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THE  
DEW OF ISRAEL  
AND  
THE LILY OF GOD,  
OR A  
GLIMPSE OF THE KINGDOM OF GRACE.

BY  
D R. F. W. KRUMMACHER,  
AUTHOR OF "ELIJAH THE TISHBITE, ELISHA, &c."

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## THE DEW OF ISRAEL, AND THE LILY OF GOD.

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HOSEA xiv. 5.

I will be as the dew unto Israel : he shall grow as the lily.

The Lord's voice crieth to his people, "Return, return, O Israel ;" and the promises added to encourage them to return are most sweet and beautiful : "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely : for mine anger is turned away from him. I will be as the dew unto Israel : he shall grow as the lily." At this last promise we pause : we are invited to inquire into its import, and to consider—

**I. CHRIST, AS SET FORTH BY THE DEW UNTO ISRAEL.**

**II. HIS BRIDE, THE CHURCH, WITH EVERY PARTICULAR MEMBER OF IT, AS THE BLOOMING LILY.**

I. "I will be as the dew unto Israel." Jehovah himself as the dew ! How soft is this similitude, and how agreeable ! How exactly suited to improve and comfort the heart ! Is not one and another of us ejaculating to Him in secret,

"Be it so unto me, blessed Jesus, my Lord ; be it unto me according to this thy word ! Be thou as the dew of the morning unto me ; let thy own blessing rest upon me, as the soft and gentle rain."

The dew, that precious boon bestowed upon the natural world, is often referred to in the Scripture by way of similitude. Sometimes it represents great temporal benefits. Thus Isaac, prophetically blessing Esau's posterity, said, "Behold, thy dwelling shall be the fatness of the earth, and of the dew of heaven from above." At other times, spiritual blessings are compared to the dew. Thus in Deuteronomy, chap. xxxiii. 28, "Israel shall dwell in safety alone ; the fountain of Jacob shall be upon a land of corn and wine : also his heavens shall drop down dew." Again ; the sure word of prophecy, in its exuberant richness and refreshing power, is commended to us by the same similitude : "My doctrine shall drop as the rain : my speech shall distil as the dew." The dew is also an emblem of human grace or favour : "The king's favour," saith Solomon, "is as dew upon the grass." It is likewise an emblem of peace and unanimity : "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity ! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard, and went down to the skirts of his garments ; as the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon

the mountains of Zion ; for there Jehovah commanded the blessing, even life for evermore." The children of God themselves, the people who are born again, are called the dew ; because they are born from above ; born of God : because a beam of Divine light shines through them, and the image of the eternal Sun of Righteousness is reflected in them : because they are jewels of the earth's attire, like the drops of dew ; a graceful decoration and refreshment spread over the great field of human nature : also because the day will arrive, when, like the dew-drops, they shall be found a great multitude that no man can number : and, lastly, because, imperceptibly and mysteriously, they are begotten and brought forth as in the night, unnoticed and unobserved by the world. Thus it is written of Christ and his church in Psalm cx., "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning : thou hast the dew of thy youth." And again, in Micah, chap. v. 7, "The remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people as a dew from Jehovah." Very frequently also the Holy Spirit, with his manifold powers, gifts, and operations, is in Scripture compared to the dew ; for He is to the soul what the dew and the rain are to nature. "Awake," saith the prophet, "and sing, ye that dwell in dust : for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead," Isa. xxvi. 19.

And now, if the Lord, as here by the prophet Hosea, style HIMSELF the Dew, can we be either surprised at it, or mistake its meaning? He who sends the dew, is also himself the Dew: He being that Spirit, of whom the apostle speaks, "Now the Lord is that Spirit," 2 Cor. iii. 17; and again, "We all, as with unveiled face, beholding, as in a mirror, the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Lord the Spirit," ver. 18. When Christ enters into the soul, he enters by the Spirit; and when the Spirit is thus imparted to us, Christ is hereby glorified in us; and shows himself a living Saviour towards us and in us.

"I will be as the dew unto Israel." What Divine humility and condescension! For it cannot imply that he will become this for any benefit to himself: it is merely for the benefit of those dry pastures that need his refreshing. Verily, the King of kings and Lord of lords, He who hath all power in heaven and earth, having all things to be put under his feet, He it is who is now minded to be as the dew unto us; or like a reviving rain, poured out upon the parched wastes of revolted human nature. Think of this Divine condescension—this unutterable love!

He will be as the dew! This promise implies that there is a dry and withered field *somewhere*, upon which he will shed forth abundantly his fructifying influence; and this field are we, in so far as we are not yet partakers of his life.

We may search and look long enough for any verdure in the soul that is a stranger to Jesus, who alone is the Source from which it springs. Alas ! every thing therein is not only withered, but burnt up by the heat of temptation and sin. Oh ! how is that beautiful Eden, which God planted within us, become a wild, a desolation ! A fire has been kindled beneath it—a spirit of rebellion against God, and has consumed or withered every green thing. The soul of man is a wilderness—a barren heath—the place of dragons and vipers—the seat of unholy imaginations and fleshly lusts. Search and seek in it for the noble plant of love to God ; lo, it has all withered and died away. Look in it for any bud of child-like confidence, heartfelt devotion, or secret delight in prayer. Trace in it, if you can, the grace of true humility, that sweet lily of the valley. Inquire in it for the herb patience, if there be a flower of it left. Look for the twining evergreen of communion with God, whether a blossom of it appears : in a word, whether the soul of man retains any strength, or disposition, or desire to do the will of our Father which is in heaven ; whether there be any heavenly mindedness, or any affection for things above. Ah ! how is there nothing of all this to be found in it ! What a dry desert ! In the most awful sense does that saying of the prophet apply to us, “Thou daughter that dost inhabit Dibon, come down from thy glory, and sit in thirst,” Jer.

xlviii. 18. Our strength is dried up ; it is become as the drought of summer. There is neither verdure nor life in us ; nor does our fallen nature of itself possess any power to restore us. Our best efforts to this purpose are no better than water spilt upon the burning sands, unless accompanied with the marvellous dew of Divine grace. Though we make ever so many good resolutions, or hear ever so many sermons and instructions ; though we read ever so deeply in the Scriptures, or outwardly join in the prayers and praises of the church ; though we retire into monastic seclusion, or frequent the company of the pious ; still nothing to the purpose is effected, nor is any spiritual life brought forth, till the Lord himself be really resorted to. For the life of the soul is revived only by his Spirit. Without this Divine vouchsafement, which we must seek, if we would receive it, our human devices, with even the means of grace themselves, prove as inefficient as the dew or rain upon the stones of the street, whose nature still remains unchanged. But the Lord can, out of these stones, form a people for himself, and raise up children unto Abraham. He can make the desert to rejoice and blossom as the rose.

"I," saith the Lord, even I, "*will be as the dew unto Israel.*" How precious are the tidings, that HE HIMSELF will be this dew ! But as the dew falls in the sultry nights of summer, when the fields thirst and languish, so does the dew of

God descend only upon thirsting and fainting souls. In the scenery of nature, on an early summer morning, where do you find the dew most abundant ? You behold it glistening in the lowly valleys, and spreading like a sea of pearls over the surface of the level meads ; but if you ascend the lofty peaks and eminences, there you find no dew : so he who would experience Christ as the Dew of heaven to his soul, let him be as the lowly valley, or the level mead ; let his prayers arise to God, with those of David, "*out of the depths !*" The Lord is high, but he hath respect unto the lowly, Psalm cxxxviii. 6. "With this man will I dwell, saith the Lord, even with him that is poor and of a contrite spirit," Isaiah lvii. 15 ; lxvi. 2. The hearts of those to whom he is pleased to communicate himself as a reviving dew, are first rendered meet for its reception. Every mountain and hill must be *brought low*. The stable and the manger, where the Divine Saviour once humbly reposed, may serve to remind us of the lowliness of heart in which we are to await the Lord's visitation. How excellently did our Divine Restorer show his skill in bringing down every rising imagination that was indulged by the woman of Samaria ! "Thou hast had five husbands," said he, "and he whom thou now hast is not thine husband." Then did her sin come home to her, and her self-confidence departed. She became little in her own eyes, and could no longer see any thing good in her-

self. She was glad to look for a deliverer in the Messiah ; and now was the time for him to declare to her, "I that speak unto thee am He." With this word did Jesus communicate himself to the soul of that poor sinner ; he thus came upon that soul as the dew of heaven, so that it began to revive and flourish. Life and vigour were now experienced in her heart and mind, and animated her words and actions, her conduct and conversation. Thus was she made a plant of renown, to the praise of the glory of His grace. A process of this same kind is still observed in the conversion of sinners. The dew of God is poured out from on high ; he rends the heavens, and comes down ; and wherever he finds the lowly valleys of humiliation—empty, poor, and needy souls—there is the place of his rest ; there he diffuses the dew of his blessing ; there he communicates *himself* as the inheritance and portion of his people ; replenishing the hungry soul with good, but leaving the rich to their own spiritual emptiness.

As the dew falls from heaven in the stillness of the night, when no rushing tempest is heard, no flash of lightning is seen ; nevertheless in the morning it hangs upon the leaves, and we wonder whence it came, and "who hath begotten" it ; so is the way of Christ. The manner and way of his coming to the soul is a mystery hidden in night ; and who can unveil it ? His coming is also generally in stillness, and without noise ; not

with the alarm of the trumpet, or the pomp of power ; not with visions, or marvellous natural phenomena ; nor with voices from heaven, and visible angelic array. Before the sorrowing, sighing, and waiting sinner is aware, lo ! He is nigh unto the ship that is tossed with the waves, and saith, " It is I ; be not afraid !" No " man in bright clothing " stands before the suppliant in his chamber, nor has any audible voice entered in at the windows ; he has seen no heavenly messenger, nor any external radiance, such as the shepherds saw in the fields of Bethlehem ; nevertheless in his inward man it is declared, " I bring thee good tidings of great joy ; for unto thee is born this day a Saviour :" to the spirit of the sinner has a testimony been borne ; and this is the testimony, that God hath " given unto him eternal life, and this life is in his Son." He is assured, in his own heart, that he has free admission to that fountain which is opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem ; he is become convinced that Christ is his Saviour. The dew has fallen in the stillness of night ; but how, and in what way, no man knoweth. Yet the sinner feels that it is with him ; and we may observe it accompanying all his words and looks, his whole conduct and disposition.

The dew of the field has moreover a bright lustre within it, for it has communion with the light of heaven. The same may be said of Christ communicated to us in the dew of his grace.

When once he has thus come in unto us, all is bright and pellucid in the depths of our disordered nature ; and the more we thus receive out of his fulness, the more are the depths of our misery presented to our view, and the more thoroughly do we see our own nothingness, and our own helplessness. Hence it is that believers so often exclaim, " Lord ! what am I ? My spiritual state is becoming worse and worse." But, blessed be God, that, like as the natural dew covers entirely that whereon it falls, so does Christ cover all our misery with his own self ; yes, with his own righteousness ; the lustre of which contains far more various and lovely hues than the tapestry and curtains of Solomon. He covers us entirely therewith ; he so enfolds and veils us in it, that Divine justice itself no more discerns in us " spot, or, wrinkle, or any such thing." " There is no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus."

Again ; how fructifying is this dew ! What a life does Christ thus impart to the soul ! He makes that which was dead to live. He is the Builder of the waste places, and makes the parched ground verdant and blooming. What a change does even the natural dew effect on the face of nature, when, after many sultry summer hours, its pearly blessings are dropped upon the fields from the bosom of the blushing morn ! Vegetation no longer appears withered and dry ; the grasses and the flowers again erect

their heads ; all nature is re-adorned with a new and vernal robe ; and the scent of life is again wafted upon the gale. But greater still and more glorious is the change, which the Spirit of Christ, poured out upon a single soul, or, as in the case of Cornelius, upon a whole household, is known to produce. And until this is done, how lamentable, desolate, and void, does all appear in individuals and families ! What a poor, insipid life do they lead ! The world absorbs all that they have—their minds, their affections, their understanding. Their thoughts flit only, as it were, around the flesh-pots and furnaces of Egypt ; their desires and their hopes grovel on the ground, and feed upon the earth. Their lips are opened merely about bodily gratifications, worldly business, and the things of time. Their whole life and being, with its incitements, exertions, and entire conduct, its joys and its sorrows, its hopes and its fears, all proceed in the same worldly track, and the whole man is laden more and more with its thick clay : every care is low, and more or less selfish and ignoble, without God, without light, without heavenly-mindedness, and full of sin. The angels of God cannot endure such a sight. But lo ! salvation comes to this house ; the reviving dew descends upon this dreary wild. Now come and behold what a change is produced ! The glory of the Lord filléth the house. How holy is the place become ! The self-seeking spirit of the world is expelled, and replaced

by the “quiet spirit” of humility and love. The conversation is in heaven; the worry of earthly excitement is cast off; the thoughts, wishes, and desires, find wings for higher aims. The treasure is discovered to be elsewhere, and therefore the heart is there also. Other bread and other water are now known of, and therefore another kind of thirst and hunger is experienced. Other objects have engaged the interest, and therefore the language and conversation have assumed another tone. They have become savoury and spiritual ; and after a spiritual and godly manner is all their business transacted. The very chambers of the house are perfumed with the sweet incense of prayer, praise, and thanksgiving, ascending day and night before the Lord. Heretofore, all was without form and void, and darkness upon the face of the deep ; but now is the light sprung up within it, and the wilderness blooms in beauty. This is the Lord’s doing, who hath said, “I will be as the dew unto Israel.”

Oh that we had every one experienced Him as the dew to our souls ! But, brethren—observe and mark it well—the very dew, precious as it is, can even occasion rottenness to the fields. ‘This is the case when it meets with too cold an atmosphere ; then it stiffens into rime, and destroys vegetation. Even so, Christ, the precious Dew of God, has proved to many a soul. Witness that awful and striking instance of it, in

Judas Iscariot. Covetousness and stubbornness were in him. What then could his spirit breathe to Christ, but wintry air? Hence that dew descending upon him, became to his soul as the cold rime, or stiffening ice. Every thing which Jesus did by word and example, or with allurements and warnings, to effect an entrance into the spirit of that false disciple, produced effects the very opposite to those of the genial dew ; served only to embitter his spirit, and to harden his heart more and more ; to mature his corruption, to ripen him for perdition, and to hasten his condemnation. Yet who was to blame, but Judas? May God preserve every one of us from a similar judgment, and forbid, that the precious dew of heaven, which alone can revive us to eternal life, should become as a chilling hoar-frost, and fetters of ice to our souls, through the infidel coldness and adverse breath of some besetting sin !

And how should we praise and bless God, whoever of us has experienced and still experiences the enlivening, refreshing, fructifying power of this divine dew ! But what if you experience it not at every moment ; or are not able fully to realize its sweet refreshment for days, or even for weeks together ? This must not set you wrong, or confound you. He who is the Dew of God, oftentimes withdraws himself for a while from his field, the soul. Then will droop the plants of faith and love,

of confidence and joy ; then is there no life for prayer, praise, and thanksgiving ; but all is dryness and wretchedness. Still, wait upon the Lord ; for he intends you should only the more experience how much depends on that Divine dew ; and how necessary it is for working and effecting every thing. When the hour for its return is arrived, then will it surely come, and cause you again feelingly to rejoice in its beneficial efficacy. And oh, what a rejoicing is it, when after a tedious sultry season of drought, the precious dew and gracious rain again descend ! It is then we learn duly to value such an inestimable blessing, and more fully to enter into the meaning of that promise of the Lord, “I will be as the dew unto Israel.”

II. As Christ represents himself in the text, under the figure of the dew, so he compares his bride the church, and herein every believing soul, to the beautiful lily : “I will be as the dew unto Israel,” so that “he shall grow as the lily.”\*

This similitude, also, is of great significance and importance. The inhabitants of Palestine probably knew of no flower more truly sweet and lovely, than the noble lily. As the nightin-

\* In the Lutheran version, the word “lily” is “rose :” the translator has, however, preferred the English rendering as most correct, and has accordingly followed it throughout this sermon.

gale among the songsters of the grove, so was to them the lily among flowers, eloquent in showing forth the praises of its Creator. Without either living voice or sound, without the rustle of the palm trees in the valley of Rephaim, or the roar of the cedars on Mount Lebanon, it seems as if created simply to bespeak the glory of Him who formed it. So Israel, "the seed" of him that "shall prolong his days," Is. liii. 10, is formed and planted in the great wilderness of mankind, to show forth the virtues of his Maker, 1 Pet. ii. 9, who hath redeemed Jacob, Is. xliv. 23, and is beautifully glorious in Israel. Likewise, St. Paul speaks of real Christians as "fore-ordained to the praise of the glory of his grace," Eph. i. 5, 6, and as "God's workmanship;" as being from the root to the crown, conformed to the lovely image of his Son. His light is declared to shine in them; and his Spirit to be breathed by them. Whatever is bright and beautiful in them, is spoken of as God's; and only what is dark, as their own. The Urim and Thummim, the *light* and *integrity*, which they bear in their bosom, shining like a breast-plate, the Lord hath "put" them there. Consequently their song is, "Not unto us, Lord, not unto us, but to thy name give glory, for thy loving mercy and thy truth's sake," Ps. cxv. 1. The power of his loving mercy and grace is, to his praise, made visible in those who are born again. "We have," says Paul, "this treasure

in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us," 2 Cor. iv. 7.

Well may we adore God's condescending choice, when we consider who those are whom he thus tenderly rears. They are a poor and afflicted people ; a number of broken-hearted penitents, who can discover nothing good in themselves. They are a distressed and embarrassed multitude, like that which David gathered about him at the cave of Adullam, 1 Sam. xxii. 2 ; they have nothing originally their own, except the defilement of sin. Weak and faint-hearted by nature, they, of themselves, would not have dared to attempt any thing worthy of God. He found them lame, blind, maimed, and reduced to beggary ; ready to lay down at the threshold of his house, and glad to live upon the crumbs that fall from his table. Such is their character. "Ye see your calling, brethren," saith the apostle, "how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called ; but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world, to confound the wise ; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world, to confound the things which are mighty ; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen ; yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are ; that no flesh should glory in his presence," 1 Cor. i. 26. Thus those who are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their

own sight, or who pride themselves upon being influential, mighty, or renowned in this world, are passed by, or are trodden under foot as rank and noxious weeds. Far rather will He accept a truly contrite David, though he had been an adulterer and murderer ; a Lazarus full of sores ; a conscience-smitten publican, standing afar off, ashamed to lift up his eyes unto heaven, and crying, "God be merciful unto me a sinner;" or a repenting malefactor in ignominy. Such will he form into his lilies. Amazing grace ! Of grace, and grace alone, doth the zeal of the Lord of hosts perform this. Not an atom of merit is there in the penitence, humiliation, or sincere contrition, which such persons exhibit. They are constituted lilies because they are found in Christ alone, clothed with his righteousness, and made the righteousness of God in him. "He hath made us accepted in the Beloved," Eph. i. 6.

The lily is often found growing among thorns. Accordingly we find the bridegroom exclaiming in the Song of Songs, (ii. 2,) "As the lily among thorns, so is my beloved among the daughters." And what do such thorns represent, but the many temporal and spiritual troubles, with which the chosen of God are incessantly encompassed here on earth ? But thus it must be ; for such thorns are as a fence and a check round about us ; as a check, to keep us humble and dependent on the Lord alone ; and as a fence, to

ward off many a temptation to pride and levity. Lazarus, without his sores, would not have bloomed so beautifully as he did in spirit before the Lord; and Paul, without his thorn in the flesh, would have been exalted above measure. The church of old shone brightest, when in the midst of her tribulations; then was her whole beauty developed.

Observe, and lastly, by what means the lily thrives and flourishes. It toils not, neither does it spin; but passively waves in the sunshine, and opens its cup to the morning dew. Thus it breathes its fragrance; thus it blooms so sweetly, and is arrayed more beautifully than Solomon was in all his glory. Consider then the lily *how* it grows; for *we* cannot grow better than by the process which it observes. As it passively waves in the sunshine of God, and opens its cup to the day-spring dew, so let us learn to glory only in that "life" which is "the light of men," namely, in Christ who is our Life; and to expand our thoughts and affections every morning, to the influence of his Spirit. Let us ever remember, that nothing is effected by the self-confidence or self-dependence of him that willeth, or of him that runneth. Oh, it is a fearful presage, when we begin to lean to our own wisdom, or our own worth, or our own strength; and think, by devices of our own, to keep up our spiritual health; to form a spiritual dew for ourselves; to make to ourselves a holiness and a glory. This is no other than the

way to spiritual death. Our life consists in abiding in the Light of Israel, in communion with Him who is the Root of David, and the Bright and Morning Star. Happy indeed are those, who know of no consolation but in Christ their Surety ; no nourishing spring but the Fountain of salvation opened to the house of David, from which they daily and hourly receive and draw. Happy those who have no other care than to live beneath the wings of the Sun of Righteousness, that they may be constantly advancing to perfect, spiritual health. Happy those, whose eyes are ever looking to the great Shepherd and Bishop of souls, to receive immediately from his hand, and to be satisfied with his good pleasure. Nothing really good for them will He withhold. "Bread shall be given them ; their waters shall be sure." Wilt thou then thrive, O Israel, and bloom as the lily ? Let a sense of thy need keep thy heart ever thus open to Christ, with thy mind always humble, and prayerfully teachable to his Spirit. Thus shalt thou be as the summer lily, lovely, fresh, and fragrant ; and in the midst of thy leaves—thy words and actions, thy prayers and praises—will be seen sparkling and glistening, the pure blessings of that eternal dew which has nurtured thee.

May then the Spirit of the Lord Jesus come upon each of us as the dew ! On all who have been hitherto but as dry and withered grass, good

for nothing but to be cast into the fire and burned ; may He do marvels, even as upon the rod of Aaron, which was sapless and dead, but, in a single night, by the mighty power of the Lord, became verdant, bloomed blossoms, and yielded almonds ! May He transform this our whole church into a very field of lilies ! That whenever he shall visit us, to call a soul into eternity, it may be said of him in heaven, as in the Song of Songs, (vi. 2.) " My Beloved is gone down into his garden—to gather lilies." Meanwhile, may His church upon earth, with all its members, expand and bloom to the utmost ! Amen.

## ISSACHAR; OR, COUCHING BETWEEN THE BORDERS.

---

GENESIS xl ix. 14, 15.

Issachar is a bony ass, couching down between the borders :\* and he saw rest, that is was good ; and the land, that it was pleasant ; so he bowed his shoulder to bear, and became a servant unto tribute.

THE blessing which Jacob uttered, at his death, from which the words of the text are taken, contains wonderful things in several of its mysterious announcements. Primarily it refers, of course, to the future temporal condition of the twelve tribes. But if we apply the description

\* The authorised English version has it “between two burdens.” The word בָּנְבָנִים, thus translated, occurs only once more in the Hebrew Scriptures, namely in the song of Deborah, Judges v. 16, “Why abodest thou among the sheepfolds,” &c., where it may equally be rendered, “between the borders;” namely those of Moab and Canaan, between which the tribe of Reuben, there addressed, was situated. The word in the Lutheran version is “borders,” in Gen. xl ix., and “folds” or “pens” (for sheep,) in Judges v. It appears to be derived from בָּנַן, to put or set in order, to dispose, ordain, or arrange. Hence Parkhurst renders בָּנְבָנִים, the regular divisions (in a stall or stable;) that is, the bars or boards which divide it into distinct standings, Genesis xl ix. 14, also sheepfolds, or pens for sheep, Judges v. 16.—TRANSLATOR.

to teach us spiritual lessons, we may obtain many important hints of instruction. For, if we consider nothing more than Issachar after the flesh, we shall have done with the text almost immediately upon noticing it as a prediction that Issachar should become a tribe of laborious husbandmen. But there is a spiritual Issachar, a borderer between good and evil; and would to God that his tents were no where to be found in our Church. With this Issachar, or in other words, the wavering and undecided, for the description of whose character we find appropriate words in the text, let us now endeavour to become better acquainted. We shall notice,

- I. WHERE HE COUCHES DOWN.
- II. HOW HE CAME INTO THIS SITUATION.
- III. THE TOILS AND DANGERS HE FINDS IN IT.

I. Issachar has here a strange and unprepossessing appellation, that of "a bony ass." Judah is more agreeably styled a young lion; Naphtali, a fleet hind let loose; Joseph, a fruitful bough by a well; or, an olive tree by a fountain, whose branches spread over the wall; Jonathan, the friend of David, is compared by him to an eagle; the Shulamite is compared, by the inspired writer of the Song of Songs, to a dove; and Israel is compared to a lily. All these names have a pleasanter sound; but that of a "bony ass" so lowers our idea of the person intended, that we

are not apt to desire a more particular acquaintance with him. But who shall say how many amongst ourselves may not be thus unflatteringly designated in various parts of the book of God? We shall see why to the spiritual Issachar this name may be given, when we have learnt the characteristics which belong to him.

Where do we find him? It is between the borders. He is couched down between the borders. Now, if we give a spiritual application to these words, we may take them as describing an evil and unhappy condition. How awfully does the Lord rebuke those whose hearts are halting in indecision—who are neither cold nor hot! To each of such lukewarm ones he declares, “I will spue thee out of my mouth.” He would that they were either one thing or the other; either cold or hot. Indecision is to Him an abomination. Observe how he speaks of those who neither declare themselves for him, nor for the world; who neither openly renounce him, nor stand forth decidedly for him; but waver between two parties—that of his friends and that of the enemies of his cross. All such he positively denounces as his enemies, and at length will treat them as such. “He that is not with me, is against me; and he that gathereth not with me, scattereth.” Suppose he were now visibly to come amongst our churches, to mark how many thousands of those would be regarded as his messengers, have couched or settled down between the borders of

his pure gospel, and those of a self-invented human wisdom, far estranged from God; what would he say? Can we not anticipate the very sentence from his lips, "I would that ye were cold or hot; whereas now ye are neither the one nor the other!" Far better were it that they were declared infiels at once, (for then the simple flock might be aware of them,) than such pernicious middle men, halting between two opinions.

Where, then, is it that the spiritual borderer couches down, and between what borders has he pitched his tent? Strictly speaking, he is not one of those who are neither for nor against religion, neither Christian nor heathen. He is professedly *for* that which is right. He appears, indeed, to many, to have pitched his tent *within* the kingdom of God, and yet he is in a very deplorable situation. He has settled down, as it were, between Canaan and Egypt. He cannot exactly be classed with the people of the world; but still less can he be numbered with the children of God. He cannot properly be placed in the same rank with the crooked and perverse generation; but still less can he be accounted one of the chosen generation and royal priesthood. He is couched down between the borders of the kingdom of grace and the kingdom of Belial. In this unhappy middle situation he can never sit down with the subjects of the former; but he will per-

ish and be consumed with the subjects of the latter.

Let us now examine his state more particularly, that we may fully understand it, both externally and spiritually. His exterior appearance in his life and conversation speaks fairly, and very much prepossesses us in his favour. Did you expect to find him in the counsel of the ungodly, in the way of sinners, or in the seat of the scornful ? Any thing but this :—to suppose such a thing of him would be to do him great injustice. He has escaped far away from such regions of Sodom, and separated himself from communion with its inhabitants. He no longer burns incense on the high places or in the groves : the assemblies of those who drink iniquity like water, are to him an abomination and despicable. You will never find him in the chambers of wantonness, nor in the resorts of riot ; never where the worldling, infatuated and blind, gives the rein to debauchery, and dances to any measures which the god of this world may appoint. He is no partner with those who say, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die ;" neither with the swine does he wallow in the mire. Equally mistaken will you be, if you expect to find him associated with those self-called moralists, who are satisfied with regulating their outward conduct by the rules of civil order, but make no profession of religion. He is not one of those who express a disgust for what some are

pleased to call hypocrisy and preciseness ; persons who are satisfied with their self-imagined integrity, but neglect God's word, authority, and ordinances ; who dislike prayer and thanksgiving to God, as useless and antiquated ceremonies ; who deride or pity those that make a conscience of such things, which they would leave only to children and weak persons. No ; you must look for him among those who are quiet in the land ; who professedly make a conscience of worshiping God : you must expect to find him where the name of the Lord is preached and called upon ; where the banner of the cross is lifted high ; where confession is made that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father ; among those who teach and admonish one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, and lift up holy hands to heaven ; where men feed in the green pastures of the everlasting word, and drink in life and satisfaction from the living spring of the sure mercies of David. There shall you find him : there hath he his tent and habitation ; he dwelleth among the saints, and is to be met with in their assemblies.

