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CHRIST
RECEIVING SINNERS.

BY

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"VOICES OF THE DAY," VOICES OF THE DEAD," ETC. ETC.

"This man receiveth sinners."

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Gift

Mrs. Hennen Jennings

April 26, 1933

stead of rejection, he will meet with instant and cordial welcome.

The author earnestly prays that this little work may be made useful—extensively useful. To be instrumental in leading souls to God, is the noblest privilege, the greatest honour, and the consciousness of it, the richest reward.

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Christ Receiving Sinners.

CHAPTER I.

The Audience.

Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him.

LUKE XV. 1.

WE find in this chapter, three instructive parables : one, the lost sheep ; and the other, the hidden coin ; and the last, the prodigal son. I will touch, first of all, on the preface to the three—"Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him ;" reserving for the next chapter the objection of the scribes and Pharisees—"This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them." These last words constitute, properly, the text ; the parables are the sermon upon it. The first two verses embody the great idea that our Lord designs to illustrate, and the parables are the vivid examples and illustrations of its precious truth. Upon this occasion, sinners and publicans—*i. e.* tax-gatherers, most obnoxious to the Jew from their profession, and more particularly so from their severity and the iniquity of their practices—"drew near unto him." These publicans and sinners were persons notoriously profane, about whose character there could be no controversy, and about whose state in the sight

of God there could be as little. But there was another class that drew near to him, "Pharisees and scribes," of whom I shall speak by-and-by; distinguished from the rest in the sight of men, but more iniquitous than the rest in the sight of a holy and a heart-searching God. When these sinners drew near, Jesus treated them as they had never been treated before. The Pharisee felt it his duty to flee from the infected person, lest he himself might catch the contagion; Jesus felt it his mission to draw close to the infected person, that that infected person might draw in the healing virtue of his mysterious character. Now this contrast between the treatment of the Pharisee, on the one hand, and the new treatment of our Lord on the other, startled and surprised not a few, and called forth the expression of amazement contained in the second verse of this chapter. Certainly, there never was a more remarkable audience, preacher, or discourse: all three are replete with instruction and profit unto every one that has ears to hear. In the auditory, if one might venture to analyze it, were two concentric circles, of which Jesus was the centre; there was an inner circle which stood nearest to him, composed of publicans and sinners; there was an outer circle that looked on, and kept aloof from him—these were the scribes and Pharisees. The inner circle admitted itself to be as bad as the verdict of God could pronounce it: these publicans and sinners professed to be nothing; they were outcasts in the sight of God, and they were sinners notoriously in the sight of man, and they felt it. They were the refuse of the earth, the reproached of men, the denounced of justice, confessedly, and without apology, excuse, or covering. Then there was the

outer circle, the members of which did not wish to mingle with the publicans and sinners, who desired, in short, to be saved in a way more honourable than publicans and sinners; who wished to have a royal road to heaven, in which no man but Pharisees and scribes might walk; and certainly, if the salvation of the gospel implied that the accomplished Pharisee and the abandoned publican must be cleansed in the same fountain, clothed with the same righteousness, and admitted by the same door to heaven, the Pharisee was not prepared to believe in so unsparing a necessity, or to accept such terms. These Pharisees were holy in the estimate of men, though not one whit holy in the estimate and judgment of God. With them a broad phylactery, that is, a robe peculiar to their sect, covered a multitude of sins. In their theology, a text exquisitely and luminously written upon the frontlet, was a perfect atonement for trampling it under feet in the daily wear and tear of common life. In their judgment, the offering of tithes of mint and of anise was a sufficient excuse for the utter neglect of the weightier matters of the law. Who was most guilty God alone can decide; but this I have noticed, that while the Saviour, to the heart-smitten, trembling, convicted publican and sinner, spoke in tones of mercy, reconciliation and love; to the Pharisee, the hypocrite, the religious pretender, he spoke in the language only of severe, stern, and merited rebuke. The publican and sinner may do society the greatest harm; the hypocrite may pass through society less marked by its crimes, but not less criminal and guilty in the sight of God. But it is not ours to pronounce upon their relative demerits; it is our privilege to proclaim to both

instant pardon and acceptance through the Saviour, who died for both, if they will.

It is said, "They drew near to Jesus." They "drew near," physically, geographically: we draw near also, but spiritually and morally. "Draw nigh to God and he will draw nigh to you;" but who does not know that neither the best nor the worst of mankind can draw nigh to God, until the attractive influence of God is put forth upon the hearts of both? Our drawing near to God is our response to his drawing us. He says; "No man can come to me, unless the Father who hath sent me draw him: and every man, therefore, who draws near to God in prayer, in praise, in communion, in sympathy, in faith, in love, in joy, in hope, is the subject of an attraction, which, begun in time, shall not terminate even in glory, but continue to put forth its sublime centripetal influence for ever and ever. It is specially stated, they drew near to *Jesus Christ*. What they did physically, every creature on earth is called upon to do morally and spiritually: that is, to draw near to none beside Christ, to none on this side of Christ, to none beyond; above, or below Christ. It is an instructive fact, that when Christ was crucified, there was a thief upon his right hand, and another upon his left, as if to lead the sinner's eye to look neither to the right nor to the left, but to rivet it upon the crucified Lamb that hung between. It is possible for us now, when we profess to draw near to Christ, to draw near to the sacrament, and yet not to Him the substance; to draw near to the Church, and rest on it, and find it is a tomb, instead of drawing near to Christ, and resting on him, and feeling in him a Saviour. And whatever in the minister's sermon, or

whatever in the rites and ceremonies of the church so rivets you that it keeps you there, and prevents you rising higher, is the very essence of all antichristian superstition. If, for instance, the architecture of the church should fascinate and keep you from thinking of Him who fills the church with his glory, it may be beautiful architecture, but it is bad divinity. Or if the splendour of the language of the minister's sermon should so captivate you, or if his doctrine, or his illustrations, or his metaphors should so dazzle you, that you lose the great penetrating, riveting thoughts they were designed to convey, it may be an eloquent address, but it is a very worthless sermon. Whatever, in short, keeps you from the great end and aim of all ministry—the Lord Jesus Christ—ought not to be there. It is the beauty of a proposition in Euclid, that every step helps you to the conclusion; and as it is the highest evidence of all true architecture, all poetry, and all painting that every thing in it and about it has a tendency to contribute to one great point, for which the painting or the building was designed, so in all church ceremonies, and services, in all preaching, in all reading, in all prayer, in all praise, we ought to be carried directly, and without obstruction to Him who is and ought to be the Alpha and Omega of all. Hence, it is the best creed which proclaims Christ most clearly; he is the best preacher who points you to the Lamb of God most distinctly; and that is the best and the most apostolic church in which you can learn to know and love your Saviour most simply and directly.

“They drew near,” it is added, “to hear him.” What they did, we also may do. What is our object in drawing near to the sanctuary? Is it to stop there?

or is it our ultimate object, as it ought to be, and as it will be, if the Spirit of God has drawn us, to hear Christ? Of all things the most pitiable is when a man preaches to please himself, and when an audience listens in order to be pleased with the minister. And the most glorious thing below is when the minister's preaching and the people's hearing lead to this conclusion, not, "How well the minister spoke to-day!" and "How comfortably did we hear to-day!" but, "How glorious is that Saviour! how precious this soul! how solemn our obligations! how weighty our responsibilities in the prospect of eternity, and of a judgment-seat!" We may always judge of what has been the sermon, or what has been the mood in which it was listened to by the first remarks we hear as we retire; when people go home criticising the words of the discourse, instead of dwelling on and speaking of the glories of the subject, there is something wrong in the people's hearing, or in the minister's preaching. May God grant that all that ministers preach, and all that people hear, may lead them to lift their hearts far beyond the temple, and to leave them nowhere except where our heart and our treasure should be, beside the throne of the Lord Jesus.

When it is stated, "they drew near to Christ in order to hear him," and it is added, "they *all* did so," we do not find that he said one single individual was present who should not have been there. Now this is remarkable. There were hypocrites, whom Jesus knew to be so: there were publicans and sinners, the most depraved and abandoned in the land, no less intimately known to Jesus: but he did not say, those who come to hear me must be a select circle, who have looked

into the book of life, and seen that their names are written there, before they come to listen; or they must have some other qualification of some other description. No such syllable is uttered. He took all that came. He felt there was a message to be delivered wherever there was an ear, however circumstanced that might be, to listen to him. In short, the gospel of Jesus Christ is an encyclical letter to the whole world; and when a minister stands in his place and proclaims the gospel, he preaches Christ, and Him crucified, not to the elect, nor to the non-elect, not to the predestinate, nor to the reprobate, if such there be, but he preaches the gospel of Christ, to every creature under heaven, and leaves it with God to make the discrimination, taking to himself only the duty of rendering clearly and intelligibly his message, and leaving all beyond with God.

We read next—for every word in this verse seems emphatic—“*then* drew near unto him,” &c. What was the cause of their drawing near? It seems to me to have been that beautiful parable in the previous chapter, which describes the guests invited when “a certain man made a great supper, and bade many: and he sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come, for all things are now ready.” In this remarkable parable the gospel of Christ, that is, salvation, is not described as something that we are to do, but something that we are to receive; not a process that we are to work out, but a recipe or medicine that we are freely to accept. “All things are ready,” every thing is done: you have only to come. And then some made excuses; but “the servant came and shewed his Lord all these things. Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servant, Go out

quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind." Now the publicans and sinners argued from the parable, and argued right, "Truly, if the halt, and the maimed, and the hedge-way beggars, and the highway tramps may come to Jesus, and receive the blessing of the gospel, we are not worse than they; and desperate as our character is, it cannot be worse; and if there be welcome for them, surely there will be no proscription for us: at all events let us try." "*Then* drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him."

Let us next notice the place where our Lord spoke. As far as we can gather from the previous chapter and from the parables to which I have already alluded, our Lord was in the Pharisee's house, speaking to all that would come to hear him; but it would appear from the fifteenth chapter that he left the Pharisee's house, and was walking to some other part of Judea, and that great multitudes followed him, listening to the words that proceeded out of his mouth. This teaches us that our Lord did not much mind what was the place on which he stood, or on which he sat. All places were sacred, all audiences were consecrated, when the great Saviour and a sinful company were there present. Hence we find our Lord preaching from the ocean's bosom, or from the mountain's brow; by the hedge and the highway side; in a fisherman's boat, and in the Pharisee's house; from the cross, and now from the throne; all places are made holy by a holy work: for it is not the place that consecrates the work, but the work that consecrates the place. An orator may collect a mob; Christ's presence can make that crowd

a church. An architect may build a vast and glorious cathedral, but Christ descending into it in his glory alone can make that cathedral a church. It is the presence of the queen that makes the hut a palace, it is the presence of the Lord of glory that makes the way-side auditory a church; and wherever such presence is, and such people are, there, there is a church of the Lord Jesus Christ. My dear reader, the holiest sanctuary in the universe is the chancel of a holy heart, and in that chancel the glory that dwelleth between the cherubim takes up its residence still.

We notice next in this interesting group—the preacher. It was Jesus, and what did he preach? He spake as never man spake. I wish that all preachers would study less Blair's *Belles-Lettres*, and Campbell's *Philosophy of Rhetoric*; less mechanical prescriptions and rules for making, what they always do make, most mechanical sermons; but that they would study more our Lord's sermons. How exceedingly simple, yet how sublime! words so plain that a child can understand them—thoughts so deep that an archangel's mind cannot fathom them. He spoke in the most *childlike* terms, and yet never in *childish* terms. There was no turgid straining of language, no bombastic metaphors like poppies in a cornfield, no swollen words and blazing similes; all was simple, direct, pure; in every sabbath-school, children will listen to and are delighted with, and comprehend the beautiful parables of Jesus: and yet wherever you meet with what is rare, a true philosopher, wearied with his flight through the universe in search of truth, you will find one who at length will pillow his head and soothe his heart by reading the simple and eloquent words

of the Lord Jesus. Our Lord was not only an example of the perfect believer, but he was also an example of the perfect preacher. And I do believe, though men do not naturally like the gospel—while the human heart, before it is sanctified, is enmity to the gospel—that wherever a Christian minister will just speak God's truth in the simple language in which it should be spoken, he will not be without thirsty hearts and anxious souls to listen to him. A great many sermons, I fear, (without passing judgment upon others,) are like the play of summer lightning far up in the clouds while all is dark below. The meaning of preaching is not to make an eloquent exhibition *before* a people, but to make a heart-stirring, conscience-converting appeal *to* them. What a minister is to do is not to attempt to please his people, but to speak to the hearts and consciences of his people. Let him care little if there be sometimes a crooked sentence, or awkward metaphor, and sometimes a plain saying that displeases the critically fastidious taste of editors. I do not mind if I have displeased some cultivated taste, some accomplished *litterateur*, if I can be the means of awakening some conscience, and giving peace to some wounded spirit, and to others the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.

CHAPTER II.

The Objection.

“This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.”—LUKE xv. 2.

LET me now notice the carping, cavilling objection of the carping, cavilling, and miserable scribes and Pharisees. “This man,” they said, “receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.” Is it not strange that what is the very glory of the gospel, should thus be quoted as the disproof that Jesus is the Author and the great Subject of it? If I understand the Old Testament Scriptures, it is declared to be the chief character of the Messiah, that he shall come into close contact with sin, have communion, or close fellowship with sinners, and yet not be their companion. But the Pharisees, wilfully or strangely ignorant of this, were chagrined because he had the impiety to eat with unwashen hands, or to speak a word of consolation to some poor widow, or some heart-broken, penitent, and afflicted sinner; and they thought this neglect of all tradition, this violation of rubric and ceremonial,—this losing sight of the claims of the church and the dignities of the order,—was enough to condemn any man, and to show that Jesus was not what he professed to be, the great Messiah and the promised Saviour. But a chief reason, perhaps, why they objected to him, was the self-righteousness of their hearts. They said,

If this man's preaching be true, all we have given to the poor goes for nothing in the way of merit; all that we have done—all the learning we have acquired—all the accomplishments we have gathered—all the offices we have held—all the prayers we have made—all go for nothing. Self-righteousness, or the persuasion that what we are, and what we have done, entitles us to something better than publicans and sinners are entitled to—is the very last element in our sinful nature that leaves us. The last thing eradicated from the human heart and conscience, is the idea that if we can only do something, we are sure to be saved; or that if we can only suffer something, it is sure to make an atonement for what is past. The very last, and the most difficult thing to induce a sinner to do, is to come to the Lord Jesus just as he is. I would undertake to persuade half the population of London, if I could reach them, that God is an angry and avenging tyrant, ready to consume them, and that this is pure orthodoxy; but it is the most difficult thing in the world to persuade a man that "God is love"—that he awaits to be gracious—that the chiefest of sinners are invited to his presence—that there is forgiveness for the greatest sin, and a cordial welcome for the vilest criminal. This is so difficult that the Spirit of God alone can do it. Yet the Pharisees, one would think, might have learned that this was to be the character of the gospel of Christ. They might have recollected the brazen serpent, which was raised to heal, not the whole, but the sick; or the rock in Rephidim, whose waters were not for those who were not thirsty, but for those who were dying with thirst; that the manna was for the hungry, and that the tem-

ple, which was a national one, was for all. They might, too, have wondered, if Christ did not receive sinners, whom he was to receive? Whom besides could he receive? Not angels, they might have seen, for they were accepted already, they were the ninety and nine. Then whom did Christ come to receive, if not sinners? All the inhabitants of the earth are sinners, and all the inhabitants of heaven are but sinners saved. Thus, instead of its being a disproof that Christ was the Messiah, and Christianity the gospel; the fact, that "this man receiveth sinners and eateth with them," has always been the most magnificent credential of the one, and the most glorious demonstration of the other. Here, however, was exhibited, the evidence of their perversity and ignorance, in that they made that which was the proof of his Messianhip to be the very reverse. The strength of the objection lay not in its own merit, but in their crooked judgments and corrupted hearts. Our Lord met with this difficulty before: "John came, neither eating nor drinking;" and they said, "he hath a devil." The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they said, "Behold a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners." In short, whatever our Lord did, an objection was sure to be raised from it and to it; if he did as others did, they said, behold "a friend of publicans and sinners;" and if he did as John did, they said, "he hath a devil." In short, there is no bad man in the two millions that constitute the population of London, who has not some reason more or less conclusive to his own mind for the course which he pursues.

But our Lord received sinners as alike his mission and his glory; and this was not an isolated fact, but

the very tone and predominating character of his whole ministry: "He came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." Again, "His name shall be called Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins." Again, "Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world." Again, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners." These are but the great harmonies that revolve around this one central truth, "This man receiveth sinners." Thus the miserable Pharisee did not know that what he thought an objection was really a credential, and that what he pronounced to be the disgrace of the ministry of Jesus was its peculiar glory.

But he not only *receives* sinners, but he *invites* sinners to come to him. What does he say? "Come unto me;" "him that cometh unto me I will in nowise cast out." "If any man thirst, let him come to me and drink." "I am the way." If one merely heard that Christ "*receiveth*," one might think it was some cold judge, far removed into the distance, who would receive men if they could muster strength and life and energy to travel the way that leads to him. But when we are told that he not only receives, but that he positively *invites*, the encouragement is increased a hundredfold. More than this: Christ not only *receives* sinners, he not only *invites* sinners, but it is his *office* to receive, to invite, to save sinners. I am sure many of us fail to look at Christ in this light, *viz.* that it is his very office to save. When we hear of a physician, we understand by this that it is his office to prescribe; of a lawyer, that it is his office to plead, and make the most of our cause and claims; of

a preacher, that it is his office to preach; even so it is Christ's office to save, as truly as it is the office of the sun to shine, of winds to blow, of waters to roll, or of the ocean to wash its shores. Hence, Christ cannot refuse you; it is impossible that he should refuse the greatest sinner that goes to him seeking truly that forgiveness which it is his office to bestow.

But not only is it his office, but it is his *glory*, to do so. Many persons have an idea, that Christ may receive them, as he has invited them, and he may forgive them, as it is his office to do so; but that it will be, in some degree, a compromise of what is due to his glory, a weakening of the severity and strictness of his justice. It is all the reverse: for not only is Christ just and faithful to forgive, but he is covered with the greatest glory when he forgives the transgressions of the greatest sinner. Never is God so great as when he pardons. Never is the Saviour so glorious as when he saves. When he said, "Let there be light," and there was light, how glorious was he, the Creator! But when he says, "Thy sins be forgiven thee," the speaker is more glorious still. It is a nobler monument of omnipotent power—it is a richer evidence of divine love, to forgive a sinner than to create and control the shining orbs that are, as it were, the footprints of Deity upon the sands of infinite space. If this be true, how worthy is the gospel of the name that is given to it—good news! The difficulty it would rather seem is for one that knows these things to be lost. One wonders that any man can live without a Saviour; that any one can fail to be a Christian, hearing of a Saviour who receives publicans and sinners, invites them, commands them to believe, whose office it is to

save, whose glory it is to save, who is just and faithful, when he saves the greatest sinner; how is it possible that any one can continue in his sin, and perish in the presence of such truths? I might show the reader many touching instances of this. Read at your leisure our Saviour's conversation with the woman of Samaria: read also that beautiful statement in Luke xxiii. 42. Recollect the dying criminal; and that criminal's last breath giving utterance to this his last cry, "Remember me;" and lo! the instant that he said so, there came a response from the Crucified, who was yet the Enthroned, "To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise." Read John vi. 37, also John vii. 37. Read, as we may have often read, the parable of the prodigal son.

