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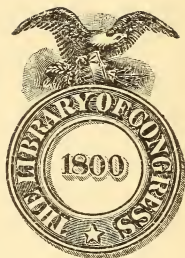
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CHEER FOR LIFE'S PILGRIMAGE

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CHEER FOR LIFE'S PILGRIM- AGE

I

STATUTES AND SONGS

PSALM CXIX. 54

THE Jews have never forgotten that they are the descendants of a pilgrim race. From the day that their great forefather crossed the Euphrates, and became the Hebrew, to the present, they have been the nation of the wandering foot, found in every land, but at home in none.

Their literature is dyed with this conception. It abounds with the confession that they are strangers and sojourners upon earth. Abraham made it when he stood up from before his dead, and purchased the cave of Machpelah from the sons of Heth. Jacob made it when he stood in the presence of Pharaoh and of the solid memorials of Egyptian greatness. Hezekiah made it when he compared his life to a shepherd's tent. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews made it when he alleged that the continuing city was yet to come. It is made here: "Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage."

But these plaintive confessions are not confined to Jews; they are the heritage of all nations. Few things in our language are more touching than the comparison made by the Northumbrian

chieftain, on the eve of the introduction of Christianity, between man's life and the flight of a sparrow through a lighted hall, coming out of the darkness and storm, and after a brief flight going forth into it again. Under this head, what more suggestive than Chaucer's "Canterbury Tales," told in an inn!

Earth is but a camping-ground, on which we halt for a little on our journey forward into the great eternity which awaits us. Other generations have been here before us, and have gone, we know not whither; but they are marching onward and forward somewhere, and we must follow them, as others us. Indeed, our world has been compared to the site of a Gipsy encampment, where the gray ash, broken pottery, and fluttering rags tell of previous caravans that made it their halting-place for a few nights, and

then yoked in the lank steeds and went on to other camping-grounds. The merry-go-rounds will stop, the oil lamps cease to flare, the fair will be done, and we shall be away with the daybreak.

These things need to be repeated; we are so apt to forget. The mere fact of returning night after night to our homes and beds makes us think that they are permanent abiding-places, when, in point of fact, we never come back to them where we left them. During our absence at the mill or the school they have been moved farther along the road we are traveling, as Arabs move forward the tents of European tourists in Palestine, so that they are awaiting them for the evening meal. Our homes are tents, always moving forward, because we are ever on the march toward our eternal abode.

We are exiles beside the river of time, as Israel was in Babylon, and we mingle our tears with its waters as we reflect on the brevity and transience of our days.

THE HOUSE OF OUR PILGRIMAGE.

What can this be but our mortal body?

“The Word was made flesh, and tabernacled among us”; “I must put off this my tabernacle”;

“When the earthly house of this tabernacle is broken up, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”

It has been truly said that we are not flesh and blood, but *are made partakers of flesh and blood*. Each one of us is

an immortal spirit, created in the likeness of God, and for a little while brought under the conditions of mortality as an education for our eternal condition.

During our brief sojourn here we reside

in the body as our tent. It is the house of our pilgrimage.

The tent is frail. "The veil, that is to say, His flesh." Only a veil hangs between us and the great constellations of eternity, between us and the world of realities, between us and the face of God. A breath may wave it, an insect's sting may pierce it, a thorn may rend it.

The tent is not always perfect to begin with. Some of us start on our pilgrimage with a crazy house, which is always in need of attention and repair. Life is much more difficult under such conditions. Paul's thorn in the flesh made it less likely that he could achieve as much as other men; it was by God's grace that he actually achieved more. All honor to the men who have triumphed over the limitations and deficiencies of their physical environment, and have become

more than conquerors through Him who loved them. We are all proud of a former Postmaster-General, who, notwithstanding his blindness, was able to reach and hold with credit one of the highest positions in the land.

The tent has a limited durability. It is not intended to last for more than eighty or ninety years at the utmost. Its average duration is much less than this. With all our efforts for its repair, it inevitably wears out at last. But how important to distinguish between tent and tenant! The one material and temporary; the other spiritual and immortal. When you come upon a wrecked signal-box, a ruined house, you know that the inmate has moved on. He is living somewhere. This is only the place where he lived and wrought—the laboratory of the chemist, the forge of the

eager worker, the observatory of the heaven-soaring thinker. So, when the body is all that is left you of the dear one in whose company you were accustomed to make pilgrimage, treat it reverently and lovingly, but remember it is the worn-out tent of the spirit, which is clothed upon with its new house, which is from heaven.

MY SONGS. "Songs in the house of my pilgrimage."

This is startling.

The pilgrim's lot is so changeful. No sooner has he become settled than he must be gone. The enchanting prospect, the sweet beauty of nature in her loveliest dress, the tender love of friends, the delicious sense of repose—all must be abandoned when the bugle sounds the reveille. So fair is the site that one would fain linger, but there is no alter-

native than to strike the tent and follow. See, the pillar of cloud is already on its way, moving in stately march over the desert sand! Is it possible to sing, when such partings and settings forth and farewells are ever our lot? The weak heart clings to the past, dreads the unknown—can it sing?

The pilgrim's life is so perilous. Take the experiences of an explorer. The fruits he plucks on the unknown soil may poison him; the flowers may narcotize him with their scent; miasma may lurk amid the most bewitching scenery; the waters of certain streams may be unfit to drink. He does not know the native customs, and at any time may involve himself, most innocently, in their undying hatred. Every day leads him through strange and difficult circumstances; every night is spent at a new

resting-place. Amid so much that is trying and perplexing, is it possible for the heart to sing? Yet this is what the psalmist says: "Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage."

THY STATUTES. A clue to the song will perhaps be forthcoming when we inquire more closely into the nature of God's statutes. What are they? A *statute* is something which is established, fixed, permanent. *God's statutes* are what He has laid down as the foundations of His dealings with men, and which are more lasting than the everlasting hills.

This wonderful acrostic psalm, which weaves into its texture the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, abounds in references to the divine statutes. Seven times over the psalmist utters the prayer, "Teach me Thy statutes," and toward

the close of the psalm he rejoices in the assurance that God has answered his cry and become his Instructor. There are seven other references to the divine statutes, on which we have now no space to dwell at length, though each is full of instruction and inspiration.

God's statutes may probably be comprehended in three classes :

His promises.

His procedure, i.e., the method of His government.

See how songful each of these is to the loving and obedient heart, though only to such.

His precepts yield song. Shakespeare says that music is "the consent of sweet sounds." But it is more, just as poetry consists of something more than harmonious words. Music is the language of the unseen and eternal, and song is the

accord of the heart with this the utterance of eternity. Of course there are evil songs, which show that the heart of the singer is in accord with the dark nether world of evil; but good and holy songs show that the heart of the singer has caught the strains and chords of the bright, blessed world of God and the holy angels.

But how should we know the thoughts and principles of the unseen and eternal world, if it were not for the divine precepts? God has set them up on earth, that we might know, through them, the order of the divine realm, and might, by obedience, bring ourselves into accord with it. Take, then, the precepts of the Bible, especially those given by our Lord—His reiterated commands *to love, to pray, to sacrifice self*. Embody them in every act of the life and every pulse

of thought; learn them, obey them, follow them; and when the life is married to them, as noble music to noble words, there will come a new gladness into the heart and a new song in the life. What rapture there is in obedience! What comfort and joy in the Holy Ghost! What songfulness in having a conscience void of offense toward God and man! Thus God's precepts become our songs in the house of our pilgrimage.

His promises are conducive to song. Is the pilgrim life so *changeful*? Listen to His promise that He will abide the same, even to hoar hairs and forever. Is it so *perilous*? Remember, He has promised to go before to prepare the path, and to follow after as our rearward. Is it so *lonely*? Have lover and friend stood aside? Have the companions of early years dropped away? Are all the

faces growing strange and unfamiliar? Still, recall His promise that He will never leave, neither forsake.

Let us con the promises, remembering that they are ordered in all things and sure, that they touch every possible phase of life, that they are the bank-notes of heaven, each bearing the signature of the Almighty, that they are yea and amen in Christ; and as we meditate and pray there will be a sense of security and wealth breathed into us, which will awaken songs. God's promises will become songs in the house of our pilgrimage.

The order of the divine procedure and government is also provocative of song.

The world around is full of the attempts and triumphs of high-handed wrong. Pride and will-worship, the lust of the flesh and of the eyes, the down-

treading of the weak by the strong, the spoiling of the defenseless by the arrogant oppressor, the apparent success of those that set at naught God's law—these facts are patent to us all. They accost us in every street and flaunt themselves before our eyes. And the waters of a full cup are wrung out to us as we cry, with one of old, "Why do the wicked prosper?"

But when we turn our thoughts heavenward we are arrested by the order, regularity, prevalence, of God's statutes—*this*, that light is stronger than darkness, and Christ than Satan; *this*, that holiness and purity mean always and everywhere blessedness; *this*, that falsehood and wrong-doing carry with themselves the seeds of disintegration and decay; *this*, that those who love their lives lose them, while to those who seek

first the kingdom of God all else is added.

And as we consider the certainty that ultimately God will justify Himself before the eyes of the universe and establish righteousness and justice, vindicating the oppressed and punishing the wrongdoer, we seem to be standing on the sea of glass, having the harps of God, and singing the song of the redeemed: "Great and marvelous are Thy works; . . . just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of saints." Thus the order and procedure of the divine government may become our songs in the house of our pilgrimage.

And if our songs be so heaven-soaring and glad when we are yet in the shifting tent, surrounded by much that, as the psalmist says in the previous verse, is calculated to fill us with horror,

what will they not be when we draw near our home, our true abiding-place, our city with its foundations; nay, what will they not be when we have crossed the threshold, and are mingling with the innumerable company of angels and with the spirits of the perfected saints! If there are festal days when the pilgrims meet in the inn on the way to their home, what will not the overflowing gladness be when they are at home forever!

“ Free from a world of death and sin,
With God eternally shut in.”

II

“THE NIGHT IS FAR SPENT, THE DAY IS AT HAND”

ROMANS XIII. 11-14

To this passage Augustine attributed his entire conversion and emancipation. “Behold,” he says, “I heard a voice from a neighboring house, as a boy or a girl, I knew not whether, saying in a singing note, and often repeating, ‘*Tolle lege, tolle lege* (Take up and read).’ Whereupon, the course of my tears being suppressed, I got up, interpreting it to be nothing less than a divine ad-

monition that I should open the book and read the place I first lit upon. Therefore I returned in haste to the place where I had laid down the book of the apostle when I arose from thence. I caught it up, opened it, and read in silence the place on which I first cast mine eyes: 'Not in revelings and drunkenness, not in chamberings and impurities, not in strifes and envies. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh in its concupiscences.' I would read no further, nor was there need. For with the end of this sentence, as if a light of confidence and security streamed into my heart, all the darkness of my former hesitation was dispelled." May similar effects accrue to each of us! As we ponder these words, may light stream into our hearts!

For us, as for Augustine, there is always, in the earlier stages of the religious life, some perplexity as to the method of treating the evil habits which have grown with our years and cling to us with grim tenacity. Shall we leave them behind us in the course of time? Will they relax their hold? Is there any way of providing for their gratification within fixed and defined limits? Is it to be a perpetual struggle between us and them, in which sometimes we and sometimes they shall conquer? To all these questionings a sufficient answer is suggested *in the aorist tense* of the apostle, by which he insists on the definite, sudden, and entire abandonment of the works of darkness, and the immediate, final, and irrevocable acceptance of the armor of light. It can be done, or the Holy Ghost would not en-

join it. Here, now, and before you have laid down this book, you may once and forever have put away, as concerning your former manner of life, the old man, which waxeth corrupt after deceitful lusts, and you may have put on the new man, which, after God, hath been created in righteousness and holiness of truth.

