the direction of which are demonstrably from on high, and will not depart from it ; and in consequence of this persistent allegiance provokes the wrath and incurs the penalties of man ; he must console himself with the benediction pronounced from the skies, which no persecutor can arrest, nor tyrant intercept, " Blessed are they that are persecuted for righteousness' sake : for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

We should not be surprised to see similar persecution break out again. It is not the monopoly of the Roman Catholic Church ; wherever the corrupt heart beats, the principle of persecution lives. Every unsanctified man would put down by force what he cannot refute by argument. But in the Romish church what is indigenous to the natural man is systematized, exasperated, and with most consummate, even demoniacal ingenuity, arranged and managed, till it becomes the most formidable engine of cruelty ever invented. I now state what I have ascertained, not by hearsay, not by second-hand reading, but from the most unquestionable proofs, and from authentic documents, that there is not a bishop, nor a priest, in the Church of Rome, who is not pledged or sworn to exterminate every Protestant in the land, and to remove every officer who has power and jurisdiction in the midst of it, who refuses to accept the Roman Catholic religion, and to become a subject and ally of the Pope of Rome. That is his pledge, his obligation and duty. And, therefore, when a Roman Catholic bishop persecutes, I regret his position, but respect the man who does what he has accepted as a duty ; but when a Protestant shuts his eyes to the proof and certainty of it, and denies the possibility of it, I have no respect for him at all. I only wish that Protestants were as true to their noble creed as the Roman Catholics are to their superstitious one. Only the Church of Rome does not begin with persecution.

She has herein the true succession of the despot on the plain of Dura : she tries the sackbut and the psaltery, those are her attractions first ; and then, if they will not bow down, there is the seven-times-heated furnace for the recusants. Her first attempt is a display of music the most exquisite in Christendom, and robes, drapery, and incense the most beautiful, and all that can fascinate the vulgar eye, that too often admires the lamps upon the street more than the stars in the sky — all these are brought to bear upon the senses and feelings of man. And if these fail, as soon as the power is hers, the sword is unsheathed, and the fagot is kindled. Before that dread system goes down, we shall have a short but a sharp night of her fiercest persecution : and, alas ! we deserve it too.

From the first to the last, the law of the Christian economy has been, "Through much tribulation into the kingdom of heaven." The prophecy of our Lord has been developed in every field on which the cross has been raised, "In the world ye shall have tribulation, but in me ye shall have peace." There was not a distinguished saint in the earliest centuries of the Christian church who did not die a martyr for Jesus' sake. Abel, in ancient times, before the last spark of the glory of Paradise was quenched, or its last leaf had fallen from its trees, was a martyr, and Cain became a murderer. Matthew the evangelist was stoned ; Paul the apostle was beheaded ; Andrew was crucified ; Peter was nailed to a cross with his head downwards ; Mark was drowned ; James was beheaded ; Thomas was killed by a spear-head, or an arrow ; Jude was slain by a mob ; Bartholomew was beaten to death by rods ; every apostle or teacher, except John, died a martyr's death in the very dawn of the Christian economy. They needed such a beatitude ; it was needed emphatically then, it may be needed again. But, thanks be to God, those Christians whom attractions do not speedily enough draw to heaven

only find that persecutions chase them to heaven; and that all things, good or bad, prosperous or adverse, "work together for good to them that love God." Yet holy and happy are the memories of the martyred dead. As a mountain lifts its cairn, commemorative of sainted sufferers, into the pure light of heaven, so are these in God's sight. Yet we think sometimes that God might have spread the Gospel without suffering, he might have convinced men's minds and carried men's hearts without so frightful a sacrifice. But it seems that, as the Captain was made perfect through suffering, the soldiers must be made perfect through suffering also. There must be a reason for it, or it would not be. The blood of the martyrs, in ancient days, became the seed of the church. The flames that consumed them shed their splendor upon the principles for which they died; and the heathen, beholding men so meekly and magnanimously suffer, were constrained to feel what previously they had denied, that the grace that so strengthened and so sustained them must be from on high, and could not be the imagination or the fanaticism of the human heart. The poet has well said,

" Flung to the heedless winds,
Or on the waters cast,
Their ashes still were watched,
And gathered at the last.

" And from their scattered dust,
Around them and abroad,
Did spring a plenteous seed
Of witnesses for God.

" Jesus hath now received
Their latest living breath,
And vain was Satan's boast
Of victory in their death.

" Still, still, though dead, they speak,
And trumpet-tongued proclaim
To some awakening land
The one availing Name."

The blood of the martyrs became the seed of the church. The sufferings of God's people shed an imperishable and penetrating glory on that cause which they sealed with their sufferings.

But it is worthy of notice that if God's people have suffered in every age, not as penalties for their sins, but as alike the consequences and manifestations of the divinity of the cause which they sealed with their blood, of those who were the most ruthless persecutors of the people of God in the first three centuries of the Christian era scarcely one died a natural death. If it be true that the saints of God were early numbered with the dead, because of their attachment to his cause, those who unsheathed the sword, and lighted the fagots, were not allowed to live in honor and pleasure a long life. Read the history of the Roman emperors who were at the bottom of almost every persecution of the first ten, and you will find that scarcely one died a natural death. Nero was driven from his throne, and forced in despair to commit suicide; Domitian, the most ruthless persecutor of the saints of God, was slaughtered in his chamber, his own wife taking a part in the murder; Decius was killed in battle, and denied what a Roman so much valued, the sanctity of burial; Valerian was taken captive by the Persians, confined in a cage, flayed alive, and killed amid the most excruciating tortures; Aurelian died wretchedly; Galerius was struck down by a loathsome disease; and Maxentius was cast into the Tiber and drowned. These are the names of the most notorious of the ancient persecutors of the saints of God. Not one of them died a natural, but each of them a cruel, ignominious, and shameful death.

We have looked at persecution heretofore as proscription of person, as putting the advocate of truth to death for his maintenance of inspired but unpopular truth; but the passage shows that there is another sort of possible persecution that is

a very common one, — reproach : “Blessed are ye when men shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.” The name of Christ was first blackened, and then he was crucified ; the names of Christ’s people were first caricatured, and next they were put to death. “These men,” said they, “have turned the world upside down.” Philosophy called Paul “a babbler.” The orator Tertullus called him “a pestilent fellow.” The Christians were charged with eating their own children, and with being atheists. The Waldenses were called Manicheans. Wickliffe was traduced ; and, if you will read the accounts given by Roman Catholics of the deaths of Calvin and Luther, you will wonder at the ingenuity of Roman writers, who could invent such monstrosities as are printed, in order to malign the names of so illustrious men. But we rejoice to know that there is a benediction here also : “Blessed are ye.” It is not in any form, however the persecution, that makes the sufferer blessed, but the cause for which he suffers. It is not the punishment he endures that commands the blessing, but it is the patience, the meekness, the magnanimity, with which he endures it, on which the benediction of God continually rests.

Such ones are blessed, for they are so esteemed of God that they are placed in the van of his army ; they are the heroes of the cross, the leaders of the forlorn hope, faithful unto death, and, therefore, have a crown of life. They are blessed, too, because of those they suffer with. You know that even shame can be borne, when it is endured in a bright and a gallant band. And so persecution and death may be magnanimously met, when suffered in company with the goodly fellowship of the prophets, with the glorious company of the apostles, with the noble army of martyrs, with all that purely lived, with all that faithfully fell, and, above all, with Jesus, the great Captain of the faith, who left us an example that we should follow his steps : what martial music is to men marching to battle

should such thoughts be to us. Such as these are blessed, too, because they have in their sufferings for righteousness' sake the inner evidence of their own sonship. They are set apart in the front of the Christian army, not as a judgment, but as an honor; and, thus honored, they have in the consciousness of that honor the sweet persuasion that they are the sons of God.

If we read what the martyrs felt amidst the greatest agonies, we shall find that there was vouchsafed to them an amount of consolation, joy and peace, that made them count their heaviest to be but light afflictions, which were but for a moment, and not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed. The martyr Bradford, when cast into prison, said, "I thank God for this prison more than for a palace, and more than for any pleasure I ever felt: for I have found God here, as I never found him before." That was not fanaticism, but solemn, sober, heartfelt experience. Glover also said, "I can enter into this prison; and when I entered it, I wept for very joy: for what am I that I should be counted worthy to suffer for His name's sake?" And another martyr, no less distinguished than these, said, when he was being consumed amid the flames, "Wonder, ye persecutors, for in this fire I feel no more pain than if I lay upon a bed of down, or walked upon paths of roses." This cannot have been fancy. The flames curling around him were no fancy; nerve, and flesh, and blood, are now no fancy. It was God's consolation so abounding in his heart that all outer things became unreal; and the approaching day, and the great prospects beyond it, so cheered and so sustained him, that the sufferings of the outer man were felt as nothing in comparison with the inward and enduring glory.

But not only are they thus blessed who suffer for righteousness' sake, but they are specially blessed because of the promise. "Theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Their wounds are

their trophies, their scars shall become as sunbeams, their mourning shall be turned into dancing, their sackcloth and their ashes into joy. In the twenty-first and twenty-second chapters of Revelation, we have the martyr's reward. It is also written, "I saw them that were beheaded for the testimony of Jesus; and they rose and reigned with Christ a thousand years. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in this resurrection." "Who are these," said an inquirer, "and whence come they? These are they that came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

But this promise implies degrees of joy: for it says, "*Great* is your reward in heaven;" that is, "comparatively and emphatically great is your reward in heaven." Are there, then, degrees of glory or happiness in heaven? I think there are. The degree of happiness in the future will be in the ratio of the capacity for it that we have received upon earth. Our title to heaven is the same in every case; but there are in heaven different vessels — every vessel full, but one vessel larger than another. There is one star of one glory, and another star of another glory. "As star differeth from star, so will be the resurrection of the just." Suppose that two persons go to an oratorio, and hear one of the first compositions of Mendelssohn or Handel, one will derive ten times more pleasure from it than the other; because, one having not only an original taste but a more cultivated ear than the other, they will have different capacities of enjoyment; and the one who has the most musical ear will necessarily derive the greatest amount of pleasure from the performance. So we can conceive two persons admitted into heaven; one having a delicate and large susceptibility of joy which the other has not, he derives a degree of felicity which differs from that tasted by the other as widely as possible. "He that soweth sparingly shall reap sparingly; and he that

soweth abundantly shall reap abundantly." We read of "a prophet's reward," and of "a righteous man's reward;" and that "whosoever gives a cup of cold water to a disciple shall in nowise lose his reward."

Do we know what persecution or proscription is? Have we any experience of what it is to suffer because we do what is right, just and holy, and believe and maintain the truth in the face of all error, and at all hazard? If we have escaped hitherto, let us suspect ourselves. Have we been living epistles that men could read? Has our testimony been clear, unequivocal, unembarrassed? If we are not called upon to die for Christ, do we yet live for Christ? If we cannot speak for him in the pulpit, or on the platform, can we act for him, and, if needs be, die for him? It is easier, however, to die heroically than it is to live divinely. The greatest martyrs are found in shops, and parlors, and drawing-rooms, and houses of business, in this world. Many a wife endures a long martyrdom, in comparison of which the sufferings of St. Genevieve and other Romish saints and saintesses are not to be spoken of. Many a tradesman, in his resolution to be honest in spite of the difficulties he must meet, and the profits he must lose, presents a spectacle that angels admire, and that God's benedictions descend upon. Blessed are such.

Be steadfast, immovable. Right is in the long run might. What is true will in the issue be triumphant: for God is with us; and if God be for us, who can be against us?

This life of suffering seems scarcely a section of the Blessed Life. It is so, nevertheless. Inward and compensatory comfort outweighs all outward suffering; and sorrow is not always sadness, nor affliction ever unhappiness. Our reward is partly from our work. We must prize duty, and be satisfied with our reward; the lightning deed, not the applauding thunder at its heels, must be beautiful to us.

CHAPTER XI.

BLESSEDNESSES.

“Lamb of God, our Priest and Pastor,
Who canst bid all evil cease ;
Ever dear and holy Master,
Make our feeble love increase !
So that when we seek Thee, owning
That thy wrath is our deserts,
Thou, blest Lord, by whose atonement
All iniquity departs,
Mayest speak forth from thine enthronement,
To our rent and wearied hearts,
Sinner go in peace.”

“Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity.” — PSALM 32 : 1, 2.

THIS is a benediction pronounced upon those who are truly the people of God. It might have been translated, as, indeed, in the first Psalm it might also have been translated, “O, the happinesses of him whose sin is forgiven ! O, the happinesses of that man whose transgression is covered !” The word in the original means how countless, how inexhaustible, how indescribable, are the blessings, the happinesses, the joys, of that man whose sins are forgiven, whose iniquities are covered ! The word of God is a treasury of benedictions ; its rare and reluctant record is a curse, its frequent and most joyous utterances are benedictions upon them that are the children of God. David wrote Psalm Fifty-first as the expression of penitence ; he wrote Psalm Thirty-second as the expression

of his praise. The fifty-first was breathed out under a deep sense of sin; the thirty-second was sung under a joyous recollection of forgiveness, and thankfulness to him who had blotted out all his sins, and put away all his iniquities.

Whenever the Bible records a benediction, we see that it is never upon outer, but invariably upon inner character. A man may be rich, and his riches may yet be the gift of God; a man may be poor, and his poverty may yet be the mission of God. Riches are not the evidence of grace; poverty is not the evidence of divine abandonment: the one and the other are perfectly compatible with utter estrangement from God, or with regeneration of heart and spiritual communion and fellowship with him. It is not the amount that a man possesses in his bank that makes him rich, but it is the amount of heart that he buries in his treasures, that constitutes the riches that are hateful in the sight of God. A man who has but a few hundred pounds in the bank may be in a sense a richer man, and therefore further from the kingdom of heaven, than he who is a *millionaire*; and, on the other hand, he who has thousands upon thousands in his coffers may be in spirit, and in the estimate of God, a far poorer man than the other. It is not the amount that we have, but the tenacity with which we hold it, — it is not the weight of our treasure, but the amount of affection that we give to it, that makes us perilously rich; and “how hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of heaven,” not because riches themselves are an obstruction, but because the frequent fact and the predominating tendency is, when we have riches, to think too much about them. And yet a man who is very poor may be more troubled about providing for to-morrow than a man who is very rich may be concerned about his riches. It is not poverty nor riches that we should ask: but “Give me neither poverty nor riches; but feed me with food convenient for me.” God’s blessing is pronounced,

not upon the extremely rich, or the circumstantially poor ; but upon those whose sins are forgiven, whose iniquities are covered, to whom the Lord imputeth no transgression. The one trait that is singled out here is an inner one ; — he may be a rich man ; it matters not ; he may be a poor man, that matters not ; if he be a sin-forgiven man, that is the character on which the blessing is pronounced, “ Blessed is the man whose sin is forgiven.”

Language is here exhausted to express the privilege of the man whose sin is forgiven, whose transgression is covered, to whom the Lord imputeth no iniquity. Why this reiteration of the same idea ? God repeats and reiterates expressions in order to rivet them the more strongly upon the hearts of mankind. When the late Dr. Chalmers was asked to what he attributed his great success in preaching, his answer was, “ Repetition.” Now, the secret of very much of the power of God’s word is that the same idea, like a precious gem, is placed in every light, is exhibited at every angle, seen in all its forms, so that every one may see its splendor, be captivated with its beauty, and pray that his may be the possession of that jewel of great and inestimable price. Thus, in order to convey to us the completeness and the reality of the pardon of sin, it is exhibited in every possible variety of phrase, — “ sins forgiven,” “ transgressions covered,” “ iniquities put away.” In other parts we read, “ Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow ; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” Again, “ I will remember their sins no more ;” again, “ I will cast them behind my back,” “ they will be forgiven,” “ they will be covered,” “ they will be forgotten.” Language is taxed to the utmost in order to convey the reality of God’s forgiveness, and the intensity of his purpose to forgive the sins of all them that believe. “ Who is a God like unto thee, — that pardoneth iniquity, that passeth by transgressions, that keep-

eth not his anger forever, that delighteth in mercy?" Now, why is this? Not because God could not express his mind in one single clause, but because he would place the same great idea in every variety of light, at every angle, repeating and reiterating line upon line and precept upon precept, till the most gifted and accomplished of mankind should see nothing that can make them doubt, and the most humble, whose minds are apt to go astray at the perplexities of the week that is before them, or the recollected difficulties of the week that is past, shall feel the force of his truth, and live to be sustained thereby.

This expression, however, reminds us of another thing. He says, "Blessed is the man whose sins are forgiven, to whom the Lord imputeth no transgression, whose iniquities are pardoned." This relates plainly to a clause contained in the name of God. In Exodus, chapter thirty-third, Moses says, "I beseech thee, show me thy glory." God says to Moses, "I will make all my goodness pass before thee;" and then it is stated, in chapter thirty-fourth, that he passed by and proclaimed the name of the Lord, showing that God's mercy, God's goodness and God's name, are one and the same thing. How delightful is the thought, that where God's goodness is most clearly exhibited, there God's glory is most brilliantly revealed; his glory is best seen where his goodness is most felt! When he passed by, and proclaimed his name, or his goodness, what did he say? "The Lord, the Lord God merciful and gracious, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity," — that is one sort of sin; — "transgression," — that is another sort; — "and sin," — that is a third sort. And then, says the Psalmist, as this is a clause or attribute of God's name, Blessed is the man in whose experience this name is a reality, whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered, and to whom the Lord imputeth no iniquity.

All these manifold descriptions of forgiveness, these constant reiterations of God's purpose to forgive the chiefest of sinners that come to him, are revealed to us in and through Christ Jesus. There is no forgiveness for the very least sin out of Christ; there is nothing but forgiveness for the very greatest sin to him that seeks it in the name of Christ. When God's name was proclaimed, containing this clause, "Forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin," Moses was told to go into "a cleft of the rock." That rock, says an apostle, was Christ. It is only, therefore, in Christ, believing in his name, justified by his righteousness, accepted through him as the Mediator, that we can receive as actual in our own personal experience this blessedness spoken of by the psalmist, the blessedness of him whose sins are forgiven, whose iniquities are covered, and to whom the Lord imputeth nothing. In Christ we have remission of sins; through him we have forgiveness; and David believed on Christ that was to be just as we believe on Christ that has been: his faith prospective to a cross that dawned dimly in the distance; our faith retrospective to a cross on which the victim hung, and from which he proclaimed the joyous announcement that breaks in reverberations of sweet music over the length and breadth of the realms of the universe. "Blessed is the man whose transgression is forgiven." "It is finished;" in Christ we have redemption, even the forgiveness of sins.

What is the special blessedness of the man whose sins are thus forgiven, and whose iniquities are thus covered? In what does this blessedness consist? Literally translated, it is, "O, the many blessednesses of the man whose transgression is forgiven!" Now, what are some of the blessednesses? I will state them very plainly. The first is perfect satisfaction of judgment and of conscience with the way in which sin is forgiven. If God were to forgive sin arbitrarily, in spite of his holy law, I feel I could not have confidence in him. I

must see God as tenacious in the maintenance of his law as he is rich in the exhibition of his mercy, or I never can have unfaltering confidence and perfect peace in the knowledge of him. If I saw that God could violate his law in order to forgive a sinner, I must conclude that he may sacrifice a sinner in order to maintain on some other occasion his law; but when I see that pardon to the greatest sinner is perfectly compatible with the maintenance of the strictest requirement of his holy law; when I see that God is not only merciful, but just to forgive me; and that he is as holy when he admits through Christ the greatest sinner to his bosom as he is when he sentences to punishment the greatest criminal that rejects Christ,—then I have confidence in him, and my conscience has peace in the knowledge of that forgiveness. Such sweet and satisfied sense of perfect reliance on God is part of the blessedness of him whose transgression is forgiven and whose iniquities are covered.

Another portion of this blessedness is the joy that we feel when we are conscious of having found the way that leads to heaven and to happiness. What is the state of every man by nature? One who knows that there is a God, but does not know what he is to him; who is persuaded that there is an eternity, but knows not whether that eternity shall be to him an eternity of joy or an eternity of sorrow. Ignorance here is torment. Let a man who has a conscience be ignorant of the nature of God, and he must, in proportion to the activity of his conscience, feel distress; but to know now that the God of the Bible is a sin-forgiving God,—to know that he that made the universe, stretched out the firmament, and lighted up all its countless lamps, descends to forgive my sin, to blot out my iniquities, and to persuade me by frequent and reiterated eloquence that he does forgive, and desires to forgive, and has no pleasure in the death, but in the salvation of the sinner, and that the way to heaven is Christ, the way of par-

don and peace,—O, that is indeed a blessedness which angels envy, and which aliens from the Gospel can have no sympathy with, or experience of!

A third portion of that blessedness which belongs to him whose transgression is forgiven, and whose sins are covered, is perfect peace of conscience and of heart,—not merely acquiescence in God, and confidence in God, as we have already said, but perfect peace of conscience and of heart. Now every man that has a heart that beats has a conscience that is sensitively quick to the presence of sin and its penalty. Every one, even the worst criminal, fallen by nature and hardened by his rejection of the Gospel, yet feels within him a monitor unseen, but not altogether dead; the echo of the curse pronounced in Paradise still reverberates in the depths of every human conscience. Conscience may be stupefied for an hour, but it is only that it may awake and reason in more terrible and piercing eloquence of righteousness, and temperance, and judgment.

Man's conscience never can be at peace until it finds that sin can be forgiven. He feels that there is sin within him, and penalty above him. But, as soon as he sees that the sin and the penalty can be blotted out forever through the blood of sprinkling,—the atonement of Christ Jesus; that this blood cleanseth from all sin; that this righteousness delivers from all judgment; that in Christ it is as impossible that I should be condemned as it is impossible that I should be saved out of him,—the peace that passeth understanding spreads like an atmosphere over his heart and conscience; and, justified by faith, we have peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord. This is blessedness. And we cannot have blessedness without it. Feed your palate with all the luxuries of the East; clothe your person in all the drapery and robes of oriental magnificence; ride in carriages, and have hundreds to wait upon you and minister to your wants; there is something

within, as long as you are a stranger to the power of Christ's religion, that, like a worm in the bud, will gnaw out the very pith and life of your peace, and make you poor, and wretched, and miserable. But, on the other hand, let God's peace be fixed in the heart, and poured as balm into the conscience, and you may be clothed in rags, yet you will be happy; you may scarcely have food to eat, yet you will be happy; and in the loss and departure of all that man loves, and in the endurance and experience of all that man dreads, you will be able yet to exclaim, "Though the fig-tree shall not blossom, though the olive-tree shall fail, though there shall be no herd in the stall, yet will I rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of my salvation."

Is not this blessedness? It is not a mere theory; it is not a dream of the imagination; there are thousands that know it and feel it; there are many that have not perfect peace, but yet they know that the little peace they have from the knowledge of this blessed Saviour is so deep, and so true, that they would not give it up for coronets and crowns, and all the wealth and possessions of the wide world itself.

This blessedness will also consist in perfect confidence in God's providential government, as a government that aids our progress and ministers to our good. The moment that a man's sins are forgiven in Christ, everything that is penal or punitive in the providential government of God is exhausted and put away forever. As long as we are strangers to the Gospel of Christ, whatever betides us is the act of a judge punishing a culprit; but the instant that we are raised from the lowly platform of our ruin, and placed upon the sunlit table-land of acceptance before God in Christ, everything penal is exhausted from every dispensation, and the element of paternal goodness inspires, directs and governs, all that befalls us. The least shower that falls on a stranger to Christ is judgment; the hurricane that beats upon the believer

has only mercy under its wings. All things work for evil to them that are not in Christ; all things work for good to them that love God, and are the called according to his purpose. There is no cross wind in the believer's voyage; there is no adverse storm in his movement to the haven of everlasting rest; what feels so and seems so, and by the world is construed to be so, is only mercy in disguise. The cloud that is so black, that to the world is charged with judgment, is to the believer only bright with benedictions, and, when it bursts upon him, he feels and rejoices in God his Saviour. No evil can befall him who is Christ's; he is immortal till his work is done; all things minister to him; nothing can separate him from Christ. All things, believer, are yours; Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours, ministers to your good, vehicles of blessing to you because you are Christ's, and in Christ your transgressions are forgiven, your iniquities are covered, and the Lord imputeth to you no transgression.

Another part of this blessedness consists in communion with God. A mere stranger to the Gospel, hearing one speak of a Christian's communion with God, will say, that is one of your theological phrases which I do not understand; or, that is a fanaticism in your creed which I cannot enter into. But it is not fanaticism; it is not a mere phrase; it is reality. Is there communion between friend and friend? Is there a friend who reciprocates your sorrows; is there a heart in which your troubles and griefs have a responding echo? Or, are you alone in this world, insulated from its sympathies; in it, but not of it in any sense whatever? This is impossible; everybody has some one with whom he is in communion, to whom he goes to tell his last sorrow, into whose ear he pours his first joy, from whose heart he can calculate upon sympathy, and from whose purse, when he needs it, he can look for aid. With that person you are in communion; with him you

have fellowship. And shall it be impossible for those that have fellowship, man with man, to have fellowship with God? Can I not go to him who fills the universe with his presence, and tell him what my troubles are, and my trials, and my sorrows, and my fears, and my hopes, and my joys? Is it possible that he that governs the atom and controls the archangel cannot minister to my wants, open his hand and satisfy my desires, sympathize with my sorrows, and rejoice in my prospects? Is communion with a creature possible, and communion with God impossible? Is earth so insulated from heaven that there is a great chasm between them, that we cannot go to God, and that God cannot come to us? That is true of hell, but it is not true of earth; and wherever the sin is forgiven, the iniquity covered, the transgression put away, there the grand obstruction to communion with God is removed, and in the place of sin, the obstructing element, is Christ, the uniting element, and communion with God is no more a poet's dream, but a Christian's real and blessed experience. Then blessed is that man whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

When our sins are pardoned, our hearts begin to be sanctified. God never forgives a man's sins without sending his Spirit to sanctify his heart. The expiation of our sin through Christ's blood is the preliminary to the extirpation of our sins by Christ's Holy Spirit. Now, when our sins are forgiven, and our iniquities covered, it is part of a believer's blessedness that his inclination and his duty will very much correspond with each other. As long as one is an unrepentant sinner, this is duty, and you know it and see it; but that is inclination, and you feel it and give way to it. As long as we are strangers to the Gospel, our inclinations and our duties are in direct antagonism to each other; but the moment the heart is made new, and the nature changed, our duties and our inclinations progressively merge and melt into

one current. I do not say that there will not be in the old man inclinations, that will struggle, antagonistic to the new nature; I do not mean to say that a believer will be perfect in this life; but I do mean to say that the main drift of a believer's inclinations will be in the direction of duty; that the channel of duty will convey the flood of his affections, that what he sees to be right will be more and more what he is disposed to do. It is impossible to overstate the blessedness of having a heart ever ready to pursue duty, and inclinations ever prepared to run parallel with the prescriptions of the word of God.