He receives sinners; for what purpose? Not to keep them so, but to make them saints. He receives sinners, to sanctify them, and unhappy men, to make them happy, and wicked men, to make them holy, and slaves, to make them sons, and enemies, to make them friends; and not only receives them so to make them, but he makes them so in order to keep them so for ever and ever. Are there then among my readers any weary and heavy laden? are there any whose retrospect of the past gives rise to fears? whose consciousness of the present creates only smiting of conscience, and condemnation of heart? Are there any saying, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Hear the good news, "This man receiveth sinners." As fully, as cordially, as freely, this year, as when he received the thief upon the cross, or forgave the persecuting Saul, and made him the devoted Paul. "God is in Christ

reconciling the world unto himself." "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." "He waits to be gracious." "He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked." "Why will ye die?" "This man receiveth sinners," may be read on the baptismal font, and on the communion table, on the pulpit, and on the Bible, and on the throne of grace; and everywhere in the universe where a sinner is lost, it will be sounded forth, "This man receiveth sinners." This truth is the envy of demons; it is the corroding recollection of the damned; it is the blessed and glorious retrospect of the saint; it is the responsibility of all that hear or read it; the attraction of the guilty; the joy of the ransomed before the throne—"This man receiveth sinners." Write it, dear reader, in your heart; write it on the lintels of your doors; hear it in all the dispensations of Providence; hear it in all the convulsions of the earth—in the breath of winds—in the chime of the waves of the sea—in all sounds—in all thunder—in the still small voice of conscience and of truth: forget it not on a sick-bed; forget it not when you come to die: "This man receiveth sinners."

CHAPTER III.

The Lost Sheep.

“What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.—LUKE xv. 4-7.

I HAVE stated in the former chapter, that there were two chief classes in the auditory of our Lord; the scribes and Pharisees, who believed that they were righteous; and the publicans and sinners, who did not even pretend to be so. I have showed, that while the latter listened patiently to the prescriptions of our Lord, the former drew elements of cavil only from the most precious statements that he made. What they did, physically, we still do spiritually; we too draw near to Christ; we draw near upon the wings of faith, under the impulse of love; and we must take care, as I have stated, in drawing near to him, to stop at nothing on this side of him. Some draw near to the minister, to the sacrament, to the sanctuary, but instead of using these as steps by which to rise to the sacred shrine, to the Deity that is within, they make them substitutes for Him, and perish, trusting in the

ordinance instead of in the Lord of the ordinance. I stated next, that they drew near to Christ to hear *him*. To hear the minister is one thing; to hear Christ may be a wholly different and distinct thing. It is possible to hear the minister and to be enlightened by his word, and yet hear in his accents not one tone of that voice that has eternal melody in its utterance, and power and emphasis in its every expression. We must therefore come to the house of God, not to hear the minister, but the Master. We must make use of the minister to introduce us to the Master; nay, we must listen to the minister's words, if they be faithful, as the echoes of Christ's, and hear music and find delight in them only in as far as we can trace the Master's accent. "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and am known of them."

When this beautiful spectacle was presented of men drawing near to Christ, sinners to a Saviour, the hungry to Him who could feed them, the thirsty to Him who could refresh them, the dying to Him that could heal them; what ought to have been the remark of those who sat in Moses' seat? They ought to have said, "What a glorious spectacle! what a blessed teacher! what a happy auditory? glory to God in the highest!" But they did not do so. Heresy, error, apostasy, generally begin with the clergy, not with the laity. The first to teach the wrong are they that ought always to teach the right. The scribes and the Pharisees, who were the teachers of the Bible, who knew what was the portrait of the Messiah in the Old Testament Scriptures, were the first to shout with exasperated feelings, jealousy, and envy, "This man receiveth sinners." But really and truly, the objection

they made to him was the evidence that he was what he professed to be. The very exclamation they uttered, "He receives sinners," which they, in their folly, proclaimed to be his shame, all heaven now rings with as the proof of his glory. It is the blessed attribute of Jesus still, "This man receiveth sinners;" and though many feel it now less than they ought to feel it, yet when that hour shall come in which the soul shall tremble and shiver in the porch by which it escapes to God, let us not forget that the objection of the Pharisee is the very essence of the gospel: "Jesus receiveth sinners." Our Lord replied to their objection, and by one of those simple but sublime illustrations which one is never weary of hearing. I do not know whether others have noticed it, but I seem every time I read and study the Bible, to feel that the epithet which is applied to the song of the redeemed in glory, ought to be applied to this blessed book: that song is called a *new* song; the Bible ought to be called a *new* Bible. We know quite well that the sweetest song that minstrel ever sang upon earth, soon becomes hackneyed, and we get tired of it; but the song of the redeemed in heaven never becomes hackneyed, it is always replete with music. Most books we read, even those which are most intensely interesting and exciting, will not bear reading more than twice or thrice. But it is true of the Bible, that the more we read the more we desire to read. The more we know the book, the more we appreciate it, till we exclaim with the Psalmist of old, "it is more precious than gold, sweeter also than honey and the honey-comb." This proves that it has infinite excellence. Infinite things alone can bear to be looked at. The reason why that

song is called new, is that it has exhaustless melody, and the oftener we hear it, the more glorious and beautiful it sounds ; and I believe that when eternity has rolled cycle upon cycle, saints will still ask for the old song, and still feel it to be the new song ; its infinite music has infinite attractions ; man never wearies of singing it, because its theme can never be over-uttered nor over-expressed.

Our Lord thus explains to the Pharisees how absurd their objection is : “What man of you having an hundred sheep, and lose one of them, doth he not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost ?” How interesting is this ! the murmuring of a scribe was the occasion of bringing forth the music of the gospel. The wrath of man is thus made the praise of God. Jesus shows by this beautiful parable, that their murmuring at his reception of sinners had no support either from the daily experience of humanity or from the most applicable analogies of the world, but the very contrary ; and hence this beautiful parable is the proof that this reception of sinners, instead of being a reason for murmuring, is and ought to have been a reason for thanksgiving. The contrast is very remarkable between the cavilling of the scribe, and the mercy of Him whom that scribe professed to preach. Man murmurs that his fellow-man is saved ; God rejoices that he is. The earthly minister of the earthly temple grieves that the Messiah received sinners ; the heavenly ministers in the heavenly temple rejoice that Christ still receives sinners. The contrast between the selfishness, the monopoly, the narrow-mindedness of the human servant, and the liberality, the large-heartedness, the

love, and benevolence of the heavenly, suggests what David said of old : "Let me fall into the hands of the Lord : " and let us be thankful that neither scribe nor Pharisee, nor priest, nor pope, has the keys of the kingdom of heaven hanging at his girdle.

The first and second parables recorded in the chapter, present one view of the love of God. The last parable, namely, that of the prodigal son, presents another, and, if possible, a more touching one. The parables of the lost sheep, and the lost coin, prove to us the love of God and the joy that is felt in heaven at the repentance of a sinner ; but the parable of the prodigal son, while it presents to us the love of God, reveals to us also the response and reflection made to it in the repentance of the sinner. We have thus, in the two first parables, the love of God commencing upon earth, and the joy following it in heaven. In the third parable, we have God's love commencing upon earth, and terminating in the repentance and return of the converted and reclaimed sinner. The one reveals the nearer, the other the remoter result.

These parables, too, seem to indicate progress. The three constitute together a glorious pyramid—a beautiful climax. In the first parable, you have a rich man losing one sheep out of a hundred—not a very great loss, and therefore the interest that he takes in that one lost sheep indicates the greatness of his love. In the second parable, you have a poor woman losing one coin out of ten—a loss proportionably greater. In the third parable, you have a father with two sons, and one son—his Benjamin—his beloved, going astray, and spending all in riotous living. We see, in the first parable, a loss of one out of a hundred sheep : in the

second parable, a greater loss, the loss of one coin out of ten; and in the third parable, a greater still, the loss of one son out of two; and therefore the joy that is felt at the recovery of that son, in the third, is greater than the joy realized in the recovery of the lost coin; and the joy that is felt at the recovery of the lost coin, is greater still than the joy realized at the recovery of the lost sheep. The three parables also reveal to us not only degrees of loss, and corresponding degrees of pain, but also degrees of guilt in the parties that are here concerned. The first parable, is that of the sinner wandering from the shepherd—a stray sheep ignorant of the way, and scarcely aware of the error into which it has fallen: in other words, illustrating the sentiment expressed by the apostle: “I did it ignorantly and in unbelief.” The sinner was lost, though it was in ignorance, ruined; the ignorance palliating, but not doing away with the sin. In the second parable we have the coin, bearing the name, the image, and the superscription of the king, casting itself away, excluding itself from the currency of the realm, buried in the earth, and turned to no good or profitable account: in short, the falling from loyalty to the King of kings. In the third parable you have more heinous guilt still: you have one who had tasted the joy, and reaped the benefits of his father’s house, and who, in spite of this, abandoned that home, and plunged into all sorts of riotous and disorderly courses. We have, therefore, not only the loss accumulating from parable to parable, but we have also the guilt of the sinner accumulating from the first, in the stray sheep, to the last in the prodigal and lost son.

The first parable, therefore, (the one which I pro

ceed to discuss,) must have touched emphatically the scribes and the Pharisees, because they might have recollected that the symbol under which the pastors of Israel were usually represented in the Old Testament Scripture was that of shepherds. For instance, Ezek. chap. xxxiv. is full of the sins, the duties, and the responsibilities of the priests and teachers of Israel, under the figure of shepherds careless of their flocks; hence our Lord, by using this symbol, employed a figure they could truly understand, and language with which they were perfectly familiar.

Let me now look at the minuter features of this beautiful parable. The shepherd *missed* his lost sheep. He had a hundred; one went astray; a careless shepherd would never have observed that one in a hundred was wanting; but the instant that it went astray, that instant this shepherd missed it. What an idea does this give of Christ's surveillance over us; the eye of the Saviour is upon every stray sinner in all his wanderings, in all his departure and apostasy from God; He sees him from first to last, as he missed him at the first. If we may apply this to a lost world—as it has been applied—there may be here an allusion to the fact, that the orb on which we live is the only stray one amid the orbs and worlds of the mighty universe,—and the last disclosures of the telescope have shown us that there are worlds piled, as it were, on worlds—that the sun, the centre of our system, is itself but related to another central sun—and that systems rising on systems, fill the immensity of space, and reveal to us some slight glimpses of the majesty, the glory, and the magnificence of Him who made them all by his fiat, and groups and controls them all by his sole

power. If this be so, and if our orb or world be the only stray one, then He who had ninety-nine millions of millions of worlds all retaining their pristine allegiance, *missed* this orb the moment it wavered from its path, and went astray from its allegiance to the great central Sun of righteousness, in whose attraction it was originally placed.

The stray sheep thus missed is called a "*lost sheep*." I know of no expression that can exhibit more graphically the utter hopelessness of a sinner's state than that of a lost sheep. The lost dog finds his way back to his master or to his kennel; a lost sheep rarely finds its way back to its fold; it goes further and further into the wilderness, till it dies of hunger, or is devoured by the wolf. No lost sinner ever yet of himself found his way back to God. The instant that a man leaves God, that instant he comes under the influence of a centrifugal force that leads him further and further from God; hell being only the deepest depth into which the soul under this impulse plunges: until, therefore, that centrifugal force, which drives the sinner further from God, be changed into a centripetal impulse, that shall bring the sinner back again, nearer and nearer to God, the lost sheep will wander further and further, till it is finally and irretrievably lost in the depths of perdition.

In the second place, the history of the lost sheep suggests to us something that we have lost. We have lost one thing—and having lost this, we have lost all—we have lost God. The most blessed fact mentioned in the gospel is that the sinner has found God; the greatest good that the saint realizes in glory is that God is his portion; and the greatest loss of mankind

is that they have lost God. We have lost his image and have become defaced—we have lost his friendship and have become enemies—we have lost communion with him and have become strangers—we have lost our sonship and are become slaves—we have lost our glory, and there is stamped alike upon the greatest philanthropist, and on the greatest criminal, legible to God's eye, this vivid inscription—Ichabod, the glory is altogether departed. We have lost the fountain, and are trying to quench our thirst from broken cisterns—we have lost the sun, and are walking by the twinkling tapers of human reason, or ecclesiastical tradition—we have lost righteousness, and we are clothed with filthy rags—we have lost the way to heaven, and are walking in the road to everlasting ruin. How much to be pitied is man! It is God's part to pronounce doom on the judgment-seat. It is man's part to pity and pray for the victims of so terrible a misfortune. For if there be a misfortune worthy of the name, it is the misfortune of having lost God, and life, and hope, and the way to heaven; and instead of this loss being a reason for indignation and rebuke on our part, it is only a strong reason for pity, for sympathy, for prayer, and for exhortation. The Son of God who missed this lost sheep at the first, feels deeply interested in its recovery. But how comes it to pass that the Son of God should ever be so interested as to have interposed in order to deliver us. He might have expunged this earth on which we tread from the galaxy of the orbs of the universe, and it would no more have been missed than a grain of sand, carried away by the wind, would be missed by me amid the sands of the sea-shore. Nay,

more, if God had been so pleased, he might have cleansed this orb of its guilty, rebellious, and ungrateful population, and have merely spoken, and it would have been instantly covered with millions of adoring sons, raising perpetual songs of praise, thanksgiving, and joy. What can have led the Almighty so to love them whose absence he could so easily dispense with, as to come down from that throne to which the imagination of an archangel never soared in its loftiest stretch, and to humble himself to a depth of agony, and exhaustion, and humiliation, and shame, and suffering, which we have never sounded nor felt as we ought? Why did he do so? There is but one answer: "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." There is no other reason on the face of the earth—there is none else we can assign. As it is, let us rejoice that it is so. Let us feel our responsibilities in consequence of it; let us be thankful who have tasted the sweetness of that boon, which will not be appreciated in all its glory till all flesh has seen the salvation of our God.

Here I may notice the infidel objection applied to Christianity; one which has been sung by Byron, and reasoned out by Hume, and paraded by the retailers on a small scale since, viz. that they cannot understand how it can be that, if there be thousands of orbs and worlds as the telescope reveals to us, God should have taken such trouble, and concentrated such sympathy upon this little narrow nook, this far-distant outpost in the hosts of the mighty universe, which he might have brushed from his path, as a dew-drop on the grass, and buried in the depths of annihilation: and

the skeptic's inference is, therefore, that Christianity cannot be true, because it is, as he thinks, contrary to the very first feelings or analogies of our experience. We answer, it is all the reverse. Our blessed Lord has shown that instead of this being contrary to all the analogies of human experience, it is in perfect harmony with them: "What man," he says, "having an hundred sheep, and lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine safe in the fold, and go after that which was lost? Or what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it?" So that instead of being an exception to the analogies of nature, it is in perfect unison with them. We ourselves know that if a mother has seven children, and if the seventh has played the prodigal, and gone to a strange land, where he is exposed to peril, that, on a winter's evening, when the wind blows loud and whistles at the casement, and the storm and hail and snow are heard pattering upon the roof, that mother will think less of the six children that are seated round the fireside, and often and deeply of the lost son, who is on the bosom of the deep, or in a far-distant land. It shows, therefore, that all the analogies of our experience "testify the ways of God to men;" and the objection of the skeptic, instead of being a solid one, is as weak and feeble as the miserable creed of which he is the victim.

No sooner, as we read in this parable, does the shepherd miss the sheep, than he goes after it. No sooner did this world fall than Christ came after it. That glorious promise, sounding amid the wrecks of

Paradise, was the first footfall of the Son of God coming after the lost sheep. Those prophecies spread through two thousand years—those calls, remonstrances, and warnings lifted up in the successive centuries of the past, were the voices of the shepherd sounding in the wilderness after the lost sheep. Those types and symbols, and sacrifices, and shadows—those ceremonies and institutions of the Mosaic dispensation, were the footprints upon the sands of time of the great, the God Shepherd, in his compassionate march from the throne of heaven to the cross of Calvary, in order to retrieve and recover the lost sheep; and his greatest act—his incarnation in Bethlehem—his agony and cross and passion—were but the crowning and visible evidence of his search after the lost sheep. He came, I have said, from his throne, he descended to the manger, but he descended deeper still; He that sat upon that throne, and could say every instant of his pilgrimage, “the Son of Man who is in heaven,” entered our grave in pursuit of that lost sheep—clasped the lost one in his bosom—quicken the dead one with his own divine love—carried it from the depths and darkness of the grave, and leaves it not until he places it a recovered soul beside him, and makes him to sit on his throne as he has sat down with his Father upon his throne in glory. What is the faithful preaching of the gospel of Christ, whether warning or promise, or exposition, or exhortation, but Christ by his ministers still going after the lost sheep? It is this that gives a faithful sermon its mighty importance; it is Christ’s voice calling after the lost sheep; it is this that gives the hearer of that ser-

mon his grave and exhaustless responsibility ; for it is the echo of Christ's voice, and he that rejects it rejects the Saviour himself. What are all the dispensations of Providence but Christ seeking after his lost sheep. He comes sometimes on the wings of the storm ; sometimes in the blaze of lightning or on the surge of the earthquake ; sometimes in the shocks of successive revolutions ; sometimes in the still small voice of domestic suffering and private calamity : and all these are the sounds of the footfall—the accents of the voice of the great Shepherd seeking after the lost sheep. Reader, have you lost some near and dear one?—that loss is the voice of the Shepherd seeking thee. Have you lost the accumulation of years, and are desolate?—it is the chasm created by Christ that it may be filled with the unsearchable riches of his own glorious presence. Whatever be the trial that smites, whatever be the calamity that overtakes you, regard it not as an accident tumbled out of chaos, but a touch by the hand that was nailed to the cross, to which your right response is : “Lord, to whom can we go, but unto thee, thou hast the words of eternal life.”

But in noticing Christ's conduct in seeking the lost sheep, we must observe that he goes after it *till* he *find* it. Christ's love has no ebb and flow : it has no flux and reflux ; it has all the fixity of an everlasting principle, and all the fervour of an inexhaustible passion. Hence, what Christ sets his heart upon, that he will triumph in ; his love does not falter in the worst of circumstances, nor does it weary in the best : it is a love that cannot be evaporated by the summer's heat, or frozen by the winter's cold. It goes forth like a sweet fountain that bursts from a hill-side, and pene-

trates the snow-drift which the night has left upon it, and turns the obstructing element into an impulse, adds to its volume, and rolls onward till it reaches the main, bearing in its bosom the trophies of its triumph—sinners saved and Jesus glorified.

Wherever, or upon whomsoever, Christ fixes the eye of his love, there he will lay the grasp of his omnipotence, and gloriously save. Christ never let the eye of his compassion light upon a sinner without by-and-by letting the weight of his power be felt by that sinner also. When he has found the lost, what does he do? Does he begin, as some of his ministers would do, to scold it? Does he begin to call it by severe and hard names, or as some would, beat it? or does he drive it home weary and weak and hungry, subjecting it to all the drudgery of the effort? or does he give it to a servant, that the servant may drag it home the best way he can? This is man's way; this is what you would do—what the scribe would do—what the Pharisee would do—what the priest would do. But Christ neither chides it, nor blames it, nor beats it, nor trusts it to a servant, but clasps it in his bosom, and lays it on his shoulder, and carries it home to that fold from which in its folly it wandered. How beautiful is the gospel! what encouragement to every sinner is in its message! What a misapprehension of that gospel when men think it only a compendium of wrath—its words Sinai words, instead of regarding them as the overtures of love, sounding from Mount Calvary. Whatever be the storm he has to encounter, or the length of the way, or the obstructions, or the enemies that beset him, he meets and masters all. How complete is our salvation! How complete a Saviour Christ is!

