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# My Father



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# HEART CHORDS.



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# My Father.

BY THE

RIGHT REV. ASHTON OXENDEN,

LATE BISHOP OF MONTREAL.



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# HEART CHORDS.

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## MY FATHER.

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### CHAPTER I.

#### THE FATHERHOOD OF GOD.

WHEN we look into the Bible, we find that every truth embedded there breathes the spirit of Love. It all bears the impress of Him who is Love itself. He might have made His service a mere drudgery. He might have *compelled* us to obey Him as slaves. He might have held His rod over us, as it were, and made us work from fear. He might have revealed Himself to us as a Being great and mighty, just and wise, withholding from us the more attractive features of His character.

But, thank God, the little glimpses we have

of Him are calculated to win over our hearts, and make us *love* Him. He does not *force* us into His service, but “He *draws* us with the cords of a man, with the bands of love.”

Throughout Scripture He is described as our **FATHER**. Both in the Old and the New Testaments He is placed before us under this most attractive character. He is not merely our *King* to rule over us, or our *Master* to command us, or our *Friend* to assist us ; but something more, He is our *Father*. This is the name which, of all others, we are in the habit of looking upon with the greatest reverence. This is the relationship in which love, and authority, and wisdom, and goodness, and compassion all meet. This simple word “Father” presents to us a picture which every one must delight in. The love of a parent is the purest, the tenderest, and the highest which this world can furnish ; and therefore it serves to show us, though in but a slight degree,

the great love and beauty of Him who “was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself.”

See how Moses speaks in Deut. xxxii. 6 : “Is not he thy Father that hath bought thee ? Hath he not made thee, and established thee ?” David also exclaims in Ps. lxxxix. 26 : “Thou art my Father, my God, and the rock of my salvation.” And in Ps. ciii., when expressing his thankfulness to God for His great goodness, he touches one string after another ; and when he gets to the very top, as it were, to the highest pitch of praise, he speaks of God as one very near to us : “Like as *a father* pitith his children, so the Lord pitith them that fear Him.” The prophet Isaiah exclaims (chap. lxiii. 16) : “Doubtless thou art our Father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not ; thou, O Lord, art our Father.” The Lord asks, by the mouth of Jeremiah (chap. iii. 4) : “Wilt thou not from this time cry unto me, My

Father, thou art the guide of my youth?" And I might refer to sundry other passages in which God is spoken of in the same terms.

And still more is this the case in the New Testament. We are there taught by our Lord Himself to address God as "our Father;" and that even our earthly parents scarcely deserve to be so called in comparison with Him. "Call no man your father upon the earth (He says); for one is your Father, which is in heaven" (Matt. xxiii. 9). And He graciously assures us that God is both His Father and ours: "I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God" (John xx. 17). We find too abundant passages of the same kind throughout the Epistles.

God is our Father, inasmuch as He created us. To Him we owe our very existence. "In him we live and move and have our being." In this respect He is the Father of all mankind; and He

justly claims their allegiance. “A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master : if then I be a Father, where is mine honour? saith the Lord of hosts.” But in a higher and more endearing sense He is the Father of His people ; and to them He says, as He did of old, “ Israel is my son, my firstborn.” Through Christ He has graciously adopted us into His family ; and we are no longer strangers and foreigners, but “ fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God.” Thus St. Paul says to the Roman converts, “Ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear ; but ye have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.”

My Father ! Under this near relationship we may approach God. We may feel that He is not at an immeasurable distance from us, but very near to us ; for through Christ “we have access by one Spirit unto the Father.” This should encourage us in our prayers, and greatly help us.

We may “enter into our closets, and pray to our Father which is in secret ; and our Father which seeth in secret shall reward us openly.” Try and realise this the next time you pray. You are going to speak to your Father—your kind and loving Father. And will He not hear you ? Is He not acquainted with all our wants ? And is He not ready to grant your every petition—far more ready to give than you are to ask ?

My Father ! This sweet thought will lighten all our trials. Our very afflictions are from Him. For “whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.” Let us learn then to kiss the rod that smites us, and to feel that it is a friendly hand that holds it. Trials may be our allotted portion. God’s ways may be such as we cannot understand. There is often a mystery about them which we fail to unravel. He may seem at times to be acting harshly towards us. But if we are His children,

His sons, shall we not look through every trouble, however severe, and say, "All is well : it is Thy doing: Thou art my Father ; and therefore I will trust Thee?" Yes, a true Christian will feel that all things are best in His hands, and that He will lead us "by the right way" to our Promised Home.

And so with all God's dealings. Many of them are dark, and we cannot understand them ; but let us believe that they are all ordered by One who loves us, who knows what is best for us, and who is *our Father*. I am persuaded that it will help us not a little, in the trials and difficulties which we have to pass through, and in all the duties which we have to discharge, to feel that there is One above, watching over us, and helping us, who loves us more than any earthly friend ; and that He is our Father—our Father which is in heaven.

You and I have probably for years been

members of God's family and household ; for have we not been baptized, and therefore in one sense been long His? Each one of us was then made a "member of Christ" and a "child of God." We were then taken into covenant with God. He received us into His family, and numbered us among His household. Such was formerly the privilege of the *Circumcised Israelite*. God was pleased to call him "My Son, My Firstborn." To him "belonged the adoption." But how much more is this *our* privilege, who have been brought to Christ by Baptism, and have received the mark of His flock, distinguishing us from the outer world.

In former days, when the Christian Church was being formed, and men came over to it from heathenism, none were permitted, however much in earnest they might be, to use the Lord's Prayer until they were baptized. They were not allowed to call God their Father, until they

had been brought near to Him by baptism. And for this reason it was called “the Prayer of the Faithful;” for they only had a right to address Him by that endearing name.

And does not this suggest to us the thought, that great indeed must be our sin, if we are not walking in God’s ways? Our condemnation will be greater than that of the heathen, if we, in our privileged condition, are living without Him in the world ; stamped with the mark of His children, but yet in our hearts and lives denying Him.

Let us then ever bear in mind the high privilege which we possess, as members of God’s family, and heirs of His heavenly kingdom. And further, let us pray that we may know Him, and love Him, and serve Him heartily. And may He draw us so near to Himself, that we can feel Him to be our God, the Protector of our bodies, the Keeper of our souls, ours for ever !

## CHAPTER II.

THE HAPPY CONSCIOUSNESS OF THIS  
RELATIONSHIP.

By nature we know not God under this most blessed and attractive character. But the great object of the Saviour's coming into the world was thus to reveal Him to us. When therefore His disciples asked Him how they were to approach their great Creator, He said, "When ye pray say, *Our Father*." And until we can realise Him as our Father, we may almost be said to know nothing of Him. We all know that God possesses wisdom and power and holiness and goodness ; but how few are able to go to Him with confidence, and cry unto Him, "Thou art my Father, my God, and the rock of my salvation !"

In our Lord's day there were many among the Jews—many priests and scribes and learned

doctors of the law—who had a good deal of religious knowledge ; but Jesus told them that they were, in fact, utterly ignorant of God : “ It is my Father that honoureth me, of whom ye say that he is your God ; yet ye have not known him.”

The knowledge of God as our Father is not, I say, natural to us. It must be taught us by the Lord Himself. We therefore find Philip entreating Jesus to impart this knowledge to him ; “ Lord, show us the Father.” Teach us, that is, to know Him under this beautiful character.

Let me try and illustrate this.\* Suppose the case of a Child separated for a time from his parents by one of the accidents of life, and growing up to manhood without any personal

\* The author thinks that he may have seen this illustration in some book which fell in his way many years ago ; in any case, it illustrates his subject.

knowledge of his father. It happened that on some dark night, amidst the perils of the sea, a vessel strikes upon a rock and goes to pieces before the morning dawn. Many of the crew find a watery grave, whilst a few, some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship, escape to land.

We may picture to ourselves among the saved ones a Merchant reaching the shore with great difficulty ; and then eagerly watching for the break of day, when he anxiously seeks for his beloved Wife and Child, who have been on board with him ; but his search is in vain. We may fancy him at length returning home, disconsolate and miserable ; but after a while settling down to his former occupations. His heart however still turns to his beloved treasures, both buried, as he supposes, in the bottomless deep.

But all the while, though he knows it not, one of these dear ones is spared. Whilst the

Mother sinks to rise no more, her little Child, clinging to a rafter, is borne upon the waves, is picked up during the night by a passing vessel, and is carried in it far away to a land of strangers.

Now, suppose that child to advance in years, ignorant of his native country, and having learnt to speak a language which his parents had never known. He goes forth into the wide world in pursuit of business, and visits foreign lands. We may imagine him meeting in a far-distant city a Merchant, whose intelligence delights him, whose kindness wins upon him, and whose uprightness makes him feel secure in all his dealings with him. After a long acquaintance with this person, he imagines that he thoroughly knows his character. And well he may, as far as matters of business were concerned.

In the course of time one circumstance after another occurs, and one fact upon another is

brought to light ; so that the Merchant begins to suspect, and is at length persuaded, that the Young Stranger is his own lost Child ; and he forthwith makes himself known to him as his Father.

How great would be the joy of that Son ! How changed his feelings towards the person, whom he had just now looked up to and esteemed ! How deepened would be his respect, and how warmed his love towards him ! And how overjoyed would he be to find that he had a place in the home, and in the heart, of that hitherto Merchant Stranger ! That youth would feel that he began from this time to know him in the fullest sense. And now, no longer wandering and restless, he would dwell at home, and find his greatest happiness in the close companionship and affection of his Father.

*Each one of us* is that shipwrecked Child. In a dark night of sin we were separated from

our Father. Various objects of life have engaged our attention, and we have entered, coldly perhaps, upon all the outward duties of religion. We have looked upon God as a great Being, whom we have treated with obedience and respect. But we felt all the while no real love for Him, and had no real pleasure in serving Him. We thought that we knew Him ; but there was a distance between us which we never got over. He was still a Stranger to us.