He whose sins are thus forgiven will enjoy blessedness in a dying hour. Sin is the sting of death; and when sin is expiated by the Saviour's blood, the sting of death is extracted, and forever. To the natural man dying still is death; to the child of God it is not death, but transition. To the unrenewed man death is still the spectre, the *poursuivant* summoning the criminal to the judgment-seat of his Judge; but to the child of God it is but the messenger of Jesus, sprinkled with his atoning blood, telling the believer, "Your home is now ready, your warfare is finished, your work is done; enter into the joy of your Lord. Come, and be blessed and happy forever and forever." The Psalmist speaks of death's "shadow," — "though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death." That one clause is most eloquently suggestive, — "the shadow of death." There is no shadow, we know, when there is no sunshine. A man goes out on a dark night, and there is no shadow, because there is no light. Death would have no shadow, if there were not sunshine. And what is that sunshine? The light of the Sun of righteousness. The fact, then, that death is spoken of as the shadow of death indicates that we are walking amid celestial sunshine, and that what stretches across our path, and seems to us, it may be, a formidable obstruction, we may quietly tread upon,

and mount up in our majestic progress to the realms of glory. Death is an airy and an unsubstantial shadow, and nothing more.

Blessed, then, is he whose sins are forgiven; for he departs in peace, his eyes having seen the Lord's salvation. "I am ready," says the apostle, "to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better." That hour which comes to you, believer, and comes to all, is not extinction, but a glorious and beautiful exchange; the sun of life that sets behind the hills of the west does so to rise in a more beautiful and everlasting east. You do not die, you do not close your life; but you pass from death to life, from a life which ends every day to a life whose full tide knows no ebbing. Absence from the body is presence with the Lord, — "Blessed is the man whose transgression is forgiven;" and, therefore, "Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord; for they rest from their labors, and their works do follow them."

Such are blessed at the judgment-seat of Christ; for the blessed summons will be addressed to them from him that sitteth on the throne, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." The inner blessedness becomes outer; the rivulet of joy becomes an ocean; in this world joy enters into us; in the world to come we enter into joy. That judgment-seat where we hear the blessing is only the vestibule and portal to that everlasting future which is all benediction and blessedness; where the believer enters into the inner court, and lives in communion with the Saviour himself; where is a table at which Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, shall sit down; where we shall meet and mingle with our children, and our parents, and our brothers, and our sisters, and all that live having their sins forgiven, and die blessed in the Lord, resting from their labors, while their works do follow them.

Is this blessedness ours? Are our sins forgiven? It is

not possible to be happy except by having our sins forgiven ; it is not possible to be wretched if we are persuaded that they are forgiven. Pardon of sin is of the essence of the blessed life. It is the preface to happiness, the source of peace, the earnest of everlasting joy. It is cheap as summer, glorious as sunshine. For him that has it, it is as natural to be happy as for grass to be green and flowers to bloom.

CHAPTER XII.

THE JOYOUS FESTIVAL.

“ Dreams cannot picture a world so fair ;
Sorrow and death may not enter there,
Time doth not breathe on its faithless bloom ;
Far beyond the clouds and beyond the tomb —
It is there — it is there, my child.”

“ And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage-supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God.” — REV. 19 : 9.

THE marriage-supper of the Lord is the *finale* of an arduous struggle, the close of a long and weary race, the end of this dispensation, the preface to the next. It is a glorious and a joyous festival; the hour, not of sorrowful reminiscences, but of glad ones. Bright faces appear at it, bounding hearts beat there. It is a marriage-festival, and so the most joyous of all. The heroes that fought and conquered at Waterloo used to meet in this great city on the eighteenth of June to commemorate a battle and a victory, of which a thirty or a forty years' peace seems, under God, the joyous fruit and effect; but here we meet at a gladder festival, under the Captain of our salvation, who lives forever, to commemorate a victory over sin and Satan, and all the elements of evil, and to remember thankfully the struggles and the trials of the soldiers of Christ, who overcame through the blood of the Lamb, and have exchanged the sword of the warrior for the

wreath of the conqueror, and are ever in the presence of the Lord.

This festival is the evidence of the final completeness of the election of God. The Bride is only the collective name of those that are clothed in white robes. Therefore, on this occasion, when the bride is presented to the bridegroom, — that is, when the whole company of the redeemed, out of every kindred, and nation, and people, and tribe, and tongue, forming one bright and sparkling group, stand before the Lamb, by whose blood they were redeemed in whose white raiment they are clad, and whose praises they celebrate and sing, — there will then be seen the completed company of the people of God, not one son missing, not one heir of glory wanting; the last stone is laid on the temple, the last sheep is gathered into the fold, the last stray child restored to his home, and we are complete in number as in character, in the home and presence of our Father.

This festival will be the solemn amen to all the promises, the prophecies, and purposes of God, affecting this dispensation. "Hallelujah" will swell from more joyous hearts than ever felt it before, as we see and feel that heaven and earth have passed away, but not a jot or tittle has dropped from the least or the loftiest promises, till all have been fulfilled. And when we see him, whom having not seen we love, and in whom, though now we see him not, yet believing we rejoice with joy unspeakable, we shall own that when we read in psalms and prophecies of his glory, and heard from most eloquent lips the delineations of his beauty, we were not told half his excellency, or half his greatness. We shall then see every promise fulfilled, every prophecy translated into history, every description of the beauty and the blessedness of the life to come no longer portrait, but reality. In nothing have we been deceived; nothing do we find to have been overstated; everything, on the contrary, seems to have been understated;

for we did not expect that so great, so magnificent, would be the glory, the splendor, and the blessedness, of that last and crowning festival.

This feast or marriage-supper, too, will be a scene of praise. A voice, a solitary voice, loud and beautiful, will come from the midst of the throne — “Praise the Lord, all ye servants of his!” and that key-note will instantly awaken from all the glorious choirs of the universe ten thousand times ten thousand glad voices, even here the most musical sounds of all, singing “Hallelujah, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.” How transporting the scene! How joyous the song! Is it not worth while to seek a place in that choir? How desirable will be a seat in that group! How certain will both be to them who are clad in white raiment, and are now the followers of God and of the Lamb! When the Israelites of old were pursued by Pharaoh, and crossed the sea dry-shod, and stood upon the opposite strand, and looked back, and saw Pharaoh and all his chivalry sink like lead into the mighty waters, Miriam struck her harp, and all the prophets of God sounded theirs, and the whole multitude sang then the song of Moses; but this song will be more glorious still, for it will be the song of Moses and the Lamb — it will commemorate the destruction of worse enemies, and it will celebrate the achievement of a triumph in comparison of which all victories have been defeats, all history insipid, and all experience sad.

This festival will be attended by a company that never met together before. Now we all gather around the same throne; but we cannot all see each other. There are in this world thousands and thousands of worshippers who day by day prostrate themselves at the same footstool, and gaze toward the same everlasting Sun; but they cannot see each other, nor could we ever be placed in circumstances in this world where we could each and all see as we are seen. Whilst we are worshipping upon earth, our children and our gray-haired

fathers that have preceded us are worshipping the same God, in the name of the same Lamb ; but they are in-door while we are out-door worshippers ; they are in the sun-lit cathedral above, we in the gloomy crypt below. These we cannot now see ; but at that day, when we shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven, at that festival which Christ shall spread, and which John describes, we shall meet with patriarchs, and prophets, and martyrs, and reformers ; we shall mingle with the goodly fellowship of the prophets, with the noble army of martyrs, with the glorious company of the apostles, with Christ's holy church throughout all the world ; and I can scarcely conceive a song more worthy the occasion than the hymn, — certainly uninspired, because not in the Bible, but nearest to inspiration, if it be not so, — “ We praise thee, O God, we acknowledge thee to be the Lord. All the earth doth worship thee, the Father everlasting. To thee cherubim and seraphim continually do cry, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God of hosts ; heaven and earth are full of thy glory.” Then, as never before, the glorious company of the apostles will praise him, the noble army of martyrs will praise him, the goodly fellowship of the prophets will praise him, and there will be heard the prophets' strain upon the people's lips, lifted up with an emphasis and a grandeur with which it was never uttered upon earth — “ Thou art the King of glory, O Christ ; thou art the everlasting Son of the Father. When thou tookest upon thee to deliver man, thou didst not abhor the Virgin's womb. When thou hadst overcome the sharpness of death, thou didst open the kingdom of heaven to all believers. Hallelujah, the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.”

One feature is worthy of special notice ; it is called the marriage-supper of the *Lamb*. How beautiful is this ! It is not the marriage-supper of the Lord of lords and King of kings ; but here, as, indeed, wherever in the Apocalypse

Christ's glory is spoken of, there is seen on it and by it — shall I call it the shadow of Christ's cross? — Jesus is seen upon the throne as the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. The very marriage-festival that crowns the close of this age, and starts the commencement of the next, is the marriage-supper of the Lamb; as if the cross and the crown were inseparable, as if the sufferings and the glory will be sung in one blended strain while the years of eternity roll. What he paid on earth will never be forgotten, as we enjoy what he has prepared for us in heaven. Ever, as we gaze at his crown, we shall recollect his cross, and amid all the splendors of the blessed Calvary, Gethsemane, the agony, the bloody sweat and passion, will never be merged. These are too precious ever to cease to be sung, or celebrated in the choirs of the happy.

“The bride hath made herself ready.” This is the marriage-supper of the Lamb, and the bride is there, of course. Who is she? It is the collective name, as we have said before, for the whole company of the people of God. The church is the collection of all the living stones chosen out of the world; the bride, the aggregate of all believers in Christ; the election, according to grace; and, therefore, “they that are called” to this festival constitute together the bride, or the church, as it has grown in bulk from the commencement of the world.

This call is not to the same feast as that recorded in the Gospel. There some were called who refused; — one went to his farm, another to his merchandise, and another to his cattle; but here none refuse, because they that are called to this last feast previously obeyed the invitation to the first. None shall come to the marriage-supper of the Lamb who did not, in time, and on earth, accept the invitation to the feast prepared by the great King. None invited here will refuse; for blessed are they that are called to it. Not one will hesi-

tate. Having tasted of the bread of life and drunk of the wine of the kingdom upon earth, they joyfully drink it now in heaven. They here occupy a loftier platform, at a yet more glorious festival. Here is not only nutriment, as there was at the first, but enjoyment also. They that are called to this are all true believers, all that are justified through Christ's righteousness, and regenerated by his Spirit: they rested on earth upon his sacrifice by faith; they are clothed by his righteousness as their bridal dress; they have followed the Lamb, his name is on their foreheads, his love is in their hearts; and now each king has a crown on his brow, each priest a censer in his hand. They are described in the fifth of Matthew, "Blessed are the pure in heart. Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness. Blessed are the peacemakers. Blessed are they that are persecuted for righteousness' sake. Blessed are the meek." These are the features, these the signatures, of that bright company, that crowned bride, these partakers of the blessedness of the great festival of the Lamb.

No national, ecclesiastical, or party or sectarian features and characteristics, are retained in heaven. I know no book so fitted to give one a catholic spirit as the book of Revelation. In no part of the Bible is spiritual and inner character so exclusively predominant. All the drapery of circumstance, of nationalism, of sectarianism, seems to have dropped away, as only fitted to stain the bridal robes of the bride, or to introduce a discord into the harmonies and the hallelujahs of the blessed. These bridal guests retain not one trace of sublunary distinctions, not a vestige of ecclesiastical connection; they never received, or early renounced, the mark of the beast; they are the blessed dead that died in the Lord, and now rest from their labors, while their works do follow them.

Let us notice the special nature of the blessing: "Blessed are they that are called." The word *called* is not here sim-

ply a summons, but a mark of the elect. Those that are called or invited to this feast are God's own people, the holy and happy company of the saved, the sons of God, the heirs of glory. It is on spiritual character that God strikes his blessing. How often do we look at wealth, and learning, and power, and say, "How happy are they!" But God does not pronounce these happy. Theirs is not real and true substance. The higher men are raised in society, the less they have of happiness. The ordinary level is the place of the greatest happiness. To be very much above it, or very much below it, is not well. As we witness the splendid equipage of the rich, the great, and the noble, if we could only look within, we should see hearts more crowded with cares that, like vipers, exhaust the very life-blood, than we find in the bosom of the man who works for his daily bread, and lies down and sleeps sweetly at night after the fatigues of the day. But in the Bible, and throughout all its records, the blessing is pronounced upon the holy heart, not upon the heavy purse; upon inner character, not upon outer distinctions. It is expressed in the words, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

Those that are invited are blessed, because it is a festival so distinctively and especially happy. There is no alloy of fear, or misgiving, or sorrow, mingled with it. The reader may have attended a bridal, or other festival. Jesus graced a marriage-festival before he joined in a funeral procession; his first miracle was to sweeten the joys of the happy, before he went forth to stanch the sorrows and to dry the tears of the mourner and the weeping. But, when we have been present at the brightest festival that ever was celebrated upon earth, have we not been conscious of a sort of under-current of sadness started from the deep and hidden springs of the heart by the very brilliancy of the scene? We have felt in our

minds presentiments of coming sorrow. Shadows, we knew not why or whence, have swept over the soul and clouded it; we could not help feeling amid the scene, These hearts that are bounding will soon be breaking. Often have the chimes of the marriage-bell mingled with the toll that announced the departure of the near and the dear. I have, therefore, never been able to gaze upon the brightest scene that ever shone on society, bright as if it were a patch of heaven's own sunshine, without feeling presentiments of sadness and intermingling sorrow. A wild and melancholy minor seemed to run its undertone through all the songs and the music of the occasion. But here there will be no dark cloud, no sombre shadow, no presentiment of sorrow. Every heart will be bounding, every strain will be perfect joy. Interruption and discord will be impossible. Some, indeed, will feel happier than others, because some have hearts larger than others; but each and all will overflow with gladness. Blessed, absolutely and emphatically blessed, are they that are called to the marriage-supper of the Lamb.

The Bible alone tells us such good news. Shut the Bible, silence its testimony, quench in your memories the very recollections of it, and the awful silence and darkness that would be left behind would be insufferable to flesh and blood. But when I open this book, and let its sunshine fall upon earth's desert and darkest places, I feel that time's worst troubles are momentary, that heaven's best joys are sure, unalloyed, eternal. It tells me, "Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord, for they rest from their labors." It alone proclaims, "Blessed are they that are called to the marriage-supper of the Lamb." It alone assures me that severed relationships, broken domestic circles, gaps in households shall all be filled up in that bright sunshine when mothers shall meet their children, and children their parents, and friends their friends, around their Father's board, and in this glad festival; and they

will feel as they never anticipated before, "Blessed, truly blessed, are they that are called to the marriage-supper of the Lamb."

Are we likely to be there? The great question is not, Who are now in heaven, and who will be there then? but, Shall we be there? That is the question that personally relates to every one of us. Am I sowing what I shall reap in sheaves of joy? Am I remembering that this is my spring? that, if I use it not, I shall never see the golden fruits of the summer and the autumn? Am I convinced now that neglect or rejection of the Gospel of Jesus is a certain and sure disqualification for being present at the marriage-supper of the Lamb? In other words, Am I a Christian? Has my soul been washed in the most precious blood? Am I clad now in that most glorious raiment? Is religion in my heart, not the only thing, for that we ask not, but the supreme thing? Do I, in the shop, in the senate, at the desk, in the streets, seek first the kingdom of Christ and his righteousness, and let other things be added? Am I living to become rich, or great, to rise in rank, and dignity, and power? What a bauble are you chasing! What vanity are you pursuing! Set your heart upon realities, not upon things that perish in the using. If we live under the attraction of living Christianity, we shall be happy upon earth; for no man is so happy as he who feels that the universe is at peace with him, because he is at peace with God; and when this dispensation shall be wound up, as I believe it very soon will, then ours will be the blessedness of them who sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and celebrate the marriage-supper of the Lamb.

Christians are twice blessed,—here in hope, and there in having. Even the afflictions of this present life give forth virtue to the Christian they touch. They are private messages of Jesus,—shining angels, holy missionaries, urging upward and onward our fainting hearts.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE BLESSED WATCHMAN.

“ O Thou, who in the garden’s shade
Didst wake thy weary ones again,
Who slumbered at that fearful hour,
Forgetful of thy pain,
Bend o’er us now as over them,
And set our sleep-bound spirits free ;
Nor leave us slumbering in the watch
Our souls should keep with Thee ! ”

“ Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame.”—REV. 16 : 15.

THE Holy Scripture is full of Christ ; his cross is its preface, his crown its consummation. We are told in one place to lean upon him who has come, we are taught in another to look for him who shall come again. None will be persuaded that the second coming of Christ is so clear and reiterated an expectancy of the Christian, until they read the Scripture with a simple desire to see how often it is alluded to. Such readers will be struck with the multiplicity of its references to the second advent of the Son of God. In one passage it is said, “ When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all his holy angels with him ; ”—in another, “ 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.” In the Acts we are told, “ This same Jesus, which is taken up

from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." In the Gospel of Mark we read, "Watch, lest the Son of man coming find you sleeping." Again, we find that "the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye know not." "The Son of man cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety,"—that is, Do not disturb us—cease to tell us anything about it—peace, safety, no danger,—“then shall it come speedily upon them.” We are told in Matthew, that “as the lightning”—not as the light—“cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.” We read in the epistle of St. Peter that “the day of the Lord cometh as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat.” We read in Thessalonians that “the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first.” The first resurrection shall not take place till Christ shall have come; for he must be personally revealed before the dead in Christ shall rise. That is the obvious interpretation of the passage. “The Lord shall descend with the voice of the archangel.” And what takes place after he descends? “The dead in Christ shall rise first; then we which are alive and remain.”—that is, we Christians who are living in Christ, in contradistinction to those who sleep, that is, the dead in Christ,—“shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air;” and God’s whole redeemed company, insulated from the earth, above it, beyond the range of its flame, shall wait until the earth go through its last baptism of fire, and then the New Jerusalem, that is, the company of God’s people, shall descend upon the earth as a bride adorned and ready for the bridegroom, on the descent of which the earth shall burst into more than its pristine blossom, and Paradise again

be restored. According to Isaiah, "He shall shine before his ancients gloriously." This must apply to Christ's personal or last appearance; Christ's second and present act is in the true holy place. Remember that the high priest in the ancient economy offered first a sacrifice upon the brazen altar without; then his second act was to go into the holy place, where no man was with him, and there he made intercession; and the third and last act was to come out of the holy place, and to give the people the benediction. Now, Christ has accomplished two of these acts; he has offered the sacrifice without, he is now in the true holy place, that is, the heavens alone, making intercession — no angel with him; and just as the Jews waited for the high priest to come out of the earthly holy, we wait for the true High Priest to come down from the true holy place, to "shine before his ancients gloriously," and bless his own, and carry to his presence the believing living, and raise the holy dead, and prepare and purify from the curse the residence of the people of God.

To look for this is laid down in the Scripture as almost as stringent a duty of the Christian as to lean upon Christ that is come. I do not say, what some have most rashly and sinfully asserted, that unless we believe that Christ's second advent will be before Christ's millennial reign we cannot be saved; but still we may add, they who think otherwise invert what I do steadfastly believe is the order of God's procedure. I first read the Bible with a persuasion — I admit, traditional rather than inferential — that Christ's personal advent was not to precede the millennium. My first conviction was, that the millennium was to be first, and Christ's appearance next. I sat down to read the Bible, and weigh its language carefully, and the evidence irresistibly impressed itself upon my mind that the millennium is to Christ what the day is to the risen sun, — the sequence of his presence, not the

pioneer and the predecessor of it. If the millennium were to come first, then I could state, at its beginning, exactly when Christ should come, because, as soon as a thousand years shall be finished, according to this theory, Christ will come. But I know not the times and the seasons; he comes at an hour men think not. The periods of prophetic chronology are all rapidly converging. The great epochs of Daniel, the grand eras of the apocalypse, as has been shown, all terminate about the year 1864. Reader, do not take up the idea that we assert that Christ comes in that year. All we allege is, that the great prophetic epochs converge just about that time; and, according to Clinton's chronology, in his "Fasti Hellenici," the most able adjustment of the chronology of the world that has issued from the pen of any, he demonstrates, not guesses, that the six thousand years of the world terminate about 1863; and then, that 1864 or 1865 begins the seventh millenary of the world. Now, the Jews looked to the seventh thousandth year of the world as the great *σαββατισμος*, or the great sabbatic rest of the people of God. Account for it as we like, it is singular that the great epochs of prophecy should all converge at that time. Do any say that before prophecy is fulfilled great things are to be done? It is true. Let any person notice the difference between the way in which things are done now and the way in which they were done thirty years ago,—let him note the speed with which events rush on, compared with the sober pace with which they moved in stately procession many years ago,—and he will see that events are now consummated in years which it took centuries to ripen before. It is as if the wheel revolved more rapidly on its axle before it came to the bottom of the hill. It seems as if everybody moved by *express*, and believed they should not be able to finish their mission before that night comes when no man can work. The omens and the auguries of an approaching crisis are so thick,

and so vivid, and so remarkable, that there is not a distinguished thinking statesman in Europe that does not feel afraid to look into that unsounded but opening future that is before Europe, our country, and mankind.

But when I state this, it is not to alarm. With the people of God it has the very opposite effect. "Lift up your heads when ye see this, for your redemption draweth nigh." And hence, this leads me to notice how the people of God are spoken of as looking forward to this event: "Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious (*ἐπιφάνειαν*) appearance of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ." "Waiting for the coming of the Son from heaven." Again, "Come, Lord Jesus;" — again, "We shall appear with him in glory;" — again, "We are not to be ashamed at his coming." We cannot read the New Testament without being struck with the number of the allusions to the people of God looking for it and to it. Some have said that these do not refer to a personal advent. I wonder how such persons will be able to argue with the well-educated Jew. The Jews say that the early promises are not to have a personal application to Jesus of Nazareth; and, if you say that these promises of Christ's reigning in his glory are figurative, the Jew will ask you, "How can you say that the one is literal whilst the other is figurative? Either both are literally personal, or both are figurative." If you assert that the first is literal, and the second is figurative, the Jew will contend, and must successfully contend, that they are either both figurative or both literal. And it does seem to me that consistency of interpretation demands that, just as the Christian in the days of Abraham, or of Isaiah, or of Malachi, looked forward to a personal Lord to bear a cross, so the Christian is in these last days to look forward, as the happiness and the joy of his heart, to a personal Saviour, personally approaching to wear

a crown, and reign in Mount Zion, and shine before his ancients gloriously.

The words, "I come as a thief," interjected in the midst of the awful judgments recorded in the sixteenth chapter of Revelation, is, first of all, designed to be a sound of comfort and of joy to the people of God. When they read of judgment coming down upon judgment, nation coming in to suffering after nation, the people of God might be tempted to say, God hath forgotten us, our God hath forsaken us. In Europe, in 1793, it looked as if God had left the world, and resigned it to the control and sovereignty of every demon passion, and of every depraved and wicked heart. But, lest the people of God, witnessing these judgments following on judgments, should say, God hath forgotten us, and left the world to itself, a voice rings from the sky like sweet music in the midst of them, "Do not think so, do not dream so;" on the contrary, "Behold, I come," — that is the good news to you, — "I come as a thief," — that is the warning to all to watch and wait, lest he come and find them sleeping.

And whilst it is a voice of joy to the people of God, it is a voice of warning to others. Are there any whose hearts are in their estates? If the estate be not taken from you, very soon either you will be taken from the estate, or the Lord will come, and separate it from you. Are there any oppressing the poor, denying the laborer his wages, and, in the language of Scripture, grinding the faces of the poor? "Behold, I come as a thief." "Be patient," says James to the oppressed, "till the coming of the Lord; the Judge is at the door." It is a word, therefore, of comfort to God's people — do not despair. It is a word of solemn warning to the enemies of Christ — do not presume. It is to both — watch, and wait, and learn, and look, and pray, lest, coming as a thief, he find you sleeping and unprepared.

The language, therefore, of this passage, denotes emphatic-

ally the suddenness with which Christ will come. The figure, a *thief*, is simply used as the symbol of unexpected suddenness. "I will come as a thief." There will be signs, we are told, that God's people will discern, but on the mass of mankind the last day and the last manifestation will come with the speed and with the overwhelming flash of a majestic but an unexpected era; the world will just be going on as it has been. The exchange will be crowded, the stocks will be quiet, the farmer will be in his field, the merchant in his counting-house, the clerk at his desk, the sentinel at his post, the watch on the deck, and suddenly an apocalypse will come that will fill the world with a blaze, before which the red lightning will look pale. It will revive the hearts of God's fainting sons and daughters, and shatter and blast the hopes of the oppressors of the people of God, and the enemies of Jesus and his truth.

This is not my guess, it is the solemn assertion of him who cannot lie, that when he comes he will come without warning, with the suddenness and the unexpectedness of a thief in the night.

But, as everything that occurs in the apocalypse has a chronological meaning, this passage, "I will come as a thief," I have no doubt, specifies that just at the period of the sixth vial, which began to take effect in 1820, and to exhaust its force after 1848, there will be a much wider spread of the preaching of the second advent of Christ than before. And is it not a fact, that this great doctrine, overlain, superseded, — perhaps necessarily so, for Martin Luther had so much to do in resuscitating the truth of "Christ crucified," that he had scarcely time to anticipate the glories of Christ crowned, — during the last thirty years has been studied, and preached, and investigated, to an extent, and with a success, an eloquence, and a force, with which it never was investigated, stated or explored, before? And therefore the passage occur-

ring just after the sixth vial, and previous to the seventh, denotes not only that God's people should take consolation, but that the truth should be brought home to their convictions and their hearts to an extent and with a success with which it was never brought home before. And whilst they are awed as God's chartered judgments sweep the earth, they are cheered by the blessed hope of Christ's appearance upon Mount Zion, and taking to himself the kingdom and the glory. But, when he comes, what will happen to the people of God? We shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. It is the desire of God's people, not only to believe on an unseen Christ, but to see him just as he is. And remarkable it is that the prediction, or rather the promise of God's Holy Spirit, is, that we shall see him as he is. And what a blessed, what a glorious sight, that just as he left the apostles and ascended in *the* cloud — it is the definite article — into heaven, as the angel said, "he shall come again," and we shall see him descend! Christ wears this very nature of man, he has shared in my humanity. It is a blessed thought, that there is not a grief in my heart that has not its resounding echo in his — that there is not a sorrow of mine that he cannot sympathize with. And if I have found him such a Saviour to trust in, though unseen, how shall I be gladdened and electrified when I shall see him no longer through a glass darkly, but face to face, as he is! These very eyes shall see him, and the sight shall be so transforming, that the instant we see him we shall be like him, transformed from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord.

Being thus made like him, that prophecy shall be fulfilled which announces the manifestation of the sons of God. At present, Christ's church is hidden; not hidden in one sense, that there are no visible worshippers, but hidden in this way — none can specify infallibly who are Christ's people and who are not, and therefore the people of God are hidden

—we cannot discriminate them. Put fifteen hundred or sixteen hundred people before me, and I cannot say who are Christians and who are not. The sons of God are hidden,—“our life is hid with Christ in God;” but when we see him as he is, we shall be like him; and the contrast will be so vivid, so sharp, so unmistakable, that we shall then know, even as we ourselves are known of him.

When he comes, this earth shall be re-cast, restored, re-constituted, re-beautified, and set in more than its first and pristine glory. I never can bring myself to believe that this beautiful earth, its beauties still outnumbering its blemishes, is to be annihilated. I cannot bring myself to believe that the devil's success is to be crowned with victory at the last day; and that this orb, which God made fair, beautiful and holy, and which sin has made as it is, and over which the old serpent has left his trail, so long, and so far, and so wide, he means to resign to Satan. But it is not a matter of conjecture. God has positively stated that it shall be restored. We have got a notion as if there were something essentially impure and hopeless in what is material. We have the old Gnostic heresy, that stone, tree and flower, must be, by their very structure and organization, bad and impure. But it is not so. Only exhaust from the earth the poison, sin,—let the footfall of him who made it be echoed from its hills and valleys once more, at dewy dawn and at eventide,—and this earth of ours will be instantly transformed into an orb the like of which is not amid all the orbs of the universe besides. I could take you, even in this world as it now is, to scenes, to glens, and valleys, to wide-spread panoramas in it, so beautiful and so magnificent, that, if you could only guarantee that no autumn frost shall nip those bright blossoms, that no winter winds shall rend and destroy those green branches, that there shall be no graves dug for the dead, no sick beds spread for the dying, and no quarrels, no

strifes, no aches, no other ills that flesh is heir to, I could wish and decide to live here forever. All that is wanted is to remove sin from the world, and with it suffering goes, autumn goes, winter goes, — all that is the product and the progeny of sin instantly departs, and an immortal world becomes the holy home of an immortal and redeemed family.