To use the quaint language of the old divines, "you must have a whole Christ, not a half Christ;" a sort of phraseology which is not scriptural, but yet having a meaning obvious to me: namely, that you need not only his *eye* to light upon you, his *hand* to lay hold upon you, his *love* to go after you, but his *shoulder* to carry you. "When he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulder." This teaches us that he that begins must finish his work: he that is the author must be the finisher: this grace which begins in time, will terminate in glory in eternity.

But when he lays it on his shoulder, how does he himself feel? Does he feel as we sometimes do when we have lost something, and found it again; somewhat glad we have got it, but still angry that we have gone through so much trouble and difficulty in seeking it? Such is not Christ's way. It may be but one sheep out of a hundred, yet he thinks it worth his while to go after it. It may be that the sheep has been recovered after a long and arduous pursuit; yet he feels not one sentiment of regret—not one feeling of chagrin, but lays it on his shoulder—in the beautiful language of the parable—"rejoicing." Whatever trouble he may have had, whatever care and anxiety he may have gone through, all is merged in the grandeur of that flood of joy that the lost sheep is brought back to the fold. It is the joy that one feels in success. "A woman in travail hath sorrow, but as soon as she is delivered, she remembereth no more the anguish for joy that a man is born into the world." So Jesus "sees the travail of his soul" in the recovery of the lost sheep, "and is satisfied." But his joy is not merely the joy of success—it is also that of benevolence. What is the

highest joy upon earth? surely the joy of benevolence. There is a joy that one feels when one has recovered a hundred pounds, that men call in their phraseology a bad debt, something that one had no hope of: one feels joy when he recovers it; and it is a legitimate joy. But when you have placed a five-pound note in the hand of some poor, pining, hungry, naked sufferer, have you not felt joy at that? This last is the purest joy that is realized on earth. If there be one flower that has survived the fall, fragrant with the aroma of Eden, beautiful and fair, it is the joy that one feels when one has done good. But there is nothing new in this. "It is more blessed," says our Lord, "to give than to receive." I believe that the joy of our Lord was not merely joy on recovering one that was lost, but it was the joy of intense and untiring benevolence. It was his meat and drink to do his Father's will, and he rejoiced ever as he saw good done. It is said that "for the joy set before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame." What was the nature of that joy? purely benevolent joy. And, my dear reader, if you have never tasted this joy, there remains one luxury for you which I envy you. I do not envy you the sweet things, and the costly things that may be upon your table, but I envy the man who has yet to taste the joy of clothing the naked, feeding the hungry, aiding the expansion, and contributing to the support of the cause of the good Shepherd.

Now a question arises, which is, perhaps, more curious than practical, but which I ought not to pass by, who are the ninety and nine spoken of that need no repentance? I cannot make the reader wiser than myself; I cannot pronounce where God has left the

matter unsolved, but I will submit what has been thought to be the allusion contained in these words, and leave the reader to take that solution which seems to him the most probable. Some suppose that he means the Pharisees, as if he had said, You Pharisees and scribes believe you are justified and need no repentance—you are the just men who need no repentance, which you assume to be: I tell you there is more joy in heaven over one recovered unjust man, than over the continuance of ninety and nine just men that need no repentance. Others think, that it relates to the angels who are in heaven, who need no repentance, because they are sinless beings; and that the joy felt in heaven is intenser from the spectacle of a sinner saved in earth, than from the glorious spectacle of millions of unfallen and adoring spirits that surround the throne of the Most High. But it does strike me that the most probable interpretation is, that the restoration of this lost orb to its pristine and predestined state of happiness, and beauty, and glory, when it shall be regained and restored by God himself, will be the greatest occasion of joy to angels that are in heaven. On the supposition which I have already made, that there are worlds peopled with unfallen and adoring beings, and that this is the only lost and strayed world in the whole universe of God, I believe there will be greater joy among the angels at seeing this world restored to its lost allegiance, and in every successive earnest of it now, than they have ever felt in contemplating the other orbs of creation, which have never strayed from God.

But practically it is of no consequence to us who the ninety and nine are. We do not belong to them;

this is quite plain. The ninety and nine do not comprehend us; our intensest interest must be concentrated on the recovery of the one lost. Are we, who once were lost, now recovered ones? is the great practical question that we have to solve.

We notice, in the next place, the perfect safety of this recovered sheep, and therefore the perfect safety of every recovered sinner; he is no longer wandering in the wilderness amid snares and pitfalls, liable to be torn by the wolf or roaring lion that goeth about seeking whom he may devour; but the lost sheep is on the shepherd's shoulder, the recovered sinner is in the bosom and beneath the outstretched wings of the Son of God; and this is only the pictorial illustration of the text, "I give unto them eternal life, and no man is able to pluck them out of my hand." But he fetches it home. Home is known only in the language and realized only in the land of our fathers: and one reason, perhaps, *why* on the Continent they have no kingdoms, is, the prior calamity that they have no homes. Home, I say, is musical in utterance, and should be sweet and delightful in experience. But all the homes of earth, the happiest homes in which those musical sounds, the glad voices of children, were ever heard, have shadows cast over them at intervals—they have wants and interruptions, clouds as well as sunshine, suspensions of their joy, rough places in their currents. But this home, to which we shall all be brought, has no cold shadow, there is no risk of suffering, there are no tears, no loss, no calamity there; the empire of uncertainty and change is perished from it. Seraphs shall be your servants, cherubim your companions: you are come unto "Jerusalem, the city of

the living God, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the Mediator." In one word, if you wish to know the glories, and have a glimpse of the splendour of this happy home, you must read chapters xxi. and xxii. of the Apocalypse, in which its features are graphically and vividly portrayed.

In concluding this chapter, allow me to remark, what a precious thing man's soul must be, that Christ should have come from heaven in order to save it! The greatness of the interposition proves the grandeur of the object which he came to accomplish. The height from which he came, and the depth to which he descended, the cross he bore, the cup he drank, the thorns around his brow, the agony within his heart, all tell us in touching eloquence what a susceptibility of joy, what a capability of wo are lodged in one single soul. But, my dear reader, we are so blinded by sin, that we look each upon the other's face, and conclude that what we see is the man, and when death makes that face pale, we think the man is gone. It is not so. The man is not gone. He is no more gone than the butterfly when it lays aside its chrysalis state, and ceases to be a worm, and unfurls its beautiful wings, and proceeds on its way, a flower of beauty and life. The soul has only laid aside its shackles—cast off its shroud, let go its encumbering element, that it may spread its wing, and rise until it soars with the cherubim that are around God's throne. Or, if that soul be not a recovered soul, the moment it lays aside its outer form, it sinks into a depth of wo and misery which no human imagination can conceive. My dear reader, how stands it with you, what is the state of your soul in the sight of God? Recollect you must

look God in the face one day ; you must be unclothed upon one day ; you must stand before God with nothing but the awful responsibility of having heard a gospel, which is a savour of life unto life to some, and a savour of death unto death to others. And if there be infatuation, which I cannot find language to express, it is the frightful infatuation of taking care of your estate, your health, your fair fame, but never taking care of what is weightier, greater, more momentous than them all a thousand times—the soul already long lost, and that needs to be saved. You are taking care of the coat, and allowing the wearer to be drowned. You are taking care of the casket, and casting the gem away. You are taking care of the mere nutshell, and suffering the kernel to rot and to decay. You are thinking about a thousand things that perish in the use ; and—oh, what folly ! what madness ! what infatuated madness !—you are careless about the never-dying soul, on which more interest is concentrated than upon anything beneath God. Angels pass by all the splendour of a great city, and regard it no more than the glittering spangle upon a royal robe ; but they gaze with intense sympathy upon some stray sheep within it.

How great is the love of the Son of God ! He loved us in our ruin. Is it not our experience that when we love a creature, we love that creature because there is something lovely in it ? but if Christ had loved us only in that way, we had not been loved at all. We love the creature because it is good. Christ loves the creature in order to make it good. He loved us, and therefore he died for us ; and therefore he seeks to save us. Let me ask you again the question—Are you

recovered? are you in the fold? are you a child of God among the people of God? a Christian? Answer these questions to your own conscience—answer them to God; they will accompany you to the judgment-seat of Christ: you must answer them when the answer truly given will settle the doom that never can be altered.

CHAPTER IV.

The Hidden Coin.

“What woman, having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it? And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbours together, saying, Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I had lost.”—LUKE xv. 8, 9.

I HAVE alluded to the congregation our Lord addressed upon this occasion, a congregation composed of publicans and sinners, and Pharisees and scribes: the first acknowledging their sins, and urging no palliation or excuse; the last pretending they had atoned for their sins by their virtues, and needed no forgiveness, and merited not to be classed with publicans and sinners. I have noticed the cavilling objection that was made by the Pharisees to our Lord's conduct, “this man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them;” and I have endeavoured to show you that the objection of the Pharisee is the glory of the gospel, and that the cavil which was made against the Saviour by those that sat in Moses' seat, is just the strongest credential that he was the Saviour promised by the Father. I have also showed that if Jesus received no sinners, there were none else to receive. There are none but sinners upon earth; and if Christ has not come to seek and to save sinners, whom has he come to save? The fact that we are sinners, and the circumstance that we

feel so, is just the evidence that we belong to that class which the Lord of glory came from the height of his throne to ransom, retrieve, and save. I showed too, that when Christ receiveth sinners, he does not do so against his will, by a stern necessity he is unable to resist, but willingly; it is his delight to save: "for the joy set before him"—this joy of receiving sinners—"he endured the cross, despising the shame." And yet how little do we realize this and feel the full importance of it? When we go to God and ask of him forgiveness, is there not lurking in all bosoms a lingering feeling that we are trying to extract from God what God has some reluctance to bestow? Is not this a too common feeling?—whether it springs from the consciousness of the greatness of our sins, or from a misapprehension of the goodness of God, I cannot say, but is it not the prepossession that we have more or less to grapple with, each in his own bosom, so that when we pray to God for the forgiveness of our sins, there come and mingle with our prayer fears and feelings that God is not willing, that we must try and overcome this reluctance, and that, after all, it will be but a narrow escape if we subdue his wrath, and are introduced into the joy prepared for his people. This, my dear friends, may be Pantheism, or it may be Deism, or it may be Romanism, but it is not Christianity. If there be one sentiment that spreads across the page of the Bible more luminous than another, it is this, that when the Son of God receives sinners, he receives them gladly, and their restoration is the element of a joy that flows through the length and breadth of heaven, like a wave from the fountain of joy, making glad all the shores that it touches. I said, that

not only did Christ delight to receive sinners, but I said also that it was his office to receive sinners. This is another thought that should give us confidence when we go to Christ for forgiveness. When you find a judge in this land, you expect he will do his office—a physician his—a lawyer his—a preacher his; and when you think of the sun, you understand it is his duty to shine and pour down light: when you think of a fountain, you recollect that it is its function to pour forth its fresh waters; and when you think of Christ, recollect it is not only his joy, but is the very office for which he is the Christ, to receive and to forgive sinners. And if I apply to him from the depths of my heart for the forgiveness of my sins, I believe—and I say these words with the utmost reverence—that he can no more refuse me the forgiveness of my sins, with a firm faith in the efficacy of his blood, than God can cease to uphold and govern the universe he has made. It is his office.

But I showed you more: I said also that it is his glory. We have also a lingering idea, that when God forgives us, when the Lord Jesus Christ blots out our sins, it is with a sort of quiet compromise of his own glory: that, as it were, he steps down a little from the position that he ought to occupy, in order to forgive us. It is not so: the least or the greatest sinner God cannot forgive with any compromise of his justice, his holiness, or his truth. But the very reverse is the fact. I gather from the Bible, that he is covered with the greatest glory when he forgives the greatest sin; that God's throne is never seen to be so glorious as when God's mercy is felt to be most rich. And, therefore, I can see the meaning of that word

which we have never felt as we ought to feel, the word *boldness*. "Let us come with boldness to the throne of the heavenly grace." "Having boldness and access with confidence." Why? Because it is Christ's office to forgive us; because it is his joy to do so; because it is his glory to do so; because he himself has said, which expresses all, "Him that cometh unto me I will not"—I would add, because he cannot—"cast out." Then I showed you how our Lord illustrated this sentiment. He said to the Pharisees, You are cavilling and quarrelling with me for looking to the lost, and letting alone those, like yourselves, who think they are among the unfallen, the just, and the good. I am not now to speak to you: this chapter is for sinners—as if he had said—but I will show you that, on your own principles, on your own reasoning, it is but natural that I should leave the ninety and nine, be they angels, or cherubim, or Pharisees, is of no great consequence, as far as we personally are concerned, that need no repentance, and look after the lost one, who, according to your own statement, needs the repentance which I am endeavouring to impress. Now whether this lost sheep, which I explained in the last chapter—"What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders rejoicing,"—be our lost world, compared with other worlds, or one lost sinner compared with sinners that are saved, and within the fold, is of no great consequence: we are quite sure that each one of us has his type in the lost sheep: we need not trouble ourselves much about the ninety and

nine, because we know we are not one of them ; this is quite plain enough ; but nevertheless, when the shepherd loses a sheep, though only one out of a hundred, he goes after it. I told you a lost dog finds its way back to its master, but a lost sheep has not the least chance of doing so ; it will be caught in the thicket, it will be devoured by the wolf, or it will die of hunger. I told you Christ does not wait till the lost sheep winds back its circuitous way home ; but the instant he misses it, the moment it is gone, he goes after it with the speed of the lightning's wing, and he does not leave it until he find it. I showed you that wherever the eye of his mercy is riveted, there the feet of his goodness will travel, and there the grasp of his power will be felt. And then I asked, when he finds this lost sheep, what he does with it. Does he beat it ? does he scold it ? does he quarrel with it ? does he say, as you say to your children when they come back again, and that very wrongly, This is just what I expected ; you deserved it all : it is well you have got it ? This is man's way, it is not God's way. My dear reader, whenever you show goodness, show it unmingled ; whenever you show mercy, show it unmingled. Let the very exuberance and excess of goodness that you show, be your strong hope of melting and subduing the wickedness that you regret. When Christ finds the lost sheep, he neither scolds it nor beats it, nor, such is the tenderness of that Shepherd, does he send it to another shepherd, and bid him take care of it, because no other shepherd could be like the great and the good Shepherd—but he lays it on his own shoulder, carries it home across moor and wild and morass and ditch, through storm and rough way, and

does so forgetting the toil that he undergoes, and rejoicing that his lost sheep is found. So, my dear reader, it is in heaven : the moment that one sinner says what he feels, I repent, and my Lord and my Saviour, I come to thee ; that feeling, in the depth of the deepest heart, touches the electric wire, the effects of which are felt beside the throne of God.

I now come to another parable, scarcely less beautiful than that on which I commented in the last chapter ; namely, the lost coin. It seems, at first sight, to be almost identical with the former, but it is really not so. Our Lord never repeats the same sentiment under the same symbol, or with precisely the same contemplated effects. It is not mere repetition, nor is it mere identity : it is presenting the same truth under another form, enabling us to look at it at another angle, and carrying it with greater force, perhaps, to some bosom to which the first parable would not convey the same vivid impression : for we know that a simile, an allusion that conveys the most kindling sympathies to one man's bosom, fails to elicit a single spark from another. To speak, for instance, to a tradesman, who has been all his life in London, and never beyond it, about scenes in the country, and shepherds and sheep, is to speak almost in an unknown tongue to him : his ideas, illustrations, and habits are of a totally different character : but to appeal to something connected with trade, with the transactions of commerce, with the intercourse of mankind, is not to change the thought, but to change the form in which the thought is expressed, and that moment he will feel an interest in what you say, and be profited by it. So does our Lord. He retains the living thought, he varies only the phraseology in which it is clothed. If

the story of the stray sheep sounds most musical in the pulpit of a country church, the story of the lost coin may strike more vividly in a city or a town congregation. The woman misses the piece that is lost. She has ten pieces: one is lost, and instantly she misses it. It is so with our blessed Lord; the stray sheep, Jesus tracks; the lost coin, however hidden, he sees. The first case is the lost sheep, which he finds; the last is the lost coin hidden, corroding in the dust, which Christ sees. A sparrow cannot fall to the earth, from its overwearyed wing, that he does not see. A hair cannot fall from an old man's head that he does not superintend. He is in the minutest, as well as in the mightiest events of life; all is seen, controlled, and governed by him. The sinner may bury himself in the depths of this great metropolis—he may lie in the dungeon or in the prison—he may be in the darkest crypt, or in the most illuminated cathedral; he may be in the narrowest and filthiest lane or alley in the city; or he may be in the highways of its commerce and its traffic: let him be where he may, let him be alone or in the thickest throng, there is not a thought that leaps, like a bubble on the waters, from that sinner's heart, that the Lord Jesus does not see and register before the throne. He sees the hidden sinner, none ever go beyond his cognizance; nor is there any thing in the sinner's heart that he does not see and hear and know. Let us pray that God may write upon our hearts the hundred and thirty-ninth psalm; let us pray that God would make practical and real to our hearts this great truth, "Thou God seest me." Let us feel that there is nothing so minute as to be beneath his notice, nothing so great as to be beyond his control. The eyelid of the minutest emmet,

and the wing of the greatest eagle, he sees; the dew-drop on the leaf, and the ocean that girds the earth like a zone, he sees. The thought of the poorest widow and the diplomacy of the greatest statesman, he sees through. If we could but realize this, that God, at this moment, sees as clearly all that is in my heart and in your heart, as if there were only two individuals in the whole universe, God and myself, how solemnizing would such an impression be! how altered would be the tone! how changed the direction of our life.

The woman no sooner missed her lost coin, than she evidently felt great anxiety about it, and set about recovering it. The Lord Jesus Christ no sooner missed the guilty, than he felt anxious to recover him. Why this anxiety? It would have been no diminution of his happiness if we never had been recovered, nor can our restoration be any acquisition to his essential happiness. The woman would not have been a bankrupt by losing $7\frac{1}{2}d.$, for that was the amount of the penny, and God would not have lost his praise, nor heaven have been without inhabitants, if this earth had been swept from its orbit, and all its tenantry plunged in everlasting ruin. If Adam and Eve had been the last, as well as the first of mankind, and this orb had existed as the solitary sepulchre in which the first pair were buried, God would have lost nothing of his praise; he had only to speak, and a million of more beautiful orbs would have started into being, rapidly as the dew-drops of the morning, reflecting his glory, and uttering forth his praise. Is it not then most mysterious to us that God should have left the ninety-nine millions of orbs in the universe he has made, which may retain their allegiance to himself, and should have

come upon the wings of mercy to recover such a world, and such inhabitants as we are? What did he say to Jerusalem? "O Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thee, but ye would not;" "Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life." "He is not willing that any should perish:" what interest can he have in us? what acquisition shall we prove to his happiness? what addition can we be to his glory? then why this intense and untiring anxiety that streams from every verse, and is audible in every parable, to save and recover us? The answer is, "He loved us with an everlasting love, and therefore with loving-kindness has he drawn us." And there is no other answer that God has given, or that man can divine.

We read that when the woman missed the coin, she lighted a candle, and swept the house and sought it. The first promise pronounced amid the ruins of Eden, the woman's "seed shall bruise the serpent's head," was the first spark from which this candle was lighted, and was the promise of a Saviour: this light gleamed brighter in the days of Abraham, brighter still in the days of Moses, till every type, and shadow, and symbol, and sacrifice, and person, became a candlestick, and the whole earth and sky were illumined by altar candles, lit for blessed mysteries. The whole land of Judea was illuminated by this light, and at last the Sun himself came: that Sun which now rises above the horizon: he is still horizontal—he is not yet vertical—he will be vertical when he comes again: he tips every event with his light, and every dispensation with his beams. The church is but a candlestick; the minister is but a light-bearer lighted from the Sun; and all this is that he may find the coin that was lost.