The works of darkness are enumerated in three classes, with two specimens in each. First, indulgence in sensual acts; secondly, indulgence in unholy thought and desire; lastly, indulgence in anything which is not perfectly loving and lovely. Surely none who read these lines are guilty of the sins of licentiousness or drunkenness; possibly a very few may be given to chambering and wantonness, harboring thoughts and imaginations which corrode and corrupt the soul; but many may be

prone to strife and jealousy. You permit yourselves to enter into the lists, contending for the priority, and are jealous of those who excel. These things are condemned by the love of God; they savor of the darkness of the unregenerate heart, and must be put away. Even if they have been permitted as the habit of years, they may be cast away as swiftly and entirely as the sleeper puts off his night-robe and prepares to gird himself for the day's duties, engagements, and conflicts.

The night is far spent. Here the comparison of night is used of Christ's absence from His church and of the brooding darkness which overcasts the world. The night is the emblem of indolence and lethargy; and are not the majority of men sluggish toward God, however keen and alert they are toward

the concerns of this world? Night is also the time of illusion. Laban imposes the blear-eyed Leah on Jacob in the darkness. Ugliness and beauty, gold and stone, friend and foe, are all one when night has drawn her curtains. Are not most men mistaking the counterpart for the real, the false for the true? Again, night is pregnant with danger, whether to the traveler across the morass, or the ship feeling her way along a rock-bound coast. Darkness is danger. He that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth, because darkness has blinded his eyes. For vast tracts of time, darkness has covered the earth, and gross darkness the people. How great the relief, then, to be told that the night is far spent and the day at hand! The night of Satan's reign, of the power of darkness, of creation's

travail and anguish, of the absence of Jesus from His church—it is far spent.

The day is at hand. In connection with the temple ritual, we are told that the morning sacrifice had to be offered at a point of time between the first indications of dawn and actual sunrise; and during the last hours of the night a party of Levites, known as watchmen for the morning (Ps. cxxx. 6), used to take their stand on one of the higher pinnacles of the temple, watching for the first indications of the approaching sun. Meanwhile, at the altar of burnt-offering, everything was ready and the priests stood waiting. At last the signal was given in the words, "The sky is lit as far as Hebron," and, immediately that cry was raised, the morning sacrifice was slain and the daily routine of the temple's ritual and worship began.

We, too, are on our watch-tower. An increasing number of God's people, in these last days, are joining the band of watchers up yonder, who stand in the chill morning air, looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ. May we not almost say that the day is come? Certainly the light has been getting brighter and clearer with every year. The Jew-hate which is uprooting the Hebrew race in countries where Jews have for centuries been settled; the willingness of modern Jews to put aside their prejudice and to listen eagerly to methodical unfoldings of Scripture; the regathering of so many to Palestine, so that, in spite of the Sultan's adverse edict, some eighty thousand are settled there; the agitation of the world over the great problems presented by the

condition of eastern Europe—all these indications suggest the hope that the sky is lit as far as Hebron.

But, after all, the conception of this passage is classical and Roman, borrowed from the camp. Through the night the soldiery, divested of their armor, have abandoned themselves to revelry and carouse, and, as the small hours have reigned, have sunk into a deep sleep; but lo! the ringing bugle-note is announcing the herald streaks of dawn, and summoning the troops hastily to put off the dress and works of darkness, and to assume their armor, free from rust and stain. "The night is far spent, the day is at hand: cast off the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light."

Now is salvation nearer than when we believed. Not our salvation merely, but salvation generally. Jesus is about

to appear the second time, without sin, unto salvation. The bodies of the saints are to be set free from the power of death, and raised in the likeness of the body of Christ's glory; the creature is to be emancipated from the bondage of corruption; the last remains of Satan's rule over our world are to be destroyed; the golden ages are to return. From the watchers and holy ones the song of redemption is yet to ascend:

"Salvation to our God that sitteth on the throne,
And unto the Lamb for ever and ever."

We look back to the hour when we first believed. It is a definite moment in the vista of the past, but we look forward to indefinite degrees of light and glory. The light shall grow ever to a more perfect day; the results of the Saviour's death shall become ever more appreciated; the circles of influence that

radiate from His throne shall reach to farther limits, and be more than ever prolific of blessing to unknown races of beings at the uttermost limits of the universe.

Let us walk honestly (becomingly), as in the day. It is nothing to us that the shadows appear to linger over moor and fell; for us at least the day is broken, for the day-star has arisen in our hearts, and we are called upon to live as children of the light and of the day. Our eternity has already begun. We have come out of the great tribulation, to rest within the silken curtains of God's pavilion; we have washed our robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb; we already walk the streets of the New Jerusalem. Only let us day by day allow our light to shine. Let us live on the level of God's thought for

us. Let us walk as in the day, as we shall do when the time of the restitution of all things has taken place, in those blessed halcyon years when the sun shall no more go down, or the moon withdraw herself, and the Lord shall be the everlasting light. But to do this as we should, we must put on *the armor of light*. In an earlier epistle the apostle had already suggested the thought: let us, since we are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. And in a later epistle he carefully enumerates its successive pieces. But here he gathers up all into one comprehensive phrase, “the armor of light.” It is just the Lord Jesus Christ. Put Him on—His gentleness, meekness, and humility; His purity and truth; His obedience to the will of God, and sensi-

tiveness to every cry of weakness or suffering; and what seems soft to the flesh will approve itself to be armor of proof in the day of battle. None are so invincible and stalwart as those who are arrayed in the meekness and gentleness of Jesus.

Put on the Lord Jesus Christ. Do not be content with a negative religion; be positive. Do not only put off; put on. Put off by putting on. It is not enough to doff the robes of night; you must don the armor of light. Cast away the works of the flesh, because you have become enamoured of and incased in that glistening panoply woven out of sunbeams and light. Do not only resist impurity; put on Christ as your purity. If you put on Christ as your purity you will have no difficulty in being free of the taint of impurity.

Do not simply forbid wrath, anger, malice, but assume Christ's heart of compassion, His kindness, humility, meekness, long-suffering, and forbearance; indeed, to cultivate these will make those impossible. You need make no provision for the flesh, not expecting to sin, not living in perpetual fear of its outbreak and solicitations, when once you have put on, by faith and in the power of the Holy Spirit, the Lord Jesus Christ.

In Jesus there is supply for every need, armor against every attack, fullness for every deficiency. Avail yourself of Him; make use of Him; appropriate His sufficiency; go into every day, whatever its anticipated emergencies, temptations, and perils, as those who are incased in the very nature and character of Jesus, which they offer

as their answer to every possible demand.

Put on the Lordship of Jesus. For this cause He died and lived again: that He might be Lord of both the dead and living. Let His authority be supreme, His will and prompting law.

Put on the humanity of Jesus. From the day when He went back to Nazareth and was subject to His parents, to the day when He pleaded for His murderers on the cross, He presents a lovely example of holy and spotless manhood.

Put on the anointing of Jesus. He is the Christ of God. Never rest till God, who anointed Him as Head, has anointed you the member of His body, and you are a Christian (an anointed one) in deed and in truth.

Then, when the day breaks and the shadows flee forever, when the arch-

angel trumpet sounds the reveille to quick and dead, when the clear light of eternity breaks in on this time of illusion and gloom, we shall meet the day without shame or misgiving, and rise to the life immortal, through Him who liveth and reigneth forevermore in the mystery of the perfect day.

III

“IT IS THE LORD”

JOHN XXI.

JOHN discerned Him first, as it was meet. To others it was a stranger that paced the sand and looked across the steel-gray water. To him who loved, and knew that he was loved, there was something in the gesture, inquiry, and tone which un̄mistakably indicated the presence of Jesus. A quick remark, in whispered undertones, to Peter was enough to cast him headlong into the water, and in a few moments, with rapid

stroke, the strong swimmer was making for the Master's feet. The man of love discerned; the man of action pressed through the intervening space to be the first to gather the spoil of that unexpected interview.

Be always on the outlook, fellow-disciple, for thy Lord, especially in the early morning, when the world is fresh and the breeze curls the wavelets as they break in musical ripple on the sand. Ere the sun is risen above the hills, and while shadows lie dark and far on shore and sea, thou wilt probably find the Master taking pleasure in the works of His hands. There, where the foot of the roisterer and dissolute cannot intrude, where the voices of the world's dissipation are unheard, while the pulses are unstirred by the fever of the world's passion, and the atmosphere of the soul

is untainted by the soil of the world's sin, at early dawn, amid nature, among the mountains, on the silver line of sand, in the woodland brake, in the garden, thou shalt hear the voice of thine heart saying, "It is the Lord." Thou wilt know Him by the fragrance of His breath, by the considerateness of His care, by His pity as of a father to his children, by His knowledge of mysteries hidden from all else; and when thou knowest Him to be present, gird thy coat about thee in the modesty of true humbleness, plunge through the dividing waves, and never rest till thou hast found thy way to His feet.

It is wonderful what Jesus is to those that meet Him thus. They may be tired with the night-watch, weary with their run of ill success, out of heart and hope; but they never approach Him without

finding a fire kindled by His hand, the fish and bread of prepared provision, and a welcome to breakfast. Never let that chance of the morning interview pass unimproved; never let Him stand there in vain; never let love descry Him without the strength of a mighty purpose bearing thee to His embrace.

And it is not only thus that thou shouldst meet Him. It may be that thou shalt be plying thy daily toil, tearing thyself from work thou hadst deemed more sacred; thou mayest have turned to the bench or store, saying, with Peter, "I go a-fishing." The night may have settled upon thee, of disappointment and heart-weariness and failure; *then*, with a tread that no mortal ear could detect, He shall glide in, the light of whose eyes is all the light that heaven needs, and He will be stand-

ing there amid the scenes of common toil. He is familiar with carpenters' shops. He knows well how to handle a boat. His delights are in the habitable parts of the earth—on the flags of the exchange, amid the concourse of the market, where trades are plied and handicrafts wrought. The quick heart may still whisper gently to itself, "It is the Lord," and the soul shall have broken through the restraint of the chill waters of reserve, and shall be locked in a companionship which even the presence of others cannot break.

Nor will He only come to thee amid the scenes of natural beauty and of daily toil. He will come to thee most of all when thou art mourning over thy failure in His service. Have the fish been fickle? Have thy wonted arts failed to beguile them? Have the weary hours

passed, thou doing all thy little best, without one tiny fish entering thy net? Does it seem to thee as if thy hand has lost its cunning, and dost thou think sadly of the disappointment which awaits others? This is the likeliest moment of all in which to come across Him. Jesus always comes to men who seem to have failed; who have meant great things, but have come short; who have toiled greatly, and have taken nothing. Such are dear to Christ. Nothing touches His heart like patient and steadfast endurance. Nothing will so surely bring Him within reach as those empty nets and light keels. Look out for Him as the night is passing and the day breaking, when strength is expended and exhaustion is paralyzing. Thine heart shall awake, smitten by the gleam of His face, and thou shalt say

softly to thyself, "This is my God. I have waited for Him; He is come to save me. This is the Lord; I will rejoice in His salvation. It is the Lord!"

Ah, soul, it may be that this story is not far from being realized. Thy night is almost over. Lo! the morning breaks. Thy boat has nearly come to shore. In a little it will grate on the pebbles, and, as through the parting mist which veils heaven thou seest a form waiting to welcome thee, thy heart will make no mistake if it softly whispers to itself, "It is the Lord;" and on thy emerging through the cold flood on the eternal shore, thou wilt see no man, save Jesus only, and find a fire of coals, and fish laid thereon, and bread; and thou wilt be bidden to bring of the fish which thou hast caught, that thou mayest feed on unexpected success with

Him who says, "All Mine are Thine, and Thine are Mine: and My joy is perfected."