But anticipation is not all we have to indulge in. A duty devolves upon us, — “Watch.” “Watch,” — that is, let every man be at his post. It is not sin to be at your post in the world; it is sin to desert it. Whatever your vocation is, attend to it; be each at his post, — the sentinel on his round, the sailor on his watch, the tradesman at his counter. Religion is not something for the Sunday or the pulpit, to be put off like a Sunday dress, and to be laid aside on the Monday, lest it should be rumpled or soiled with the wear and tear of the week; it is to go with men into every employment; it is to give tone, direction, shape, coloring, form, power, to all that man is, and to all that man does. And, hence, the sailor on the deck, the soldier on the field, the tradesman at his counter, the lawyer in his office, the physician by the sick bed, and the shoe-black at the crossing, may as truly honor and glorify God as the minister can by preaching the Gospel in his pulpit. Nay, the minister is but the officer to give the signal and to proclaim the duty, and the people are to carry the duty into practice. When the sermon is finished by the preacher, it is about to be begun by the people; they are to go out into the world and prove that it was an eloquent and conclusive sermon, by showing that it makes them better husbands, better wives, better children, better sailors, braver soldiers, tender physicians, honest lawyers. It is thus that our religion is to be exhibited in the world. Thus we are watching when we are each at his post. Wherever God in his providence has placed us, there we need not be afraid to let Christ at his second advent find us.

There is no sin in filling the office which God has assigned, and there may be the greatest watchfulness for Christ's coming, whilst there is the greatest diligence in discharging the duties before us. We are all born, since the fall, with a great tendency to Romanism. Hence, the origin of the notion that the monk who leaves this evil world, and lives in a desert, or in a cell, and scourges his flesh, and starves and stints himself, and wears rags, and wallows in filth, — which is surely a worldly, not a spiritual element, — has gone out of the world, and that he only is holy and takes a right view of life. But he looks to me the reverse; he is the coward who leaves the place where the Captain of the faith has placed him; he is the true soldier who stand by his post, and shows that his religion can serve him as truly when he sweeps the crossing as when he sits down at the communion-table and commemorates Christ's death. The monk and the suicide are cowards, not champions. One runs because afraid of temptation, and the other dies because weary of trials.

But combined with this there will be, of course, that resting upon Jesus, that yearning for his presence, that expectancy for him, that will ever cheer and lighten. And, hence, the overtasked young man, toiling in the heated air, expending life and energy from seven in the morning till ten, and eleven, and twelve, at night, may, in the midst of it, weary and way-worn, not cease to try to reform that system, but have this consolation: Well, it must come to an end; the Lord will come, and the glory of his coming will make me like him, when I shall see him just as he is. My harness will be taken off. My rest will arrive.

While at our post, in our place, let this bright hope cheer us, and lighten the load and the pressure of the trials we are called upon to endure: it is only for a season. It is the eternity of hell that makes it so terrible; the greatest agony is endurable, if it has an end. Now, there is no toil, no

drudgery, no exhaustion, we are called upon to endure in this world, to which there is not an end; and the longer that the world lasts, the nearer that end is. Let us, then, look with joyful expectancy, and brightening hope, for the glorious appearing of Jesus Christ, our great God and Saviour.

But be sure, dear reader, that you are, in the sight of God, and according to the test and the standard and the measure of the sanctuary, one of the people of God. When Christ comes, it will be too late to repent; the harvest is come, the summer is ended, and, if not saved then, you cannot be saved at all. When Christ comes, it will be too late to believe; there is no faith possible—all faith ceases, because the object of it is seen. Faith is the evidence of things not seen; but when the things are seen, then faith, like the husk or calyx of the ripening fruit, drops off and disappears.

Let me ask, Are you a Christian now? If the farmer neglects the spring, there will be no autumn. If the invalid neglects his symptoms till disease becomes inveterate, there will be no cure. If the voyager misses the tide, he will lose his passage; and if you do not now seize the day of salvation, close with the offers of the Gospel, commit yourselves to the keeping, the cleansing blood, and the justifying righteousness, of Jesus Christ, the only Saviour, there will be no doing it then. Your lamp will be empty, and there will be no oil to be purchased; the bridegroom will have come, the foolish virgins will find their lamps gone out, and the blackness of darkness their only portion for ever and ever. If, then, we know not when Christ comes, but do know that he will come, and if the signs and tokens of the age, accumulating on all sides, and becoming more vivid, distinct and defined, with each day's progress, tell us that he is at the door, that the Judge is at hand, let us see that we have washed our robes and made them white in his blood, that we

are his people, that we bear his signature, that we stand up for his cause, and by living faith, like the vine-branches, are united to him, and then we shall not be ashamed at his coming. Thus will be found in his place, ever ready, the Blessed Watchman.

CHAPTER XIV

THE HOLY AND HAPPY DEAD.

“ There is no death : what seems so is transition
This life of mortal breath
Is like a suburb of the life Elysian,
Whose portal we call Death.

“ She is not dead, — the child of our affection, —
But gone into that school
Where she no longer needs our poor protection,
But Christ himself doth rule.

“ In that great cloister’s stillness and seclusion,
By guardian angels led,
Safe from temptation, safe from sin’s pollution,
She lives, whom we call dead.”

“ And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth : Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors ; and their works do follow them.” — REV. 14 : 13.

A VOICE from heaven commanded John to *write* these blessed words. Their record is not the conjecture of man, but the inspiration of God. John did not guess it, nor did he venture from his own reasoning to assert it. A voice from heaven, of which he became the vehicle, the organ and the utterer, cried, “ Write, Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord.” The voice said, *Write*. That word expresses one of the most valuable facts recorded in the Bible. *Scripture* means that which is written. The fact that the Bible is

intrusted to a permanent and fixed record is most important when we consider what have been the distortions, the deviations, and the errors, of oral tradition and transmission. *Write* is the secret of the incorruptibility of the text, the evidence that it is a fixture, and that, however man's comments may vary,—and they vary as do the clouds in the sky,—the great truths of Scripture remain beyond and above them, fixed and bright as the stars in the firmament.

John is here called upon to write respecting the nature and the subjects and the issues of death. Death is so solemn and momentous a fact, that we should expect in the book that prescribes how to live some prescription how to die; and that from the same oracle that tells us what life is, and how its burden may be borne, we should hear what death is, and to what destiny it leads. This blessed book tells us how to live, helps us to fear not to die. It alone records, not as a probable conjecture, but as an absolute fact, that ever has been, ever will be, and from the nature of things must be true, "Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord, for they rest from their labors."

This text is a lamp in the dark and gloomy sepulchre, a consolation just where consolation is most deeply needed; an inscription upon the tombstone that covers the ashes of the sainted dead, that makes death look life-like, and the grave seem but the vestibule or the approach to a house not made with hands, eternal in the skies. It is such a text as this that indicates the Christian religion, a life to live by, and a hope to die with. It begins at our birth, it surrounds our cradle, it comes to the sick bed, it forsakes us not when we enter the house appointed for all living. It gives life its consecration, its brightest path and its blessed issue; and it takes from death its terrors, its awe and uncertainty. I know no other system that can do this. Infidelity serves at least to live with, though it serves very badly; but it fails at a

dying hour. Christianity makes life holy, and death happy. To live in the Lord is the highest life, to die in the Lord is the noblest death : it is not the Christian that dies, but death itself that dies. His is a beautiful transition, and no more.

Here, too, lies the difference between the Christian and the mere man of the world,—I mean the man who is not truly a child of God. A worldly man, who lives by bread alone, believes that all blessedness is in living, and that that blessedness grows in intensity and brightness just in the ratio in which he excludes the light, the anticipations, or the forebodings, of an eternity to come. He says, Blessed are the rich, Blessed are the great, Blessed are the learned ; but he cannot conceive that there is any blessing upon dying, or that death has any coronal of beauty or of glory. He shrinks from death as from a dire necessity. If he cannot escape the fact of it, he ever tries and toils to escape the thought of it, because to him life has nothing but outer joys, and death, which quenches these, is therefore nothing but unmingled calamity ; if he see life no more, he cannot understand that strange parable, “Blessed are the dead.” But a Christian, who has learned what Christ is, sees death not as a catastrophe in nature’s hand, but an emancipation from the hand that was nailed to the cross. To him death has lost his sting, and to his eye the grave is encircled and illuminated by an *auréole* of heavenly light. He fulfils life’s duties as becomes one of God’s sons, and he enters the valley of the shadow of death fearing no evil, because his rod and his staff will comfort him.

God’s best benedictions light upon persons. If I open the Rituals, and Missals, and Pontificals, of the Popedom, I read of blessings upon robes, upon candles, upon animals, unctions, sprinklings, all the ceremonial of a great and mischievous apostasy ; but if I open the Bible, the blessings fall, not in drops, but in showers,—not on candles, but on Christians.

“Blessed are the pure in heart,” “Blessed are the meek,” “Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness,” “Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake.” God’s grand benedictions light upon the hearts of his people; and let the heart be blessed, and the home, and the grave, and the sick bed, and the wide world, will reflect and repeat the blessing. All things grow bright around, because man, the living being, has been blessed of God within. Not only blessed in life, but blessed in death also, is a Christian. Matthew 5 is the catalogue of blessings on the living, the last two chapters of the Revelation are the catalogue of benedictions upon the dead: It is the blessed life that leads to the blessed death; it is they on whose hearts benedictions have fallen in life in whose hearts benedictions rest in dying. They go from hearing on earth into heaven, only to hear, on the steps of glory, the benediction of the Lord, “Come, ye blessed of my Father” (“Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord”), “inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”

But, whilst there is a blessing thus upon all the sainted dead that die in the Lord, there seems to light a special one on this class. The close of the fourteenth chapter indicates the chronological position of this blessing; it is just after recording this benediction that he says, “And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in thy sickle, and reap: for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe.” It thus indicates that the epoch at which this special blessing was pronounced is just on the eve of Christ’s descending from the clouds, taking vengeance upon them that know him not, and ushering in the fulfilment of ten thousand benedictions

contained in prophecy upon all that live and die in the Lord. If they are blessed that died in the Lord in the days of Abraham, of Elijah, or Paul, or John,—if blessed that died in the days of Luther, if blessed that die in the Lord now,—emphatically blessed, especially blessed are they that die in the Lord “henceforth;” for their dead dust shall have so short a time to sleep in the grave before it is stirred by the echoes of the resurrection trump, and the severed soul will have so short a time to remain in its widowhood, till it repossess, prepared and rebuilt, the tenement of clay, that they are especially blessed, for their separation of soul and body will be no sooner made, than their reünion, by the resurrection of the latter, will almost instantly take place, and, therefore, “Blessed” from henceforth, emphatically, specially, “are they that die in the Lord.”

It is not, Blessed are all the dead, of all ages; but, if there are any that were not in this benediction, it is not because the benediction was too narrow, but because they would not hail it, and have it, by embracing the way to it. It is, “Blessed are the dead that die *in the Lord.*” Here is the grand and vital distinction. They may die on sick beds, or on the battle-field; they may die on the bosom of the desert sea, or on the sands of the lonely and arid wilderness; they may die in plague, pestilence and famine, or as they died on whom the tower of Siloam fell, or as they who sank before the sword of the cruel and the murderous Herod; they may die friendless, or amid the sympathies of friends; they may die at home, or somewhere in a strange land,—it matters not, if they die in the Lord. Blessed are such dead, wherever they die, however they die, and whatever be the exit by which the soul passes from this mortality into that immortality and glory.

We must not judge of the character of the dead by the circumstances of their death. We must judge of the dead,

if we judge at all, by the nature and distinguishing peculiarity of their life. We are all prone to judge merely from providential occurrences, but in most instances we fail to form or utter a righteous verdict. "Think ye that those eighteen upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, nay; but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." There are a thousand exits for the soul, but it is not the nature of the exit that determines the character of the inmate. To be in Christ is safety, to be like Christ is character; God's providence arranges the mode of death, God's grace alone stamps the character on which in dying there is inscribed, "Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord." Be sure that you live in Christ, and you need have no fear and no forethought about dying at all. We always say it is a solemn thing to die, — unquestionably it is; but it is a much more solemn, because a much more responsible thing, to live; and if we could only take care of living as we should, we need not be afraid that we shall die as we ought.

What is meant by being in the Lord? The phrase is peculiar, the meaning is precious: it means moral, personal union and communion with the Lord Jesus Christ. The phrase, grammatically, is harsh; morally and spiritually, precious beyond expression. It does not mean that they obey Christ, or simply follow his example, or simply believe that he was a good man, or a moral man, or a great man, or a heavenly messenger; but that they are one with him as truly, in moral relationship, as the branch is one with the stem from which it springs, as the limb is one with the body to which it belongs. The blood that circulates through the arm received its tidal current first through the heart; the sap that is in the stem, that bursts into blossom in spring, and bears fruit in autumn, has travelled from the root and through the stem, upwards to the various branches, all identified as one; and the distinctive

life of a Christian, — not his intellectual, nor his physical, nor his moral, but his spiritual life, grows as truly from Christ, his head, and his heart, and his all, as the sap in the branch comes from the stem, the blood in the veins from the arteries and the heart; and thus the Christian is in Christ, vitally, inseparably. And thus the life that we live is the life of the Son of God; so that Paul could say, “I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.” To be in Christ is to be one with him, and to stand before God in this respect just as Christ stands, — righteous as he is righteous, because his righteousness is my righteousness, — forgiven, because Christ died; all that he paid he paid for me, all that he bore he bore for me, all that he did he did for me; all his are mine, and mine are his, and the whole body of believers is accepted, and justified, and acquitted, because Christ the Head, their fore-runner, is accepted for them, and in their stead, in the presence of glory. Thus the believer is in Christ, and, united to him, derives life from him. The hundred and forty-four thousand have the Father’s name written on their foreheads, they sing the new song, they are “they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the first-fruits unto God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no guile; for they are without fault before the throne of God.” We thus see their inner state to be in Christ, and their outer fruits holy, fragrant and fair.

If these words, chronologically considered, are uttered on the last and consuming judgments of apostate Christendom, then it is an encouragement to those who are likely to suffer not to be afraid to take up their cross for Christ’s sake; it is telling Christians, You will have a short but a sanguinary struggle. Martyrs will be needed, and here is martyr-encouragement ready for you. Death awaits you, but remember it is a blessed death. Suffering may be before you, but “Fear not, for I am with you.” Dying for the Lord may be dared

when living in him has been previously realized. Christians can look to death without terror, and anticipate the grave without dismay, because they hear sounding in its chambers the echoes of a celestial voice, "Blessed are the dead;" and they see writ upon its forehead, "They rest from their labors, and their works do follow them."

In order to make the benediction yet more emphatic, we read not only, "Write," but, "Yea, saith the Spirit;" that is, this record is not only a transcript from the book of God, but it has also the signature and the seal of the Holy Spirit attached to it. A voice from heaven says, "Write," and then John writes it—the Holy Spirit comes down and seals it, not to make it more sure, but to make us, the readers of it, more satisfied, "Yea, saith the Spirit."

God's word is not a dumb, but an eloquent oracle. We hear members of the Church of Rome say, "It is better to have a living, speaking judge, than to have a dead, dumb book." God's book is not a dead, dumb letter; we read, "What *say* the Scriptures?" and, again, "Yea, *saith* the Spirit." In other words, it is a speaking book; it has all the fixture of a writing, and it has all the freshness of a living and personal utterance. The Bible is not a dead transcript, without power, but a living utterance,— "What *say* the Scriptures?" or, "What the Spirit *speaks* to the churches." "Yea, *saith* the Spirit, they rest from their labors, and their works do follow them."

Such a sentiment as this is worthy of the Spirit thus to repeat. There will be wanted for the awful crisis rare and special comfort; it is for martyrs suffering a cruel death, for all Christians shrinking from ordinary death. John hears a voice from heaven, saying, "Write it," and he does so; and the Spirit comes, not only as a teacher, but as a comforter, and adds, while applying this leaf from the tree of life to the human heart, "Yea, saith the Spirit,"— it is true, they

do rest from their labors, and their works do follow them. The Holy Spirit, according to our blessed Lord's testimony, takes of the things of Christ, and shows them to us. How beautiful is this office! Not only does he take the words of Christ and make us hear them, but he takes of the things of Christ, and so shows to us these things that he makes felt and real what is written, and enjoyed in the soul what is inspired in the outer book, and engraves upon the living tables of the heart the comforts, that is, the leaves which he has gathered from the tree of life, which are for the healing of the sorrows and sufferings of the nations. In the Gospel of John, we read that the Spirit comes first as a teacher. "I will send you another comforter, that he may abide with you forever; even the spirit of truth." A falsehood is an opiate, but the truth is an inexhaustible comfort. The Church of Rome has opiates by the dozen; the church of Christ has the comforter, who is all-sufficient; and it is the Spirit, as the comforter, that saith, "Yea, saith the Spirit, they rest from their labors, and their works do follow them."

Let us look still further at what the Spirit adds, — "They rest from their labors." Then there is no torture, or pain, or suffering, on any pretence whatever, after death. The future of a Christian is rest. There are no sins left that need to be expiated, for the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin; there are no expiations needed to be made, for Jesus Christ died once for all. If so, what can be the use, where can be the necessity, but, above all, where is the recorded evidence, of a state of expiatory suffering, sorrow or torture, after death? There is none. "They rest from their labors" rings the death-knell of the anile dogma of purgatorial torment. Christians were laborers when living; they only cease from being so when they die. And does not the whole Bible tell us that we are soldiers, pilgrims, strangers, — fears within, fightings without, — "run the race set before you, looking

unto Jesus," — "fight the good fight," — "labor not for the meat that perisheth"? We have to promote the truth, we have to defend it, we have to practise it. This is the field of battle, not the pitched tent or the permanent temple. This is the ocean's bosom on which we are tossed, not the sheltered haven. This is the era of trouble, of toil and of tears; it is after we have lived in Christ that we die in Christ, and so rest from our labors, and our works do follow us. In other words, as soon as absent from the body, we are present with the Lord. Joyous hope! when a Christian dies, he does not descend, but ascend to a higher platform, mingle amid brighter light, drink deeper of inexhaustible joy and pleasures that are at God's right hand forevermore.

It is added, in the next place, "Their works do follow them." Their works *follow*, not *precede* them; if it had been said their works *precede* them, it would have looked as if their works had gone into the presence of God as claimants, or merits, or rights; but in the record that their works do follow them, there is evidence that their persons have been accepted, and their works in consequence of their having that previous acceptance. It is not that persons are accepted because of works that precede them, but the works are welcome as evidence, because the persons have already preceded and entered into glory. And hence our blessed Lord's words are exactly the explanation of this: "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit" — a son inherits — "the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." There is the blessedness. Then what does he add? — "I was hungry, and ye fed me; I was in prison, and ye visited me;" here are the works that do follow them. But mark the order; there is the acceptance of the person blessed in Christ, and because in Christ; then, the admission of the words, like the train of splendor that follows the setting sun, — like the fruits

that are produced as the evidence of the goodness of the tree, — “their works do follow them.”

It is their *works*, — not their *words*, nor their professions, their intentions, their designs, their half-conceived, half-accomplished purposes, — “their *works* do follow them.” Being dead, Christians yet speak. Every man leaves behind him an influence that works after him for good or for evil. We have two immortalities, — we carry to heaven one immortality, we leave behind us upon earth a second immortality; and, being dead, — that is, removed from this earth, — we yet leave behind us a character, lessons, teachings, works, facts, doings, monuments, that speak for God or that speak against him, make men holier, wiser and better, or corrupt them and make them the reverse. Our works, it is said, do follow us.

I notice, in the last place, that nothing but our works follow us. His coronet does not follow a noble, nor her diadem a queen, nor his wealth a rich man, nor his learning a great scholar. These were elements of responsibility, and their responsibility remains, but they do not follow them. The purple, the ermine and the lawn, must all be laid down at the grave. In fact, all that the greatest and the noblest have is merely a life-rent, or life-possession. These things, therefore, we must lay down and leave behind us, but the good that we do is not buried with our bones. And, hence, the poorest Christian may leave after him an influence far more powerful, influential and precious, than the most exalted inheritor of the noblest title, who lived only for himself, and not for the good and the benefit of the rest of mankind. We must enter into the presence of God without any of the trappings, the pomp, the circumstance or parade, of life, — only with our souls in Christ or out of him; and our works, like influences we have left behind, following us, attesting the beneficence of our course, or pronouncing anathemas and curses for the evil we have done to others.

Are we among the blessed living? Are the benedictions in St. Matthew's Gospel ours? If these be ours in life, the Apocalyptic benedictions will be ours in death: "Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord." So may we be blessed, so may we die, our works following us, and ourselves peacefully and evermore resting from our labors!

"Asleep in Jesus! peaceful rest,
Whose waking is supremely blest!"

CHAPTER XV.

BREAD FOR THE BLESSED LIFE.

“Who testified this solemn truth,
Through frenzy desolated,
Nor man nor nature satisfy
Whom only God created.”

“It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.” — MATTHEW 4 : 4.

THE beasts of the field, because they have no consciousness of a higher want, may be said to live by bread alone. They feel their necessities hour by hour, and are satisfied with the supply of those necessities as they arise. The mere natural man tries to live continuously by bread alone, that is, by such means and nutriment as this world can give; but, as we shall see, he fails to satisfy a hunger which no earthly bread can fill, or to remove that deep and inner thirst, which no water from the cisterns of this world has ever been able to satiate. In other words, man has a higher life than the brutes of the field, — a life higher than that which is visible to the eye, audible to human ear, or apparent even to the senses of himself. He has within him a life that terminates with the grave, and a life that culminates either in joy unspeakable and full of glory, or that plunges into that terrible aphelion, where God hath forgotten forever to be gracious. Man's lower life is satisfied with the bread that perisheth, but this higher life

needs a higher nutriment; and it is of this higher life that our Redeemer speaks, when he says, or rather when he quotes from the book of Deuteronomy, "Man doth not live" — he may *exist*, but he does not *live* — "by bread alone;" that is, the growth of this world's seed, or the product of this world's stores.

And what is the Bible but a provision for the supply of this inner hunger, which bread doth not satisfy, and for the refreshment of this inner soul-thirst, which this world never can meet? The Bible is the storehouse of such bread, the preacher is the proclaimer of it, the Lord's Supper is a seal and a sign of it. Our own inmost and deepest consciousness tells us that we need something better than human eye has seen, or human ear heard, or man's heart, left to itself, conceived, to give us that rest in which we can say, "It is enough, I am satisfied, and thus I could live forever."

And, as this bread is supplied for this inner and this higher life, so man is welcome to partake of it. The bread that satisfies the body needs to be toiled and paid for; but the living bread that cometh down from heaven, like all God's greatest and choicest boons, is to be had without money and without price. Singular it is that rare things and precious things, as the world calls them, are very costly things; but the most precious things of all, though the world from their very abundance least appreciates them, are to be had without money and without price. Even in this world, the pure spring water is more sweet and precious than all the wines of the Rhine, Portugal or France; the air that we breathe is far more delightful than all the perfumes of Arabia; and a bright day, a splendid landscape, or panorama of landscapes, is a sight as glorious as princes can see; and a starry sky on a winter night is so splendid an apocalypse of God, that, if we were to see it only once in our life, we should never forget it. The best and most precious things are the cheapest; so the

bread that feeds the soul, and the living water that satisfies its thirst, are to be had without money and without price; and the remonstrance of him who bids you welcome is, "Why spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which doth not satisfy? for man liveth not by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth" — something higher — "out of the mouth of God."

Let us look at the negative side of the statement, "Man doth not live by bread alone;" that is, there is nothing in this world's provision that can satisfy that higher want which is in all, and the yearnings, the aspirations, and the unsatisfied claims and pangs, of which are felt more or less at intervals by every man, even in his greatest aberration from God, and forgetfulness of his will and law. Experience is the first witness. It will testify that man doth not live by bread alone. What has been every man's attempt, more or less, through life, but to live by bread alone, — that is, to secure by his own efforts an enjoyment that will satisfy? The tradesman in his business, the soldier on the field, the statesman in the cabinet, the noble in his hall, the physician in his practice, the judge upon the bench, all have been trying an experiment repeated every day, and every day a failure, to live, that is, to be satisfied, with bread alone, or what this world can supply. But what have they all found? That there are chambers in the soul of man that no earthly thing can fill; deep wants, yearnings and desires, that no provision in the height or in the depth can satisfy; a hunger that bread does not remove, and a thirst that water does not quench; and desert places that no sunshine can gladden, or dews freshen or make blossom; and pains, desires, longings and anxieties, so deep, that the more you try to fill them from earth's stores, the greater their agony becomes; and so real, that they prove, by the pain they create, that man was made for a nobler

thing than bread alone, and that he cannot, and never has, and never will, live by bread alone.

Not only does experience testify this, but there are special seasons in the life of every man when this experience is more poignant, and the lesson more sensibly expressed. Some of these are seasons of bereavement, and affliction, and sorrow. When the only bread that you had, and beyond which you never looked, is swept away, even the "whole staff of bread," the chasm that is left behind is so intolerable, that insanity and suicide have not unfrequently been the issue. When the only star that shone upon life's long and weary way has been shrouded, or suddenly disappeared, as if snatched from its orbit, and you have been left to grope in darkness without a guide, and without a light left you on earth, and no light known beyond it, you have learned that when you had it it was not sufficient, and now that it is gone, and you have nothing left behind, you feel that man cannot and does not live by bread alone. You have learned, by the loss of the near and the dear that you loved, by the departure of that which was your all, by the loss of your only wealth, and health, and spring of happiness upon earth, that there is nothing in this world that you dare trust in as permanent, and that there is nothing, when you have it, adequate to satisfy the wants and still the yearnings of an immortal soul. It is the evidence of the fall of man's soul, that he seeks to live by bread alone; it is the evidence of the unquenched grandeur of man's soul, that he cannot live by bread alone.

Especially, however, is this realized in seasons of bereavement. The Christian, who does not live by bread alone, but has something better, even every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God, to live by, is not smitten down, like the mere natural man, who lives by bread alone, in such seasons of sorrow and bereavement. The night that comes to a Christian discloses a thousand suns in the firmament, in ex-

change for the one sun that has set; and if he has left the loved, the cherished, and the dear, God's word, on which he lives, tells him that a new star was needed for a new sphere, a new missionary for a new place in the skies, that the lost is not lost, but gone before; and instead of weeping as they that have no hope, they rejoice that Christ will come, and the trumpet shall sound, and they that sleep in Christ, and they that live in Christ, shall meet together in joyous recognition, and so be forever with the Lord.