It is said the woman sweeps the house when she thus seeks the lost coin. The dust she raised, I have no doubt, was great; the confusion for the moment intolerable. So has it been in the history of Christianity. Men quarrel with Christianity because it does not produce peace in the world. Our Lord has told us, "I am not come to send peace on the earth, but a sword." What is all that has been taking place so lately on the continent of Europe? It is the sweeping of the European house, that Christ may find the lost coin, restamp it with his image, reprint on it his name, give it a new currency, make all rejoice that the lost is found and the hidden is discovered.

The woman seeks it, and seeks it, we are told, until she finds it. The intensity of the Redeemer's pursuit we cannot express. It is the effort of the general to retrieve the battle; of skill to recover the dying; of one whose fortune has been wrecked to regain it, and these are faint symbols of the intensity of effort made by him to recover the lost soul. But you say, "He has only to put forth his omnipotent power, and it will be recovered." Were we mere brutes, I could understand this. Were men mere machines, we should need no such process as the gospel; it would require only the touch of Omnipotence, and all would be restored to their proper place. But man is a rational being, and even in his ruins is respected by God, and he ought not to be disrespected by himself. Our very wreck gives token of the splendid magnificence of the original temple; and such is man's nature that God will not save a man against his will. He makes within us that will, but he never saves us against our will; and therefore we must expect that he will deal with us

as endowed with reason, as furnished with affections; as having heads to be convinced, hearts to be impressed—affections to be restored—sympathies to be kindled. He will save us rationally, not mechanically. We are not brute creatures to be driven by power, but men to be drawn by appeals to our reason and affections. The Lord Jesus Christ setting out to seek the soul, seeks it in every nook in which it can hide itself; he seeks it in every corner in which it may be accidentally concealed; he seeks it in every hiding-place to which it runs. He seeks it amid the tumult of revolted passions; amid the restlessness of unsanctified desires; he seeks it where we should say search was hopeless, and he persists in seeking it where any one besides would despair of finding it. He seeks it by our conscience, for what was conscience once? God's representative. God had only to speak in heaven, and Adam's conscience was the very echo of God's voice. The connection between God and man's conscience was then like the electric wire: instant, complete, and continuous. But when sin was introduced, a non-conducting element was introduced, an element too of ruin and disaster; but still, deranged as man's conscience is, it is not destroyed. I believe there is not one faculty that Adam had, which we have not also, deranged, dimmed, weakened, but in no case utterly destroyed. And, among the rest, we have conscience still; and whensoever God speaks, man's conscience hears, and recognises the voice of its Lawgiver. Christ spoke, and the waves of the restless ocean recognised the voice of Him who made it. And whenever God speaks to man's conscience, that still more restless and tumultuous sea—tumultuous because of sin—recognises

the tones of Him who originally constructed it. What is that sense of want that you often feel? what are those checks, those remonstrances, those twinges within you, of which you are sometimes conscious? what is that dissatisfaction with self? that conviction that all is not right to live with, and still less ready to die with? what is that terrible looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, when disease is upon you, and death seems possible or probable. All these are the sounds of the footfall of the Son of God in your conscience, seeking the lost coin, to restamp it, reglorify it, and to give it new currency in heaven.

He speaks to men not only by their conscience, but he speaks to them by affliction. What is affliction sent for? Many persons tell us there are always secondary causes, which either create it or result in it; and certainly there are secondary causes; no one can doubt it: but there is a greater also; the secondary cause is but a secondary wheel moved by a first wheel. "Affliction comes not from the ground." It is, I believe, to every man on whom the eye of Christ is fastened, just as truly mercy from God's throne, as the angel that came into Peter's prison, and struck off his chains, and opened the gates that he might be free; and who has not found it so? The sick-bed has far more persuasive eloquence than the pulpit and the sermon: who knows not that to have a little illness is a greater element of sanctification than to hear many a sermon? And when we are visited with bereavement—when bonds we thought lasting are broken—when ties we thought were strong are dislocated—when names that were like household words have become, silent, and faces on which we gazed with delight

are pale or buried in the grave: the desolation—the aching desolation which bereavement has left behind—enables us to hear God's voice sounding in the stillness and silence of the chasm—"Prepare to meet thy God." It is good for us that we are sometimes afflicted: they are to be pitied who have been least afflicted; but happy is he whom the Lord chasteneth; for though "no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous," yet afterward it worketh out a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory "unto them which are exercised thereby."

Christ seeks us, and comes after the last coin in the preaching of the gospel. What is the reading of the Bible? Christ's voice seeking us. What is that word which the preacher speaks? or that thought which goes to the very depths of your heart? It is Christ seeking you. And whether he speaks to you in the music of his promises, or in the thunders of his threatenings, or in the still small voice, "Come, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest:" whether in short he speaks to you in judgment, or in mercy, it is Christ in pursuit of you, seeking the lost coin that he may restamp it, and give it again its ancient or a better currency.

In this parable we read that wherever he thus seeks he will find it. I showed when the shepherd went after the lost sheep, he did not desist from his pursuit until he found it. It is so with Christ Jesus. Wherever he has set his heart to find the hidden coin, there you will see his hand recovering and restoring it. Then we have stated the result of his finding this lost coin, or, in literal phraseology, the lost sinner. We will reserve for the next chapter the two facts which I have

not yet commented upon, namely, the joy in the presence of the angels, and the greater joy over one sinner that repenteth than over ninety and nine just persons that need no repentance. If I understand the gospel, it is not that we are first to repent, and then to believe in the Saviour, but if I do not misinterpret, it is that we are first to believe and then we are to repent. If you seek, my dear reader, to extract repentance from your heart before you go to Jesus for forgiveness, you seek the living among the dead, you seek for life, and of course you seek in vain; but if you go to God, to seek from him who is exalted to bestow it, the repentance you need you will not seek in vain. Christ finds the lost sheep; then there is repentance; Christ finds the lost coin hidden, then there is repentance. Christ is "exalted a Prince and a Saviour to give repentance." All this implies that we recognize him as thus exalted on his throne before we obtain that repentance. It was Christ's look on Peter that created in Peter responsive repentance, and until Christ looks upon us, and we see sin, not as committed against the Legislator, or the Creator merely, but as committed against the crucified Redeemer, the Saviour, the Intercessor on the throne, we shall never see sin in the right light, or at the right point of view, or in its real essential and terrible hideousness in the sight of God.

In the next place, if Christ should be thus looking for you, then, my dear reader, seek, if possible, in the providence of God, to place yourself in the way of his finding you. It is true there is no nook in which you can hide where he does not see you, but it is as true that there are certain walks, and paths, and places where he has promised to meet you. Do not run from

the reading of the Bible, from the faithful preaching of the gospel, do not try to escape from a twinge of conscience that you do not like, but try to believe that Christ may remove it: do not try to escape from convictions that rankle in your mind, and say, I will not go to the house of God till my conscience is a little more stupified, till this uncomfortable feeling be gone away. It is true that by such a course the uncomfortableness would be removed, but it would be like the plan of unskilful physicians who would try to remove a disease by deadening the feeling of it, not by striking at the root and essence of it. And do not try to run from Christ by hiding yourself in your own passions and your own prejudices. Many persons seem to spend life in raising clouds of distrust, and doubt, and fear, and difficulty, as if they sought to escape the eye of Him whose eye would pity them. When a cloud comes between you and the sun, it is not the sun that has ceased to shine,—the cloud is not near the sun though it is near us; but the practical effect is the same: and when we lose our sense of the presence, and the favour, and the acceptance of our Lord, do not think that that glorious sun has set behind the horizon, but that some prejudice, some doubt, some distrust, something in our mind has arisen to conceal from our view Him under whose wings there is healing.

I cannot but notice, how intense is the love of the Lord Jesus Christ to his people. His whole career on earth was a pursuit of rebels, of sinners, of men that said, “we will not have this man to rule over us,”—of men that said, “crucify him, crucify him.” And for what did he pursue us? and for what does he pursue us still? Most naturally, you would expect to destroy

us. But the whole language of Scripture declares that he is come to seek and to save that which was lost. Notice all the miracles that our Lord did; every miracle not only was the evidence of power which could crush, but was the demonstration of love and goodness which he wished us to feel and to respond to. He did not smite his foes with famine, but he fed the multitudes with bread; he did not palsy the arm that was raised up to smite him when he was carrying the cross, but he healed the palsied hand, and enabled the cripple to leap like the roe; he did not strike dumb the men that reviled him to his face, but he opened the mouth of the dumb; and unstopped the ears of the deaf, that they might praise him and hear him. His whole path from the manger to the cross was luminous with mercy and love, and his one great object was to seek and to save that which was lost. His whole teaching, too, was of the very same stamp and description. Read his remonstrances, read his parables, read his invitations: you never find the Saviour speak the language of rebuke and condemnation, except where there was hypocrisy. It is most remarkable that to a hypocrite he spoke in tones of awful severity; because, I believe, if there be one sin more odious to God than another, it is wallowing in sin, and gilding it over with religion that the sin may pass current as virtue, and that we may get *eclât* among mankind: but when a poor sinner woman was dragged before him—when guilty publicans gathered round him, his voice was a voice of mercy, his act forgiveness, his language cordiality and welcome. He seems in all his teaching to have been a glorious magnet let down from heaven to draw lost sinners from their hiding-place, and bring them for ever to

himself. He declares that the great object of his teaching was "not to condemn the world, but to save the world." And beautiful was that teaching indeed! A bouquet of wild flowers, a cluster of ripe fruit, a mother with a babe in her bosom, a poor widow going with her mite to the temple, a field of wheat, the seashore, the river, these were the *nuclei* of gracious thoughts which he uttered for us, and those thoughts were the embodiments of infinite mercy; and all he said, and all he did, was such that it could be said, "no man ever spake as this man;" and it might be added, "no man did as this man;" and it might be added yet further, "no man died as this man." He gave his life for the sheep, a sacrifice for our sins; and he is now sitting upon his throne, still seeking to save the lost. He controls providence, directs events, overrules all things, if peradventure he may find us.

If this be so, let me ask you, are you coins once lost, but now found? Were you once blind, but do you now see? Have you reason to believe, in the language of the first parable, that the shepherd has raised you on his shoulder, and has begun to carry you home rejoicing? Have you any reason to believe, in the language of the second parable, that the lost coin has been rescued from the rubbish by which it was covered, and has been drawn by a heavenly attraction to Him who is the great magnet of the universe, and having been stamped with his image, has been inscribed with his name, and is no more the worthless currency of Cæsar, but the precious currency of heaven? In other words, have you renounced the sins that you practised, the lusts that you cherished, the evil passions that you were conscious of? and can you say from the heart,

“I love what once I hated, I delight in what once I ran from; a day in God’s house is better than a thousand in the tents of sin; God’s word is sweet to my taste, and precious in my estimation; I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ my Lord.” My dear reader, it is well if we can speak thus now: we know not when the sick-bed and death-bed may come. We know not when we may be summoned to our Judge, or our Judge come to us. We live in days that are pregnant with stupendous events, and heaving the whole heart with convulsive throes, as if creation were groaning and travailing, waiting for its approaching deliverance. “We know not what a day may bring forth.” At all times we may die. Are your lamps burning? are your loins girded, as men ready for their Lord? My dear reader, to be at peace with God will not make you one whit less industrious, or one whit less beautiful in all the relationships of life. You say you have no time to be a Christian. What time did it take the jailer of Philippi? What time did it take Saul of Tarsus? “What must I do to be saved?” was the cry of agonizing despair one moment: the prescription was instantly given, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved;” and the next moment, the jailer “believed and rejoiced with all this house.” Do you think he was a less effective servant of Cæsar, after he had entered the service of Christ? I believe that it will be found that in all the departments of life—in the army, in the navy, in the Parliament, in all professions, in all trades, in the shop, the warehouse, anywhere, and everywhere—the most devoted servants of the Lord Jesus Christ are the best servants of Cæsar.

CHAPTER V.

Joy in the Presence of the Angels.

‘I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.’—LUKE xv. 7.

IN the declaration that there is joy among angels at a sinner’s repentance, Christ showed by an appeal to heaven, of which earth ought to be a copy, that if there was joy in the presence of the angels, that never fell, over one lost sinner restored, there ought not to be grief or chagrin among the just ones, if such they were, that Christ was sent to recover sinners. He supposes, for argument’s sake, the Pharisees were the ninety-nine just persons, and then he shews them by illustrations the most beautiful, drawn from the earth, and by a fact, the most interesting recorded of heaven, that instead of regret and disappointment, there ought to be nothing but joy at the restoration of sinners. A shepherd with an hundred sheep, if he lose one does not say, what does it matter to me; no great loss; here are ninety-nine left: I will find a source of joy in the ninety-nine that are in the fold, and I shall feel very indifferent about the one that is gone. Whether it be buried in the snow-drift, or be devoured by the wolf, or perish of hunger, I shall neither hear its groans, nor see its struggles. This may be Pharisaism, but it is not nature. Nature shews us that the shepherd

leaves the ninety and nine safe in the fold, and goes after that one which was lost; so, he says, it is with the Son of God. He has ninety-nine orbs, it may be, that retain their allegiance, and one stray planet, the earth, which has broken loose from its orbit, and come under a new and destructive attraction. He leaves the ninety and nine orbs that bask in their primeval sunshine, and roll on in their first harmony, and goes after this stray planet that has lost its attraction, and come under a terrible eclipse, and will be plunged in everlasting night, unless it be retrieved and recovered. I have omitted to state what, perhaps, is of some interest, that if this refers to ninety-nine worlds that are not fallen, and this one world which has fallen, as Chalmers has tried to shew in once of his most eloquent astronomical discourses, then it teaches us that this world, as a whole, is a lost and a fallen one, and that nothing, however excellent in it, can be a compensation for the fact that it is in a state of disruption from the sun, by which it should be controlled. It is just the way in which we meet the difficulty of upright, benevolent, honourable, generous men, who say: "What! do you mean by stating God will condemn us, who pay every man his due—who never were guilty of any dishonourable act—who have ever pursued a course of generosity and philanthropy, around whom, orphans crowd and bless us, and widows kneel to pray for us? are we also to be regarded as perishing?" I answer, yes. It is said, "unless a man"—whosoever he may be—"be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Suppose a world has gone astray, in the way in which I suppose this to have gone astray: let it retain all its primeval verdure and beauty—there

is nothing in it, however beautiful, that can possibly atone for this one fact, that it has left the orbit in which God placed it, wherein its mission, its function, and its duty lay. In vain it retains its beautiful landscapes, its fair gardens, its homes covered with sunshine, its peaceful people, its meandering streams, its brave and noble sons, all that we can conceive to have been originally created in it, for all this is no compensation for the first grand outer fact that it has gone astray from the great centre to which it ought to gravitate, and round which it ought continuously to move. Or, to use another illustration, suppose, for instance, that Ireland were to break loose from England and Scotland, and refuse to be subject to the same laws and government: and suppose that after Ireland had been mastered by a power she was unable to resist, the heads of that country were to come and say to our Government, "We have been a very peaceful, industrious people, notwithstanding our disruption; we have had no great crimes perpetrated in the midst of us; we have been internally happy and prosperous: our fathers have been attached to their homes, our children have been dutiful to their parents, our people obedient to the magistrates; these facts must and will surely exculpate and acquit us." The answer of our Government would be, no internal excellence in you can be an atonement for the great crime you have committed in breaking loose from the government to which your first, best, and truest allegiance is due. Your internal order is no excuse for your external rebellion. So is it with this our world: no excellence that it may have on it or within it can be atonement for its first apostacy from God. It is

a revolted world. I have read and heard the remark, that it is altogether inconsistent with all idea of the greatness of God, and the dignity of Deity, that having worlds around him without number, and having the power to create more, he should have taken such pains and trouble about this little speck that he might have expunged without its being missed, as to have sent his own Son to become incarnate, bleed, and suffer, and die, to retrieve it. If the restoration of this world were the only thing intended, all analogy, as I have already proved, would still shew the invalidity of the objection; but I believe that the recovery of this world is not the ultimate object of our Saviour's incarnation. I believe this world is yet to be the moral capital of the universe; that from this sequestered nook in infinite space, ten thousand times ten thousand orbs are to learn new lessons, and gather new proofs of the glory of God. Just as the capital of the country becomes the seat of legislation, to which all the provinces look, so this same little orb, small and insignificant as it may appear, will be the lesson book of the universe: and at this moment the inhabitants of un-fallen worlds may bow down to gaze and wonder, first at the infatuation of man, and next at the infinite and unfathomable mercy and love of God.

But I desire to dwell more directly upon the text I have quoted, "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." The first instance in which we read of joy among the angels, is at the completion of creation. "The morning stars," that is, the angels, we are told, "then sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for

joy." The next occasion on which we read of the joy of angels, was when Christ was born: "We bring you glad tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people:" and the third occasion—and this shews the stupendous nature of the event—is when one sinner repents and turns to God. Three great things, which the natural man would be the last to place in the same category, are so placed by God; the creation of the world, the incarnation of a God, the regeneration of a lost and ruined soul. One reason, perhaps, why angels thus rejoice, may be their infinite benevolence. I do not know higher benevolence than rejoicing at good, in which the rejoicing one has no share. When we rejoice at natural blessings which reflect their benefits upon us, there may be something selfish in our joy, but when we rejoice at blessings tasted by others, but denied to us, then our benevolence rises from being a human thing, and becomes almost divine. Angels have no share in the benefits of our restoration—they never felt any need of repentance, and can derive no good from seeing it, and yet they rejoice when one soul is born again. Another cause of their joy may be their perception of the nature, and their feeling of the hatefulness of sin. I believe that we have no adequate conception of what sin is. The very bluntness of our moral perceptions, the effect of sin, prevents us from seeing the intensity of force concentrated in that monosyllable—sin. Angels saw it when it struck at the attributes of Deity in heaven; and the rebellious angels felt they saw it too, when it rose up against God, in that Paradise which his own smile had made so beautiful, and his own breath had made so fragrant, and they hated it. They saw sin drag the

Lord of glory from his throne, nail him to a cross, lay him in a stranger's grave. Angels have seen what havoc the trail of the fell serpent has left upon the earth, from Paradise lost till Paradise again shall be regained. And ever as they see one soul delivered from its bonds, comprehending as they do its real nature, they see sin loosening its gripe—its empire so far broken—the prospects of its tyranny destroyed, and so intensely do they hate it, that the emergence of even one from that sea of ill, which seems to have no bounds—from that dead sea, where

“Death lives, life dies, and nature breeds perverse
All hateful, all abominable things.”

they rejoice, and thus there is joy in the presence of the angels of God.