When Jesus meets the disciple He has much to say. We need the anointed ear as well as the quick eye. He asks for love—for the noblest love of which the heart is capable: the love of respect, of devotion, of consecration, such love as we would give to God. He asks, that He may give us an opportunity of expressing it. He asks because He loves to hear us express it. He asks with a special significance when we have acted in any wise inconsistently with its great demand.

Hast thou not been conscious of this, fellow-disciple, when thou hast denied Him with oaths and curses, hast said thou didst not know Him, hast turned thy back on His great anguish? It

was as though He says, "Is this thy love to thy Friend?" Art thou speaking and acting consistently with the high code of love's ideal? Yet surely thou dost love in spite of this. Didst thou notice the other day, in the report of Nansen's explorations, that about the pole there is a wide, open sea, the depths of which are warm, though the surface is covered by floating ice? Thy Master and mine knows well that the heart of a disciple may be warm, though on the surface may drift the ice-floes of denial and apparent neglect. As He asked of Peter, so of us, "Lovest thou Me?"

Let us never dilute the attachment that should bind us to Him. I notice that He asked of Peter the great divine love, worthy of God, and that Peter proposed to give Him a weaker, more

sentimental affection. A second time Christ maintained His demand for the supreme love, but for a second time Peter proffered Him the lower. Let us avoid Peter's mistake, and when Jesus asks the best from us, let us not put Him off with second-best; when He asks the supreme, let us not give Him the inferior; let us not drag Him down to our level, but let us confess ourselves willing to rise to His. Let us bring Him such love as we have and lay it at His feet, and as it fails to fill out the measure of His demand, entreat Him to take it in His hand, and for silver to bring gold, for iron, brass, and for stones, jewels.

What revelations of ourselves Jesus gives us when we stand together in the presence of our brethren and in sight of the heaps of fish which betoken the suc-

cess that He has crowned us with! He shows us ourselves—nay, we see ourselves reflected in the light of His life. We stand manifested before His judgment-seat and discern what He has discerned in us.

Has He not led thee through the chambers of memory, and shown thee how much of all thy work has emanated from self? He leads thee back to thy youth and shows how much that the world praised was the result of the forceful energy of thine eager soul—so much was wood, hay, and stubble, which thou accountedst gold, silver, and precious stones; so much was void, which thou thoughtedst was Nazarite consecration; so much was soulish and carnal instead of being spiritual and eternal. I hear Him saying to thee, as often to me, “Thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst

whither thou wouldest." Yes, that was our mistake. We were always girding ourselves up to new resolves, endeavors, sacrifices, exploits. We were fond of taking our own way.

"I loved the garish day; and, spite of fears,
Pride ruled my will."

O time, wilt thou not give us back those opportunities? Is the principal swallowed up in thy capacious maw, and only the poor interest of tears and experience left? Alas for us! So many steps in vain! So much walking to no effect!

"Remember not past years."

Then the Lord foreshadows the future: "Another shall gird thee, and carry thee." This might make us fear, if we were to interpret it as indicating the coming of a stranger, a detractor, or

Satan. But if the "other" is a veiled allusion to Himself, or to the Holy Spirit, by whom holy men of old were borne along, we are content. Let it be even so, O Thou *other* Comforter! Come and bear us whither Thou wilt, though the flesh cry out, and the cross loom in front, and after it the grave in which we rest at last. Beyond it all lies the upper chamber, the scenes of Pentecost, the church built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, the New Jerusalem, with the disciples' names inscribed on its stones.

In the presence of the Lord all curiosity is silenced. Dost thou look into His face and try to read the destiny of some twin soul, asking, "What shall this man do?" Thou wilt get no clear response. It may be because thy request was prompted by some kind of selfish longing. It is not for thee to

know, but to be; not to compare thy lot with others, but to be strong and brave and true. All depends upon the Master's will, which is taken and which left, which tarries and which speeds home, which is alive until He come and which passes to meet Him by the shadowed cloisters of death. Our business is to follow Christ.

Let us turn again to earth, with its demands and sorrows and sins, following Jesus as He goes about doing good, following Him to the ascension mount, following Him in thought and desire to His throne; and, penetrating every mystery, all perplexities, each enshrouding cloud, with the unfaltering conviction of faith let us dare to say, "Though I cannot read His purposes, or distinguish His form, or even hear His voice, I know it is the Lord; let Him do what seemeth Him good."

IV

OUR GENTLE SCHOOL- MISTRESS

TITUS II. 10-14

THIS paragraph may be called the *epiphany* paragraph, because twice that word occurs within its precincts. There has been an epiphany of God's grace; there will be an epiphany of His glory, and we know full well that *that* epiphany will be ours also; for when He is manifested we also shall be manifested with Him in glory. "Epiphany" means manifestation, the shining forth

of the hidden sun from which the veiling cloud has been withdrawn.

It is according to the method of the apostle that this marvelous paragraph, in which the two epiphanies meet, should be addressed in the first instance to *slaves*. Titus had been sent to Crete, that he might set in order the things that were wanting and appoint elders in every city; he was sent to organize the struggling churches in all parts of that island. Without doubt these little bodies, which shone like sparks of fire amid the encircling gloom, had a larger proportion of slaves in their composition than of any other class. There was that in the gospel message which constituted a powerful attraction to the downtrodden serfs. Moreover, they needed, more than any other class, the most inspiring teaching that the apostle could commu-

nicate to lift them above the degradation and misery of their lot, and to enable them to feel that in the discharge of the most menial and distasteful work scope was given to them for the high service of God. In this connection it is interesting to see that the closing words of our paragraph are "good works."

"Good works" is a characteristic phrase of this epistle. The Greek word is "beautiful." The apostle was extremely anxious that these poor household slaves should abound in beautiful work. Titus was to be an example of such works (ii. 7). Those who believed in God were carefully to maintain "good works" (iii. 8). The converts were to learn to maintain "good works" for necessary uses (iii. 14). The intention gives character to the act, and noble or beautiful conceptions of Christian life

would tinge with their own hues the most trivial act that called for doing. Therefore the apostle sets himself to store the hearts of the disciples with these lofty conceptions, that the white light of common life, passing through the stained glass of divine principles, may fall upon the pavement beneath in prismatic beauty.

Some who read these words may be occupied with the commonplaces of life. Domestic servants, children at school, tradesmen, mechanics—let them not suppose that these spheres of duty are unsusceptible of bearing traits of beauty. The heart can shed the light of its own ideals upon the commonest, meanest details until they wax lustrous. Many a beautiful life is being lived in top attics and cellar kitchens, because a beautiful soul is prompting every act,

irradiated by the gospel and irradiating it.

The mantle of the incandescent light may serve as a beautiful illustration for this. Its manufacture is on this wise. A piece of cotton or gauze fabric is formed of a bell-like shape. Then for weeks or months its texture is saturated by various chemical ingredients, which coalesce and form into a solid structure. After a while, when ready for use, the mantle is placed over a burner and a light applied. Immediately the slight gauze is consumed, but on the surface of the amalgam, to which it gave its form, the light and heat of mingled gas and common air will burn for a thousand hours. Similarly, on the flimsy groundwork of a very trivial act the loftiest thoughts, ideals, and motives may congregate, and remain long after

the act itself has passed, giving light and leading men to glorify the Father who is in heaven.

Amid the multitudinous grandeur and interest of this paragraph, there is one central conception on which we may stay for a while, in the hope that its delicate beauty may exercise its witchery over our souls. The grace of God is compared to an instructress, a teacher of young children, and is depicted as keeping a school, within which all who love Christ are gathered. Hugh Miller, in his "Schools and Schoolmasters," has spoken of the various influences which equipped him for his life-work; and we are all pupils in many schools, and sit beneath the instruction of many masters. But amid all the influences that mold our lives, there is none so gentle, benignant, formative, and strong as the

influence of our earliest and latest teacher, the grace of God.

As I write there comes back to me a vision of a gentle lady to whom, as a little boy, I went to school. Even now I can see her pure and sweet face. She was never vexed. It was pleasant to learn what she taught, because of the charm of her personal character, which attracted young hearts and made them soft as wax to receive the die. And much of what I have learned in after life seems to have been but the development of what she gave in embryo. Many of us recall such in the sunny years that lie behind us in the morning light, and they give us a vision of what the grace of God must be.

Between the two epiphanies grace has set up a school. She hath brought salvation to all men, and she instructs

those in whose hearts her loving words are welcomed. Have you entered her school? Are you sitting on her forms? There are several peculiarities.

All her teaching centers around a biography. She teaches truth, but it is the truth as it is in Jesus. The way, the truth, and the life, of which she constantly speaks, are gathered up in His wonderful personality. To know Him is to know all that she can teach; and yet, after all that she can teach, He is always greater and more wonderful.

All her students learn from the same book. There is but one manual for them all. From the moment they enter her school-house, to the last one they spend there, they turn the same leaves, though, under her gentle teaching, these glow with an ever-growing meaning.

The pupils of grace begin at the high-

est forms and end with the lowest, and those who know most take the lowest places, supposing that they know nothing at all. They confess that they are less than the least of all saints, that they have not apprehended, but are laboriously following on.

There are no fees, except that every scholar has to bring, as they are wont still to do in the remoter parts of Scotland, each one a contribution to the common fire.

There is a system of rewards and punishments in the school of grace—prizes to be won, penalties to be avoided. The lessons are always turned back if they are not perfectly learned. The scholars are kept close, even in the lovely summer days, if they have not completed their tasks; and there are times when the teacher has been known to use the taws; but the infliction of chastisement

has ever seemed an unwelcome task, only resorted to when all else had failed. Her voice is low and sweet, her foot-step noiseless, her hand soft and tender. Her power lies in her winsomeness, which attracts and charms, her patience, which counts no pains extravagant if only some young learner can be induced to apply himself to knowledge. Her portrait has been limned by an immortal hand, and hangs forever in the portrait gallery of God's Book; but there she is also known as wisdom.

“ Doth not wisdom cry,
 And understanding put forth her voice?
 In the top of high places by the way,
 Where the paths meet, she standeth;
 Beside the gates, at the entry of the city,
 At the coming in at the doors, she crieth aloud: . . .
 Receive my instruction, and not silver;
 And knowledge rather than choice gold.”

We are taught what we are to deny.
 “ Ungodliness and worldly lusts.” One of the first lessons of children is to re-

strict and limit the indulgence of each passing whim and fancy for the sake of some worthier aim. It is impossible to make much of the young life the gate of which is always on the swing and open to every intruder. To discriminate and refuse is a prerequisite to all true advance. The child who stops to gather all the flowers in the spring hedgerows is not the one to send on urgent messages.

Similarly, if we would have the fruition of God's glorious grace, we must deny all that is inconsistent with God and godliness, which is godlikeness. We must resolutely deny and die to all that is inconsistent with God and unlike God, all that would grieve the Holy Spirit, all that would create surprise and dislike in those who live on most familiar terms with God. Ungodliness and worldly lusts are closely connected. The heart of man, like a climbing plant, must adhere ;

and if its support be not God, then it will be that system of things by which we are surrounded, known as the world. We must have one or the other, and these are mutually destructive. To have God is to be unworldly; not to have God is to be consumed by divers worldly lusts, which war against the soul. Therefore the apostle does well to class these twain; they are two sides of the same bad coin, and grace teaches us to deny each.

We are taught what to practise. "To live soberly, righteously, godly, in this present world." *Soberly*: that is our behavior toward the things around us, whether pleasures, gains, or acquisitions of any kind. *Righteously*: that is our behavior toward our fellows, adopting as our code of dealing with them the standard of unvarying rectitude and honor. *Godly*: that is our behavior

toward God—to love Him, resemble and obey Him.

Are you ever at a stand, not knowing what to do for the best in respect to some question of practical life or honor? Take the hard problem into the presence of the grace of God; she shall instruct thee. How much we miss that would help us in determining our course amid the perplexities of the present evil world!

We are taught what to look for. “The blessed hope and appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ” (R.V.).