We learn, from our own personal experience, that man does not live by bread alone. There is one season that has not yet come to us, but which must come to all, a death-bed, when this lesson will be felt with all its force — felt even by those who have learned to live by every word that cometh out of the mouth of God. Try to anticipate that day. What will be the worth of gold and silver and riches, as earth rushes from beneath your feet, and the great unsounded ocean of eternity rolls inward and beats upon the shores of time? What will be the worth then of rank, of splendor, of pomp, and of circumstance, when all are leaving you, and you are leaving them, and just as you are, unadorned, undisguised, you are about to stand at the judgment-seat of God, and amid that light in which there is no shadow, and before that eternity of which there is no reversal? How deeply then will you feel that man does not live by bread alone; that there is nothing in this world that can meet such a crisis; that there is nothing in its stores, in its wealth, in its rank, in its riches, that will give you one moment's bright hope, one minute's real consolation! The richest and the greatest man derives no more joy on a death-bed from all he had, than the poorest man feels of pain from the recollection of all he had not. We must now draw our consolation from on high; we must now eat of some better bread; we must now have communion with some nobler river, even the river of life, or a death-bed

will be sad and sorrowful, when we learn, too late, to profit by the lesson that man doth not live by bread alone.

But it is said, Man that thus liveth not liveth by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. Solomon made the experiment of living by bread alone. The second chapter of Ecclesiastes is proof that the experiment is not an untried one. It comes down to us attested by one who has tried it in the most favorable circumstances, and who learned, by bitter and poignant regret, that man does not, and cannot, and never will, live by bread alone. In short, man has a higher destiny than time; death is not the end of him. As the body needs food to keep it till the grave come, so the soul needs its nutriment and its appropriate food to nourish it for everlasting happiness, and for reigning as a king and a priest unto our God and to his Christ for ever and ever.

Let me ask, are you seeking this higher bread, or are you satisfied with the lower? If you are satisfied with the lower bread, you are bitterly, I pray it may not be fatally, deceiving your own selves. There is no happiness in that man's heart whose hopes and sympathies, and joys and life, are bounded by the visible horizon; and there is no more prospect of happiness to that man's soul, who has never hungered for the bread of life, nor tasted it, and never thirsted for the water of life, and freely drank of it. Upon all rank, and wealth, and pomp, and human greatness, upon all coffers, and treasures, and broad acres, there is written legibly to the eye of faith, "Whoso drinketh of this water shall thirst again;" but upon truth, upon the Saviour, upon the Bible, upon real religion, there is legible to the eye of the same faith the sequel of that precious sentiment, "But whoso drinketh of the water that I shall give him, it shall be within him a well of water springing up unto everlasting life." All experience, from Solomon's till now, attests the text, "Man doth not live by bread alone;" and all Christian experience, from Adam's day till

now, tells us that man doth live by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

First, there is the word of truth which faith believes; secondly, there is the word of promise which hope accepts; and, lastly, there is the word of duty which love obeys. The three graces of a Christian, or the three aspects of his new life, are, faith, which believes the word of truth; hope, which accepts the word of promise; and love or charity, which enters on the path of duty: and by these three, the word of truth, the word of promise, the word of duty, accepted by faith, and hope, and charity, man lives a divine, a noble, a happy life; a life that only lets go its shackles and its limits when the body is deposited in the grave; while the soul, made white in the blood of the Lamb, stands amid those who have also washed their robes, and sings the song of Moses and of the Lamb for ever and ever. I have said, then, that there is, first, the word of truth, which faith believes. What is that word of truth? The revelation of God, and the Saviour, and the Holy Spirit; justification freely through Christ's righteousness; pardon freely and completely through Christ's most precious blood; regeneration by the Holy Spirit, and sanctification by his continuous presence and power. These vital truths associated with Christ, in whom and through whom they are reached, constitute the word of truth which faith believes, and, believing, rejoices with joy unspeakable and full of glory. A Christian believes that God is; therefore, that all must be right: that God governs; that, therefore, nothing is left to chance: that God is making all things work together for good for him; therefore, that no evil can betide him: that God's eye is on him; that God's heart sympathizes with him; that God's presence ever envelops him; and, therefore, that "neither life, nor death, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, can separate him from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus." If I find

that I am circled in the everlasting arms, that all winds help me, and all waves waft me to my home,—if I find that nothing can permanently injure me, or separate me from Christ,—then I live in perfect peace; I live by this word of truth that proceedeth out of the mouth of God, and have bread to eat that the world knoweth not of.

There is the word of promise which hope accepts and lives on. The word of truth is a present revelation, which faith believes; the word of promise is a future prospect, which hope anticipates. Now, a Christian has not only faith that leans upon the unseen present, but he has also hope which draws nutriment from the sure and certain, because pledged and promised, future. A Christian's faith lives on the truth that is now made known to him; a Christian's hope is cherished and sustained by the future that is promised to him; and thus faith draws the nutriment of its life from things unseen, but not unknown; and hope draws the nutriment of its life from things promised and sure to be performed; and so, by faith and by hope, a Christian lives upon sources above the world, beyond the present, and the life that he lives is the life of the Son of God, who loved him and gave himself for him; and, living not by bread alone, but by a supply from a higher source, he lives a happy, a joyous, and a blessed life.

And, lastly, there is the word of duty which Christian love sets itself to obey. We obey Christ's word, not simply because we are his subjects, and he is our King, but because he loved us and gave himself for us, and we love him because he so loved us.

This love, planted in our hearts, quickened by the contact of his, prompts the hand to do what Christ bids us, and the foot to walk in the ways which Christ has assigned us; and thus, faith believing all that Christ has revealed, and hope drawing into its bosom from the future all that Christ has promised, and love going with an ardent heart and an elastic

footstep to do all that Christ bids it, there is, in the Christian's bosom, the highest happiness that can be reaped or realized upon earth; the earnest and the pledge of that perfect joy that is at God's right hand, and of those enduring, because spiritual pleasures, that are for ever and ever, and evermore.

In which category are we? Are we on the negative side, with those who live, or try to live, by bread alone? We have found it — and in our soberest and calmest moments we confess it — a most unsatisfactory life.

We have thought often, If now I could only reach that point, then I should be at rest. We have reached it, and we find that we are further from rest than ever. We have said, If I could only gain that position, then I should be happy. We have gained it, and it has only been a higher level, standing upon which we have seen a wider horizon, and discovered further scenes and prospects still unattained. The servant has said, If I were only a master, I should be happy; and the master has said, If I were only rich, I should be happy. He is made rich, and then he says, If I were only ennobled, I should be happy. He is made a noble. Is he happy? No. If I were only a king, I should be happy. Has he been happy then? No. If I were to be conqueror of the world, I should be happy. Has he at last been satisfied? Alexander wept because he had no more worlds to conquer; and David, a king and a conqueror, taken from the sheep-folds, and seated upon a royal throne unprecedented for magnificence, cried from it, "O that I had wings like a dove, that I might flee away, and be at rest forever!" Here is no rest, or satisfaction, or peace, to be realized in any change of circumstance that man can have. That person who cannot be holy and happy as a servant will never be holy and happy as a master; and that poor man that cannot be holy and happy in his poverty will never be holy and happy when he is made rich. It is not splendid gardens, acres and estates, that make man

happy ; but it is the happy man that spreads sunshine over the cottage garden, and makes the humblest acre, bleak and unproductive, blossom almost as the rose. Let the heart be put right in its relationship to God, and all things will be right around you ; but, until you have learned that you cannot live by bread alone, but only by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God, you will never have learned the nature, or tasted the sweetness, of the blessed life.

Let us study this blessed book, that reveals riches that take not wings and flee away ; let us love this blessed religion, that promises and never yet failed to make happy him and her that become its subject ; and let us pray that God would dispose our hearts no more to seek happiness by hewing out cisterns, and broken cisterns, that can hold no water, but to come at once to the fountain of living waters, and to drink and be refreshed. There is nothing in the world grand enough, or noble enough, or lasting enough, to satisfy man's soul. There is nothing in true religion that is not fitted to give him peace upon earth, and to be a forelight of that joy, and glory, and happiness, which will be when things seen and temporal shall be no more at all.

CHAPTER XVI.

REFRESHMENT AND REST.

“ Love the Lord, and thou shalt see him ;
Do his will, and thou shalt know
How the Spirit lights the letter,
How a little child may go
Where the wise and prudent stumble ;
How a heavenly glory shines
In his acts of love and mercy,
From the Gospel’s simplest lines.”

“ I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste.” — SOLOMON’S SONG 2 : 3.

THIS is evidently the language of the church of Christ, represented here and throughout the whole song under the beautiful and interesting epithet of the Bride. She states, not only her admiration of the Bridegroom, that is, the only Saviour, by declaring that he is the Rose of Sharon, the fairest, most fragrant and loveliest, that blooms in the fields of nature, or the gardens of man, but that her experience of what he is, by sitting down under the shadow of him whom her soul loved, has been so precious, that she cannot but exhaust the most expressive metaphors in order to convey her idea of Christ. “ His fruit was sweet to my taste. He brought me to the banqueting-house, and his banner over me was love.” At one time she likens him to a tree, and herself sitting under his shadow, and eating its sweet fruit. At another time she likens him to the head of a noble hall or

royal house, bringing her to the banqueting-room, and the very banner that was over her in the cool of evening was beautiful with love.

In this instance she is seated, and sheltered from the sunshine, under the cool and wide-spread shade of the tree of life; and not only is she refreshed, and defended from the intense heat of the day, but she also partakes of and gathers his fruit, which she finds to be sweet to her taste. This figure is not new in its application to our Lord. He tells us himself, "I am the vine, and ye are the branches;" and, in that beautiful Apocalyptic portrait of the age that is to be, we read that in the midst of the street of the New Jerusalem there was the tree of life. That portrait is to be actualized in this world: for I gather from the whole of the last two chapters of the book of Revelation that they state what is to be on earth, and nothing at all of what is to be beyond it. The heaven of the people of God will be this earth, after it has undergone a change as complete as the bodies of the people of God, when they are raised from the dead. The earth will have its regeneration just as our bodies will have their resurrection; and then it will be a meet dwelling-place for the risen and glorified people of God. "I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride"—the very figure of this song—"adorned for her husband." He saw this coming down from heaven—that is, the descent of all the saints who are in heaven, now coming down to earth, made meet for their residence, and the saints that slept raised from the dead, and meeting them midway, and so the tabernacle of God will be with men. In the midst of this scene, to be actualized on the face of this earth, he says he saw "a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there a tree of life,"—as it ought to be trans-

lated, — “which have twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.”

This is, indeed, the blessed life. What may we suppose to be the special enjoyment of the bride when she sits beside the Bridegroom, or under the shadow of that tree whose fruit she tastes? There is, first, the idea of protection. Under a wide-spreading and magnificent tree we have protection from the stormy wind, as well as its cool shadow to shelter us from the sunbeams of mid-day.

We have also conveyed the idea of refreshment; weary in the sunshine, we are refreshed and cooled by the shadow, and we enjoy it to a degree that they only can appreciate who have been in sultry climates, and have felt what Isaiah calls the shadow of a great rock, or of a wide-spreading tree, in a heated and a sultry land.

We have also rest. She sat down under his shadow. The way-worn pilgrim took a momentary rest; the traveller, wearied out with a long and arduous journey, — the sky as brass above, and the earth as iron beneath, — sat down under the wide-spreading tree, and found that repose which is the best type of the rest which Christ will give: “Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” “There remaineth a rest for the people of God.”

Now, all this, it is true, is imagery; but, like all imagery, it has its reality. It teaches us this great lesson, that there is, in resting on Christ, in loving him, in communion with him, in seeking his glory, in trusting in him as the only Saviour, protection, refreshment, rest and peace, all the elements of a blessed life.

Have we found this? Does religion give us now refreshment and peace? Does it furnish to us a resting-place in the midst of an agitated world, where all things move to and fro? We are Christians just in proportion as we are Chris-

tianized; and we are Christianized just in proportion as we feel consciously in our happy experience that we have some one to go to when troubles overwhelm us, a shelter to come under when the sunbeams of persecution beat upon us, a resting-place, a peaceful ark, to which wing-weary we may return for rest.

The bride says, she found his fruit sweet to her taste. The fruit of a tree is what it produces for the service of man; and, what fruit is to a tree, certain blessings which Christ has prepared and bestowed are to him for us and for our comfort. What are some of the fruits that grow and ripen on this tree planted in the midst of the Paradise of God? The first fruit is, the handwriting that was against us is blotted out. We are no longer under the curse of a broken law, but under the blessing of a law magnified and made honorable. Another fruit is our title to heaven. We are made righteous by the righteousness of him who was made sin in our stead, and endured its curse, that we might never endure it. We triumph over Satan; we have victory over death; the grave is to us no prison, but only a short and transient pathway. We have his Holy Spirit poured down and given to us; we have his promise to come again to us; we have his preparing many mansions for us; and we have next in him, and because of our union to him, defiance of all accusers. "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again." In short, we might take the catechism, and sum up all the purchased blessings of the new covenant, and see in them the fruits that this tree bears, — justification, sanctification, regeneration, adoption into the family of God, assurance of happiness, the hope of glory, peace in the conscience, joy in the affections, light in the understanding, strength for our journey, and the certainty that he who has begun the good work in us will complete it to the end. In

short, whatever blessing we have mentioned in the Bible as the purchase of Christ, and a gift to us, that blessing is a fruit that hangs ripe upon this tree planted in the midst of the Paradise of God.

This fruit is accessible. It is not fruit that swings in the winds and shines in the sunbeams at a distance; we can reach it and gather it, and we are welcome to eat it. "His fruit was sweet to my taste." This fruit is satisfying. The best things in this world give but a transient delight, and often the reäction of all earth's joys is sadness and sorrow; but the fruit that Christ gives us has a joy and a satisfaction that is complete. We are not spending our money for that which is not bread, and our labor for that which profiteth not; we are receiving that which is rest and satisfaction indeed.

Let us recognize this tree alone as the only one that can give sufficient shadow, and that bears fruit that is really sweet and satisfying. Go to other trees, and you will be disappointed; but have recourse to this, and you will be satisfied. We are not simply to look at it, but to sit down under it. When a person sits down, it implies rest. You are not a mere traveller passing by it, or a mere spectator looking at it, but you are weary and sitting down for rest, having felt the scorching heat of noonday, and now delighted with this shadow; and hungry, and seeking to be fed by its sweet and pleasant fruit. This expression "eat," as applied to Christianity, is a very strong, but a very just one. What we eat is incorporated with our bodies, and becomes sinews, bones, flesh and blood, which are the elements of our physical strength and endurance in the world. This figure is meant to teach us that the blessings of Christianity, the pleasant fruits that grow upon this tree, are to be in our case incorporated with our very life; so that Christ's life is to be our life, his righteousness our righteousness, his strength our strength.

We are to be strong in him, and the life that we live is to be, not our own, but his. In the world, therefore, we shall not be of it, but conquerors over it.

Religion is first a personal thing. It is not "we,"—a body, a corporation,—but "I sat down under his shadow, and his fruit was sweet to my taste." And therefore the very first and most momentous question that we must ask is, "What must I do to be saved?" What my neighbor does certainly concerns me; and, if he does wrong, I ought to pray for him, and try to put him right. But the time to do that is after I have ascertained that I myself am right; that is, that I have what he has not, the Saviour. Religion is, first, but not finally, a personal thing.

All real religion is experimental. It is not a theory for clever wits to discuss, but an experience for the human heart to enjoy. The believer here says, "I was conscious that I sat down, and I enjoyed the cool shadow of the outspread boughs; and I tasted this fruit, and I found it sweet." Religion is therefore an experimental thing. It is not subscription to a creed; it is not acceptance of a dogma, doctrine or tenet, by the intellect; but it is the enjoyment of a life, a power and influence, in the regenerated heart. It is not a beautiful creed, but a blessed life.

We state this our happy experience of what religion is, not as parade, nor as boasting, nor as vain-glory, but in order that others, seeing how happy it has made us, may inquire where the fountain is that furnishes such sweet springs, where the tree is that bears so delicious fruit, and where and what is that shadow in whose cool enveloping embrace there is so much repose and enjoyment. Hence, the Psalmist says, "Come, all ye that fear God, and I will tell you what he hath done for my soul," not for me to be boastful, but for you to be benefited. Experimental, personal, practical religion will not only enable us to do justly, love mercy, and walk

humbly with God,—for these are its most ordinary fruits, which the natural man in some degree brings forth,—but it will give conscience peace, and make our hearts beat with joy ; it will impart in the world a sense of superiority and independence ; a rest amid restlessness, a quiet amid storms, an energy amid difficulties, and a hope in the dreariest hours and darkness of the world's despair, that will make us visibly differ from those who, whilst just and honest, are strangers to that elevation, that grandeur of hope, and that happiness of heart, which are the evidences of the blessed life.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE BLESSED MOTHER.

“ But such a sacred and homefelt delight,
Such sober certainty of waking bliss,
I never felt till now.”

“ And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.” — LUKE 1 : 46, 47.

BECAUSE the Virgin Mary has been made an idol by some, it may not and does not follow that we should be blind and insensible to the beauty of her character as a blessed mother and a distinguished Christian, highly favored of the Lord in both respects. She plainly regards herself, not as a goddess to be set up on the throne, but as a humble sinner saved by grace, and a worshipper beside the footstool. It is one of the most striking proofs of the prophetic and allusive nature of the words of Jesus, that there are, in the Gospels, so many and so striking anticipatory references to the worship that would one day be paid to Mary in after ages. Three or four different times she appears in the Gospels, and almost each time it is, if not to receive a rebuke, at least to suggest some reason for looking high above the favored mother, and to trust only in the Son of God, the Saviour of the guilty.

In Matthew 12 : 46, we find a very remarkable instance of this : “ While he yet talked to the people, behold his mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak with

him. Then one said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee. But he answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother." What a striking indication that all relationship by nature was to be merged in a more magnificent relationship by grace; and that they that do the will of Jesus are admitted to a dignity that makes them fellow-heirs of the same blessedness that Mary shares!

We have another instance in Mark 3: 32, where these words occur: "And the multitude sat about him, and they said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren without seek for thee. And he answered them, saying, Who is my mother, or my brethren? And he looked round about on them which sat about him, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother." In another place a woman said to him, "Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the breasts which thou hast sucked." But what was his answer? Did he say, Yes, she is blessed; and, because she is the mother of my human nature, therefore let her be constituted the queen of heaven? No, but he said, "Yea, rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and do it." The last time she appears in the Gospel in connection with these and similar remarks of our Lord is in John 2, where Jesus was invited to a marriage festival; the wine failed, and Mary, sensitive of what she thought due to her relatives, and knowing that Jesus had done wondrous works in the presence of the people, said to him, "They have no wine,"—as much as to say, We should wish that thou, who hast all power, wouldest create and give what they

cannot buy, and thus cannot otherwise procure, lest their poverty be detected. Jesus' reply to her was a very striking one, "Woman, what have I to do with thee?"—as if he had said, Now my ministry is begun (for he had just begun his public ministry), and here I must be alone. The tears of a mother must not mingle with those of her suffering Son. You, Mary, must fall back into the obscurity that becomes a creature, and depart in shadow; and I only must rise luminous and glorious, absorbing every light in my splendor. I must tread the wine-press alone; I must monopolize all the suffering, and receive therefore all the glory; not even a mother must share in the sorrows that have no companion and no comparison; and, therefore, a mother incapable of sharing my sorrows must not participate in my glory. Mary, you must decrease and disappear, that I, engaged about my Father's business, may be all and in all.

And very remarkable it is, the last time that Mary appears in the New Testament is in the first chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, where her name is just mentioned, and no more.

Now, can there be, in all this, the least foundation for the very sad and very awful homage that is paid to Mary in the Church of Rome?

Let us turn to Mary herself, and see what her feelings were. "My soul," she says, "doth magnify the Lord." She gives all the glory to her Lord; not an atom does she reserve for herself, not one ray does she seize wherewith to encircle her own head. She kneels at his footstool, a lowly worshipper. She thinks it privilege enough to worship; never dreams she of being worshipped. Let us study the example of Mary; it is beautiful, it is a precedent for us,—a worshipper beside the footstool, not a goddess on God's right hand.

Let us mark, in the next place, her worship—how truly

personal. "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour." All worship must be personal before it becomes social, it must be individual before it can be public. We must have learned in the depths of the heart to say "My Father," before, in the midst of the great congregation, we are able to say "Our Father." There must be, first, insulation from the world and personal communion with God, before there can be true mingling with the church, in prayer and praise. It must be first "My soul," before it is "Our souls," — "My spirit," before "Our spirits."

Her worship was purely spiritual, — no outward incense, no record of prostration, genuflexion, or splendid ceremony; it was not standing, kneeling, sitting, — these are the details, scarcely worthy of mention, never fit for dispute. "My son, — my daughter, — give me thine heart," is God's demand; and Mary responds to the demand, and says, "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit doth rejoice in God my Saviour." The soul has often worshipped on the exchange, and the body only has often worshipped in the congregation. The heart has often rejoiced in God the Saviour on the crowded streets, when the knee only has bowed, or the voice only been uplifted, in the sanctuary. No pomp or splendor of ritual in God's worship is any compensation for an absent soul; and a present soul, earnestly engaged, gives a consecration that nothing else can command, or be a substitute for.

The worship of Mary was singularly humble. She owned herself a sinner. She says, "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour." Who needs a Saviour? A sinner. If Mary was born innocent, immaculate, sinless, she would not have needed a Saviour; but the fact that she rejoiced in God, in his relationship to her as a Saviour, is the admission, "I am a miserable sinner." We may rest assured that Mary occupies

her lofty place among the choirs of the blessed, not in the least degree because she was the mother of our Lord, but wholly and solely because she washed her robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

The part of the passage on which I had wished particularly, however, to dwell, is, the joy that Mary felt as an inheritor of the blessed life. Is she a precedent for us in this respect? — does joy become Christians? It does, much more than sadness, much more than sorrow. There may be much in ourselves to make the best of us sad, but there is more in Christ to make the worst of us rejoice. It is very remarkable, in reading God's word, how very frequently we are exhorted to joy. Hannah said, of old, "My heart rejoiceth in the Lord." David says, "My soul shall rejoice in God." Abraham saw Christ's day afar off, and rejoiced. "The Christians took joyfully the spoiling of their goods." The kingdom of God is defined to be "righteousness," — that is one, — "peace," — that is the second, — "joy," — that is the third; there are three component elements of the kingdom of God. The first is character, the last two are privilege. It would seem, therefore, to be as much a Christian's duty to rejoice, as it is a Christian's duty to pray. And I am sure that the very first effect of the Gospel is to make a man's heart happy; and its secondary but ever succeeding effect is to make a man's life holy. The Gospel does not teach happiness through holiness, but it teaches holiness through happiness. The first effect produced is joy because of good news; the second — the necessary effect — is devotedness to him who is the subject of the good news, in whatever things are pure, and just, and honest, and lovely, and of good report. But there are many other passages of the same kind. For instance, "The fruit of the Spirit is joy." He spake unto them, that their joy might be full. And again, the apostle says, "Count it all joy when ye fall into divers

tribulations." And Paul says, "Rejoice — and again I say, Rejoice." There are so many exhortations to joy, that one wonders that Christians are not the most joyous men; and if they be not so, it is not because the spring of joy is exhausted, but because something in their character obstructs its influx, or they have some misconceptions of the character of God; and it is on this account that they mourn when they ought to rejoice, and clothe themselves in the weeds of sorrow when they ought to be arrayed in their bridal robes, as the chosen of Christ, and the heirs of his glory.

Let us endeavor to ascertain what is the character of this joy that Mary felt, and that all true Christians may feel. It is impossible to suppose that a man has been turned from darkness to light, through the influence of the Spirit, and the truth applied by the Spirit to his heart, without his feeling some measure of joy. The first transition must be accompanied with joy. Deliverance from darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son, the opening of the eyes to all the light and loveliness of heaven, the scattering our prejudices, the revelation to our hearts of God as the sin-forgiving God, must naturally create a joy deep in proportion to the sense that we have of the goodness of him who is its author, and of the blessed hope that we are the heirs of salvation. But this joy that a Christian feels on his first conversion is not permanent; it ceases, in the lapse of time, to be a passion, and comes to be more and more a principle. The Christian character parts with the fervor of its first feelings; but that fervor is not destroyed; it rather becomes consolidated into the fixity of a permanent and governing principle. And though, therefore, the first feelings of our acquaintance with the truth may have departed, our present calm, and deep and abiding enjoyment, may not be the less real or the less spiritual.

This joy, when felt by a Christian, is partly the joy of in-

creasing knowledge. Everybody knows that nothing is more delightful, or occasions greater joy, than our having made some grand discovery, or taken some new step in acquaintance with the world that is around us, and the phenomena or facts that are in nature. Ignorance may be sadness, but progress in knowledge is always connected with joy. Archimedes was so delighted with his last mathematical discovery, that he was insensible to the noise of the besieging foes that were gathering round him to destroy him. When the spark was first struck from the kite, Franklin was so overwhelmed with joy that he was scarcely able to bear it. And Christians, as they grow in more intimate acquaintance with God, and in clearer apprehensions of the truth, in greater anticipations of the glory that is to be revealed, experience — each according to his constitution and temperament — a joy that the stranger cannot intermeddle with.

In the next place, Christians have a joy that I may call the joy of worship. It is a joyful thing to worship God. Let us come into his courts with praise, and into his gates with thanksgiving; let us be glad in him, and sing hymns to him. “I will go unto God — unto the altar of God — God, my exceeding joy.” And is there not joy in praising God? The Psalmist’s words upon a people’s lips, that are the expression of a people’s hearts, are inspired by joy.

Again, there is a joy, not vouchsafed to all, nor, indeed, the duty of all, but that all may have; I mean the joy of full assurance. The ordinary Christian believes on Christ in order to be saved, and saved he will be; but the Christian who has advanced to the full assurance of faith can say, “I know in whom I have believed, and that he is able to keep what I have committed to him against that day.” The ordinary Christian has true faith, the fruit of which is everlasting glory; but the Christian who enjoys the precious privilege and full assurance of faith has not only the safety of the

other, but he has in this world an earnest, and a prelibation, and a foretaste of the happiness that is to be revealed.

There is joy in the hopes that a Christian may cherish. There is not only the full assurance of faith, but there is the full assurance of hope. If I am sure that Christ is mine, and that I am his, — if my spirit doth rejoice in God my Saviour, — I can look forward to the grave without dismay, and can expect the approach of death, conscious that he has lost his sting; and I am sure that I shall stand at the great tribunal without spot and blameless in God's blamelessness, at that day.

And I know that when I am admitted into the realms of glory, if I am a child of God, it will be to meet all those who have been taken away from me by death, who fell asleep in Jesus; and there constitute forever a happy, holy and blessed company, forever with the Lord.

A Christian, therefore, has joy from the past, joy from the present, and joy from the future; and he may indeed, with an emphasis that the world cannot understand, instinctively exclaim, "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour."

But every Christian has not the joy of assurance. If so, are there any reasons why we have not all the sweet joy that Mary had? There are many; first there are desponding thoughts, — still worse, desponding thoughts of God, — which wither the richest joys, nip the least in the bud, and freeze all the streams of gladness in the human heart. But such views are wrong. There is no reason why the worst should despair, as there is no reason why the best should presume; and, instead of entertaining despairing thoughts of God, the glorious privilege is offered to every one to go to him as to a father, and to feel in his presence all the affection and the relationship of sons.