Another cause why angels rejoice at the rescue of one soul, is not only their hatred of sin, but their delight in holiness. I believe that what beauty is to us, that holiness is to them; the splendour of the sky, the beauties of a landscape, the tints of a flower, whatever is beautiful in nature, are in their impressions on our senses dim and imperfect exponents of the effect that perfect holiness has upon the unfallen. Holiness is true beauty, and beauty is but an outward type or symbol of holiness. Wherever holiness has begun to be, beauty begins to develop itself; and so at the sight of one seed of approaching Paradise cast upon the earth, there is joy in the presence of the angels. Another cause is no doubt their estimate of the greatness of one soul. There is one thought which I have always tried to feel, but have failed to feel as I ought, namely, the greatness of man's soul. The more I

think of it, the more I am convinced that the most magnificent created thing in the earth is man's soul. What capacity of wo! what susceptibility of joy! what latent powers to be developed! what giant faculties! how worthy of a God to make it! how needful was the interposition of a God to redeem it. That soul is not something that is the monopoly of a king; it is thy soul and my soul, that which thinks and feels, and loves and hates within us; that which has immensity for its home, eternity for its duration: that which has once begun to live, but which the worm that never dies cannot kill, which the fire that is never quenched cannot consume, which will last and live and feel the intensity of endless joy amid the splendours of the beatific vision, or the intensity of indescribable agony in the realms of everlasting pain. Angels fathom its capacity, and when angels see such a magnificent thing retrieved from wreck, and from being the victim of such misfortune, and made the adopted son of God, can we wonder that there is joy in the presence of the angels over so august and impressive a spectacle. Another cause of angel joy at the recovery of one lost soul is their ever seeking and delighting in the glory of God. God made the universe to reflect his glory, and He will yet remake this marred orb to reflect it again more brilliantly than at first. God will not lose one ray of his glory by its fall; on the contrary, I believe there will be thrown up from this recovered orb an intenser glory to Deity than ever shall be reflected from all the other worlds in infinite space. They all reflect his power and goodness, but this world most brilliantly his mercy, his love, his truth, his justice, his holiness. And when angels see a soul restored, they see in that

soul a focus of God's glory; they see a new luminous point upon the earth radiating that glory. They see a monument of how good, how just, how holy, how merciful God is, and they rejoice as they see it. They see in one recovered soul, a whole panorama of wonder, of beauty, of glory; they see there the condemned acquitted, the diseased healed, the lost found, sin destroyed, the sinner saved; God just while he justifies him, holy when he embraces him, faithful to his word while he acquits him, and true to all his threats and all his promises, when, from being the heir of misery, he makes that soul the inheritor of glory. Truly there is ground for joy among the angels at such triumphs. They see also in the recovery of one lost soul, another stone taken from the arch of Satan, another element of Satan's power removed, and a new element contributed to God's glory. And ever as they see one stone taken from the arch that Satan reared, one victim of the curse made the recipient of a blessing—ever as they see approach nearer that day when Satan shall be bound, and his victims shall be free—ever as they see a fore-light of approaching heaven—a first-fruits of a regenerated world—the fore-taste of that blessed day when they shall rejoice, not ever a soul recovered here, and a sinner retrieved there, but over mercy and truth that shall meet together, and righteousness and peace that shall kiss each other, and a world that closes, as it commenced, with Paradise, and mankind the reflection of the happiness and holiness that are before the throne of Deity, they unanimously rejoice.

These, then, are some of the grounds on which we may suppose that “the angels rejoice over one sinner

that repenteth." But there occurs a question interesting, not in connection with the points I have stated, but specially interesting in connection with controversies that have been mooted upon this passage. I need not inform you that as often as you attempt to reason with those who say that you ought to pray to angels, and ask their intercession, and you make the objection, "how is it possible that an angel who is a finite creature, can know what may be transacted at the same moment in a thousand different parts of the globe?" the invariable answer is, "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." Angels are ministering spirits to them that shall be heirs of salvation;" if so, they may directly know it. But by whatever means ministering angels know this fact, it is not said here that those angels who are ministering upon earth know it, but that the angels in heaven know it: and in the third place, in whatever way angels in heaven know of this transaction upon earth, this passage does not shew that they know it of themselves directly by some inherent excellency in their nature, but seems rather to prove that they know it only *by being told* it: if we read each parable in succession, and notice how it closes, it will be seen that this interpretation is truly textual and fair. For instance, in the lost sheep: the shepherd loses one sheep out of a hundred. Then what does he do? he goes after it until he finds it. What does he then do? he lays it on his shoulder rejoicing, *i. e.*, the shepherd, the proprietor of the sheep rejoices when he finds it. What does he next do? when he comes home—home corresponds to heaven, in the parable—"he calls his friends and his neighbours to-

gether,—these correspond to the angels in heaven—and he “*tells them*”—what they are otherwise ignorant of—“*rejoice with me, for I have found the sheep which I had lost.*” So he adds, in the same manner and exactly so, “there is joy among the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.” Now what would be the fair and honest construction of that text but this, that when the Lord of glory recovers a lost, stray, and immortal soul, he is so delighted with the recovery, that he calls together the angels of heaven, and tells them, that having rejoiced over a new-born world, and having rejoiced over an incarnate God, they may now learn an event as glorious, or only next in glory, a lost soul recovered, and he bids them rejoice; and then and thus there is joy in the presence of the angels. If we take the hidden coin, it teaches the very same thing. The woman sweeps the house till she finds the coin, and when she has found it—notice how thoroughly the whole is guarded—“when she has found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbours together,” who did not know that it had been lost, or, at all events, did not know that she had found it, and she says, “rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I had lost.” “Likewise,” he adds in the very same manner, “there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.” Christ, the shepherd of the sheep, calls them together, and bids them rejoice. Whether it be right to pray to angels or not, I am not now discussing, absurd and unscriptural idolatry as I can prove it to be. Whether ministering angels upon earth know any thing about us or not, this is not the place for determining; but this I think I have shewn, that no member of the Church of Rome, or of any

communion holding kindred sentiments, may quote this passage to prove that angels in heaven know directly what is transacted upon earth: on the contrary, the moment they refer to the passage, you may tell them, that instead of proving their view, it proves most conclusively the very opposite, namely, that the angels know nothing about it till the great Shepherd of the sheep tells them and bids them rejoice.

Having noticed the grounds upon which angels rejoice, let me draw from this passage a few reflections.

How great must be the event, a sinner repenting, when this occurring upon earth produces an echo in the hearts of angels in heaven. How brilliant must this fact be, when we find its glory reflected unspent and undimmed before the throne of God himself. Let us learn how stupendous that must be, however despised and overlooked by the wise and the learned of the world, from which a ray of light beams through infinite space, and plays the most luminous upon the throne of God. Let us learn, in the next place, the greatness of this event, from the fact that angels *still* rejoice over it, just as they rejoiced over it when Adam was first born again. In other words, it has not come to be common by repetition, or ceased to create a fervid enthusiasm by frequent reiteration. We know that nothing but the most beautiful things can bear to be looked at often: none but the most exquisite harmonies can bear to be heard often: things that are sweetest pall in time, the gilding wears off, and the possession itself is cast away in order to give place to another. There must be, then, some infinite grandeur in the restoration of a lost soul, seeing that it is in

the nineteenth century as electrifying a phenomenon among the angels as it was when the first soul repented, and the first sinner was born again. Angels never weary with studying Christ's Gospel: angels rejoice no less after the lapse of four thousand years at the restoration and recovery of one lost soul.

Let us notice, in the next place, that moral and spiritual things are evidently the most intensely interesting to the angels and to the inhabitants of heaven. There are around those angels material glories which no man's unpurged eyes could bear to look upon. They have scenes of beauty, magnificence, and splendour which we shall see, but which now, because of the feebleness of our eyesight, we could not bear to gaze on: yet these angels turn aside from all the material splendours of their glorious home, and gaze, with arrested and rivetted delight, upon this one fact, that a soul has repented and returned to God. They see as the most beautiful diamond that sparkles on the brow of heaven, the tear that drops from a penitent's eye. Amid the sounds and melodies of cherubim and seraphim about the throne,—among the harmonies of a thousand harpings, whose music we have no adequate conception of, the sigh of a broken heart penetrates and rings fullest of sweet melody to an angel's ear. An ancient writer has well said, that the tears of penitents are the wine of angels; *i. e.*, their greatest joy is derived not from the material splendour of their abodes, nor from the innumerable angels that form the choirs in heaven who have never fallen; but from the news borne from this lost orb of a soul repenting, a sinner saved. Thus, events which man calls great, are not known, or are not thought worth mentioning in

heaven; but an event which most men look upon as very small, is thought worthy of a response of joy in heaven. For instance, that an heir is born to the throne is not noted among the angels. But in some poor little chapel, with a few forms and benches for its people, and with an imperfectly educated man for its minister, God blesses his own word, some weary soul is born again, and that event electrifies the angels that are in heaven. A monarch is swept from his throne, that throne is consumed upon the streets, a nation rises in its phrensy, and turns all things upside down; angels take far less interest in this: but in the midst of the crash and the confusion, some one has been thrown upon his knees—some heart is brought to hope and believe and trust;—and angels hail the event with rejoicing, for there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth. The earth is thus interesting to heaven just in proportion to the number of souls who are born again in it. Those spots which are beautiful to angels are those where souls are born again: they look at all things only as subsidiary to this great and blessed result. May we not also infer, that the repentance of a soul born again, is not a transient and evanescent thing? I have heard some persons say, that a man may be a child of God to-day, and a child of the devil to-morrow; that he may be accepted, adopted, and justified to-day, and may be under the curse, condemned, and reprobate, and lost to-morrow. I cannot believe it: I cannot think that such an event as being born again, according to such theology, would be worth angel's rejoicing; it would only be a soul changed to-day, but destined to be rechanged again to-morrow. But if

this event be so stupendous; if the impression that it leaves in heaven be so glorious, then we infer that if indeed born again, neither life nor death, nor angels, nor principalities, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate the subject of this mighty change from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus. I believe, that if one is born again now, it is just as certain that he will be blessed in heaven, as it is that he is born again on earth; because whom God justifies, them he glorifies, and if he has made us sons, he makes us heirs, and if heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ. But, you say, this will make such an one say, we may live in sin: what does it matter? nothing can destroy me. You are here changing the persons. If an unconverted man take up such a conviction, of course he will do so; but I am speaking of a *man changed*; and if changed, all things to him are become new. He has new tastes, new laws, new motives, new springs, a new master, new hopes. The man who is born again can no more delight in sin than the human body can delight in being pricked and stung and cut, and having all its nerves and sensibilities torn. It is not his nature, it is not his taste: the former things have passed away, and all things have become new. So this event, the birth of a soul, is no temporary change—it is a far greater event than the birth of the mightiest monarch, it is an event whose root may be on earth, but whose blossom is in the skies.

Let us notice the interesting fact, that heaven and earth are thus united and tied together; that there is a chord of sympathy between them. Every pulsation of a believer's heart has its rebound beside the throne of God. Light from the footstool is reflected at the

throne. A believer persecuted on earth is felt by Jesus as if he himself were persecuted there. We are not orphans, we are not cast off and despised ones. God looks lovingly upon us : Christ came not to condemn us, but that whosoever believeth on him might have everlasting life. And if, let me add, the joy resulting from the recovery of one lost soul is felt to be so intense, what will be the joy ! what the songs ! what the ecstasy ! when the whole earth shall be covered with the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea. From all this we learn that new duties devolve upon us. If a soul recovered unto God be the source of joy in heaven, to be the humble instrument of that recovery is to be covered with a portion of the glory of heaven—to share in the sympathies of angels—to be instrumental, in short, in doing the noblest thing that can be done below ; what angels rejoice in, we should willingly labour for ; what they feel so joyful though they have no share in it, we ought to feel to be the most important who have the greatest stake in it. The angels in heaven have none of that monopoly which cares for one's own things, however small, and cares little for other men's wellbeing, however important. Whatever be the sphere in which we move, our neighbourhood, our parish, our country, the world, we have a mission. Let us live, not for being rich only, or great only, but for doing good. The noblest work is beneficence. Never does man become so like God as when he does the greatest good ; and never does the Christian act worthy of his calling till he feels that when he has done all he is able to do, he has done but nothing in comparison with what he should do.

CHAPTER VI.

The Prodigal Son.

“A certain man had two sons: and the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided them his living. And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into far a country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him. And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.”—LUKE XV. 11-19.

THIS is one of those beautiful passages of Scripture which it is impossible to adorn by any language of man: the fear that one feels is, lest the exposition of the commentary should detract from the force, the point and the beauty of the original: still it has deeper meaning in almost every clause that meets the eye, and it is the duty, as it must be the delight, of a faithful expositor, as far as the Spirit of God may enable him, to break the shell and bring forth the kernel, and so unfold the thoughts of mercy and of love that lie under the imagery here employed. I need not remind the reader of the connection in which it stands: the objection of the Pharisees was, “this man receiveth sinners;” the first reply of our Lord to

this objection was the shepherd leaving the ninety and nine sheep that were safe in the fold, and going after the lost sheep, and persevering in the pursuit till he find it; and after finding it, laying it on his shoulder, and bringing it home rejoicing. The next answer he gave—and such harmonies between things spiritual and things physical, are not merely beautiful illustrations, but conclusive arguments—was the woman who had lost one out of ten coins, lighting a candle, and searching for it until she finds it; at which she bids her friends rejoice. At the end of each illustration, our Lord adds, there is joy in the presence of the angels—not over the ninety and nine that are in the fold—not over the nine coins, that are safe—but, over the lost one found. Instead of having the temper of the Pharisee, murmuring that such lost ones are found, and such hidden ones recovered, they rejoice: “there is joy in the presence of the angels over one sinner that repenteth.” The next illustration, not more apposite, but more striking and instructive, is a man with two sons, one of whom remains at home, while the other leaves and plays the prodigal. It has been a dispute who this elder son was. I think that the only answer, is, that he was the same in this parable that the ninety-nine sheep were in the first, and the nine safe coins in the second parable: and the reply that I gave then is the reply that I give now, whosoever the ninety and nine sheep be, it is plain we do not belong to them; we are represented by the lost sheep: whoever the nine safe pieces of silver may be, it is plain we are not of them, we are seen in the lost coin; and whosoever the elder brother may be, it seems equally plain he is not the type of us. The

straying or prodigal son is the type and representative of all mankind.

I will examine this illustrative parable, for the sake of convenience, under four great heads. First, man at home; secondly, man in apostacy; thirdly, man's conversion and return; and fourthly, God's reception of him.

Man at home, I need scarcely say, is man in a state of perfect innocence. Once he lived under the overshadowing wings of God, holy and happy in the home that God made so beautiful and constituted so holy. Beauty without him, harmony within him, ministry around him, infinite and accumulating joys expanding before him in the future, constituted every inducement that a creature could have to retain his allegiance, and every dissuasive that Infinite Wisdom could apply to prevent his disloyalty. If a mere creature could stand, Adam would have stood; and the inference that many divines have drawn from this, is, that no creature can stand on a creature footing; and hence that it was not to repair an unfortunate occurrence that Christ came into the world, but that the great end and aim of God from the depths of eternity past, was to send Christ, and to give angels and men their standing, their safety, and the continuance of their happiness from Christ. Whether this was his design from everlasting or not, it is the fact that the angels that are in glory, stand incapable of falling because Christ died, and that the saints that shall be around the throne for ever and ever, shall serve and wait without end because Christ died. It is no less certain that not one of us can ever see heaven, or find out happiness, except by seeking life in the Saviour's grave, safety on the Saviour's

cross, salvation in the Saviour's blood. But in man's first happy state, a seed of evil was deposited in his heart. Whence evil came, I cannot say; how it was permitted, or how to reconcile its existence with the holiness, the power, and the wisdom of God, I do not know. I do not believe God made sin. All things, it is said, were made by God; but there is not a record in the Bible that God made sin; whence came it? If, reader, you are an unbeliever, I ask *you* to say whence it came? and you will find, if it puzzles and perplexes me, it will puzzle and perplex you just as thoroughly. It is not a difficulty peculiar to Christians, it is a difficulty, all must admit, and none can explain. The origin of evil has tried the ingenuity of metaphysicians from the days of Cain downward to the last of the schoolmen, and no solution of it has been given. The best and only true exposition is this, "God made man upright but he hath sought out many inventions."

We have next to consider man's apostacy. He was at home in his Father's house. But that home did not satisfy him, and therefore the younger said to his father, "Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me." Every clause in this parable is singularly expressive. We cannot but see that this demand was the first symptom of an alienated filial feeling; for what does he say? "Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to my lot." One would have supposed he had been consultating with his solicitor, in order to be able to couch his demand in strictly technical and legal phraseology, and thus approach his father, and ask for what was his right. He had evidently lost the affection, and therefore he abandons the attitude of a son, and presents himself before his fa-

ther as a suitor-at-law demanding his legal rights. Now, whenever a son bases his petition on the ground of law, and not on the ground of paternal love or filial gratitude, there is the evidence of the first wavering of the heart. The language of the son will always be, "Give us this day our daily bread." The language of the apostate will ever be, "Give me the portion of goods that falleth to me." The first asks a boon from mercy; the second demands from justice what he calls his right. This last is the predominating characteristic of the sinner. If there be one sound that rises from the fallen heart of human nature more loudly than another, it is "give me." This is the unceasing litany that is heard amid the shrines, the altars, and the temples of mammon; it is the ground note of that song that ever swells to mammon's praise; it is the inscription upon all his coffers—"give me." It is the cry of that selfish monopoly, that intense sympathy with self which thinks only of its own wants, however few, and cares nothing for the wants and necessities of others, however great and numerous—that selfishness which would trample down thousands in order to elevate itself upon their ruins.

When the son urged his selfish demand, the father made no angry remark: but "divided unto them his living." It may be said he might have refused the abuse that immediately followed. I answer, it was better not. His son's heart was gone from home, why retain the body? The heart is the man, the body is but the outward covering; and when the son showed by his demand that his heart was prodigal, it was a very insignificant thing that this body should be kept filial. The father therefore divided his living. When

man fell, it was his heart that fell first from God: for he saw that the fruit was beautiful to the eye, and pleasant to the taste, and to be as gods was an ambition worthy of his nature and desirable: and that when Adam's heart had apostatized from God, God would not keep Adam's person in Paradise, but drove out the man an exile upon the earth that his sin had polluted, to taste all its bitterness, and bear all its storms. "Not many days after," the son had thus got leave for his person to go after his heart, "he gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country." It would seem that between the apostacy of his heart and this personal and mechanical separation from his father's house, there was an interval: that interval, I have no doubt, was one of fear, of struggle, and of perplexity: he thought of the love he owed his father, but felt stronger still the lusts that reigned within him: he thought of his duties to his parent, but he felt greater inclinations to sin: when once, however, the heart has apostatized, it is a mere question of time when the rest shall follow. Let the heart nestle in its home, and all will be safe; but let the heart go astray, finding the elements of its peace, its comfort, and its happiness elsewhere, and all is gone. The shell is left by the fire-side, but the son—the "Absolom, my son"—is elsewhere.