But how is this ? Must he not then be a hypocrite ? This is too hard a thing to say of him. Hypocrites are another sort of people. But if he adhere to the true church, if he join himself to those children of God, with whom the world will have nothing to do, and if he do this with sincerity and without hypocrisy, what more, you

ask, is required of him? Ah! my brethren, very much more is required of him; every thing which essentially belongs to a state of grace. It is true, he lives in connexion with God's people, but only externally: not in spirit and in truth. He is no living member of that mystical body, of which Christ is the Head: though joined to it outwardly, he is not incorporated with it vitally. He is no fruitful branch of the true Vine; he thrives not by its sap and life. Though externally allied to it by some human and perishable contrivance, (as fruit tied upon a bough to please children,) he has not vitally grown upon it in the Spirit. It is true, if we look at his understanding, we see nothing of Egyptian darkness there. He is acquainted with the theory of the gospel, and shows that he has been under good instruction. He knows much of the Bible by heart; is conversant with devotional writings, and can relate much of persons awakened and born again. But all this is nothing more than an artificial repository, a mere human work, a stock of knowledge acquired by reading and hearing, and elaborated by thought and reflection. He has had it put into him, preached into him, inured into him. But it amounts, after all, to nothing better than an acquired habit, inasmuch as he is not enlightened by the Holy Spirit; he is not taught of God. Hence all the knowledge he has obtained is deposited in his mind like dead capital without interest; or, like food undigested, and

never converted to the purposes of life. His spikenard yields no fragrance.

If we look at his conduct we can point out nothing in it that, strictly speaking, contradicts his profession. His character is unblemished in the eyes of men ; he lives quiet and unobtrusive ; his habits are domestic ; he is an honourable man, and reputable ; he is industrious and orderly ; frequents only Christian society, and despises the gay follies of the world. But, after all, tell me, my brethren, is this the full extent of that life and conversation which God intends, when, speaking to Abraham, he says, "I am the Almighty God ; walk before me, and be thou perfect ?" Or is this what Isaiah means, when he exclaims, "O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the light of the Lord ?" Or, is it the meaning of the apostle, when he says, "Our conversation is in heaven ?" and again, "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit ?" Is there in the life of such an individual any fruit of the Spirit, or does it run along like a clear brook, flowing from the ground of the renewed heart ? Alas ! it is no such thing. It is partly the effect of good education and habit, or of frequenting good society : partly a presumptive and eclectic spirituality, an acquired goodness of his own ; a work which the Holy Spirit will never acknowledge as of *His* operation, because he verily hath borne no part in it.

Again ; if we look at such a person's religious

exercises, all appears very pleasing to the eye. But are those prayers which he daily offers up, are those praises in which he joins with the great congregation, or at home with his family, to be regarded as the incense which is first given of God, and then in grateful sacrifice returned to him ; having been kindled by the Holy Spirit himself, and presented to the Lord, in the censer of a broken and contrite heart ? Oh no ! he prays, because he has been taught that it is right to do so ; not because he cannot live without prayer. He prays ; but not the Spirit of Christ within him.

How pitiable then is his settled condition between the borders ! He is a nominal Christian without a birth into a new life ; he acknowledges the corruption of human nature without feeling his own ; he is conversant with spiritual things, but not truly enlightened in them ; he professes to believe in Jesus, but is insensible of his need of Him ; he numbers himself among the saints, without being one ; he knows how to talk of a life of grace, without having entered upon it ; he imagines his life and conversation to be quite Christian, and yet is in thought and disposition no better than a natural man. His heart and mind are unchanged. He has not “put off the old man with his deeds, and put on the new man, which, after the image of God, is created in righteousness and true holiness.” Creation of every kind is the work of God ; but such

a person's Christianity is a work of his own. The old man in his nature has put on the garb of piety ; and that is all. Such is his condition. He is gone out of the world in some sense ; but he is far from having really entered into the kingdom of grace. His exterior is Christian-like, and his manner of talking and acting is correct ; but he wants the life of God in his soul ; his heart is not renewed. He is "couch-ed down between the borders."

II. How did he come into this condition ? "He saw rest, that it was good ; and the land, that it was pleasant."

What he has become, is not by our heavenly Father drawing him, neither is it by the call of his grace in Christ, nor by the special operation of the Holy Spirit. He is become what he is by his own choice, by the suggestion of his own mind, and by an incitement of his own natural heart. Was it the sorrow for sin that occasioned him embracing the gospel ? Was it the dread of Sinai's reiterated thunder, or of the curses pronounced from Mount Ebal ? Was it any real longing for redemption, any anxious concern to obtain spiritual health and deliverance ? Nothing of the kind can be asserted respecting him ; for very different desires and interests moved him to become a professed Christian.

"He saw rest," or repose, "that it was good."

What rest or repose? Was it rest for his soul in Christ? Was it peace with God? Was it repose in the great Redeemer's merits? Was it a release from the burden and curse of sin? Was it deliverance from the servile drudgery of legal bondage? Oh no! quite another repose attracted him, and provoked his longing desire. "He saw the land that it was pleasant." What land? Was it that better country, namely, the heavenly? Was it that blissful and glorious region of light and love, in a superior state of being, unto which Jesus himself is the Way and the Door? Or, was it even that region of grace here on earth, wherein his people live by his dew and sunshine? Did his soul really desire this? Did he long after it? Nothing of the kind can be said of him. Very different inducements was he conscious of.

It is sometimes one thing, and sometimes another, which leads persons of this character into their dubious situation between the borders. Some are attracted by the harmony and mutual love which they find among those who are quiet in the land. Such an one has perhaps had painful experience of the falsehood and selfishness of the world. He has learnt, to his cost, that persons without religious principle always prove unworthy of confidence, and that the world abounds with strife and rancour. He has looked for friends among them, and been miserably disappointed. He, therefore, turns his attention

to the religious community. He observes how much real Christians appear to be of one heart and one soul ; how they are united in affection and fidelity, and serve one another as brethren of the same family. This just suits his own taste and convenience. He sees all this, that it is good ; and he resolves to join himself to the company of the godly.

Another has naturally a soft and yielding disposition. He is easily affected and influenced. He loves solemn sights and scenes, on account of the agreeable emotions which they excite within him. Hence he is charmed with the manner of life which he sees in the people of God ; with the animated devotion of their worship ; with the soothing and elevated strain of their singing and praying. He beholds the land that it is pleasant ; and from his own reflection and feeling he says in his heart, "It is good to be here :—let us build tabernacles."

Another has a natural inclination to thought and inquiry. This leads him to search the Scriptures, where he finds abundance for his mind to feed upon, and to exercise his quickness of understanding. With lively interest he gives himself to reading and research, and feels pleasure in his intercourse with those who revere the sacred volume, and make it the directory of their families and their lives. He becomes deeply interested in conversing with them upon Christian opinions and views ; he enjoys religious dis-

cussions and conversations. Thus, from his own choice he joins the people of God, without having admitted into his heart, the seed of the new birth from the word of life.

Another, from being naturally gifted with a keen perception of what is intellectually beautiful, is charmed with the sublimity of the inspired writings. The moving descriptions, the luminous imagery, the parabolic language, the lovely and touching scenes with which Scripture abounds, beget in him a kind of enthusiasm. But then he can read, with the same enthusiasm, the splendid productions of profane poets ; and it is evident that he joins Christian society as a mere matter of taste ; as he evinces no conversion to brokenness and contrition of heart. He has seen that, in the families of the pious, there is far more regularity-and union, than among people of the world. In the peace, the quietness, the mutual affection, and the constant cheerfulness which he notices as so peculiar to *them* : in a word, in the blessing of God which he thinks he sees attending them, and which he considers *must* be upon them, and upon all their concerns, he finds something very desirable, especially when he contrasts their families with his own. He beholds this repose, that it is good. He is weary of the incessant noise and wrangling of persons immediately about him. He determines to reform his own family, by introducing religion into it ; and he introduces it outwardly accordingly.

He adopts family reading, singing and prayer; he sees a check put upon the partings and petty discords which hitherto prevailed ; the house is quite reformed : yes, indeed the *house*, but not the *heart*. The image, the frame-work of religion is here, but the true spirit and life of it are wanting. The outward man has abandoned the world ; but the world has not abandoned the inward man. The dress is changed, but the person remains the same.

In such various ways men may be spiritually couching down between the borders. “ He saw rest, that it was good ; and the land, that it was pleasant.” Thus it may be no real longing for reconciliation with God, no hunger for Christ’s righteousness, no thirst for the graces of the Holy Spirit, which induces them to renounce the world, and to join the people of the Lord. The mere privileges and advantages belonging to the children of God in this life may have been all they have wished to share in ; and for the sake of these, they may, simply of their natural mind, have chosen to become quiet, retired, and attentive to religious services, with a will-worship and pains-taking of their own. They undertake to be Christians, as they would undertake the business of a trade, or the study and practice of an art or science ; and they easily learn to assume and decorate themselves with the exterior graces of Christianity. Only two things they appear to want ; and with these, they want every

thing which essentially constitutes a child of God ; first, a broken, contrite heart, wherein alone the Lord will condescend to dwell ; and secondly, the Spirit of Christ ; concerning whom it is written, “ If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.”

Having thus learnt what is this situation between the borders, and how he came into it, let us,

III. In the last place, briefly notice the spiritual toils and pains that necessarily attend this state, as also the fearful perils which surround it.

This toilsome and harrassing condition is depicted in the words, “ He bowed his shoulder to bear, and became a servant unto tribute.” Having bowed his shoulder to bear, he has a burden laid upon him, under which he sighs and groans ; and this burden is—not the burden of sin ! Would that he felt this, for his state would then soon begin to amend. But this burden is, alas ! his Christianity itself : that notional Christianity, to the drudgery of which his bwn wisdom has allied him. Our blessed Saviour has said indeed, “ My yoke is easy, and my burden is light ;” but the truth of this from personal experience, the self-enslaved borderer is at a loss to prove. Here then we are reminded of those words of the prophet Isaiah, “ And it shall come to pass in that day,” (namely in the days of the new covenant,) “ that his burden shall be taken

away from off thy shoulder, and his yoke from off thy neck, and the yoke shall be destroyed because of the anointing," Isa. x. 27. As the yoke upon the animal easily slips off, when its neck is well anointed with oil, so when we are anointed with the oil of grace and of the Holy Spirit, the spiritual burden begins to slip from off our shoulder, the law and service of God are no longer felt to be a galling and fretting yoke, but perfect freedom, delight, and joy. But Issachar being without this unction of the Holy One, his shoulder bows and sinks under its burden. He has not gone to the Lord Jesus with all his heart, as an empty vessel, broken open by repentance and a sense of want, to receive out of His fulness all needful grace and strength. Having converted *himself*, now he would become holy, and walk after the manner of Christians, at his own expense, and by his own endeavours. He would do as other Christians do, and he would rise in devotion as they ; but he does not consider that he wants wings for the purpose. He would sing as they, and he would pray as they, but he wants incitement, delight, and breath for it. In this unhappy state, he would fulfil the law of God, but has no filial motive for doing it ; no love, no cheerfulness, no strength. It is a *vassal* service, wherein he labours and pants ; he disquieteth himself in vain with his will-worship, his self-edifying, his own self-dependent devices for ho-

liness. His are pains without gains ; work without wages.

Having thus "bowed his shoulder to bear," he is "become a servant unto tribute." This expression is mournfully appropriate. For his prayers morning and evening, his formal ejaculations before and after meals, his singing and devotional exercises, what are they but so many payments of tribute, which, having to bring it daily and duly, he brings, not with the cheerful freedom of a child of God, but like a bond-slave, with constraint and weariness ! As he has never felt his need of the outpouring of the Spirit of grace and supplications, so he has never desired nor waited for it. Hence his religious exercises are forced, his holy services are extorted from him, by fear ; all is mere human performance, because he lives not in the true union of spirit with Him who is the life of the soul. The services of those who are born again, are yielded from the heart, and flow from it as freely as streams from the fountain ; but he is a well without water : how should any stream flow from thence ! Feeling bound, at the return of set times and seasons, to pay his scot of prayer and religion, he brings his tribute money, casts it down at the Divine footstool, and renders, as he thinks, unto God, the things which are God's. But the tribute money is stamped with a wrong impression ; it bears the image and superscription of "the first man," who "is of the earth,

earthy ;" not of "the Second Man," who is the "Lord from heaven ;" consequently it can never be deposited in God's treasury. Lo, such is he ! not a child in the family, but a poor, mean servant under tribute, who having nothing, yet is constrained to payment ; and, which is worse than all, pays in coin that is refused and thrown back at his feet as base and counterfeit. He is a burden-bearer, labouring under the self-imposed drudgery of his own will-worship, and wearing out his days and strength under the fretting yoke of legal bondage, as ignorant of the cheerfulness and freedom of spiritual life, as is any poor beast of burden.

And oh, by what a variety of dangers is his soul surrounded ! The very thought of these is sufficient to cause trembling of hands and sorrow of heart. For here is a person, who with all his miserable blindness, imagines himself actually within the kingdom of grace upon earth, and yet as truly belongs to "them that are without," as do the grossest sinners of the world. He has succeeded tolerably well in conforming his exterior habits to those of the children of God ; and thus he has fallen into the miserable error that he is really one of them. Moreover, he is often regarded and treated by them as one of themselves ; and this serves to confirm him in his infatuation, so that he couches down the more securely between the borders. Thus he most pitifully imagines himself to be dwelling in Canaan,

while his tent is at the edge of Tophet, and at the brink of the valley of slaughter. He dreams of being in Jerusalem, but alas ! he is encamped very near the Dead Sea, and not far from Admah and Zeboim. And when "the Lord cometh in flaming fire, to take vengeance on all that know not God, nor obey the gospel," how can he spare such an one ! The Judge thus finding him only between the borders, must surely sweep him away, and assign him his portion with the unbelievers.

Come then at once before God, whoever you are that think yourselves in communion with the Jerusalem which is above, and breathe out to him from your inmost souls, "Search me, O God, and know my heart : try me, and know my thoughts ; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting," Psa. cxxxix. 23, 24. Be well assured, that in the last day, nothing will avail, except what the Holy Spirit has produced, borne witness to, and perfected in us. Every arbitrary device of our own, every mere human work, will then be burnt up as wood, hay, and stubble. All dependence on factitious spirituality, will-worship, and self-invented piety, all our own righteousness and imaginary sanctity, will be treated as a thing null and void, whose blossom will go up as dust. No other knowledge will then be inquired after, save what you have learnt by the teaching of the

Holy Spirit. It will not be asked in that day, *how much* you have prayed or sung, but whether you have sung and prayed in spirit and in truth, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God. It will not be inquired whether you have stood well in the esteem and connexion of believers upon earth, but whether you have really lived in communion with Him who is the true God, and eternal life ; and have grown up into Him in all things, who is the Head, even Christ. Alas ! how many are there in what is called the "Christian world" around us, who are conversant with all religious society, and nevertheless couch down only between the borders ! having, for one reason or another, espoused the profession of godliness under the influence of their fellow-men, rather than of the renewing Spirit of God. May the Lord have mercy upon them, and open their eyes to see, that though they have free intercourse with real Christians, they are merely dazzled with their own good exterior ! Where is the broken spirit, the contrite heart, the budding of regeneration, the new creature, the genuine thirst for inward purification by faith in Christ, the fervent, heart-praying desire to know Him in the power of His resurrection, the fellowship of His sufferings, the conformity to His death ? Where is all this, which, as the work of the Holy Spirit, can alone constitute the real Christian ? It is wanting ; and the wretched soul knoweth it not. May the God of all grace

preserve us from such awful self-deceiving, the end of which is everlasting destruction ! Let this consideration deter us from a perilous settlement between the borders ; that "in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we may have our conversation in the world." For "by the grace of God," saith the apostle, "I am what I am;" and to the same effect is that utterance of the perfect and upright Job, "The Spirit of God hath made me, and the breath of the Almighty hath given me life," Job xxxiii. 4.

## THE MORE THAN PARENTAL LOVE OF GOD.

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ISAIAH xlix. 14—16.

But Zion said, The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me. Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb ? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands ; thy walls are continually before me.

WHAT a saying of God is this ! What an exceeding great and precious promise ! It is a fruit tree by a fountain in the wilderness ; where many a pilgrim has, from age to age, shaken off the golden fruit for his refreshment : neither does its leaf wither ; but it thrives and blooms, and bears abundantly unto this hour. Shake it only, O troubled soul, and it will yield thee a rich supply. Let us notice,

- I. ZION'S BUILDING.
- II. ZION'S COMPLAINT.
- III. GOD'S PROMISE.

I. "Zion" here signifies the true Church ; born from above, by water and the Spirit. Elsewhere she is called Jerusalem ; and very frequently is

she is spoken of as a city or building. Thus, St. Peter saith, "Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house." A very expressive and comprehensive similitude of the true Church.

If we inquire, first, who is her *builder*, we find that there is but one who can properly be called by this name. The founder of the true Church is He by whom God made the worlds; therefore she is called "The city of the Lord, The Zion of the Holy One of Israel," Isa. ix. 14. The plan of Zion's building is older than the world itself. Before the foundations of the earth were laid, it was designed and drawn out in the everlasting purpose of God. Its height, and depth, and breadth, and length, were all accurately laid down; the time for its completion was minutely predetermined; its very stones were numbered, and the places appointed where they should be hewn and fashioned. Nearly six thousand years ago, did the blessed God commence the building, and it is going on at this day exactly after the original plan. The Lord buildeth up Zion, and he buildeth alone; absolutely and entirely alone; no stranger can dare to put a hand to the work. Whenever he uses any of us as his under-builders, he first makes us sensible of our own weakness; the excellency of the power is of him, and not of us. When experience has taught us, that of ourselves we can do nothing; when, like Jacob, we are obliged to halt on the shrunk limb which God has touched, then only will he make use of

us. He who will have the temple to be built unto his own glory, he alone will be the Builder. He is jealous for the glory of his holy name.

If we inquire concerning the *foundation* of the true Church, an apostle meets us with an answer: "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." The God-Man is the Foundation. If any other Christ be professed, than he of whom the Baptist cried, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world:" if the only Blood-surety be wanting, with his all-sufficient sacrifice, with that blood which cleanseth from all sin, there may indeed be what is called a church, but it can be no *κυριακὸν*, no house of the Lord. The true church is built upon Christ; not merely as he is a good man; not merely as he deserves the character which even Pilate could not but recognise in him, saying, "I find no fault in this man;" nor only upon such a Christ as infidel philosophers and mere men of taste can very well consent to, but upon the whole and entire Christ of God: who, though "to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness, is, unto them who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God."

If now we consider the *building* itself, it consists of stones, and of lively stones. Stones indeed all of us are by nature: hard and cold stones, dead in spiritual life, and settled and

fixed in the earth by our own heaviness and inertness. How many have sat for years under the gospel, like the "children sitting in the market-place;" to whom it may equally be said, "We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented!" The rain, the sunshine, the storm, and the lightning, have from time to time, descended upon them; but still they remain as ever, hard, insensible, and unchanged. Is not this the quality of rocks and stones? But, God be thanked, that "he is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham;" and it is such very materials, rough and refractory as they are, that God has selected for the building of his spiritual temple, that the greatness of his power and wisdom might be manifested. It is not of the holy angels and archangels, nor of all the company of heaven; neither is it of the fallen angels, those once bright morning stars, that he constitutes the building of Zion; but it is of the children of fallen Adam, who were perishing in spiritual death and misery. He who has undertaken every concern of this building, has made it his own special work to bring forth and qualify the stones for it. His evangelists, and the ministers of his word, who are styled "workers together with Him," cannot, of themselves loosen and bring off a single pebble from its native bed, except he speak the word by their mouth, and wield the hammer in their hand. Then is ful-

filled what He himself declares, "Is not my word like as a fire, and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?" Jer. xxiii. 29.

The "operations" of the great Master-builder are not uniform, but marked by "diversity." Some stones are separated from their quarry, and brought off by a preparatory process, in a gradual and gentle manner. Thus a Martha, a Mary, a Lazarus, and others like them, are gently dislodged from earthly attachments, and fitted at length for the Lord's service; while over a Peter, a Nicodemus, and others, a power is exercised, which is more instant and imperative. Others again are shivered from their worldly holds, as by an explosion of rocks. Such was the case of Saul on his way to Damascus, and that of the jailor at Philippi. A report is heard, and the hard stone is at once disengaged. But when may one be truly said to be thus disengaged? At that moment, my brethren, when he finds himself a poor, lost sinner, a ruined debtor, sensible that he has nothing to pay; a penitent mourner over his own moral destitution. Then is he loosed indeed. God hath broken him away, and he is become quite another man, as compared with those who remain embedded in the elements of the world; he is become a "lively stone," awakened to reflection, and crying out unto God. Such a stone the great Master-builder takes in charge, causes it to be fashioned to his mind with the hammer of his word, and polished

with the grinding of tribulation. Thus he builds it into the structure of his temple, on Christ, the sure Foundation, and secures it with the cementing and uniting virtue of that lively faith which is of his own operation. There shall be holy "stones *set up in his land,*" saith the prophet Zechariah, ix. 16; and the Lord, by Ezekiel, speaks even of Tyrus as "*set upon* the holy mountain of God, and walking among stones of fire," Ezek. xxviii. 14.

If we closely inspect the building, we find the lively stones admirable for their unity, evenness, and mutual conformity. From whatever quarter of the world they may have originated, whether from Europe or Asia, from nations white or black, from savage wilds or cultivated regions, they are no sooner builded together into this "habitation of God through the Spirit," than they are all alike and uniform. Every one of them appears sprinkled with blood; all of them are dark in the world's eyes, and darker in their own; but in the eyes of God, they are pure as lilies, and white as snow. They are, one and all, contrite souls, humbled persons, pilgrims and strangers in the earth; having no continuing city here, but seeking that which is to come. They are all sufferers in this world, "*groaning within themselves, and waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of their body.*" They are all saved; but it is by hope: they are happy; but it is in hope. They are but one body, and

one Spirit, having been “called in one hope of their calling.” They have one Lord, who can command them from the cross; one God and Father of all, who hath reconciled them unto himself, through the blood of the Lamb. They have one faith; for they all seek their life out of themselves in Christ. They have one baptism, namely, that into the death of the Second Adam. Such is the unity of the true church. It is a perfect unity in essentials, and in its nature; but contains the most manifold variety in its forms and gifts. “Of Zion it shall be said, All kinds of people are born in her ;” sings David, Psalm lxxxvii. 5. They are all born of God; here is their unity: but in themselves they are every variety of people. “Behold,” saith the Lord unto his church, Isa. liv. 11, “I will lay thy stones with fair colours, and lay thy foundations with sapphires. And I will make thy windows of agates, and thy gates of carbuncles, and all thy borders of pleasant stones.” Precious stones are they all, and their variety sets off their beauty. Of one, hope may be his prevailing characteristic; of another, seraphic love; a third, simple, childlike humility; a fourth, clear in wisdom and knowledge. Some are contemplative, and retiring within; others are apostolical, and active abroad. Some are babes in Christ; others are young men or fathers in the Lord. Some have been drawn to Christ in one way, others in another.

**II. ZION'S COMPLAINT.**

We have heard of Zion, the city and dwelling-place of our God : and that "the Lord loveth the gates of Zion," Psa. lxxxvii. 2. But how faithfully and ardently he loves her, she herself does not always consider. Why else that complaint which now comes under our notice ? "Zion saith, The Lord hath forsaken me ; and my Lord hath forgotten me," Isa. xlix. 14. O Zion, complain rather of thy own unbelieving heart ; for if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God.

It is acknowledged, that circumstances may arise, under which nothing may appear more just than this complaint of Zion. When, in Noah's time, the earth was filled with violence against the Lord and against his Anointed, and the people of God had dwindled into one little family ; when, in the days of the kings of Israel and Judah, the seed of Abraham had revolted from Jehovah, and his nominal people were bowing their knees at the altars of Moloch and of Baal ; or when, in a subsequent period, the king of Babylon trampled with his iron chariots upon Salem's ashes, and afterwards her mighty foe, Antiochus, set up his abomination of desolation upon Jehovah's altar, and caused the holy volumes of revelation to be torn in pieces and scattered to the winds ; when, in later ages, papal darkness rested upon all the nations of Christen-

dom ; and, more recently, when from a darkness of yet deeper blackness, from a national delusion of infidelity, from a godless and monstrous perversion of intellect, there arose a cry against the King of kings, more frantic, if possible, than that ancient one of "Crucify him, crucify him ;"—in any one of these instances, who could blame the daughter of Zion for hanging her harp upon the willows, covering herself with mourning as a widow, and giving vent to her grief in the lamentation before us, "The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me ?"

But what are thy feelings in our own day, O virgin daughter of Zion ? Truly the times to thee now are pleasant again. We behold thee on thy tower as a watcher, surveying and considering the stability of God's edifice around thee ; and lo ! it stands magnificently, and is increasing gloriously. From one quarter of it and from another, in many directions, thou hearest again the cry of "Hosannah ! Blessed be He that cometh in the name of the Lord." There is a testimony and a praise re-awakened in the land, where all was lately sad and still as death ; and it is a testimony concerning Him whom thou lovest. The banner of the cross is again unfurled. Vernal beams shine down from behind

\* Witness Voltaire's repeated blasphemy, "Crush the wretch!"—TRANSLATOR.

many a dark cloud ; and gracious showers are descending here and there upon God's inheritance. Our young men see visions, and our old men dream heavenly dreams of better things arriving ; at all which, thou canst not forbear to take the harp down once more from the willows, and to sing to the Lord a new song, as terrible among the rulers of the darkness of this world. Nevertheless, shall any ask thee, " Watcher, what of the night ? Is it quite passed away ?" Then wilt thou be obliged to answer, nor canst thou do it without tears, " The morning cometh : still, as yet there will be night. If ye inquire already, yet must ye return, come, and inquire again." Thou considerest how thou art really as yet but as the " worm Jacob," and as a solitary " cottage in a vineyard." Thou considerest how as yet the ways of Zion do mourn and lie desolate in a thousand directions ; how her priests sigh, and her virgins are afflicted, Lam. i. 4. Grief dims thine eyes, with beholding the numberless bands of hirelings in and out of the pulpit ; all of whom are busied every where about leading the people astray : avoiding Calvary, and directing their course to the regions of curse and perdition. Thou dost sicken at surveying the seduced millions of the flock, who cannot endure to hear of the Great Shepherd, and most unaccountably choosing death rather than life. And while thou art witnessing all this gloom, this thick darkness, in every direction, what wonder

if thy heart almost break, or if the old complaint be ready again to start from thy lips, "The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me!"

But though the church of Christ do not, as a body, take up such a complaint as this at present; yet it is too obvious, that, in the hearts of individual children of Zion, thoughts of the kind are still awake. Enough of this is perceptible in all quarters, to those who are well acquainted with God's people, and have an ear open to their sighs; so that it is often implied, if not expressed, "The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me." Lo! one poor penitent mourns apart, smites upon his breast, and cries, "God be merciful unto me a sinner!" But he has not yet learnt to behold the kindness and love of God our Saviour; hence he can think of nothing else, but, "The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me." Another wrestles in hard conflict with sin and Satan; and, however much he strives to overcome the wicked one, or to subdue his own failings and corruptions, they still revive, and so prevail, that this soldier of Jesus Christ, at length, sinks down and cries, "Why am I thus forsaken?" Another sits in the darkness of horrible doubts and fears, which cause his very limbs to shake. He despairingly doubts of his state of grace; he doubts about the truth of Christ and his love; so that his heart is tortured with surmising, "The Lord hath forsaken me,

and my Lord hath forgotten me." Another has long been fainting in the heat of outward tribulation, and still the Lord delays his deliverance. Meanwhile the enemy triumphs, and suggests, "Where is now thy God?" and, alas! his God does not at present appear for him. The paths of Jehovah still remain in the deep waters, and he hideth his head in the clouds, so that even the friends of such an individual may be apt to say, "Surely, if you were sincerely seeking the Lord, he would not thus afflict you." Hence the poor sinner begins to despond, and to conclude that the Lord has indeed forsaken him. Be the occasion, however, what it may, such a complaint is not unfrequent amongst us. With one and another of us is it found; in this or that secret chamber, it is even loud at times; and not a few, it is feared, thus howl upon their beds, with many a tear and many a wakeful night, when the world is asleep, and people are in deep slumber about them.