We are taught what to believe. That Jesus “gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify us.” This was the prime end of our Saviour’s coming into our world. All His work culminated in the cross; there He stood as our substitute, and

bought us to be His own, and He will never be satisfied till we are redeemed from all iniquity and purified even as He is pure. There is no need that any of us should live under the power and tyranny of sin. We have been redeemed from under its accursed yoke, and have only to assert our freedom on the warrant of God's Word.

This is one of the favorite lessons of grace. As some holy woman, whose purity of character and dignity of mien secured her from molestation, might have gone among the slave populations of the Southern States after the great war, explaining everywhere to them the nature of President Lincoln's proclamation, assuring them that they were free and urging them to assert that freedom, so does this blessed teacher instruct us of our freedom and urge us to act on it.

Lastly, we are taught what we are to be. "A people for His own possession" (R.V.). These Cretan converts were in many cases but too familiar with the thought of being owned by another—often by a cruel and hateful master, who exercised his deadly rights to the full. It was a mighty inspiration when they came to realize that they were much more Christ's, set apart for Himself and bearing His image and superscription.

Oh, that grace may more perfectly explain to us the majesty of our high calling, and enable us to realize it! Let us sit at the feet of our gentle teacher, with humble and teachable hearts, to hear her lovely voice and weave her instructions into the warp of our mortal human life.

V

THE GOSPEL MOLD

ROMANS VI. 17

THERE is a remarkable difference between the Old and New Versions in the rendering of these words. The Old puts them thus:

“But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.”

The New is as follows:

“But thanks be to God, that, whereas ye were bond-servants of sin, ye became

obedient from the heart to that pattern of teaching whereunto ye were delivered."

The idea is borrowed from the smelting-furnace, wherein the metal is brought to a fluid state, so that it can take on the shape of the mold into which it may be poured. Below there in the earth the mold or matrix lies prepared, the reverse of the design. At a given signal the contents of the furnace are discharged, and obey the form of the pattern which awaits them. Some time elapses, during which the metal cools. Then the mold is destroyed, but the pattern remains fixed forever on the substance that yielded itself to its shape.

This process furnishes the apostle with a wonderful illustration of the effect produced upon his converts by his teaching. They had been the bond-slaves of sin, presenting their members

to uncleanness, and to iniquity unto iniquity, having no fruit to show for years, which as they reviewed them gave them nothing but regret, and for which no compensation was possible, because the wages were death; and yet these people had become saints, walking with God in purity and righteousness all their days, because their hearts, melted in penitence and contrition, had willingly assumed the shape of his teaching and so had become conformed to the image of the Son of God. If we were to obey from our hearts that same type of teaching, might it not bring about in us a similar transformation?

Of course we must distinguish between the design or image to which we are to be conformed, and its mold or type in the apostolic teaching. If you go into some great foundry, you will

not be able to discern the exquisite beauty of the designs in the molds, because these are hidden in the darkness of the ground; you must be conducted to the show-room and see the finished design, to produce which the mold has been prepared. Similarly the perfect beauty of the likeness of our Lord, to which we are one day to be conformed, is beheld only by those whose eyes are purged from all earthly influences and behold Him as He is. The mold of the apostolic teaching is all that we now behold; but if we reverently and heartily accept and yield to it, we shall some day awake in the perfect likeness of our Lord, and shall be satisfied.

Let us comfort ourselves with this assurance. As He is, so we shall be. Can you not image the reluctance and questioning of the metal, when first it

leaves the heart of the furnace and begins to pour along its appointed channel toward its destination? How cold it is! how dark, how perplexing! And when the mold is entered, and the dividing streams part company to take their several ways into the dark and subterranean passages, how regretfully they must regard their happy past! how they must wonder what is happening! how prone they must be to murmur at their exclusion from light and air! But if they refuse to take on the prepared pattern they will only expose themselves to added pain, because broken up with ruthless hammers, plunged again into the furnace, and compelled to retrace their way. Better far to obey immediately and gladly the pattern to which they have been delivered. When that is achieved, and

the mold is broken, and the finished work is brought to light, the metal will be satisfied. The founder also will rejoice with exceeding joy.

There is a great prejudice against doctrinal preaching in these degenerate days, wherein men seek the attractive edifice, with little regard to foundation-laying. But the apostle lays great stress on doctrine, and says that it is as essential to Christlikeness as the mold is to the fashioning of metal into the predestined design. Doctrine is to the words of Scripture what those great generalizations which we know as laws are to the facts of nature. The comet obeys the attraction of the sun, the apple falls to the ground, the grain of dust follows a certain curve in its drift through the air, and men class them together under the great common law

of gravitation; similarly we find in Scripture different declarations about God that may be classed under certain majestic common statements, and we call those statements doctrine. Doctrines, therefore, are the laws of the spiritual realm, gathered from a comparison of many scattered texts; and as we ponder them reverently and prayerfully we are thinking over again the deep thoughts of God. In meditation and obedience we surrender ourselves to them, or, in the words of the apostle, we are "delivered" unto them; and as we obey them from the heart we take on their shape, which is the image of Jesus Christ.

We may well ask, What is that form of teaching, and those doctrines, to which the apostle specially refers? Some of them are as follows:

I. THE DOCTRINE OF ONENESS

WITH JESUS. Directly we believe, we are in Him as He is in us. We are joined to the Lord and are one spirit; we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. This is not only a matter of present personal experience, but we learn that it is the realization of a divine conception and purpose. We were, indeed, chosen in Him before the worlds were made. We suddenly awake to the fact of our union with Jesus, but that union was present to the mind of God in the distant ages of the past.

The Holy Spirit, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, founds an argument on the fact of Levi being in Abraham when the latter paid tithes to Melchizedek and was blessed by him. Since the less is blessed by the greater, he argues, the Levitical priesthood was clearly inferior

to that of Melchizedek, on the model of which Christ's was constituted. Thus we may be said to have done in Jesus what Jesus did as our representative and High Priest. We are and we were in Him that is true. We died in Him, rose with Him, ascended when He left Olivet beneath His feet, and sat down with Him when He took His seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

II. THE DOCTRINE OF IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS. Men sneer at it, but it is unquestionably an integral part of the apostle's teaching, especially in chapters iii. and iv. of this epistle. More than once we are told that, as righteousness was reckoned to Abraham because he believed, so it is reckoned to all that believe in Him who was delivered for our offenses and raised again for our justification. It were easier to take

the sun out of the heavens than to take the doctrine of reckoned righteousness out of the epistles of the New Testament.

There are two railway lines to the Crystal Palace—the Low and the High Level. If you travel by the one you must climb numberless stairs before you reach the palace, but with the other you have only to pass easily across the road. The first illustrates the efforts of men to obtain a righteousness of their own; the second, God's method of justification. He not only forgives us, but by the act of His grace puts us on the level of the righteousness of Christ—His obedience unto death, His resolute conformity to the Father's will—and bids us live on that level by the power of the Holy Spirit.

III. THE DOCTRINE OF EMANCIPATION FROM THE CURSE OF A BROKEN LAW. "Sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under law,

but under grace." We are under law when we have transgressed law. Adam was under the law when he had taken the fruit, and Joseph's brethren when his words aroused their consciences and made them remember their sin, which lay half hidden under the dead leaves of the years. The murderer is under the law when, fleeing from justice, he trembles at each snapping twig. So long as our sins are unconfessed, and faith is not exercised for the transference of their burden to Jesus, we are under law.

But so soon as we believe, we enter upon the privileges of that union with Jesus which we described above. We see that in Him we have met the deserved penalty of a broken law; that in Him we have exhausted the curse which was due to us; that in Him we have met the demand that the sinner should die. The law has had all it can ask,

and is satisfied ; we are no longer under its thrall or power ; we have passed into the realm where God's grace is supreme.

IV. THE DOCTRINE OF IDENTIFICATION WITH CHRIST IN RESURRECTION. He "raised us up together," "that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life." In the story of the deluge, the ark bore Noah and his family from the old world, where corruption and sin had reigned, to the new world of resurrection and life as it emerged from its watery grave ; even so the Lord Jesus, the true ark of safety, has borne us, through His death and resurrection, into the world of life. It is on this thought that the apostle bases the appeal, "If then ye were raised together with Christ, seek the things that are above."

This is the beginning of sanctification :

to feel that in Jesus we no longer belong to the world that cast out and crucified Him, but to that in which He reigns forevermore; to know that His cross and grave stand between us and the past; to realize the power of His resurrection in its daily detachment from sin and attachment to God.

V. THE DOCTRINE OF CHRIST'S ABSOLUTE OWNERSHIP. It was not enough that Christ should deliver us from the condemnation and penalty of sin; He has also redeemed us to Himself, to be a people for His own possession, so that we should become His bond-servants and slaves. Ah, what a claim is this, that He should be able to put His hand on each of our members and say, "This is Mine; I purchased it for Myself, and to use it at any prompting but Mine is sacrilege."

You cannot overcome sin by a nega-

tion ; you must have something positive with which to combat its solicitations. Sin asks that our members should be presented to it as weapons for its unholy use, but it cannot produce a single sufficient argument or ground for its claims. Then Christ comes and claims that we should place our members at His disposal, and produces the Father's warrant that all His blood-bought ones should be considered His in a unique and special sense : " Thine they were, and Thou gavest them Me." As He produces this warrant, there is no excuse for dallying or delay ; we gladly present our members as servants to righteousness unto sanctification, and in doing so we find the best and all-sufficient answer to the eager biddings of the flesh : " We are Thine, O blessed Redeemer ; Thou only hast a right to us, for Thou hast

redeemed us to God by Thy blood. Other lords besides Thee have had dominion over us, but henceforth by Thee only will we make mention of Thy name."

Such are some of the doctrines included in that gospel teaching into which, as into a mold, the apostle wished his converts to be delivered. Let us meditate on them till they become the habitual furniture of our souls; let us ask the Holy Spirit to work through them with living energy, making them operative and mighty in our daily experience; let us dare to take our stand upon them as certain facts and realities: then, like these converts at Rome, we shall find ourselves freed from sin, and, being emancipated from its intolerable thralldom, we shall become the happy servants of God, having our fruit unto sanctification, and the end everlasting life.

VI

SCRIPTURES AND POWER

MARK XII. 24

To be told that they did not know the Scriptures nor the power of God, and that this was the cause of their error, was sufficiently startling to the Sadducees who came to the Master with their question. They were not prepared to be taught anything that they had not already perceived to be in the ancient Hebrew Scriptures, much less to have it taught by this Nazarene, who had not been reared in the schools of the rabbis.

It was a new experience to be told that they erred greatly because they knew not the Scriptures nor the power of God.

Three things are noticeable: (1) Our Lord did not appeal, as Plato might have done, to arguments for the other life, based on the nature of the soul, or to the processes of nature; but to the Scriptures, which to Him were the ultimate court of appeal. In His conflict with Satan and in His teachings, His supreme appeal was always to the Word of God. (2) That He classes the five books of Moses under one heading and speaks of "the book of Moses"—from which we may infer His judgment that it was the product of one mind, as distinguished from the assertions of modern critics that it is a composite production, in which several hands may be detected. (3) That He discovers an argument for

the future life in the present tense which Jehovah used in His first conference with Moses. We should never have thought of the fathomless depth that underlies those simple words, "I AM," unless He had taken us to the edge and bidden us look into the sheer immensity, blue with distance. It was enough that, two hundred and fifty or three hundred years after the death of the youngest patriarch, God spoke of Himself as being the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and Jesus founded on that affirmation the argument that these souls must all be in existence somewhere, since God could not be God of the dead, but of the living. Is He the God of Jacob two and a half centuries after he has been laid to sleep in Machpelah's ancient cave, then Jacob must be alive. What marvelous depths lie under some of the simplest texts! We pass and repass over them day by

day, all unknowing. But we can guess from this instance what mysteries of wonder and beauty Jesus may have unfolded to His disciples during the forty days.