Departure from home was the commencement of the younger son's apostasy; departure from God is just the primary sin of man. The language used throughout the Bible to represent sin is apostacy. "My people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters," and they have

“hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water.” When a son ceases to find his happiness at home, he finds it, or hopes to find, or tries to find it, elsewhere. When a sinner ceases to find his rest in God, he seeks and tries to find it elsewhere; and when man forsakes the fountain of living waters, he goes and digs out broken cisterns that can hold no water. Having forsaken God, his true fountain, he engages in the drudgery of digging cisterns below, and while he feels all the drudgery, he experiences all the pangs of thorough disappointment. We have the very same sin expressed in that passage in Hebrews: “an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.” Physically or mechanically, we cannot separate ourselves from God. Spiritually and morally, we do separate our hearts from God. I say no man can separate from God, physically and mechanically. The angel that soars in the heights and the reptile that creeps the lowest in the depths, are equally within the reach and under the inspection of God. “If we ascend into heaven, he is there; if we descend into hell, he is there also: if we take the wings of the morning, and fly to the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall his hand lead us, and his right hand shall uphold us. If we say darkness shall cover us, even the night shall be light about us.” And therefore, mechanically and physically, it is impossible for the greatest apostate to get rid of the grasp of omnipotence, and the sight of the omniscience of God: but morally, spiritually, in heart, every one of us, by nature is an apostate: even when the outward aspect seems worship, the inward heart has all the feelings of enmity, and all the inclinations of apostasy; the course of man, until changed

by the Spirit of God, is one of constant retrogression from God; as he grows older, he does not become more religious, but more inveterately attached to the pleasures, the possessions, the joys, the "broken cisterns" of this present world; every stage of his retrogression presenting a new spring of misery, till it reaches the very aphelion of his apostasy, by being plunged into that darkness which shall know no light, and drinking that cup of wo which is never emptied. And as man retreats further and further in this world from God, his imagination ceases to soar; the imagery of heaven fades from his memory, the last struggling affection of his heart leaves go its hold of God, his eye fails to see, and his ear ceases to hear God anywhere. His pride hates God's sovereignty, his sin hates God's holiness, he expects to live by despising the one, and rebelling against and provoking the other. This is the consummation of man's apostasy; but not satisfied with the sorrow and the bitterness of such apostasy as this, he further plunges into active evil; he not only draws from God, but he draws nearer and nearer to every thing that is hateful and abominable in the sight of God. It is added, therefore, of the prodigal son, that "he wasted all in riotous living." When he set out he gathered all that his father gave unto him, which implies that he had a considerable amount: but he had not long been absent from his father's house before his gathering came to be scattering, and all he had was utterly expended: no doubt he had much merriment in the mean time. There is a sort of joy and sensual excitement in sin: there is revelling and delight in the riot of human passions; it is animal, still it is joy in its way; but it has been found by all who

have imitated the prodigal's example, that the joy of a sinner is but like the crackling of burning thorns beneath the pot; it is, in the language of the apostle, "the pleasure of sin that is but for a season." The passions soon cease to be sensitive; the gilding wears off the toy; the siren song comes to be hackneyed by repetition, and the last wreck of a sensual debauchee presents at length the most horrible spectacle that rational man can reach or Christian deplore. We too, my dear reader, have gathered all, and wasted all; for, as I have said, the prodigal son is the type of us: how many sermons have we heard, and dismissed from our minds? how many talents have we abused? how many mercies have we been unthankful for? how much have we expended on the gratification of the lust of the eye and the pride of life; how little have we laid out on ministry to our souls? Persons who would not grudge to spend a thousand pounds in furnishing a drawing-room, would grudge to spend a few pounds in providing a commentary on the word of God, or a suitable library to instruct them in the things that belong to their eternal peace!

When he had wasted his substance in riotous living, it is said, "he began to be in want." A famine arose in the land, whose granaries he thought would be always full, and he too felt it. This is true of a higher state. There is a famine that you have more or less felt, and which the apostate ever feels at every step of his departure from God, far more terrible than a famine of bread or of water,—when the soul pines for a happiness it knows and yet tastes not—when it hungers for life and truth and joy—there is then a famine worthy of the terrible name; and it is a famine that

appears at rich men's tables, and startles by its appearance the gay and the giddiest circles of the great—a famine of the bread of life and the water of life. He is poor who is destitute of the unsearchable riches of Christ; he is hungry indeed who has not the bread of life, and he is thirsty indeed who drinks from the broken cisterns of sin, and draws nothing from the fountain of living waters. The character of the great mass of mankind is “labouring for that which is not bread, and spending their money for that which satisfieth not.”

But even this state of famine did not yet induce him to return to his father. True it is, the last help that man has recourse to is God: when he feels this famine, this want, this unhappiness, this inner spring of misery,—this root,—this prolific root of bitterness,—such is his enmity to God that he will try every expedient, manœuvre, and resource, rather than arise at once and go to his God.

When the prodigal began to be in want, “he joined himself (it is said) to a citizen of that country.” Afflictions vex un sanctified man; but they do not change the heart; the grace of God alone can do this; he who fretted at the bondage of his home now becomes the slave of a swineherd. He who began by making all the things of the world minister to the gratification of his senses, now experiences the reverse, and all his senses and powers must minister to the bondage of the world. He not only lost his home, the joys of his home, and the sympathies of his brotherhood, but he missed the very things he sacrificed all for; and so it will be still, “What shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?” The one is a

peradventure, the other is a dead and absolute certainty. Let us never forget that if we set out to gain the world, ours is but a chance, a peradventure if we succeed. For one that succeeds, who does not know that nine fail? But if you set out to seek the world, and let the world absorb your heart, and concentrate upon that world your best, your holiest affections, the certainty is that while you may lose the world you will lose your soul. Yet man, when he has lost God and begins to feel miserable, goes and joins himself to any thing and every thing that will promise most loudly to remove his misery and restore his lost happiness. The prodigal joined himself to a citizen of the strange country; so does the natural man join himself to trade, devoting to it every energy, or to pleasure, or ambition, or political duties, or he joins himself to gayety, to brilliant circles, shining *fêtes*, great parties, if peradventure amid the glare of the world's splendour he may extinguish every beam of that light that leads to solemn inquiry. He joins himself to the strange citizen of a strange country. Man without God does not cease to have a god. The prodigal had no sooner left his father than his growing sense of separation made him join himself to this citizen of a strange country. Man no sooner leaves God than he takes something else in his room. There is no such animal as an atheist; even the brutes are not so: for in their ministry, and their instincts, they indicate a recognition of one superior to themselves. There are plenty of antitheists—men opposed to the true God—but there is no such thing as a man without a God: if they leave the true God, they take the strange god in his stead. Man's soul was made to be a temple, and

when it is not the temple of the living God, it becomes the temple of an idol. Man's heart was made to be an altar, and incense will rise from it, either to Jehovah or to Jupiter; whosoever it be that draws forth your first morning and your last evening reflections; whatever it be to gain which you bend every energy, mould every influence, subordinate every thing you have—you may call it trade, or pleasure, or politics, or law, or physic, that is your god—that is the cistern out of which you are drinking—that is the being from whom you are seeking the safety of your souls, the happiness of a world to come. Are we living in or without the living God? Are we still drinking at some strange cistern, and joined to some citizen of this world? If any are so, and thus hoping for happiness as the prize, they ought to know they are not the first persons that have made the experiment; they are the repeaters merely of an experiment that has been made ten thousand times, and ten thousand times has failed. I will give the result of the experiment as tried by one who had the greatest power of his age; great skill, great resources, and the fullest opportunities for the experiment that ever mortal had, and under the most favourable circumstances. He thus describes the process: "I sought in mine heart to give myself unto wine,"—that was one of his experiments—"I sought to lay hold of folly"—balls, plays, &c.—"that I might see what was good for the sons of men that they should do under heaven all the days of their life. I made me great works"—when I had nothing to do but to pull down the old walls and build new ones—"I builded me houses"—I thought that the cause of my disquiet was the smallness or the inconvenience of the rooms, the

smokiness of the chimneys; the want of colouring here, and gilding there: Oh, I thought, if I built a large and spacious house, I should be happy; forgetting that it is not the house that makes the inhabitant happy, but the inhabitant that makes the house delightful; and that changing the bed of a sick man is not to heal his disease: what we want is not change of circumstance around us, but a change of heart within us —“I planted me vineyards,” in order to get the choicest wines, wines of the richest fragrance; “I made me gardens and orchards, and I planted trees of all kinds of fruits: I made me pools of water,” that there might be abundance of fish supplied to my table and of the choicest kind. “I got me servants and maidens, and had servants born in my house; also I had great possessions of great and small cattle, above all that were in Jerusalem before me. I gathered me also silver and gold, and the peculiar treasure of kings, and of the provinces,” diamonds, gems, and all precious things; and in order still more to increase my happiness, “I gat me men singers and women singers” —the very choicest imports from abroad; taking care that they should have special pay and patronage in order to be the first of their profession; —“and the delights of the sons of men, as musical instruments, and that of all sorts. So I was great, and increased above all that were in Jerusalem before me; also my wisdom” —intellectual wisdom —“remained with me.” I was a botanist, mineralogist, an astronomer; I studied the harmonies and relationships of all things; and, in short, to crown the experiment, there was not an element that might contribute to my happiness wanting; “I withheld not my heart from any joy:”

I did not stop because God's commandment said thou shalt not do it; I flung all fear away, in order that I might make the experiment fully and freely; "and my heart rejoiced in all my labours; this was my portion of all my labour." I resolved to look on this magnificent pile of splendour and glory as my source of inexhaustible happiness; I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought; and behold,"—I was a happy man?—"behold all was vanity and vexation of spirit."

Now, can we have better opportunities than Solomon had, or is the experiment more likely to succeed in the nineteenth century than so many hundred years before the birth of Christ? Others also have tried it. Lord Chesterfield, celebrated for his courtesy, both in precept and practice, and for his acquaintance with all the elegancies of a courtly, and all the accomplishments of a social life, said, "I am now at the age of sixty years: I have been as wicked as Solomon;"—it is a great deal to admit that; but he adds in conclusion, "I have not been so wise: but this I know, I am wise enough to test the truth of his reflection, that all is vanity and vexation of spirit." A great poet has given a similar testimony; a poet who had rank, title, genius, wealth, every thing, in short, that man could have which this world could supply, and the last lines he wrote were—

"My days are in the yellow leaf,
The flower, the fruit of life is gone;
The worm, the canker, and the grief
Are mine alone."

Such is the testimony of Lord Byron. If I refer to

ancient times, and take Solomon, or to modern times, and appeal to the case of a distinguished nobleman, or if I come to still more recent times, and take a distinguished poet, noble, rich, and accomplished, I find they all solemnly declare, that whatever be the name of the strange citizen to whom they have hired themselves, his service is vanity and vexation of spirit.

What did this strange master do for the prodigal? No doubt the prodigal thought he would be treated by him much better than by his father. Many young sons believe that they have the worst treatment at home, and if they could get into some other home they should be much happier. They are utterly mistaken; they see the gilding only of the stranger's home: they do not see the corroding care that cleaves to its hearth, and creeps through every nook of it, only hidden by gay drapery. The prodigal, then, having left his father, tries to find another who would suit him better, and he hired himself unto this strange citizen, as Solomon did, as Lord Chesterfield did, as Lord Byron did. And how did he treat him? Hear what he did, and what the world will do with you, and what sin has ever done with his servants—he sent him to herd swine. This is most expressive. To a Jew, no employment was more offensive and disgusting; therefore our Lord, by using this expression, teaches us that the service of sin is the most loathsome, degrading, and hateful thing; and how great the contrast!—the contrast between the angels singing around the throne, amid the splendours of the beatific vision, and a man herding swine, the slave of the hard-hearted swine-keeper. Yet such is the contrast between Adam in Paradise, the companion of the Most High, and Adam in the experiment of So-

lomon, in the life of Lord Chesterfield, and in the wretchedness of Lord Byron. And we read that when thus employed, he found it not only degrading and disgusting labour, but missed in it even a supply to his physical necessities. One can put up with a very disagreeable trade, if it brings considerable emolument; but the prodigal found not only a disagreeable trade, but he found he had no emolument at all. "He was fain to fill his belly with the husks that the swine did eat." "Husk" is not a happy word; the word is in the original *κερατιον*, which means "little horn;" it is known to be the fruit of the carob-tree; it is like a bean-pod, and shaped very like a little horn; it was never used as food for man, but usually given to cattle and to swine. It is said, he was "fain" to fill his belly with the husks that the swine did eat. So little confidence had his master in him, that he watched him, lest he should share the food of the very swine he fed. He tried to satisfy the hunger of man with the food of beasts; but the language of the text implies that it served only to deaden the aching agony of hunger, not to satisfy it; teaching us that when man tries to fill his immortal soul with the things of sense, that are fit only for swine, he fails; he blunts the sensibility of his loftier nature, but he does not satisfy its cravings. What are all the efforts of men who are without God, who have no real religion within them? They are efforts that may have inscribed upon them all—immortal man trying to satisfy his soul with the husks of swine. What were all the efforts of Greece in the day of its noblest grandeur? What were all the attempts of Rome, in its feasts, its banquets, its festivals, but hu-

manity in its last phasis, and just previous to the Saviour's Advent, trying to fill its soul with the husks that swine did eat? But these failed to satisfy.

The last feature is still more expressive; its meaning is implied rather than stated. "When he came to himself." He was in a state, practically and substantially, of lunacy, of mania, of moral derangement. And what is the character of man still? The man who is the most sensible, the most clever, the most sagacious in the things of time, shows he is a fool and a maniac in the things of eternity. If you see a man insensible to the clearest evidence—evidence that satisfies every one around him, you are driven to suppose that his mind is not right. Or if you see a man who is anxious about the minutest trifle, but indifferent to the most momentous realities—if you saw a mother amid the blazing rafters of her house trying to save the cradle, and careless of the safety of the babe, you would conclude that that mother was a maniac: or if you saw a person standing on the brink of a volcano, or amid the vibrations of an earthquake, careful only to pick up pebbles, and careless of personal safety—or standing on the deck of a ship that was sinking inch by inch into the gulf, counting and calculating how many were likely to be lost, and how many would probably be saved—would you not pronounce such persons to be madmen, or at least to be destitute of all that constitutes the characteristic sagacity of their race? Or if you see a person mis-estimating every thing around him, thinking that a shieling is a palace, that rags are royal purple, would you not conclude that he is a maniac? And if we see men calling dross riches, folly wisdom,

time eternity; careful for the body as if that were to live for ever; careless of the soul as if it were to die to-morrow; calling the law hardship, the cross folly; the gospel unworthy of our best, our deepest, our most solemn consideration—we have all the insanity of the maniac, but there is not his irresponsibility too,—the maniac is not responsible for what he does; the ruins in which he lies are not of his own doing: but the sin that weighs the unbeliever down to destruction is a load he is deliberately and wilfully piling up.

I have thus attempted to depict man in his apostasy. Reader, is this your state at this moment—apostasy from God? My dear brother, who is your master? who is it that occupies the largest nook in thy heart? what is the topic that gathers around it your intensest sympathies, thoughts, affections, fears? What is it that absorbs you the most? We live at a crisis big with terrible results; not even the most sagacious statesman knowing what to-morrow may bring forth; kings tumbling from their thrones, and popes tumbling after them; the whole world agitated and convulsed, and God sparing this isle from the storm, reserving it, like a beautiful gem in the bosom of the deep that girdles it: why does he spare it thus? I believe this respite is like the peace that was given to the Christians at the downfall of Jerusalem, that they might escape from its ruins, and find a refuge in the neighbouring city of Pella. That peace is ours at this moment; and I believe that they that do not avail themselves of it, to make their peace with God, will meet judgment without mercy when the storm comes. Jerusalem neglected its opportunity, and our Lord

said to it, what it disregarded then, but what it felt in all its bitterness when it was too late: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thee as a hen gathereth her brood under her wings, and ye would not."

CHAPTER VII.

The Conversion.

“And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger. I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son : make me as one of thy hired servants.”—LUKE xv. 17-19.

WE have seen the sinner's apostasy, let us now consider his conversion.

The first symptom of conversion is : “He came to himself.” Every clause in this parable is full of important meaning ; it alone is evidence that the Bible is inspired. There is a depth, a comprehensiveness of meaning in every touch of this exquisite painting that proves to me that the painter is God, and all the colours taken from heaven. How expressive is this one touch—man never comes to himself until he comes to God. We may talk as we like about the dignity of man, the greatness of man, the glory of man, the perfectibility of the human race ; but this is truth, notwithstanding, that till man come to God, he cannot come to himself, he cannot develop his best energies. He has lost his dignity, his glory, his happiness, his soul, his self, and he can find his dignity, his happiness, his glory, his self, only in God. We say of a man who is intoxicated, he is not himself ; or of a man who is deranged, he is not himself. It is so with the sinner, he is not himself ;

he is not what he was made, he is not what he is meant to be, nor what grace can make him. He has to come first to God, and then he will come to himself. Man fallen, is below his proper standard: man recovered is only at his proper standard. Man had all in Paradise—he lost all by sin: but man shall regain all in Paradise regained, having come first to God, and having found next himself. The expression “come to himself,” too, as I have already shown, may denote that man as a sinner is deranged. The Scripture uses the expression “fool” to describe the wicked. And surely, that man shows himself to be a fool who thinks only of things that perish like snow-flakes in his hand while he touches them, but nothing of great and enduring realities with which he must come very soon into contact. Surely that man cannot be wise who thinks only of the outer case, and nothing of the inner. Does not that man present all the symptoms of derangement who thinks and acts as if God would make his enemies happy, and his people only miserable? On the other hand,—call him fanatic, enthusiast, or what you please,—that man has a mind full of soberness and truth, and is emphatically wise, whose religion leads him to count all but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus; whose order of procedure is to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and whose deliberate and solemn conviction is, “what shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?” If there be no soul, if that soul be in no peril, if there be no righteous retribution, if there be no judgment-seat, no heaven, no hell, then say so,—manfully say so. I like to hear one carry out his conviction; and if this be your con-

viction, manfully say so ; fling the Bible from you, do not show yourself again in a church pew, treat the Sabbath-day as other days, do not compromise, do not be half and half ; carry out your conviction to the utmost possible extent. You know very well you dare not do so. Instincts that were implanted in Paradise, and yet not uprooted, rise and protest against such conduct as folly, depravity, and crime. But it is said, "when he came to himself," he began to think and reflect ; and think and reflect right well, for the very first thought that struck him was a contrast : "How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger." I have no doubt that he not only exercised a retrospect, but also, if I may use the word, circumspect. He saw the very swine feeding on the husk with satisfaction, and the whole face of the created world wearing a calm, which seemed to show that all things around gravitated each to its centre, and felt rest each in fulfilling its mission ; while he alone was full of remorse, dissatisfaction, restlessness, and agony. Still I believe that a walk in a beautiful country, amid delightful scenes, is fitted to have the same sanctifying effect. The contrast between the sweet calm in which nature seems, to repose, and the troubled spirit that is within a guilty sinner's heart, is fitted to suggest the question, why is it so ? why this contrast ? something must be wrong in the one that is not so in the other. But he not only looked around him, but he made a retrospect. He said, in my father's house, I have no doubt there is bread for servants, will there not be a morsel for a *son* ? there is bread even for *hired* servants who have no affection for my father : surely, there will be a little still left for

one who is indeed a prodigal, but still a son ; if there be bread for *many* servants, surely there will be a little left for one, and that *one* a son. Is not this just an instance of some of those recollections that rise within us, bringing vividly before our minds our primeval happiness, as if some unspent sounds of heaven's harmony reached the solitary cells of the soul within us. Like the rose that Eve is said to have carried forth from Paradise on the day of her expulsion, and that withered in her hand, but still reminded her of Eden, we have some sere and faded blossoms gathered originally in purer scenes, and still fragrant with a portion of their original perfume, and wearing a few of their first tints. It seems as if some flashes of heaven's sunshine, like summer lightning among the clouds, spread over our world to remind us by contrast of the blessedness we criminally lost, and of the glory, which, by grace, we may yet gain. So the prodigal contrasted what he was in his father's house, and what he felt, with what all nature seemed to express around him. What brought these things to his recollection ? Affliction. None of us like affliction ; no one likes to be laid on a sick bed ; no one likes to have all he accumulated by industry, in order to make his latter journey to the grave more soft, swept away at once. Yet such strokes are not random things. There is a "need be ;" "if need be that ye are in manifold afflictions ;" and we find in every case in the Bible that the affliction that was the most severe, was, in the case of nine out of ten of the most distinguished saints, the very affliction that was most blessed. Like the moistened clay that was applied to the eyes of the blind, the affliction enabled the prodigal to see sights,

and visions, and prospects, he had not seen before. These afflictions brought him from the strange land and its citizens to his father's home, so that he could say with David, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted."