But come hither, ye godly sorrowing and troubled souls,—for with the sorrow of the world that worketh death, we intermeddle not,—come hither, and think not that we mean to rebuke you for your unbelief; this is neither a duty of our office, nor doth the Lord rebuke you. Do we then undertake to comfort you? This also is beyond our ability. Nevertheless, dear brethren, there is One always present with us, who is both able and willing to impart to you

the needful consolation. "Thy Redeemer is mighty, the Lord of hosts is his name." He hath heard your cry; he hath seen your tears; and tender mercies are over you, his weeping children. Behold, he is now present in the midst of us. Lift up, therefore, your eyes to the Lord, and his throne of grace; for the light of his countenance already shines upon you. Recognize that tender love and compassion which are even at this moment proceeding from him. Flee to his outstretched arms of more than parental faithfulness, and repose your cares in the ever-watchful bosom of his "loving mercy and truth." Yea, and once more hearken to his voice; for he has a special word addressed to *you*. It is a word of consolation; a word which can once for all be the means of transforming your darkness into everlasting noon. Observe,

### III. GOD'S PROMISE.

He declares, "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget; yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me." What an appeal is this to our hearts! what grace, mercy, and peace are here! Ponder each word of this oracle distinctly, my brethren; enter into its full meaning; leave not any part of it unconsidered,

and then say if it is not enough. If it be an unspeakable privilege to be permitted to come before the Almighty, and to say, "My God, my God;" if it be a still greater privilege to cry "Abba, Father!"—what must it be to have God expostulating with us more tenderly than the tenderest mother!

"O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted," think to what the Lord here compares his love, and how infinitely great he appears in this his condescension! "Behold what manner of love!" Thou hast not yet forgotten the tenderness of thy mother: and, behold, greater tenderness is here. "As one whom his mother comforteth," so would the Lord thy God thus comfort thee. Did thy mother bear and carry thee all the days of thy infancy? Did she love thee as her own life, from thy childhood? And hath not thy God done much more? Whence was it that thy first existence sprang, with all thy blessings and mercies unto this day? Who was it that laid down his life for thee? Of whom wast thou born again? Is not every true believer in Christ a new creature in him, and born of God? Behold, He will not concede that the love felt by any mother is so tender as his own. Her arms may, on all occasions, be stretched out towards thee; but *His* everlasting arms are ever underneath thee. Her bosom may have been the resting-place for thy infant weariness or pain; it may at the present moment be a

resting-place for the cares of thy aching heart ; but the bosom of the Almighty is ever open to thee as the resting-place of thy soul. Thy mother's eyes may have been wakeful and watchful for thee day and night ; but the eyes of the Lord, though they behold all the evils of thy nature, (evils, of which maternal eyes, if they see them at all, can discern but a little,) are still upon thee for good. "The Father himself loveth you," saith our Saviour, "because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God," John xvi. 27. And again, when praying to his father for all believers, he saith, "Thou hast loved *them* as thou hast loved *me*," John xvii. 23. Does the mother carry or lead her child ; does she take charge of it, nurture it, guard its health, watch every opportunity of promoting its comfort and happiness, and clothe it with fair and goodly raiment ? Think how the "faithful Creator" will not be outdone in all this by the creature whom he has formed. He bears and carries you ; he guides and conducts you. He takes care of you, and gives his angels charge concerning you. He nurtures you, guards your health and spiritual welfare, and watches every occasion for promoting your true comfort and happiness. He clothes you with the garments of his salvation. And must not even the mother's love sometimes rebuke and chasten her child ? What does God more, or what does he less ; even God our Saviour, who

saieth, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten?" Rev. iii. 19. Is the mother unwearied in bringing her child to repose, however uneasy or distressed it may be? Our God is unwearied in doing much more for every uneasy or distressed soul; for every one who is willing to repose all care in his bosom, and to find peace there.

But, will God in every deed thus compassionate me, with tenderness more than that of a mother, and with loving kindness infinitely better adapted to my wants and necessities? He will, my brother, he will; for his word is true. Let us, then, attend once more to these his own gracious words, "Can a woman *forget*?" Truly she can, as it were, forget her father and her mother, to cleave unto her husband; but can she forget the child of her bosom? Should it even grow up a perverse child, however ungrateful such a child may prove to her in after life, can she forget him? O ye mothers, are ye not ready to say, "Never, never?" But, supposing it possible for her to endeavour to forget an unworthy child grown up, can she forget her *little* child, or her tender infant? still more can she wilfully thrust it away from her love and care? How could this be possible to any one resembling a mother? But though we should imagine what is thus impossible to be possible, namely, for a mother to *forget* her helpless child, we can hardly imagine the possibility of her not having compassion for the son

of her womb. What ! can she with calm indifference behold it writhing in agony, or pining with want ? If she had never wept before, she would weep at such a sight ; and where is the mother that would not be ready with all her heart to suffer in her child's stead ? Therefore, when the Lord asks, " Can a woman forget her sucking child ?" does not the heart of every mother reply, No ; it is impossible ? But, saith the Lord, though it *were* possible, yet will I not forget *my* children. Though even a tender mother should forget her child ; yet not so the unchangeable, independent, and all-perfect God our Saviour, whose words are, "*I will not forget thee !*" Here, then, he discloses a depth of love which no human mind can fathom. We find nothing comparable to it ; we have no word to express it. Daughter of Zion, canst thou still complain, " The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me ?" Such a complaint surely is doing him wrong ; it is injustice ; it is sin : and take heed that it be not blasphemy. Away with it ; fall prostrate before Him in the dust, and adore.

Further ; let us ponder those precious words with which this Divine appeal concludes, " Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands : thy walls are continually before me." What inestimable consolation is here intended to be conveyed to the church in general, and to every converted soul in particular ! As the

master builder of a city first draws out his plan, and describes the city in its whole circumference, with its streets, squares, palaces, and houses, so hath the Lord Almighty laid down the whole plan of his spiritual city, and graven it on the palms of his hands. In his "determinate counsel and foreknowledge" it already stands perfect and complete with all its magnificence. He has long commenced the actual building, and in due time he will finish it ; for he is ever carrying it on towards its accomplishment : "He will work, and who shall let it ?" Who shall hinder him from bringing forth the top stone with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it ? Zech. iv. 7. Though ye of Samaria and of the Canaanites exclaim ever so vehemently, "Down with it, down with it, even unto the ground," never shall ye be able to plant your banner upon its citadel, nor even upon its walls. Zion's walls are continually before him ; his eyes are upon his church day and night. "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it," Matt. xvi. 18.

And as is Zion in general, so is each of her sons and daughters graven upon the palms of his hands. Couldst thou view thy own image which is graven there, it would amaze thee to perceive how gloriously it is described. It is not such as thou now bearest upon thee ; not at all like that body of sin and death which still cleaveth to thy present self. The Lord has there described thee, such as thou shalt be found here-

after : he beholds thee, already in the glory of thy perfected holiness, even while thou art going about here below in the midst of sufferings and spiritual conflict : and such as thou art now described on the palms of his hands, such shalt thou be found hereafter in his kingdom of glory. His zeal will perform this ; his almighty hands will accomplish it. And thinkest thou there can be a time or place in this world, wherein the eyes of the Lord shall not be upon thee ? Learn here from his own word, that thou art continually before him. Though thou retire into the most secret chamber to weep, though in the dead of the night thou water thy couch with thy tears, though thou lie, like Elijah, under some juniper-tree in the waste howling wilderness, or have lost thy way in the deepest thicket of the mountain forest, the more than motherly heart of thy God is with thee, the more than motherly eye of thy God is upon thee, and in his hand thine own is grasped, however little it may be felt by thee. Wherever, or in whatever circumstances, thou mayest be, if thou imagine that the Lord hath forsaken thee, and thy Lord hath forgotten thee, such an idea is erroneous ; and herein, God knoweth, thou disquietest thyself without cause. Oh, if thine eyes were only opened, as were the eyes of Elisha's servant, to see the chariots of fire and horses of fire that are really round about thee, how wouldst thou be amazed !

Away, then, with all needless anxieties and unbelieving fears! Whoever is able to receive the comfort of the more than maternal love of his God, let him receive it. The Lord forgetteth not one of his children, not one of those little ones that believe in Him: not one; not the weakest babe in Christ. "He shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom;" and we may be sure that the poorest of the flock are in the hollow of his hand. But am I really one of them? is the inquiry of many an anxious heart; and we reply, Indeed, indeed, you are, if such you are seeking to be found: if you are seeking it with humiliation and sorrow for sin, and this with all your heart and all your soul. If you are "hungering and thirsting after righteousness," if you are humbly longing for the full benefit of his atonement, namely, for pardon, justification, holiness, peace with God, perfect love to himself and to the brethren—if all this is sought after with a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart; if inward purification, through faith in his blood, be your most earnest desire, then indeed are ye born again by the word of God; beloved, then are ye the children of God. And although you may not be able, as yet, fully to rejoice in your adoption, or to feel the comfort of that more than maternal love of God our Saviour, still we exhort you to persist in believing all that he here declares concerning it; and the time for you to

taste how gracious he is will soon arrive. Smoother and pleasanter paths would his love gladly assign us, were it not that the health and safety of our souls require a different treatment. You remember, in the history of the women who came before Solomon, the yearnings of the real mother over her own infant; and so you may rest assured, that whenever any mischief is near you, the Lord, with infinitely more wakeful tenderness than that of the best of mothers, will interpose for your deliverance.

But, oh! take heed not to presume upon this tenderness of everlasting love, if you are living in wilful transgression of the least of your Saviour's commandments. It is only the children of Zion that can be joyful in their King, Psa. cxlix. 2. Into this happy state we are not introduced by any virtues of our own, not by fastings or alms, not by "much speaking," or benevolent exertions. All that you are to bring and lay before Him is your own misery under the burden of sin, your poverty and helplessness, a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart. Then, if you can only utter, like the thief upon the cross, "Lord, remember me!"—if you can only smite your breast, saying, "God be merciful to me a sinner;"—if you can sincerely mourn at the sight of Him whom your sins have pierced; your very sighs will rend the heavens, will "enter into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth," and will verily reach his heart. May God renew this right spirit within us all! Amen.

## THE ENCAMPMENT OF JUDAH.

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NUMBERS ii. 3.

Judah shall encamp eastward toward the sun-rising, with his banner and host; their captain, Nahshon, son of Amminadab.\*

THIS chapter describes the manner of Israel's encampment, as Divinely appointed to be observed on their journey through the wilderness to the promised land. The whole of this appointment was very significant. For, as the nation of Israel was a type of the Israel of God, so the ordinances given to that people may be viewed as a shadow of higher and better things.

Let us notice, with a view of our spiritual improvement,

- I. THE TRIBE OF JUDAH.
- II. THEIR CAMP.
- III. THE DIRECTION IN WHICH IT IS SITUATED.
- IV. THEIR BANNER.
- V. THEIR HOST.
- VI. THEIR CAPTAIN.

\* Lutheran version.

I. The tribe of Judah. It is well known that the tribe of Judah was one type of God's people under the New Testament dispensation. Very frequently in Scripture is the true church spoken of under the name of Judah. Thus David, beholding in spirit the glorious coming of Messiah's kingdom, sings, "Let mount Zion rejoice, let the daughters of Judah be glad," Psa. xlviii. 11. Thus also the prophet Joel proclaims that "Judah shall dwell" (or abide) "for ever," Joel iii. 20. The prophet Zechariah likewise saith, "The Lord shall inherit Judah his portion in the holy land," Zech. ii. 12. And we cannot easily mistake what was meant in the blessing of the patriarch Jacob by the words, "Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise," Gen. xlix. 8. The tribe of Judah was distinguished as the *royal* tribe ; and such is the true church of the living God : a chosen generation, all of whom are made kings and priests unto Him, 1 Pet. ii. 9 ; Rev. i. 6. For "the saints shall judge the world," 1 Cor. vi. 2. "The kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High," Dan. vii. 27. Judah was the tribe out of which sprang "The Second Man," who is "the Lord from heaven." And lo, the church of God is the "woman clothed with the sun," who "travailed in birth, and brought forth the man-child," namely Christ, who was to "rule all the heathen with a rod of iron." The church, internally

considered, thus travaileth in birth, and bringeth forth by the power of the Holy Ghost overshadowing her ; and, externally considered, she doth the same, by the testimony and preaching of the gospel. Judah was the tribe which occupied the hill of Zion and Jerusalem, with Moriah the place of the sanctuary. So the church is that royal priesthood which occupies the city of God, and goes in and out with freedom. The church is itself Jehovah's city and sanctuary. It has charge of the holy fire of the altar. The glory of the Lord filleth the whole house. The spiritual church is the real tribe of Judah.

The name of *Judah* signifies praise. "Now will I praise the Lord," said his mother Leah at his birth ; and this was the occasion of his name, Gen. xxix. 35. Thus is the spiritual Judah established and made a praise in the earth, Isa. lxii. 7, to the glory of God, of whom it is born and made. This whole family in heaven and earth is named and appointed to be a continual praise to the glory of the omnipotent grace of Jehovah. For what was the spiritual Jerusalem once, and what the whole spiritual Judah ? Kings and priests as they all are,—is not each "a brand plucked out of the fire?" Zech. iii. 2. Who are these ministers of the sanctuary ? Were they not once without God in the world ? but they are brought nigh by the blood of Him "who justifieth the ungodly ;" and are now made holy, and consecrated to his holy service. Who are

those joyful harpers singing to their harps, "a new song," before the throne? Rev. xiv. 2, 3. Were they not very stones when the God of Jacob first taught them to utter his praise? Who are those green olive-trees in the garden of God? What were once those fruitful "trees of righteousness," that are now so evidently "the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified?" Were they not dry and dead rods of the stem of Adam, fit only for burning, and such as nothing but the new-creating power of the Almighty, could ever have recovered to verdure and bloom? Behold these fellow-servants and companions of angels, these joint heirs of the kingdom, these partakers of the glory that shall be revealed; whence were they formed to this high character? The "hole of the pit from whence they were digged," was as the chamber of death, and nigh to the depths of hell. Were they not "brought up out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay?" Psa. xl. 2. Come they not from the field of the dry bones, and from the camp of the slain? Are they not delivered from the teeth of corruption, and rescued from the paw of the devouring lion? Have they not been ransomed, from the power of spiritual death, released from the chains of darkness, and of the Divine displeasure, and lifted down from the pile of Tophet where they were ready to perish in the fire of Moloch? Oh! the miracles of mercy which are wrought upon this people! Well may they

be called *Judah*, for every thing about them renders “praise” to the Lord. Behold them a living monument of the power and grace of Christ ; a monument more to be admired than the fabric of a world, because it shall more abundantly for ever declare to all intelligent creatures the glory and praise of God. The Lord is there, and his delight is there. This people are his “peculiar treasure ;” they are “a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of their God,” Isa. lxii. 3. With this immense family of ransomed sinners our great High Priest is surrounded, and invested as with a festal robe, down to the lowest filament of which descends the unction of the Holy One, like the precious anointing poured on the head of Aaron. This people are also the “jewels” which he “maketh up” for the day of his triumph, and as a golden chain worn by the King of kings. Their names shine with heavenly lustre in His priestly “breast-plate of judgment ;” their very tears are set as diamonds upon his purple vesture ; all their sacrifices are faithfully treasured by him in his sanctuary ; and how they are valued by him, let his own sufferings, for their sakes, declare. And when He shall come again in his glory, that all flesh may see it together, he will be attended by the holy myriads of this people : they shall sit down with him on his throne, to judge the world.

Verily, " Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren," the angels, " shall praise."

You now know the tribe whereof we speak. But our text does not refer to that small people that dwelt peaceably among the hills of Zion, and settled along the western bank of Jordan, every man under his own vine and fig-tree ; but to Judah abroad upon the march, encamped in the wilderness amidst the sound of trumpets and the din of arms, prepared for war and conflict. The tribe in this condition better typifies the state of the church militant here on earth ; for the life of the spiritual Judah is a life of warfare and conflict. Its enemies ye know. They are more, and greater, than Midian and Amalek ; they are enemies within and without ; they are active and are mighty. There is the prince of the power of the air, with the rulers of the darkness of this world. There are household foes ; lusts in the members, and enemies in the heart. There are adversaries in the busy crowd, and adversaries in the secret chamber. There are liers in wait and ambuscades. There are covert mines laid under the way, and even under the encampments. Here, then, is spiritual warfare absolutely necessary for self-preservation.

The tribe of Judah in the wilderness was marshalled into distinct companies, each of which had its own peculiar armament ; so is it with the spiritual Judah. The followers of our David are a mixed multitude ; they are variously formed

and endued ; they are not all of the same stamp, complexion, or dialect ; neither do they all use the same description of weapons. One sort overcomes the enemy with tears ; even as little children when danger is near, instantly run weeping to their mother. They are a timid company ; nevertheless they go on conquering and to conquer. Another sort skirmishes like a maiden-warrior ; being armed with holy shame and modest diffidence. No sooner does temptation appear, than their heart recoils from it with fear and trembling ; "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" Genesis xxxix. 9. A third company wields skilfully the sword of the word. Every assault of the tempter is repulsed with, "It is written :" or, "Get thee behind me, Satan !" for thou meanest not the things which is godly, but that which is "earthly, sensual, devilish," James iii. 15. A fourth company holds out with "strong crying," Heb. v. 7, and secret breathings to God ; and prevails, like Moses, with hands extended towards heaven, and supported by Aaron ; or even as chickens find refuge and defence under the wings of the hen : so are they safe. A fifth company makes a successful struggle by a special use of the cross ; a single glance at the sufferings of the Son of God dissipates every storm that would rage in their members, and the bolts of the adversary are shot in vain. A sixth company smites down the foe with one effort of simple faith. Embol-

dened by reliance upon God's thousand promises, which are written as with "an iron pen and lead in the rock for ever," they are persuaded that the enemy shall have no advantage against them. Hence they laugh the enemy to scorn, with an indignation that obliges him to withdraw.

Moreover, as the weapons which Judah's several companies oppose to the devil and the flesh are various, so are those with which they overcome the world of despisers and blasphemers. One class always uses the piercing shafts of love and meekness, blessing those who curse, and heaping coals of fire upon their head. Another class is victorious by their well-doing and shining example, that the mouth of the calumniator is condemned to silence. A third company will defeat the counsel of an Abithophel by their abashing and confounding simplicity. A fourth are distinguished as the swordsmen of the Spirit. They know how to lay truth's enemies in the dust, by their strong reasons, powerful thoughts, and triumphant methods of proof. Thus, as in Judah's tribe after the flesh, so also in the spiritual Judah, are there a mixture of persons, and a variety of weapons. Yet the living sword, and harness, and shield of them all, is but one, namely, He who is at their head, the Captain of God's host; Christ, the Lord.

II. Let us next contemplate this people in their camp. "*Judah shall encamp*," saith the Lord.

And indeed the spiritual Judah is an encamped people. They were not always so. Once they remained in their own houses, elated in self-esteem, living unto themselves, and dreaming of their own powers and projects. But the hand of grace has brought them low, and has bowed down the proud even to the ground. They now lie in the dust, conscious of their own weakness, poverty, and nakedness; and their watch-word is, "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength," Isa. xlvi. 24. They are prepared for march, for conflict, and for victory, in the order and manner which God shall appoint, and by His direction they lay down in their camp with self-abasement and poverty of spirit. As sinners, they prostrate their souls in the dust at the feet of Jesus. Therefore, Get you down all of you into the depths of the camp, ye that are fain to think of your worthiness, and to flatter yourselves with crowns of your own devising. It is not so seen in Judah. Encamp at once; and let your only glorying and consolation be in *that* crown which your King wore for you before Pilate upon Gabbatha; let it be in His purple and bloody robe, and not in one of your own. Come down, ye who are actuated by that spirit which willeth and runneth after its own imaginary deserts and praises. That is not Judah's manner. Judah remains quiet in the camp, and lives upon the camp provisions, furnished to his hand from the merits and virtues of Another, who is great-

er than he. Down from your heights, ye who are endeavouring, by self-chosen amendment, to make good your faults and failings ! This is an error, and not Judah's method. Judah, like his father Jacob, beholds in this wilderness an ascent of steps dropped from heaven, at the summit of which is the throne of grace ; and, prostrating himself to the lowest of these, which touches the earth, he hears the Divine oracle declaring all his faults and failings made good by his great High Priest, and covered by His atonement. Such is the position of Judah.

Judah shall encamp, saith the Lord. His people shall "dwell in quiet resting-places," and enjoy what He himself hath conquered for Judah. He hath prepared for him "a table in the wilderness," and furnished it with all manner of blessed refreshments. His soul shall lie down in these resting-places, which the blood of his Surety hath purchased for him. Oh, blessed place of repose ! Peace is there ; quietness and assurance are there ; for Thou, Lord, makest Judah to dwell in safety. Here then is provided a precious resting-place for our souls. Cast thyself into the very midst of it, as into an asylum of God. Whoever of us has lain with Christ in the dust of Gethsemane, as "a worm, and no man," Psa. xxii. 6, is invited also to enjoy with him, the blessedness of the camp of Judah.

"Judah shall encamp." But in what form and order ? Upon this we have only to say, with

respect to the spiritual Judah, that the mystical cross of their great High Priest embodies itself in all their stations and movements, gives shape to all their hopes and expectations, directs and regulates their prayers, praises, and exertions. Whatever they attempt or whatever they enjoy, is conformed to the cross.

But how slight appears Judah's camp, compared with the strong fortifications of this world ! It consists only of tents and tabernacles, easily set up, and as easily taken down. Spiritual children of Judah are but sojourners here. They are strangers and pilgrims upon earth. Every one among them, and every thing belonging to them, must be in readiness for the march. Amidst all the tenderest relative ties, and circumstances of time and sense, they are to dwell only as in booths, made of branches of palm trees, and willows of the brook, having their affections sitting loose to the things which are seen and temporal. "It remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none ; and they that weep, as though they wept not ; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not ; and they that buy, as though they possessed not ;" "knowing" that as all other "time," so the suffering time of tribulation, "is short," 1 Cor. vii. 29, 30 ; is but as a sojourning in a tent, for a night. Though "weeping may endure for a night," they know that "joy cometh in the morning," Psa. xxx. 5. For here they have no continuing city, but they seek one to

come, Heb. vii. 14. Oh, the happy and blessed art of spending the night every where and always as in the tents of sojourners, pilgrims to God ! This is learnt only in the school of grace. It is inexpressible how much the heart of fallen man is set upon things temporal and perishable ; and there is but one Physician that can disengage us from our morbid attachments. O Judah, blessed art thou in thy pilgrim encampment, in thy moveable tabernacles.

III. The direction in which the camp is situated, is the next object for contemplation.

Judah shall encamp *toward the sun-rising*. Such too is the cheerful situation of the beloved people ; they have the evening behind them, and the morning in their eye. This is characteristic of all the spiritual Judah, from the least to the greatest. The child and the man of grey hairs are looking towards the rising day, towards the Day-star from on high. Where the Rose of Sharon bloomed, and the Root of David sprung up out of a dry ground ; where the bright and morning Star arose to illuminate the night of human misery, thither are the eyes of all of them directed ; thither do their thoughts and affections go forth together. At one time do the hills of Bethlehem rise before them in the distance, and they hear, with an enraptured spirit, the songs of praise of the heavenly host. At another time they behold in spirit the lake of Galilee, and re-

joice in the Man whom the winds and the waves obey. Now they would build with Peter, a tabernacle on the mount of transfiguration.—Then they behold Jesus as the reputed son of the carpenter, and as having become their brother in the form of a servant ; and they rejoice with joy unspeakable that he is so nearly related to them ; they recollect with tears of gladness, that “He is not ashamed to call them brethren,” Heb. ii. 11. They then remember the darkness of Gethsemane, the agony and bloody sweat, the wormwood and the gall ; which things are now converted to the healing of their souls, and they rejoice to have found such balm in Gilead, and such a Physician there. Often in their spiritual vision eastward, do they cross the hill of Calvary. Their soul pauses over the spot where hung the penitent malefactor, and seems to suffer there in his stead, exclaiming, “Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom,” and applies to itself the malefactor’s comfort, “Verily I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise,” Luke xxiii. 42, 43. It then goes to the sepulchre, to behold there the bands of death burst asunder, and the seal broken up for the triumphant disclosure of immortality, by Him who is called “the Lion of the tribe of Judah.” After this, the eye of their faith is attracted by a glistening upon the heights of Olivet. Thither they soar in spirit, and behold the heavens opened, and the Son of God ascending through clouds of witnessing

angels. And they strike the harp of David, and join the heavenly harmony, saying, "God is gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of the trumpet. Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in," Psa. xlvi. 5; xxiv. 7. Thus does the soul of Judah breathe the air of paradise, and stretches forth her wings of devotion, to follow in spirit the exalted King of heaven and earth, up to those bridal mansions of bliss which he is gone to prepare. See, my brethren, how Judah turns to the rising sun, and his position is towards the morning of an eternal day.

Yes, "toward the sun-rising," as awaiting for the Sun of Righteousness to appear. Soon will He come forth as a bridegroom out of his chamber, and arise upon those that fear the name of the Lord, "with healing in his wings." The cock-crowing of the early dawn is already perceptible among Christians, Jews, and heathens. A blush already tinges the eastern sky, and the grey mists that await the coming day are already breaking and dispersing. The noxious fumes of rebellion, which for ages have risen up from the camp of the enemy, are beginning to be powerfully disturbed. Soon will He shine forth, and revisit us, who is called "the Day-spring from on high;" and the bride is greeting his approach, and saying, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus, come quickly!" "Behold, He shall come, saith the Lord of hosts :" behold, he shall come "in the clouds of

heaven, with power and great glory," Matt. xxiv. 30. The rage of Judah's enemies shall then come to an end; and "the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills ; and all nations shall flow unto it," Isa. ii. 1. Thus are we encamped toward the sun-rising, and keep our eyes watching for the morning ; and though the morning-watch wherein we live be still accounted midnight by the multitude, we breathe morning air in the spirit of hope and faith.

Judah is encamped toward the sun-rising. Thither does he direct his eyes, filled with tears of hope and joy ; and in that direction is his longing soul turned continually. Look throughout the whole city of God, and you will see that every face in it is toward the sun-rising. One is well nigh weary of sojourning in this cold barren land of Meshech ; a sickening desire for home burns within him ; he is looking after the morning of the everlasting sabbath, that he may be able yet to hold out unto the end of his pilgrimage. Another is satiated with conflict in the land wherein he is a stranger, in this land of storms ; and he longs for "a peaceable habitation, in sure dwellings and quiet resting places." Hence he is constantly inquiring, " Watchman, what of the night ? Watchman, what of the night ?" Another, encompassed with gloomy doubts and fears, is continually at his tent door

to see whether the dawn is not ready to appear, and to catch a glimpse of the rising turrets of that celestial city, which is coming from God out of heaven. Another, as seeing before him mountains of difficulty and perplexity, would not have courage to advance a step further, did not his eye of hope discern beyond them all, a gleam of that morning of which the poet sings,

“ Pilgrim, thine are dreamy fears,  
Gone as soon as morn appears.”