What is there in Scripture that invested it, in Christ's judgment, with such a unique authority? What are the Scriptures? It would be difficult to find a reply more satisfactory and scriptural than that given by the late Dr. Gordon, of Boston: "Literature is the letter; Scripture is the letter inspired by the Spirit." What Jesus said of the new birth is equally applicable to the doctrine of inspiration: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." Educate, develop, and refine the natural man to the highest possible point; yet he is not a spiritual man till, through the new birth, the Holy Ghost renews and indwells him. So of literature: however

elevated its tone, however lofty its thought, it is not Scripture. Scripture is literature indwelt by the Spirit of God. The absence of the Holy Ghost from any writing constitutes the impassable gulf between it and Scripture. In fine, the one fact which makes the Word of God a unique book, standing apart in solitary separateness from other writings, is that which also parts the man of God from common men—the indwelling of the Holy Ghost.

This is a true witness, and, because of this characteristic, we must say not simply that Scripture *was*, but that it *is* inspired by the Spirit of God. The bush burns with fire. The voice of God speaks. The Word gives living force to the words. The words that Scripture utters are spirit and life. As the sun burns in our grates, having been trans-

mitted from unknown millenniums through the coal, which has been described as "fossilized sunlight," so the Holy Spirit is present in the Scripture, as in no other writing whatsoever. Christ's perception of this made the Scriptures His constant meditation and final court of appeal.

It should be noticed also that our Lord bases His argument on the very words of Jehovah. It was not enough that the words contained the Word, but that they were the very Word of God. In the same way the Apostle argues for the unity of the spiritual children of Abraham when he lays emphasis on *seed* as contrasted with *seeds*, the difference of an *s* establishing his point. To quote again the writer alluded to above, "Words determine the size and shape of ideas. As exactly as the coin an-

swers to the die in which it is struck does the thought answer to the word by which it is uttered. Alter the language, and you by so much alter the thought."

The words, therefore, he argues, are all-important in enabling us to comprehend God's exact meaning. In point of fact, the higher critics themselves bear witness to this by the minute attention which they expend on the text of Scripture. It greatly confirms the argument to notice the stress which Christ lays on the very words of God. Had He said, "I was," it might have been seriously doubted whether the saints were yet alive. All such questions are put to rest by the majestic "I AM."

It has been truly said that every revelation of Himself that God makes to man involves a revelation of what man is in his nature and needs. When we

learn that Christ is made to us righteousness, we know that we are unrighteous. That He is our Paschal Lamb teaches us that we are in danger of the destroying angel. The name Comforter, given to the Holy Ghost, assures us of our need of one to stand beside us. When, therefore, God describes Himself as God to men who had passed from this earth for centuries, it was conclusive evidence that they were living somewhere, within some warm inclosure of His most blessed and happy-making presence.

There is, therefore, misconception when we speak of *the dead*, as though death were an abiding-place, a permanent condition. It is a passage, not an abiding-place; an act, not a state; a shadow flung for a moment by the portal through which we enter the other world, where the chalice of life brims

over. Instead, therefore, of speaking of the dead, let us speak of those who have died. Up to a certain moment, which was the crisis of a physical change, they lived with us, but the moment after they had passed that change they were as certainly and as intensely living on the other side. Death is birth into the fuller life. The signal-box is vacant, but the operator is elsewhere, carrying out his code.

Considerations like these will greatly mitigate our sorrow for those who are asleep. Ours is the world of the dying and dead, the valley over which death spreads its huge, bat-like wings. Yonder is the world of the living. They live with God, in God, on God, unto God. They drink of the river of water of life near its source. "Sons of God," "sons of the resurrection," "equal unto

the angels," "unable to die any more"—such are some of the terms applied to the saints who live on the other side of death by the Master of life. "All live unto God."

The place of their abode is the chosen house of Him who, though present in space as power, is specially manifested there as love. The restriction placed on the evolution of the spirit's life in this world, like an iron fence, will there be removed. With God is the fountain of light; in His light they will see light; in His presence they will find fullness of joy; at His right hand pleasures forevermore. What the tropics are to the shriveled flowers of our northern climates, that heaven will be to the puny spirit-life of our present experience.

The fire that burned in the bush has generally been taken to mean the tribu-

lations through which the church passes in this world, and which fail to consume her fabric or rob her of one twig or leaf that belongs to her organically. But surely it is truer to the symbolic teaching of Scripture to regard it as a symbol of the presence of God, who is as fire in the purity and spirituality of His nature, who needs no fuel to sustain His eternal being, and who is willing to stoop to the meanest and most despised of His creatures in tender pitifulness. Abide in Him, and let Him abide in thee; let Him settle down on thee, enveloping thee in the luminous garments of His holy presence, so that thou be inaccessible to death. All that corrupts and disintegrates shall be rendered powerless to harm thee. Thou shalt abide in the secret place of the Most High, and hide under the shadow of the Almighty.

Whatever God has promised in the

Scripture He is prepared to make good by His power. "Ye know not the Scriptures, nor the power of God." It is necessary to know each. Abraham believed that what God had promised He was able also to perform. He looked from the promise to the Promiser, from the world to the eternal power of the Godhead, to which nothing was impossible, not even hard.

This must be our attitude also. In the proper balancing of these two—in the study of the Scriptures, on the one hand, and in the adoring contemplation of God's power, on the other—we shall find our best preservative against the errors of our age, and may await the time when God will vindicate Himself, fulfilling every promise and prediction of Scripture with the might of His stretched-out arm.

Do you ask how the dead are raised up, and with what body they come?

Do you fear that somehow in the crowd you may miss elect and beloved spirits? Do you question fearfully the ability of such a nature as yours to find consummation and bliss amid such new and wonderful surroundings? Be still and wait; these fears would be annulled if the veil were torn from our eyes and we knew the Scriptures and the power of God.

Not the Scriptures without the power, or you arrive at the dry-as-dust pedantries of scribe and Pharisee. Not the power without the Scriptures, or you drift into the ineptitudes of mysticism and fanaticism. Always combine the Scriptures and the power of God, and is not the commanding proof of the unique position of the Scriptures as the inspired Word of God, that through them, as through no other book whatsoever, the divine power travels and works?

VII

STILLED AND QUIETED

PSALM CXXXI. 2

THIS psalm is perhaps the most exquisite expression of the Christ-spirit before the incarnation. There is nothing to match it, save the words which tell that the heart of the Redeemer is meek and lowly, and that the childlike and humble are the special subjects of the kingdom which He is setting up among men.

It is one of the shortest of the psalms, because the humble and contrite spirit is content to fill but a little space, and

yet, for all its brevity, it has probably exerted as much influence on men as its companion Psalm cxix. The one is as the silvery treble pipe, the other as the deep bass in the organ of Scripture, to which the Psalter may be very properly likened.

The psalm is also unadorned. Others of its companions bear traces of splendid conception and elaboration; they come forth bedecked with the jewels of imaginative poetry; but there is here no attempt at anything more than a statement of the placid experience of the inner life, which was once rocked and overcast with storms, but is now pellucid and tranquil as a mountain tarn in summer.

It is said to be "A Song of Ascents" (R.V.). At first sight it might seem out of harmony with the rest of these glorious pilgrim hymns, well suited to those who are climbing to the city of

God. It resembles rather Bunyan's shepherd boy, singing to himself in the valley, than the stalwart pilgrims breasting the steep. So meditative and lowly, there is little of the exulting strain to match the soaring soul. But it is better to climb by stooping, to ascend by our descents, to mount up with wings because we have learned to lie among the pots.

It is noticeable that this psalm of the child-heart follows that in which the psalmist claims forgiveness with the sob of penitential contrition. Perhaps we must appropriate the former before we can properly appreciate the latter. It is very strange, but true, that only through the gate of true soul-sorrow for sin can we pass into complete likeness to the little child who is as yet innocent of conscious sin. It is as if there is a kinship between the forgiven prodigal and the sweet child that has not gone

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beyond the precincts of the Father's home. Thus, in heaven, saints like Augustine will be perfectly at home with the hundred and forty-four thousand who have never defiled their garments.

The psalm is attributed to David, and there is no reason to doubt his authorship. But this adds new interest to it, for it is clear that it was not natural to that lion-heart to write like this. From his earliest maturity he had been a man of war, trained in the camp and court, where force and pride hold sway; compelled to force his way to the throne through intrigue and calumny, too stained with blood to be permitted to build the temple of peace—his was not the hand that we should have naturally credited with this tender and delicate sonnet. It must have come to him when some of the rougher experiences of his life had passed and he had felt the necessity of curbing his strong, im-

petuous spirit. If this be the case there is some hope that others of us, whose life has been stormy, and whose natural bent is in the direction of pride and self-sufficiency, may be led through similar exercises of soul to say, as he did, "The days in which my heart was haughty and mine eyes lofty are past. Not now do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too wonderful for me. I have learned to still and quiet my soul like a weanling upon its mother's knee."

I. THE SENTIMENTS OF THIS PSALM ARE NOT NATURALLY OURS. The heart of man is full of pride, which shows itself in many ways.

There is the Pharaoh phase, in which we proudly refuse to renounce, at the bidding of God, that which we claim to have acquired by our own ingenuity or capacity. "Who is the Lord, that I should obey Him to let Israel go?"

There is the Naaman phase, which

starts back in a rage from some simple ordinance to which the Lord claims obedience.

There is the Haman phase, that cannot endure the refusal of a Mordecai to stand up or move for him. "All this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate."

There is the Hezekiah phase, in which we show all the treasures of our home in the spirit of ostentation and vain display.

There is the Pilate phase, which refuses the remonstrances of the Christ that stands to be judged.

Proud of our religious observances, of our charities and self-denials, of the positions we hold in the church, of our very humility and courtesies to the poor; impatient of the least slight; annoyed if not treated with sufficient or customary respect; quick to take offense; cherishing feelings of dislike to those who out-

strip us; bent on edging our way to front positions; priding ourselves on the successes we have achieved, the talents with which we are gifted, the services we have rendered to the cause of Christ—few of us can say, “My heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty.”

What a contrast between us, dwelling amid the luxuries and superfluities of modern life, pampered and well provided with everything that delights the flesh, and a man like John Woolman, one of the rarest souls God ever made, who spent his time in walking from one Friends' meeting to another, habited in the simplest garb, faring on the plainest food, taking the rebuffs of the wealthy and arrogant without surprise, and content to be counted the offscouring of all if only he might raise his protest on behalf of the suffering and downtrodden!

II. THE NEED OF STRONG DEALING

WITH OURSELVES. David evidently had passed through a crisis at some period of his life. He seems to have taken himself seriously in hand. Up to a certain point the impulses and desires of his nature had reigned over him, bringing him into captivity; then he resolved that their sway should be at an end, and, in the power of the divine Spirit, quieted and stilled his soul. His illustrations are borrowed from the storm and the home.

To the *storm* he goes for his first image. His inner life had been swept by strong billows, driven across it by the winds of passionate desire. We know something of these billows, too. We also are swept by these winds: longings for the gratification of sense, the cries of our appetites for forbidden food, cravings for notice, notoriety, reputation, advancement, the imperious insistence

that our personality should be taken account of, our gift and position reckoned on, our services valued. When our demands in these directions have been met with disdain or refusal, we have simply retired into the shadow, to eat out our hearts in chagrin and rage. Those standing around us may have seen a calm mantling our face, but it has been a very superficial covering for the fierce storm which has beaten vehemently in the heart.