But something has perhaps occurred, by which an entire change of feeling has been wrought within us ; and God, in His great mercy and love, has drawn near to us, and revealed Himself to us as our Father. He has opened our eyes and discovered to us our own true history, and His great love for us. He has taught us by His Holy Spirit, and enabled us to call Him “Abba, Father.” The Spirit has “borne witness with our spirits that we are His children.”

It is related of Thomas Erskine that, once meeting a Shepherd in a lonely path in the Highlands of Scotland, he greeted him with the question, "Do you know the Father?" And, without waiting for a reply, he passed on his way. Years afterwards he met the same Shepherd among those same hills, who immediately recognised him, and gave him the answer at last as he passed, "I know the Father *now*."\*

It is well if we too can give the same answer. It is well if God has revealed Himself as our Father. And if so, how great the change! How blessed now is our intercourse with God! How joyful is the performance of every religious duty! We no longer feel them to be irksome to us, but delightful. The spirit of bondage is gone, and the spirit of adoption has taken its place. We have long looked upon God as our Creator, our Governor, our Preserver, the Giver

\* "Old Faiths in New Light," by Newman Smyth.

of all our blessings. But now we see Him to be what is better, far better, than all : He is *our Father*.

Ought we not then to have *full Confidence* in God? What is a child's feeling towards his parent? Is it not perfect trust? He sees not as yet perhaps a why and a wherefore for many things that are done ; but he is fully convinced that all must be well that his father orders for him. And so should it be with us.

A view of God's Fatherly character should also call out *our Love to Him*. Naturally our hearts are cold and unbelieving. But when we see and feel something of God's great love to us, then we begin to love Him. This is the great secret which can alone draw out our affection. If you can realise God's love to you, then your frozen heart will begin to melt. "We love him," says the Apostle, "because he first loved us." Think of God, the God against

whom you have sinned, not waiting till you made the first move towards Him, but coming out, as it were, towards you, and throwing open His loving arms to welcome you ; and will you not exclaim with thankfulness, "Thou art indeed my Father. To Thee I owe the life of my body and the life of my soul. To Thee I am indebted for all I have and all I am. I cannot but love Thee. My cold heart now burns with a new affection. Here I am ; from this hour make me Thine !"

Again, when this close relationship to God is truly felt, it should produce in us a spirit of *filial Obedience*. A slave obeys his master because he is forced to do so ; and if he fails he will smart for it. But a loving child of God obeys his Father, because he feels it to be his happiness. He will be always ready to say, "Call me whithersoever Thou wilt, and I will follow Thee in the path of obedience. Bid me

do the hardest service; it will be light to me. Thou art my Father, and therefore I will cheerfully obey Thee. I delight to do Thy will, O my God."

When Satan tempts you—and he assuredly will tempt you—try to realise God as your Father, and yourself as His child, and say, "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" If disposed to murmur, and to be dissatisfied with your lot in life, remember that it is of your Father's ordering, and therefore that it is, and must be, right. Or if called to undertake some good and great work, and you feel your insufficiency and weakness, lift up your heart to Him who says, "My grace is sufficient for thee, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." And say to yourself, "I am His child, and He has promised never to leave me nor forsake me."

## CHAPTER III.

## MY FATHER'S THREEFOLD GIFT.

WE are indebted to God for many great and precious gifts. Our creation was a marvellous gift. God need not have made the world, and He need not have placed man in it; but He has done so. Moreover, He gave him a perfect dwelling-place in Eden, "and there he put the man whom he had formed," making over to him all that it contained. He made him a free grant of it to this effect: "Let man have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth." And He added, "Behold, I have given you every tree and every herb: to you it shall be for meat."

Such was God's precious gift; and if we had used it aright, and had acted as loving and

obedient children towards so gracious a Father, our happiness would have been complete.

As years rolled on, God bestowed other gifts, as men needed them. When He called Abraham, and made him the head of a new family, who were to be His peculiar people, separated from all the other nations of the earth, He gave them a special home, an inheritance which they might for ever call their own. This became from that moment the Promised Land, which He made over to His people Israel, "a land flowing with milk and honey ;" that is, unusually fertile, and in every respect fitted for their use.

And on this same people God bestowed another remarkable gift. He called Moses, their Leader, up to Him on Mount Sinai, and there gave them a code of laws, which was to be the guide of their future lives, and such ordinances as were suited to their condition. These were given with very great ceremony, in order to

mark their importance, and also to impress the people with God's great condescension and love.

Now, great as these gifts were, they may be called God's lesser gifts when compared with that which I am going to speak of—even that marvellous gift, or rather cluster of gifts, which forms the subject of this chapter.

The Gift of God's dear Son far exceeds all the others. It out-tops them in greatness, and surpasses them all in its glorious object and effects. This was not a sudden gift, but one long promised, long held out, and for its bestowal man was gradually prepared. Many of the ordinances which the Lord gave to His people Israel seemed to point to it. The prophets, one after another, spoke of it. And at length, "in the fulness of time"—in God's time, and not ours—when His plans and purposes were fully ripe, then it was at length bestowed. But,

as I have said, it can hardly be looked upon as a single gift ; it was rather a series of gifts, each portion of which was just suited to man's wants.

First, *a Saviour* was given. "God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son." This was His gift, undeserved by us, but freely bestowed of His great bounty. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and gave himself for us." Man had sinned ; he had forfeited God's love ; he was suffering from a burden which was intolerable. And Jesus came to relieve him, to suffer in his stead, and thus to restore him to God's favour.

And does not this Gift stand out beyond all the rest ? Does it not tower up above them all ? It was a *wondrous* gift ; for God spared not His own dear Son. It was a *timely* gift ; for man was perishing. It was a gift that supplied our *greatest need* ; for it came with a remedy for our suffering ; it came with pardon for the

guilty ; it came bringing life and peace to a fallen world. Man was not only weak, but ruined ; he was not only diseased, but “dead in trespasses and sins ;” and it opened before him a new and blessed life—a happy life here, and a happier hereafter.

But there was a Second Gift ; for with the gift of a Saviour God also bestowed the gift of an *Endless Life*. “The gift of God,” says St. Paul, “is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” The Apostle describes the sad effects of sin ; and then he goes on to speak of God’s precious gift. He declares that “the wages of sin is death.” And in another place he says, “God is not mocked ; for whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to the flesh (that is, to his own evil inclinations) shall of the flesh reap corruption.” If we indulge in sin, we shall pay for it. The sure wages of our conduct will be death—death

here, and death eternally ; but God offers to us eternal life. What a contrast there is between these two sentences—"The *wages* of sin is death :" "The *gift* of God is eternal life !" Death is what *we deserve*; but Life is what *none of us deserve*; it is an unmerited gift from the gracious hand of God.

There was also a Third Gift which God bestowed, a part and parcel of the gift of His Son—namely, the gift of *the Holy Spirit*, who was to be our ever-abiding, our indwelling, Guide and Comforter, and who was to enlighten, quicken, and save the souls of His people. Before our Lord left this world, He promised that we should receive this gift. He charged His followers to "wait for the promise of the Father, which (said He) ye shall receive of me." Ten days after, the promise was fulfilled, the expected gift was bestowed. And the preciousness of this gift God's people have felt ever since.

You see then that this Threefold Gift of a *Saviour*, of *Eternal Life*, and of the *Holy Spirit*, has been granted to the world. No one is excluded from it. It was not a partial gift, but a universal one ; it is free to all.

It is very sad to think how many in this world have never even heard of this gift. And whose fault is this ? Christ has come to save the world. The Holy Spirit has come to bless us. Eternal Life is offered to every one. And yet this great boon is unknown to more than half the world. Who, I ask, is to blame ?

When our Lord uttered His parting charge to those who were gathered around Him on the Mount of Olives, they at once obeyed. There was no hesitation. They went forth immediately. No country was too distant for them to visit, and no danger too great for them to encounter. With the zeal of the Pharisees, but with far more love and earnestness, "they compassed

sea and land" to make proselytes, and to tell men of this glorious Gift, which was offered without money and without price.

But presently the zeal of Christ's followers waxed cold. They still possessed the Gift, it is true, and perhaps valued it. But they kept it to themselves. For many centuries little or nothing was done to extend the knowledge of Christ. Much precious time was lost. Great opportunities were wasted. The light was hidden under a bushel. The Lord's gracious intention was not carried out. His words were forgotten, and His charge disregarded.

Shall we say then that the fault lay at the door of those who lived in bygone centuries? Undoubtedly it did. But, alas, it lies at *our* door also. Had our forefathers been earnest and active in the spread of the Gospel—aye, and had *we* been more active too—how different would the state of the world have been at

this time ! Instead of Christianity reaching a few favoured lands, as it now does, it would have covered, as with one vast blaze of light, the whole face of the world ! Indeed it is so. And we have need to seek forgiveness for our unpardonable neglect, for what we have left undone, for carrying out so feebly our blessed Lord's command.

But whilst millions have not even heard the good news, thank God it is far otherwise with us ! We have heard of it, and we know its value. Have we accepted it ? It has been offered to us again and again ; have we laid hold of it and made it ours ? Each one of us must apply to this Saviour, who has given Himself for us. Each one of us must seek the influence of the Holy Spirit for himself. Each one of us must stretch out the hand of faith, and grasp the precious boon which has been made over to us, even life eternal.

Happy for us if, in all the changes and chances of this our life, in all its rough dealings with us, in the midst of its sorrows and its joys, we experience the blessedness of possessing Christ, and of being able to say, "He is mine, and I am His;" of having the Holy Spirit dwelling within us, with all His quickening and comforting grace; and of knowing that, come what may—trials, bereavements, sickness, suffering, yea, even death itself—an Endless Life is ours, begun here, but to be perfected in heaven. May we then be able from our hearts to say, "Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift!"