And another, though weeping the tears of nature at the grave of one beloved, is able nevertheless to rejoice in spirit, and is ready, even at that grave, to shout for joy, because his eye is steadily fixed upon the rising of the day, wherein all the saints shall be re-united, to be for ever together with the Lord. Go into any chamber of tears where a single child of God can be found ; witness at any bed-side the pain and sufferings of his saints, Psa cxvi. 15 ; behold one, a brother of Job, and another, a sister of Lazarus ; and you may well wonder how they endure all with the same patience and sweet serenity. But know that a rising beam finds its way to their spiritual vision, a ray from the festal morn of the everlasting sabbath, by which the eye of their faith discerns “a crown of glory that fadeth not away,” held out to them by the hand of Jesus ; and ten thousand times ten thousand thus crowned already, with Jesus in the midst of them, as the

Author of their eternal life. This is their comfort and their joy. They are looking for the morning, and seem already as if they heard the distant cock-crowing ; as if the morning breeze of heaven fanned their pallid faces, and its twilight were gleaming in their dying eyes. Hallelujah ! the night is far spent, and the day is at-hand.

And as all the companies of Judah now living, are encamped "toward the sun-rising," so may it likewise be said of the departed saints of the Israel of God. What was mortal belonging to them is sown in hope. Their honoured dust, which once formed a part of the habitation of God, and temple of the Holy Ghost, lies waiting for that morning of the resurrection which will certainly dawn upon it. The wind of the Lord will breathe over it, and the sound of his trumpet will awaken it from its long slumber. Then shall the bodies of the saints come forth from their graves in glory unspeakable, and their souls shall return to them again. Yea, "thy dead men," O Judah, "shall live," saith the Lord : and with my own once dead body shall they arise. "Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust : for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead," Isa. xxvi. 19. Blessed be thou, O tribe of Judah, that art encamped toward the sun-rising : tarry but a little while, and thy full morning will have arrived. Sing as thou wilt thy home sick lamentation,

"I'm a child, and often roam,  
When the scene is dark and drear:  
Take me out of tempests here,  
To my Father's peaceful home."

Most unexpectedly shall thy mourning be turned  
ed into joy. Go on then to ejaculate, while so-  
journing in this tabernacle,

"Twilight gleams will not remove  
Sighs for home. O Prince of day,  
Grant me soon to soar away  
To thy realms of light and love."

Thy mansion is already prepared in those realms,  
O man of God. Tarry only a little longer on  
the hills of hope. Lo, while thou art yet re-  
peating that "song in the night,"

"Longings for my home above  
Often agitate my mind;  
Rest below I cannot find;  
'Tis with Thee, the God of love,"

behold, thy morning dawn has stolen upon thee ;  
the day-star has arisen in thy heart ; a few mo-  
ments more, and the sun is up, which dispels  
thy night for ever.

#### IV. Judah's encampment toward the sun- rising was to be WITH HIS BANNER.

The tribe had a special banner, whereon, tradition says, a lion was represented upon a red flag, suspended probably, after the common ancient manner, upon a cross. Be this as it may,

we know that Christ crucified is the banner of God's Israel and Judah, the ensign lifted up unto the nations. Banners gave the signal for the people to march ; they were planted upon hills and eminences, that they might be seen at a distance, and straightway the hosts marched towards and gathered round them. So it is with our banner of the cross. It is a magnet of irresistible attraction. Wherever it is lifted up, there is a movement, an excitement, a stir, and the elect of God gather around it with exultation or with weeping. There you may see persons, whom the humiliation of the manger could not affect, nor the throne of majesty overawe, whom the prospect of everlasting welfare could not allure, nor that of everlasting woe alarm. But a glimpse of the cross has riveted their attention ; the crown of thorns has touched their very soul ; the reedy sceptre has smitten them to the ground, the sufferings of the Son of God have melted their rocky hearts. Where is it that a Rahab and a Magdalene are changed into the daughters of the Lord Almighty ? Where is a raging Saul converted into a minister of the Most High ? And where is captivity led captive by the Lord ? Is it not where the word of the cross is proclaimed, and the banner of the cross is unfurled ? The banner of the cross draws and gathers the people unto the Lord. Lo, this is the centre around which many millions of spirits in heaven

and on earth stand marshalled day and night; for under this banner is life eternal.

When a host has lost its banner, it is not only a great loss, but a great disgrace, and almost worse than a defeat. Our enemies know this; and what do they more eagerly desire than to wrest, if possible, this banner from our hands? Christ as a holy person, Christ as a Divine person, Christ as a King, Christ as exalted to heaven and glorified, they are willing to allow us, provided they can only deprive us of Christ *crucified*. All the shafts of their scorn and ridicule are directed against our holding him in this character. To turn it into foolishness and an old wives' fable, is the object of all their learning and teaching. They would be glad to despoil us of our banner, the banner of our tribe to which we are sworn. Rally therefore around it; and keep in close order about it. Die, rather than permit it to be taken from you.

The banner leads in the van of the host. So does the cross: and "*Forward*" is the watchword inspired by it among its followers. Does the cross lead the way through tempest and conflict? It inspires us with courage, it gives us patience, it yields us triumph. Does it conduct through suffering and darkness? It calms our fears, and gives us light. Does it direct our way through temptations and trials? It makes the world disgusting, and its vain delights and lusts insipid; it tames and subdues the flesh. Would the remem-

brance of our past sins, which we have now repented of and forsaken, still depress or affright us ? Would our own hearts disquiet us, and make us despond ? Yet, with the cross of Christ for our guide, that is, with renewing, purifying faith in Christ crucified for us, who is he that shall condemn us ? For it is God that justifieth. Does our banner go forward to the valley of the shadow of death ? Still it dispels the darkness that would otherwise reign there : the river of death dries up before it, and heaven opens to our view. Lastly, does it lead on to the tribunal of the judgment day ? There will it have opened our way into the presence of the great King himself, who will hold out to us the golden sceptre, and charge his angels to bid us welcome. Such manifold power is there in Judah's spiritual banner. It leads us through difficulties which else were insuperable. That power of the Spirit which accompanies it, dissolves the gate of brass and cuts asunder the bars of iron ; it opens a way through stubborn rocks, and over mountains that reach to heaven.

When a combatant falls in the field, it is counted an honour for him to be covered with the banner. O Judah, let it be the same with *thee* If thou fall or grow weak in the conflict; instantly let the banner of atonement wave over thee and cover thee ; let it animate thee again to seek glory, honour, and immortality. And when, at length, thou departest this life, depart under the shadow of this banner ; and lo, thou hast

been faithful unto death, and shalt receive the crown of life.

V. The text further speaks of Judah's **HOST** and **CAPTAIN**.

How astonished should we be, what mingled terror and great joy would surprise us, if suddenly those covering angel-hosts, which encompass the spiritual Israel, were to burst the veil which renders them invisible to mortal eyes, and come forth at once into full view! Some in this world *have* been favoured to behold a portion of those invisible squadrons which always attend the children of God. Jacob was thus favoured when he fled from Laban : "And Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him. And when Jacob saw them, he said, This is God's host ; and he called the name of that place *Mahanaim*," which signifies two camps or hosts, Gen. xxxii. 1, 2. Elisha's servant enjoyed a similar sight, when he was with his master at Dothan, whither the king of Syria had sent horses and chariots, and a great host by night to take him. "When the servant of the man of God was risen early, and gone forth, behold, an host encompassed the city both with horses and chariots. And his servant said unto him, Alas, my master ! how shall we do ? And he answered, Fear not : for they that be with us are more than they that be with them. And Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the Lord

opened the eyes of the young man ; and he saw : and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha," 2 Kings vi. 14—17. Here was another Mahanaim. Thus the spiritual Judah's host is the heavenly band of "watchers," who are sent forth to minister to the safety and welfare of those who shall be heirs of salvation. These are those mighty ones "that excel in strength;" who, with their golden harps before the throne of the Majesty on high, behold in light the face of the Ancient of days. These are those blessed messengers, who, being caused to fly swiftly from heaven, so gladly visit the dear children of God upon earth ; so gladly bring their concerns into his presence, and are so desirous to carry back a good report of them into the everlasting habitations ; who await the Divine behests at the foot of the throne ; and who speed like the winds of a tempest, and as flames of fire, in holy impetuosity, and with the rapidity of lightning, to the assistance and protection of God's elect. It is the angels of God who alight amidst the community of his saints here below ; who go in and out of his city upon earth, to guard our little ones from harm ; to encourage our young men in holy enterprises ; to invigorate God's labourers, who are bearing the burden and the heat of the day ; to cheer with good tidings our aged and venerable fathers and mothers in Israel, and to let them hear beforehand the first gentle swell of their

heavenly harps. Oh ! one cannot but feel a sweet and holy thrill at the thought, that such a host of God invisibly encampeth about them that fear him. And who knoweth how near also those clouds of witnesses who have gone home before us, and of whom the world was not worthy, may be permitted invisibly to return to us ! Is it likely that the gate by which a Samuel, a Moses, and an Elias stepped back, though but for a few moments, into the circle of their mortal brethren,—is it likely, much less is it certain, that that gate has since all along been shut and barred ? Who would assert this ? But it is enough that we live already in the midst of the invisible world, and have heavenly beings for our friends and fellow-servants, even the angel-spirits for our companions and guardian attendants. And let the naturally timid Christian, and those who think themselves exposed to any personal danger, and are ready to cry out, Alas ! how shall we do ! console themselves with the certainty, that such an invisible host is always encamped round about them. More are those that are for us, than all those that can be against us. Let us rejoice in this, and have peace.

**VI. The name of Judah's CAPTAIN is NAHSHON, SON OF AMMINADAB.**

This name, as will be seen by its interpretation, truly belongs to the Prince of the host, the

Captain of our salvation. Nahshon signifies *Experience*; and who is so experienced in conflict as He who was made perfect in sufferings, and having spoiled principalities and powers, overcame death, and opened to us the gate of everlasting life! Who is so experienced a captain as He, whose unslumbering pastoral care has been exercised for ages in behalf of his people! What arm is like His, who, by himself alone, has all along opened a way for his poor ransomed church to pass through millions of her foes! Who is so experienced in the tumult and alarm of war as He, against whom the infatuated and cold-hearted world have been bearing arms day and night, for so many centuries! And who is so accustomed to triumph as He, who is making all such enemies his footstool, and every where abides last upon the field! Appropriate therefore to Him is the name of *Nahshon*, or *Experience*. And well indeed is it with those, who in Him possess such a shield of help, and such a sword of excellency. He is also as truly in character the son of Amminadab. For this name, which signifies *My people are a willing gift*, directs our thoughts first to God the Father, as *freely giving* to Christ all who will ever come unto him, and as making them also *willing* in the day of his power. We know that to the incarnate Word, the Son of God, hath been assigned and given from the beginning of the world, a people consisting of lost and ruined

sinners, enemies to God by sin and wicked works ; who being made willing in the day of his power, show forth the riches of his goodness and grace, to the praise of his glorious name. Hear his own declarations upon this great subject. “ All that the Father *giveth* me shall come unto me ; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. This is the Father’s will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath *given* me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day,” John vi. 37, 39. Blessed then for ever and ever are those, who, upon good and scriptural grounds, can be numbered with this company of his chosen ; whom the Father, from everlasting, hath given to the Prince of Peace, not for works of righteousness which they have done, but of his own mercy and grace. These are the true sheep of Christ ; and as they belong to an omnipotent Shepherd, he gives unto them eternal life ; he promises that they shall never perish, and that none shall be able to pluck them out of his hand.

Therefore, in quietness and confidence, O Judah of God, enjoy the name of thy tribe, thy camp, and its position ; thy banner, thy host, thy Captain. Arrogate not the false liberty of marching or halting at your own will. Suppress within you every rising of pride and vanity ; and ever number yourselves among the weak and the poor. Live upon grace alone : be nothing in your own eyes ; and whatever you are, let it be

in your Mediator and Surety, who is your strength and your salvation. Repose only in his merits, his grace and power. Abide under the banner to which you are sworn, and which is both your glory and your consolation ; the certain pledge of your victory and your liberty. Let your face be always turned towards the sunrising ; look not behind you after the false glare of this world, till “your light is come, and the glory of the Lord be risen upon you.” Look for the *brightness* of its rising, and breathe the morning air : for this is the will of your God. Say not in your heart, I will walk in darkness ; for twilight at least is before you. Neither let the night visions of your sins, infirmities, or crimes, nor the body of sin and death, suggest despondency to your penitent heart. Look beyond them all to the morning of the promised jubilee of complete redemption, which is drawing nearer to you every hour. Rise amidst the beamings of hope, and hold converse with heaven itself. Triumph over darkness, temptations, and death, by an *upward* flight of faith ; and thus let your spirit mingle with the dawn of eternal day. O Judah, be of good courage ; for it is the Lord’s command. Sing cheerfully thy morning song, even in those vales of mist and darkness, through which thy way may conduct thee. He leads us, whose name is Immanuel, God with us. Amen.

## WISDOM'S DELIGHTS WITH THE SONS OF MEN.

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PROVERBS viii. 31.

Rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth ; and my delights were with the sons of men.

THE key to this mysterious chapter is not difficult to be found. Divine Wisdom is the speaker ; and we know that Christ is personally "The Wisdom of God," 1 Cor. i. 24. He is that Wisdom which is "justified of her children ;" and which said, "I will send unto you prophets and apostles," Luke xi. 49.

In the words before us, there are revealed, concerning this personal, substantial, and self-existent Wisdom, things which may be easily apprehended by the light of the New Testament. We shall begin with the latter part of the verse.

### I. MY DELIGHTS WERE WITH THE SONS OF MEN.

Wisdom then has her delights ; and where does she find them ? Are they only about the tree of life, by the river of the water of life, where, crowned with glory, she beholds ten thousand times ten thousand celebrating her praises, doing

her homage, and ministering unto her? Not so. Her delights overflow beyond the bounds of paradise; they descend even to "the sons of men." This is spoken, not only in reference to the beginning of time, when it must have been the Lord's delight to dwell with man, to walk among the trees of the garden, and to behold the first innocent pair; but here is reference also to the time after sin entered our world, and "the imagination of man's heart had become evil from his youth," and the whole human race had become "dead in trespasses and sins," entangled in the snare of the devil, laden with iniquity, subjected to the curse of the violated law, and sunk fast in the deep mire where no ground is. Well then may we be astonished, that of our race, under such circumstances, the Lord of glory should say, "My delights are with the sons of men."

These delights are manifold. The prime of them doubtless is that which he finds in his own self. For his name *only* is excellent, beautiful, and amiable; and his praise, above heaven and earth. All else is lovely and glorious, only in so far as it has emanated from Him, and is perfected by Him. He has complacential delight in himself, for he *only* is perfection, independent and eternal. The communications of his glorious attributes are also his delight. But where do these communications rest, if not on the sons of men? The elect angels have a glory put upon them distinct from these. The glory of *Christ* is a

special boon to *sinners*. Wonderful as this appears, it is truth; and that is more wonderful. For the sake of sinners he made himself of no reputation; despoiling himself, as it were, of his glory. He does keep his white raiment not for himself alone, but bestows it for the adorning of his "bride," the church. Were it otherwise, how could we lift up our eyes to heaven? How could we be of such good courage, did not his righteousness cover all our sins? How could we think of God as our Father, in whose sight "the heavens are not clean," unless we are assured that we are clothed with the righteousness of Him who is all righteous, and invested with the holiness of Him who alone is holy? How could we, who are as the bruised reed, withstand all the power of the enemy, were we not assured that we are strengthened with might by his Spirit? How could we ever expect to have boldness in the day of judgment, were we ignorant or unmindful of that saving truth, that "by the obedience of One shall many be made righteous?" But the gospel encourages us to draw nigh unto God, in full assurance of faith, relying entirely on Him "who is made to us, Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification, and Redemption," and to regard him, in these respects, as our own. It may be said, that it is an easy thing to shine in the merits of another. This, however, is God's way of saving sinners; and easy as it is, few are found to adopt, or even to believe it. Thus then are his delights

with the sons of men. "Father," said he, briefly, but clearly, "the glory which thou gavest me, I have given *them*," John xvii. 22.

This glory is his delight : and as his supreme delight is in his own perfections, not less so is it in those works of his, to which the glory of his perfections is communicated. Accordingly it is written, "The Lord shall rejoice in his works," Psa. civ. 31. But where is the Lord Christ's special work ? Not among the powers of darkness ; for *they* have been, as it were, their own artificers ; they have wrought themselves upon their own wheel into what they are. Not among the angels of light, for they have kept their first estate : they have suffered none to take their crown, but have holden it by unsinning obedience. Not among the virtuous or righteous after the flesh : they presume upon being good without Christ, and their cause will have to be tried at the bar of God. If then you look for the Lord's special work, look for it among such as smite upon their breast and cry, "God be merciful unto me a sinner !" "Thou Son of David, have mercy on *me*!" "The dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from their master's table." Look for it among those who are ready to wash the feet of Jesus with their tears, and to wipe them with the hairs of their head : or among those who will tell you, that once they were blasphemers, and persecutors, and injurious, but they obtained mercy. The language of all such is, "Whom have I in heaven

but thee ? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee," Ps. lxxiii. 25. "Lord, thou knowest all things ; thou knowest that I love thee," John xxi. 16, or, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him," Job xiii. 15. It is where we behold such stirrings as these ; where the stony heart is replaced by a heart of flesh ; where the forehead receives his mark, and bears an impress from the seal of his Spirit ; where eyes that never wept for sin, become fountains of tears, that glisten with the light of heaven ; where *righteous* ones begin to mourn like doves over the ruins of their own righteousness, and the once wise of this world now reflect upon the sherds and rubbish of their own wisdom, and lament that "like a crane or a swallow so did they chatter," Isa. xxxviii. 14; where poor and miserable sinners have found heart to love *him* ; where the once condemned criminal can cheerfully venture to appeal, in the presence of accusers, to a merciful Saviour as his gracious Advocate and Protector. Here, beloved brethren, is the Lord Christ's work, his special work ; and wherever this is found, there is his delight ; and it *is* found, with the sons of men, with poor redeemed sinners. In them is his complacency ; they are "the travail of his soul ;" he "beholds" them, and is "satisfied."

The language of inspiration contains frequently much in few words ; and this is particularly true of the gracious words uttered by our blessed

Lord himself. How unlike the common language of mankind, which often consists of many words with little meaning ! " My delights were with the sons of men," are the words here ; but they evidently convey the notion of *dwelling* with the sons of men. He is not ashamed to speak with such condescension and love as this to poor sinners ; for " he is not ashamed to call them brethren." Consequently he will dwell with them, and this is his delight. As it is also written, " Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool, but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit," Isa. lxvi. 1, 2.

But oh ! most blessed Saviour, how can thy complacency rest where there is so much to provoke thy righteous displeasure ! How can it be thy delight to dwell among those who have no natural delight in thee ! Or, how can thy joy be fulfilled, or thy rejoicing break forth, where all is so wearying and revolting ! Yet he says, " My delights were with the sons of men." That these his delights are not transitory, but deeply rooted and everlasting; has from age to age been manifested, ever since the beginning of the world. Look back to that beginning of time, before even one human being was formed, and observe what a sublime process ushered in man's creation. Man, who was to have dominion over every thing upon the earth, was not created like the other creatures. God said of every thing be-

sides, "Let it be," and it was so. They were made in a moment, by the word of his mouth. But in creating man, God became, as it were, the potter, and formed him carefully out of the dust of the earth ; and then, after he had fashioned the dust, and breathed the breath of life into his nostrils, " man became a living soul."

No sooner was man formed, than we find the Lord God, in the character of Immanuel, already with him walking among the trees of the garden. Neither was there any thing very strange or astonishing in this, as long as man continued innocent. But what if we assert, that, *by the fall itself, and in consequence of human sin*, his delight to dwell with us became only **GREATER THAN EVER!** Does it seem credible ? And yet it is the fact. Verily, now began to "sound like an harp," the "bowels" of his compassion towards us. "For the Lord is gracious ; his mercy is everlasting ; he delighteth in mercy." Henceforth began to be evinced the full meaning of that oracular message, "Be silent, O all flesh, before the Lord ; for he is raised up out of his holy habitation," Zech. ii. 13.

If we look back into the days of the Old Testament, we shall see how the blessed Saviour from the beginning went in and out amongst his sinful creatures ; and built himself tabernacles amidst dust and ashes. Behold, in the wilderness of Beersheba, how he visited Hagar, the Egyptian handmaid; and comforted her with

words of kindness. Pass on to the plains of Mamre, and witness that delightful sight, the Lord as Abraham's guest at the tent door in the cool of the day, and the two angels with him, sitting and eating under the tree, Gen. xviii. Revisit Peniel, where he appears as a man ; and Mount Horeb, where he manifests himself, not upon a throne, but in a bush, burning with fire and not consumed. Let the cloudy pillar open for a moment, and there you behold the glory of his countenance. Think of his abiding forty years in that cloud by day, and in a shining pillar of fire by night ; and this for the sake of guiding, like the sun, and protecting, as with a shield, a stiff-necked people, who were constantly rebelling against him. What delights with the sons of men were here ! Nor had he forgotten them at Ophrah, where Gideon beheld him as the Angel-Jehovah, sitting under an oak. The time would fail us to speak of Jerusalem and its temple, where he dwelt between the cherubim above the mercy-seat, and of his visitations by all his holy prophets down to the time of Malachi. But we find him nearer to us still ; for whither are we arrived this day ? Is it not at Bethlehem ? Come then, and let us pay a devout visit to the stable and to the manger. What do you there see ? It is a babe, an infant of days, and yet the very same who said, " My delights were with the sons of men !" " God manifest in the flesh !" How unutterably won-

derful ! "The mighty God ? The everlasting Father ! The Prince of Peace !" " My Lord and my God !" Here human reason is at a stand ; our knees tremble ; our hearts throb ; our spirits are confounded, and we retain no strength. The miracle of mercy is too overpowering for the weakness of mortals. It is well at present that we as yet see it through a veil and at a distance, hardly admitting into the mind the thousandth part of it ; otherwise we should die : so vastly more is it than at present we could bear. Thus His former dwelling with Israel in that familiar intercourse already noticed, was very far from being, in the fulness of his own meaning, his dwelling with the sons of men. It was a relationship too foreign ; a friendship too lukewarm. Viewing *himself* simply as God, and *them* as poor sinners, he saw that the distance was still infinitely too wide : he therefore " made himself of no reputation, and was found in the likeness of men," " The Son of *man*," a *human* child, our *real* kinsman, our *brother*. But alas ! how easily can men talk of such wonders, as if they were either nothing, or something quite familiar and of common place ; while the eyes of seraphim, who from their heavenly elevations have been looking down almost two thousand years into this abyss of love, have never been able to ascertain its depth, nor to cease from their adoring admiration of it ! Their sublimest harmony of the hallelujah is raised up from this profound.

What led the Saviour to such exceedingly great condescension? It was purely of His tender love towards mankind. "My delights were with the sons of men." But whence originated this love of God? It originated in his own bosom; and we can say no more, and see no further. Bear then in mind, beloved brethren, that although Christ be no longer the infant in the manger, still he continues as a man. He is our brother unto this day, though now upon the throne of heaven. He has still a human and brotherly heart towards us, which is touched as tenderly as ever, with "the feeling of our infirmities," having himself been "in all points tempted like as we are." And though we cannot, as did Mary and Simeon, take him as the child Jesus in our arms, his delight to dwell with the sons of men is so far from being at all diminished, that he is still as near to us, and his dwelling with us is as intimate, as when he was upon earth, and even more so. For under the New Testament dispensation, there is a more abiding and entire habitation of God our Saviour *in us*, as well as *with us*. It is not the tarrying only with us for a day, however delightful this may be to an Abraham, a Matthew, or a Zaccheus; it is no going in and out, as in the camp of Israel, when the glory of the Lord appeared at the door of the tabernacle. But as truly as Christ dwelleth in heaven, in the high and holy place, (and there indeed he abideth a Priest continually,) so truly is he with

his people upon earth during all the days of their pilgrimage. The High and Lofty One, who inhabiteth eternity, whom heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain, thus in very deed dwells with man. He will have a church in every Christian's house ; and where should he be if not in his church ? That is, in the very midst of every Christian family. Verily, Christ speaks of himself as more than even a *family* inmate, "If any *one* hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me," Rev. iii. 20. And as to his *continuance*, he saith, "Lo, I am with you *always*, even unto the end of the world," Matt. xxviii. 20. Well may we "praise the Lord for his goodness;" for his condescension to the children of men, Psa. cvii. 8. And if He delight thus to "dwell with" us, and "in the midst of" us, what may we not look for at his hands, in the way of counsel and instruction ; not merely on our most important occasions, but as a very pleasant help and guide to us even in our daily emergencies ! He is in the house, in the family, in the heart ; and we may refer every thing to him : yes, every thing. For imagine not, my brethren, that, according to the common meaning of the words *devotional* or *spiritual*, he is too spiritual for you to refer to him all your *temporal* matters. Remember, that the Lord God of Israel, your Saviour, who was pleased to concern himself about the widow's

handful of meal in a barrel, and her little oil in a cruse, is equally pleased to concern himself that you also may "lack nothing" you really need. O would ye but believe, ye should see the glory of God. O Israel, Israel ! "what nation is there that can find their gods so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is, in all things that we call upon him for?" Deut. iv. 7. Who delights to be about our path, and to watch at our bed ; to stand by us in our labours and employments, and to concern himself that we shall lack nothing that is either temporally or spiritually good, Luke xxii. 35. For "his delights were with the sons of men."

II. Divine Wisdom is also represented, in our text, as *rejoicing* in the habitable part of God's earth. The Hebrew original is peculiarly forcible and poetical ; it indicates the liveliest exultation and delight, meaning literally, playing or disporting on the orb of God's earth.

Let us notice the context ; "Jehovah possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. When there were no depths, I was brought forth ; when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth ; while as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the highest parts of the dust of the world. When he prepared the heavens, I was there :

when he set a compass upon the face of the depth : when he established the clouds above : when he strengthened the fountains of the deep : when he gave to the sea his decree, that the waters should not pass his commandment : when he appointed the foundations of the earth : then I was by him, as one brought up with him, and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him. Rejoicing in the habitable part" (or, in the orb) "of his earth, and my delights were with the sons of men." What then is implied in such declarations as these ? Surely that, as He formed the earth and the world with *wisdom*, so also with *love* ; as he formed it for the immediate *benefit*, so also for the *happiness* of his creatures ; and moreover, with a special view to the pleasure and delight of the sons of men, on whom he had already thought with tenderness. Yes, my beloved brethren, when he spread a flowery carpet upon the fields, and gave to the lilies their holiday adorning ; when he tinged the heavens with their lovely azure, and poured into the vegetable world its congenial green ; when he built the mountains and hills, so as to embosom between them many a far-stretched level of delightful verdure, and sunk the beautifully sequestered valleys far beneath, with their cool rivulets and crystal brooks ; when he bestowed upon the little songsters of the woods the gift of their sweet melody, and taught the lark to praise the Lord in the height ; when he was thus engaged in dis-

pensing a profusion of bountiful convenience, appropriate decoration, and lovely colouring, then might Divine wisdom be said to have "rejoiced in the habitable globe." And when the Father of creation so arranged the whole, as to make the face of nature serve literally as a book of God, though many parts even of this book are above the present reach of our faculties; when he appointed "the things which are seen" to be as vehicles and types for conveying to us some distant notion of the things which are spiritual and invisible, and made them pleasingly hieroglyphical of a multitude of sublime and eternal truths, the deciphering of which furnishes a delightful employment down to the present day; when, for instance, he set the sun in the firmament as a memento of himself, making its influence a visible representation of his own influence in the spiritual world; when he constituted the grain of wheat, which falls into the earth and dies, in the process of putting forth the living germ of a new and noble plant, seemingly to attest the physical reality of that new birth which he has taught to be indispensable to ourselves; and when he appointed the beautiful butterfly, lightly poising with its painted wings upon the rose, and reminding us of the death-like changes through which it has passed, as if sweetly and gracefully to preach to us of a joyful resurrection, and subsequent glorious liberty of the children of God, Rom. vii. 21;—then, yes then, was our

own Saviour, Immanuel, by Him as one brought up with Him, and He, by whom God created all things, was daily his delight, rejoicing always before Him; rejoicing in the orb of his earth, with prospective delight, among the sons of men.