Let us notice the resolution he came to after he made this contrast. First, he came to himself: secondly, he reasoned, reflected, and contrasted: and thirdly, he made up his mind to this resolution—"I will arise and go to my father." Many are always on the eve of making this resolution, and not a few come to the very point, and form the resolution, "I will arise and go;" but here they stop short; they go not to their father, but to "another citizen," to see if change of masters will create a change of feeling, if peradventure the joy that they missed in the one bondage, be thus realized in the other. They change their country, and calculate they shall thereby change their mind; really they abandon the service of one lust and engage in the service of another. They get tired of the Drama, and determine to take a turn at the Opera. They leave Drury Lane, which has failed to satisfy them, and go to Covent Garden, where they hope to succeed better. They give up alcohol and take opium, or they give up both and take tobacco; or they give up all three, and join the Temperance Society. It is still the sick person changing the side, altering the prescription, but ever failing, because the secret of the misery is in the heart's core within. They get tired of one minister, and they go to hear another, and lay the blame upon the poor preacher, forgetting that the whole blame is within; or they give up one creed, and subscribe to another, or abandon one ceremony and adopt another.

They "box the compass" of the world, seeking new masters in this strange country in which their own sins have placed them, but they are still bitterly disappointed, for they feel that there is no rest nor repose; nor will they reach any till they rise and go, not to another master, but to their father, "I will arise and go to my father."

There is another class, however, who do not go so far as this. The lowest and the worst of all think that they cannot be better; that they are best as they are, and that it is impossible to be better here, and that God made and meant them to be so, and that men and swine, *i. e.* God's rational offspring and the brute animals, were created to feed equally upon husks. This is Owenism and Fourierism; whose disciples hold that the husks of swine are fit for our food; that the food of man and the food of swine are one, and that the whole difference is merely in the dressing; hence the sarcastic remark, "that cookery alone distinguishes man from the lower animals." This is particularly the creed of Socialism. They say man has nothing in him nobler and better than the beasts that perish; and that the same food was meant for both, the same home, the difference between the pigsty and the home being merely a difference in mechanical details, and in little arrangements; but practically and substantially both having lived alike are alike, and fall into the common gulf—annihilation; but we would not believe them; these creeds revolt the best instincts even of our fallen humanity. We will not believe that man's soul dies like the brutes, and that this creation is without a creator, and that this family is without a father, and that these hopes—these

indomitable hopes—which have survived all oppositions, and withstood all shocks,—the hopes of immortality,—are planted here only to baffle the miserable subject of them when he expects to find them realized. There are others, however, who adopt another course; they determine to reach by force or by fraud what they will not or cannot reach otherwise. One of these says, I am in a wretched state, I am starving: I am here feeding on the husks of swine: “I will arise,” and steal—forgetting God’s great prohibition, and thinking by plundering a neighbour to enrich himself. Never yet did any man become rich by dishonesty. To try to enrich oneself by dishonesty is not only the way to become poorer, but it is also the way to become miserable. Many a man has tried the experiment; he has run the round of the theatres, of dissipation, and folly, gratifying every lust, ministering to every passion; and when he could get no more fuel for his passions, he has then laid his hand on that which is not his own, and has become a wreck here, and possibly a wreck for ever. Others again determine on revolution; they say we have nothing to lose, and a chance of gain in a change, let us join in upsetting things that are. I suspect that there is more of this at the bottom of every revolution in the world than what is called political feeling. Others again are so disappointed, so grieved, so vexed, that their reason becomes impaired; the powers of the mind paralyzed, and they commit suicide, and yet the wonder is that this does not oftener occur. I do not think that suicide is ever perpetrated when a person is in his right mind. The first law of nature is self-preservation; and whenever that law is violated, it always seems to me clear that

the mind is unhinged, and hence I believe that no one ever put an end to his own life unless he was insane. But while such insanity has not responsibility itself, yet the previous habits that induced the insanity may be fraught with responsibility in the sight of God. There is no rest for the soul any more than for the dove that left the ark, till it returns to God. The soul has feelings in it that earth cannot meet: and yet, as long as it is un sanctified, it has lusts within it which it will not cease to gratify. Your corruptions, supposing that you are un sanctified and un renewed in the strange land, tie you to the earth, your better instincts within you lift you to the skies. You will not trust your infidelity lest it should fail you; you will not accept Christianity lest it should disturb you; you have neither the world's false peace, nor the peace of God which passeth understanding. Hence the most miserable beings are those who have light enough to see their duty, but lusts enough to neglect and despise it; who have conscience enough to tell them what they ought to be, but passions strong enough to make them what they should not be. They have all the disquiet that man can possibly have below, and they have no hope of any thing better or brighter beyond. But I dare say that when the prodigal came to that point, "I will arise and go to my father," it was not without a struggle, nor without opposition that he even formed and executed that resolution. Suppose that you have got over all the other misapprehensions and misconceptions that I have specified, and that you are resolved that the food of swine and the food of man are not the same, that living bread is for the soul of the one, and the husks that perish for the other: and suppose that you have re-

solved not to change masters, in the vain and delusive notion that a change of masters will make a change in the servant's heart, and that you have determined not to steal, nor to become a revolutionist, nor a suicide, but as there is only one course, the course of peace, safety, and everlasting happiness, you have at last resolved, "I will arise and go to my father," you will find that numbers of difficulties and obstructions will suggest themselves to you; Satan, ever busy and watchful, who never puts forth so great ferocity as when a poor sinner is just escaping, like the fabled hero of old, from subterranean darkness into the glorious light, will suggest to you a thousand difficulties and obstructions; he will perhaps whisper that you had better go to the head servant, or to the steward, who will break the matter to your father, and you may thus obtain reconciliation without the humiliation of going into your father's presence. But you must see that if the servant be faithful, he will be too identified with his master to have any communication with his disobedient son without his master's cognizance: and if he be a bad one, he will like too well his place, and his pay, to do what would endanger either.

The prodigal must have also thought, if such objection occurred to him, I know not who is the steward now; I have been many years absent; I do not know whether he is cross or kind, whether he would repel my proposal, or instantly accept it; I will not try this experiment; I will, therefore, throw myself upon my father. But this suggestion might still occur, had I not better write to him? It is much easier to write to a person with whom we have a difference than to go at once to him and boldly tell him that difference.

But then he thought, I am in a strange land, perhaps there is no post; I cannot get food to eat, much less paper to write upon, or money with which to pay the postage; therefore to write is utterly impossible, even if I were disposed. Were I to ask my father for money to buy clothes and food, he would not trust me; he has heard and seen nothing but evil concerning me, and he could hope for no good by adding to means that might be turned to yet more extensive evil. He would say, how can I appear before my father? I am in rags, and barefoot: shall I get some one to go and beg for a suit? but no one will give me bread; who will give me clothing? My father would not trust me with money to buy raiment, for when he trusted me with half his goods, I spent it in all sorts of riotous living: and thus, if I go at all, I must go as I am; and therefore, "I will arise and go to my father." But it will be suggested to him, many of your old friends and companions will see you, and will say as you pass, "there goes a specimen of the fall of pride: that faded finery reminds us of one who set out in splendour, with contempt for all his companions who were so far behind him in this world's prosperity, and this you see is the issue of it." Well, let it be so; I have determined to carry into practice the resolution I have formed; "I will arise and go to my father." If there be one reader of this work who has made up his mind to leave the sins of the world and embrace the Saviour; to leave the strange land in which his heart has become an icicle, and all his feelings deadened, and to arise and go home and seek his father; as sure as he makes the attempt, ten thousand difficulties will stare him in the face. When the woman sought to

touch the Saviour's garment, there was such a crowd that she could not get there; the same crowd thrusts itself between the Saviour and the sinner still. And as sure as you determine, in the simplicity and honesty of your convictions, to arise from this land of bondage, of misery, and of restlessness, and to seek peace in God your Father; ancient creeds and modern confessions, and systems of theology, and Arminianism and Calvinism, and a thousand other "isms," will all start up and argue against your approach to your Father. Your commission is to tread them down as infamous intruders; there is nothing between you and God in Christ. The greatest sinner is commanded to arise, and as soon as he arises, and seeks the God who is his Father in and by Christ Jesus, he will find a reconciled Father, and he will feel as a rejoicing son: there is nothing to be done—and this is the point I wish you especially to notice—there is no penance to be performed.

You are now called upon to arise and go to your Father. There is no penance to be endured, no propitiation to be made, no preparation to go through, no new suit to get, no new shoes to put on, nothing to do but to come just as you are and go to your Father. There is no spot in which sin has left you where your Father is not ready to receive you; there is no time exclusively canonical; at midnight, at noon, at evening or at morn, God waits, and you have but to arise and go to your Father. There is no price that you have to pay, no holy water to be sprinkled with, nothing to do, nothing to prepare, nothing to suffer, but to arise and go to your Father. And there is no language that is specially holy; speak to him in Latin, in Greek, in English, or in Afghan, if it be the language of the

agitated, the awakened, the trusting heart, God hears and understands, and will welcome you, as a son coming home to his father.

What an awful responsibility is placed upon every man that reads or hears this, that between the greatest sinner and the sin-forgiving God, there is nothing but that sinner's reluctance to arise and go to his Father! Herein is the very essence of Protestant Christianity. The distinction between true, scriptural, Protestant Christianity, and all other systems, is very short: the whole difference is in a nutshell; every other system puts something between the sinner and God in Christ: the priest, or the sacrament, or absolution, or the ceremony, or penance, or the Church, or the Pope, something or other between the sinner and God; now what Martin Luther was enabled of God to do, and what the Bible so distinctly justifies his doing, was his sweeping away every thing between the believing sinner and God's instant forgiveness, and teaching that sinner to arise just where he is, and as he is, and go to his Father, and have instant peace with God through Jesus Christ.

There is no spot, no time in which and at which you may not arise and go to your Father. And when the prodigal did so, he resolved to offer no palliation, or excuse. When a sinner's heart is not completely broken, he has a great number of ingenious excuses and palliations. One says—"True, it was very bad, but then it was the force of circumstances:" "true, it was very sinful, but then it was my own constitution:" "true, nothing can justify it, but it was rather my misfortune than my blame; the suggestion of others, the force of passion, bad examples." Here is the

true succession of human nature. Just as sure as Adam, when he was spoken to, threw the blame upon poor Eve, and took none to himself; and when Eve was spoken to, she threw the blame upon the serpent, and took none to herself, so man still puts the blame upon any thing and every thing but himself. But the prodigal, aided by the Spirit of God, overcame this, and said, "I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son." I am wholly and solely to blame, and there is no blame anywhere but in my own heart in the sight of God. Notice how strong the language is: "against heaven and in thy sight." The greatest evidence of genuine repentance is, when one feels sin as committed in the sight of God. Here I must make a remark of the greatest importance. When we sin, we wrong our neighbour, but we only sin, strictly speaking, against God. Hence David's language, in Psalm li., "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight," is erroneously construed by those who say that this means comparatively or against thee chiefly. But I think the words are strictly and literally true. Sin can be committed against God only. Hence my neighbour may forgive me the *wrong* I have done him, but God alone can forgive the *sin*. Thus, therefore, the idea of a priest forgiving sin would suppose that that priest was God. And if the priest be God, or in the room of God, we can understand how he can forgive sin; but if he only "sits in the temple of God, showing himself as if he were God," then his pretension to forgive sins is eminently unscriptural, yea, truly blasphemous.

The prodigal son recollected the inextinguishable relationship—"I will arise and go to *my* father." That word "*my*" was the monosyllable that made the mighty difference; wicked as I have been, he is still *my* father, and I am still *his* son. So God is represented in the Bible; for it is, "Not to the Lord *a* God," but "to the Lord *our* God, belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against him." We are invited in the gospel to arise and go to God; and not as to a severe judge, but as to a waiting and fond father; a father in Christ, reconciling the world to himself; having no pleasure in the sinner's death, but rejoicing in his instant acceptance. And "I will go to my father, and will acknowledge, I am no more worthy to be called thy son;" here is not only full confession, deep sense of sin, but strong humility. I am not worthy of the name of son; make me a servant; only place me in the sunshine of my father's countenance, I care not how lowly the place, how humble the service, if near to my father. Such is a sinner's desire to be reconciled to God and find peace in him, to realize in him his Father, that he will take any place at his footstool, or any seat beside his throne, if he can only glow in the light and breathe in the love of his Father.

Such, then, is the conversion of the prodigal. We trace this conversion, unquestionably, to many circumstances. He had been guilty of the basest ingratitude, the greatest impatience of domestic restraint, wasted his substance in riotous living, and he soon felt the wretchedness of the country to which he had exiled himself, the unsatisfactoriness of the only food that he could eat—affliction, remorse, comparison, retro-

spect, recollection, conscience, were no doubt blessed to awaken him, but there was a higher power than all—it is written, “No man can come to me,” that is, arise and go to his father, “except the Father which hath sent me draw him.” In other words, our ruin is so deep that it needs an infinitely wise God to convince us of it,—our sin is so great that it needs God himself to convince us that it can be forgiven,—our reluctance to go to him is so strong that it needs omnipotent power to draw us before we shall draw near to God; in short, it is part of the penitent’s first prayer, and of the glorified saint’s first hymn, “not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.” But lean upon that Spirit, pray for that Spirit’s strength, and thus leaning, and thus praying, arise and go to your Father, and you will find him, as the prodigal found his father, ready and rejoicing to welcome you.

CHAPTER VIII.

The Reception.

“And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.”—LUKE xv. 20.

WE saw, in the course of our last remarks upon this passage, how grace that prompted the resolution, “I will arise and go to my father,” ended in the performance, “he arose and went to his father.” The least particle of grace in the heart of a prodigal son will not be extinguished until it end in glory, and present him a beloved son to his reconciled and loving Father. The resolutions of nature are repeatedly formed and repeatedly broken. The resolutions implanted by grace prove like the morning light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day. The man who has in his heart the least particle of grace, has, in the felt presence of that particle, the sure earnest of a crown of glory. He that planted it will perfect it; its author is its finisher; the beginner of the good work will complete it to the end.

When he arose and came to his father, and “when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him.” How can the father have happened to see his son “a great way off?” How did he know what hour, what day, or by what road he would come? The only answer possible is, that the father was seated, with all a father’s

recollections and sympathies, upon the roof of his eastern house; a flat roof on which, in eastern countries, they are wont to enjoy the air and view the surrounding scenery, under a sky, the reverse of ours, where mist would be the strange thing, and brilliant sunshine is the every-day thing. One day, no doubt, the father seated on his watch, loooking around him if he might catch a gleam of the approach of him who was still nearest and dearest to his heart, saw a mere speck in the distant horizon. He had no suspicion that it could be his son, but he watched the speck that grew into a shadow, and the shape of a human being; and as he gazed upon it longer with trembling fears, and intermingling hopes, and doubts, and suspicions, all awakened, he saw something in the gait, in the movement, in the size of one approaching him, that convinced him it might be his returning prodigal son: and who does not know that the eye of love needs no telescope to see its object; the eye of affection has its focus extended by the feeling that flows through it. A father's eye could recognise his son, when rags were his only covering: he looked again, and at last suspicion grew into conviction, and conviction into absolute certainty, this is none other than my returning prodigal, he that was lost, he that was dead. Now the moment that the father's conviction grew into certainty, what did he do? The "father of Christendom," as he is called, was once placed in a somewhat analogous situation, in the person of the most celebrated pope of the celebrated succession, Pope Gregory VII., known generally by the name of Hildebrand. This was not a poor prodigal son, but an emperor, the Emperor Henry, who had offended that father, and he was called upon, and con-

sented to make reconciliation with him : the emperor came, but how did the "father of Christendom" receive him? He shut the gates of his palace, commanded the emperor to do penance in the trenches amid snow during three winter nights, and then to come with his crown in his hand, and to receive that crown from the hands of the pontiff, and thus be reconciled. Such is Popish Christianity ; but it is not Bible Christianity : there are those still who have all the feelings of Hildebrand, but not the full scope, thanks be to God for things as they are, for their development. The father, had he been a priest, would have prescribed to the prodigal a course of penance and preparation for three days or three weeks, and then he would have treated with him ; but this was not the case here. The father neither closed the gates nor bolted the door, nor prescribed a penance, nor gave instructions to the servants, nor dealt with him through a third party ; but true to nature, which, even in its ruin, is nobler than Romanism, his heart throbbed with compassion, or, in the simple language of the text, "he had compassion on him" who had no compassion on himself : he *ran*, in contrast to the son, who *came* creeping, cringing, doubting, and fell upon the neck of his son, and kissed him, and without one word of painful reflection, bade him come and eat of the fatted calf, that the whole house might instantly make merry. Sinner, this is just thy God ; this is the type, the model, only with the alloy of human imperfection, to represent what God is to us. God waits for thee, thou needest not wait for him ; Omnipotence is ready to save thee ; but it will not save thee against thy will : the sinner is made willing ; he never is made a saint in spite of that will. He asks from

heaven, why will ye die? and he commissions every minister of the gospel to say, "Him that cometh unto me"—him, mark that word—it is not the very good man, the respectable man, but it is "him"—be his sins of the deepest die, and the time during which he has committed them of the greatest length; it is true this very day, and true for every reader of this work, "him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." The strong negative which is equivalent to the most powerful affirmative, "so far from casting out, I will cordially embrace, and kiss, and welcome him." In noticing this part of my subject, I may observe that the ancient Pelagians, as they are called, have pleaded this as evidence of the fact that the sinner has in himself inherent sufficient strength to arise and go to God. It would be absurd to expect that a parable should convey every doctrine of Christianity, however minute, in so small a space. But there is a text which plainly settles the matter: "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him;" and as Scripture is always in harmony with itself, we are perfectly sure that this great truth underlies the simple statement of the parable: the Socinians or English Presbyterians have also quoted this passage as evidence that all that the sinner needs to enable him to go to God and find acceptance with him is simply repentance; that he needs no atonement, that he needs no mediator, and that there is one way to God, and that way is repentance; and that repentance alone is sure to be accepted of God. The answer to this is the statement of the apostle in his epistle to the Hebrews: not "having repentance," but "having a high priest over the house

of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance." And again he says, "having therefore boldness to enter into the holiest," not "by repentance" but "by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way;" and, therefore, we are told in a parallel passage, that that way is the blood of Christ, the element of boldness is the fact that Christ died, and that the path to God is not repentance, but "a new and living way." Let me also state that this God who is here typified or represented by the father, sees not only the penitent a great way off, but he sees the thought of penitence in the penitent's heart a great way off, before that thought is adequately conceived and realized by himself. The father saw his son a great way off, ran to him, fell upon his neck, and embraced him. God our father in heaven sees the first impulse of a penitent's heart, he hears the most silent expression of a penitent's grief; he sees the first tear that starts from a penitent's eye; "there is not a thought of our heart, but lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether." If there be then genuine repentance inwrought by the Spirit of God in the heart of any reader of this book, God sees it. It is an element of grace that will issue in glory; it is the evidence of the commencement of that work that will be crowned with everlasting acceptance before God in heaven.