## CHAPTER IV.

THE FATHER'S LOVE FOR THOSE WHO LOVE  
HIM NOT.

GOD'S love is of a twofold character. There is a love which He bears towards His own dear children. This is a love of relationship, a love of friendship, a love of approval. But He loves also, though in a far lower degree, those who know Him not, who care not for Him, and who treat His overtures with scorn. This is a love of compassion, a love of forbearance which endures much and long, a burning love which men's coldness and ingratitude fail to quench.

Of this love I am going now to speak—the Father's love for those who *love Him not*. This is a love to which we all owe much, which has followed us from the days of our childhood, which has borne with us in spite of our sins and

our opposition, and (oh that I may add) which has at length won us over to Himself.

The tracings of this love are most beautifully illustrated in two or three of our Lord's Parables ; but in none so graphically as in that of the Prodigal Son. A father is there described as having two sons, for whose happiness he provides abundant means. The younger of the two, the Benjamin perhaps, determines to leave his happy home and his father's presence. He breaks through the restraints which have hitherto bound him, and follows his own self-willed course, seeking after a happiness which he never finds ; and at length reduces himself to the misery and danger which he so richly deserves. At length however he is stopped in his mad career, and comes to a better mind. He thinks of his once bright home, contrasts it with his present exile, and longs to find himself once more an inmate of his father's house.

He at once starts up, and resolves to set his face homewards. And as he proceeds on his way he thinks to himself, "Shall I be admitted at that once welcome door? Will my father receive me after all that I have done to offend him, and to wound his loving heart?" And well may he doubt; for he deserves nothing at his father's hands.

But if he had fully known his father's character, he would be sure that from the very moment that he had left him, up to the hour of his return, his father had followed him in his various wanderings with thoughts of pity and of love. He had longed (oh how unremittingly!) that his banished one should return. And now, as the trembling Prodigal draws near his home, footworn and sad, he sees, in the far distance, one approaching him. It may perhaps be one of his father's servants sent out to search for him, or it may be his brother. No, it is the

father himself, who loves him still, and who is coming forth to meet him. And forthwith he falls on his neck ; and embracing him with an affection which none but a father could feel, he exclaims, "This my son was dead, and is alive again ; he was lost and is found."

O sinner, behold here a picture of thy Heavenly Father loving thee even in thy sinfulness, ready to welcome thee back, and clasp thee in His arms. It may be that you love Him not ; but *He loves you.* He has long yearned over you with the truest affection ; but you would not come to Him that you might have life. The door has long been open. Nay, Jesus has once and again stood at the door and knocked ; but you would not open it to admit Him. Warnings have perhaps been given you, but in vain. Affliction may have been sent ; but the rod was unheeded. It may be the thought of God's anger made you for a moment

tremble ; but it had no softening influence upon you. Oh, think again. Think of His untiring love, His boundless love—that love which led Him to give His Son for you. May that love draw you to His feet, saying, “I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.”

It is not too late. For if there be at this moment the least feeling of contrition, the smallest moving of the heart, the faintest longing after better things, then it is clear that God has not utterly turned away from you. His Holy Spirit still strives with you. He is still waiting to be gracious. There is not a moment to be lost. The open door may be on the point of closing. The stretched-out hand of mercy may soon be withdrawn. God may be ready to swear in His wrath that you shall never, never, enter into His rest.

There was one thing which especially marked God's dealings with His people Israel, even in their waywardness. There was wisdom in every one of His acts, and power in all His doings, and justice and righteousness in all His measures. But there was something else which specially marked His conduct towards them. It was love—love to the unthankful and the disobedient—love unrequited and undeserved. Love chose them at first. Love watched over them at all times. Love bore long with them in their rebellions. Love followed them in all their course. He might truly say, “I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.”

And so it is that God deals with His unloving ones now. He wraps around them, not rough chains of iron, but “bands of love.” And if this love fails to win us, all else will fail. If this

does not melt us, and subdue us, and reach our hearts, nothing will.

If then you know nothing of this love—if it has never reached you—kneel down and ask God to make you feel it. Ask Him to shed it abroad in your heart. It has turned many to God who were once afar off from Him. It has reached many consciences which were at one time hard and callous. It turned Saul from his career of opposition. It recalled Peter from his denials, and so melted him that “he went out and wept bitterly.” It led the woman who was a sinner to cast herself down at the Saviour’s feet as a loving penitent. Love has gained many victories. Oh that it may win you over, and make you a disciple of Christ !

## CHAPTER V.

## THE FATHER'S LOVE TO HIS OWN CHILDREN.

THE subject of my last chapter was, "God's love to those who love Him not." But as I said, there is a much higher love which goes out from the heart of God, even the love which He bears towards His children who are endeavouring to serve Him, and by whom His love is returned. This last is a *special* love; the other was a *universal* love. The one stretches out its arms towards all, ever ready to gather them in; the other presses to its bosom with untold affection those who are already gathered. The one is unrequited and scorned; the other is felt and appreciated. The one was in the mind of the father in the Parable, during those sad years when his child was away from him; the other was in that

father's mind at the happy moment of his son's return, and henceforward during his home life of obedience and devotedness.

Jesus loved all, even the scoffing Jews who rejected His Messiahship ; but He *specially* loved those who took up their cross, and followed Him. He loved Matthew during the time that he sat at the receipt of custom, intent upon his money-gathering, but caring little for his soul's interests. And he loved Peter and John, whilst they thought only of their fishing boats and their nets. But when they responded to His call, gave up all these things for His sake, surrendering their whole hearts to Him, then He loved them with that higher love—that stronger love—which He bears towards His elect ; and “having loved His own that were in the world, He loved them to the end.”

Dear reader, has God in His great love won you over to Himself ? Has He drawn you by

the influence of the Holy Spirit into His service? Are you unmistakably His, knowing Him, loving Him, and desiring daily to serve Him? Then you may indeed look up and say, "This God is my God for ever and ever: He will be my guide even unto death." But even more than this. You are permitted to say and feel, "He is my *Father*." And you are permitted to add, "We love Him, because He first loved us." His love has been the magnet which has drawn me to Himself.

And truly your new life may be a very happy one. You have now God for your Father, Jesus for your Saviour, and the Holy Spirit as your indwelling Guide and Comforter. Moreover, you have Heaven for your home, and Eternal Life for your portion. "Happy are the people that are in such a case; yea, blessed are the people that have the Lord for their God!"

Now, try and *live very near to God*, walking

by faith, and not by sight. Live for Him who loves you. Live for heaven, and not for this passing world.

Live *a life of Filial Obedience*. The child who loves his father or his mother delights in serving them ; and in the very act of obeying them his heart goes out towards them, and his love grows. So it is with God. As we do His will, and labour in His service, our hearts glow with love, and we feel that His service is perfect freedom. Thus St. John says, “*This is the love of God*”—our love to Him consists in *this*, and this is the proof too of our really loving Him—“that we keep his commandments ; and his commandments are not grievous.” Often ask yourself, What is my Father’s will ? What would He have me do ? And when He makes it clear to you what His will is, do it willingly and cheerfully for His sake. As obedient children, do not fashion yourselves according to the course

of this world ; but “as he that called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation.” Try to please your gracious Father in all things ; and be it your chief desire and aim to bring glory to Him.

Live *a life of Usefulness*. It is desirable to engage in some definite work for God. And as you work, let the thought often come across you that He loves you with more than a father’s affection, or a mother’s tenderness. Count it your greatest happiness to be employed in any way for Him. Depend upon it, God has some work for you to do—some work for which you are specially fitted—and some work in the doing of which you will be sure to find a blessing either to yourself or to others, and perhaps to both. Be sure of this—it was never intended that any one of us should be useless.

Live *a life of Purity and Holiness*. We should be ever growing in likeness to God. The child

should be like his Father. He should "grow up unto Him in all things." We should be ever fighting the good fight, overcoming evil, and acquiring day by day fresh Christian graces. Oh for purity of heart and life ! The Apostle says, "Keep thyself pure," pure in our bodies, as well as our souls. Let us remember that "our bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghost ;" and that we must keep them pure and undefiled, if we would live unto God.

It is true, we shall never reach perfection here. But as he who would hit the mark must aim high, so should we. We should be constantly growing. Our course should be as the shining light of the sun, "which shineth more and more" till it reaches its meridian height. And if we feel—as we most likely shall feel—that sin cleaves to us to the very last, we will keep our eye all the more steadily fixed on the cross, content to the end of our days with the

humble prayer of the publican, “God be merciful to me a sinner.” “O Lamb of God that takest away the sin of the world, I hide myself in Thee.”

Endeavour then to get firmly fixed in your mind the happy conviction that God loves you—that He has loved you from all eternity—that He has shown you many proofs of His love during your past life—and that He loves you still. This will draw out your heart towards Him ; and your daily feelings and your daily service will be those of love. You will feel towards Him and act towards Him, not merely as a servant, but as a loving child.

## CHAPTER VI.

## MY FATHER'S WILL.

WE have all of us a will of our own; and if we give full rein to these wills of ours, they will be sure to lead us wrong, and to plunge us into endless difficulties. The worldly person, the pleasure-seeker, he who is laying up his treasure upon earth, acts entirely from his own evil inclinations, and is always seeking to gain his own ends. His is a mere earthly life. He lives for the present day. He comes up, and is cut down like a flower—admired perhaps by the world around him, and making a great show for a while—and then passes away, and is no more seen. He desires worldly greatness and worldly happiness. And, it may be, he obtains them. His will is gratified. He has his reward, but it is a poor one.