And in Christ, the Wisdom of God, as thus graciously revealed, the same wonderful condescension continues still. We know that an affectionate mother, intent on promoting the comfort and happiness of her little child, succeeds in her object by cheerfully adapting herself to the child's simple and innocent ideas and dispositions. Now, it is precisely in this way that our blessed Lord has condescended to us his weak and helpless creatures, and shows his delight in the sons of men, by continuing thus to stoop down to us. Every instance of his adapting himself, as far as can be, to our human notions, wishes, and expressions, is an instance of that peculiar delight attributed to Him in the text. Attend only to His language every where, and observe how his own Spirit teaches his prophets and apostles to do the same, and to be "gentle among them, even as a nurse cherisheth her children," 1 Thess. ii. 7; how he will not disdain to own their poor addresses to him, and to make himself intelligible to them in their own imperfect dialect. Observe how, on all occasions, he condescends to our human conceptions, that he may draw nigh to us, and become known by us. Though the "gifts and calling of God.

are without repentance," yet mark how often he speaks of its repenting him because of the groanings of his people ; and of its repenting him of the evil. See again, how, in order to give us joyful ideas of the glory that shall be revealed in us, he adapts himself to our conceptions, by borrowing his imagery from our human delights and earthly recreations, when he speaks of that unutterable glory, as a feast for invited guests ; a marriage supper ; a dwelling in the mansions of his Father's house ; in a city with beautiful streets and buildings ; an adorning with precious stones and shining metals ; a partaking of pleasant fruits ; repose in paradise beneath the tree of life, and so forth. Why is all this, but because our present condition, compared with that in futurity, is only as childhood compared with manhood ? Is not then such condescension of the blessed God our Saviour to our comparatively childish conceptions, that he may gradually, as by Jacob's ladder, conduct us up to conceptions of his own, only another beautiful illustration of the words of the text ? Surely he who does not know God in these his gracious doings, cannot be said to have beheld "with open face as in a mirror the glory of the Lord."

Again ; consider the *manner* in which he brings his mysteries near to us, for the strengthening of our faith in his declarations and promises. It is like the manner of adaptation to little children. For he *sets before us every variety*

of representative imagery, to woo our attention ; and hereby to enable us, as it were, to see, handle, and in a degree to understand, what would otherwise be unintelligible to us. Thus to preserve fresh in remembrance the promise he gave to Noah, and to keep up our confidence of its fulfilment, he hangs out to us in the clouds a beautiful bow of seven colours, that we may feast our eyes upon it ; and assures us, that as often as he presents it to us, he himself will look upon it, and remember his promise not to curse the ground any more for man's sake, or to destroy the earth with a flood, Gen. ix. He graciously did the same with Gideon, when he at once so entirely condescended to him, as to a child's wish, respecting the fleece upon the threshing-floor. Gideon, wishing to have a double seal of the Lord's promise, asked first, that the dew should be upon the fleece alone, and that the floor on which it lay should be dry ; and then that the fleece should be perfectly dry, while there was dew all about it upon the ground. "And God did so ;" he fulfilled the desire of Gideon in both instances, Judges vi. Such is his condescension to human infirmity. But this conduct on the part of God has always deep wisdom in it. Thus as the Lord, by Noah's rainbow, depicted in soft lineaments for spiritual eyes, a representation of the promised Mediator ; in like manner may we not suppose in that miracle of the fleece, there was a typical pre-showing of the manner in which he

bestows the spiritual dew of the new covenant under the Christian dispensation ? For, previously to this dispensation, the copious heavenly dew was in Israel alone, and the rest of the earth was dry ; but since then, the dew has descended upon the nations, and it has been dry in Israel.

How agreeably and significantly did the wisdom of God win the attention of the sons of men, in the structure and ordinances of the tabernacle of the temple ; where, with every variety of strange imagery and shadowy representation, it brought near to them the mysteries of heavenly things, of the highest and most blessed import ! And in what childlike language does it address us, even to this day, concerning the greatest wonders and most sacred truths ; to wit, by the water of baptism, and by the symbols and pledges of the Lord's supper ! Are not these things a most condescending accommodation of the wisdom of God to the weakness of his children, which seems to require something of a sensible and representative kind, in order to understand and believe ? Behold Divine Wisdom's lovely and gracious condescension, in adapting herself thus to the comparative childhood of our present condition !

And how much is there of the same character in God's every-day communion with his beloved children ! Oh that we were always as quietly confident as we ought to be, that this is all he

means, even when his dealings with us appear in a light which is much too gloomy, and by which we admit needless cares and anxieties into the mind, instead of rejoicing in the Lord evermore! "He hideth his face, and we are troubled;" as if his mercy were clean gone for ever, and his promise come utterly to an end for evermore. But it is not so. He is but behind "the lattice," Sol. Song ii. 9, and would have us call upon him, saying, "Return, O Lord, how long? and let it repent thee concerning thy servants," Psa. xc. 13. Then, according to his promise, will he hear and answer us; for sweet to him at all times is the voice of his obedient children, Sol. Song ii. 14. At one time we may feel as if He had even repented of having "forgiven us all trespasses." Then will our old sins rise up against us; sins which we thought had long ago been cast into the depths of the sea; and we tremble to behold them, as at our first repentance. But the Lord, even at this season, is only dealing with us as with his forgetful children, to reawaken our first love. At another time, even in the midst of his gracious discoveries and influences, he suddenly shows us the enormity of our past transgressions, beyond the manner in which we had ever seen or felt it before. Then it seems as if we surely *must* sink down again under his just displeasure. Here, however, he is only "dealing with us as with children." And he does so, that we may the more sweetly taste how

gracious he is, and set increasing value upon the merit of his atonement, and upon the influences of his Holy Spirit. Again, he permits our ancient adversary to stretch out his hand with a desire to take our crown, or at least to shatter the foundation of our hope and comfort. Then is the cry heard, "Lord, save us; we perish," Luke viii. 24. But we perish not; neither is the danger so great as we imagine. Closely considered, it is only a dealing with us as with children, on the part of God's adorable Wisdom, which suffers such things to come to pass, that we may hold fast that we have, Rev. ii. 10, 25, and not, as we imagine, that we may lose it. And when He brings us through many a labyrinth in our earthly course, for the quickening of our spiritual understanding; or, when he takes up, and makes use of the most trifling circumstances in our life, to convey something comfortable to our hearts, or something instructive and profitable: when he causes objects of everyday occurrence to become beautifully eloquent and appropriate representations of a great variety of spiritual blessings, and to remind us of a doctrine, a precept, a warning, a consolation, a promise, or a narrative in his holy word: when he manifests such tender regard to the least of our wishes, and so kindly surprises us with his guidance and blessing in the smallest matters: when, as we peruse the sacred volume, we find him converting some scriptural occurrence, ap-

parently unimportant, into a typical or parabolical representation, full of refreshment to our souls; thus teaching us to obtain figs from thistles, and delicious grapes from the thorny bush: —in all such instances the Divine Wisdom is tenderly condescending to the wants of the children of men, and “rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth.”

If, moreover, by that word “rejoicing” you would also be reminded of *sweet music*, it is applicable to this also. All the music on earth which is not made *by Christ and for him*, is discordant in his ear, and as the raven’s croak. As it was He who gave to David’s harp so sweet a sound, vibrated its strings upon the hills of Bethlehem, inspired the royal bard with his own voice, and directed it in those lovely psalms to personate Himself, so it is no other than He, who still to the present day, opens the lips of them that sing with the spirit and with the understanding also. He opens their lips to show forth His praise; he gives harmony to their voices, and cheerful melody to their hearts. He lodges the psaltery in their bosoms, and plays upon the hidden chords of their inmost soul, with the breath of his mouth. He lives in their sighs of sorrow, and in their shouts of joy: in their longing plaints of love, and in their hymnings of praise: in their cries at the cross, and in their exultation upon that delectable hill, where, upon their foreheads, they find themselves sealed with the Spirit

unto the day of redemption. In every breathing of the renewed nature, whether it be of a groan or an hosanna : in every act of homage, and in every hailing of holy joy : in the great temple choir of the waiting church militant, who all harmonize in that one ejaculation, "Amen, even so, come, Lord Jesus, come quickly !" there, even there is He, the Lord and his Spirit, present, as the life and inspiration of all, however poorly fitted such persons and things may seem for presence and habitation like his.

Such, my brethren, is something of the manner in which His delight is with the sons of men, and such is his rejoicing in the habitable part of God's earth. Happy are the people who have Him, who is the Wisdom of God, Him, who is the Lord of sabaoth, thus always *by* them, rejoicing always *before* them, and delighting *in* them. Let us then not be "wise in our own eyes, or prudent in our own sight," Isa. v. 21 ; "for it is" also "written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent," 1 Cor. i. 19. Let us, dear brethren, be converted, and become as little children ; humble ourselves as a little child, and receive the kingdom of heaven as a little child, Matt. xviii. 3, 4 ; Luke xviii. 17. The mind of Immanuel, God with us, is only after such ; only among such children does he delight to dwell. And wherever he delights to dwell, certainly it

is good to be there ; it is a foretaste of heaven in this wilderness.

O Lord Jesus, appoint over us, as our banner, that love, which associates thy delights with the perishing sons of men, and renders thy rejoicing here with poor sinners sweet to thee, as the joys of a higher and far better world. Amen.

## THE NIGHT VISION.

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**ZECHARIAH i. 8.**

I saw by night, and behold a man riding upon a red horse, and he stood among the myrtle trees that were in the bottom; and behind him were there red horses, speckled, and white.

The prophecies of Zechariah contain some of the most deeply interesting and cheering revelations that ever were disclosed under the Old Testament dispensation. This prophet much resembles Ezekiel in his fervour, and Isaiah in his sublime imagery and mysterious visions. Like the latter, he may truly be styled an evangelical prophet. The Anointed One of God and his kingdom, are the centre and axis about which the fiery wheel of all his revelations and imagery turns. The vision in our text is both beautiful and consoling. Let us consider,

### I. THE TIME WHEN IT WAS SEEN.

### II. THE VISION ITSELF, WITH ITS SPIRITUAL IMPORT.

I. The time when the vision was seen is expressed in the words of the text. "I saw," saith

the prophet, "by night." Primarily he meant natural night, while men slept. At that season the Lord came to him, opening the prophet's spiritual eyes, and causing to pass before him, like a pictured scene in bright and glowing colours, a sublime and cheering vision. For it seemed good unto the Holy Ghost to attest that important truth, that "the Keeper of Israel neither slumbereth nor sleepeth," on this occasion, by a proo~~f~~ fact, to render it the more impressive; for which purpose he comes to the prophet in the darkness of the night. Nearly all the saints of the Old and New Testament have had some experience of such nightly visits of God; and the wise Elihu thus speaks of them to Job as a thing very common in his time: "In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed; then he openeth the ears of men, and seal-eth their instruction, that he may withdraw man from his purpose, and hide pride from man," Job xxxiii. 15—17. Many have experienced the truth of this, and, like Nicodemus, have become acquainted with Jesus by night. At that season, when the body is at rest, when the senses are shut up by darkness and silence, and withdrawn from the turmoil of day-light distractions, then is the soul's hearing more acute; the thoughts proceed with less restraint, and unimpeded meditation dives deeper into the truth of things. Then does the trumpet of the Divine word peal

with redoubled force in the ear of conscience ; the thunder of its maledictions is appalling ; and the alarms raised by the inward accuser are more awakening and terrible. And when the clear vision of our sins, of our vain and erring life, of our broken vows and resolutions, of our impurity and hypocrisy ; the clear prospect of death that awaits us, with the certainty of a judgment to come, to which we are every day drawing nearer and nearer ; the clear view of the sufferings of that Saviour whom we have betrayed and crucified afresh : when visions such as these break in upon our retirement, haunt us in our beds, and fix themselves before the eyes of our minds—then do we feel strong discipline applied to us, and a powerful kind of instruction sealed to us by the Almighty. And whither at such seasons can we flee to escape it ? Into the company of mirthful friends and acquaintance ? They, too, are in their beds, and fast asleep. Into the avocations and bustle of business ? Its doors are closed for the night. Into the streets or market-place, among the throng of the neighbourhood ? The streets are void, and the market-place is silent. It is night ; and there is nothing at hand wherewith to deafen the ear, veil the mental eye, and drive away serious thought. Then is the soul troubled ; it is tossed like a vessel on the stormy waves ; its anchor is cast this way and that way, but finds no hold. The troubled sinner looks out for a haven, but every

thing like it is tempestuous as the open sea ; and he seems rocked over an abyss. He would gladly charm away the storm within him ; he endeavors to rally his day-light thoughts, and to reason with himself, saying, Why should I be troubled ? there is no real danger. But it is all to no purpose. Consolation has no place within him ; his uneasiness only increases the more ; till he finds *Him* who can say, " Peace, be still !" and who spreadeth forth his hands in the midst of us, Isa. xxv. 11. Numberless Christians have at one time or another experienced those awful and terrible, but salutary and beneficial night scenes ; and can say after the manner of Eli-phaz the Temanite, " In thoughts from the visions of the night, when deep sleep falleth on men, fear came upon me, and trembling, which made all my bones to shake," Job iv. 13, 14. O ye who in the day-time, amidst the noise of this world, neglect to hear the voice of God, may you in such nightly visitations of the Almighty soon be favoured to hear him speaking to you more forcibly and intelligibly ! Let this night, rather than that of to-morrow, be preferred for serious meditation ; " If thou save not thy life to night, to-morrow thou shalt be slain," 1 Sam. xix. 11. Lay such a thought to heart, when you again lay down to rest.

" I saw *by night*," saith the prophet ; and these words may remind us of the circumstances of the time at which the vision was given.

Zechariah prophesied about five hundred years before the birth of Christ. He had lived with his parents in the captivity of Babylon ; but after the friendly edict of Cyrus, king of Persia, he returned with the first company under Zerubbabel to the country of his fathers, and assisted at the rebuilding of the holy city and its temple. Then was a time of great joy and jubilant expectation. God, who remembered his covenant with their fathers, had again decidedly appeared for his people Israel ; and all seemed raised by the cheering hope of golden days at hand. Then was it not night, but bright day in Israel ; nevertheless, the glory was of short duration, for the men of Samaria brought a dark cloud upon it. Hardly had the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the temple with gladness and great zeal commenced, when these strangers, who were rather heathens than Jews, but who wished to share an equal right to the common worship of the temple, offered to assist them in the work. This offer was necessarily refused ; and the refusal stirred up ill blood. The men of Samaria sent an address to the court of Persia, bitterly calumniating the inhabitants of Jerusalem, as a disloyal and seditious race ; and gained credit to their misrepresentations. Hence ensued a royal edict, prohibiting the building of the city and temple, and licensing the intruders of Samaria to obstruct the work with fire and sword ; so that it was a time of trouble and

tumult, a time of sore distress and dejection. God seemed again to have forsaken his people, for their fairest prospects were suddenly darkened, as if the loveliest morning had been overcast with midnight gloom. Here then is "the night" wherein Zechariah saw the vision. The gloom of that night encompassed him, and had entered his very soul; for every thing at present tended to fill the minds of God's people with doubt and despondency. They could no longer discern Him near to them, as Israel's protector.

"I saw by night, and behold!" saith Zechariah. Let us apply these words, by way of accommodation, to the spiritual night of Christians. For night in a spiritual sense is only dreadful, when we are deprived of *spiritual* vision, when the eyes of the understanding are darkened. It is night, when with sufferings upon us, we do not recognise the Hand that inflicts them. It is night, when we find ourselves in a wilderness of perplexity, where we can discern no way out in any direction. It is night, when a curse seems to destroy our temporal prosperity, and we cannot perceive whence proceeds that which is depriving us of our honour and credit, our welfare and family peace; whether it is from heaven above, or from hell beneath, or from incidental circumstances around us. It is night, when from the world calumniating and mistaken us, we appeal to God, but there is "neither voice, nor any

to answer, nor any that regardeth." It is night, when, having sunk into the depths of distress, we cry out of pain and anguish, but imagine that our cry is lost in the air, and that our prayer is altogether ineffectual, because no help seems ready at hand, no footsteps of relief are audible, no prospect dawns, no opening is given ; but our way through the dark valley remains to us an inexplicable mystery, with regard to which we cannot guess what end is to be answered, or what will be its issue. In such cases, night may be said to have overtaken us ; for the great Light which makes and rules the day, is gone down out of sight, and we are in the situation described by Job, who speaks of himself as "the man whose way is hid, and God hath hedged him in," Job iii. 23. Nevertheless, "unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness," Psa. exii. 4. This was the case with Job himself ; for in due time the meaning and salutary "end of the Lord" were shown to him, James v. 11. This was the case with Hagar ; for the angel surprised her by a well of water in the wilderness, and opened her eyes to behold it, Gen. xxi. 17, 19. Likewise with Abraham ; for the Angel Jehovah "called unto him out of heaven, and said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him," Gen. xxii. 11, 12, and his great trial was immediately at an end. Likewise with Jacob ; for the Lord blessed him in that night of severe conflict, and gave him the

name of *Israel, a prince with God*, saying, “ As a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed,” Gen. xxxiii. 28. Similar is the experience of Christians at present, and I may say, of many amongst us. For have you not been surprised with help and deliverance, as with the suddenness of lightning ? Has not a blessing often entered the house like an unexpected guest ? Has not gloom often disappeared as fast as vapour that just now girded the hills ; and has not light poured in upon you quickly, and shown you why God led you thus ?

And yet, my brethren, this is not properly a seeing by night ; for we here imply the return of sunshine, or at least the breaking of dawn into the cave Adullam ; we here imply that God has again permitted himself to be spiritually seen and felt, so that the soul cannot but cry out, “ Thou hast turned my darkness into day.” But when our heaven still abides clothed in blackness, and God’s paths are untraceable in the deep waters ; when the poor soul is obliged to cling blindly to that rock on which it is written, “ All his works are faithful,” and rests with implicit faith on that word, “ What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter ;” when believing against belief, and hoping against hope, it stays itself upon Him, because he saith, “ Cast all thy care on me, for I care for thee ;” “ when thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee ; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow

thee : when thou walkest through the fire, thou shall not be burned ; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee : for I am the Lord thy God ; the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour ; fear not, for I am with thee," Isa. xliii. 2, 5;—when we lay hold of such promises as these, and make them our rampart, setting before our inward eye the same Lord who said to Manoah, "Why askest thou after my name, seeing it is *רָאֵבֶן*, *Wonderful!*!" Judg. xiii. 18, and from this one attribute derive milk and honey in the desert ; or when, without seeing, tasting, or feeling, we comfort ourselves with the remembrance that we are under the care of the same God, who delivered Daniel from the mouths of the lions ; the same God who could preserve his three servants in the midst of the burning fiery furnace ; who commanded a fish to serve as an ark to Jonah in the depths of the sea, and commissioned the ravens to feed Elijah morning and evening in the wilderness ; then, with whatever lack of light and comfort, we can trust and stay ourselves on such a God as this :—then have we learnt the blessed art of seeing in darkness, and of discovering the sun itself behind the thick cloud ; then may we take up the prophet's parable, and say, "I saw by night, and behold !"

But there is another kind of spiritual night more fearful still. David feared it when he said, " Hide not thy face from me, lest I be like unto them that go down into the pit," Psa. cxliii. 7.

Yet even here there may be vision in the midst of darkness, and this is a favour indeed. When the adversary assails me with unholy suggestions, or with unbelieving doubts and fears, and no deliverance is felt, then indeed it is night about me, and the sun is far below my horizon. Yet, lo, there occurs to me the thought of Him in whom is fulfilled the prediction, "O death, I will be thy pestilence ; O hades, I will be thine utter destruction," Hos. xiii. 14; and there is brought home to me that other mighty truth, that in Him I have already "overcome the wicked one," 1 John ii. 14, so that he cannot essentially injure me. Thus it is given me as trusting all to the care of Him who is my triumphant Head, to "glorify God in the fires," to be quiet in the midst of unquietness ; and what else is this but bright vision in the midst of darkness ? "I saw by night, and behold !"

When from a grievous falling away, my soul awakes in terror ; when despair is almost looking me in the face, and suggesting to me, as to Cain, that "my iniquity is too great to be forgiven,"\* Gen. iv. 1 ; then truly am I sitting in darkness, and on me is no light shining. But all at once I remember the everlasting Father, who drew Solomon out of the deepest mire, and thus still verified the name he had freely given

\* This is the Lutheran rendering of בְּרוּךְ עָזֶן נַחֲמֵד, and seems to be the best.—TRANSLATOR.

him in his cradle, the name “*Jedidiah*, \* because of the Lord,” 2 Sam. xii. 24, 25; and more than this, there is brought to my remembrance the Good Shepherd, who left the ninety and nine in the wilderness, that he might go and seek the one sheep which had gone astray ; and when he had found it, he bore it home on his shoulders rejoicing. These blessed recollections at such a season are gretful indeed ; and though I cannot yet *feel* that the Lord is with me, neither can shout with joy that I “have obtained mercy,” but my soul still waits with trembling ; nevertheless, some encouragement of hope has returned to me : “I saw by night, and behold ! behold !”

When the blessed belief, that “*God dwelleth in us, and we in God*,” is not realized ; when what is *His* seems gone from me, and what is *mine* and sinful, only remains ; when the activity of my spiritual life seems suddenly at an end, and I can no longer behold within me the evidences of grace ; when the faith that heretofore could shout for joy, is shrunk into one poor and forced sigh, “Lord, rebuke me not in thy wrath, neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure ;” when love is cold, and the unhappy soul cries out with David, “I am like unto them that lie in the grave,” and can no longer think of having a portion in Judah ; when, by and by, sin can be

\* יְדִידֵיהּ, “*Beloved of the Lord*.”

committed without tears of sorrow ; and stumbling, without real contrition ; when reading the Scriptures brings no enjoyment, and praying has no fervency in it,—oh, this is a night of darkness ! Still, even in such night there is seeing by faith, which will not be thwarted by our poverty of feeling, neither owes its life to taste and relish. He who is “ THE AMEN,” has in such a time of deadness visited us in the glory of his faithfulness and truth, so that in spirit we could hear him say, “ The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed ; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee,” Isa. liv. 10. Thus we obtain more than a glimpse of “ Him who justifieth the ungodly,” and who calls only for empty vessels, that he may fill them with his glory. Thus is opened to us the mystery of that justification which comes not from any thing in us, but by the love, prayers, and intercession of Jesus ; and though I seem to feel, taste, and see nothing, and my heart within me is desolate, yet I am permitted to cast myself in simple faith upon the Lord, who hath said, “ My grace is sufficient for thee !” *And thus is the night overpowered* ; not so indeed, as that the sun itself has peered down upon me through the dark cloud, and thrown its beams *sensibly* into my soul ; but that my faith nevertheless has stretched itself forth, and found its way through the dark veil, so as to commune

with the sun behind the cloud. When such visions in darkness have been vouchsafed to the servants of the Lord, they can exultingly say, "I saw by night, and behold ! behold !"

## II. BUT WHAT DID THE PROPHET ZECHARIAH BEHOLD ?

It was a precious vision. It stood still, immovable before the eyes of his delighted mind, like a picture in wonderful freshness of colouring. Afterwards he hears the explanation of it; though the vision spoke for itself—"good words and comfortable words." The vision was fraught with consolation and promise; and as it is suited to *our* condition also, let us consider it more attentively. Zechariah beholds "a man;" and it clearly appears in the sequel, that the man is Christ, the Angel of the covenant. The Lord makes himself known in a variety of characters, and becomes to his children whatever their particular circumstances require him to be. Are we weak and faint-hearted? He discovers to us his tender love, as more than that of a mother, saying, "Can a woman forget her sucking child? As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort thee." Have we missed the direct path? He meets us as the Good Shepherd with his pastoral staff, saying, "I will bring back that which is gone astray." Is any sick? He manifests himself with his seasonable oil and wine, saying,

"I am the Lord that healeth thee." Is any dispirited and terrified? He immediately stands over against him with his sword drawn in his hand, saying, "Nay, but as Captain of the Lord's host am I now come." Does any one feel the wrath of God in his soul! The King of kings and Lord of lords manifests himself to us as red in his apparel, saying, "I tread the winepress **ALONE**," Isa. 3, "the winepress of the fierceness and **WRATH** of Almighty God," Rev. xix. 15. Are we in bondage and captivity? He appears to us as the breaker of all bonds and bars, saying, "I have the keys of hades and of death."

Now the times or Zechariah needed a helper in the character of a man, and a "man of war," Exod. xv. 3, for it was a season of war and tumults; and lo, the Keeper of Israel manifests himself in this character; "I saw by night, and behold a man!" Christ, *a man!* This very word is full of comfort. Therefore let the prophet by this word remind us, that our God is also *man*: that the Lord of lords is *our Brother*. Christ, *a man!* Let it remind us that He is the Husband of the spiritual church, whereof we are members. "Thy Maker is thine Husband, the Lord of hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel," Isa. liv. 5. And as the wife receives and bears the name of her husband, so do we receive and bear that "new name" of Christ our Saviour. Having lost our own name for ever, we bear his name, and wear his

marriage ring, Luke xv. 22, with his seal, to remind us that "he abideth faithful," and that as "he cannot deny himself," so he will not deny or disown *us*. Christ, *a man!* He is therefore "the Desire of all nations." For it is as man that we are so interested to behold him; as man he lives in our thoughts; as man he stands before us, when we pray to him; and hereby we pray with confidence. What truth can be more consoling, than that "he was *wounded for our* transgressions, he was *bruised for our* iniquities; that the chastisement of our peace was upon *him*; and with his stripes we are healed?" Isa. liii. 5. In this respect he is to us the Rose of Sharon, from which all our spiritual sweetness is drawn. He is the Fountain of the water of life, from which flow our rivers of peace. The wounds he received for our healing, will never be forgotten in the heavenly world; neither let us forget them, day or night. But the Deity received them not; it was the *man*. Cheering then is our vision, when in any night of affliction we can "behold" this "man!"

Zechariah beholds him upon a red horse. Christ governs and guides his spiritual church, and thus makes them "as his goodly horse in the battle," Zech. x. 3. And the true members of his church are guided by his Spirit as with a bridle; they are curbed and governed by his word, and *by them* he goeth forth, conquering and to conquer. Many of them have once panted

under the yoke of the law. "Judah shall plough, and Jacob shall break his clods," Hos. x. 11. But this has been only to subdue the stubbornness of their corrupt nature, and to make them the more sensible of his gentle government.

Christ, also, like the man riding upon a horse, stands ready to fly with speed to the help and defence of his people. In the days of his flesh, when he walked in humiliation upon our earth, one person had to wait till another had been assisted by him; and then was the complaint affectingly uttered, "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died," John xi. 21. But now the case is altered. After his resurrection, it might be said of him, "Behold, my Beloved cometh, like a roe or a young hart, leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills. Behold, he standeth behind our wall, he looketh through the windows, glistening through the lattice," Sol. Song ii. 9. Wherever he has been wanted, there has he appeared, by day or by night; and even though the doors were shut for fear of the enemy, he has stood in the midst, saying, "Peace be unto you." How often have we experienced this, temporally as well as spiritually! When we have been apt to think him farthest from us, he has knocked at our door, his light has sprung up in our tabernacle, and we have been unexpectedly constrained to glory in tribulations; so that we might well say with Habakkuk, iii. 8, "Thou didst ride upon thine horses, and thy chariots of salva-

tion." In this manner can Christ *at one and the same moment* be with *all* his people ; and return to all the thousands of Israel, however widely they may be scattered abroad ; for He rideth upon the heavens as upon a horse, and ready indeed is his help, for it is omnipresent. As the horse whereon the man sat was red, so the Lord himself is "red in his apparel ;" that is, he has bled for the transgressors, and therefore may well be regarded as always mindful of his redeemed. Hosanna to Him that sitteth upon the red horse, and is red in his apparel !