Under such circumstances David seems to have arisen, and, in the energy of the divine Spirit, to have stood on the shore of his tempest-swept soul, bidding the hurricane "be still." You and I have tried to do as much, but have failed as egregiously as Canute to stay by his word the incoming waters of the sea. Ah! we need a stronger power than human to hush the inward storm. Christ alone can put the curb upon our

seething passion or inordinate desire. He waits our request before He can undertake to quell the whirlwind and quiet the wave. If you cannot say, "Surely *I* have stilled and quieted my soul through faith," you can say, "Jesus my Saviour has done it for me, and He keeps me still and quiet, though the storms may pass over the sky."

The other illustration is borrowed from the *home*. The babe has been nourished at its mother's breast. Almost instinctively it has reached out its hands for the supply through which pure love has passed to its soul as well as nourishment to its body; but now the time has arrived for it to be weaned, that it may be able to take stronger food to build up its enlarging frame. The breast must be withdrawn and the little one accustomed to other sources of supply. It is a bitter ordeal, and the sor-

rowful babe vents its complaint with much wailing and piteous outcry. It sobs as though its very heart must break; it beats with its tiny hands against the loving mother-face that bends over it; it threatens to be inconsolable. At last, beaten and exhausted, it accepts its privation, falls back upon its mother's arm, and no longer adds the violence of its strife to the sense of its loss. It suffers one evil instead of two. It acquiesces in the loving choice of another. It passes through a necessary privation to a life which is infinitely preferable, and which it would choose, did it understand.

David must have seen this process repeated many a time, and one day it came upon him, as a flash of inspired insight, that he, too, had been clinging to the breasts of human consolation, that he had been nourishing his life from sources which, however pleasant, were not com-

patible with the highest development. To relinquish them meant sorrow that was hard to the flesh, but he saw that it was useless to spend his life in vain regrets. It was better a thousand times to accept the divine arrangements and allow himself to fall back upon the strong and tender arms of that God in whom motherhood and fatherhood blend.

The weaning is God's part. At the destined moment—the moment in which our highest interests demand His interpositions—God will not hesitate to wean us from sources of supply which He permitted to us in the time of our comparative immaturity. He loves us too well to perpetuate ministries of creature help and comfort which are interfering with our attaining to the full stature of Christ. When the time comes for us to be weaned God will wean us, but everything depends upon the way in which we take His discipline. We may at once acqui-

esce, and in this case we pass through the transition stage at as little cost of suffering as may be. On the other hand, we may sedulously and petulantly resist. Then will ensue weeks and perhaps months of repining, murmuring, and bitter complaint, that will expend and wear us out. And all the while we shall be missing the deepest lesson that God can teach—a lesson of loving, trustful acquiescence in His will; for, in addition to the advantage of passing from a lower to a higher stage of Christian experience, this weaning is intended to bring out a more perfect trust. We thus doubly thwart the divine intention when we murmur and complain.

After a while, exhausted, beaten, strengthless, helpless, we give up our insistence for our own way, our rebellion against His. We give up the conflict. We yield our will to His, and fall back on the everlasting arms of Him who

comforts us as a mother her first-born. How much better it would have been to have done this at the first, before we had expended ourselves so largely and had given observers the impression that the ways of God with His children were severe! As a weaned child after its struggles lies upon its mother's knee, and presently comes again into loving accord with her gentle face tenderly regarding it, so the soul finds its tranquillity in resignation to the will of God, which is our peace.

There is a certain definiteness in the act which resigns the entire conduct of life to the Almighty. At a given moment of time a certain attitude is taken up, which dates a new era, and thereafter care is exercised not to tamper with imperious desires which it has cost so much to quell. I greatly admire that entry in the diary of the late General

Gordon: "March 8, 1882. I have come to a conclusion; may God give me strength to keep it! *Stop all the newspapers.* It is no use mincing the matter; as the disease is dire, so also must be the remedy. These are the words which have done this: 'My son, *unglue* thyself from the world and its vanities. Put on the Lord Jesus Christ; find Him thy wisdom, righteousness, redemption; thy riches, thy strength, thy glory.'"

III. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN STOICISM AND TRUE RELIGION. A stoic like Marcus Aurelius might have written the first two verses of this psalm and there stopped short. He could not have said, "Hope thou in the Lord from henceforth, even forevermore." For him there might be the negative, the refusal to be perturbed by vain desire and intolerable care; but there was no such knowledge of God, in His ability to

fill the void of the soul, as to enable him to turn thitherward in hope. The stoic reckons himself dead to the thousand misfortunes of life; he has no knowledge of the thousand compensations of God. He shuts all the doors and windows of the lower ranges of the heart, but fails to open the upper to the blue sky and the sunlit air. Be sure, if you are weaned from the breast of human comfort, you turn with invincible comfort to the heart of God. Do not simply deny yourself, but receive from Christ all, and more than all, that you forego. Forsake what you will, but appropriate spiritual equivalents for all that you renounce. Hope in God, for the heart of a man has never yet conceived of all that He can become to those who give all up for Him. All human love and comfort are not comparable to the love and beauty of the Redeemer.

Hope in God ; from henceforth believe in His mother-love and that He is doing the best possible for each of us. Never go back from this moment. Stand to it, whatever betides, that God has done, is doing, will do, His very best. Refuse to discuss the matter with yourself or with any other. Let this be as absolutely fixed as your trust in the constancy of your closest friend.

Hope in God forevermore. As the years pass they will but deepen and intensify the sense of His trustworthiness. Time can never utter all the depths that await us in God : the tenderness of His sympathy, the closeness of His heart against ours, the delicacy with which His hand wipes away our tears. Thus, as the outer man decays, the inward man will be renewed day by day, and affliction will seem light and momentary compared with the far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

VIII

A NEW COVENANT

LUKE XXII. 20

IF you have lost your way in an unknown country at night, and come upon a railway track, you know that if you follow it far enough in one direction or the other you will arrive at a brilliantly lighted station, in which you can obtain shelter and refreshment. So as you come upon the observance of the Lord's Supper—which, like a narrow track, threads the ages—you can pass from it backward or forward. If you go back

you come inevitably on the night in which Christ was betrayed; if you go forward you are led to the marriage supper of the Lamb, with which the present dispensation will close.

The Lord's Supper commemorates three distinct facts about our Lord: He died; He lives; He will come. *He died*, and evidently, in His judgment, His death was the most important item in His career. Forget all else, He seems to say,—My teaching, My example, My mighty works,—but keep ever fresh before your minds and the world the memory of My death. *He lives*, else how should the apostles have thought of commemorating that which had filled their loving hearts with distress? They only dared to think about His death because they knew that He who died in weakness was living through the power

of God. And *He will come*. This has inspired the church as she has sat down at the table, expecting that at any moment He may glide in, and visibly take His place, and transform anticipation to welcome.

But in addition to these three facts, the Lord's Supper commemorates the setting up of a distinct covenant between the infinite God and those who are represented in the man Christ Jesus. And while the eating of the bread sets forth the necessity of our daily feeding on Christ, the drinking of the cup has another phase of meaning, and points to our participation in the blessings of the covenant, which is ordered in all things and sure, and which is all our salvation, all our desire. "This," said He, "is My blood of the covenant, which is shed for many unto remission of sins."

I. SOME EXPLANATORY WORDS ABOUT THE COVENANT. In the Authorized Version, "covenant" and "testament" are used interchangeably in such passages as Galatians iii. and Hebrews ix., which discuss this sublime theme. This is a matter of regret, as it obscures the deep connection of thought which connects them. It is better to think and speak of the "covenant," by the provisions of which God has bound Himself. "Covenant" means more even than "agreement." In the eye of a court of law, the latter may be set aside, but never the former.

A covenant gives a solid basis of peace.
A parchment deed may show marks of great age, the writing difficult to decipher, the wording obscure. The child intent on play, the young life yearning for love, may turn from it with languid

interest; but if it were missing the fabric of that happy home life might instantly collapse, as a building from which the foundation had been withdrawn. Security of tenure rests absolutely on the covenants, properly drawn out and witnessed, that repose in the darkness and neglect of their deed-boxes. So, also, our peace of heart and repose of soul, at the present moment and in all the ages of the future, depend absolutely on that covenant which the Father has entered into with the Son as our representative and Mediator.

Our Lord speaks of a NEW covenant.
Let us turn for a moment to the old:
“And Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord, and all the judgments: and all the people answered with one voice, . . . All the words which the Lord hath spoken will we

do, . . . and be obedient" (Exod. xxiv. 3, 7). "The words of the Lord, and the judgments" evidently refer to the foregoing chapters and to the whole body of Mosaic legislation so far as it was then revealed. The key-note was the reiterated words, "This do, and ye shall live," and the response, "We will do."

With this let us contrast the provisions of the new covenant: "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord; I will put My laws on their heart, and upon their mind also will I write them; and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more" (Heb. viii. 10, 12; x. 16, 17).

Obviously the introduction of this new covenant involves the disannulling of the old. "In that He saith, A new covenant, He hath made the first old. That

which is becoming old and waxeth aged is nigh unto vanishing away." In point of fact, as the apostle shows in the Epistle to the Galatians, the covenant of Sinai was introduced as a parenthesis into the covenant of grace, which was first revealed in God's promise to Abraham when he was yet a Gentile, not having undergone the special rite that became the distinctive badge of the Jew. "A covenant," he says, "confirmed beforehand by God, the law, which came four hundred and thirty years after, doth not disannul, so as to make the promise of none effect" (Gal. iii. 17). If the law was not added till after the covenant of grace had been revealed, it could be set aside when it had fulfilled its temporary purpose; and, in contrast with its disannulling, the ancient covenant of grace would stand forth as

new. Its key-note throughout is "I will." We are no longer concerned with the "we will" of poor human resolution, so soon broken and dissipated, but are encouraged by the eightfold assurance of the "I will" of God.

This covenant is entered into with Christ. "The fathers continued not in My covenant"; such is God's bitter complaint (Heb. viii. 9). The people's repeated assurances of obedience were hardly uttered before they were falsified by the incident of the golden calf. It is the universal experience. "I approve the better, I do the worse," said the cultured heathen. "The good I would, I do not; the evil I would not, I do," said the Christian apostle.

If, then, the observance of the provisions of the new covenant had been left to the will and power of men, however

earnest and devoted, they must have met with the same fate. It is not in man that walketh to maintain his steps in the holy requirements of God's law. Therefore, in His love and mercy, the Father entered into covenant with Jesus, who stood as sponsor and surety for all who should after believe in His name.

This was foreshadowed in the original promise to Abraham: "Now to Abraham were the promises spoken, and *to his seed.*" Not then was it made clear what was involved in this reference to his seed.

It might have seemed to refer only to Isaac and his posterity. But centuries after the Holy Ghost adds the explanation, and the apostle says, "which is Christ" (Gal. iii. 16). In other words, Christ is the true heir of the promises of God's covenant with Abraham, not for Himself alone, but as the representative

of all those who are one with Him in His mystical body. "As the body is one, and hath many members, . . . so also is Christ." That is, Christ stands for all the members of His body; and when He is said to be the seed of Abraham, with whom the promises are made, it is intended that all who believe in Him should see themselves included (1 Cor. xii. 12).

The fulfilment of the covenant does not, therefore, depend on what we may do or not do, because Jesus, as our representative, has done all that needed to be done, and, as our surety, has undertaken that the ordinance of the law should be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit.

This covenant has been solemnly ratified. For the ratification of the first Moses took the blood of the calves and

the goats, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, saying, "This is the blood of the covenant which God commanded to you-ward" (Heb. ix. 19). For the ratification of the second Jesus shed His own blood. Until death supervenes a deed of covenant has no special force: "A testament is of force where there hath been death: for doth it ever avail while he that made it liveth?" (verse 17, R.V.). Therefore the new covenant, having been established by the most solemn sanctions, is of everlasting validity. You remember the phrase of the Holy Spirit—"the blood of the everlasting covenant." It dates from eternity, and will last to eternity. God hath sworn by Himself, and He cannot change. Earth and heaven may pass away, but through the dissolution of worlds the word of God, by which

He hath bound Himself, must endure. We, therefore, who have fled for refuge to this sure and steadfast hope, may have strong encouragement (Heb. vi. 17-20).