It was very different with our Lord Himself—

with Him who was our great Pattern. He came on earth for a grand purpose ; namely, to make an offering of Himself according to the will of God ; and His mind was set upon accomplishing it. “ My meat,” He said, “ is to do the will of Him that sent me ; ” “ I delight to do thy will, O God.” And as the time of His greatest suffering drew near, He never for a moment wavered ; His will was unchanged ; He was bent upon carrying out His Father’s purpose, exclaiming, “ I have a baptism to be baptised with (a baptism of suffering) ; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished ! ”

And so it was with His disciples. There was no self-pleasing or self-aggrandisement with them. Their one desire was to do their Lord’s will, to obey His commands, and to accomplish His purposes, however much it might cost them.

Such too should be *our* desire. But how can this be accomplished in us ? How can our

selfish and unruly wills, our wills which are oftentimes so strong for evil, be brought into subjection to the will of God ? He must Himself effect it, and He alone. It is one of the most marvellous of His works. St. Paul speaks of it as “a pulling down of strongholds, a casting down of imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.”

And what a lovely sight it is to see one on whom this blessed change has passed, no longer seeking his own, but the things of others ; no longer following the bent of his own evil will, but having his thoughts, his feelings, his desires, all brought into harmony with God’s will, all under control, and all consecrated to Him ! When this is the case, God is honoured ; and there is a calmness and peace within, which nothing can disturb.

Our Lord has Himself taught us, in that Pattern Prayer which He has given for our use, to make this among our other petitions, "Thy will be done." I suppose that most of us have offered up this petition at least twice a day since we first learned to say our prayers. Every morning and evening we have said to God upon our knees, "Thy will be done." Oh that we may in future utter it with our hearts, as well as with our lips ! For we do indeed need more of this holy, happy resignation to our Father's will.

Let us ever bear in mind that we are but as little children, and that God, like a kind and wise parent, knows what is best, and will assuredly do what is best, for us ; and further, that it is very good for us to be daily crossing and checking our own perverse wills, to be often doing things which are positively distasteful to us, because we know that they are pleasing to Him.

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When therefore anything appears to be your duty, though it be contrary to your feelings and wishes, and you had rather perhaps do anything than that one thing, in such a case make an effort to do it. And if, by God's help, you can bring yourself to discharge that duty, you will be doing your Father's will, and you will have gained a victory over yourself, which will prove an unspeakable blessing to you.

It may be well just to touch very briefly on the question, "What is God's will concerning us?" Of course there are many particulars, which it would be impossible to enumerate within the limits of this chapter, and what God requires of one He does not always require of another. I will therefore merely glance at a few general points.

First then, it is our Father's will that we should be *Useful* whilst here. In God's household there is an allotted work for each one of

His children. It may be a great work in men's eyes, or it may be a little work ; still, if it be the work which God has given us to do, we should set about it in earnest. We are not sent here merely to vegetate and die. We are sent to do something for our Master. Every one has his mission.

Again, it is God's will that we should often practise *Self-denial*. For instance, this or that thing may seem likely to contribute to our present enjoyment. And therefore our first impulse is to rush into it at once, shutting our eyes to the consequences that may follow. But no ; we should check ourselves, and pause for a moment to consider if such be the will of God, and if it be pleasing to Him. And if not, then He would have us exercise self-denial, giving up our present enjoyment that we may ensure our future welfare, and yielding up our own will that we may act in accordance with His

will. In our every-day life how many things happen which are directly at variance with our wishes! If, like spoilt children, we give way to our own wayward inclinations, and fret and foam when these are crossed, we shall be constantly unhappy. But if we look at these disappointments as the dealings of a wise and loving Father, and if we feel that His will, not ours, is best, we shall be calm and contented. We shall not merely *say*, "His will be done," but we shall distrust our own wishes, and heartily desire that His may be accomplished. This is the way to be really happy, and here is the secret of true peace.

Sometimes too it is God's will that we should *Suffer*, either in body or in mind. He sees that such treatment is necessary for us, and that the furnace is needed to purify us. We require this training in order to make us gentle and submissive to His will, and that we may walk

humbly in His ways. For this reason God sometimes afflicts His children. But how differently do we receive His chastisements ! One person is laid down upon a sick-bed, and feels sad and discontented. The time hangs heavily. His pains make him peevish. His sick room seems lonely and dull. He longs to be in the world again. Or if his sickness becomes serious, he is alarmed and uneasy. He looks gloomily at death, and dreads its approach. Another person will take his sickness as coming directly from the hand of God. He looks upon it as his heavenly Father's doing, that Father who loves him ; and his great desire is that His will may be accomplished. He feels too that he can glorify God as much on his sick-bed, as when in full health, and that there is a work for him to do even there.

Above all, it is God's will that we should be *Holy*. "This is the will of God, even your

sanctification." It is not knowing much, or feeling deeply, that He looks for in us, nor is it merely that we should live an outwardly holy life. He is satisfied with nothing short of a holy *heart* within; a heart that loves Him, and desires in all things to please Him; a pure heart, free from sin, and that finds its rest in the Lord. And not only does He teach us to be inwardly holy, but He has also provided us with the means of becoming so. He has given us His Word that we may grow thereby; His truth to sanctify us; Prayer that we may hold intercourse with Him; His House that we may speak to Him, as in His audience chamber; His Church to teach us; and His Sacraments to feed, strengthen, and refresh us.

And further, it is God's will that His children should be *Happy*. He bids us "rejoice in Him always." It is quite allowable for us to find joy in this world—joy in our friendships, joy in

our family ties, joy in all around us, joy in our intercourse with others, joy in the innocent pleasures of earth. But let us never forget this—that our joy will be utterly worthless if it is apart from God. The joy of the Lord should ever be our strength.

Oh that it may be our daily endeavour to yield ourselves without reserve to the will of God ! Thus will our life here be a constant ripening for our better life above ; and then,

“When on earth we breathe no more  
The prayer, oft mixed with tears before,  
We'll sing, upon a happier shore,  
Thy will be done.”

## CHAPTER VII.

## MY FATHER'S BUSINESS.

IF you were to go into one of our great Manufactories, you would see hundreds of hands at work. At first sight it would seem as if all was confusion ; but presently you would discover that each had his appointed post, and that he was sent there to take a particular part in the great work going on.

So is it again with a hive of Bees. A casual passer-by might fancy that nothing but disorder reigned among the busy throng. But the more closely he watched their movements, the more he would be persuaded that each individual Bee has its allotted task, and that each takes his part in the general work of the hive.

And thus does God appoint to *us* our work in life. We did not come here by accident. There was a reason and an object for our being

born. God has placed each one of us here for a special purpose. And happy those who are anxious to know what that purpose is, and who are asking with the Apostle, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"

And here, as in the last chapter, I would direct your thoughts to Him who is our great Exemplar. From His very childhood it was His earnest desire to work for Him who sent Him. You remember the scene which took place at Jerusalem, when Jesus was yet a Child, and His parents had brought Him there in accordance with a Jewish custom. They missed Him in the crowd of pilgrims who swarmed at that time in the Holy City. At length they discovered Him sitting as a lowly learner at the feet of the doctors, or appointed teachers of the law; not, as some have imagined, putting Himself in the place of their Instructor, but asking them questions, such as became a little

child and a humble learner. But in so doing there was a wisdom in His words which greatly astonished them. And on His parents addressing Him somewhat complainingly, He replied, "How is it that ye sought me? Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?"

Again, about twenty years later, when our Lord was reposing at the Well of Sychar, His disciples, who had left Him for a few hours, on their return pressed Him to take some food which they had been purchasing. But His answer to them was, "I have meat to eat that ye know not of." These words were for a moment evidently misunderstood; and they therefore said to one another, "Hath any man brought him aught to eat?" Upon which our Lord explains Himself, and says, "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work."

From the example then of the Saviour we may learn what should be our aim in life. Our

“meat should be to do the will of him that sent us ;” we should be “about our Father’s business.” But this is not the case with the world generally—far otherwise. Let us see what most people are living for.

Some, alas, are only living to commit sin. The drunkard, the fornicator, the dishonest are working for Satan. As each day comes they renew their work. They go abroad to find out where evil is going on ; and they lie down at night full of contrivings how they may sin on the morrow. Such is their miserable aim.

Again, there are those who seem to think that they are only placed in the world to enjoy it while it lasts, and that life is one great holiday. The pleasures they indulge in may not be forbidden pleasures ; but still, can it be right to make them the object for which they live, and to have no higher aim in life ?

There are others different from either of

these, but still very unlike the blessed Pattern before us. Their aim seems to be to do no harm, but little beyond it. They have talents and opportunities, but they do not employ them. They preserve their *health* by being temperate, their *property* by being prudent, their *character* by being regular and orderly. No one lays anything to their charge. We do not see them despising God's laws; nor, on the other hand, do we see them honouring Him. We do not hear of their *denying* Christ; but we certainly do not hear of their *confessing* Him openly before men. What is the life of such persons worth? Alas, nothing in the sight of God.

How very different are such lives to the life of our Lord! He had a single object ever before Him. One thing He aimed at. One desire was uppermost in His soul. He was always "about His Father's business." And so it should be with us. We may lawfully

engage in many works. But this should stand first and foremost. Towards this should be the chief bent of our minds. This way should all our energies be turned. We should endeavour to do the will of God.

It is doubtless lawful for a Christian to interest himself in matters which are not directly religious. The Word of God does not say, "You must not occupy yourself with the things of earth ; they will soil you if you even touch them." But what it does say is, " Set not your heart upon them. Act as travellers who give to their business all due attention, but are in haste to be passing on towards their native land." One likes to see a person, whatever he is about, doing it heartily and with vigour. But let him do it as if he felt that his Father's eye was upon him. Let him act as a servant of God.

Many cannot understand this. They hold that religion must not interfere with our every-

day life. But it *ought* to interfere with all we do. It ought to leaven everything, give a colour to everything, be the spring which moves everything.