The prophet further speaks of the myrtle trees. True believers are trees which Christ himself hath planted ; trees of righteousness, fast rooted in the ground of his merits, and thriving by the grace of his Holy Spirit. Such are all the children of God here on earth. As branches of myrtle were anciently distributed to guests as an invitation to joy and gladness of heart, so are these spiritual myrtles committed to the angels of God, for the increase of their "joy in heaven." As, at the marriage festivals of the Israelites, green myrtles were carried before the bridegroom, accompanied with cheerful pious songs, so does our heavenly Bridegroom rejoice over his myrtle trees, or people, on earth, and names his church HEPHZIBAH, "*My delight is in her ;*" and her land BEULAH, the "*married bride ;*" for the Lord delighteth in her, and her land is "*God's husbandry,*" Isa. lxii. 4 ; 1 Cor.

iii. 9. And where grew the myrtle trees which Zechariah saw? The man "stood among the myrtle trees that were in the bottom," that is, in low ground, where they always thrive best. The lower their situation, the greener is their leaf, the more full of sap is their stem, and the more grateful their fragrance. Most true is this of all the elect people of God. His trees would wither on hills; on those hills which stand in contrast to humility and poverty of spirit. The members of his true church thrive only in self-abasement and self-renunciation.

The man among the myrtle trees "*stood*," saith the prophet. The Lord abides among his people; as it is written, "*I dwell with him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word,*" Isa. lxvi. 2. "*The Lord thy God is in the midst of thee, the Mighty One, who will save; he hath exceeding great joy in thee; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing,*" Zeph. iii. 17. Next, we notice behind him a motley squadron of red, speckled, and white horses. What are these? Are they the "*Mahanaim*," those mighty ones that excel in strength, who are sent forth to minister unto those who shall be heirs of salvation? Or, are they the manifold perfections of God, which come forth to serve us; His grace, His truth, His mercy, His omnipotence? Or, are they the sure promises which carry us as upon horses, through depths and over mountains, and speed us without fear

through the darkest and saddest nights ? Wher-ever the heavenly Rider is, let us remember that there also is a squadron about him ; there a whole host of pleasing strangers and welcome guests exult behind him : but our house and heart are too narrow for them all.

Such is the vision which was shown to Zechariah by night, for his comfort concerning Jerusalem. Brethren, the vision is true. For thus He stations himself and abides in the midst of us, as a man upon a red horse, among the myrtle trees in the bottom ; and behind him, red, speckled, and white horses. Think, brethren, then, upon this mighty and holy One of God, when you rest by night upon your beds ; when cares or fears steal upon you ; when Satan ejects his darts : think upon him in the day time, whenever your outward way is dark and gloomy, or whenever it is dark *within* you. When you have lost the sight and relish of every thing, open the eyes of your faith, for certainly in these days when many of Christ's children amongst us are troubled, and filled with anxieties, he will be neither slumbering nor indifferent, but will come to their help swiftly. Be, therefore, of good cheer, and perhaps before evening, the eyes of many a distressed soul may be opened, like those of Elisha's servant, to behold the mountain covered with horses and chariots of fire, and to be constrained to cry with that prophet himself, " My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and

the horsemen thereof!" 2 Kings ii. 12. And even should it not be so, but should all continue dark for a time about us, still let us believe and triumph in the God of all grace.

## SPIRITUAL DECLENSION AND RECOVERY.

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HEBREWS vi. 4—6.

It is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.

THIS is a remarkable sentence of Holy Writ, about which, on account of the all-important subject to which it refers, the minds of many have been greatly perplexed. Some will be curious to know how we understand these words of the inspired apostle; but they are mistaken, if they think we have selected them for the purpose of displaying our own wisdom. Far from us as ministers of Christ, be such attempts, which would bring upon ourselves the just rebuke of God. We desire not to furnish new matter for dry speculation; much less to add fuel to the fire of controversy. With refined speculation the church is already satiated; and the very life of

religion is in many Christian communities forgotten for the sake of it. Christendom is already enough distracted by the war of opinions. Were we to turn aside to these, how could we be good ministers of Jesus Christ, or stand fast in the truth ? For good and pleasant is it to dwell together in unity. But as the words before us, like all other words of God, are " profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness ;" and as they appear particularly suitable at the present time, when many, having evidently backslidden, are conscious that they have forgotten the covenant of their God, and would be glad to renew it, we therefore choose this Scripture for our consideration. May it appear hereafter, that the Lord himself brought it to our attention. I shall now consider three principal particulars.

I. THE PERSONS SPOKEN OF.

II. THE APOSTACY OF WHICH THEY ARE CAPABLE.

III. THE WARNING WHICH IS GIVEN THEM.

I. WHAT PERSONS HAS THE APOSTLE HERE IN VIEW ?

Are they children of God ? This is an important inquiry, which has often heated the minds of some, and made others anxious. For there are those who maintain, that the regenerate can-

not be the persons spoken of, but only those who are called temporary believers ; that is, such as have occasionally had good impressions, and have formed good resolutions, but have never become truly decided ; consequently are to be regarded as "those that are without." This opinion originated in a fear lest one of the most vital and consoling doctrines of Scripture, namely, that of the indissolubleness of the covenant of free grace, should be impugned by any misapplication of these words. Whether there was reason for such fear or not, it can never be right and according to truth, to wrest the word of God into compliance with human systems ; neither is this the way to show our reverence for it. God's word must always dictate to us, and our systems must comply with it. We therefore assume, that the passage now to be considered refers to children of God. But it may be asked, Can these fall from grace ? Let us not be pre-occupied in our judgment, but attend to one thing at a time ; and difficulties will melt away as we proceed. First then, let us see what proof there is, that the apostle here speaks of God's own children.

He enumerates respecting them a variety of marks, which certainly belong to real Christians. And while we are examining these marks, let us examine likewise ourselves, whether we bear upon us the same seals of the true Israel. The first of these is, that *they have been enlightened.* As there are various kinds of enlightening in vis-

ible nature, as by the sun, by the moon, and by lamps, so are there various kinds of enlightening, relative to the human soul. There are many persons who certainly know what is the one thing needful, and what are the several stages on the road to heaven ; but they know it only from human instruction, and have their light at second or third hand. Theirs is a moonlight, which neither warms nor fructifies ; neither makes that which is dead, alive, nor that which is withered, green. Such enlightening we may have, and yet be as far from the kingdom of God, as the most unenlightened heathen. There are others, who show that they partake of a better enlightening, and even of a kind of warmth accompanying it. But they are excitable persons, who are easily moved at hearing of Christ, and the experiences of his saving grace, and become, perhaps, irresistibly convinced that such things are true. Thus they are found warmly disposed to honour the gospel, and many actually *relish*, in some degree, those charming truths which seem to overflow in the minds of others. But this feeling lasts only for a little while ; they lose all relish of that which is spiritual, as soon as other circumstances bring back other impressions. They have been shined upon, and enlightened by the lamps of the wise virgins. But should any of their lamps have burned down, or their oil have been spent, so as to yield a fainter light, or those who carry brighter lamps happen to have withdrawn, then are

those persons as much in darkness again as ever ; and this because they have not cherished the true light in themselves. Now, neither this, nor the former class of persons, does the Scripture call *enlightened*. It gives this name, not to those who receive their light at second or third hand, but only to those who cherish within them a light which is received immediately from Christ himself ; to those of whom it is written, “ Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.” And this light pervades the soul and spirit, “ piercing even to the dividing asunder of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart ;” that is, it is a light which discovers to the sinner his misery, and makes him feel it : as was the case with Saul on his way to Damascus. It is a light which conducts not only into doctrine and theory, but into practice, having first loosened the tongue to cry out, “ What must I do to be saved ?” It is a light which makes the Saviour not only discernible, but infinitely desirable and precious ; so that men call upon him, saying, “ Thou Son of David, have mercy on us.” If then we have experienced the power of this light, which turns the world within us upside down, producing both in our inward frame and outward conduct a radical change, so that we are no longer cold or lukewarm, but fervent in spirit, serving the Lord, and bring forth the peaceable fruit of righteousness, love, and spiritual life,—

then, and only then, are we, according to Scripture, enlightened. And if we have been thus enlightened, then doubtless we are children of God, and born of the Spirit.

The apostle further says, they "*have tasted of the heavenly gift;*" which is another exclusive characteristic of true Israelites. This heavenly gift is no other than that spoken of by our Saviour, to the woman of Samaria ; " If thou knewst the gift of God ;" and by St. Paul, in the last verse of the 9th chapter of his 2nd Epistle to the Corinthians, " Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable GIFT." The gift then is Christ himself; and to have *tasted* this gift, as the bread which cometh down from heaven, to have received Christ into the heart by faith, and to have been comforted by it with the delight of a pardoned sinner,—this is a thing which no unconverted person can have done. I will not deny that we may taste and relish something relating to Christ ; we may receive some precious saying of his with a certain degree of pleasure ; some excellent doing of his may have cheeringly affected us ; the graciousness of his Divine character may have excited our admiration and emotions of delight, without our having been converted, and become as little children. But to have tasted the heavenly gift, even Christ himself, as being what he really is, the Reconciler and Friend of penitent sinners ; to have tasted that the Lord is gracious, as our remedy against sin and death, and as the nurture

of our spiritual and everlasting life,—this none of us are capable of, except we are born of God ; for it presupposes a sense of our poverty and necessity, a hunger and thirst after righteousness, and much more besides, which can belong only to a participation of “the Divine nature,” 2 Pet. i. 4.

Another mark attributed to them is, that they have been “*made partakers of the Holy Ghost* ;” and this surely will not allow us to remain uncertain what sort of persons the apostle has in view. He does not say, that the Spirit has occasionally knocked at the door of their hearts, or that they have once upon a time been stirred by the breath of God ; but that they have been *made partakers* of the Holy Ghost. The Spirit of the Lord within them has admonished, judged, rebuked, instructed, and comforted them ; has made intercession in their groans ; has attuned their songs of praise ; has led the battle in them against the flesh ; has led them to repentance after every fall ; has glorified Christ and his merit in their hearts. Thus have they been made to drink of the new and spiritual life. Who then can doubt that they are children of God ?

And that we might know that they have received the Spirit of God as an earnest of their salvation, it is added, that they “*have tasted the good word of God*.” This sweet expression clearly intimates, that they have experienced the word of God in themselves as a *good* word ; as a word which takes the most kind and sym-

thetic part in whatever happens to us, or oppresses us ; as a word that has upon all occasions, counsel and deliverance for us, and stands by us in the most gracious manner with its light and healing balm. Such experience as this of the word of God, can belong only to those who have come into actual communion with the Holy Ghost the Comforter, who dictated and inspired the word itself ; who expounds and seals its truth to his disciples ; who knows how to educe from it what is best suited to them at all seasons, and how to apply the least saying, or historical matter of it to our edification, joy, consolation, warning, or encouragement. Blessed then are those who have tasted the good word of God, for they surely must belong to his family.

And now for the last mark : they "*have tasted the powers of the world to come.*" Understand by this expression whatever you can : think of it as implying those outpourings of grace which enable us to overcome the world and death ; or, as implying a lively foretaste of eternal joy, a transporting anticipation of perfect bliss in heaven, a delightful hold which our faith has already upon things to come, a confidently joyful presentiment of the majestic return of the King of glory, a powerful assurance of the final consummation, and of our being "*ever with the Lord ;*" or, as signifying our present triumphant elevation upon the wings of faith above time, above all afflictions and crosses, above death, judgment, sin, and

hell ; or, understand whatever as believers you please by these words,—this you must allow, that St. Paul could have had only children of God in his eye, when he declares of them, that they “have tasted the powers of the world to come.”

Would to God, brethren, that all of you who profess and call yourselves Christians, were able to discern these marks in yourselves ! Then we could rejoice over you, and say of you, with Balalaam of old, “ How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel ! As the valleys are they spread forth, as gardens by the river side, as the trees of lign-aloes, which Jehovah hath planted, and as cedar trees beside the waters ;” and with Moses, “ Happy art thou, O Israel : who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord ! ”

## II. THE SPIRITUAL DECLENSION OF WHICH THE CHILDREN OF GOD ARE CAPABLE.

St. Paul then, speaking of children of God, and even of such as have gone on for a considerable time in the way of salvation, and have attained maturity of growth and decision of character, says, “*If they shall fall away.*” Fall away ! Yes, brethren, this is his own expression. Yet who can forbear shuddering at it ? Who should not here be afraid ? Far behold an abyss which seemingly threatens to swallow up the most precious truths of our faith, that of free un-

merited grace, and those which relate to our everlasting preservation in God's hands. Where then is our most blessed and cheering comfort, where is our Divine peace and confidence ? For the mere thought of being our own preservers, is enough to destroy all these. But does the apostle speak of an actual falling away ? Will not the word bear a different meaning ? Certainly not ! neither does it help us to say, that instead of asserting the possibility of falling away, he merely *supposes* the case, saying, " *If* they fall away." Many, indeed, think that he considered *real* falling away as a thing impossible : but such an opinion appears groundless ; for he here says, that a falling away *is* possible, even to the children of God ! It cannot easily happen ; but it *may* happen.

In strict language, every fall is a falling away ; for it is a temporary forgetfulness and turning aside from Him who hath said, " Abide in me." But the Scripture evidently makes a distinction between falling and falling away. Thus the apostle here does not refer to that falling or stumbling through weakness, of which it is written, " The just man falleth seven times a day, and riseth again." Such falls are often made useful to us ; and let no man judge or condemn them who thus fall ; for they are already judged enough by the Holy Spirit. To their own Lord and Master they stand or fall : yea, they shall be holden up ; for God is able to make them

stand, Rom. xiv. 4. The apostle then speaks not here of *such* falling, but of falling *away*; and what this is we are more particularly to consider.

In the 4th verse of the 5th chapter of his epistle to the Galatians, we meet with persons who had fallen away. Let us endeavour to understand their case. The apostle describes them as having been actually awakened and converted; and declares to them, "Christ is become of no effect unto you; ye are fallen from grace." In what consisted the *falling away* of these Galatians? In this, my brethren: that they had got out of an *evangelical* state into a *legal* one; out of a *receiving* condition into an *earning* condition; out of a recognition of themselves as poor, lost, helpless sinners, into a vain, self-working, self-helping course. They had lost the lively sense of their unworthiness and inability; and, instead of abiding implicitly at the foot of the cross, so as to live upon grace and forgiveness alone, they had become bewildered with the unhappy notion of being their own saviours and intercessors. And whereas they ought to have judged and condemned themselves for their sins, and then, in continual humiliation before the mercy-seat, to have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, they had become minded to heal their own backslidings, to establish their own righteousness by works of the law, and to form to themselves a personal, self-acquired worthiness; so that St. Paul was

obliged to cry unto them, “Ye did run well; who hath hindered you that ye should no longer obey the truth?” This was a falling away; a departure from grace; it was an erring from the way of God’s children into the way of self-righteous, natural men; a virtual renunciation of Christ; a tacit declaration that they no longer needed him, and could do without him. It was a depreciation of his precious blood; a contempt of his sacrifice, and a rejection of his person: so that St. Paul could utter that reproach with the utmost propriety and justice, Christ is again “crucified among you.” Indeed, he might with good reason have exclaimed to them in the words of our text, Ye have “crucified the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.” Such then, it clearly appears, may be the *falling away* of real Christians; and alas! it is not uncommon in the kingdom of God upon earth.

But there is a falling away which is more fearful still. Not only a falling away from grace into legal bondage, but a falling away into lawlessness, or into a course without law altogether; a falling away from God to idols; from the kingdom of heaven to the world; from the way of light into the way of the flesh and of darkness. This would seem hardly credible, did not sad experience show it to be true. Look at David at one period of his life. But no: on David’s crime, dreadful as it was, we will not insist; it was rather an awful *full*, than a *falling away*.

Think then of Solomon, that precious man of God, that *Jedidiah* from his cradle : observe him in his career ; and how can you help shuddering ? Oh, behold, behold ! The fervent singer of the Song of Songs, the master of assemblies for his wisdom of proverbs, the man full of faith and zeal, whither has he fallen away ? He has “seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines ;” and his wives have “turned away his heart,” 1 Kings xi. 3. By all these is he encompassed, and they hold him in their snares and bands. His heart is bound to strange gods, and he walks after Ashtaroth, the abomination of the Sidonians, and after Chemosh, the abomination of the Moabites, and after Milcom, the abomination of the children of Ammon, 2 Kings xxiii. 13. He doeth “that which is evil in the sight of the Lord ;” he builds on the high places idol temples and altars to these abominations, and assists his idolatrous wives at their incense and offerings. Twice does the Lord appear to him, and give him a commandment not to walk after other gods, 1 Kings iii. 14; 2 Chron. vii. 12—22; but he obeys it not ; he continues in his departure from Jehovah the God of Israel ; so that the Lord is obliged at length, to come against him with the thunder and lightning of his judgments. And, oh ! how many of the children of God have brought upon themselves, in like manner, his rebukes and visitations ! How many,

to whom the world had been already crucified, have gone back again to the world ! How many, who have been perhaps for some considerable time serving the Lord, have turned aside into the wilderness of sin, from which they were clean escaped ; and there, have been fain to feed again upon the husks which the swine did eat ! Alas ! are there not even now in the midst of us some such unhappy persons, who once walked with God ; but, behold, they have broken the covenant, and defiled it ; who once stood at the foot of the cross, but are now with their own hands crucifying the Son of God afresh, putting him to an open shame, and treading under foot his precious blood ; who once were ready to number themselves with repenting Peter, or with the thief upon the cross, or with the woman that was a sinner, but now not a tear is dropped by them over their sins, because their heart is become as iron and brass ; who once joined in singing the song of Moses and of the Lamb, but are now strangers to the blood of the Lamb, and sing the song of the world and of Belial ; who once were pleasant plants to the glorifying of God, but are now as common trees “choked” up in the forest, withered and dry, without bloom, leaves, or fruit, without sap in bough or branch ; whom neither transplanting nor watering can benefit any more ? Alas ! we fear that our own church can show some such ; that we have no need to

look after them at a distance, because we live near them. Is it not so? And if it be, have we not before us living instances of the *possibility* of "falling away" from grace?

### III. THE WARNING GIVEN.

Let me then address, lastly, those who have fallen away. Hearken to that awful thunder of the Divine oracle, which declares that "it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame." How terribly does this sound! almost like "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." And, indeed, it is evident at once how difficult must be the restoration of those, who, having taken root in a life of holiness, and having been blessed with sweet experiences of Divine love, could after all, have fallen away! Whoever is conscious that he is guilty of this, may well tremble. The word "impossible" in our text is enough to fill him with horrible dread. And if so, "let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall!" Let all of us watch and pray; let our abiding station be

ever at the foot of the cross. *There* let us lie down and take our rest ; *there* let us arise in the morning ; *there* perform every duty of our daily life ; *there* let us be formed, and fixed, and live ; *there* wait for the Bridegroom ; *there* breathe our last :—so are we safe.

But your expectation, my brethren, is now on the stretch, and we may well suppose that many a heart has secret misgivings and sad forebodings ; yes, that some among you, who have fallen, are feeling the weight of that word "*impossible*," as the weight of a mountain upon your souls. We mourn over you ; but yet we ask, Have you indeed fallen away ? You are ready to reply in the affirmative, and are in great fear on that account. But do you not sigh and groan in spirit, and would you not gladly return unto God ? Do not your hearts long for this ? only you imagine there is no hope of it, supposing yourselves lost, because you have been unfaithful, regarding yourselves as vile sinners, who have crucified the Son of God afresh, doubting how he can ever receive you again, and concluding this to be *impossible*. Are not such the thoughts and feelings of your souls ? If so, these very thoughts and feelings tell us enough about you to warrant our saying, Rejoice, and be of good courage ; for your despondency is without cause. Certainly the words of our text bring you nothing but consolation. Yes, my brethren, consolation. Only understand the apostle's

meaning. He teaches indeed that it is impossible to renew again unto *repentance* those who have fallen away; but you, as it appears, have already begun to experience that renewal. Your fear and dread, your heartfelt sorrow, your judging and condemning of yourselves before the Lord, what is it else than that brokenness and contrition of spirit which God will not despise? Is not your sorrow that godly sorrow which worketh repentance unto salvation? Therefore you have no need to reckon yourselves as those who are fallen away. Be convinced of this truth, and be of good courage. Let your anxious souls be so comforted by it as to return at once to God decidedly and fully, instead of yielding any longer to desponding thoughts, which will only drive you farther and farther from Him.

Yet we fear that some are comfortless and desponding in another way. A parent is perhaps thinking of a son who has fallen away; or a brother is dejected on account of a backsliding brother; or a friend is anxious about an apostate friend; and that word "impossible" is like a weight of lead to such anxious persons, so that they feel as if they saw the gates of hell opened; and a brother, a son, or a friend exposed beyond recovery to everlasting fire. Wherewith then shall we comfort such dear brethren, whom perhaps we have deprived of the agreeable feeling and consciousness of their own safety also, or at least have shaken and disturbed it? We say to

such among you as it regards yourselves, Be the more diligent to watch and pray. And as it regards those for whom you are anxious, we would say, If they have ever proved themselves children of God, they will surely recover and return. Though our own eyes may never see them do it, and though they may hardly be conscious of it themselves, yet the Spirit of God has not utterly forsaken them ; for concerning Him we have the promise, "He abideth with you." The word of God can never be at variance with itself, but the general tenor of Scripture will bear the closest comparison with any of its parts. What Christ says in the Gospel of St John, "My sheep shall never perish, and no man shall pluck them out of my hand ; my Father who gave them me is greater than all, and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand ;" and what he said at Capernaum, "All that the Father giveth me, will come unto me ; and this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all that he hath given unto me, I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day :" these words of the Lord abide immovable. And what the Holy Ghost saith in our text, militates not against these sayings of Christ. This we must now briefly evince to you.

By closely attending to the text, it appears to me to assert no abstract impossibility of renewal to those who fall away ; but only that "it is impossible to renew them." Now, a physician may

say of a person dangerously ill, it is impossible to do any thing for him; by which he only means, that medical skill is here at an end. Should he say it is absolutely impossible for such a person to recover, he would say too much; for Divine omnipotence can heal beyond all human expectation. The apostle then appears to me to mean that those ordinary remedies, to which the Lord has given such mighty efficacy, those admonitions of love, private warnings, and preaching of the word, whereby other children of God are easily re-awakened and invigorated, have no effect in the case of these lapsed persons; that serious appeals and sharp rebukes, promises and threatenings, kind remonstrances and friendly entreaties, are to such souls as dew fallen on a beaten path, or rain on the rocks. Observe, then, that this word "*impossible*," refers only to the ordinary means of grace committed to God's ministers, but has no reference to God himself; and has the same meaning as our Saviour's word in the 10th chapter of St Mark, where he saith, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." For when the disciples, astonished at this, inquired, "Who then can be saved?" he explained himself by replying, "With man it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible." But why did not St. Paul add a similar explanation? I answer, that as he intended to warn men against false

security and apostacy, he saw it necessary to speak more strongly; but to prevent it from giving needless disquietude to any true Christian, there are several notices in this chapter itself, by which we may be reminded that it is not impossible for God to renew again his lapsed children unto repentance.

Look first into ver. 3, where, having had occasion to apprehend concerning some of the persons to whom he is writing, that they were fallen away, he clearly intimates his concern lest his preaching the great mysteries of godliness to some of them should after all prove without effect, like seed upon hard and unsusceptible soil. He expresses, however, his determination to persevere in preaching those great mysteries to them. "This we will do," saith he, "if God permit," or render it possible. What does he mean by God's permitting or making it possible? Did he not know that some of them were hardened in heart against it? Had he not said just before, ch. v. 11, 12, that the persons whom he had in view were dull of hearing, and were become such as have need of milk, requiring to be taught again the first principles of the oracles of God? This is true; but he means, that though it was out of his power, it was not out of the power of God, to restore such backslidden souls; but that, however they were shut up against him, he could break up the hard ground, so as to soften and render it productive. He, therefore,

expresses his belief upon this point plainly enough, yet somewhat covertly, saying, "If God permit."

But it may be asked, whether he does not in the 8th verse manifestly imply that those who have once fallen away, are irrecoverably lost. For he there compares them to a soil which, notwithstanding the blessing that has been rained upon it, bears only thorns and briers ; and says of ground like this, that "it is *rejected*," (or bad ground, useless for cultivation,) "and nigh unto cursing, whose end is to be burned." We reply, these, indeed, are strong and fearful expressions ; but to be *nigh unto cursing*, is not the same thing as to be *actually cursed*, any more than to be *nigh unto death*, means *actually dead*. The words, "whose end is to be burned," are truly awful words ; but they are not words of desperation, though such they may seem at first sight. Had those who have fallen away been compared to *dry wood*, which at length is used only for "fuel of fire," the case would have been very different. But they are compared only to *untractable soil*, whose end is to be burned. Now, it was the custom in the east to set barren lands on fire ; but for what purpose ? Was it to render them useless, and to convert them into a desert ? No ; it was to cleanse, renovate, and restore them to fruitfulness. Here then the apostle means, that as men treat their lands, so will God finally deal with his children who have fallen away.

They shall be renewed again unto repentance, but it must be as by fire ; with the burning torch of severe judgments and fearful visitations ; by such flames of wrath and pains of hell as were felt by David and Solomon. Be of good cheer, then, ye truly penitent and believing, but still anxious and desponding brethren. If it be still doubtful to you, whether the covenant on God's part be concluded and established for ever, remaining immovable and indissoluble under all circumstances, read only the whole chapter which contains the passage we have been considering. Here the apostle preaches to us of the Divine faithfulness in such a manner, as may well cause every penitent sinner's heart to sing for joy. Here it appears as if those whom the inspired writer had smitten to the ground with the thunder of his awful warnings, he would now raise up again to heaven with his own hands. Observe how strongly in this very chapter, he insists on that obvious truth, that it is impossible for God to lie, or revoke his word ! If he have, once for all, ratified as by an oath his favour towards us by the voice of his Spirit ; if he have, once for all, not only left for us poor sinners a promise of entering into his rest, but sealed that promise to our souls, then we have a strong consolation. These two things, his oath and his word of promise, once given, can never waver : in having these, we have, for all occasions, a sure and steadfast anchor, which entereth into

that within the veil. Behold, such are the thoughts of the apostle upon these great subjects!

And now, for whose benefit has our address been delivered? First, for those who are at ease in Zion, living in false security; and secondly, for those who are desponding, and of little faith. To the former, it has been intended as a warning, that they may learn to watch and pray, to abide simply and entirely at the foot of the cross, and not be seduced unawares into error and confusion. For it is most dreadful and painful to be at last set on fire, like a barren and thorny field, in order to be renewed again unto repentance. To the latter it has been intended as a word of strength and consolation. For the covenant of Jehovah stands fast for ever; "the foundation of God remaineth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his." Yes, he knoweth *you*. Come unto Him, all ye who are invited to sit down at the table of his marriage-feast, like the prodigal son, tattered and worn-out as you may be; come only just as you are, covered with the dust of your wanderings in the desert of this world: for no sooner does He behold you returning to the tables of his covenant, than he immediately remembers that covenant with you, though you may have forgotten it for years; and he will paternally welcome you, and speak comfortably to your hearts, saying, "Fear not, for I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore

with loving-kindness have I drawn thee." Oh ! is He not then a faithful God, a Father of mercies, and a God of all comfort ? Let his faithfulness and tender mercies even now break your hearts ; and come unto Him with your hearts thus broken ! He will embrace you, revive you, and give you peace.

## THE DEPTHS OF SATAN.

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MATTHEW iv. 1—11.

Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness, to be tempted of the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungered. And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, and saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down; for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee; and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God. Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; and saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan; for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him.

We are here upon one of those memorable battle fields, where glory was gotten, that still to this day smiles upon ourselves; where triumphs

were achieved, which assure victory to us in Christ Jesus before we fight, and make us more than conquerors even in death. Never was a combat more wonderful in its nature, or more beneficial in its consequences, than that of which the inspired historian thus informs us. It was one which intimately concerns every human being, and has the closest relation to our most sacred interests. Therefore it well merits our devout attention.