Another reason why Christians have not this joy is that

they do not all look intently enough to Christ as their only Saviour; they look too much to themselves, where there are only elements of disquiet, and they fail, so far, to look to Christ, where alone is every element of satisfaction and repose. A patient who takes the prescription that the physician recommends — having confidence in his skill — will have perfect peace; but the patient who pays little attention to the orders of the physician, and feels only his own pulse, is sure to be disquieted, as well as to have little prospect or chance of cure. It is so with the Christian; he who is looking to himself, instead of looking at his Lord, extracting from his own heart the elements on which he is to live, and drawing from the external world the elements that make him worse, will inevitably be sad, depressed and cast down. Let us, therefore, if we wish to have this joy, and have it more abundantly, run the race set before us, looking to Jesus, the author and the finisher of our faith.

Another reason why a Christian is a stranger to joy is his sometimes living in the conscious violation of what his conscience tells him is plain duty. Jonah, in the ship, raised a storm; and sin, knowingly practised by a Christian, will disturb, if it do not destroy, his soul, waste away all Christian joy, and make the heart, that should be bounding, heavy, disconsolate and sad.

Another reason of the absence of such joy is excessive love of the world, — I mean its ways, and frivolities, and pleasures. It seems impossible that the love of Christ and the love of the world can coëxist in the same heart; and, if you try to combine them, there will be no comfort from the world, and there will be no joy from Christ; and such a man will be a sort of borderer between the world and Christ, — he will have neither the opiate peace of the one, nor the bright and sustaining joy of the other. Demas took as his only portion the world, and his doom was tears and hopeless

suffering; and, in proportion as we follow and imitate his example, shall we lose the sunny joy that Mary so richly possessed; for there can be joy in a Christian's life only in proportion as Christ is more thought of, and the world, and the things of the world, are cast further into the background.

Another reason why Christians may not have this joy is their neglect of ordinances. I do not say that God is tied to public worship, nor do I say that the Lord's supper, baptism, and all those outward signs, are essential to salvation; but I do say that these are wells in the valley of Baca, they are water in the desert supplied from the fountain of living waters, and he that lives without them either must belong to a higher and more spiritual sphere, of which he gives no evidence, or he must fail to realize that joy which is the portion of them who go on from strength to strength, and rejoice in the Lord all the day long.

Let me show, in few words, how we are to obtain this joy. First, think only of duty, and leave the joy to follow its performance. Do not do a thing in order to obtain this joy, but do what Christ bids you, and leave him to give the measure of joy that he, in his love, sees to be best fitted for you. He says himself, "He that doeth my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me, I will love him, and will manifest myself unto him. And these things have I said unto you, that your joy might be full."

In the second place, rest simply, exclusively, from first to last, upon Jesus, as the only Saviour and sacrifice for our sins. Look at anything beyond or above him, and you will miss the true ground of trust, and fail to taste the joy of the Lord, that is the strength of his people. But look simply to him, rest wholly upon him, seek to repose greater confidence on God's precious truth, and trust in his word, and the result of such simple, childlike faith will be, in your case, what it was in that of the jailer of Philippi. It is said that he came

to the apostles a depraved criminal, and in the sincerity of his heart asked, "What must I do to be saved?" They answered, in the simplicity of their faith, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." He believed, and, it is added, he was baptized, "and he rejoiced, believing in God with all his house." Thus simple belief on the Lord Jesus Christ is the true secret of joy.

And, lastly, seek the presence and possession of the Holy Spirit, the author of joy. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace." And wherever that blessed Spirit dwells, there will not only be love and peace, but also joy. Honor the Spirit by seeking his presence, and he will answer you by making you joyful in the possession of it. Lean on Jesus wholly for the pardon of sin; seek the presence and peace of the Holy Spirit as the source and fountain of it.

This joy is defined very beautifully by our Lord, when he speaks of his joy being theirs, that "their joy might be full," and that "his joy might abide in them."—"These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy may be full." Now, what was Christ's joy? Not the joy of the world, but of seeing souls saved; "he, for the joy set before him, endured the cross." Jesus rejoiced in spirit on one occasion, and that arose from the triumphs of his cause, the reception of the faith, the conversion of souls. And the prophecy says, "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied."

When we partake of this joy, it does not taste or last like the joy of the world. The joys of the world, like gathered flowers, begin to fade the instant they are possessed; but the joy of the Christian is amaranthine. Around it is the air of everlasting spring; it grows more beautiful and fragrant with the lapse of years, survives the winters of the world, and reaches its culminating beauty when the things of sight and sense are fading from our presence. Hence, a Christian

can say, "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; though the labor of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; though the flocks shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls, yet will I rejoice in the Lord.—I will joy in the God of my salvation."

A Christian may go out with joy; he may be led forth with peace. A Christian's faith has no sympathy with the religion of the monk; it has no lot or part in the despairing religion of the suicide. He does not leave the world because of its sins, expecting to escape them when he cannot escape from himself; and he will not leave the world because of its trials, its misfortunes, and its sufferings. His joy has nothing in it cloistral, nothing monkish, nothing suicidal; it is the joy of the Lord, giving him the victory over trials, strength in the day of trouble, and making him happy where all around him is blighted and desolate. The graves of the dead, to a Christian, are ever covered with the sweetest flowers; the dust of them that are asleep in Jesus, so dear to him, he expects to meet again in the realms of glory; and when heart and flesh shall faint and fail, he knows that God is the strength of his heart, and his portion forever. He dies neither sad, nor sorrowful, nor desponding; he lives and dies as Mary worshipped, saying, "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE ONLY ABSOLUTION.

“ Let me gaze, then, at thy glory ;
Change to flesh this heart of stone ;
Let the light illumine my darkness
That around the apostle shone.
Cold belief is not conviction,
Rules are impotent to move ;
Let me see thy heavenly beauty,
Let me learn to trust and love.”

“ 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.” — LUKE 7 : 48—50.

A WOMAN who was known to be a sinful one appeared in the house of Simon the Pharisee, and showed that hospitality which his host, who prided himself on his precision and his perfect character, had failed or forgotten to show, to his great and holy guest, the Lord Jesus Christ. When Simon thought within himself, — not venturing to express the thoughts that were within his bosom, — “ This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him ; for she is a sinner ; ” Jesus, the searcher of hearts, seeing the thoughts that were revolving in the Pharisee’s soul, instantly addressed him, “ Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee.” And then he showed, by a beautiful incident, which drew from the Pharisee the confession that he who is forgiven most would naturally

love most, the true order of forgiveness and love. This woman had been forgiven much, and the reason of her evidencing such enthusiastic love was her deep sense of forgiveness through her acceptance of her blessed Lord and Master, Christ Jesus.

All the incidents recorded here seem to have been subsequent, not prior, to the forgiveness of her sins. It was because she was forgiven before that she loved much, and it was because she loved much that she so sacrificed the best that she had, in order to express the reality and the depth of that love to him who, in her heart, became daily more and more the chief among ten thousand and altogether lovely. Her conduct was the fruit of forgiveness, not the purchase of it; every *trait* that she exhibited was not something done in order that she might be forgiven, but something done just because she knew she had been forgiven much, and could not help, therefore, loving much.

He said, "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; *therefore*," — as it ought to be rendered, — "therefore she loved much." After this, he said to her, "Thy sins are forgiven thee;" and at the close of the chapter, "Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace." Now, what was meant by pronouncing absolution after the admission that she was already absolved? The answer seems to lie in this, that at first she believed on him for forgiveness, and, therefore, she obtained it; afterwards Jesus gave her, in addition to forgiveness, the sweet sense, the blessed assurance, that she was forgiven. But, is it possible for one to be forgiven, and not to be assured of it? Many a Christian passes through life trusting in Christ for forgiveness of sins, justified in the courts of heaven, and yet no sweet echo of the sentence pronounced above rings in the often lonely, and sad, and sorrowful chambers of the heart. Many a one is a Christian who is not sure that he really and truly is so. It is one thing to be forgiven; it is another

thing to know assuredly that we are forgiven. The one is a fact, which is our salvation in heaven; the second is the knowledge of that fact, which is our happiness upon earth. The one—faith in Christ for forgiveness—is safety; the other—the assurance that we are forgiven—is joy additional to that safety. True faith is twilight, the assurance of faith is sunshine. A woman who is a wife is married, though the ring may drop from her finger; the ring is not the cement of her marriage, but it is the evidence, the assurance, and the proof to the outward eye, that she is married. Assurance is not the essence of faith, but it is to the believer the positive and sensible enjoyment of the blessedness of him whose sins are forgiven; the visible, or, rather, the felt witness of the Spirit in the court of the conscience within, that our sins are blotted out, and our iniquities pardoned in the court of heaven that is above. Jesus recognized the woman as a forgiven sinner, and, therefore, acting as became one; and he adds to the fact that she was forgiven the blessed assurance from his own lips that it was so; so that she might go away, not only trusting for forgiveness, but assured that she actually had it.

The Lord makes one grace the pledge and the pioneer of another. He granted her, first, forgiveness; he granted her, next, the assurance of it. He not only pardoned her sins,—which was very great mercy,—but he gave her all the joys that spring from the assurance of that pardon. None who live in the light that they have, up to its full extent, will be left without more light; “he that hath to him shall be given.” I do not believe that God ever leaves any one who acts up to the light that he has, and the responsibility that he feels, without giving that person more light, and more strength. I do not believe that God will ever leave a truly sincere and honest inquirer to perish everlastingly. Not that one will be saved because he is sincere; but that God will

not leave the sincere inquirer without giving him the light he gropes for, and showing him that Saviour who alone can meet the necessities of his heart, and minister to the hopes and expectances of his soul.

It is worthy of notice that Jesus here identifies pardon of sin with salvation. In one clause, he says, "Thy sins are forgiven thee;" in the other clause, "Thy faith hath saved thee." Thus the pardon of our sins is the essential preliminary to the salvation of our souls. There can be no salvation except there be forgiveness; and there can be no forgiveness except in one way, — a way that shall reflect glory on the sin-forgiver, judgment on the sin-forgiven, and yet mercy on him who has been guilty, and to whom it is forgiven. But the one — forgiveness of sin — is the necessary preliminary to the other, — the salvation of the soul. Jesus is not only the author, but the finisher, of our faith. I cannot believe that a true Christian, really transformed by the renewing of the Spirit of God, will ever fall away. But will not this make men presume? It cannot make a Christian presume; and another man has no right to presume at all, because he has no grace to fall from; — for a sinner, unrenewed, to suppose that he is safe, because Christians, who are regenerate, are so, is the most illogical and absurd reasoning that one can possibly imagine. A Christian, whose heart has been changed, does not allow himself a license to sin, because the same mighty Spirit that brings to him the pardon of his sins imparts to his heart the hatred of the sins which are forgiven. To a Christian it becomes natural and instinctive to do whatsoever things are just, and pure, and lovely, and of good report. He has the assurance of his progression, and the certainty of his never falling off; and, therefore, he is the more diligent and abundant in every good work. The worldly reasoning is, It is God that worketh in you; therefore do nothing at all. The Scripture reasoning is, "Work

out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God that worketh in you to will and to do of his good pleasure." The apostle does not say, when quoting Christ's word, "My grace is a substitute for thee;" but he says, what is far better, because true, "My grace is sufficient for thee." It does not take your place, do your duty, that you may sit down in indolence, and hope you will be snatched to heaven in spite of what you feel, and in the face of what you love, and notwithstanding what you do; but it becomes sufficient for you in leading you to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, and righteously, and godly, in this present world. "Whom God called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified." Thus the pardon of sin and the salvation of the soul — the one the commencement or the preface to the other — are identified in these words of our blessed Lord.

Salvation is here spoken of as a present possession. He says to her, "Thy faith hath saved thee: go in peace." In God's holy word, salvation is rarely spoken of as a thing that is to be, but frequently as a thing that already is. "He that believeth on the Son" — not *shall have*, but "*hath* everlasting life." Then, you ask, what is heaven? The future is the flower, the perfection and the glory, of the present; the salvation that begins in time culminates in eternity. That which is first the private experience of the heart becomes the full and magnificent enjoyment of the whole man. Salvation is a state of safety through the blood of the cross, and a course of progressive approximation to God by the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit. He, therefore, who is truly born again, is not saved as much in degree, but he is saved as much in fact, as if he were within the precincts of heaven, and in the presence of God and the Lamb. In this world joy enters into us, a tiny rivulet; in that better world we shall enter into joy, a majestic and illimitable ocean.

The salvation that begins in time, a small and glimmering spark, expands in eternity into all the brightness of everlasting noon; the believer's course, like the shining light, is first the gray dawn, then the opening morn, then the shining more and more unto the perfect day.

Jesus said to the woman, "Thy *faith* hath saved thee," — not, baptism hath saved thee; not, an outer ecclesiastical work of any sort hath saved thee; but an inner grace, laying hold upon something done for her, not something done by her, was the instrument, or the medium, of her salvation. Very often faith is referred to as the great and distinctive grace that saves. We are not saved by faith, however, in the sense that it takes the place of works. The ancient prescription was, "Do this and live," live on the ground that you have done this. The modern prescription, "Believe, and live," is not parallel, word for word, as if we were saved on the ground of our believing. If that were so, then correctness of life would have been salvation under the law, and accuracy of creed would be salvation under the Gospel. But there is no more virtue in a clear head than there is in a righteous hand; there is no more virtue in believing perfectly than there is in trying now to do correctly. We are saved now, not by our faith as the ground of our pardon, but by what faith grasps — the righteousness of Christ, the alone efficacious ground of our forgiveness and acceptance before God. Hence the distinction has been well made, we are saved by works declaratively, — that is, we prove that we are saved by what we do; we are saved by faith instrumentally, — that is, faith is the hand, the instrument, that lays hold upon something else; we are saved by Christ's righteousness meritoriously, — that is, his righteousness, seized by faith, illustrated and henceforth unfolded in the life, is the alone meritorious ground and foundation of our acceptance before God, and our entrance into glory. Why has faith ascribed to it this great distinction? There

are reasons for it very obvious, on the very face of it. In the case of this woman, she had shown much devoted love and affection to the Lord. She had displayed great generosity in pouring out her precious perfume upon his feet; and equally great devotedness in clinging to him, notwithstanding apparent rebukes that might have made her retire; she exhibited true repentance in that she wept whilst she washed his feet; and the greatest humility in that she wiped his feet with the hairs of her head. But when Jesus specifies what saved her, he does not say, Thy generosity hath saved thee, thy love hath saved thee, thy repentance or thy humility hath saved thee; but he puts all these in the background, and says, "Thy faith hath saved thee." Now, why does faith take precedence of every other grace? Because every true grace that a Christian has brings something. Love brings a glowing heart; liberality, a large and open hand; humility brings a bowed knee; repentance, a broken heart. All these are most precious, most beautiful; but each brings something, and each might go away with the feeling that it contributed to purchase what it gets in return. But faith brings neither the loving heart, nor the open hand, nor the bowed knee, nor the broken heart; but an empty hand, an empty heart, and with its emptiness a deep and poignant sense that it is so. It brings nothing, it seeks all; and it seeks all because it deserves nothing; full pardon and free forgiveness from him who knows its anxious, its earnest, and its prayerful approach. And this faith is the mother-grace, and all the rest follow in her train, never precede her or become substitutes for her. Faith thus comes, owning she is blind, and naked, and miserable, and destitute of all, and puts the crown on the head of him in whom all fulness lies; and asks the pardon that she needs, the sanctification that will make her beautiful, the peace that will give her joy, wholly from grace, and not as a recompense or a reward for anything she has brought, or any-

thing she can promise to bring. Thus, Jesus says to her, "Thy faith" — as an instrument, and only as an instrument, even when the choicest and the leading grace — "hath saved thee."

We see here the personality of salvation: "*thy* faith hath saved thee." Not another's faith, not a sponsor's vow or obligations, but "*thy* faith hath saved thee." Salvation, from first to last, is a personal or individual transaction. It is transacted, not upon the floor of the sanctuary without, but in the chancel of the heart within. It is between God and the believer first; and then it goes forth to freshen the world's bleak places with the expressions of its beneficence, feeling that all it can do is not too great to express the gratitude and the obligation that it owes to him who looked upon it in its low and lost estate, and has redeemed its subject with precious blood, and made him a king and a priest unto God. It is faith, the instrument, that lays hold of Christ the Saviour; but *thy* faith, not another's.

After our Lord had given her this blessed and comforting assurance, he adds, "Go in peace!" Is it straining it too much to say that here is evidence that the blessed life is not a sequestered and secluded life, led apart from the rest of mankind, in the cell of the monk or the anchorite, but a life of activity, of energy, of effort? No man can be a Christian one day without instantly feeling in his soul weighty responsibilities, and becoming a missionary also. He that feels he is forgiven yearns to go and tell those that need forgiveness how they may be forgiven also. Ye are salt, the earth must not be deprived of its savor; ye are lights, ye are cities set upon a hill; you must not be hid, you must be luminous. Like the demoniac, you must not sit at the feet of Jesus after being clothed and in your right mind; but go and tell those in your home what things the Lord hath done for you. So the very assurance that he gives to this woman, having im-

parted so much joy to her heart, contains a hint that it was not a substitute for, or to supersede active and personal service in his cause; but rather to be a new and inexhaustible impulse to go and serve, with all her heart, him who had saved her soul. The expression "Go," too, would seem to denote progress: "Go in peace." There is action that is not progress; there is excitement that is not health: a person who is in a fever has far more excitement in his frame than he whose pulse beats with the steadfast march of life; and so there may be very great action where there may be no real advancement. But in the case of a true Christian, if there be grace, if there be forgiveness of sin, — if there be the sweet and blessed sense that it is so, — there will be progress from strength to strength, from grace to grace. An unconverted man, trying to get to heaven by what he can do, is very much like a culprit upon the treadmill: he is constantly stepping, ever toiling, but never making progress. A Christian, whose bonds have been loosed, whose heart has been changed, on whose soul there has been shed abroad the sweet sense of forgiveness, is on the high and happy way that leads to heaven; he goes from strength to strength, until at last he arrives before God in Zion. Be not weary in well doing; redeem the time. "Go in peace;" in peace with God. What an atmosphere is that! No more suspicions of his mercy, no more doubts of his faithfulness and his love, no more misconstruction of his dispensations and his dealings. You are his son, and therefore his servant; the very deep conviction that you are his son making more intense the efficiency of your services rendered to him; after receiving so much from him, you unfold what you receive in obedience to him. The right way of thinking of God is not to hear him always saying, "Do;" but to feel God always giving, and never asking or commanding. If you look upon God as a God always exacting duties, you will render, or try

to render them as a slave his duties to a tyrant master; but, if you will only think of God as never exacting anything, but always giving everything, — from a crumb of bread to Christ, the brightness of his glory, — and leaving the impression made by his gifts to dictate the duties, the obligations and the sacrifices, that devolve upon you, you will find that ceasing to hear, as a slave, a master exacting, and beginning, as a son, to feel a father continually giving, you will think no sacrifice too great, no service too warm.

In peace with conscience. The most stern battles have been fought in individual hearts. The toil, the agony, the thought, expended in keeping conscience quiet, need not be expended in keeping still a menagerie of wild and savage beasts; and as long as a man has a conscience, and he knows not where to find that which can give him peace, he must either take an opiate to stupefy him, — that is, have recourse to a poisonous drug to keep it quiet, — or he must do what the worldling does, take a deeper plunge into the world's folly, gayety and dissipation, in order to keep himself insulated from himself. The true explanation of much of this world's frivolity and dissipation, — of the theatre and the opera, in the case of thousands that frequent them, — is that of persons trying to escape from themselves, to get an evening's sequestration from a conscience that tells them something is wrong, or from a heart that feels as if it were not what it should be; and because they are contented with an ignorance that leaves them in unmolested insensibility to the way, the truth and the life. But, when your sins are pardoned, when your faith has saved you, when you go in peace through the blood of Christ and under the inspiration of the Spirit of God, you are at peace with your own conscience, your inclinations and your duties run parallel. God's precepts and your preferences roll in one channel; and you know how easy the hardest duty becomes when you have been taught to love it, and

to see it is beautiful, and right, and true in the sight of him who has blessed you with everlasting life, and pronounced in the depths of your soul his own divine absolution: "Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace."

You go in peace with all true Christians. Wherever a Christian is, there is a brother; wherever a Christian woman is, there is a sister. You can forgive the Episcopacy of one, you can forget the Presbyterianism of a second, you can pardon the Congregationalism of a third, you can pass over the Immersion of a fourth; you can see, in spite of all these, and through the folds of all these, incapable of being concealed, grace that has renewed the heart, and changed the heirs of wrath into the heirs of Christ Jesus.

At love and peace with God, at peace with all true Christians, you will receive, at the hour that comes to you and must come to all, the full fruition of that peace, in the blessed, heartfelt assurance that there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus; and you will respond to the summons that calls you to your Father's home, not with a heavy, but a joyous utterance: "Now, Lord, lettest thou thy servant depart in peace; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation." My faith hath saved me; I now come in peace.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE WAY OF THE BLESSED LIFE.

“ Ah ! if our souls but poise and swing,
Like the compass in its brazen ring,
Ever level and ever true,
To the toil and the task we have to do,
We shall sail securely, and safely reach
The Fortunate Isles, on whose shining beach
The sights we see, and the sounds we hear,
Will be those of joy and not of fear.”

“ But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness ; and all these things shall be added unto you.”— MATTHEW 6 : 33.

JESUS tells his own not to take thought about the morrow, or about the things of this world, “ for after all these things do the heathen seek ; ” and, in opposition to them, to seek, not what they seek, but first of all the kingdom of God, and the righteousness that is its distinguishing ornament, substance, and characteristic ; and the things which the Gentiles seek, unsought by you, will by God be abundantly given you.

“ Take no thought ” does not mean, Never think upon the subject at all, but, Take no irritating, perplexing, vexing thought. The Greek word is *μεριμνα*, which means “ perplexing, agitating, harassing thought.” He does not bid you shut your eyes to to-morrow, and make no arrangement to-day for to-morrow’s advent ; but he bids you contemplate to-day and to-morrow, a stranger to those irritating and harassing cares which interfere with the duties of to-day, and darken

all the prospects of to-morrow. He says, your policy, your compass, your chart, your course, are all comprehended in one grand prescription, which never fails, and is ever applicable, "Seek first, chiefest, the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and then all these subordinate things will be added unto you;" for, "if God spared not his own Son, but gave him up to death for us all, giving us so grand a thing, will he not with him also freely give us all those things which are needful and expedient for us?"

Man has been found in every age,—Christian, heathen, Mahometan, and Jewish,—a murmuring and repining subject of God's government. There are things in the present that he fancies to be evil; there are things in the perspective of to-morrow that he fears will be evil; and, between the evils that he feels and the evils that he fears or fancies, he is often miserable, depressed, and cast down. Christ's prescription is, Do not heap to-morrow's evils, if there shall be any, for they are not yet come, upon to-day's duties; but discharge manfully and fully the duties of to-day, and wait till to-morrow for to-morrow's duties. You have strength for each day's duties, but you are neither promised nor are you possessed of strength for the duties of to-day, which are obligatory, and for contingent duties and trials, which are for to-morrow, and which may not come at all. Sufficient for the day is its trial or its trouble; meet it like Christians; and when to-morrow comes, then in to-morrow's strength you will be ready for to-morrow's duties.

The fact is, after all, that none of those things that man fears in the present, or fancies in the future, are in themselves productive of evil. Labor is not an evil in its practical effects; for human life would be wretched without it. Poverty is not an evil in its actual effect; for it weans from the world, and makes one think of a better, a holier, and a happier one. Sickness is not, in its practical effect, an evil; for it teaches

man that this is not our home ; and it makes him look up and seek for that better rest that remaineth for the people of God. A bereavement is not always an evil, if they you are bereaved of be numbered with Christ's saints in glory everlasting. And, therefore, those troubles that we feel to be so, when sanctified, are real blessings ; and those troubles which we fear and dread in the future may never happen ; or, if they do, as our day's evil is, our strength will be ; and the issue will be to-morrow what the issue of the same trial has been to-day, glory to God, and good to them that are exercised thereby.

The text substantially is, therefore, Mind the main thing, and subordinate things will come as a matter of course. Seek my glory, and I will take care of your good. You put yourselves in conformity to my holy law, and I will take care that you shall not suffer more than is good, or more than can be sanctified for and to you. "Seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness ; and all these things shall be added unto you."

I know not a more striking illustration of the idea in the text than the heroic conduct recorded of the three Hebrew youths in the book of Daniel, when the Babylonian despot, "in his rage and fury, commanded to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Then they brought these men before the king. Nebuchadnezzar spake and said unto them, Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, do not ye serve my gods, nor worship the golden image which I have set up ? Now, if ye be ready that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery and dulcimer, and all kinds of music, ye fall down and worship the image which I have made, well : but, if ye worship not, ye shall be cast, the same hour, into the midst of a burning fiery furnace ; and who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands ?" The three Hebrew youths replied in terms that showed that they sought first the kingdom of God and his righteousness ;

and were quite satisfied that all other things would be added. "Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter ;" that is, we have no carking, harassing, or irritating thoughts about answering you in this matter. "If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But, if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up." Here we have, in the actual life of these three Hebrew youths, an experimental and personal comment upon the text, "Seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

How sad it is to observe that man usually, in his daily life, reverses this ! He seeks at best to be rich toward man first, rich toward God next. He says, Let me enjoy and earn the world now; and then I will calculate upon getting a twilight at the close of life, in which I can think about my soul, and seek the kingdom of God. Let my heart fill itself with all the pleasures, the enjoyments, the profits, and the honors, of the life that now is; and, when I am satisfied, and able to retire, and leave the din, the tumult, and the excitements of life, I will think about religion, and, to use the world's language, begin to be serious. This is just the inverse of what is here described; but, whatever man may think, God's way has ever been found to be the successful one. The man who makes religion his chief business, and worldly things his secondary business, gets both; and the man who makes the world his chief thing, and religion his secondary thing, often loses both; and, to a dead certainty, loses one, and that one the most important. It is a law as certain as rising and setting suns, "Them that honor me I will honor." They who set their hearts first upon the things that are unseen and

eternal will have all that is good for them of the things that are seen and temporal ; whereas they who set their hearts supremely upon the things that are seen and temporal will not be satisfied with gold, nor silver, nor palaces, nor gardens, nor men-servants, nor women-servants, nor instruments of music, nor all that this world can provide ; and they will miss, in the ardor of their worldly and sensuous pursuits, that great and precious gem, salvation, with its lasting light of glory and beauty.

I have spoken generally of the order of this prescription : let us now consider as minutely as possible its specific clauses. What is " the kingdom of God " ? It means the *βασιλεια*, the sovereignty, the government, of God. The idea contained in the prescription is, Bring into all your thoughts, affections, desires, the controlling government of God ; and you will find that all other things will fall naturally and necessarily into their proper places. That kingdom, we are told, is not meat nor drink. It is not a question about what I shall eat, or what I shall drink, or wherewithal I shall be clothed ; but it is " righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." Therefore, be a subject of that kingdom ; accept the jurisdiction of its King and Governor ; pursue righteousness, and peace, and joy, and you will find that earthly and subordinate blessings will pursue you. The great law is, Pursue heavenly things, and earthly things will follow ; pursue earthly things, and you may miss them, while heavenly things will not follow. Seek first righteousness, and peace, and joy ; seek first to live, and act, and speak, and think, under the government, with a sense of the presence of, and as responsible to, the God who made you, and gave Christ to die for you ; and then all other things will be added.