Two men go to work. One feels that his labour is a drudgery, a thing that *must* be done ; the other works because he feels that it is God's will that he should work ; he knows that God is with him, and therefore he works heartily and happily. Two persons rise in the morning. One goes about his daily occupations, thinking how he may save himself the most trouble, or get the most gain, or gratify himself the most. The other says within himself, Another day is given me. How can I spend it for God ? What is His will, and how can I best do it ? How can I make the most of my time, and do the most good ? Which of these, think you, is the happiest ? Which has most of the mind of Christ about him ?

Be sure then that if we are labouring for the

world and for self our life is all in vain. We have forgotten why, and for what particular end, we were placed here. We are labouring for that which is not bread, and are feeding upon ashes. And then, at the close of life, how sad it will be to be forced to acknowledge, “I have laboured ; but have received my wages. Mine has been a perishable work in the world ; and I have received a perishable reward. The world has my labour, and keeps it. I have received its pay ; but it is useless to me now that I am going to leave the world. I have lived a few years ; but it has been in vain—a wretched past—without hope for the future.”

But I do trust that some of my readers can truly say, “My heartfelt wish is to have God’s work ever before me. My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me—to make, not my own will, but His, my rule—and not my own work, but His work, my object.”

## CHAPTER VIII.

## MY FATHER'S EAR.

GOD's ear is ever open. Every word we utter is known to Him. The Curser's oath, the coarse language of the Impure, the scornful boast of the Unbeliever, are heard by Him, and are registered, as it were, in His memory. Every idle word thoughtlessly uttered is noted down, and must be accounted for. The sorrowful sighing too of the Prisoner, and the proud vaunting of the Oppressor, come before Him, and He is the Avenger of all such. In fact, there is not a word in our mouths, or a thought in our hearts, but He knoweth it altogether.

But, thank God, He has also a hearing ear for His praying people. They never call upon Him in vain. When the Israelites were groaning under the cruel oppression of Pharaoh, and cried aloud to their Father and their Friend

He hearkened and heard them. He knew their sorrows, and their cry of distress reached His ear. And afterwards, in the days of Malachi, when the mass of the people had departed from Him, we are told that there were a few among them who clave unto Him, and thought upon His name; and it is said, “They that feared the Lord spake often one to another, and *the Lord hearkened and heard it;* and a book of remembrance was written for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name.” When the Publican went into the house of God, and breathed out a short but earnest petition, confessing his sin and asking for mercy, that cry was heard in heaven. So also was the prayer of the dying Thief upon the cross. His words, “Lord, remember me,” went up with acceptance, and reached the ear of God. And if God has seen fit to show you your sinfulness, the first cry that comes from your broken heart is heard

and accepted by Him, and there is joy in heaven when it is uttered. Or, in the hour of affliction, when your heart has been overwhelmed within you, and you have put up a cry to God, He has hearkened and heard it, and has given you relief.

In any great crisis, when difficulties arise and we need counsel, or when different paths are before us and we know not which to choose, or when we are going to undertake some great matter, and we long to see God's guiding hand, we may apply to Him in full confidence that He will kindly hearken to our application. Yes, and in our ordinary daily life, whenever we kneel down, either in private or with others, God is on His mercy-seat, and has both an ear to hear, and an open hand to bestow. In fact, He hears us when we bring any great matter before Him, or when the smallest want is expressed.

Everything which concerns our *souls* is a legitimate subject for our prayers, and we can-

not ask too largely, or specify too minutely our various spiritual needs. But the question is sometimes asked, Are we justified in bringing our *temporal wants* before God? I believe that we may carry even these to Him, so long as we ask His guidance and blessing in submission to His will. For instance, if I am poor, I may ask God to relieve my poverty, if He sees fit, but not otherwise. He may however see that poverty is better for me, and so He may in mercy continue it, or He may be pleased to grant me some alleviation in my straitened circumstances. Or if I am laid low with illness, surely in this case I should not be wrong in entreating God to remove my pains, and restore my health, provided such was according to His will, and for my good. So I think that we may ask for spiritual blessings without any reserve whatever, and for worldly blessings also, if we desire our petition to be granted, pro-

vided He, in His wisdom and love, sees that they will conduce to our good and to His glory.

And is God's ear never closed against our petitions? No, never, excepting when sin is allowed by us—wilful and unrepented sin. What does David say? "If I regard iniquity in my heart, God will not hear me." I know of no other impediment to the full flow of God's mercy towards us than the fact of our bringing sin with us to the throne of grace. This closes our Father's ear, and He turns away from us, and refuses to hearken.

For example, a person knows something of the things of God, and "has tasted of the heavenly gift." He longs to have more grace imparted to him, to have his faith strengthened and his love increased. But there is some sin in which he indulges, some evil habit which he encourages. Until that sin is put away, and that evil habit given up, his recourse to the throne of grace will

be fruitless. God will not hearken, or entertain his request. We must put away “the accursed thing,” or we shall never be welcome there.

But how large are God’s promises to a true and believing petitioner! “Whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive ;” “Ask, and it shall be given you ; seek, and ye shall find ; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.” There are great blessings that we might enjoy, great gifts that God is ready to bestow, if we would only apply for them. Oftentimes we complain of our lack of faith, of the coldness and dryness of our hearts, and we live on in this complaining mood. But God is able to pour blessings into our souls, if we did but go to Him, the great Fountain of all gifts, with our empty pitchers, desiring to have them filled. “Ye have not,” says the Apostle, “because ye ask not. Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss.”

Go to God more simply and more believably,

and be assured that He is far more ready to give than we are to pray. "Call unto me," He says, "and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things which thou knowest not" (Jer. xxxiii. 3). And again, "I know the thoughts that I think towards you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil. Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you" (Jer. xxix. 11, 12). And yet again, "Prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it" (Mal. iii. 10). Oh for more praying hearts, for more delight and comfort and enjoyment in coming to the throne of God ! For if we asked more, we should receive more.

And what a blessing it is to know that the ear into which we pour our requests is a Father's ear ! When you pray then, remember it is to

your Father, and that He has a kind ear, a compassionate ear, a bounteous ear, to hear you. "When thou prayest enter into thy closet (where you will be alone with God), and when thou hast shut the door (excluding the outer world, and also that inner world which steals into the heart), pray to thy Father which is in secret, and thy Father which seeth in secret will reward thee openly." May He who hath an ear to hear give us hearts to pray !

And may we not feel especially assured that God's ear is open to us whenever we enter His Courts, so that we enter them in a devout and prayerful spirit ? He is there to meet us and to bless us, and every earnest prayer put up in the name of His dear Son will reach His gracious ear. And never will it be more open than when we meet around that Holy Table where we commemorate the Saviour's love, and where He pleads the all-sufficiency of His sacrifice for us.

## CHAPTER IX.

## MY FATHER'S VOICE.

GOD speaks to us; not however as He did in former times to our First Parents when in Eden (Gen. iii. 8, 10); to Abraham on Mount Moriah (Gen. xxii. 2); to Moses on Mount Sinai (Exod. xix. 19); and to Elijah (1 Kings xvii. 2-4), &c. He did this either by the mouth of His angel messengers; or by His holy prophets, whom He raised up at special times to awaken His people; or by visions and dreams whereby He made known His will. But when Christ made His appearance among us, He revealed Himself to us by His beloved Son. Thus the Apostle says, "God, who at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake in time past by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken to us by His Son." And when Jesus displayed His glory on the Mount of Transfiguration, a voice

was heard from heaven, saying, "This is my beloved Son, hear him." And God still speaks to us, though in a less direct way. But *how* does He speak?

First, He speaks to us *in His Word*. In that Holy Book we find such expressions as these—"Thus saith the Lord;" "Verily, verily, I say unto you." And the careful reader of the Bible may there discover what are the directions which God gives us, and what His will is concerning us. We should read God's Word then with an anxious desire to arrive at the truth which it contains, "searching the Scriptures" with all diligence, and feeling that there lies within a hid treasure, if we can only find it. For just as the miner discovers the precious ore which he looks for, not lying upon the surface, but deep down in the soil, so it is through diligent searching that we shall be rewarded by the discovery of God's truth. For there

it lies, hidden perhaps from the cursory reader, but to be found by those who search for it.

Again, we should read it in a humble, child-like spirit, as those who feel their ignorance and are willing to learn what God is pleased to reveal to them, seeking the guidance and teaching of the Holy Spirit that we may be led into all truth; for as the Holy Scriptures were originally "written by the inspiration of God," so they must be explained and brought home to us by Him, or we shall never profit thereby.

We should put ourselves therefore in the inquiring attitude of Samuel, and say, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth." And if we take up God's Word thus, laying our hearts open for His teaching, we shall hear His voice, as it were, and feel that He does indeed speak to us.

Secondly, the Lord speaks to us *by His Ministers*. They are employed by Christ Him-

self “As the Father sent me (He said) so send I you.” They offer prayer in our name. They plead for us, and with us. They administer to us the Sacraments which are so full of blessing to us. They are “Ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us ; we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God.” They have a message from God unto His people. This is the light in which we should regard Christ’s ministers. Their words may be poor in themselves ; but as God’s heralds, God’s messengers, God’s servants, they speak with authority as from Him. And we should receive their words as having, for that reason, a special power in them. Thus St. Paul said to his Thessalonian converts, “Our gospel (or good tidings) came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance :” so effectual was their preaching for the saving of men’s souls.

Thirdly, God speaks to us *in His Works*. He sometimes startles us by His thunder, and seems thereby to remind us of His power. "The voice of the Lord (says David) is upon the waters. The Lord of glory thundereth. The voice of the Lord is powerful. The voice of the Lord is full of majesty. The voice of the Lord shaketh the wilderness. The Lord shaketh the wilderness of Kadesh" (Ps. xxix.). He speaks to us in the storm and also in the bright sunshine. He speaks to us by the flowers of the field, and by the green grass with which He graciously clothes the earth. And all nature thus proclaims Him to be a God of love.