II. THE CONTENTS OF THE COVENANT. It is not possible for wife, child, or relative to open the will, and for the first time scan its provisions, without a keen intensity of emotion. Nor should it be otherwise as we consider what our God has provided for us in Christ.

(1) *The obedience of love.* "I will put My laws into their heart." We shall no longer obey because we must, but because we choose; we shall delight to do His will; ours the conformity of friend to friend, when love fuses heart to heart, rather than the servility of the slave, who knoweth not what his master doeth.

(2) *The supply of all need.* "I will be to them a God"; i.e., that in His all-

sufficiency we should have everything that we need for life and godliness, so as to be complete in Him.

(3) *Direct knowledge.* "All shall know Me." The interposition of the human teacher shall be needless, because the soul shall have direct access to the divine.

(4) *Entire forgiveness.* "Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more." We too seldom realize what perfect and complete forgiveness appertains to the believer in Jesus. If such a one should approach God with a recapitulation and confession of the sins of bygone days, pleading piteously for mercy, for mercy and absolution, it is as though God should say, "My child, I do not know what you refer to; I find no record against you in the book of My remembrance. I have blotted as a cloud your

transgressions, and as a thick cloud your sins; they are gone as a wreath of smoke into the air, as a stone into the ocean deep."

What is there that we can require for this life or the next which is not contained in these four clauses? I know not which to choose, each is so requisite to entire blessedness, and at different periods of our experience we need now one and now the other; but if there is one star that shines more brilliantly than the rest, it is that blessed assurance that God will be a God to us—all that we might expect of God, and more; all that the nature which He has given requires; all that is requisite to be the complement (i.e., the completement) of our almost infinite need.

"I must have all things, and abound,
While God is God to me."

III. THE SIGN AND SEAL OF THE COVENANT. "The cup of the new covenant in My blood."

The significance of the cup is due to our realizing sense that it is placed in the hand of the Lord Himself and that we take it from Him. The table at which He reclined has been elongated down the centuries, and He as really passes the cup to the communicant as when He handed it to the beloved disciple leaning on His breast. Ask the Holy Spirit to make Jesus real whensoever thou partakest of the Holy Supper, withdrawing every other presence, that His may rise, in all its sweetness and majesty, before thy spirit's vision.

Whenever, therefore, the cup is passed to us, it is as though Jesus said, "All the provision of the new covenant is for *thee*; as this cup, which thou seest now,

comes to thee, so the blessings of which it is the sign and pledge, but which thou canst not see, are within thy reach."

The rainbow was the outward sign of the promise spoken at the assuaging of the deluge; the Passover was the token that God had redeemed His people for His peculiar possession; and the cup is the appointed sign and memorial of all that is meant by the new covenant, with its fourfold provision. With what new and blessed meaning is the cup invested! Every time it touches my hand Jesus shall say, "In Me this covenant is for thee."

Each time, also, that we partake of the cup, if we are full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, we in effect prefer our claim to all that the covenant offers. We sip the wine where the lips of Jesus have touched the cup before us, and we avow

our desire for fellowship with Him in the fullness of God. May we humbly and reverently realize that all is ours, and then appropriate all those benefits of His passion that He has won.

Thank Him as you avail yourselves of them. Words can never tell how much is due to Him. But do not dishonor Him by pleading that He should do what is covenanted, as though He were unwilling or reluctant, or had to begin to meet your need. All has been done, all has been borne and suffered, all has been acquired, and all is now provided and secured; draw near with comfort and joy, and avail yourselves by faith of all your blessed inheritance; live in your home, possess your possessions, dismiss the brooding of anxious care—all things are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's.

IX

CHRIST AND PAIN

REV. XXI. 4

THERE is much in this Apocalypse that we cannot understand,—the sapphire throne, the glassy sea, the descending city of God, the bottomless pit,—but amid these sublime and dazzling hieroglyphs there are sweet breaks of melody, like verdant grassy plains amid the splintered grandeur of the higher Alps. Here, at least, we can feast our weary souls.

Such is this verse, musical in its

rhythm, pathetic in its reminiscence of the anguish which is at an end forever, content to leave the positive marvels of heaven untold if only it may assure us that at least the saddest elements in our earthly life shall be forever banished.

What a marvelous completeness there is in the Scripture record! It rounds the cycle of truth, opening with a paradise in which there was neither mourning, nor crying, nor travail; narrating, in pages stained with blood and tears, man's bitter heritage, self-caused, of weariness and woe; and ending with the new heavens and earth, on the air of which no stifled groan or sigh or dirge can ever break.

The pain of misunderstanding will be no more, since we shall see eye to eye and know as we are known.

The pain of suspense will be no more,

because we shall behold the purposes of God in their ultimate and beneficent outworking.

The pain of waning love will be no more, because in that happy land, as the children sing, love is kept by a Father's hand and cannot die.

The pain of bereavement will be no more, because death cannot intrude into that glad city of life. No cypress-tree grows there; no mourning garb is ever seen in those streets; no funeral cortège ever winds its slow length along them.

But it is to physical pain that these words seem primarily to refer.

I. THE MYSTERY OF PAIN. How can we account for it? That it is an intruder seems clear from the fact that *travail* was so distinctly inserted as one of the items in the divine sentence on

the fallen pair. Besides, pain is one with death, and we know that death did not pass over to the human family until sin had opened the door for it to enter. The pain of the lower order of creation does not now enter our discussion, since that is so evidently connected with the fall of Satan, who made them subject to vanity, though not willingly. Perhaps, too, the coming fall of man cast its dark shadows before.

Our Lord gives three clues to the solution of this mystery, any one of which leads us away into the infinite, as paths that go up into the moors and lose themselves.

(1) *He attributed some pain to the direct agency of Satan.* "Satan," said He, "hath bound this woman, lo, these eighteen years." And this conception of the direct agency of Satan in the per-

secution and pains of men is constantly referred to in other passages of Scripture.

When the apostle's visit to his converts was delayed beyond his expectation, he did not attribute it to the divine will, but said deliberately, "Satan hindered us."

When he was suffering from some heavy affliction which maimed his strength and limited his usefulness, he did not scruple to speak of it as a messenger of Satan, sent to buffet him.

And in the epistles to the churches, indited by the Lord through the Spirit to the beloved apostle, they are distinctly warned that Satan would cast some of them into prison.

It may be that certain forms of illness and suffering, especially epilepsy and mania, are the direct result of malevolent and malignant spirits; and if so, the

unhappy patients should be specially assisted by the prayer and sympathy of their brethren, that they may be recovered out of the snares of the devil, who have been taken captive by him at his will.

(2) *He attributed some pain to wrongdoing.* "Go," said He, to the paralytic who had lain for thirty-eight years on the brink of Bethesda's pool, "sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon thee." We may infer from this sentence that the pain of those thirty-eight years had been caused by some direct violation of the moral law, and that it might return, and worse, if he trifled with the prohibitions of conscience and Sinai.

How much pain there is in the world which need not have been there except for man's wilful transgressions! As we sow to the flesh, we painfully reap cor-

ruption. The moment's unholy gratification is fearfully avenged by months and years of anguish.

“ Pain follows wrong
As the echo song—
On, on, on.”

On the whole, this is beneficently conceived, and the certainty of the operation of this great law has repeatedly stayed the sinner's steps when on the verge of disobedience. It is well that the fire burns, or we should be throwing ourselves into the flames unsuspecting.

(3) *Our Lord attributed some pain to high moral considerations.* When talking of the sickness of Lazarus He said: “ It is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God should be glorified thereby ;” as though to suggest that some suffering at least cannot be

included in either of the categories already named, but is permitted as a platform on which the power and love of Jesus may be revealed to men. What an honor is conferred on such—ah, happy souls!—subjected to pain for the revelation of the Master's nature, certain of being sustained by divine consolations during the ordeal and of being infinitely rewarded when it is done.

Again, when healing the man born blind, He denied the suggestion of His apostles that the pain was due to prenatal sin, and affirmed that his blindness had been permitted that the works of God might be made manifest in him.

These words may have a wider scope than for any individual case. They may cast a light on the permission of moral evil, whether in the forms of sin or pain. It did not, and could not, originate in

God. An enemy wrought this, and sowed tares in God's harvest-field. And God permitted it because He knew that evil would furnish a dark background for the exhibition of His glorious attributes; that the pain and anguish would finally be immeasurably outstripped by the preponderating blessing; that where sin abounded His grace should much more abound; that, as sin reigned in death, so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life.

II. OUR SAVIOUR'S ATTITUDE TOWARD PAIN. Always counting it as an intruder, throughout His public ministry He bore Himself as its uncompromising antagonist. He healed the sick and cast out devils. Many a time He would enter a village or town and heal every sufferer before nightfall, so that, for a marvel, there was no sleepless couch,

no anxious watcher, no moan of pain, throughout the whole population.

Three words may sum up His attitude during His earthly life and His attitude to-day :

(1) *Patience*. "The kingdom and patience which are in Jesus." He could not have suffered pain for Himself, because His body was absolutely pure and holy. Even in the grave it did not see corruption. But He suffered untold pain as our Brother, who fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah, and Himself took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses. He could not have delivered men if He had not taken their maladies to Himself, though how, we know not. Surely something more is meant than keen sympathy.

But amid all His sufferings and sorrows He bore Himself with unflinching

fortitude, with immeasurable patience: led as a lamb to die, drinking the cup submissively which the Father placed in His hands, silent under the scourging of His foes.

(2) *Sympathy.* "He sighed"; "He sighed deeply"; "He groaned in spirit." When He saw the sisters and mourners bathed in tears, He wept.

Such fellow-feeling is His still. He is touched with the feeling of our infirmities and with the pressure of our pains.

(3) *Ministry.* The Venus of Milo looks benignantly down on the upturned faces of her admirers, but she has no arms—powerless to help the generations as they pass before her. But Christ sits at the right hand of power, rides forth in the chariots of salvation, and stretches forth His hand to heal and save.

Probably it is only thus that it is pos-

sible for Him to be blessed, as He bends, with sleepless care, over our world. A woman may be very delicately strung, unable to look on wounds and acute pain ; but directly it is her child that is suffering, and something has to be done for it, she forgets her former fears and finds blessedness amid her awful anxiety by practical ministrations. So, probably, our Saviour is blessed, because He never stays His right hand, but exerts all power to mitigate the rule of sin and rescue the suffering children of men.

III. THE DESTINED END. "There shall be no more pain." Its causes will have been ended. Satan will be bound, consigned to the abyss, and no longer able to afflict.

There will be no more death, or Hades, for they will have been cast into

the lake of fire. There will be no more sea, and so separation and loneliness will have been done away.

The body of this humiliation will be changed into the likeness of the body of His glory, and the inhabitant of that world shall no more say, "I am sick."

We shall no more recall the pain of our present condition than we can remember the aches and pains of childhood. The recollection of pain is always short-lived, but there it shall be as utterly obliterated as the traces of footsteps on the sands by the incoming tide, or as the murmur of shells when the ocean waves thunder along the beach. The statues shall be complete, and the almighty Sculptor shall cast away, never to take up again, the chisel with which He has achieved some of His noblest designs.

X

GOOD FOR A TIME

HOSEA IV. 4

IMAGINE yourself in a tropical country, dependent for its fertility on the periodic rains. For months there has been neither rain nor dew: the brooks are beds of stones, the pools caked and dry; the rivers have dwindled to silver streaks; the land burns as a furnace; vegetation is scorched; the husbandman cannot drive his plow through the obdurate earth; and the cattle, with blood-shot eyes, stand on the hilltops and

quaff the hot air in the extremity of their fever. But one morning there are symptoms of a change. A little cloud is seen by hundreds of eyes, like a wreath of gauze on the face of the intense blue of the sky. "See the cloud—rain is coming!" The cry goes through the land. But as men watch, it vanishes. It is a morning cloud, that passes away. Such are many of our resolutions in their slightness and evanescence.