### I. THE LEADING INTO THE WILDERNESS.

Our Saviour had dedicated himself in the baptism of Jordan, and had been visibly anointed by the fiery baptism of "the Spirit without measure," to the Mediatorship of the new covenant. There had descended upon him from heaven an audible Divine testimony, that he was the beloved Son of God, in whom the Father was well pleased. Thus consecrated and Divinely furnished for his mediatorial and priestly office, he is led, by a powerful influence of the Holy Spirit, into the depths of the wilderness.

### II. THE FASTING.

Was this fasting a part of the special plan of Him who led him into the wilderness? It was; and a means to an end. Do you ask on what account it was expedient that Jesus should fast,

and especially in such a dreary solitude, and so severely, or for such a length of time? Know this first, that our Messiah's fasting had reference to a purpose very different from that of the fasting of Moses on Mount Sinai, and of other holy persons. While it was to serve as an exercise of devotion and of preparation for his priestly office, it was also, according to the opinion of some, the commencement of his priestly sacrifice for the sin of man. So that to open the meaning not only of his temptation in the wilderness, but also of his fasting there, we must look for the key behind the barred gates of paradise lost—thus was his fasting the amends for Adam's forbidden fruition, the payment for his guilt in the garden; it was a suffering that contributed to make satisfaction. Did the first father of our race sin while dwelling in the delightful paradise of Eden? Therefore we find the Second Adam in a waste and dreary wilderness. Was the first man, who is of the earth, earthy, embowered by the lovely trees of the garden, and nurtured by its delicious fruits? Therefore must the Second Man, who is the Lord from heaven, be imprisoned in a wilderness of hunger, surrounded by nothing but stones and rugged rocks, where grew not a single plant that could relieve the cravings of nature. Did our first father, before he had sinned, enjoy the most delightful fellowship with God, and with his holy angels, and with one who was such a true help meet for him, that her

unspotted innocence was most meek to mingle with his own high and divine enjoyments? Lo, He who was born the Second Adam and Father of the everlasting age, was banished into the most gloomy solitude, to "dwell with the wild beasts," Mark i. 13, and amidst the circumventions of that old serpent, the devil and Satan. Dreadful contrast! But such is the righteous judgment of God. Our great Surety and Representative, in that forlorn and inhospitable desert, fasting and hungering in the sinner's stead, atones for the otherwise unpardonable presumption with which Adam, in despite of the express warning of God, had stretched out his hand to take the forbidden fruit. Verily, my brethren, Jesus has thus made full amends in behalf of all his people. Nothing more of the kind is required of ourselves; the atonement is made, once for all and for ever. But as for any of you who think lightly of this satisfaction of the Lamb of God, *you* may regard the situation of Jesus in the wilderness as a faithful counterpart of your own future condition. For thus will ye have to take up your abode in the gloomy desert of eternity; where ye shall hunger, but find stones instead of bread; where ye shall thirst, but have fire, storm, and tempest for your portion to drink instead of water; where ye shall dwell with such fallen spirits as are called ravening wolves, Matt. vii. 15, Acts xx. 29; unclean dogs, Phil. iii. 2; Rev. xxii. 15; roaring lions, Zeph. iii. 3; and hissing serpents,

Deut. vii. 15 ; Isa. xiv. 29 ; Mal. i. 3. Thus shall ye be solitary and forsaken amidst whole hosts of the condemned, Isa. xiv. 9, 19 ; Matt. xiii. 37—43. For in hell there is neither converse nor friendship, nor affectionate intercourse : there nothing but hatred and selfishness prevail ; and each reprobate spirit is too much occupied with his own torment and wretchedness to concern himself about his companions in woe. And the duration of this punishment is “everlasting!” Matt. xxv. 46. Will not the very sound of such awful truth one day rend the rocks and make the mountains tremble ? Let not then our own hearts be harder than the rock, Jer. v. 3.

Fastings there are even still in the kingdom of God upon earth ; bodily and spiritual fasts of all kinds ; painful and cheerful fasts. Those which are most cheerful are kept in that vernal season of the soul, when in the genial warmth of the risen Sun of Righteousness, it first begins to bring forth fruits meet for repentance ; for it now feels the kindness and love of God our Saviour, which hath appeared unto all men, and it is affianced to the heavenly Bridegroom. The soul now no longer needs self-denial and forbearance to be commanded and enjoined ; for it renounces self of its own accord. It flies, as by a new instinct, from scenes of temptation and danger, like a bird from the deadly weapon of the fowler. How can the once lost son, now happily recovered, content himself any longer with the husks ! for he has

tasted the fruit of the vine that flourished in “the pleasant land,” and of the refreshments of its milk and honey. How can the renewed man still take delight in the trimbrel and the dance, or rejoice at the sound of the tabret and pipe, after he has once learnt to raise his holy songs of joy on the harp of David! In opposition to the vanities and follies of this world, he sets the certainties which his faith now beholds in the opening glories of heaven; and with the couch of ease and luxury he contrasts the cross whereon He whom his soul loveth was suspended, bleeding and crowned with thorns. Away then at once with every wretched and shadowy joy, and every glittering vanity; trouble us not, vain world, with these, for we are keeping a fast to the Lord. How often do we hear it controverted and questioned whether one pleasure or another be compatible with real piety! Only let men become really in earnest about their own salvation, and they will cease from such flimsy casuistry; and will perceive at once what agrees or disagrees with the spirit of true religion; or how far permission and ability to pursue any pleasure may belong to children of God and heirs of the kingdom.

Other fastings are incident to a state of grace, which are not joyous, but grievous. These happen when the soul is led away, not from the wild luxuries of the world into the pastures of the good Shepherd, but from these refreshing and

invigorating pastures into a seeming wilderness. Oh ! it is a bitter change, and we have felt it the more from having enjoyed such unspeakable happiness while leaning on Jesus' bosom. We then cry out, Where is the blessedness I knew ? Where are now those lively and sweet emotions, those congenial delights and lively enjoyments which we realized in the Lord's nearness to our souls ? We were so happy that we could gladly have departed from this present life at once, and have passed beyond our present precincts of paradise into the unseen world. The south wind breathed upon our garden, so that the spices thereof flowed out, Sol. Song iv. 16 ; the clusters of Canaan were gathered abundantly, and a heart-gladdening sense of love was like the fresh morning dew diffused upon our spirits ; it made us feel ourselves at the King's table, recreated and comforted, and caused us to forget all sorrow. But unexpectedly a change takes place ; the streams of milk and honey are dried up ; the soul is deprived of its pleasant food ; it sits down, in leanness and indigence, on the ground ; its harp is hung upon the willow, and with our utmost efforts we can do no more than sigh for one dew-drop of heavenly blessing. This is fasting indeed to the children of God in the wilderness. Happy he whose place of security is the munitions of rocks ; who rests upon Christ and his word, and not in his own frames and feelings ! " Bread shall be given him, his waters shall be sure," Isa. xxxiii.

16. Such an one, even when he is "as having nothing," in the way of positive relish and enjoyment, yet is "possessing all things" by simple and implicit faith ; and, though exulting feelings may have left him, the peace of God is still with him. He casts anchor beneath the immovable and sheltering rocks of the Divine promises, and comforts himself with the assurance that they stand fast for ever. He knows that though the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed, the kindness of God shall never depart, neither the covenant of his peace be broken. Even such a fasting in the wilderness, when God appoints it, is good and wholesome. What can we better wish for, than to be always under the guidance of Divine grace ? Therefore let it conduct us according to its good pleasure.

### III. THE TEMPTATIONS.

Jesus went into the wilderness to fast. But more than this was designed by the purpose of God. For what saith the Scripture ? "Jesus was led up of the Spirit into the wilderness *to be tempted of the devil.*" How terrific and extraordinary a portion of our Saviour's history is this ! that the Son of God should be led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil ! Yet comfort yourselves, ye tried and tempted heirs of the kingdom, with this very thing, for it is recorded in Scripture expressly for

your consolation. Neither imagine that the roaring lion goeth about in Israel unchained and free ; or that he has full liberty to fall upon whomsoever he will, or that he can throw his fiery darts at pleasure, and lay his snares so unperceived as to escape your Saviour's notice. Our Prince and Protector has him always in his eye, and curbs him with a firm hand by the power of his word. Thus the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong. Powerful as our adversary may be, he can have no power whatever against those concerning whom he is commanded, "Touch not mine anointed." In this single injunction of our Saviour there is a wall of fire surrounding us, beyond which no fiery dart of the wicked can fly. Every actual assault upon us is by the express permission of our Lord himself, and consequently intended to be overruled for the soul's health and salvation. Hitherto shall it go, and no further. "Howbeit" in all this the wicked one "meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so ;" but he is, in fact, "drawn out and made a show of openly;" and our King is "triumphing over him in it." The enemy is but one of those principalities and powers, whether they be in heaven, or earth, or under the earth, with whom the Lord doeth whatsoever he will. He employs him as he did Sennacherib, Nebuchadnezzar, and others, for the benefit of the holy seed. He makes use of him as a staff in his hand, as a rod, as a driver,

as a chastener ; and when he has done with him, he breaks the staff of Israel's shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, and flings it from him : he shuts up the dragon in the abyss. Rejoice, therefore, ye sheep of his flock ; for the powers of darkness, though as lions and wolves in their own nature, are subject to your Good Shepherd. Whenever Satan's fiery darts are hurled about you, think that the Lord by his Spirit is only conducting you into the wilderness, and setting you in the conflict ; and that he is himself with you in the field.

As no temptations or trials can befall the children of God without the Divine permission, so they have all one and the same object. They are intended to show what is in man ; to bring to light and make manifest what is in us as men, and as children of God. It frequently happens that the Lord himself desires to prove us, for he taketh pleasure in his works, Psa. civ. 31. Thus he proved Abraham ; but at the critical moment he called out of heaven, saying, " Now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me," Gen. xxii. 12. He knew this before : but he would have that fear of God, which he had wrought in his servant's heart, developed, that the Lord might rejoice in his *perfected* work. So, at the present day, many a beloved child of grace is conducted into severe trial and conflict, that he may learn to pray, supplicate, persevere, and walk by faith

upon the waves, with his hand, as it were, in the hand of Jesus. It is true that we are often sore troubled at such a season, and unable to believe those who testify that the Lord is now delighting in us. For real Christians can see nothing in themselves for the Lord to delight in. But the Lord nevertheless can see something of the kind ; and he *will* see it, because such is his good pleasure.

Furthermore, he often suffers his dear children to be tempted and sorely tried in a variety of ways, that what is hidden in their hearts may be manifested, not so much to himself, as rather to their Christian brethren and sisters. Thus he shows us an Abraham's faith ; a Job's patience ; a Moses' love and meekness ; an Elijah's zeal ; a Canaanitish woman's humility and fervency ; and a Paul's exultation in sufferings ; that we may learn to glory in that strength of his which is perfected in weakness. Do we in faint-heartedness imagine that such eminent saints may well get to heaven, but that with respect to ourselves, every thing must certainly come to nought ? Then he tells us of David, Simon Peter, and a cluster of others, from whom the winepress of God expressed not only wine, but also bitter waters of sorrow for sin ; and thus he revives our spirit, and imparts fresh courage ; especially when he reminds us, that David and Peter still retained the glory once put upon them, when the latter was designated "a rock," and

the former “a man after God’s own heart,” Acts xiii. 22. It has often happened that persons who have shone with remarkable lustre of holiness, and enjoyed extraordinary respect from the world, have, at length, become disposed to resist, like the oak, in their own strength, the gusts of trial. But these gusts have left them stripped of their honours, disfigured and blasted ; and thus have they become monuments of our fallen nature’s weakness and helplessness. All the lustre of their holiness, influence, and efficiency, has like a brook been lost in the sand, and has so entirely disappeared, that they who had heretofore been rivers of blessing wherever they found their way, can now hardly be recognized as the same persons. Now, such things the Lord has suffered to come to pass, that the idolatry with which we are too ready to extol human nature may be prevented ; that grace may be preserved in its pure lustre, and all honour and glory redound to Him whose right alone it is to receive it. The more particular intent of our trials and temptations generally is, that we may the better learn what is in us ; that we may ever be kept lying low as in the dust. For we, as children of fallen Adam, have naturally such superficial notions of true piety, that we would fain think ourselves possessed of it at once, by a cheap and easy method ; but Jesus would have us learn that “that which is born of the flesh is flesh ;” that he has to deal with us as persons radically ungodly ; and that

every soul is of this character whom he undertakes to save. Therefore he suffers the arrows of the adversary again and again to wound us, that we may be the more wakefully conscious of sin dwelling in us, and that the hideousness and ill-savour of its hitherto unperceived brood of evils may offend as it were our very senses. Hence he permits the wicked one occasionally to set in motion the unholy dispositions or blasphemous inventiveness that lay slumbering in the inner chambers of the soul, that we may perceive how many abominations still remain to be purged out of the human temple of God, and may learn quite to give up and renounce our natural pride and self-esteem, Job xxxiii. 17. For the same purpose he permits the adversary sometimes to come upon us by surprise, and to sound a blast of alarm over our slumbering lusts. Then, how are we amazed to find old deformities still about us ! Alas ! we thought that by our pious exercises we had long ago dislodged and swept them away, and that the whole house was already garnished with holiness ; but now we find it far otherwise. The beloved bride then learns that she is "black" as well as "comely ;" "like the tents of Kedar" as well as "like the curtains of Solomon ;" and that she has no inherent excellence of her own. Thus she learns more thoroughly to repent, and remember, and do her first works. The Bridegroom of the church will have it so. Therefore, many a saint, beginning

to indulge in self-complacency concerning his own supposed eminence in holiness, finds the loftiest step of this eminence break under him, and himself prostrated upon the earth, or even plunged in the mire. He is now more vile in his own eyes than he had ever before imagined. Like a bird of paradise that has lost its plumage, he is now in his own eyes naked and bare, and is impelled by conscious shame to hide himself as in a cleft of the rock, where he learns by experience what it is to rejoice with *all* the heart, that the *true* bridal dress is of the Lord's *own* choosing and bestowing ; that a cross once stood upon Golgotha, from which a righteousness has ascended to a throne ; and that fallen men can add to it no supposed excellence of theirs, but must simply and solely ascribe "grace, grace unto it."

#### IV. THE OBJECT OF CHRIST'S TEMPTATIONS.

We have already seen why, in general, God permits the adversary to tempt his children. We are next to consider, on what account he suffered the Lord Jesus himself to be tempted. And here first we must solemnly protest against that horribly heretical notion, that Jesus was led into the furnace of temptation, that by conflict and contest, wrestling and prayer, he might overcome, mortify, and kill sin in his own flesh ! We dare not for a moment allow such a thought respecting

our most holy and blessed Saviour. That God sent to us his own Son *in the likeness* of sinful flesh, we know and acknowledge; but it was in the likeness *only*, and *not in the sinful flesh itself*. He was in all things made like unto his brethren, Heb. ii. 17, with the exception of *one* point, and that one point was *sin*. God be thanked, that the word of God is as clear upon this subject, as is the light of noon day. With the perfect sinlessness of our great Mediator, the whole fabric of evangelical hope must stand or fall. Were the white raiment of his innocence soiled with the least stain of an unholy attribute, were it possible for heaven, earth, or hell, to point out "any such thing" in his nature, then we should have nothing to do but to shut up our churches, burn our Bibles, cast away our confidence, and yield ourselves up to despair. For then could Jesus be no Saviour of men, neither could the payment he has made for us have any value whatever.

We have already remarked, that the temptations which came upon him were undergone entirely for our sakes, inasmuch as they were part of his vicarious and sacrificial sufferings. We have seen our first parents tempted by the serpent; and their presumption impelling them at once into the whirlwind of the abyss. The Second Adam, having undertaken to retrieve our loss, was exposed to still greater temptation, which nevertheless he triumphantly resisted; the

lances of our great adversary were broken, his stratagems and machinations completely defeated, and an all-perfect obedience yielded to the Father of creation and providence. The first Adam, by his disobedience, made himself and us the enemy's captives; but the Second Adam, fore-going the throne of the majesty on high, and descending into this lower world amidst evil spirits, swallowed up this death in victory. Oh, unexampled humiliation! that the Son of God should have been touched by the murderous hands of the devil! that the Heir of all things should have suffered the old serpent to lurk in his path! that He, the Holy One, should have been encompassed by the powers of darkness! that the Lord of the blessed angels should have suffered his human person to be seized, carried off, and borne away by the prince of the accursed, to hear his thrice-repeated temptation unto deeds most ungodly! But while it was so admirable on the one hand, it was inconceivably fearful on the other. The children of God are of too narrow capacity, and too nearly allied to sin, to comprehend the infinite recoil of Christ's holy soul from unholiness; and as for the ungodly and profane, they, being children of the wicked one, are too congenially related to him, to dream of the intensity of our Saviour's sufferings by temptation. Yet to such sufferings it behoved the Lord's Anointed to submit: it behoved his holy human nature to shudder at the floods of Belial, that there he

might begin to remove our mountains of guilt. And all these assaults he had to encounter alone ; without the least aid was he to persevere through conflict and warfare in doing the will of God, that by an illustrious and perfect obedience entirely his own, he might cover from the eyes of Divine justice, the disobedience of Adam and his posterity.

Another object of Christ's temptations was, that having suffered being tempted, he might be able to succour them that are tempted, Heb. ii. 18. Able he certainly could have been, without tasting of our trials, or being personally assaulted with our temptations ; but by his actually undergoing them, the weakest among us may be strengthened to believe in his ability, so as to have more freedom in pouring out their hearts before him and in showing him their trouble. If two persons can meet and converse together respecting the same necessities, distresses, and buffetings of Satan which each has undergone, how much does this conduce to their open-heartedness with one another, to their confidential communicativeness, and to their mutual sympathy ! They disclose to each other their every inmost suffering ; soul melts into soul ; and while they enjoy such refreshment and delight, they count no time. With those who are strangers to the experience of our peculiar trials, we are not so readily communicative about them, because we expect no corresponding sympathy. And doubt-

less we should have a far less intimate communion with our heavenly Friend, had he not been our companion in tribulation, and a partaker of our every suffering. But now, how refreshing do we find it to know, that he himself was in all points tempted like as we are ; that he was a Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief ; that he well knows by personal experience the severest anguish of our souls ; so that though no fellow-mortal should be able to understand us, we have a Friend always at hand, of whom we are assured that he enters into every feeling of our condition ! Psa. lvi. 8. His experience reaches down into our inmost darkness, into the profoundest depths of our spiritual temptation. Under no juniper of the desert can we sit solitary, but he has there sat down before us ; no thorn of the wilderness can wound us, but it has already wounded him ; no fiery dart can assault us, but it has already assaulted him. Verily, he is touched with the feeling of our infirmities : believe it only, dear Christian brethren, that when the Refiner sits at his furnace, during the whole process of your trial and purification, his own holy and almighty heart, more than that of the most affectionate mother, feels sympathy for you in heaven. Therefore it was out of mere mercy and love towards a world of sinners, that God spared not his own Son, but delivered him up to the furnace of trial.

It appears also, that herein he had an object

with reference to *the tempter himself*; on account of the distinguished situation which the chief of the apostate angels occupies in the kingdom of spirits. If we put together the scattered notices of that fallen morning star, which are found in various parts of Scripture, we can hardly suppress our wonder and awe, at beholding something of the natural character of this degenerate prince of hell.

Satan, in the surprising ruins of his former unspeakable glory—for where among men can we find intelligence, prudence, perseverance, energy, and power like his? and, what is more astonishing, these are only the relics of his original glory;—Satan, I say, still appears, according to the Bible, with a kind of majesty; not only in his being called a prince, and a mighty one, but even “the god of this world;” and we cannot but observe in Scripture, that occasionally a kind of respect appears to be paid to his ruined dignity. The apostle Jude, in a passage where he is producing a contrast to those who despise dominion and speak evil of dignities or magistrates, says, “Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee. But these filthy dreamers speak evil of those things which they know not,” Jude 9, 10. In the book of Job, we behold the sons of God presenting themselves before Jehovah, and it is

added, "Satan came also among them, to present himself before the Lord," Job i. and ii. And the Lord condescended to converse with him, and to ask him if he had considered his servant Job. And in reply to the subtle question of the false accuser, "Doth Job fear God for nought?" the Lord gave him power over all that belonged to that holy man; he permitted Satan to visit and to try him, that hell itself might learn that Divine strength can be perfected in human weakness. What a wonderful transaction! Surely it constrains us to say, that "the Almighty" considered it of some importance, that even the prince of darkness should acknowledge Deity, and give the Lord the glory due unto his name. And this is really the case; for at his name every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess that he is Lord. Hence likewise, it appears, that Satan was even permitted to look into the deep foundation of the work of redemption, especially by tempting the Lamb of God, to try if he could find any fault with his unblemished purity; that he might know Messiah's qualifications as a Surety to atone for human transgression; that he might know, that "Zion" is "redeemed with righteousness," Isa. i. 27, and not with arbitrariness; and that he might never be able, with any show of justice, to protest against the salvation of God's elect, Rom. viii. 33. When the wisest and most subtle of all rebellious spirits is compelled to astonishment at the wisdom of God,

to admire his doings, to wonder in mute silence at the depth of his counsels, to commend, against his will and inclination, the equity of Divine proceedings, and to give honour to God unto his own confusion, this surely tends not a little to the glory of the Divine name. One of the most solemn and sublime moments in the great day of full manifestation will be, when Satan himself shall be compelled to yield acknowledgment that the Lamb is worthy to receive glory, and honour, and power, Rev. v. 13 ; and shall feel constrained to bow at the name of another who is greater than he. This will amount to a consummation of praise second only to the hallelujahs of angels.

#### V. THE TEMPTER.

Forty days and nights of fasting had been spent by our Saviour in the lonely wilderness, and "he was afterward an hungered." Then the tempter came unto him, visibly, but in disguise, probably as "an angel of light," 2 Cor. xi. 14. He appears to have had a twofold object in this attempt. First, Satan desired to ascertain whether Jesus was really the Son of God ; and secondly, in case he were, he meditated to raise up a rock in his course, upon which the precious work of redemption should be wrecked for ever.

It is very probable, as others have thought like-

wise, that the tempter was yet in doubt whether this was the Messiah. Jesus, who was called "the carpenter's son," had lived on earth thirty years in great obscurity, probably working at the trade of his reputed father; thus "in the sweat of his face," earning his daily bread; during all which time, we are not told that he did or said any thing beyond what other children of men might have done or said; except what is recorded of him with respect to his visit to the temple, when he was twelve years old. "His" general "kinsfolk and acquaintance," probably, had long begun to think of him as no more than an amiable man; and it is possible that even Mary and Joseph had considerably lowered their expectations concerning him, as all the miraculous circumstances of his life had long ago ceased; and the voices from heaven been discontinued. God veiled the peculiar glory of his Son in such a manner, that even the keen eyes of Satan might be unable to discern it in the plain "carpenter, the son of Mary," Mark vi. 3. This great adversary, however, did not entirely overlook him. And though, *among men*, no one appeared any longer to imagine that the humble labourer at Joseph's business could be God's Messiah, yet Satan himself was wise enough not to lay too much stress upon a poor and humble exterior. He could think it possible, that this "carpenter" in all his obscurity might nevertheless be the Lord of glory. He would see nothing inconsist-

ent or absurd in the Redeemer's having to commence his great work in such poverty and lowliness ; and many a strange event and circumstance, which he had observed in his history from its commencement, would intimate to him too plainly that Jesus of Nazareth could be no other than the Son of God. Still, however, he only conjectured this verity ; he had not yet that clear conviction of it, which a fallen archangel would require ; therefore he desired to obtain full certainty, that he might take his measures accordingly. Had he at present actually discerned him as the Messiah, much of his subsequent conduct toward him, would, as we shall hereafter see, be inexplicable. His first and immediate object, therefore, was to ascertain this. Very prudently did the crafty spirit so preconcert his temptations, that if Jesus was really the Messiah, his work of redemption might meet, at the outset, with a shock by which it should be for ever frustrated. The ultimate object of the prince of darkness was by an adroit manœuvre to divert the Saviour from his mediatorial career, and thus to confirm his own infernal dominion over mankind. He therefore presents himself to Jesus, as a well-wishing and kind-hearted friend. He would have it appear that he desired nothing so much as to see the great work of redemption prospered and achieved ; only he professes to suggest a shorter method of accomplishing the glorious design ; and he plans all with the very

craft and subtlety that might be expected from a being, who with the strongest natural power of intellect, had sunk into the deepest abysses of wickedness and malignity.

#### VI. LIABILITY TO TEMPTATION.

The tempter came to Jesus with the most refined cunning and artifice. Trusting that the forlornness of the solitude, and the barrenness of the thirsty desert, would be helpful to the triumph he meditated, he seizes the opportunity for his first attack, from the hunger spoken of in the text. In like manner does this murderer of souls know how to turn his weapons against ourselves, in the most convenient place, at the most critical moment, and in circumstances the most favourable to his purpose. When we are apart from all company, and no human eye can be upon us, when no dear brother is near to put us on our guard, nor any experienced fellow Christain at hand to confirm or animate us; when our thoughts are permitted to wander at pleasure, then does this "strong one armed" come up to the attack, stretches his arrow upon the bow, and exerts his utmost skill to inject poison into our very hearts. When we are all hungered or athirst; when want pinches us, and we feel a craving either for money or sustenance; when real need of rest, or imaginary want of repose, leisure, honour, convenience, or enjoyment, stirs

within us an uneasy longing for the thing denied ; when any particular wish, though in itself not blameable, takes possession of our hearts ; —then is the tempter immediately at hand, addressing the passions in a friendly and winning manner, suggesting to us one *good* reason after another, and discovering to us means in abundance for the gratification of our desires. And, however adverse the thing may be to the will of our Father in heaven, Satan knows so well how to garnish and colour it, that we are easily brought even to imagine peace and prosperity are with us, when it is nothing less than “Satan himself transformed into an angel of light.”

The mystery of his iniquity, craft, and guile, which, humanly speaking, is unsearchable, had never been so disclosed as it now was, in those temptations with which he endeavoured to circumvent our blessed Lord. But it may be asked, Could the Christ of God be tempted in reality ? The Scripture informs us, that he was not merely tempted, but in all things\* tempted like as we are, only without sin, Heb. iv. 15. Our blessed Saviour, the Scripture saith, was manifested in the likeness of sinful flesh ; that is, in human nature weakened by the fall. He inherited every injury which sin had done it, only no disposition

\* Luther, from holy reverence, appears to have stood in awe of rendering *κατὰ πάντα* by so strong an expression as “*in all things.*” His rendering is, allenthalben, “*in all places,*” “*every where,*” or “*on every hand.*”

to sin itself; no capacity, no capability of sinning. Hence we read, that he was tempted *without sin*. But if there be any sinless instincts and infirmities of our common nature, these undoubtedly he inherited. He was susceptible of hunger and thirst ; he could be weary and overtaken with sleep ; he could weep and rejoice ; he could feel the need of bodily rest and refreshment. Now, such infirmities and sensibilities, which in themselves are sinless, the tempter hoped to take advantage of, in order to seduce our all holy and blessed Saviour from the way of God marked out before him. He therefore propounded to him such ways and means of satisfying those wants, as were altogether incongruous with God's way. Had the Redeemer acceded to them, or been ever so remotely inclined to them, Satan's monstrous wickedness would have succeeded ; the Lamb would not have been without spot, nor the High-Priest without sin ; his sacrifice would have been invalid, the whole scheme of redemption would have been for ever annulled, and we ourselves exposed to perish, and that without remedy. How much then depended on the result of this temptation of Jesus in the wilderness ! What an immeasurably important trial was it to be, of our Redeemer's qualifications ! And what interest ought we to feel in attending to the further developement and issue of that extraordinary and eventful transaction !