Fourthly, God speaks to us sometimes very plainly *by Providential Circumstances*. Things are at times so clearly ordered that our path of duty becomes plain. The finger of God seems to point the way. The voice of God seems almost to give utterance; so that there is no

doubt as to what we should do. We seem "to hear a word behind us, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand and when ye turn to the left." I do not say that it is always so ; perhaps very rarely. But still there are times when God thus makes His will known to us, so that we can hardly mistake it. And surely every earnest Christian will be very anxious to discover these providential leadings, and will be on the look-out for them, lest he miss God's offered guidance.

Fifthly, He speaks to us sometimes *by the Chastisements* which He sends. "Hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it." There are some who can only be brought to God by such means. His Word is perhaps unheeded, and His Messengers speak in vain. Then He is pleased to use this severer method ; and it may be that, by some trial or affliction, He brings us to Himself, and thus calls us away from a

sinful or a worldly life to the better and happier way of holiness. But of this I shall speak more fully in the next chapter.

Sixthly, He speaks *by the whispering of Conscience*. This is “the still small voice” within, by which God speaks to us both concerning the wrong which is to be avoided, and the right which is to be followed. By this He speaks *to the Sinner*, and often stops him on his downward course. And by this He speaks also *to His Children*, showing them the path which they should take, and gladdening their hearts when acting rightly. We all have a conscience; but in some it is dumb and inactive, and with some it is perverted, and liable to lead us astray. We should therefore ask God to give us a pure conscience, an enlightened conscience, and also an assuring conscience when right; for “our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience.”

Seventhly, God speaks by the gentle *influence*

*of His Holy Spirit.* He speaks to our inner souls. And happy those of us who hear His voice, moving our hearts, calling us to repentance, leading us by His gentle persuasiveness to quit the path of sin, and to walk in His ways. The Spirit often speaks to us through the medium of our conscience, enlightening it, and making it a true and wholesome guide to us. But in various other ways He speaks to us, quickening our drowsy souls, lighting up a new flame within us, teaching us, guiding us, and sanctifying us; carrying on, in short, a great and blessed work within us.

Who is there among us that has not thus, at some period or other, heard the Lord speaking to him? Ah! we may stop our ears and refuse to hearken. And this we may do again and again, till at length our hearts grow callous, and He may swear in His wrath that we shall never enter into His rest. Those are most awful words in Prov. i.,

“ Because I have called, and ye refused ; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded ; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof : I also will laugh at your calamity ; I will mock when your fear cometh. . . . Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer ; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me.” But blessed indeed are those, who hearken and hear their Father’s loving voice, and forthwith obey Him and follow Him.

Lastly, there is a *Final Call* to every one of us—a final summons to leave this world, in which we have been mere sojourners, for one as yet unseen. And how differently does this call sound in our ears ! If we have made this world our home, then we shall quit it with a pang which no words can describe. But if we have lived a life of faith, looking at the things which are unseen and are eternal—if our life has been hid with Christ in God—if we have lived

for heaven—then will this call be a joyous one ; and we shall depart to be with our Lord for ever.

It is well to ask ourselves, Are we ready for this Final Call ? There is a sort of *general* readiness which belongs to the thoughtful Christian. His soul has wakened up from the sleep of sin. He is living a Christian life. He knows that God's call may come to him at any day, bidding him leave this world for another. But is he *quite* ready, *quite* prepared ? Is his armour bright ? Is his account made up with God ? Is there nothing yet to be done—no work to be taken up that has been put aside—no unfinished work to be completed ? Has he got beyond that point which would lead him to pray, “Spare me a little that I may recover my strength before I go hence and be no more seen.” Oh that we may be really ready—only waiting for God's summons, “Come up higher !”

## CHAPTER X.

## MY FATHER'S DEALINGS.

MANY persons are discontented with their lot, and are disposed to question God's dealings with them, just as the Israelites did of old, saying, "The way of the Lord is not equal." They are disposed to murmur at God's ways, as though there was something wrong and partial in them. And though they may not dare to utter such language as this, they feel the same in their secret hearts. The fact is that we only "know in part," and are quite unable to fathom the depth of God's dealings and purposes.

God's great end is to bring us to Himself. And in order to do this, He often seems to deal somewhat harshly with us. He acts towards us sometimes as a Mother acts towards her Child. Who has not watched the fond and careful Mother setting down her little child in one part

of the room alone, then gradually retreating from it, leaving it to stand by itself half terrified ; and then beckoning to it, and calling to it to take courage and come ? Who has not seen the little trembling creature burst into tears, because it seemed to be so deserted, and then at length, gaining courage from necessity, and with little tottering steps, advance towards the outstretched arms of its mother ? At last, having performed the great feat of a walk across the floor, it hides itself, rejoiced and comforted, in her bosom.

Thus God teaches us to walk by faith. Sometimes His providences are dark, and He seems to have deserted the soul, when He is only going before it, and calling it to come after Him. His ways are not as our ways, nor His thoughts as our thoughts. If they were, very few of us would ever reach heaven.

For instance, as regards our earthly bless-

ings, God sometimes seems to scatter these unequally among us. One person is "rich and increased with goods, and has need of nothing." Wealth has fallen into his lap almost unasked for. He is born in a fine house. He is cradled in luxury. And as he lives on, his every want is supplied. Another is poor. He must earn his bread by the sweat of his brow. He has hard work to struggle through the world. And sometimes, when hunger and want stare him in the face, he thinks of his richer neighbour, and his heart is tempted with the thought that his heavenly Father deals unjustly, and that He is more bountiful to one than He is to another.

Again, two men start in life, one with as good prospects as the other. Both are equally clever, and equally persevering. They embark in business. Everything that the one undertakes succeeds. All his plans answer. And gradually he rises higher and higher in his profession, and

becomes a man of substance. The other meets with constant misfortunes. His ships are wrecked, or his cattle die, or the money which he puts out to interest is lost. Now, in such a case, if a man's mind is not checked and influenced by religion, no wonder if he questions the rectitude of God's dealings.

We may easily find other cases of a like kind. Some, for instance, enjoy health and strength, and the use of their reason ; they have kind friends about them, and a comfortable home. Others are constantly suffering from some painful disease. They are weak and helpless, and perhaps are long confined to a sick bed. What a difference between the two ! Blessings are strewed thickly along the path of one : trials and distresses mark the history of the other. Here again, some would dare in their hearts to accuse God of partiality, giving to one what He withholds from the other.

But as yet I have only spoken of those cases in which our *temporal* interests are concerned. God however sometimes deals with our *souls* in a way which we cannot understand.

Look at any two Countries—our own Land, for example, and Africa. Here in England we live under righteous laws. Every man has his liberty. No one may wrong another without suffering for it. Every man may “sit under his vine and under his fig-tree, none making him afraid.” More than this; we enjoy the vast blessings of the Gospel. We have our Churches, our Pastors, our Bibles, our Schools. If we are poor, there is relief for us, so that we need not starve. If sick, there is some one to visit us. If dying, there is one to tell us of a Saviour’s love and mercy. Truly we may say, “The lot is fallen unto us in a pleasant land; we have a goodly heritage.”

Now think of Africa. Heathenism reigns

there. “Darkness covers the land, and gross darkness the people.” You may travel there for thousands of miles where no Bible has ever been seen, no Gospel has ever been preached, and no Missionary’s voice has ever been heard. Men live and die without God and without hope ; with a heaven before them, but no way of reaching it ; with a Saviour not far from every one of them, but with no one to lead them to Him. And there too no one is safe. A poor villager may be seized any day, hurried to the slave-market, and carried far away from home and kindred.

Does the same God rule over both Countries ? Yes, He does ; and the souls in one land are as dear to Him as in the other. For both Christ died, and for both He has purchased a heavenly kingdom. And yet it seems as though He had favoured the one far, far, more than the other. In the same country too what a difference

there is between one spot and another ! Take some of the by-streets and alleys of London, There people live and die perhaps without any one to go and tell them that they have precious souls to be saved, and that a loving Saviour has given Himself for them ; whilst in our more favoured villages and towns the gospel is brought home to our very doors.

God might have so ordered it that all should be blest alike, and that the light of His truth should shine upon one as well as another. And why has He not done so ? We cannot tell. But we are sure that there can be no unrighteousness with Him; that the Judge of all the earth cannot but do right. There is one thing which we do know, and which it is well to remember ; namely, that those who have lived in the midst of gospel light will have to give a far stricter account than those on whom it has never shone. Christians in England, who have

not accepted and obeyed and loved the Saviour, are tenfold more guilty, and will be dealt with far more strictly, than the poor ignorant inhabitant of Africa ; for to whom much is given, of them much will be required.

Do not, then, puzzle yourself by inquiring why God has sent the gospel here, and why He has withheld it there. But rather reflect, "If I have not received the gospel, and welcomed the Saviour to my heart, then I shall be among the rejecters of Christ, and my portion will be with the lost."

Or, if trouble and misfortune fall to your share, whilst the lot of others is bright and prosperous, remember that this world is your training-school for heaven ; and be sure that your gracious Lord will conduct you thither by no rougher path than is absolutely needful.

There are doubtless many things which we cannot understand now. There is a hidden

mystery in many of God's dealings. But one day we shall have a key to all these puzzles. Every tangled thread will be unravelled. What we know not now we shall know hereafter. "There is nothing covered that shall not be revealed, neither hid that shall not be known." Let us then patiently wait, content with all that God does, without prying into His secret purposes ; willing now to know only "in part," but looking forward to that day when we shall read all in the fuller light of eternity.

We come then to this conclusion—that whether we be rich or poor, prosperous or afflicted ; whether we have many advantages or few, more blessings than our neighbours or less ; whether we succeed or fail in our undertakings ; whether the sun shines clear and bright above our heads, or the rain comes pouring down, and flooding our fields in the time of harvest—we shall do well to be content, and to leave all in

God's hands, for His dealings are sure to be right, and will all conduce to our real welfare. And we may be certain also of this—that we have more than we deserve, and have all of us enough to fill our hearts with thankfulness, and our mouths with praise.