But there is singled out here one distinctive and prominent element in this kingdom, namely, " His righteousness." There are three constituent elements of the kingdom of

heaven — righteousness, peace, joy ; but one of them is the basis of the other two ; or, rather, righteousness is the root, peace is the blossom, and joy is the fruit into which that blossom ripens. Now, says our blessed Lord, seek that kingdom, and this its distinctive and most glorious peculiarity, righteousness, first, and all the other things will be added unto you. The righteousness may be purity of heart, meekness of temper, integrity of conduct, singleness of purpose, simplicity of eye ; or it may be that distinctive righteousness, which is so peculiar to Christianity, as there only revealed, the righteousness by which we are justified, or “ the righteousness of God without the law manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets ; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe : for there is no difference : for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God ; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus : whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God ; to declare, I say, at this time, his righteousness : that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.” We may take it, therefore, as that righteousness which is imputed, and constitutes our title to heaven ; or that righteousness which is imparted, and makes our fitness for heaven : either that righteousness which is upon us, and of which Christ is the author ; or that righteousness which is in us, and of which the Holy Spirit is the worker : the external righteousness perfect, our only title ; the inner righteousness imperfect, but progressive, and our only fitness for the realms of glory.

Having seen what is meant by the kingdom of God, and by this righteousness, we are, in the next place, to see how it can be practically applied. In teaching or in learning, in college or in school, seek first the kingdom of God and his

righteousness. In other words, do not teach science first, religion next, but religion first, and science immediately after it. Do not suppose that schools will prosper where science is all, and religion nothing, any more than that schools can be of efficient use in reference to earth, where religion only is taught, and science is excluded. We do not wish science to be cast out of our schools any more than religion; but we wish science and religion both to be taught, but each in its own relative place — religion the governing, the all-pervading, the controlling element; and science, that which follows it, most precious and most important in its own place. Not that we wish to modify scientific discovery by religious truth, but that we wish man, whatever he learns, whatever he studies, to do it in the fear of God, never forgetting that, amid all the accomplishments and attainments of this present life, there is with reference to eternity only vexation of spirit, and that only in the knowledge of God and his Son Christ Jesus is there eternal life. We are not to go through Solomon to Christ, but by Christ to Solomon. We are not to cast out Solomon, that we may study Christ, nor still less to cast out Christ, that we may study Solomon; but to take the wisdom of this world, and the wisdom that is from above, to give to each its place, but to religion the supreme, the dominant, the most honorable place in our affections, and our hearts, and our pursuits. This is the blessed life.

In the next place, we are to seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, by seeking above all things, and securing primarily, the salvation of the soul. Do not seek first to be learned, to be rich, to be famed, but to be saved. Carry this as the most important principle that you can bear with you into the world, "What shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world," that is, all these things, "and lose his own soul?" that is, the kingdom of God and his righteousness. Therefore, seek first the kingdom of God, that is, secure the

safety of the soul ; and then go forth unshackled and unfettered to seek the remaining things in their place, and with the amount of energy and attention that is proportionate to their subordinate importance.

In settling on a ministry of the Gospel, if that be your option, apply this text. Do not first of all attach importance to the denomination, and then a secondary importance to what the minister of it teaches. Rather seek a ministry that preaches vital truth in an ecclesiastical polity you dislike, than a ministry that preaches deadly and pernicious error in an ecclesiastical polity that you prefer. Do not seek the form first, the substance second ; but the substance first, the form next. Sacrifice a ceremony for the truth's sake ; give up what you love, in order to have what you cannot live without. Concede a prejudice however early, a prepossession however deep, for the sake of that precious truth through which you are sanctified, and except in the light of which you cannot see the way to the kingdom of heaven. And when any one says, you ought not to forsake a ministry that does not preach truth, but to continue under it, praying that it may be better taught, and hoping that it may teach truth, so far there is good in this, but there is danger. If, day after day, you take with your daily meals the minutest doses of poison, these minute homœopathic doses, if I may so call them, will ultimately affect the whole system ; and if you attend a ministry where error is preached, however minutely, it will ultimately affect your soul's health. Analogy so teaches us ; and it seems to me that it is better to go to the chapel to hear the Gospel, than to remain in the parish church where it is not preached at all ; for, if you love the parish church much, surely you love the Gospel more ; and, should such a necessity ever occur to you, you leave the parish church, not because you love it less, but because you love the Gospel more. You must seek first vital truth, evangelical Christian-

ity, living religion, and then all the rest you will take as you can get it, and thus sacrifice all for the maintenance of a vital and indispensable principle.

In the education of your children in the school and at home, seek first the kingdom of God. Rather bring them up ignorant of many an elegant accomplishment, than ignorant of real religion. Send them to a school where they may be taught the accomplishments that you prefer, if you like, but see that they are there first taught the religion without which they cannot live holy, and die happy. Send them by all means to be taught by the most accomplished scholar, but try first to ascertain if that scholar be also a Christian. Do not teach your children first to be churchmen, and then Christians, or first to be dissenters, and then Christians; but teach them first to be Christians, and leave the churchmanship and the dissent to arrange themselves as may be. Seek first, in the education of your children, the kingdom of God, the sovereignty, the reign, the influence of real religion; and all the details of form and ceremony, and sect and system, will wonderfully adjust themselves. If all our faces are right towards heaven, we shall all march in beautiful and consistent array; for, seeking the main thing, the subordinate things will all be vouchsafed to us.

In your domestic arrangements seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness. Begin each day with seeking the blessing, without which it cannot prosper. Let your first thoughts and your first exercises be those of real religion. Seek every day first in time, as well as first in thought, "the kingdom of God and his righteousness; and all the rest shall be added unto you."

In entering on business, in selecting a profession, do not look alone at this, What will bring me the most money? but look first at this, Is it consistent with Christian duty? Will it leave me room for Christian thought, scriptural study, holy

privilege? Do not select a profession, a business, or an employment, that will give you no Sabbath, that will leave you no time for reading God's holy word; but seek first a business or a profession that will allow you time for religion; and then the rest will be added. Do not make the greatest profit to be the governing principle in your selection, but a subordinate one. Make it second, if you like, or third, if you like, but be sure that it is not made first.

In changing your residence, in emigrating (as in these days men are emigrating to such an extent, that the phrase given to their emigration is "an exodus"), do not go where the mines have the richest gold, or where the valleys are likely most to answer your expectations of profit; but do take into consideration this mighty, vital, everlasting, never-ceasing to be obligatory question, Shall I there hear the Gospel? Shall I be there within reach of a company of Christians? Shall I be there excluded from all that can remind me of God, of judgment, of a Saviour, of the soul, of eternity? Do not, like poor Lot, prefer the well-watered valley of the Jordan to higher and holier considerations; but seek first the kingdom of God; think first about religion, and then think next where the richest mines are struck, where the best pastures are to be found, and where you are likely soonest to get on in a world that is soon to pass away.

Thus your life will embody the prescription of Jesus, which, like the great law of gravitation, when once brought into action, will govern and control all with an unseen but not an unfelt power and influence — "Seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." Thus you will have true enjoyment of the things that you have; for you will be able to say, I have not a shilling in my purse, nor a sovereign in my bank, that has been earned in God's wrath, or in opposition to God's will, or in defiance of God's ways. You will feel your possessions to

be sweetened by the happy recollections that they are not what you sought first, but that they are things which God has added unto you whilst you were seeking first the better and the holier things of eternity. And when God takes away in his providence those subordinate things, you will still have peace; for you will have that kingdom of God, and his righteousness, which are the inexhaustible springs of real happiness; and, in the absence of this world's good things, you will have contentment; in the possession of this world's good things, you will have thankfulness; and whether God gives or takes away, your being possessed of this kingdom and righteousness will enable you to say, "Blessed be the name of the Lord."

Such is the way to enjoy the blessed life. The prescription is from the tree of life. It is not new or untried, but ancient, practical and ever successful.

CHAPTER XX.

COMPLETE IN CHRIST.

“ I know that safe with him remains,
Protected by his power,
What I ’ve committed to his trust,
Till the decisive hour.

“ Jesus, my shepherd, husband, friend,
My prophet, priest, and king,
My lord, my life, my way, my end,
Accept the praise I bring ! ”

“ Ye are complete in Christ. ” — COLOSSIANS 2 : 10.

THIS is one of the shortest, but most expressive epitomes of the most essential and vital truth of our blessed religion. The apostle warns those to whom he addressed the text against supposing that any philosophy that could be imported from the most polished capitals or universities of the earth, or any wisdom that could be struck out by the genius of man, is at all requisite, or in any sense needed, in order to constitute our perfect acceptance in the Lord Jesus Christ. He says, “ You do not need, as far as your acceptance in him is concerned, the sparks of philosophy ; for you have the great, bright sun. You do not need the cup of water ; you have access to the fountain. You do not require the rags of human righteousness, tainted and imperfect even when they are purest ; you have Christ the Lord your righteousness, all your wisdom, all your sanctification, all your desire. ” St. Paul does not mean that we may not study philosophy, or

that we are not to acquaint ourselves with science. The apostle is speaking, not of what is ornamental upon earth, but of what is essential in the prospect of eternity. He is pronouncing judgment in the sphere of religion, not in the sphere of human literature, science, or acquirement of any sort; he says, "Whatever may be useful to you as men, whatever may be dutiful as citizens, this alone is essential in the prospect of an everlasting world—Christ, our priest, prophet, and king;"—in other words, "Ye are complete in him."

What are some of the constituent elements of our completeness in Christ Jesus? I would answer, our completeness in Christ must denote our supply in him of all we lost in Adam. In him we lost our knowledge of God, our title and fitness for heaven, and all that the creature originally had as made in the image of a holy and perfectly happy God. All we lost in Adam is restored in Christ a thousand-fold. We are in him completely furnished with all that God can exact of a creature at a judgment-day, or that can fit a sinner for the joys, the glories, and the blessedness of heaven.

But what is meant by being in Christ? It is not enough to know that Christ was, it is requisite we should feel that Christ is to us something more than a distant person, or an historical fact; in other words, that he is to us a Saviour, prophet, priest, and king. In Christ is to be a Christian. Complete in Christ is having all that a Christian needs, or that a Christian heart can desire. "There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ." "I knew a man," says the apostle "in Christ."

This phraseology is so strange, so violent, as mere grammar, that, if it were not meant to convey a thought too magnificent for the formulas of human speech, it would be unjustifiable. We never say that a servant is in his master, a pupil in his teacher, a philosopher in his founder. Such language would be absurd. Then, how is it that the apostle says

that a Christian is in Christ? The explanation of it is, that a Christian's connection with Christ is totally different from a pupil's relation to his teacher, or a servant's connection with his master, or a philosopher's communion with his founder. A Christian is so truly knit to Christ, that he is represented by a branch in a tree, not tied on, not mechanically fastened to the parent stem, but part and parcel of its substance, deriving nutriment and sap from its roots, and bearing fruit, not in virtue of its own vitality, but of a vitality derived from the stem and roots with which it is connected.

Thus a Christian is in Christ. Now, in Christ, says the apostle, we are complete. In what respects? We lost in Adam our knowledge of God. When Adam turned his back upon Paradise, his brightest recollections of Deity were expunged from his memory, and his holiest impressions of His presence faded away from his heart; and all Adam's sons, as far as they are dependent upon earthly sources for their acquaintance with God, are yet more ignorant than he. Creation, before Adam fell, was the perfect mirror of God. Looking on its streams, its flowers, its landscapes, man could see God; but, the instant that sin smote creation, it shivered the grand and beautiful mirror into a thousand fragments, and now, instead of reflecting the likeness of God, it refracts it, and conveys distorted, mutilated, and imperfect representations of it: so that, looking into creation, we can see in one place evidence that God is good, and in another place evidence that God is angry, and in another place evidence that God punishes sin; and the creature's creed, as inferred from the page of creation, must be a mass of inconsistency and imperfection. He must be perplexed to know what God is. If God be holy, will he punish all sin? If God be good, will he pardon all sin? How deep down the moral scale will his mercy descend in pardoning? How high will his justice ascend in punishing? Will he condemn all? or will he save all? or whom

will he pardon? and whom will he punish? Nature is dumb, the oracle is silent, the mirror reflects not the deepest truth that human nature yearns to know. But that knowledge which we lost in Adam is restored in Christ. We see in him the very brightness of God's glory, in his tears God's compassion, in his miracles God's power, in his death God's justice, in his sacrifice God's love. Looking into that face that was marred on earth, but is now resplendent with unutterable glory beside the throne, I can see my Father, and learn the solution of the perplexing problem, how God can be holy and just while he yet pardons my sins, and saves my soul. I am complete in Christ Jesus.

We are complete in Christ, as far as our title to our forfeited inheritance is concerned. We lost in Adam our title to heaven. What was that? This do, and thou shalt live: be perfectly holy, and you shall be perpetually happy. That was the law under which Adam was placed; that is the law under which we are placed. But every conscience tells every man that he has broken the law, and that, if perpetual happiness is the blossom of perfect and perpetual holiness, he can never see it. But Christ is to us what we never could be to God. He who knew no sin was made sin for me, that I might be made just what I want, complete in the prospect of eternity, the righteousness of God in him. It is not true that under Christianity the law is diluted; it is not fact that the Lawgiver has come down from his demands. With Adam it was, "Do it yourself personally, and you shall live forever." With us it is, "Believe that Christ has done it for you, and you will just live as truly as if you had been Adam, and done it, and been happy forever." In other words, Adam had to perform the righteousness in order to have the title. He made the attempt and failed. We have but to accept the title already made, and we are justified and all-glorious in the sight of God. Now, what a blessed truth is this, that what

we lost in Adam—a right to heaven—is restored in Christ; that what man could not do in the best of circumstances, what he never can hope to do in the worst of circumstances, Christ has done for us; and I, the chiefest of sinners, resting upon him, in the exercise of true faith, as my substitute, my sacrifice, and all my righteousness, am just as accepted in the sight of God as if I had never fallen, accepted as Christ himself; for my righteousness is not man's, but a divine righteousness, the Lord my righteousness.

Luther justly called this the article of a standing or a falling church, that we are justified before God so completely by the righteousness of Christ, that we do not want any other, even if there were any other. We are complete. The righteousness is perfect. Our possession of it is indubitable. We do not need any other righteousness; we desire no addition to it. Would you bring a farthing taper to increase the light of the meridian sun? Would you take a little rag of human raiment to patch on the glorious garment of our salvation? We are complete, and we would tell saints in glory, if they offered their assistance, and still more sinners upon earth, whether priests or people, "We need nothing else than what we have, and we can be satisfied with nothing less than Christ has provided. We are completely justified and pardoned; we are complete in Christ."

We are complete in Christ in the sense that in him we have all fitness for heaven provided for us. We need not only a title to heaven, which we lost in Adam, but we need also a fitness for heaven, which we lost also in Adam. Heaven is a prepared place ("I go to prepare a place for you") for a prepared people ("He hath made us meet," or fit, "for the inheritance of the saints in light"). We need, not only a change of state, which is effected by Christ's righteousness being imputed to us, but we need a change of character, which is effected by Christ's Spirit dwelling in us. I need not only to

be complete as to my title, but also as to my character. And the same Saviour who took my sins upon him, and bore their penalty, and gives to me his righteousness, that I may inherit its results, sends, also, the Holy Spirit to change the heart of stone into the heart of flesh, to dissipate my prejudices, to bow the stubborn force of my passions, to create in me a clean heart, to make me progressively conformed unto himself: so that, when I shall enter heaven in virtue of the only title, Christ's righteousness, I may find myself able to breathe its air, to join in its songs, to take a part in its services, to mingle with its happy groups, and to live there the blessed life in its intensest state. This, also, I have, and therefore am complete in Christ; for he said, "It is expedient for you that I go away: for, if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you: but if I depart, I will send him unto you." Again, we are told that the Spirit regenerates the heart, enlightens the mind, comforts, sanctifies, purifies. I have in Christ that Holy Spirit. I am not to look to baptism for it, I must not look to the Lord's supper for it,—I must look above both, to Jesus alone, as the fountain from whom the Spirit comes, and by that Spirit alone I am sanctified and made fit for the inheritance of the saints in light.

I might go over almost every grace in the Christian economy, and show that all are to be had in Christ. Do we need an altar? We have one, but not of stone or brick, in the outer sanctuary, but "an altar whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle,"—Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day and forever. Do we need a priest? There is no visible priest in the Christian church. Jesus Christ is our High Priest, who ever liveth to make intercession for us. Do we need a sacrifice? There is no atoning sacrifice in the house of God. The Lord's supper is a festival, not a sacrifice. Jesus Christ offered up one sacrifice, once for all, inexhaustible, and available forever. Do we need peace?

He is our peace. Do we need to know the way to heaven? "I am the way, the truth, and the life." Do we need a rule of faith? His word is the lamp to our feet, and the light to our path. Do we need a hope that maketh not ashamed? "Christ in you the hope of glory." Therefore, we need not the traditions of men; we have the inspired, written and permanent truth of God. Therefore, we need not the sacrifices of human altars; for Christ made an end of sin when he died once for all, the just for the unjust. We need not merit of works, or the supererogatory virtues of a pretended church, or the merit of penance, or of purgatory, or any other; for we have a perfect righteousness in Christ. We need not the intercession of assumed saints beside the throne; for Jesus ever liveth to make intercession for us, and we are complete in him. We need not the purifying of purgatorial fire; for his blood cleanseth from all sin. We need not the forgiveness of council or Pope; for we are completely forgiven in him. Be steadfast, therefore, and immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE BLESSED PROMISE.

“ No sickness there,
No weary wasting of the frame away ;
No fearful shrinking from the midnight air,
No dread of summer’s bright and fervid ray ;

“ No hidden grief,
No wild and cheerless vision of despair ;
No vain petition for a swift relief,
No tearful eye, no broken hearts, are there.

“ Care has no home
Within that realm of ceaseless praise and song :
Its tossing billows break and melt in foam,
Far from the mansions of the spirit-throng.

“ The storm’s black wing
Is never spread athwart celestial skies ;
Its wailings blend not with the voice of spring,
As some too tender floweret fades and dies.

“ With Hope, our guide,
White-robed and innocent, to tread the way,
Why fear to plunge in Jordan’s rolling tide,
And find the haven of eternal day ? ”

“ In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began.” — *TITUS* 1 : 2.

THE stream of Christian safety begins in God, and leads infallibly to God. Only a religion that comes from heaven can lead men to heaven. The origin or fountain of our faith

is the pledge of its issue. Eternal life was promised before the world began; its beginning was eternity, and its issue shall be eternity. The past and the present announce one grand truth — salvation. All lines from the past, the present and the future, — the great circumference, — meet and mingle in Christ, in whom all the promises, and the promise of eternal life among the rest, are yea and amen.

The scheme of mercy and redeeming love was not an after device, to remedy an untoward or an unhappy disaster. The common idea, but a very unjust one, is, that man unfortunately sinned, and that God was necessitated to interpose after this disaster, in order to remedy the ruin that sin had wrought, and to introduce a better and a more glorious dispensation; whereas, the Bible plainly indicates that the whole scheme of mercy was devised before the world began, that it was the burden of a promise before there was a single sinner to taste the sweetness of that promise. "In hope," says the apostle, "of eternal life, which God hath promised before the world began." But in man's sin, though God thus prearranged, God had no share. In man's salvation God has all and exclusively the share. God shall receive nothing of the dishonor that accrues from man's sin; he shall receive all the glory that results from man's salvation. Before man's sin, God purposed to save him; before sin was in the world, eternal life was promised in Christ to them that should believe on his name. If this be so, the doctrine of grace is not a new religion. It is sometimes said that the Protestant religion, which is salvation by grace, is the new faith; and that the papal religion, which is the salvation by works, moral and sacerdotal, is the old. The papal religion is very old, but it is not old enough to be true; it is old, but the Protestant religion is first, for our religion was devised by the wisdom, expressed by the love, performed by the faithfulness of God, and in the promise, before there was a sinner to be saved, or ruin

introduced by sin to be rectified. The patriarchs unfolded the promise that God made before the world began, the apostles more clearly developed and displayed it, and the reformers of the sixteenth century simply rescued and vindicated its claims from the corrupt and deadly superstition which had overlaid it. The Christian faith was not an invention made in the councils of heaven after sin had introduced itself and its ruin into the world. Before the world began, before a creature was made on earth, or sin had infected a single province of it, the great scheme of restoration was devised, and committed to a promise, to be realized in the fulness of the times.

But when we read of a promise made before the world began, we are naturally puzzled to ascertain to whom this promise was made. A promise always implies a promiser and a person to whom it is given; there must be two parties in this matter, — one is not enough. If these two parties be required for a promise, who can have been the party to whom it was made before man was himself created, or the world was organized as it is? It was not made to man, for he was not in existence. It was not made to angels; the elect angels needed it not, and the lost angels were beyond the reach of it. To whom, then, was it made? To Him who was before the world, who created it, who was in the beginning, and was God, and was with God, and without whom nothing was made that was made, and who afterwards became man. The promise was given to the Lord Jesus Christ.

But, if made to him, what interest can we have in it? He was selected as the head in whom the promise should be deposited for us; by union with whom, we that need the promise taste its sweetness, and reap all its power. The first promise, "The woman's seed shall bruise the serpent's head," which embosomed the frailty of man and the victory of Christ, was made in him, as it was made to him. It was a note of this

promise audible; it was a leaf from this tree of life laid on the heart of humanity, which was further developed — the very same promise, not another promise — when God said to Abraham, “In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed.” The whole course of revelation is just the promise of eternal life, which was made to Christ the mediator, becoming more and more unequivocally displayed, still more and more audible, until it shall find its echoes in the song of the everlasting jubilee, “Glory, and honor, and blessing, and power, unto him that loved us and washed us in his blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto our God; and we shall reign with him for ever and ever.” Thus the promises were made to Christ, but made to him, not as God, but as the mediator between God and man. Union with Christ by living faith is necessary on our part to realize the promises, and to feel their power. God hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places, but all are treasured up in Christ Jesus, from whose fulness we must draw grace for grace in order to enjoy them. This promise was made before the world began, to the Lord Jesus Christ, and to him as the mediator, the divine head, for the enjoyment of his believing and adopted people. Christ will have all the glory of every promise which in the realms of the saved shall meet its fulfilment; and, as we recount the successive links of that resplendent chain of promise, which stretches from Christ before the world began, and terminates in Christ after the age is closed, we shall joyfully give to him all the glory, the honor and the praise. The promise was uttered by the Father as the expression of his infinite love; it is conveyed through the Son as the only mediator; it is applied to our hearts by the Holy Spirit of God; and thus a Triune Jehovah has all the glory, and redeemed and ransomed saints shall have all the benefit of a life blessed forevermore.

This promise of eternal life made to Christ before the world

began was and is not any new creation of love in God, but the expression and the unfolding of a love that was already in him. If God had never promised, his love would have been equally certain ; if he had never promised eternal life, it would, nevertheless, have been bestowed. The promise is not the creation of a love that was not, but the expression audible to man of a love that everlastingly was. It is, if I may so say, God's love made audible. It is a stream from the deep and exhaustless fountain of infinite paternal love. Just as the flowers of the earth indicate its fertility, as the stars of the heaven are the exponents of its splendor, the promises of God, spread over the church like flowers, over the Bible like stars, are the manifestations and the exponents of that hidden love which loved us before the world began, and which shall find its completest trophy in the salvation and the everlasting happiness of all that open their hearts simply to accept it. If, therefore, God had not promised, his love would have been the same ; but his giving a promise is an evidence of that love which, having given Christ the chief thing, freely with him also gives us all things.

This promise of eternal life is not, like the promises made upon earth, precarious, and not to be relied on, but sure and certain ; or, in the language of an apostle, " Yea and amen in Christ Jesus." The promises of Satan are gilded lies, plausible deceptions ; he never made a promise that he meant to keep, except the keeping of the promise should be power to himself and probable ruin to the creature. The promises of man are extremely precarious ; they depend upon a thousand contingencies. The promise made to-day he may be unable, or he may be unwilling, to keep to-morrow. But God's promises are not so. The apostle tells us God " cannot lie," " God is not a man that he should lie." Whatever, therefore, God has promised, that his faithfulness will do. God will never refuse to do that which he has distinctly, unequivocally promised

What comfort is this — “I give unto them eternal life, and none shall pluck them out of my hand:” this is true and must stand, if all the stars should fall from their sockets; not one syllable of that promise shall fail, though heaven and earth should pass away. This is the blessed life.

And, in the next place, God cannot forget. Man one day makes a promise, and next day he forgets that he made it; but God has no memory; the past, the present and the future, are equally luminous, being one everlasting present before the Almighty. And man sometimes, when he makes a promise, finds circumstances change, his own dispositions change, and sinfully, but yet actually, he recedes from his promise. But God cannot change; he is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever; he is not a man that he should repent.

Man is sometimes himself swept away before the time occurs that he should make good the promise that he has given; but God can never fail; omnipotence, omnipresence, endure forever; he shall outlast all, none shall outlast him. Rocks shall be melted, valleys shall be raised, hills shall be levelled, kings shall fall from their thrones, the crowds shall rise in vengeance, nations shall be convulsed, and continents upheaved: but not one jot or tittle of the largest or the least promise that God has made shall ever pass away, till all be fulfilled. This promise came before the world was; it is carried on independent of the world; and it will survive and flourish when the earth and the things that are therein shall be burned up. Such is the promise of eternal life.

But, as the fulfilment of this promise is not contingent upon such incidental things as those that I have alluded to, it is also not contingent upon our deserts. God made the promise to us in Christ, for Christ's sake, in the exercise of sovereignty; and when we sin, grievous as it is, deeply to be deprecated as it must be, yet it does not make God unfaithful to his promise. If God's love were dependent upon ours, it would speedily

depart; if the stability of God's promises were contingent upon the stability of our faith, we should never see their fulfilment. But he deals with us in the exercise of glorious sovereignty, follows us when we forsake him, draws us to himself by the exhibition of his love, and binds us with cords of goodness that cannot be dissolved. The promise of eternal life does not depend upon anything in the world, nor upon anything that we are; it is made to all that believe in Christ Jesus, and he that is a living member of that living Saviour has a right to all the promises that are yea and amen in Christ Jesus.

Let us notice, however, the special burden of the promise: "In hope of eternal life, which God hath promised before the world began." Eternal life is the burden of this promise: It is a spiritual life now, an eternal life hereafter. Our natural life begins at our birth, and terminates in the grave; our eternal life begins at our new birth, and never terminates. Every man has a life from which immortality is inseparable. There are two great currents that rush along the channels of time,—a current of immortal life, that ends in that moaning sea of sorrow that never has been sounded, and a current of spiritual life, that enters, not ends, in that ocean of joy which is at God's right hand, the chimes and the waves of which are pleasures that roll and flow forever. Every man must live, forever, a life of everlasting suffering, or a life of everlasting joy. Heaven and hell, to use the popular expressions that designate the future, are not states into which we are mechanically thrust at death, but progressions, begun in time, and only matured and developed throughout eternity. Every one has the spark of heaven, or the worm of hell, in his bosom at this moment, moving onward with irresistible progression, either to an inheritance of joy incorruptible, or to a doom of misery where God hath forgotten to be gracious. There is no standing still, there is no mid-position; there is no

going back: onward we must move. And the most solemn inquiry that man is called upon to make is, What is my course? in what way am I travelling? what destiny am I nearing? what will be my doom? Is it everlasting life, the burden of a promise? or eternal death, the burden of a terrible, but inevitable curse? "The promise of eternal life" is life begun here.