Hosea lived on the eve of the dissolution of the northern kingdom, and graphically describes the awful deterioration of the people. His pages give a graphic picture of the desperate wickedness that prevailed among all classes. There was no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land; naught but swearing, and breaking faith, and

killing, and stealing, and committing adultery; blood touched blood. Gross impurity and intemperance had taken away their heart.

The people sacrificed upon the tops of the mountains and burned incense upon the hills, under oaks and poplars and terebinths, because their shadow was dense enough to hide the shame of their impurities. Therefore God withdrew Himself from among them and gave them up to suffer the results of their sins. He became to Ephraim as a moth, and to Judah as rottenness, and threatened to tear and carry them off, as a lion pounces on a shepherdless flock, harries the sheep, and bears off the lambs to his den. "I will go," said the almighty Redeemer and lover of Israel, "and return to My place, till they acknowledge their offense, and seek My

face: in their affliction they will seek Me early."

On hearing this there is an immediate revulsion of feeling. "Come," the people cry, "and let us return unto the Lord: for He hath torn, and He will heal us; He hath smitten, and He will bind us up. . . . Let us know, let us follow on to know the Lord." But as soon as their words are reported the Almighty seems to say: "I have heard all this many times before; from the days of the judges, when My people have been stricken for their rebellions, they have turned to Me with promises of amendment, which have never been realized. They have always suffered the same fate. Their goodness has been like the morning cloud, and as the dew that goeth early away. O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah,

what shall I do unto thee? Something more must be done, but *what?* It is useless to look to resolutions and promises of amendment as the foundation of the new life. I must go further, and lay My hand to establish something that shall become the steadfast foundation of a lasting edifice."

The divine question, "What shall I do unto thee?" is answered in the proclamation of the new covenant. "What shall I do? I will give My Son. What shall I do? I will give My Spirit. What shall I do? I will come and indwell. What shall I do? I will expend blood for their cleansing, and fire for their sanctification. What shall I do? I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers, in the day

that I took them by the hand to bring them forth out of the land of Egypt; for they continued not in My covenant, and I regarded them not. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days: I will put my laws into their mind, and on their heart also will I write them." This is the difference between the old covenant, under which God's people lived in the days of Hosea, and the new covenant, which was introduced to take its place and remedy its confessed failure. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then would no place have been sought for a second. But there was a disannulling of the former because of its weakness and unprofitableness, for it made nothing perfect.

The difference between the first covenant and the second may be there-

fore stated in a word. Under the first, Israel, after the flesh, sought to realize its fair ideals and fulfil its resolutions in the energy of its own will and power; under the second, God enters the heart, in Jesus and through the Holy Spirit, to effect within us His own ideal, and to make permanently our own those visions of beauty that, like the New Jerusalem, come down to us from God out of heaven. It is because we choose to live under the old, rather than to exercise our privileges under the new, that our goodness, like Israel's, has resembled the morning cloud and the dew that goeth early away.

We hear an appeal for some dire need, and beneath the burning eloquence of the speaker we resolve to give, say, five pounds, for the relief of the sufferers, it may be in Armenia or in the drought-

stricken provinces of northern India. But when his voice has ceased we think that half the amount will suffice, while on the following morning we deem half a guinea ample, even if we have not altogether receded from our resolve.

We hear a sermon on the nobility and beauty of a life of self-sacrifice; we are told that the fullest field for its manifestation is in the home; we see how we may acquire this noble quality amid the daily attrition and fret of the home circle, and are quite anxious to get back to commence; but when we find ourselves face to face with the hard facts, the harsh reality, the thorns and briars, our resolution fails us, and we are as crabbed, awkward, and morose as ever; it seems impossible to break through the reign of frost and be genial, tender, and self-

forgetting. Again our goodness has become as the morning cloud.

We hear an address on the need for more prayer, more Bible study. The still hour with God is so presented as to enthrall our interest and enchain our desires. We hear the Master saying, "Can ye not watch with Me one hour?" and ardently respond, "With all our hearts." On the following morning we spring from our couch an hour earlier than our wont; the next morning we manage only half an hour; and within a day or two we are just as sluggish and careless as ever. Our goodness is like the morning cloud.

What can God do with such characters? It is impossible to build temples on shifting quicksands or drive nails into rotten wood. Unless something more is done, all life will be consumed in making resolutions and breaking them;

in repenting and relapsing; in dashing merrily down the slope, and in laboriously dragging the sled up to the summit again. Therefore God comes to us with the new covenant, sealed with the precious blood of Jesus, and made effective by the inworking of the Holy Spirit. And each time we raise the cup of the Holy Supper to our lips we ostensibly claim that He will fulfil all its provisions within us and do according to His most gracious engagements—writing His laws on mind and heart, and causing them to appear in character and life. We seem to say, “O blood of Christ, be thou the impassable barrier between me and my past life of failure and disappointment; and do Thou, O blessed Spirit, work in me mightily to will and do of God’s good pleasure, that I may work out what Thou dost work in.”

It is impossible to exaggerate, O soul

of man, what God is prepared to do for thee, so that thy goodness should never again be as the morning cloud. Dare to believe in His all-sufficiency, and, having faith in the operation of that mighty power which raised Jesus from the dead, dare once more to resolve. Though thou hast resolved and failed a thousand times, dare to resolve again, and intrust the keeping of thy resolves to thy faithful Redeemer, believing that He will accomplish in thee and for thee all that He has taught thee to desire.

Our resolutions may then take three directions, as suggested in this paragraph.

First, let us resolve to return. "Come, let us *return* unto the Lord." Back from the far country to the old place in the Father's home.

Second, let us resolve to know God. "And let us know."

Third, let us resolve to follow on to know the Lord, with unswerving patience, till we know even as we are known.

The inception of these resolutions on our part is very grateful to God. His nature longs for our love and trust as the parched soil does for rain. We do not sufficiently apprehend how necessary we are to God, how dear, or how longed for. The first symptom of increasing earnestness is welcomed by Him, as the parched vegetation thankfully welcomes the sound of the abundance of rain, or drinks in the first few pattering drops of descending moisture.

He will do more than welcome: He will protect, maintain, and quicken into stronger and healthier growth. The Holy Spirit will take charge of the feebly smoking flax and fan its flame into a fire.

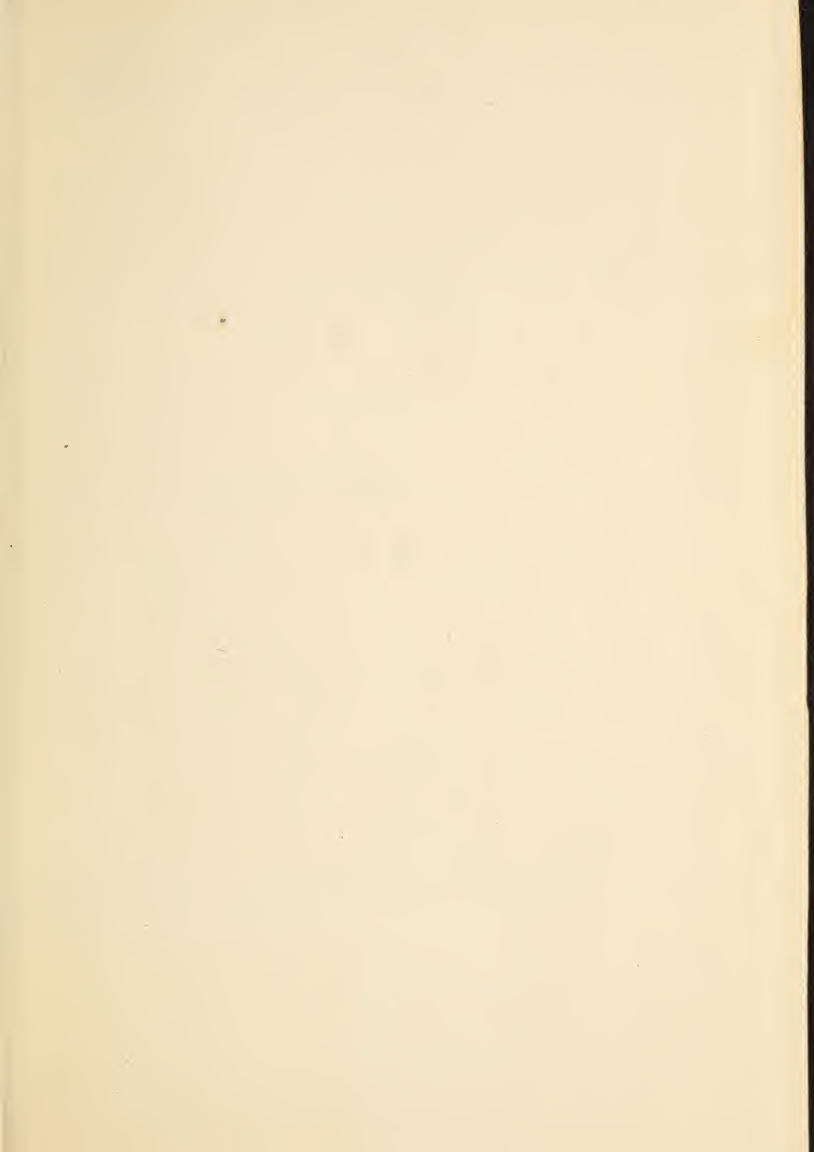
He which hath begun the good work will complete it. There shall be a perfecting of the tender purpose, a blossoming of the fragile bud. Is not this included in that nourishing and cherishing which is predicted of the Lord's body, and which might be applied to a nurse's or mother's solicitude for some flickering baby life, that keeps standing still and asking whether or not it should continue, or whether it would not be better to give up the fight altogether? "After two days will He revive us, on the third day He will raise us up, and we shall live before Him." The power that raised Jesus from the dead on the third day waits to do as much for us, not spasmodically and intermittently, but regularly, certainly, ceaselessly, until it seats us, beyond all principality and power, beside His own steadfast throne.

Let us, then, gird up the loins of our mind, and resolve again in the resurrection grace of the Holy Spirit. Let us dare to register vows of absolute consecration and surrender, laying aside every weight and the sin that doth so easily beset, and let us follow on with patience to know the Lord; and as we do so we shall find ourselves strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, unto all patience and long-suffering. We cannot expect to snatch so great an attainment with one swift rush; we must follow on, placing it before us as an acquisition which, at all cost and by any sacrifice, must be ours. And it shall be ours; for, though His going forth is as gentle and gradual as the morning, it is as sure. As an old saint said, with a touch of a heartbreak in her tone, "The Almighty is tedious, but He's sure."

Let us take the grand old rendering, "His going forth is prepared as the morning." The spot of the earth's surface on which you live has taken leave of the sunshine, and is plunging ever farther and farther into the blackness of darkness; as the hour of midnight strikes you are as far removed as possible from the last gleams of the evening glow; but you are hastening toward the dawn, which awaits you in solemn pomp. Let the lonely night-watcher understand that at each swing of the pendulum he is hurrying to meet the smile of the morn which awaits his coming, in preparation of golden clouds and bars of amber light and delicate tints of green and azure.

The morning is *prepared*; it waits; it has been decked by the hand of the Creator to comfort and bless the returning hilltops and seas and flowers and

homes of men. Dare to believe that so God is waiting for you—only follow on. Do not be dismayed by the darkness—follow on. Do not give up heart and hope because the delay is so long—follow on. Do not be wanting through lightness or fickleness—follow on. God will break on thee in all the loveliness of His being; thou shalt see His glory in the face of Jesus; the dawn of a more tender and intimate fellowship is nigh; only follow on till the voice of the herald is heard crying, “Arise, shine; thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.”



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