Yes, Lord, Thou art always in the right ; we are often in the wrong. Thou comest to us with bounteous gifts ; we come to Thee with a sparing hand. Thou art righteous ; we are unrighteous. Thou seest the end from the beginning ; we cannot look into the future. Thy dealings are right, and wise, and good. And this we shall clearly see, when hereafter we look back upon all that Thou hast done.

## CHAPTER XI.

## MY FATHER'S WORLD.

MANY persons who are religiously minded are disposed to think and speak of the World as an unmixed evil, and altogether under the dominion of the wicked one. It is true that there is much evil in the world, and that when man fell he brought a curse upon it. It is true also that Satan is called "the god of this world ;" for he exercises his sway over it, making it the principal scene of his evil machinations.

But it is God's world, and was very beautiful at first, and very good when it came out of His hands, although it has been tainted by man's sins. Much of its original beauty and goodness still survive ; and it will probably be one day restored to its pristine state. It would be wrong then to conceal the evil that is in the world ; and perhaps equally wrong to divest it of all good.

When St. James speaks of “the friendship of the world” being at “enmity with God,” he means that, since its inhabitants have rebelled against Him, there is much in it which runs counter to His will and to the laws of His Kingdom. And when another Apostle bids us “not to love the world, nor the things that are in the world,” he would have us cautious not to be led aside by its charms, but rather to set our affection on things above, and not on things on the earth. He would have us bear in mind that there is much positive evil here, and much also which, though innocent and harmless in itself, when followed to excess engrosses the mind, and draws it away from God ; for truly there is much in the world which, though not exactly evil, may become so to us —much that may steal away the heart and shut out from it the love of God. There is a danger lest the heart, which was made large

enough for God, should be allowed to waste itself upon the world. He meant that we are not to love what is sinful in the world ; we are not to be tied down to its bad customs, or to follow its evil practices, or to be led away by its follies.

Our worldly callings, for instance, and our daily occupations, are in themselves harmless, and they even form a part of our duty ; but if we allow them to take up too much of our attention—if we set our hearts upon them, and allow them that place in our affections which ought to be given to God—if they are permitted to come first in our daily thoughts and desires, and to stand uppermost and foremost in our minds—then we are making the world our idol, and our hearts become like the inn at Bethlehem, in which there was no room for Christ.

Our friends and relatives too have a strong claim upon us ; and surely God would not debar us

from their affection, as though He were jealous of our love being given to them, and as though we should love Him the more for loving them the less. This certainly was not St. John's or St. James's forbidden world.

And as regards the pleasures and amusements of the world, God never meant His people to hang down their heads, and go mourning on their way Zionward. He loves to see us cheerful and happy ; and there is doubtless an innocent mirth which it is quite lawful for us to indulge in. But we should remember that there are some amusements in the world which are actually sinful, or lead to sin and forgetfulness of God ; and there are others too, which become sinful when they are followed with undue eagerness. And we should remember also how soon—how fatally soon—we pass imperceptibly from things lawful to those which are doubtful ; and then a step further, to those that are posi-

tively sinful. How soon does the heart, in which there was once a spark of the love of Christ, become chilled and warped by its contact with the world! How soon does the reading of light and frivolous books take the place of that precious Word which is Truth itself! And how soon is communion with God exchanged for intercourse with the world!

We must therefore be upon our guard, and be very careful to live as our Lord lived, and as His followers should live also. We should live as strangers and pilgrims upon the earth, remembering that this is only our dwelling-place for a time, but that heaven is our home.

Still this world in which we are now living is God's world. It may be "used" without being "abused;" and we should endeavour to make it our friend and our servant, instead of our master. It may become a very paradise to us, if sanctified by the presence and blessing

of God. For as Bishop Heber says, "every prospect pleases, and only man is vile."

Surely then it must be wrong to speak of the world with an exaggerated scorn, and to abandon all hope of extracting a blessing from it ; to harp upon its distorted features, instead of hailing with thankfulness the remains of its original beauty. It is wrong to take a gloomy view of things around us ; for is it not a blessing and a privilege to live here as the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty? Ought we not to be thankful for our creation, and for the many blessings which surround us? And shall we render to God a scanty gratitude, like the poor wretch in prison, whose life is robbed of every charm, and who thanks his gaoler for thrusting through the grating the crust of bread and the jug of water which are to prolong his miserable life? Shall we sigh, and whimper, and complain that life is a burden, a wretched

existence? Shall we be for ever vexing ourselves with the thought that the world we live in is a bad world? Or shall we not rather rise up and work for God, thankful for what He has done, and believing He will yet do far more for us?

Oh, is there not much that may be turned to good in the world, if we will but try? Is there not much that is very beautiful on every side of us--the bright sun, the green fields, the blue sky, the fresh and balmy breeze, the delights of taste and smell? There is enjoyment in the world, if we will seek it rightly; and there is a great and blessed future before us, if we will take our share in securing it. Let us believe that "Light is sown for the righteous, and joyful gladness for such as are true of heart." Let us stand strong on our feet, full of thankfulness, full of hope, full of trust.\*

\* Many of these ideas are suggested by one of the Rev. Phillips Brooks' sermons.

I have now two cautions to offer you. One is, do not attempt what certainly cannot be accomplished ; to make room in your hearts for the love of the world and also the love of God. They cannot exist together. Many are continually trying it ; but what is the consequence ? If we could look into their hearts, we should find the religious life flagging, its beauty and its force paling away, and its warmth chilled, as it passes through the cold atmosphere of the world, having lost all its power.

My other caution is not to deem it necessary to go out of the world for safety. There is no need to hide ourselves in some nook and corner to escape its dangers. We are to do as much good as we can whilst we are here ; to put our talents to the very best account, and to show plainly that, although *in* the world, we are not *of* the world ; but that we have our eyes and our hearts fixed on a better country even a heavenly.

And now for a word of encouragement. I have asked you to give up the world, so far as making it your portion. This perhaps will need no small effort, and no trifling sacrifice; but then more than an equivalent is offered you. And surely, since the heart is capable of loving God Himself, it is sad, very sad, to see it wasting itself on a cold, narrow, and unsatisfying world. But when I tell you not to love the world, I also tell you of something better which you *may* love. I do not wish to drive the world out of your heart, and then leave it empty. It must love something. It has been well said,\* You cannot give a pent-up stream its choice of drying up or flowing on. It must, after a while, rush on either in a right or a wrong channel. Direct it rightly, and it will flow joyously through the meadows, fructifying them in its onward course. But

\* Sermon by the Rev. F. Robertson.

attempt to block up its passage, and it will soon force its way, a thing of madness and of ruin. Stop it you cannot ; it must flow on in one direction or another.

So is it with the heart. Let it not take its own course, unfettered and free; for then we shall have the riot of worldliness. But let us ask God to bring us under the gentle bondage of His grace. Let us ask Him to drive out the world, and fill the empty void with His own presence. This will satisfy all our craving. To love God—to have our hearts filled with His love—this is our highest happiness. Then shall we have no need to go here and there with our broken cisterns ; but there will be within us “a well of water springing up unto everlasting life.”

## CHAPTER XII.

## MY FATHER'S DWELLING-PLACE.

WHERE is God's dwelling-place? He is a Spirit, and His Almighty presence pervades the whole universe. "Do I not fill heaven and earth, saith the Lord?" "Thou art about my path and about my bed, and spiest out all my ways." In one sense then He is everywhere.

But there are Three places where God specially dwells, and where He is pleased to manifest His presence in a more marked way.

1. God is in *Heaven*. There He holds, as it were, His court. Heaven is His throne. He is spoken of as being there, surrounded by holy angels and by the spirits of just men made perfect. We know but little of heaven, neither what it is, nor where it is. But we are naturally impressed with the idea that God is there, and that it is a high and holy place where sin can

never enter. That heaven is above is an idea inborn with all of us. When we pray, and when we think of God, we naturally raise our eyes and our thoughts thither. And holy Scripture endorses this feeling. When Elijah was taken to be with God, he is said to have "*gone up*." And so was it with our Lord. He is described as being "*carried up* into heaven." Of St. Stephen, too, it is said that in his dying moments "*he looked up* into heaven."

2. There is a sense also in which *the Heart of man*, when renewed by grace, is spoken of as God's abode. "I dwell," He says, "in the high and holy place ; with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit." And Jesus says, "If a man love me, he will keep my words ; and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." And again, He says to His disciples, "Lo, I am with you alway."

And is it not an unspeakable comfort to know that God is ready to fill our hearts with His indwelling presence, and that the Saviour says, “If any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him?” Oh that we may open our hearts, and give Him a welcome! And when there, may we be very careful lest, by the indulgence of some sin, or by carelessness of life, we drive out this most blessed Visitor! We should take care that we truly belong to that great spiritual Building, of which Jesus Christ is the chief corner-stone; and that we are, each of us individually, “an holy temple in the Lord, in whom we also are builded together for *an habitation of God through the Spirit.*”

But there is a Third place in which God is pleased to dwell—namely, in those *Sanctuaries* specially set apart for His service, and consecrated by prayer. There, as in Zion of old, where His temple was, and where He recorded

His name, He delights to dwell. There the Saviour, according to His promise, is in the very midst of His people. There is our Father's audience-chamber, where the supplications of His people are specially welcome. There He meets us, and stretches out the sceptre of His grace towards us.

It is true that God's presence is not restricted to any earthly spot ; for we may well ask with Solomon of old, " Will God indeed dwell on the earth ? Behold, the heaven, and heaven of heavens, cannot contain Thee ; how much less this house that I have builded." It is true that our gracious Father has a welcome for His children *whenever and wherever* they approach Him :

"Where'er Thy people meet,  
There they behold Thy mercy-seat ;  
Where'er they seek Thee Thou art found,  
And every place is hallowed ground."