This suggests the inquiry, Are we at this moment possessed of that spiritual life, which is the bud that is to be unfolded in the blossom of eternal life, when time and things temporal shall be no more at all? Let us test our feelings and hopes by the plain and unequivocal characteristics of spiritual and eternal life, wherever it is realized. "He that believeth on the Son," says Jesus, "hath eternal life." It is not simply a thing of the future, but an enjoyment for the present. "He that believeth not the Son shall not see this eternal life, but the wrath of God," the only element in its stead, "abideth on him." If, then, as professed believers in the Gospel, we have this eternal life, it will be found invariably an internal principle operating upon the whole outer life, and never an influence, a tone, a coloring, superinduced from without. If we pray because we wish to be seen to do so of men, if we give alms in order to get credit of men, if the whole of our character is shaped and toned by influences palpably without, and not from a great spring of power or virtue within, we give too plain and unequivocal proof that this spiritual life is not ours. He that has the spiritual life, has it as a spring of living water within, that overflows the whole of his outer conduct and intercourse with society; and he that has but the semblance of it, a name to live by whilst he is dead, is made what he looks, not by a force from within, but wholly and simply by conventionalism, or influence from without.

Wherever this spiritual life is, it will exhibit its existence by the attributes of life. A healthy man feels hungry, and

he must have bread; thirsty, and he must have water to drink. And, if we have this spiritual life, we shall hunger for living bread, and thirst for living water. A hungry man will not be satisfied with a stone; if he ask for a fish, he will not accept a serpent; if he ask for bread, he will not eat stone. And, if you are spiritual and living men, you will not wait upon the ministry of a man who feeds you with husks, and not wheat; who gives you the traditions of men, and not the truths of the Gospel; and tries to satisfy the great and hungry heart of humanity with a stone for bread, a serpent for a fish, a scorpion for an egg. Do you come to the sanctuary hungry for bread? Can you love the Gospel, though conveyed in the simplest and least attractive formulas? It is always a sign of a very sickly appetite when one needs to add to his food spices and stimulants. It is no less evidence of a very feeble life, if life there be, when we cannot hear the plain truths of the Gospel except they be adorned with the flowers of eloquence, or tricked out with the gaudy ornaments of human rhetoric. The farmer likes a field that is filled with corn, not one that grows with resplendent poppies; he likes grass that is pure grass, fit for the service of the beast upon the hills, not that which is mixed with buttercups. When we come to the sanctuary, it is not flowers we want, to be a bouquet of beauty; but food to sustain our souls, and strengthen us for the toil, and the travail, and the trials of the week. If, therefore, we have this spiritual life, we shall be satisfied with nothing short of bread; and we shall not go to spend our time for that which is not bread, and our attention for that which profiteth not.

If we have this spiritual life, which is the germ of eternal life, it will unfold itself in action. The evidence of a dead man is, that the lungs do not move, the eyes do not open, the hands are not lifted, the feet are motionless. The evidence of a living man, spiritually living, is action. Wherever there

is the life of God in the soul, there will be prayer. Prayer is a Christian's vital air; it is the breath of his soul. A praying man, truly praying, must be a living man; and no living man ever endured without prayer. He will not only pray, but he will praise, he will walk in God's ways, his hands will be employed in God's service; he will demonstrate that there is life within by devotedness, self-sacrifice, liberality, consistency, without.

The first thing man needs is life; the next thing is prescription for the development of that life. If a person receives life, he will walk; and we need not trouble a man who is dead to speak, or to point out the way to a city of habitation. The first thing we need is life from God, and the next thing is a prescription of the way in which we are to walk. Socinianism presents Christianity simply as a directory, and forgets that man is dead. Evangelical religion appeals to God, first for fire from the altar that man may live, and then it lays down the course in which man is to walk.

This spiritual life will be characterized by another feature, namely, sensibility. To a Christian man, sin is pain, holiness is pleasure. To a dead man's flesh the point of the sword would convey no pain; to a living man's finger the prick of a pin would inflict a pang felt throughout the system. Wherever, therefore, the soul is alive by the possession of this eternal life, it will be sensible to that which does violence to it, and it will rejoice in that which augments its happiness and unfolds its nature. If, therefore, we be spiritually alive, if we are alive in God, if this promise is anything in our experience, we shall have the sensibilities and the sympathies of spiritual life.

This life lives in every latitude, maintains its vitality in every phase of human experience. It is a characteristic of human life that it can acclimate itself. Man can live amid

the polar snows, or under equatorial suns, there being in life that wonderful power of adaptation which enables him to find his home wherever on the surface of the globe Providence may place him. What is true of this animal life is no less so of this spiritual life. It will flourish in adversity, it will triumph in prosperity, and will maintain its strength and its functions unimpaired in the tents of Mesech and the tabernacles of Kedar, or in the palace of Pharaoh, or in the court of the Ethiopian queen, or in the Basilica of Nero. It matters not in what outward circumstances a Christian may be placed; he either defies them and lives to God, or he subdues them and makes them the willing exponents of his mind, or he turns them to the glory of God, and to the benefit of those with whom he is associated in life.

Have we this spiritual life, hid, it may be, now, with Christ in God, but sure to be developed, when time and things temporal shall be no more, in eternal life, the promise of which was made before the world began? The possession of this life is what we are here for; the loss of this life is the loss of happiness; the gain of it is the greatest gain that man can make, for "what shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own immortal soul?"

But this life, which I have said is the burden of a promise, is, also, in the next place, and the last place, stated to be the object of hope. "In hope of eternal life, which God hath promised." The promise is the husk; eternal life is the living seed within; hope is the hand that lays hold of it, and feeds on it. What, then, is that hope which seizes this eternal life which God laid up in the promise before the world began? There is a distinction between faith and hope; — faith is essential to a man's safety; hope is inseparable from a Christian's comfort. If you have no faith, you have no Christianity; if you have no hope, you have no enjoyment of that Christianity. Faith grasps every truth

embosomed in a doctrine ; hope seizes every joy contained in a promise. Faith takes whatever is true that God has placed in his word ; hope takes whatever is bright and happy which God has embosomed in the promises. The basket of doctrine holds the truth that faith feeds on ; the cup of a promise holds the joyful and exhilarating draught that hope thankfully drinks. The one, that is, faith, leans upon the word of God ; the other, that is, hope, leans upon the promises of God. What God has promised to do is what hope looks at ; what God has declared he has done is what faith leans on. Faith lives on the past and the present ; hope lives on the future ; and faith and hope take the whole, past, present, and future. Hence, faith draws nutriment from the past into the present ; hope draws nutriment from the future into the present ; both bring their nutriment from afar, — the one from the past, and the other from the future. Faith spreads its wing and alights upon the glorious sentiments, “ God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him might not perish, but have everlasting life ; ” “ He that knew no sin was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him ; ” “ The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin. ” Faith rests upon these, feeds upon them, and we, being justified, have peace with God. Hope, on the other hand, spreads its wing, and soars onward into the future ; reads of “ a city that hath foundations, ” “ a better country, ” “ a rest that remaineth for the people of God, ” “ an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away ; ” and thus it is filled with joy unutterable and full of glory. Faith looks back to the cross, hope looks forward to the crown ; faith and hope look to one Christ, — the one to Christ as the sufferer, the other to Christ as the conqueror, but to each, as to both, Christ is all and in all.

If there be this distinction between the natures of faith

and hope, there is none in their certainty. What a man spiritually hopes for is just as certain as what a man spiritually believes in. It is no more certain that Christ died than that Christ will come again; it is not one whit more certain that Christ endured the cross than that he will wear the crown; and, therefore, the hope that anticipates the glorious crown is just as sure as the faith that looks back and rests upon the cross on which Jesus died. Yet this is not the world's idea; it speaks of hope as an airy vision, it talks of blasted hopes, of disappointed expectations, of things airy as hope. The word of God has no such language; it speaks of hope as a helmet for the head, as an anchor sure and steadfast within the veil, at which we may ride secure amid the storms of coming ages; and when the waves are most tumultuous and troubled, lift up our heads, knowing that our redemption draweth nigh.

Thus there is a promise sovereign in its origin, a burden or the contents of that promise,—eternal life, and something that lays hold of it,—the grace of hope. But when the future age shall arrive, this hope, so certain now, shall be dissolved, and this faith, so precious now, shall be lost in fruition. In the future there shall be nothing to believe, for all will be seen, heard, and tasted; and there shall be nothing to be hoped for, for all its splendor and glory shall be fully come. Faith has in it now something of love,—“Whom having not seen we love, and in whom, though now we see him not, yet believing we rejoice.” Hope likewise has in it something of love. But when the last day comes in the last age, and the new world shall begin, then faith and hope shall be consumed in the flames of love, willing, devoted, and rejoicing victims. There shall be no space in heaven for faith; there shall be no space in heaven for hope; love shall fill all the interstices of the human heart. Having ceased to believe, and there being no necessity to hope, we shall love

with all the heart, and all the soul, and all the strength ; and, so loving, live on a higher and brighter table-land the blessed of life.

Let us walk as the possessors of such hope ; let us live above the world, where our heart and our treasure is ; whilst in the world, let us not be of it ; in the language of an apostle who has described what the promises of God are fitted to do, "Whereby are given to us exceeding great and precious promises,"—for this end,—“that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through sin.” Let us, as possessors of these promises, sure and steadfast, live as the glorious expectants of immortality, where our hopes and our anticipations are, at the right hand of God, in the presence of that glory which is unspeakable and full of joy, into which, if there be any truth in what faith believes, if there be any certainty in what hope cherishes, we, as possessed of the blessed life now, shall be admitted into the full realization of eternal life, without suspension and without end.

CHAPTER XXII.

WORDS OF ETERNAL LIFE.

“ Lord of all that ’s fair to see,
Come, reveal thyself to me.
Let me, ’mid thy radiant light,
View thine unveiled glories bright.
Let thy Deity profound
Me in heart and soul surround ;
From my mind its idols chase,
And wean from words of time and place.”

“ Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go ? thou hast the words of eternal life.” — JOHN 6 : 68.

MAN has sought such words in the height and in the depth, in the past and in the present, but he has not found them ; no accents of life have sounded in the hearing of any who have not sat at the feet, and listened to the teaching, of the Son of God. Man’s great desire is to find some such intimation as is contained in these words. We see time rushing past us with the speed of a torrent ; we feel ourselves borne upon its surface, and, untaught by the Gospel, we know not what is the nature of that unsounded depth to which we and it are approaching. We ask ourselves, when we soberly and quietly look about us, What are we ? What is our place here ? Am I a mere bubble on the surface ? is life a mere eddy in the current ? Is that future which I must face, and which seems to roll inward every moment like a great ocean, annihilation ? Is death everlasting silence, — eternal separa-

tion from those I love,—the extinction of hopes I have cherished in my heart, and of images that are there as in a picture-gallery I must resist letting go? Do I lie down like the beasts of the field, and when I cease to be, and to breathe, does this wonderful structure, this far-grasping intellect, this soul of illimitable desires, this nature of boundless capacities, lie down in the dust, and cease to be? These are questions that have been often asked in the past, and are asked still oftener now. There is not a sober mind on earth that can sequester itself from the din, the bustle, and the interests of the world, over whom these thoughts do not pass, and in the secret depths of which questions such as these are not ceaselessly and earnestly suggested. And, if it is not to be annihilation, if time is only the preface to eternity, if there be a future, what is the way to that future, and what is its nature? Will there be universal restoration, whatever be the ruin, or will there be universal condemnation, whatever be the worth? Is there penalty in the future following crime in the present, as echo follows sound? Are there thrones of glory there? and, if so, who sits upon them? Are there joys at God's right hand? and, if so, who tastes them? Are there any questions equal to these in importance—is there anything that so immensely concerns us? Is not that man awfully besotted by this world's cares, anxieties, ambitions, passions, who does not ask, yearning for satisfaction, What am I? Where am I going? Can I hear at any oracle one sweet sound of eternal life, to tell me that I am not a cast-off creature,—that this world is not an orphan orb,—that there is a joyous land beyond the stars, and that the way to it is so plain that the wayfaring man need not err therein? Ask philosophy if it can tell you the way, and it is dumb; ask exhausted Judaism,—the tabernacle, the mercy-seat, the cherubim, Moses, Bezaleel, Aaron,—and they are dumb. Nature, once eloquent in Eden, is silent, and can give you no

answer ; conscience tells you there is something wrong, and it is too much a fearful looking for judgment and condemnation. Plato can guess, Socrates can hope, Cicero will resolve ; but, blessed Jesus, thou only hast the words of eternal life !

When Peter addressed our Lord in these words, he acted as the spokesman of all, and uttered, not a personal and private and peculiar sentiment, but a feeling that rose from the heart of humanity, and found its expression by his lips. The poor disciples, though they erred often, and wavered in their faith, yet shrunk back with horror at the very idea of separation from Christ. He alone had taught them when no one beside was able or willing ; as a hen gathereth her brood under her wings, so had Jesus gathered and collected them ; he had pitied their errors, corrected their mistakes, forgiven their sins ; and the very thought of separation was terrible, as if they had said, "Blessed Lord, thou hast been our support, our teacher, our hope, our joy ; if thou departest, we shall be like branches broken from the vine—prostrate, bleeding upon the earth, without a home, without a hope, without a foundation of any sort. Leave us not, nor forsake us ; for to whom can we go ? Thou only hast what is music in our ear—the words of eternal life."

There are seasons when these words will be the sentiments of every true Christian, more or less prominently, in this present world ; and it is by looking at some of these seasons that we shall see the words in their own beautiful and holy light, and discover how much more of precious truth is in them than meets the eye or the ear when first read or spoken. We sometimes look around us in this world, and we see perplexities that tease us, and defy every possible solution, How often do we see one struggling with ceaseless poverty whose ingenuous and noble character seems to us so little to deserve so sad a lot ! We see, again, another surrounded with all the affluence of the earth, but who seems of all men the least to deserve it

We see innocence bowed to the dust, and guilt triumphant and ascendant. We see hate, passion, intemperance, sometimes succeed; and integrity and moral worth sometimes suffer; and we ask, How is this possible? If there be a God, holy, just, true, who governs the world, how can these things be? Such a question is neither strange nor new. The Psalmist once saw the same thing, and his feet stumbled, and he began to say, Then religion is vain; I have washed my hands in innocence in vain; the whole horizon is black, the earth is chaos, Providence must be a dream. "Until," he says, "I went into the sanctuary—then understood I their end." Then this world-drama is not the close; things as they are are not normal; another day comes, when all shall be adjusted and put right. This world, without a day of judgment to close it and to crown it, would be like a pyramid without its apex, like the human body without its head—imperfect, unnatural, monstrous, incomplete. But Jesus tells us that a day comes when God shall judge the secrets of all hearts, and all things shall be put in their right light, and all character shall meet its just destiny; and all the things of the world shall be so explained and set before us that we shall see there was a God, and that the temporary chaos was only the prelude or the inevitable preface to a more lasting and glorious harmony. It is thus that we find in this book, which contains the words of eternal life, the solution of difficulties that would otherwise overwhelm us; it is a light at the end of a dark and winding tunnel, which satisfies us that all is now under the providential control, and that all will end in the glory of God.

There are other times when the soul of man is full of deep and anxious thoughts; even when it goes furthest from God, it feels often wants that the mere body cannot satisfy, hopes and fears which nothing upon this earth can scatter. There are times when you begin to find out that what you once

thought shadows are solemn and gloomy realities. Under some desolating stroke, have we not felt all seemingly mist and shadow around, and all emptiness above? And have we not then been conscious of a hunger that this world's bread cannot satisfy; of a thirst that this world's springs cannot remove; of necessities, of an aching emptiness of soul, that is at once the prophecy of a grand supply, and the evidence to us that something has gone sadly, if not vitally, wrong? We are out, perhaps, amid the scenes of nature; we look above us, and the very silence of a starry night seems almost to suggest to us questions deeper and profounder than nature can ever answer, but to which there are blessed replies in this holy word of God. We then feel there is something greater than the world; something more lasting than its machinery; some one above it that made it, some one in it that controls it. What is that? Who is this? We refer to Christ; he alone has the words of eternal life.

But there is another state in which the soul often finds itself. We have had hours of deep and penetrating conviction of sin. We look back upon the past period of our life, and the lightning of Sinai shines upon the tablets of the soul, and makes legible and visible life's past and hidden misdoings; our own conscience speaks from the depths of the soul, and reasons of righteousness, and temperance, and judgment. I cannot see that I have been a drunkard, or a robber, or a murderer; but I do feel that I have lived for self, for the world, or, for what seems more amiable, society, or, what seems still better, to do temporal good to others; but I do feel that God has not been in all my thoughts, that the first commandment of the law I have thus trodden under foot, forgotten, neglected, or positively despised; and I am constrained to ask, what the thoughtless sometimes ask, in the prospect of a future, in the precarious uncertainty of life, in the consciousness of something higher than the life that now

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is, How shall I appear before God?—wherewithal shall I come before the Most High? I am a sinner; will God forgive me? I am guilty; is there pardon for my trespasses? And, if there be pardon, who can assure me of it? if there be a sin-forgiving God, who can convince me of this? In that blessed book, which grows not old with years,—which is the oracle in which Christ still speaks, on whose brow there are no wrinkles,—which the age is far behind, and has never yet got beyond,—I read of One who said words of eternal life, “Go and sin no more.” I read the history of a prodigal who came from the midst of estrangement and apostasy, and, instead of finding in his father’s house the preparation for his punishment, found ready for his reception a joyous festival. I read in that blessed book of One who says that he has power to forgive sins; and, hearing such tidings as these, I go, not to the minister, not to the priest, not to the teaching of Christ, not to the precepts of Christ, but to Christ himself, and I say, “O thou who didst receive the prodigal, wilt thou refuse me? Thou who didst say to the woman caught in sin, ‘Neither do I condemn thee; go and sin no more,’ is there not forgiveness for me? Thou who hast power to forgive sins, am I exempt—am I set aside, and placed beyond the reach of it?” These words were spoken, not for the first century, nor for the second, nor for the tenth, nor for the sixteenth, but for the nineteenth, and for all ages and for all persons: “Whosoever will, let him come and take of the water of life freely,”—that is, let him come and be freely pardoned, fully sanctified, and made fit for heaven and for happiness. And when I go to Christ, in trustful faith, I find in him, not a cold teacher, a distant sovereign, with silent reserve, like the official men of this world, who are obliged to hedge themselves round with a thousand repulsive points, but whose very official dignity is only to us a proof that the greatest upon earth must not be too nearly and closely looked at, lest they be found to be like

other men,—not the cold reserve of a distant king, not the mere guidance of a teacher, but one who was in all points tempted as we are,—who is able to sympathize with us, who has wisdom to teach us, who has love to engage in teaching us; in him and from him I hear the words of eternal life, and to him I go, and, justified by faith, I have peace with God through Christ Jesus.

It will suggest itself also—especially in these days of division, separation and dispute, when Christian men of different sections of the church seem, alas! to try to discover in how many points they differ, and to conceal and lose sight of the blessed and glorious ones in which they agree. You hear of schism here, dispute there, separation elsewhere; you hear sounding from one side, “You must join us, or you will never get to heaven.” You hear proclaimed from another part, “Unless you pronounce the same Shibboleth, and say it in our way, you have no chance of ever enjoying happiness hereafter;” and an inquiring and an anxious mind, hearing so many different opinions, listening to so many conflicting sects, is bewildered and puzzled. Your feet almost slip, and you say, “There is a good man of that party; here is a great man of another;—I wonder if I am right; shall I join this party, shall I go to that?” The solution of your difficulty is a very simple one. Salvation is not incorporation with a church, but union with Christ, the head of the church universal. You are not to go to a prelate or priest, or a synod or a presbytery, for the words of eternal life; you are to go to Christ, for he alone has them. The way to heaven is not a church, but Christ; it is not one whit nearer to heaven through a Protestant church than it is through a Romish chapel. The way to heaven is not through a church, or a chapel, or a cathedral, or a meeting-house, at all; it is by Christ Jesus alone; and if you belong to him, you may be perfectly satisfied that you belong to the true church; and if you do not

belong to him, by union with him in living and true and fruitful faith, you may worship in a cathedral, or in a chapel, — you may belong to the church of ecclesiastics, the most quarrelsome church of all, or to the meeting of “ Friends,” the quietest of all, — but you do not belong to the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, shut your ears to the din of ecclesiastics, put outside the door altogether the sound of contentious words; and in silence and in quiet open this blessed book, and hear, not what Paul says even, or what Apollos says, or what this rabbi thinks, or what that divine believes, but hear what Christ says; for thou, blessed Jesus, alone hast the words of eternal life.

There are other seasons, also, in the experience of us all, — seasons of severe and painful affliction, when we have lost all that we had treasured or desired in the world, and feel indeed that we are desolate. In a world where mercantile enterprise meets with so many sad and unexpected reversals, there is not a day that shuts down upon this great metropolis that does not end on hearts that were bright and hopeful at dawn, but are desolate, and lonely, and sorrowful, at night. In one street one is left an orphan, without a friend or a sympathy in the world; in another, there is a widow weeping with her children, knowing not where to find to-morrow’s bread or this day’s raiment. In such circumstances as these, what can comfort? By all means supply the loss as you are able; sympathy, brotherly love, Christian liberality, will induce you to make the attempt; but remember, in the orphan’s heart, and in the widow’s soul, and in the sufferer’s mind, there is a word that will go deeper than any that man can utter, and that blessed word falls from the lips of Jesus; he has words that will comfort, he can give a peace that will pass understanding, he can bind up the broken heart, and give beauty for ashes, and make the widow’s soul to sing for joy.

There are times, too, in the experience of us all, — sometimes at least in this world, — when we are the subjects of painful and of bitter bereavement. At such an hour, when some beloved one is taken away, in whom your hopes, your affections, your joys in this world, were garnered up, — at that moment, when no anxious look can start the rigid eyelid, no agonizing question, “Is it well with thee in the future world?” will open the frozen lips, — when all is silence, however earnestly you question, — what, at such an hour, can give comfort? The dead cannot speak, the living cannot comfort; when the mere worldling comes and tries to speak comfort, you could wish that he were many miles away. In the hour of the deepest desolation, when all earthly grandeur seems empty, and all earthly wealth is worthless, I do not know any words that are worth hearing, except the words of Christ, “Thy brother shall live again,” — “I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live,” — “Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord; they rest from their labors, and their works do follow them.” At such an hour we find in the book a comfort in its words, a power in its lessons, a music in its hopes and consolations, that makes all else appear poor, and empty, and worthless, in comparison.

When that hour comes to us, that comes to all, — when we, too, the youngest, and the strongest, and the healthiest of my readers, must see and feel pass over us the shadow of fatal disease, or imminent death; the brow fevered, the pulse quickened, and all presentiments of what must receive us — the house appointed for all living, — what is it at such an hour that can really comfort us? What is it in such a moment that can give peace? Nothing, nothing upon earth, but the words of eternal life. That individual who would try to hush this sweet sound is cruel indeed; the man that would try to take from my heart this blessed balm is indeed to be

pitied by us, — he must surely be condemned of God. Take away from me these words, shut the Bible, clasp it, tear it from me, — to whom can I go? The Speaker of the words of eternal life is there only.

Thus, at whatever phase of human experience we look into, whatever portion of human life we penetrate, we must see that, in all time of its tribulation, in all time of its weeping, in the hour of the loss of those we love, and in the hour that ushers in our own departure to another world, there is repose and consolation in Christ only; and, like the dove of Noah, wing-wearied over chaos, we can find peace and consolation and rest only in him.

Nothing else will succeed in such times as these. Feed the palate with all the delicacies of the East, store the intellect with great thoughts, give the weeper that mourns over his dead all that this world can supply; and the heart, unsatisfied and uncomposed, will lift up its piercing entreaty, "Give me, O, give me words of eternal life; bread that can feed me, and water that can refresh me." The soul is too great to be satisfied with anything that this world can yield, and its deep sense of loss in the circumstances I have mentioned too real to be relieved by the poor and the miserable comforts that earth can give. But in Christ I find all and more than I need for every emergency. Do I need pardon? In him is forgiveness. Do I need sanctification? "I will pray the Father, and he will send you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever." Do I need strength? "My strength is made perfect in weakness." Do I need grace? "My grace is sufficient for thee." Do I need acquittal? "There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." Do I need triumph over death, — victory over the grave, — the opening of the kingdom of heaven to me, a believer? I can say, "O death, where is thy sting?"

O grave, where is thy victory?" Absent from the body is to me to be present with the Lord.

We now know what true religion is; not, as we have seen, union to a sect, or membership of a church, or being an admirer of such a preacher, or a member of such a party. This is not religion; it is often compatible with the absence of vital religion; for, alas! alas! it is too true that in the visible church there have been quarrels that would even disgrace the House of Commons; among divines there have been disputes, angry, bitter, acrimonious disputes, that are not found amid the partisans of this world. The visible church is made up of tares and wheat, bad and good, onward to the very end; and to belong to a visible church, and to be zealous and enthusiastic for it, is not necessarily to be a Christian. True religion is clinging to Christ, if all the churches upon earth should forsake him, resting upon him for pardon, upon his promise for the Holy Spirit, upon his words of eternal life for the hopes of glory. This is living and true religion; it is a personal thing, not an ecclesiastical thing; it is telling all priests — Presbyters, Episcopalians, Independents, Baptists — to stand at the bottom of the mount, while I, like Abraham, ascend to its sun-lit peak alone, hear my Father speak to me, and alone ask of him to speak again the blessed words of eternal life. This is religion, and for this there is no substitute, and nothing else can supersede it. And if men, instead of wrangling about church-mending, would only exercise towards each other more of Christian love, there would be greater peace and progress in Christianity throughout the world.

Recollect, whatever be your case, whatever be your perplexity, whatever be your loss, that Christ is always present to speak to you the words of eternal life. I know it is difficult to teach this; you say, O, if he were only seated in the midst of us; if we were with him in the boat in the lake

of Gennesaret; if we could but listen to him; if he were only now visible before our eyes, and talking to us, then, indeed, we could hear with delight; but he is absent! Yes, absent personally, but present truly. It is not seen things that are the most real: unseen things are the real; seen things are the sham, the evanescent, the transient; we are told that Jesus is with his people to the end of the world, and that, wherever two or three are met together in his name, there is he in the midst of them. What a blessed thought is this! You may be far from church, from minister, from sacrament, far from sweet sounds of praise and from the earnest entreaties of prayer; but, if a Christian, you never can go far from Christ. You may be far, far from all the means of grace, from all the forms of worship; but you never, if a Christian, can be far from Christ. It is the worshipping heart that makes holy ground; and wherever such a heart beats, there is present One who hears it, and who knows its wants before it can find words adequately to express them. Never let go the blessed thought that you are as near Christ now as Peter was; that you can hear him now speaking as truly, as eloquently, as musically, as we can show you, as ever Paul or John heard him speak upon earth; and that his presence, instead of being less real, is more real, and may by you be more sweetly and powerfully felt, than when Peter heard him, and said, "Lord, evermore give us this bread; speak to us, O Lord, the words of eternal life." But, you ask, how does he speak to us? What is the Bible? Just the echo, perpetuated along the centuries, the corridors of time, of what Christ said upon the mount of Beatitudes, on Calvary, and in Gethsemane. A voice spoken in a long gallery reverberates along its corridors till it is heard at the other end; the words of Jesus, spoken eighteen centuries ago, still reverberate, as if the world and the centuries constituted one grand whispering-gallery, till everybody upon

earth that listens may hear the words of eternal life. But in what words does he speak? What is every text of the Bible but the very echo of what Christ said? I am as certain that he said, "Come unto me, and I will give you rest," as if I heard him uttering those words of life at this very moment; there is not a text in the Bible that is not the utterance, distinct, unmistakable, of everlasting life. It is a blessed thing, that what the Bible says is the utterance of truth; that eternal life is often found in the shortest and the simplest formula. Such texts as "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners;" "The blood of Jesus cleanseth from all sin;" "He was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him;" "Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden;" "He that believeth on me hath eternal life;" "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life;"—are words of life; the man that has these truths resounding in the chambers of memory, and received into the depths of his soul, has the seeds, the elements, the certainty, of everlasting life.