The father said not one word blaming or reflecting upon the son's conduct. He was quite willing to forget all in the joy that he felt at his restoration and return; yet we perceive that it was after the father had fallen upon his neck and kissed him, that the son said, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and be-

fore thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son." In other words, genuine repentance is not something that precedes forgiveness, but something that follows it. No man ever repented truly before he embraced the Saviour. He embraces the Saviour first; he repents from the heart next. It is the kiss of reconciliation that starts the tear of genuine contrition; it is the rays that are radiated from the countenance of a father that thaw the frozen heart, and turn the streams of sorrows which were felt before, into streams of genuine repentance and evangelical contrition. The prescription of the gospel is not that you are to try and dig repentance from your heart first, and then go to Christ, but you are to go to the Saviour first, and to your Father in him, and leave him to give the repentance you need. It is not repentance that introduces us to Christ, but Christ that introduces us to repentance. He is "exalted a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance to Israel;" and, therefore, the application must be made to him as a Prince and a Saviour, before that repentance is felt. The son resolved to repent before he went to his father: but he only repented after his father had accepted and welcomed him. This is very beautifully expressed by the prophet Ezekiel, in chap. xxxvi. 25—27, speaking of the Jews, "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments and do them." Verse 31.

“*Then* shall ye remember your own evil ways, and shall loathe yourselves in your own sight.” All this is the gift of God to them; and then, as the result of that gift, they give all the evidence of genuine repentance, and of a holy life. And so he tells them that it is after they have tasted this they will repent, and turn from their evil ways. So in the same manner, in Ezek. xvi. 60: “I will remember my covenant with thee in the days of thy youth, and I will establish unto thee an everlasting covenant.” And after this—“thou shalt remember thy way, and be ashamed, when thou shalt receive thy sisters, thine elder and thy younger: and I will give them unto thee for daughters, but not by thy covenant.” He speaks first of the gift of his grace, of the expression of reconciliation: and he then adds, “they will bring forth the fruits of the spirit, and of a holy life afterward.” And so in the case of David: when did David write that genuine expression of genuine repentance, Psalm li. ?—not before he was forgiven. It was after Nathan had come from God, and said to David, “thy sins be forgiven thee,” that David went forth, and expressed in poetry the inmost feeling of his soul, “Against thee, thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight.” It is thus that the storm may rend the heart, and fill it with sorrows; but it is only the Sun of righteousness that melts the heart and makes it break into genuine repentance. Repentance, therefore, takes place after, not before acceptance with God. In the first instance the prodigal said, “I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants.”

But this last clause is omitted after his acceptance by his father, he then says only, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son." Why was this omitted? I answer, that in the very first relation this clause was the only evidence of faltering in the filial hope and confidence of the prodigal, because he ought to have known that either he must be received as a son, or not be received at all. But when he saw the expression of his father's love, and felt the warmth of that paternal kiss, and when he was embraced with so little of reprimand, and so much of cordial welcome, he knew that there was the love in that father's heart which would never leave him to be a servant, but would restore him instantly to the dignity and to the privilege of a son. If he had persisted, after his father had thus welcomed him, in still asking for a servant's place, the world would have called it humility, the gospel would have called it monkery. It is not humility to refuse the higher place when the master bids us take it. The highest humility is to take the highest place when the great Master invites us to it. So this son felt it: the servant's place, which was the petition of the distant prodigal, is omitted and forgotten the instant he is accepted and feels the affection of an accepted and a welcomed son. And I can easily feel how this part of the parable must have touched some of the Pharisees. Their objection was that Christ received sinners. But, I doubt not, some of these Pharisees were fathers; and there are sympathies and affections in a father's heart which tradition and superstition and wickedness are not able utterly to extirpate: and when the Pharisees heard the touching

and beautiful statement that a father rejoiced when his lost prodigal son was brought home, there was not a father among them that did not blush at the objection he had uttered, and feel that never man spake like this man. When the prodigal was received by his father, what did the father say? Not one syllable of reprehension; when God forgives, my dear reader, he forgives completely. We never forget the sin: but God forgives completely and perfectly, so that it is no more thought of. The father took scarcely time to listen to the confession of his son; he could not hear any more, but cut it short in the middle of his anxiety that there should be a real welcome: instead of listening to the confession, he turned round and said to his servants, "Bring forth the best robe and put it on him, and put shoes on his feet." "The best robe," is our translation of the words, but it is extremely expressive in the original; *τὴν σπολὴν τὴν πρῶτην*, the robe, that first one, that most distinguished, that chiefest, that best one: and this seems to confirm what I stated, in explaining the parable of the marriage feast, that there were wedding-garments hung upon pegs in the hall, and an individual had only to take one and put it on. The father then says to the servant, Bring forth one of them; there is going to be a great festival, a high feast; he must wear a wedding-robe: take from him the rags which have degraded him as the prodigal; clothe him in the robe that indicates the accepted son; admit him to the joyous festival, and let all begin to be merry. We have this very spectacle beautifully exhibited in Zech. iii.: "And he showed me Joshua the high-priest, standing before the angel of the Lord"—*i. e.* Christ Jesus—"and Satan standing at his right

hand to resist him. And the Lord said unto Satan, The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee; is not this a brand plucked out of the fire? Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and stood before the angel. And he answered"—*i. e.* Christ—"and spake unto those that stood before him, saying, Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him he said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment"—the wedding-garment.—"And I said, Let them set a fair mitre upon his head. So they set a fair mitre upon his head, and clothed him with garments. And the Angel of the Lord stood by." In other words, the ministers and ambassadors of Christ are to show us how all the rags of nature may be completely put away; how the iniquities of a past lifetime may be blotted out in the precious blood of the Lamb; and how may be put on, instead, the glorious righteousness of Him who is the Lord our Righteousness, who was made sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God: and by and through whom we may be presented, like Joshua, clothed in fair garments, or like the prodigal, in a wedding-robe, fit for the high festival of joy. The father also added, "put a ring on his finger." We read that in ancient times rings were invariably used for seals. The ring was that which sealed the letter, the document, or the deed. We have therefore in Scripture frequent allusions to their use. Thus in Eph. i. 13, "Ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance." So Gal. iv. 6: "Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts,

crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore, thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ." You see, therefore, that giving this ring or seal was the evidence that he was no more a servant, nor to seek a servant's place, but a son that had received a father's welcome. It is thus God deals with his own people, though not always. He takes away our sins through the efficacy of atoning blood; he clothes us with the garment of righteousness, which is our only title to eternal happiness; but, in addition to this, he gives us the Holy Spirit of God to dwell in our hearts, and to be within those hearts an augury of our everlasting happiness, a first-fruit and earnest of the glory and rest that remains for all the people of God. He next commands, "put shoes on his feet." In ancient times, servants did not wear shoes, as is very much the case in the northern parts of Scotland still. Besides it is plain that the prodigal's must have been quite worn out: hence putting shoes on his feet was not only necessary, but it was also a symbol of his being raised from the place of a servant, and placed in the relationship of son; and it implied duties. Thus the apostle speaks of being shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace: so it taught that this prodigal was not to wander any more, but, like Abraham, to "walk before God;" like Enoch, to walk with God, and to lead a life that should be the evidence of his sonship, and holiness that should prove whose he was and at how great a price he had been redeemed. The father, when he introduced him thus clothed with new raiment, with shoes on his feet and a ring on his finger, commanded them "to bring the fatted calf, and kill, and make merry." The fatted calf was killed—plainly

not for sacrifice—but simply for the feast, or the festival to which they were called. To say that this represents the atonement of Christ, is to misrepresent and misinterpret a plain passage of Scripture. Then, “Behold, this my son was dead and is alive again, was lost and is found.”

You will perceive that the elder son was at a distance labouring in the field. He was not present ; it is not at all improbable that sons and daughters had been born to that father during the long estrangement and absence of the prodigal son. It was these that he called together ; and the language he used seems to justify this ; for the father is very special in pointing out the fact that this is his son ; “this is my son, you, the rest of my children, have never seen him ; you had no sympathy with my feelings while I sat in the midst of you, so sad and full of thought ; and those absent looks of mine, which you thought so strange, were expressive of my mental wanderings after the son whom I had lost. That prodigal has come to his right mind ; he is now restored ; this is he—your brother, my son : he was dead and is alive again ; he was lost and is found.” He therefore calls upon them all to make merry ; and it is plain that it was not the servants who were making merry, because, in the subsequent part of the chapter, the servant, who seems to have been merely ministering at the festival, was called aside by the elder son to explain what these things meant. The presumption is therefore that there were other sons and daughters : the prodigal was restored to that happy group, and all were bidden to rejoice. That home in which there was long one note discordant, the echo of its dissonance deepest in the paternal heart, had that

note now merged and lost in the harmony of happy feeling, amid the sunshine of glad faces. Here the parable strictly closes; just as the lost sheep when recovered by the shepherd became to him matter of joy, and he called and bade them rejoice; just as the hidden coin when recovered by the woman was matter of joy to her, and made her call her friends together to rejoice with her, so the lost prodigal recovered, the dead son alive, is here exhibited as a source of joy to the father. He calls together the inmates of his house, spreads the social board, displays all his riches in order to express the gratitude he felt that the lost prodigal again is found. So our Lord shows there is joy in the presence of the angels of God, when a lost sinner repents and returns to God: as there is joy at every hearth and in every home when a lost son is restored. How is it that the Pharisees have no sympathy with the angels above, no sympathy with homes that are thus happy; so much so that they excluded themselves from nature itself, in order to exclude Jesus from being received and recognised as the Messiah?

CHAPTER IX.

The Elder Brother.

“Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard music and dancing.”—LUKE xv. 25.

I NOW come to another point in the narrative, *viz.* the conduct of the elder son upon this occasion. The elder son, you will perceive, in ver. 25, was in the field, and as he came near to the house, he heard music and dancing. This clause in the parable is full of meaning, and not the least proof that it is one of the brightest gems in the Bible; whatever side you present, it reflects rays of that love which gives pardon to the guiltiest, and forgiveness to the greatest sin. The elder son was labouring in the field. How beautifully does this contrast with the conduct of the younger! The younger went off from his father, and wasted his substance; the elder seemed to have remained at home, an industrious and laborious son, doing his father's and his own business. He hears from a distance—and yet strange, one would think, that his attention had not been drawn to this before—the sound of music and of dancing, which was the expression of the joy that they felt. Whether music and dancing are lawful, is not here discussed or decided. I cannot conceive that there is any more harm in moving the feet than in moving the fingers: it is not in dancing that the sin lies, but in the accompaniments which too generally have been connected with it. He heard music and dancing, which are in various countries the expression of delight and joy. We notice at once how the surly temper of the elder son de-

velops itself. You will see there was something here that formed a very prominent feature in his character. If he had had the right feelings of a son, he would have rushed in, knowing that there was perfect welcome for him in his father's home, a cordial embrace among his own relatives. But the bad temper of the man held him back. Instead of rushing in, he stands without, evidently under the power of bad passions. He calls a servant—a circumstance of itself the evidence of some estrangement. He calls a servant, and asks in an imperious tone, demanding rather than asking, explanation of what seemed strange, and contrary to his wishes. We may notice, in the reply, evidence of the exquisite accuracy and truthfulness that pervade this parable. The servant said to him, "Thy brother is come, and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound." The father was overwhelmed with thoughts of the moral transformation of his son, "he that was dead is alive again, he that was lost is found." The poor servant, who was a mere stander-by, felt no connection with the inner feeling; he attended merely to duty, and had no sympathy except with outward facts; and therefore he said, your brother has been received by his father "safe and sound;" none of his limbs are broken or features defaced; he is received safe and sound. He knew nothing beyond this, nor cared for knowing any thing more. The father's statement was, he was lost to happiness, to his home, and his God; he is now found. He that was dead in trespasses and sins, is now spiritually alive. But the servant, who had no understanding of this kind, said, "he has received him safe and sound, and therefore thy father hath killed the fatted calf." Now the elder son, if he had

been a right-minded brother, or a right-minded son, instead of hesitating for a moment, when he heard that his brother had actually come back, would have rushed into his presence, and cordially and heartily welcomed him home, and thanked God that his brother was restored. But, instead of this, we are told, he was angry. Angry at what? that the lost was found, that the dead was alive, that a dear brother was restored, that his father was happy: there must have been some speck of wickedness in the core of that elder brother's heart, or he could not thus have felt. It is added, that "he would not come in," just as if he could thus revenge himself on what was doing within without his cognizance. "He was angry, and would not come in." Then what did the father? Beautiful indeed is the affection of a father's heart! exceeded only by that which nestles in a mother's! The father, though he saw his son acting in a manner so unworthy of the affections and duties of a son, did not utter one word of anger or rebuke, but "went out and entreated him to come in." He ought not to have needed such entreaty. But the elder brother, answering, said to his father, "Lo, these many years have I served thee, and thou never gavest me a kid" —even that, so much smaller a thing than the fatted calf—"thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends. But as soon as this thy son is come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf." See how expressive this language is of the chagrin, the envy, the hatred of that elder brother's heart. He does not say, "as soon as my brother is come," but "as soon as *this thy son*," this contemptible fellow, thy

son, "which hath devoured *thy* living with harlots." That was not matter of fact; the elder son had had his share, and the younger had had his. It had ceased to be his father's, and became his own. There was no evidence that he had wasted his father's living "with harlots." This was a mere guess; because there was nothing in his past history to warrant it. It may have been, or it may not; but there was no evidence on which the son could say so. And what is only matter of conjecture never should be made the subject of current rumour. And next he says, "*as soon as he was come.*" Now mark the words again. He does not say, as soon as he repented and reformed himself, and became a better man, but, "as soon as he was come:" as if there were sinfulness and excessive indulgence on the part of the father—"as soon as this thy son is come, thou hast killed for him," not a kid, a little thing, which thou never gavest me, "but thou hast actually killed the fatted calf." Envy, jealousy, ill-will, uncharitableness, were all compressed into this speech. It is laden with such bitter vituperation, that one can scarcely find words adequate to express one's hatred of it. But if the elder son had not only seen the fatted calf killed, and the cordial embrace which his brother received—but had gone in and beheld this son, "who hath devoured thy living with harlots," clothed in a splendid robe, seated on the best seat at the festival, his passion, already fierce enough, might have lost all bounds; and, like Cain, he might have gone out again a fratricide. More probably, perhaps, if he had crossed the threshold, and beheld the scene of gladness and gratitude that beamed in every countenance, he would not (I retract the opinion) have acted like Cain; he

would have joined in the merriment, and danced and sung too. The language that he used is extremely like the language of the younger son, when he said, "Give me the portion of goods that falleth to my share." But let us hear the reply of the father: "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine." You have enjoyed all this plenty, you have had merely to ask and you have received. You have no reason to complain; instead of indulging in complaint, you ought to be thankful.

The last question that remains, is, who is this elder son? Probably the best and most straightforward answer is to say, we do not know. I am certain, on second and more elaborate reflection that it cannot represent or have the least reference to the angels. The elder brother cannot be the type of the angels, for the whole language that precedes is utterly inconsistent with this interpretation. Was it designed to represent the carping, envious, bitter-hearted Pharisee? This is much more likely. But then the father says, "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine." Could this be applied to men who were simply hypocrites, and had no religion at all? I feel this an insuperable difficulty; may we suppose that our Lord applied it to the Pharisees, *è concessò, i. e.* hypothetically: "Suppose that you are what you pretend to be; suppose that you are really holy men instead of being mere pretenders to holiness, in such a case every thing ought to lead you rather to rejoice that the lost is found, and the dead made alive again:" if so, the language used by the elder son would have been in the simplest language, the severest rebuke conveyed to those Pharisees. My conviction, however, is, and I have tried every resource in order to find out

who the elder son is, and in none do I find the difficulty satisfactorily solved ; perhaps the best interpretation is that given by Trench,* that this elder brother, is the type and symbol of a man strictly honest, just, industrious—a Christian, in short, of the very lowest possible grade. For how many prejudices, passions, sins are compatible with real Christianity still living in the heart ! I say it is possible then to suppose he was a Christian of the very lowest possible type,—“an outdoor Christian, not an indoor Christian,”—one who laboured cheerfully in the out-field, who had little sympathy with the enjoyments, and little more with the sweets, of home,—one who made very little progress in the knowledge and experience of the truth ; perhaps a semi-Papist of that day, who had the spirit of exclusiveness characteristic of that sect, and wished none to share in what he enjoyed : or a Tractarian or Puseyite of that day, who thought, for instance, that if a minister of another national church or a Dissenter should be admitted to drink at the same stream, and draw from the same fount, he would be sure to drink it dry, or at least to pollute it. You may suppose him to have been a Christian, but a Christian with a morbid heart and prejudiced mind, with much of the old Adam still lingering in his body. He was jealous that a recovered sinner should rank with him, or that a returned prodigal should receive a welcome that he had not. Or we may suppose that he was not a Christian at all,—but only a moral, upright, honourable man, a stranger to spiritual religion : and is it not a fact that there are in the world men that shame Christians by

* In the course of my lecturing on this parable, I received a note from a hearer, complaining I had not acknowledged my obligations to Trench. The answer is, Trench and I are both very deeply indebted to Olshausen.

their honour, their candour, their integrity? There are merchants, I believe, in England, who would not utter a falsehood, if it were to save their fortunes; whose word is recognised in distant lands as equivalent to a foreigner's or a stranger's oath. Who does not rejoice at this, and praise God that it is so? You will find in this city men of the strictest honour—who give to Cæsar all that Cæsar can demand—whose homes are the scenes of the richest hospitality—whose hands are ever in their pockets in ministry to the wants of the orphan and the widow—and all this they may be, and yet they may not be regenerated men, the children of God: for it is possible to keep the last six commandments of the law perfectly, and yet to forget the first four: their relationship to their fellows may be perfect; their relationship to God may be altogether neglected: the very beauty and perfection of the human graces by which they are adorned tempts them to lean upon them as their merits and their title to God's favour. The elder son may have been some such one as this. And who knows not that when they are told to wash at the same fountain, be clothed in the same righteousness, lie down in the same level, seek forgiveness not because of what they are, but without money, and without price, that these are offended at the requirements of the gospel; they cannot conceive that they are to be classed in the matter of acceptance before God with the lowest, the vilest, the guiltiest of mankind. But the most accomplished man, whom all the juries in the world would acquit if accused,—and whom all his fellows would applaud—that man and the thief upon the cross, or the criminal of twenty years, must just seek mercy, and forgiveness, and pardon, freely and in the same form, and from the same foun-

tain, and on the same ground, and be saved together, or remain separate for ever.

If he be not any of the three that I have mentioned, the elder son may be a feature in the parable altogether independent, for we are not always to construe each point in a parable as if it had a distinct and separate meaning. We may suppose that some are added to make the narrative cohere perfectly and completely. But I think there is meaning in it; certainly it teaches one lesson, which is not to be envious of the success of others. Let us not be jealous of the reception of others. Let not the member of one communion be grieved that another prospers: let not one minister lament that another is more successful in winning souls to Christ. Let us rejoice with the angels in heaven who are in the home of our Father, let us rejoice wheresoever, and in whatsoever church, and under whatsoever ministry a lost soul is found, a dead soul is quickened. My dear reader, whoever be the elder son, whatever be the explanation of the other features in the parable, we are certain that we belong now or have belonged to the lost sheep; we are or were the lost coin; we are or were the prodigal and stray son: Are we reclaimed? have we returned? have we arisen and gone to our Father? There is nothing between you in the strange and distant land where you have planted yourself, and instant reception by that father who is our Father in heaven, but your own reluctance to go to him. Every obstruction on God's part is removed; the only obstruction is in your heart. It is still true—

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