Whether they draw near to Him in private or

in public, whether they “enter into their closets and shut the door,” or seek Him with their brethren in His house, His ears are alike open to their petitions. His throne of grace is always accessible. As suppliants, we are always welcome. But let us ever bear in mind that His house is, in an especial sense, “a house of prayer,” and within it His presence is enjoyed in a more marked degree than elsewhere.

And if we can realise God’s presence in these His earthly courts, if we believe Him to be really there in the midst of us, imparting His grace to us and feeding us in His ordinances, then we shall form some idea of those far richer blessings which we are to enjoy hereafter, when He will dwell with us, and we with Him in “the many mansions of His house” above.

Oh that David’s feelings and the happy ex-

perience of his heart may be ours : “ I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord ! ” May we find comfort and refreshment there ; and may our hearts more than ever long to be with God Himself, to enjoy His actual presence, to worship Him in His heavenly temple, and to dwell in His house for ever !

Our worship on earth should be to us a fore-taste of our higher worship in heaven. And the more spiritual it now is, the better will it serve as a preparation for that which is to come. In heaven however we shall have no more need of ordinances. The channels will be cut away, and we shall drink of the river itself. “ The Lamb which is in the midst of the throne will Himself feed us, and God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes.”

## CHAPTER XIII.

## MY FATHER'S IMAGE.

AT the Creation of mankind God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” “So God created man in his own image ; in the image of God created he him.” This, I take it, means that man, when he came out of the Creator’s hands, was a pure and holy being ; and so far like his Maker, though in other respects utterly unlike Him. Sin however marred and defaced this glorious image ; and man became a fallen creature, like a beautiful piece of workmanship broken and spoilt.

But God in His love devised a remedy. Jesus, “the second Adam,” appeared, Himself the very counterpart of God, “the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person,” “Immanuel, God with us” ; so entirely one with God that He could say, “He that

hath seen me hath seen the Father." Thus was God's image restored. During His stay among us He lived a pattern life, being "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners."

And not only did Jesus display a holy life Himself, "leaving us an example that we should follow his steps;" but more than this, He provided for us the means whereby we might become holy also, washing out our uncleanness by His own precious blood, and bestowing upon us His Holy Spirit that we might become new and holy beings. He "redeemed us from all iniquity, and purified unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works."

Such are the means provided, by which we may regain the lost image of God. The believer in Christ becomes an entirely altered being, and "a new creature" or a new creation, in Christ. "Old things are passed away; all things are become new" to him. God not only calls

us unto holiness, but we may, and we ought to become holy ; and unless this is our character we shall never see God, or be with Him.

But in what does this restoration to God's image consist ?

It is not *a mere External Possession*. It cannot be put on as an outward cloak or vesture. It does not consist merely in an altered life. A person's outer walk may be upright, his speech may be blameless, his habits may be regular, and his tastes religious. But more than this, there must be a change in the inner man. He must have a holy *Heart*. His feelings, his affections, his desires, must be all in harmony with God ; for the two cannot walk together except they be agreed. Our minds too must not only be the receptacles of grace, as a warehouse in which goods are stored, but as a manufactory in which a great and good work is wrought out by the hand of God, and in which

we take our part also. A great work then must be carried on *within*, ere anyone can be said to have “put off the old man,” and to have “put on the new man,” ere Christ can be “formed in us,” and God can see His own image reflected in our souls. In short, the seat of this renovation must be *the heart*.

Neither again is the restoration of God’s image *an Instantaneous Work*. It is gradual and progressive, not the work of a day or of an hour : it is often the work of years. The old nature with its belongings must be cast out. Old habits must be overcome. Old sins must be put away till none remain. Old temptations to which we once yielded must one by one be resisted. The right hand must be cut off, and the right eye plucked out ; and this is no easy feat. The old mutilated image must be put away, and the new image must begin to take form in the soul. We must learn to know God, and to love Him ;

and this can only be done by drawing near to Him day by day. We must cultivate the friendship of Christ, by waiting upon Him in His ordinances—in private prayer, in public worship, in the closer intercourse of His own sacraments, in daily communion with Him; and thus realising His friendship and His love.

Most blessed is this process ! It is a beautiful sight to watch a Flower gradually expanding itself—first the leaves forming, then the little bud so full of promise, and last of all the flower opening itself to the warm rays of a summer sun. Or, how interesting to watch the rise and progress of a River—tracing it up to its source, from whence it filters into a tiny rill—by degrees enlarging itself and running gracefully along its course, fertilising and gladdening the soil as it flows along.

But still more interesting is it to watch the

growing influence of God's Holy Spirit in a renewed heart. There is no stagnation, no standing still. God's restored image becomes more and more apparent. His likeness is seen in the whole character.

In what then does this Restoration consist? It consists in our wills, our affections, and our desires—the whole inner man—becoming spiritual and God-like, in our being holy as He is holy.

But can this ever be? We may reach a high pitch here, but not the highest. We do see some Christians so chastened, so disciplined, so completely under the influence of God's grace, that His likeness shines forth in them with great clearness and beauty. But they themselves will be the very first to say, "Not as though we had already attained, neither were already perfect; but we follow after." Here, alas! there will always be a mixture of sin and

infirmity to spoil the symmetry of God's image, and to mar its beauty. It will never be complete here. And yet even in its beginnings how glorious, how lovely ! How blessed to be thus under the forming hand of God ! How happy His child, whom He is thus leading onward and upward, and making more and more like Himself !

Many a saint has walked this earth. There are many beautiful characters in the Bible, but none perfect save one. I know of none whose portrait is drawn at full length, of whom there is not some defect recorded. Jesus alone stands out from all the rest a perfect model, the sinless image of His Father. In this as well as in other respects He rises far above all others ; just as we have sometimes seen in one of our large Cathedral Cities the houses below immersed in a thick mist, and then as we look upwards some lofty Tower catches our eye, standing erect

far above the buildings beneath, clear and beautiful, with its pinnacle glittering with sunlit glory. So Christ is the one Being in whom we behold the perfect image of the Father—the one Being towering above the lower levels of life around Him.

Christ was perfect, but no other. We may serve God, we may love Him, we may live for Him here below. But there must needs be a constant effort and struggle against sin to the very last—watchfulness lest we fall—a constant coming short of the goal we aim at. The plant cannot reach perfection until removed to another clime.

We shall never, whilst on earth, come up to this sinless pattern ; but we shall hereafter. For then we shall have bid adieu to all that is evil, and shall be the inhabitants of a world, into which “there shall in no wise enter in anything that defileth ; neither whatsoever maketh an

abomination ; but they that are written in the Lamb's Book of Life."

Dear reader, may your endeavour and mine be to walk with God here, and then we shall live with Him hereafter. Let us cultivate His image now, and then we shall bear it for ever. Oh that we may be able to say, "Now are we the sons of God ; and it doth not yet appear what we shall be ; but we know that when he shall appear *we shall be like him*, for we shall see him as he is !" "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness ; I shall be satisfied when I awake *with thy likeness*."

## CHAPTER XIV.

## MY SAVIOUR'S FATHER.

THE filial relationship of the Son of God—this will be my last subject. There are many deep and mysterious questions connected with it ; but these I leave for the Theologian to discuss. My duty is to place it before you in its simplest and most practical light.

Jesus is spoken of in the New Testament both as the Son of Man and the Son of God. He was both. One as regards the human side of His nature ; the other as to His divine. He was a perfect Man, the pattern Man, the son of Mary, flesh of our flesh, and like unto us in all things, sin only excepted. But He was also “the Son of God,” one with the Father. This expression shows His divine nature. Thus when He wrought miracles, and by other acts showed Himself to be more than man, it was said of Him, “Truly

this was the Son of God" (Matt. xiv. 33; xxvii. 54). And this was especially manifest by His rising from the grave; for death had no dominion over Him, and by that fact He was "declared to be the Son of God with power." You remember too the gracious message which, on the very day of His resurrection, He sent by Mary to His disciples: "Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father. But go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God."

Never forget then that Jesus is the Son of God, and that He, in great condescension, declares *His* Father to be also *ours*. How exceeding great is our privilege! for not only is God the Father of mankind, but He is in a far higher sense our Father in Christ. He regards us as His own for Jesus' sake, and accepts us in the Beloved. He gives us all things richly to enjoy,

as being purchased for us by His dear Son, who has also prepared for us a place in the many mansions of His Father's house.

It is most important to get a clear view of the *Divine* nature of Christ. This will greatly help you in your approach to Him as the all-sufficient sacrifice for your sins, for without it that sacrifice would be unavailing. In this consists the infinite value of His atonement. He is God, and can therefore pardon, and His blood cleanseth from all sin.

This will also give efficacy to your Prayers. What are they, even the best of them, in themselves? They are worthless ; but when offered through the intercession of Christ they come to Him with acceptance, for Him the Father heareth alway.

And yet we must not lose sight of His *Human* nature ; for this is an assurance to us that He knows our infirmities and bears with

them, and that He feels for us, having experienced many of our wants Himself. "Seeing then that we have a great High Priest that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities ; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

What a Son was Christ ! How anxious was He to carry out His Father's purpose! "Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered." How eager was He to accomplish the work allotted to Him ! At the close of His earthly career, He lifted up His eyes and said, "I have glorified thee on the earth; I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now, O

Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was." How willing to drink the cup of suffering, though He felt its bitterness! "Father," He said, "let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt;" and again, "The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?"

Oh for more of this filial obedience, this cheerful acquiescence in the will of God, this readiness to suffer when called upon to do so! Let our Lord's bright example be ever before us. Let us run our appointed race, "looking unto Jesus, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of God."

And now, before this Little Book closes, breathe out to God the prayer that you may know Him as your Father, that you may know Him by the direct teaching of the Holy Spirit, that you may

realise your acceptance in Christ, that you may enjoy the comfort and freedom of His children, and that you may daily be getting nearer to that Home where God will be your portion for ever.

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