Jesus speaks to us also in his promises. What are his promises? They sparkle with sacred light like the stars in the firmament. His precepts are the commands of a legislator: his prophecies are the utterance of him who sees the future as he sees the past: but his promises are not only prophecies of what shall be, but promises of the good that will be, the vehicles of the thoughts of eternal life.

These words that Christ speaks to us are full of love. This is a blessed thought. If you will read the teaching of Jesus, it must often strike you as remarkable that the only sin that he rebuked in words of awful denunciation was hypocrisy, and that the very worst and most profligate, that came to him seeking mercy, never went away with an angry word; it was

as if Jesus looked upon the man's sin as his saddest misfortune, and had only words of pity and of sorrow, followed by a word of judicial pardon and forgiveness. All that Jesus taught is full of love, and in proportion as we preach in the same strain we shall be followed in our preaching with a corresponding success.

The words that Christ speaks have another character. They are weighty testimonies. If the Bible were a long process of reasoning, and the texts the corollaries, — the results of that long process, — they would not be so clear to the ordinary mind, they would not be so evident; but, instead of being so, the Bible consists of clear, distinct announcements from one who came from heaven, and was filled with infinite wisdom, in order to make it known. He does not say, "You have heard," "it has been said," and "it has been thought;" but, "I say unto you," — a positive, distinct declaration of what is truth, on the highest possible authority.

Christ's words of eternal life are very plain. Take the Bible as a whole, there are great mysteries in it. If the Bible had no mysteries, it would be without one of its greatest credentials. This book, while it contains a portrait of man as he is by nature, and of man as he is by grace, contains also a portrait of God. As He is infinite and incomprehensible, I must expect to find in it mysteries that must exceed my capabilities. I am not to measure the Infinite by the finite. But more is plain than obscure; for instance, hear those words of the Bible that contain the truths of everlasting life, and learn how plain they are. Creeds of churches are obscure; canons of councils are many of them scarcely interpretable at all; but the Bible is plain, it is the most popular book; and those books that explain it and partake of its character grow in popularity precisely as they approximate to its character. It is the plainest of all books on earth. If you will open it and read it without any other

thought, you will be struck with what I may call the common sense of the Bible; it is full of what is called common sense. Apart from its inspiration, it is just that which commends itself to man's conscience as a book full of the truest and the plainest reasoning.

It is our privilege and our right to open this book, and to hear in it Christ's words of eternal life. No man, either with a crown upon his brow or a censer in his hand, — prince or priest, — may dare to come between the poorest widow and the words of eternal life. No power on earth dare modify its testimony, or dilute its words of benediction. We must judge the church by the Bible, not the Bible by the church. We must hear what God's book says about the church, before we hear what the church says about God's book. In doctrinal matters, it is not, "Hear what the church says about the Bible," but, "Hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." None may come between us and these words, We must not be satisfied with their echo, we must not accept them at second hand; we must open the original itself, and hear the words of eternal life.

CHAPTER XXIII

TEMPLE LIFE.

“ Jerusalem, my happy home,
Name ever dear to me !
When shall my labors have an end,
In joy, and peace, and thee ?

“ When shall mine eyes thy heaven-built walls
And pearly gates behold ;
Thy bulwarks with salvation strong,
And streets of shining gold ? ”

“ Blessed is the man whom thou choosest, and causest to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts : we shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, even of thy holy temple.”—PSALM 65 : 4.

MAN pronounces benedictions that are only in words, which he cannot make the vehicles of real or efficient power. When God pronounces a blessing, it is not only in word, but in power. It strikes and lasts when heard. Man may bless those whom God has not blessed—this is our weakness ; and we curse those whom God has blessed—this is our sin. It is a light thing to be blessed or cursed of man ; but it is a precious privilege, a real result, a lasting force, to be blessed of God.

“ Blessed is the man whom thou choosest.” The men of this world think they are blessed or happy who are rich, illustrious, or great ; it is not so. God pronounces blessings, not on outward appearance, but invariably on inward character

He pronounces the blessing according to what the heart is ; man very often gives it according to what the man wears.

The characteristic features of the blessed are these : "The man whom thou choosest," not the man who first chose God. We are sinful and ruined ; if rewarded according to our works, we should perish forever. Grace in its sovereignty fastens upon us in our lost estate, and selects and stamps us for glory. An eye we did not see sees us, an arm we did not know lays hold upon us, and we are therefore chosen and blessed of God. This doctrine of election is stated frequently in Scripture. "According," it is said, "as God hath chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world." This choice is made in sovereignty. He elects the creature who has nothing, in order to make the creature eventually something. Election is not an empty decree, but an operative influence. This special influence and effect is called approaching unto God. Only a religion that comes from God can carry its subjects to God. Chosen of God, we receive our first impulse, and so are made centripetally to approach unto him as the closing and blessed consummation. This language implies that we are found projected by sin to a distance from God ; and not only so, but that we are disinclined to return to him. It is a very strange thing that, knowing what heaven and its happiness are, man can ever settle down satisfied with what he is ; the only explanation is that our own feelings are lowered down to the temperature of the world in which we live, and we think there is nothing in prospect better for us, or possible. We are therefore by nature unwilling to approach God. But when we are chosen of him, and come under his attraction, we delight to approach unto him — we feel ourselves borne upward under an irresistible yet joyous and welcome attraction. "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me." Duty and delight become one. Blessed is the man who is thus drawn ; because, the

nearer we approximate in likeness to God, the happier we feel. But this blessedness is not a mere vague feeling of happiness. There accompanies it a sweet sense of pardon, based on the surest grounds. "Blessed is the man whose sin is forgiven," is ours also. It is a very delightful thing to know that the Great Sovereign of the universe has pardoned us, and that sin shall not be our ruin. Our resting on Christ's atonement, and our inward and just belief that God has chosen us, is the Spirit witnessing with our spirit, that we are in Christ Jesus, the sons of God, the heirs of heaven, and therefore subject to no condemnation here or hereafter.

Another great element of this blessedness is the conscious fact that we are regenerated, one proof of which is that we like things that God approves, and which formerly we hated. This feeling deepens as we draw near to God. Our joy increases as a river. We feel blessed when God causes us thus to approach unto him: but what are some of the sources of the impulse that he employs? First, the light and the force of truth, which penetrates our minds and sanctifies our hearts. Secondly, the hopes of joy, and the fear of offending God; and these truths, lodged, like seeds, in the heart, grow up under the influence of the Holy Spirit, and exercise the force and permanent spring of living principles. But especially does God cause us to approach to himself by the personal presence of the Holy Spirit, who takes the things of Christ, and so presents them to our minds that the great truths of the Gospel rise before us beautiful and true as they never did before, and fill our hearts with pure light, and create therein the warmth of celestial love, the very atmosphere of heaven.

The promise to the man thus blessed is, that he shall dwell in God's courts. This does not mean always dwelling in the outward building called the church. This is impossible, were it desirable. It means having a Sabbath spirit, a temple life, and a worshipping heart. It means living near to God,

finding everywhere an altar, and in all space a divine consecration. What a man does is as expressive of gratitude as what a man says. Love is worship as pure and earnest as the words of the lip; and wherever, and by whomsoever, anything is done from a pure motive, and to the glory of God, there is worship that rises swifter than the morning or the evening incense into the presence of the Eternal. Deeds are songs. Life is praise. When the tabernacle in which we now sojourn shall be taken down, we shall enter the chancel itself, and, without veil or obstruction, dwell in the Lord's house and serve him without ceasing — temple, priests and Levites, in his presence.

They shall be satisfied with God's goodness. There is no satisfaction deducible from any object upon earth, or rendered by its deepest and fullest cisterns. The more a man has, the more he desires, and the less he is satisfied. On earth there are but empty joys, that collapse, like bubbles, the instant they are touched; but in heaven there is fulness of joy. Here there are pleasures, like snow-flakes upon a stream, that no sooner touch life's current than they are dissolved and disappear; but in the upper temple there are pleasures that last and blossom eternally.

In the presence of God there is joy that grows in beauty, and dilates the heart equal to its expanding greatness. Blessedness is intense in the ratio of our nearness to God, likeness to Christ, and possession and presence of the Holy Spirit. In the future world these are realized in all their glory, all interruptions are removed, clouds are impossible, decay, and disease, and death, are unknown. The brightest things last longest; eternity, unlike time, increases and brightens every element it embraces in its capacious bosom.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE APOSTOLIC BENEDICTION.

“ Lord, dismiss us with thy blessing,
Fill our hearts with joy and peace :
Let us each, thy love possessing,
Triumph in redeeming grace.
O refresh us !
Travelling through this wilderness.”

“ The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen.”— 2 CORINTHIANS 13 : 14.

THESE words close our services in the sanctuary every Sabbath. They may fitly close every period of time. They are the most appropriate, because the most suggestive, commencement of every new period that comes round in the good providence of God. Our services, our Sabbaths, our years, and each day's sorrows, should end, and every day's duties should begin, with this benediction. Let us pray that every year that is before us may carry with it, and have upon it, as it sweeps past, the grace of Jesus, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost.

This benediction embosoms pardon for the past ; it unbosoms hope and peace and blessing for the future. It is seasonable to pronounce it at the close of one year ; it is most appropriate to pray it at the commencement of another. May it not only be to us in word, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, a benediction from heaven !

A blessing so precious, so frequently heard, and by the apostle given as the close of the two most instructive epistles to the Corinthian church, is worth investigation. Let us open the cabinet, and ascertain its contents. Let us break the alabaster box, that its precious perfume may be diffused over the years and days to come, so that we may be refreshed and strengthened for the march of life.

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ” is one-third of the benediction. What is this grace? Literally and strictly, it means free favor, or God’s dealing with man, not according to his merits, which would precipitate him only in disaster, but according to grace, a higher principle, unfolded in the Gospel, in spite of man’s merits, and after the riches of God’s liberality and sovereign love. We are told what grace means by its contrast. “The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ,” John 1: 17. Therefore, when we pray that ours may be the grace of Christ, it means that we may receive all we need, in spite of what we deserve. It is a prayer on our part that those blessings promised by the law to them who perfectly, and without a faltering foot-step or wavering heart, keep the law, may descend upon us who have broken it, and are legally under its condemnation, but are brought by grace from beneath its ruins, and placed no more in law, but in Jesus Christ the Lord. This benediction implores that the blessings which the law promised to them who were under the law and kept it may descend upon us, who, indeed, have broken the law, but are yet in Christ. Thus we have complete pardon, through the obedience of one, and are acquitted and justified as if we had kept the law inviolate, and were each unimpeachable in thought or deed in the sight of a holy and heart-searching God.

This grace, which the apostle prays may be with all God’s people, shines and sparkles in every page of the sacred record. It is the glad music of every promise; it is that which

gives its tone and coloring to the whole fabric and structure of evangelical religion. "Ye are saved by grace," is Christianity in a nutshell, — our religion expressed and embodied in the shortest sentence.

Grace is felt and shown to us in the forgiveness of our sins.

The apostle alludes to it frequently in this light. "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace," Ephesians 1 : 7. "Justified freely by his grace," Romans 3 : 24. When, therefore, the minister pronounces the blessing, and its echo and responsive "Amen" rises from our hearts, our common petition is, that God's grace may be glorified in the forgiveness of our sins; that this primal blessing that we need may be bestowed upon us in the only way in which a crumb of bread, or a cup of cold water, or the salvation of the soul, or a crown of glory, can be given, through and by the atonement, the mediation and intercession, of the Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, when we pray that grace may be with us, we ask that we may obtain *gratis* what we never can obtain by paying; that we may be pardoned by grace, as we can only be condemned by merit. We present ourselves as mendicants and suppliants; as empty, poor, naked, and destitute of all; and we say to God, what Wickliffe, the morning star of the Reformation, made the burden of his petitions, "O Lord, forgive me gratis!" that is, save me by grace.

But, when we pray that this grace may be with us, we desire that we may have a deep sense of it; not only that we may realize its advantages, but that we may have an inward sense and enjoyment of its sweetness. The apostle says "The grace of God, that bringeth salvation, hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world." Titus 2 : 11, 12. He says, in another part, "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ;" that is, you

have experience inwardly and on your hearts of what it is, when he bestows upon you blessings, not only without your merits, but in spite of your demerits; so that you are constrained to feel that the best and greatest thing that you ever got from God, he gave you, not because you deserved it, but in spite of your having incurred the contrary. This the apostle implies, when he prays that the grace of Christ may be with us, that this grace may be felt by us. What will be the influence of this grace, thus inwardly felt by us? In proportion to our inward sense of God's unmerited goodness to us will be our outward devotedness to all the duties and responsibilities of the Christian life. It is God's grace felt within us that instantly creates, responsive to its touch, gratitude to God. The more we feel of his grace, the more of gratitude shall we cherish to him who gives it. It is most important that we should, in our hearts, feel this grace; that we should see how great, sovereign and undeserved, it is; that we should understand that to God can accrue nothing that will add to his greatness, or augment his happiness, by thus graciously pardoning and saving us. In proportion as we feel it, we shall be prompted to exclaim, "O, the riches of his grace, the height and depth of his love!" Nor in a less degree, as the apostle says, will the grace of Christ teach to live soberly, righteously, and godly. It is in proportion as we consciously receive everything by grace that we shall most richly bring forth in our lives the fruits and foliage of the Christian character. Our sense of it is virtue. As long as we see and think of God as exacting duties, we shall regard him as a tyrant master, and feel ourselves as poor, miserable, shrinking slaves. But, if we cease altogether to think of God as exacting, and begin to think of him exclusively as by grace giving, the result will be, that we shall no longer regard him as a tyrant, nor feel ourselves as slaves. We shall see him as a Father, and feel ourselves sons. We shall view him as the

great Benefactor, and we shall show to him gratitude in some measure commensurate with the munificence of the blessings that he bestows upon us. In truth, the great secret of Christian life is never to think of what God commands, but always of what God gives; to think of him less as commanding duties, and more and more as bestowing undeserved mercies. But will not this lead men not to obey God? We answer, just the very reverse. Our obedience will not only be in its principle purer, but it will have a momentum that is stronger; for he who sees that he has received from God all, and that God asks nothing in return, leaving the recipient to act in accordance with the sense of the blessings that he has received, will be constrained instinctively — it will be his nature — to go forth and glorify God with his soul and body, which are his; for we cannot help loving him who has so undeservedly loved us, and such love in the heart responding to the love that God has shown is the fulfilling of the law; for that thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbor as thyself, is the first and last of the commandments of the law. Thus, as we see grace in the beginning, middle and end, we shall be constrained, by that grace, to live soberly, righteously, and godly; looking for that blessed hope, the glorious appearing of Jesus Christ its author, “who loved us,” — there is the proof of his grace, — and “gave himself for us, that he might redeem us to himself, a peculiar people, zealous of good works.” Such is Christ’s grace; that which embosoms so much in the present, which will unbosom so much for the future, which is sufficient for us, which, felt most deeply in our hearts, will glow with greatest light, and power, and beauty, in our walk, conduct, and intercourse with the world.

Let us look, in the second part of this benediction, at the love of God. The definition of Deity in the New Testament is, “God is love.” I can gather from creation that God has

loved, but I learn on the cross only that God is love. If you ask me for the greatest proof of it, it is in these words,— words often lightly spoken, and little realized, but full of deep and inexhaustible meaning,—“ God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” It is not, Christ died for us, therefore God loves us; but, God loved us, therefore Christ died for us. Christ is not the cause of God’s love to me, but he is the evidence of the preëxistence of that love, and the provision for that love descending on me in full consistency with a justice that never can be unjust, a holiness that never can be unholy, and a truth that never can be untrue; and through that grand provision, Christ crucified, not only does God’s love reach me, but his justice, truth and holiness, acquiesce in its doing so. Out of Christ, these attributes would have smitten me, as would the consuming fire, and have utterly destroyed me; but in and through Christ, these attributes reach me, as the grand current of salvation, washing away all my sins, and acquitting and absolving me from all my transgressions; accepting me at the judgment-seat; and, after the judgment-seat, not only tolerating me in heaven, but welcoming me; not only admitting me as a legally-acquitted person, but hailing me as a returned son, for whom, not penalty, but a glad festival, has been preparing from everlasting ages.

This love that the apostle pronounces is seen, first, in pardoning our sins. It gave Christ a propitiation for all that will, and it also engages to apply that propitiation to each that believes. We need God’s love not only to provide the remedy, but to individualize and particularize itself, and so to reveal its provisions to my heart, that I shall hail it, and rejoice in it, and be justified through it.

This love is shown in adopting us “ Behold,” says John, “ what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us,

that we should be called the sons of God!" By nature we are aliens and enemies. In Paradise we left our robes of innocence, beauty, glory and perfection, and went forth, or, rather, we were in mercy driven forth, naked, poor and blind. We tried to clothe ourselves and conceal our nakedness with fig-tree leaves. Poor man, feeling, when he had sinned, that he had lost something he knew not what, and had come under a feeling of want and desolation he knew not how, thought, in his ignorance, that he could lull the sense of desolation, and supply every want, by sewing together leaves from that tree of which, in all probability, he had just eaten, — "the tree of knowledge of good and evil," the fig-tree, — and hoped that thus and thereby he might again be restored, and become a son of God. But thus he could not become what he once was, and so was clothed with a better righteousness. God is adopting us as sons; that is, taking us from the family of Adam clothed with fig-tree leaves, and translating us into the family of God clothed in the skins of slain sacrifices; that is, he is taking us from the family of the first Adam, in which we became apostate, and translating us into the family of the second Adam, our elder brother, and so making us sons and daughters of the most high God. Amos raised from a herdsman to be a prophet, David chosen from feeding the ewes to be a King of Israel, Peter raised from spreading a fisherman's net to preach the Gospel and be an apostle, the prodigal brought from feeding on husks and living in the company of swine to sit at his father's table, and eat at a grand festival, — these are but feeble types of that great translation, which lifts us from herding with a world which writhes beneath the curse, to the communion of a company who have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, and therefore are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night without ceasing. O, the height and depth, the length and breadth, of this love; it passeth understanding!

Is it not worth wishing that this love may be with us? Is not this benediction the true compliments of a new year? Are not these three wishes well worth uttering as the day or the year breaks upon us, knowing not what it shall be? Be satisfied of this, that if God's blessing is on us, the mark is on our brows that will shield us from sin and sorrow, and preserve us faultless to his presence in glory.

The love of God our Father will be with us, too, not only in adopting us, but also in chastening us. One of the lessons that flesh and blood does not like to learn is, that God's love chastens. Our common notion is, that pain, suffering, sorrow, adversity, affliction, are all the proofs of God's anger; but the true notion is, if we be Christians, such things are the proofs of God's love. The mere creature feels affliction, and he argues from his affliction upwards, and infers God is angry with him; but the Christian begins with God, and says, God is my Father, therefore what happens to me, however grievous, is the evidence and the fruit of his love, not the fruit and evidence of his wrath. The mere child of nature argues from what betides him up to what God is. The Christian argues from what God is down to the character of what betides him. Therefore, though no chastening seemeth joyous, but grievous, yet afterwards it worketh out the peaceable fruits of righteousness. "If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?" And again, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten." Therefore, the love of God in the chastisement of his own is one of the clearest scriptural truths. "Blessed is the man whom the Lord chasteneth." Why? Because we need to be weaned from the excessive idolatry of what we see, hear, taste, and possess. If man were left to himself in this world, without a trouble, a cross, an obstruction or a difficulty, he would so strike his roots into this world that he would become part and parcel of it. We

need, therefore, trials, afflictions, crosses, perplexities, tribulation, chastening, in order that we may not be condemned with the world, but lifted above it, led to triumph over it, that we may set our hearts, not upon a rocking earth, but upon the true rest that remaineth for the people of God.

This love is also seen in giving us all things that are truly needful and good for us. What is the first function of a father? To provide bread and raiment for his children. "As a father pitieth his children, so doth the Lord pity them that fear him." We begin our prayers, as we should begin our creed, with "Our Father." If that be his relationship to us, and this our relationship to him, we may expect that he will not only give us bread for the ordinary level on which we tread, but that he will teach us that man doth not live by bread alone; and, therefore, give us that manna, that true bread, that will strengthen us to tread with growing vigor that loftier level, that sun-lit table-land, which is the tessellated pavement of glory. "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" What a truth is here! It is an argument the most logical, a text the most plain, that, if God has given us the greatest gift that it was in the power and possession of Omnipotence to bestow, surely he will give us the lesser things, that are merely convenient, not absolutely essential, for us. Then, may not only the grace of Christ, but the love of the Father, be with us all.

There is, lastly, in this benediction, "the communion of the Holy Ghost." What does this mean? "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." "The Spirit of Christ dwelleth in us." "Know ye not that your bodies are temples of the Holy Ghost?" Let us recollect that the promise of the Spirit is the great promise of the New Testament. The present dispensation is the dispensation of the Spirit; but, by the very nature of that Spirit's testimony,

we are not satisfied with the present; but, as he takes of the things of Christ, and shows them to us, we are looking forward to Christ's second coming, the bridegroom and husband of his church, in the rapidly approaching future. Jesus tells us that his absence will be in some degree compensated by the Spirit's presence; and, therefore, he repeats, in the Gospel of John, on three different occasions, this promise: "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things." We do not want an infallible Pope to teach us; we have the teacher of all things. But you say, "How, then, do men differ?" They differ in essential things, because they are not all taught by the Holy Ghost. But, if this promise of the Spirit to teach me all things has any truth in it, then why should not I have that Spirit? Why should not you, reader? Do you believe God? Is it a promise to the priest? No; it is to all his disciples in all ages. "And he shall bring all things to your remembrance." What a blessed promise! Sometimes you are laid upon a sick bed, and you cannot read a single page of the Bible; or, you are tossed on the deep, and feel "the sorrow of the sea;" or, you are in the land of the Madiais, where, if you are found reading a page of the Bible, a dungeon without a Bible is the doom that awaits you. But what a blessed thought, that, though the poor prisoner may be deprived of the Protestant Bible, lest, forsooth, it should teach heresy,—surely a glorious proof of the Protestantism of that book!—he cannot be deprived, by all the cardinals of Rome, of this promise: "The Holy Ghost shall bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." And again, says our blessed Lord, "When the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me."

We have this Spirit, first, as a teacher. I can teach the

outer man ; and I think the arguments I could adduce, for the inspiration of the Bible, and for the truth of the grand, distinctive doctrines of Christianity, are so clear, cogent and irresistible, that there is no man of common sense and ordinary learning who can possibly resist the conclusion that the Bible and Christianity are from God. The fact is, a sceptic now-a-days does not appear in his ancient colors ; if he did, he would be pronounced by intelligent men to be a fool. The scepticism of the passions, not of the head, is the development of infidelity in the present day. But, while I can teach all this outwardly, it needs the Spirit of Christ to teach the heart inwardly ; so that truth which conscience subscribes in the creed may become an inner life in the heart. It is not enough that we should have the best of teachers in the pulpit, but that we should also have the only teacher in the heart, who can take the truths that are addressed to the outward ear, and so supply them inwardly to the heart, that they shall be there like seeds that grow up into rich harvests, or like truths through which we are sanctified and made fit for heaven.

But this Spirit is not only the teacher. The word " communion " of him, *κοινωνία*, the " possession " of him, denotes that we have him as the Comforter. Here, again, is a blessed truth, that the Holy Spirit is not only a teacher, but a comforter. When Jesus promises the Spirit, he says, " Even the Spirit of truth, the Comforter." The world comforts by explaining away the danger ; but the Holy Spirit never comforts by a falsehood. He is first the Spirit of truth, and next he is the Comforter. It is through the truth that he comforts. A truth may give momentary pain, but it will give permanent pleasure. We never can have the peace that passeth understanding, except we have the Spirit of truth in our hearts ; and, therefore, he is first the Spirit of truth, then he is the Comforter.

And this Holy Spirit is also the Sanctifier and Regenerator. Baptism may be administered by the minister, and its waters sprinkled on the forehead; but that is not enough. Unless there be the inner baptism, which the Holy Spirit does give unto them that open their hearts to receive it, there can be no real Christianity. It is a great pity that things so distinct in the Bible should be confounded by some. There is the outer church, with outer baptism, outer preaching, outer communion; then there is the inner church, with inner baptism, inner teaching, inner communion. Man, the minister, can bestow the first; God, the great master, can alone give the second. The secret of what is called Tractarianism and Romanism (I mean of their origin) is, just supposing that Christ's true church is coëxtensive with the outward, professing, and visible church, and that sacraments are *ex opere operato*, the substance as well as the sacrament; but, if they are the substance, then they are not signs. If they be the things, then they are not sacraments at all, but the things themselves. Therefore, those who hold that baptism is regeneration, and the Lord's Supper transubstantiation, have done away with the sacraments; for they have, as they think, the very things: but if they have not the things, as we are sure they have not, then they have only a desolating delusion. Thus, the Holy Spirit is the Sanctifier and Regenerator.

Here, then, are the compliments of every season, birthday or bridal day, preface to a book and peroration to a speech,—the grace of Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost. Here, too, is the cardinal doctrine of Christianity—a Triune Jehovah. If Christ be not God, the apostle is guilty of idolatry in this blessing; for he says first the grace of Jesus Christ, next the love of the Father, and next the communion of the Holy Ghost. If the Holy Ghost be not a person, then this benediction is absurd. Surely the apostle does not mean the communion of a metaphor, or of a

figure of speech; but of a person. Therefore, what we call the union of three persons in one God seems to be the very core and substance of Christianity itself. It is the tree that grows in the midst of the paradise of God, — a Triune Jehovah, — and its leaves are all the doctrines, and its fruit all the graces, of the Christian character.

This doctrine of the Trinity is never stated in the Bible, as it is in the Scotch Confession of Faith, or in the English Articles, as a dry, metaphysical doctrine, but always as a doctrine embosomed in enlightening, comforting, or practical relationships. For instance, it is in one passage (1 Peter 1 : 2), “Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Christ.” Wherever it is mentioned, it is always associated with precious and practical truth. God is love; the Father is electing love, the Son is redeeming love, the Spirit is regenerating love. Father, Son and Holy Ghost, — one God, — is love.

How wonderful the fact, that each person in the blessed Trinity should have a definite share and part assigned in the Bible in our Salvation! We are baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. How great a thing must man's salvation be, that a Triune Jehovah is its author, its Agent, its beginning, its accomplisher, its end! How deep the ruin that requires so vast, so awful, and yet glorious an interposition! Let us not doubt that sin and our ruin are real things, when it required the grace of Jesus, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, to renovate and restore us.

We go into the visible church baptized in this name; let us go into coming months and years blessed in this name. Let us pray, each year that comes, that this benediction may go with us. Our poverty will thus be sweetened, our riches will be sanctified, our trials will work together for good to

us, seeing that we love God, and are the called according to his purpose. Let this blessing rest upon our families, our congregations, our kingdom, and upon the whole people of God, scattered throughout the world. Let the past be closed with this benediction; let the future go forth consecrated by it; and upon us, and all we love, at home or far, far away, may the grace of Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, descend. Amen.

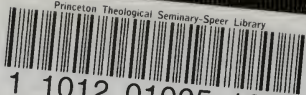








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