**VII. THE FIRST ASSAULT.**

The tempter had watched the most favourable opportunity for making his first attack. He perceived that Jesus was an “hungered;” therefore he came to him, and said, “If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.” Here was the first of those assaults by which the tempter meant to ascertain whether this was the very person of the promised Messiah; and then (in case he were really the Lord from heaven) to annihilate at one blow his work of sacrificial atonement. The devil’s aim was to begin with polluting, had it been possible, the pure human soul of the Redeemer with the sin of distrusting his heavenly Father’s provision. As he commenced his assaults in paradise with the question, “Yea, hath God said?” to seduce our first parents into error respecting the Divine prohibition; so his words, “If thou be the Son of God,” were meant to be equivalent to that question. His first object was to create a doubt respecting the import of that testimony which had recently descended on our Saviour at his baptism, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.” And now, only observe the wondrous craft of the tempter. In that single sentence, “If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread,” he lays a thousand snares in our Saviour’s path at once. He would first insinuate how impossible it must be

that God should leave his own Son in the wilderness, among rocks and stones and thorns, to pine away with hunger ; and could our Saviour have given the least entertainment to this suggestion, his soul would have been defiled with unbelief. Further, he would induce him to work such a miracle in proof of his being the Son of God, as should serve also his relief from hunger and suffering ; and this he knew would be acting against the counsel of God, according to which the Messiah was to be poor, suffering, and emptied of his glory to compensate for Adam's guilt. But the devil might further think, that should he not succeed in persuading our blessed Lord to forsake the way of poverty, to step aside from the path of lowliness, and disclose his real dignity, yet perhaps the pressure of hunger might prevail on him to comply with the suggestion of working a miracle for his own relief ; that it would seem an excusable thing to save himself from starvation by the power committed to him ; and that by thus helping himself he would put away from him that cup of bitterness, the drinking up of which to the very dregs was essential to his making reconciliation for iniquity. Such were apparently the thoughts of Satan ; he hoped that Jesus, if he overcame the first snare, would be taken in the second or the third. With more subtlety the plan could not have been laid. Had there been the smallest blemish of sin in the Lamb of God, it would not have been discover-

ed. But not a sunbeam mote settles upon the white raiment of his perfect innocence. He stood alone in the field of conflict ; and saw that there was no man to help, none to uphold. Nevertheless he broke the "power of the enemy :" the devil was disappointed, and Jesus triumphed.

The temptation to command stones to be made bread, will, if spiritually considered, be found a most common one every day. All the experienced children of God have known something of it. There are brethren amongst us, and they are brethren in the Lord, to whom, nevertheless, a fast is proclaimed at the present season. They are out of regular employment, and can earn little or next to nothing ; some are masters in business, but their business does not prosper. They have to be concerned how to obtain their daily bread. Brethren, ye sit in the wilderness among the stones and thorns, and ye are "an hungered." Now, would it not be a wonder if the tempter did not insinuate his way to you, and suggest, Canst thou be a child of God, who thus suffers thee to starve ? This suggestion is soon followed up by another, "Command that these stones be made bread." It would be a wonder indeed if he did not ply you with every unbelieving suggestion, such as either that you ought to make less scruple about principle, for the sake of employment, or of standing upon good terms with patrons and friends ; or that it is not necessary to be so strict to truth, where your interest is at

stake, or the maintenance of your family is concerned ; that you may very pardonably put your hand to some unlawful business, to save yourselves from starvation ; or that it is good policy to join some worldly and unchristian party, that may help to keep you from going down in the world ; or that you ought to "try your fortune," as it is called, in the lottery of some questionable speculation. Now, this is the same as if Satan persuaded you in so many words to command these stones that they be made bread. But, my dear brethren in Christ, let the stones be stones ; suffer them to remain as they are ; but look for *your* bread and support from your heavenly Father *alone*, who hath promised you far greater and better things than this. By Him "the hairs of your head are all numbered," and he willeth not that "one of his little ones should perish."

But if things come to what is termed *the worst*, is it not much better to starve in God's name, than to see good days in the name of his enemy and yours ? The days of fasting will soon be over—as soon as they have produced that maturity of your spiritual life for which they are appointed. Take courage, then, and "be of good cheer ;" for though you are abiding at present in the wilderness, it is that you may see the faithfulness and glory of the Lord ; and generally, these have better been discovered in the great and terrible wilderness, than in the land flowing with milk and honey.

There are others amongst us who at present are requited for their very piety with scorn and derision, and have little joy or refreshment in their own souls. Would it not be a wonder if Satan did not interpose, and suggest to such that in Christianity there is little or nothing after all, that he may thus beguile them into the world's spirit and pursuits, in quest of that joy which they find not in God? Brethren, all such counsel is from Satan, and in giving it he virtually advises us to change stones of suffering, and spiritual barrenness, into bread of our own choosing, bread which has no savour of the bread of life. Far rather let us prefer spending our few remaining days with Christ, not only in a wilderness, if it must be so, but in the furnace itself, rather than have recourse to any relief proposed by the adversary.

"The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan." Let this be our watchword in the field of conflict, whenever we perceive the enemy approaching. God be thanked, that whereas the true Michael hath encountered him, and overcome him, his positive dominion over us is annihilated. It is true he can still buffet us, and make such a push at us as to occasion giddiness, sickness, and a fall; but destroy us he cannot. Though he may lurk as a lion about our tabernacle, the Lord hath put "a hook in his nose and a bridle in his lips." The prince of Judah, the Captain of our salvation, has both him and all his agents under abso-

lute control, and appoints them their bounds, which they cannot pass. Only let us abide in our strong-hold, in the atonement of Christ's blood, and we are safe.

### VIII. THE CHIEF WEAPON.

The weapon with which Jesus triumphed, was the word of God. The Bible is a spiritual armoury, hung with swords and lances, blazoned shields, bright breast-plates and helmets. No good soldier of Christ ever gained a victory, but he first furnished himself from this armoury. The mere sling-stones obtained from thence, have felled many a Goliath to the earth. Whoever makes a proper use of his free access to it, fails not to withstand the tempter, who is overawed by God's word. Hence, from the beginning, it has been his endeavour either to weaken its force, or to exclude it from us entirely. What false reasoning has the arch-sophist left untried ! What fine argument has he brought into credit with the world, to make the word of God suspected, to render it dubious, or to deprive it of its paramount authority ! What impious falsehoods has he, by his agents, circulated abroad, against the genuineness and authenticity of the Holy Scriptures ! Not a single book of the Old or New Testament has that wicked one left unattacked ; not a single miracle recorded therein has he been ashamed to treat as fabulous ; not a

single Divine promise therein registered has he not endeavoured to make of "none effect." And still to this day is he busy, by his instruments and ministers, by false prophets, learned professors, and others, as well as personally, by immediate whispers and suggestions of his own, to unsettle men's minds respecting the infallibility of the written word ; for this word has often proved his overthrow. But "resist the devil, and he will flee from you ;" turn a deaf ear to his insinuations and reasonings. "He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own : for he is a liar and the father of it," John viii. 44.

But some may wish to know, in what manner the word of God is of such eminent service in temptations. Let us then observe, that whenever Satan would entangle and seduce us, his first endeavour is to confound our notions of truth and falsehood. What is wrong he represents as right, what is merely human as Divine, what is unholy and bad as holy and good. He would turn the truth of God into a lie, and the lie of man into the truth of God ; and in proportion as he thus dazzles and deceives us, in the same proportion we do his will, and even think perhaps that we are "doing God service." But in this "deceivableness of unrighteousness" he can never succeed, if we implicitly believe in God's written word ; for this will ever teach us in

the plainest terms, how to distinguish right from wrong, and truth from falsehood. It will show us in every case what we ought to do, think, or say, agreeably to the Divine will.

Take the case of a Christian minister. The adversary would sap away all efficacy from our preaching, and he sets about it in a very insidious manner. He suggests to us, that surely we may preach a little more *charitably*, not making the way to heaven quite so narrow nor the gate quite so strait: that thus our congregations will be far better disposed to hear us; that many whose prejudices we now only strengthen against the truth, may thus be gained; and whatever other agreeable arguments to that effect can be suggested, the wily deceiver well knows how to time and to apply. If now "the man of God" parley with such suggestions, leaning to his own understanding, and having no better guard than his own opinion, he is ensnared at once, and the proposal will appear quite reasonable and good, for Satan is far wiser than we are. But if the minister of God depend only the more wakefully on God's word itself, if his faith being thus in vigorous exercise, he can reply to every such Satanic proposal, It is written, "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life;" and again, "Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel than that ye have received, let him be accursed," Gal. i. 8, 9, then the adversary can do

nothing. Such bold affiance in the word of God with the believing reply, "It is written," will compel the enemy to retreat.

Take another instance. The tempter would bring you to doubt whether Christianity be the exclusive means of a sinner's everlasting happiness. Therefore he carries you suddenly to some lofty height of thought, and shows you millions of souls in the church as well as in the heathen world, who are yet without Christ; and then he begins solemnly to address you, and to ask whether you really believe that such countless multitudes of your fellow-men are all in the way of perdition; and whether your understanding or your heart can assent to this. "Yet all those persons," saith he, "believe not in Jesus; at least not as you do and others like you. Can then Christ be absolutely the *only* way to heaven? Must that which you call the new birth be so essential to salvation? Or rather, is it not that your own sentiments are far too narrow, illiberal, and uncharitable upon this matter?" Such are his suggestions; and if you have no better armour against them than your natural reason, you will imagine that the deceiver has given you the proper view of the subject, and he will triumph in having made your footing to slip from under you. But if you can lay your hand upon God's word, and meet the tempter with one saying of it, replying, It is written, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a man be born again, he cannot

see the kingdom of God ;” It is written, “ I am the way, and the truth, and the life : no man cometh unto the Father but by me ;” It is written, “ Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it ; ” “ Many are called, but few are chosen ;”—if you can believably hold fast by such Divine declarations as these, then is the adversary defeated, his snare is broken, and he will cease from attempting to persuade you that Christ is not the sole foundation of our peace with God ; unless he attempt to render suspected the written word itself wherein you trust.

Take another example. He wishes, we will suppose, to bring you back into the world ; and how would he do it ? He gently insinuates, that true religion does not require you to stand aloof from your former companions, or to be so shy of the society of those whose opinions may a little differ from your own : that Christian charity teaches quite another lesson ; that it is your duty now and then to go into the world, that you may let your light shine before men, to prevent religion from being slandered as belonging exclusively to monks and misanthropists, and to show that piety is sociable and cheerful, than which nothing is more necessary for gaining the hearts of others to its cause. Yea, that even for your own exercise and confirmation in holiness, it is your duty not to withdraw from the world ; for what is there in being holy, where there are no temp-

tations or allurements to the contrary ? whereas, to meet evil in the face, and to be able to resist it wherever we see it, is to play the man and the Christian. Such are the reasonings of our great adversary ; and they are very congenial with the disposition of our fallen nature. Now, if you attempt to dispute such a matter with him with your own wisdom, you will certainly be perplexed and overcome ; for no shrewd sophist is so subtle in reasoning as he is. He knows how to make the most foolish thing appear most plausible and rational. But if you have faith in the word of God, and trusting in it you can reply, It is written, "Be not conformed to this world," he is then defeated, for you have struck the dagger out of his hand. Thus the word of God, when grasped with a firm hold of faith, is found to be a strong "sword of the Spirit," wherewith we "wound the dragon." Even the ten commandments, when written in the heart, and uttered against him, are sufficient to repel the enemy. Against this roaring lion they are like ten weapons such as Samson's, or ten swords such as Michael's.

For observe how the blessed Saviour overcame him. The counsel of the tempter was, that Jesus should form stones into bread, and thus, by self-assistance, obtain relief from the pain of hunger. With this insidious and ensnaring counsel there was much, humanly speaking, to induce our Saviour to comply : and could he have done so, the work of redemption had been nullified at

once. But he listened to no such counsel. He let the stones remain stones, and suffered his own hunger to continue. What then was it which he so regarded, that he could not follow the crafty advice of this pretended friend ? It was the WORD of God. His inward eye was directed to what is written in the eighth chapter of Deuteronomy : he grasps it with steadfast faith, and opposes it. to the tempter: "It is written, Man liveth not by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." In this Divine saying, he finds motive enough to suffer another hunger of forty days and nights, or longer, if necessary, rather than forego his Father's help through any distrustful frowardness. It is as if he had said, " My heavenly Father, who conducted me into this wilderness, can sustain me in it without bread ; it is in Him that I trust." Thus was he armed as with an impervious breast-plate. The enemy was obliged to try another temptation ; for the present attempt was utterly unavailing. Any seduction of our Saviour to self-assistance for throwing off what, as our Surety, he must needs endure on account of Adam's transgression, was found hopeless. His faith fed upon the word of God, and he experienced that his heavenly Father could sustain him in the extremest want of nature's supplies, by a single word which had proceeded out of his mouth. And if we, by the like precious faith, hold fast the word of life, the enemy can gain no advantage over us.

The word of Scripture, with which Jesus baffled the tempter, was uttered by Moses, when, by Divine commission, he reminded the children of Israel at the borders of the promised land, how faithfully and graciously the Lord had conducted them forty years in the wilderness. "He humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of Jehovah." So true is it that the Lord, though he generally employs human means, can sustain his children without them. He has rained bread from the clouds rather than suffered them to famish: and he can send abundant supplies in the night to "his beloved," even while they sleep, Psa. cxxvii. 2. This he did at the brook Cherith for Elijah, and something like it at Zarephath for the widow's household; and thus has he done in many other places besides. He has so wrought as to evince that it is not merely his outward staff of bodily bread which supports us; that this is not the thing whereon our life depends; but that it is his word, his will, his blessing, his secret power, accompanying the outward means, that really nurtures, strengthens, and sustains. If the bread we eat become sustenance to us, it is because He hath willed it to be so; and when that is no longer his good pleasure, though we

knead and prepare ourselves bread as we please, it nurtures us not, but we pine in the midst of superfluities. From the sustaining power being not in the bread, but only in God's word and will, we can account for Elijah's going in the strength of one meal forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God, 1 Kings xix. 7, 8 : and for his daily supplying, supporting, and satisfying many a poor family, who for long seasons together have nothing morning or evening except a morsel of dry bread or a few vegetables, and a draught of water. Neither let us imagine that the Lord has need even of these for the support of his people. His simple word, " They shall live," is sufficient, if it so pleases him. As he sustained Moses on Mount Sinai, and Jesus in the wilderness, without bread, so can he sustain us at present. He has only to speak the word, and the air we breathe could be converted into wine or milk or the most delicious sustenance, and could yield us power and strength in the midst of outward famine and helplessness. Most literally does " man live not by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." There have been times of persecution, when thousands of his children have experienced to the very letter the truth of this Divine declaration ; his poor believing people are daily experiencing the truth of it at present ; and true indeed it is, as the Lord liveth.

Therefore, let every needy soul amongst us

lay hold of God's word as a preservative from fear and faint-heartedness, and as a shield and buckler against all the assaults and temptations of the wicked one. It has seemed good to the blessed God, that many of his dear children amongst us should meet with great temporal embarrassments. They are beginning to want every outward comfort, bread and fuel, work and business; every prospect of credit and success threatens to fail them. They are as in a wilderness, among rocks and stones, and their tears have been their meat day and night. Steal or defraud they cannot; for by Divine grace they are preserved from every thing of the kind. But Satan would gain an advantage against them at once, if the thought could be lodged within them that God had forsaken them, and that they must get out of their difficulties by their own devices; or, were they to admit distrust and anxiety about what they shall eat, what they shall drink, or wherewithal they shall be clothed; or, were they to conclude that God's providence is intimating through their poverty and distress, that they are at liberty to help themselves by any improper means. Oh put not such a triumph as this into the power of your great adversary, my distressed and perplexed brethren, but stand to your arms, the same which your Master bore against him, and which have hereby received a peculiar sacredness and power. Reply to him in faith, "It is written, Man doth not live by bread only, but

by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God ;” for it is a faithful saying, it is truth itself. Hold fast by it, build upon it every hope : wait, only wait “a little while” in the wilderness, and verily you will find that God has never left you nor forsaken you. There still live some amongst us who have been in greater difficulties than yours. *They* believed that word without distrust ; and in this belief they resolutely withheld the adversary, whenever he approached with his pernicious counsel. They went on hoping in the Lord ; and what was the result ? Their mouth is now filled with laughter, and their tongue with singing, Psa. cxxvi. 2. They can tell you at this moment that for mountains of gold and silver they would not have been without the experiences they enjoyed during their deprivations in the wilderness ; for there they saw the glory of the Lord, and became living witnesses of the truth, that man liveth not by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. As your Saviour preferred to let the proof of his Sonship rest with his heavenly Father, so may you, my Christian brethren, quietly upon all occasions leave the proof of your adoption to be evinced by the Lord himself. He will take care to testify in due time, with respect to those that are his, not perhaps by appointing you an abundance of this world’s good, but by certainly supporting you in whatever destitution you may be. Then shall ye call

to the waste places, to the rocks and stones to sing together with yourselves, because He hath prepared you a table in the wilderness, and without bread hath sustained you, by the word of grace which proceedeth out of his mouth.

#### IX. THE SECOND ASSAULT.

The foregoing temptation had been frustrated. Satan was probably not yet certain that Jesus was the Son of God, neither had he succeeded to divert him a hair's-breadth out of his mediatorial course. Therefore a second attack is now resolved on. He "taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple :" not in vision, as some have supposed, but corporeally, as the simple language of the sacred historian plainly intimates. By supernatural means he conveyed him through the air to Jerusalem, and set him upon the flat roof of a lofty wing of the temple.

Jesus stood upon the wing of the temple, and Satan stood beside him. It was a dizzy height. Deep beneath lay the city, and still deeper in the vale beyond, was the brook Kedron, like a silvery streak, hardly perceptible. The adversary continues to wear the appearance of a cordial friend, professing readiness to make common cause with him ; and if he were really the Messiah, the Son of God, as then desiring nothing more earnestly than to see him expedite his

work of redemption to an issue. Pointing, therefore, from the fearful height to the thronged courts of the temple and the crowded city below, he addresses him, saying, "If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down :" as if he had said, "I desire no more than to be assured that thou art the promised Messiah, that I may instantly bow the knee to thee as one of thy ministering angels. I am not the only one that eagerly waits for this disclosure of thy personal dignity. Thou wilt be King and Ruler over a great people, as soon as it shall please thee to manifest thy princely glory. Behold now an opportunity for this. Descend by thy miraculous power visibly at once into the midst of the people ; and let such a convincing miracle command from them universal submission to thy majesty and honour. Then wilt thou be as God ; and wilt have the requisite assurance that thou art the promised Messiah ; and that God hath not forsaken thee, as he seemed to have done in the wilderness." Such might be the purport of Satan's present address ; and for the better securing of his object he adduces that glorious promise in the 91st Psalm, which unquestionably refers particularly to Christ : "He shall give his angels charge over thee, and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone." Deep was the plot, and the temptation strong ; for the deceiver having the appearance of a friendly angelic minister, his purpose seemed pious, good,

and suitable. Behold, brethren, your Saviour on the tempting elevation ; and Satan inviting him to move but one step forwards, and he shall be “the Lord in the air,” the angels shall bear him softly down below, the people shall shout their hosannas, and Christ become the general object of adoring admiration and attachment. But had such a proposal been complied with, the work of reconciliation had been at once and for ever destroyed ; for our Surety would thus have turned aside from the mediatorial way of poverty and emptiness, in opposition to the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God ; and thus the “Lamb” would not have been “without spot,” but blemished with the sin of tempting God ; and consequently unmeet for a paschal sacrifice of atonement. How critical then was such a moment of trial ! But, praise ye the Lord ! Jesus could read the word of God through that veil which Satan had hung before him. He knew that the angels would bear him up. Was then the Son of God to depart from those ways into others of private choosing, and was he still to look for the Divine power and faithfulness to defend his human person ? Far from it ; this could never be. His holy soul shrank back with a shudder at the Satanic proposal. One word of Scripture was intended by Satan to confound and ensnare him, but another becomes his shield and defence. He replies, “Again it is written, Thou shalt not

tempt the Lord thy God :" and once more does the enemy meet with a signal discomfiture.

#### X. SPIRITUAL HEIGHTS.

In the holy city, in our spiritual Jerusalem, Satan still practises his most cunning crafts and seductive devices ; here also he too frequently gains his most signal triumphs. These, of however short duration, he is continually endeavouring to renew, and especially in the holy city. Hence there still abound in it temptations, which resemble those he devised against our Lord himself. The deceits of the adversary are never more active than in alluring us to spiritual heights, which may be compared to the tremendous transportation of Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple. The best and happiest condition of the soul on earth is to abide humbly at the feet of Jesus, to be poor in spirit, willing to spend every day with Lazarus at the rich man's gate, or, like the woman of Canaan, to be thankful for the very crumbs which fall from the Master's table. Then is it well with us ; then are we rich ; then are we safe. But the wicked one too well knows that this state of mind would defeat his purpose ; therefore it is no marvel that he aims at nothing so diligently as to entice the children of God out of their spiritual poverty and lowliness. He has a variety of methods for this purpose ; let us here notice some of them.

He comes to you transformed as an angel of light, and takes you up into the holy city, when spreading before the eyes of your mind the gifts and graces, rights and privileges, you partake of as joint-heirs of the kingdom, he brings you easily to imagine yourself more than ordinarily elevated into communion with God and with his holy angels. He then selects for your special notice one of such gifts in particular, and begins to show you what a multitude you possess in this one: how a single gift of the Spirit sanctifies you, enlightens you, leads you into all truth, searches the deep things of God, moves you, conducts you, speaks in you, testifies in and by you: all which may be perfectly true. But he does not stop here; for next he endeavours to persuade you, that the Spirit must surely be able to reveal to you something more, which is but partially or not at all disclosed in the Bible. And now, going farther still, he would have you to regard your own thoughts as suggestions of Divine inspiration. He carries you yet higher, and would persuade you to consider yourself as inspired by God, as one who no longer needs the outward light of the letter, because you possess the inward light of the Spirit. And then, oh the peril! before you are aware, you may be borne up as by enchantment to the pinnacle of the temple. You may feel yourself raised above God's external word and testimony, above church ordinances, and every thing of the kind.

You may regard all such things, nay, the whole Jerusalem itself of other believers, as far beneath you ; and it is only a miracle of omnipotent grace, that you do not turn giddy on such a towering height, and come to some fearful end, perhaps to positive madness. Into delusions of this sort were some of our brethren at N— beguiled not very long ago. They have now quite forsaken all external communion with their brethren ; they recognize no church discipline ; neither will they be directed by the written word of God, but they appeal to the Spirit within them as testifying other and higher things. There may be true children of God among them, who, as such, will one day see their error and be set right again ; but the error itself can never be other than a most mournful and awful one. God preserve us from all such seductions of Satan ! Keep a firm hold of the word, my brethren. It is written, " If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received," (by the holy Scriptures,) " let him be accursed ;" and again it is written, " Thy word is a lamp unto my feet." If we stand to what is " written," and testify it in faith, this will put the adversary to flight.

But if Satan cannot succeed with us in one way, he will attempt it in another. Christians of every character may be raised by him to the dizzy pinnacle of the temple. Innumerable are the methods by which they are enchanted up.

They may be carried thither by the sweetly soothing notion, that God has revealed to them all mysteries, that he has enlightened them beyond the common lot of teachers and instructors ; so that they imagine themselves to have the key of David at command. They may be seduced by their self-imagined treasure of knowledge, and be taken captive by a diabolical interpretation of these words, " Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things," I John ii. 20. This is no uncommon way in which Satan interprets Scripture, and applies it; so that a man may even come to think himself the man who smites the earth with the sword of his mouth, who rules over minds with the sceptre of his word, and after whom no one dares to speak. To many a Christian his teaching and preaching gifts have, through the devil's craft, become a snare. Others have grown high-minded by the notion that their state with respect to God was privileged with something extraordinary, that in the kingdom of Christ they must have been placed at least a few degrees higher than other poor sinners. Perhaps their experience of remarkable answers to prayer was made use of by Satan in preparing for them this sweet poison. Others have settled down in the notion that the church cannot well do without them. They have " seemed to be pillars" in it, as apostles and prophets of their day. The blessing with which

God has attended their ministrations in public or private, has been converted by the devil's art into a snare by which they have been caught. The adversary has deluded others with the imagination that their own dreams and fancies were Divine visions and disclosures ; hence they have ventured to give utterances of their own as if they were oracles of God. Before the mind of others the adversary holds up an enchanted mirror, in which they view themselves as saints encircled with a glory ; or the devil sends to them friends who commend, admire, and idolize them as eminent for meekness, patience, faith, and love. Thus they become gradually deluded into the notion, that surely God must have ordained them to be held up as patterns of holiness to the world.

Such are some of the spiritual elevations of which the pinnacle of the temple may remind us. And though persons thus infatuated may think to go no further than to regard themselves as apostles, eminent saints, and prophets, yet if they once suffer themselves to be set upon heights of this sort, they are not unfrequently carried higher still. Neither do all return down again by the regular steps, gently and without injury ; but alas ! many, after reeling on dizzy heights, plunge at length into the most pernicious depths of heresy. In every age there have been such unhappy persons, who in their own notions have been raised almost to the place of God, so as

even to usurp the office of Christ and his Holy Spirit; and all this has been peculiarly experienced in the holy city. Brethren, abide in your Rock, and there remain humble before God. I would say this especially to those who are rich in gifts, or "apt to teach;" who are had in reputation among the brethren; who take the lead in Christian societies or communion, or whose light shines with more than common brightness in Zion: for with such persons the dragon easily finds an ear, whereby to seize and carry them off into the heights. Gird on you as a breast-plate that word of the Divine oracle, "Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Bear it about as an helmet or a diadem, that "whosoever receiveth not the kingdom of God as a little child, he can in no wise enter therein." Hold fast as a sword in your hand, the word by which you are taught that "God resisteth the 'proud, but giveth grace to the humble.'" And ever remember that the rose of Sharon and the lily of the valleys will neither bloom nor even live upon heights and eminences, but far below them. And whenever the devil would urge you to any extravagant or perplexing speculations on mysterious subjects inscrutable to man, or allure you to vain and unprofitable subtleties,—whether to comprehend the *distinction* of the Three Persons in the Godhead, or to comprehend the *nature* of eternity, or the two-fold nature of Christ as God and man, be-

fore you will heartily believe such things,—or whether he would allure you to any other lofty heights of divine mysteries, then recollect yourselves, and meet the adversary with that scriptural reply, It is written, “Now we know in part, and we prophesy in part; but when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.” Testify to him in the name of Jesus, that you desire not to know more than is necessary to salvation, and good for your own spiritual health: thus will you resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

#### XI. “IF THOU BE A CHILD OF GOD CAST THYSELF DOWN.”

That the enemy readily avails himself of our adoption to put us off our guard against his beguiling us into all kinds of presumptuous and ungodly living, is well known. For instance, he has discovered that you retain some besetting sin in your members, which you have not learned to subdue. He therefore draws you into company or circumstances, whereby no sooner is the lust stirred afresh, than opportunity is given for its gratification: and thus you are on the brink of a precipice. “Cast thyself down,” whispers the devil; but you are disposed to flee from it. “Stay, stay,” is the suggestion; “it is so pleasant in the vale below.” You strive against it. “Cast thyself down!” is forced upon you louder

than before ; and though you tremble at the danger, you have not the self-denial to turn away from it at once : but you feel as if detained by enchantment. "Cast thyself down !" continues the adversary ; "you are a child of God, and may safely reckon upon pardon and recovery." Such are his suggestions ; and if God prevent not, your plunge is certain. Take another instance : you are naturally irritable, and something of a provoking kind said or done by those about you, puts your feelings in a tumult. You are disposed to resent it, but you are in doubt whether you may venture to do so ; and now you are at the precipice. "Cast thyself down !" cries the devil ; "you are God's child, and children of God are not to compromise with such low and carnal people ; evince like a man, your zeal for what is right and becoming." Such a thought is no sooner suggested than you may be instantly urged by violent displeasure to use harsh and unbecoming language, and add sin to sin.

As the adversary proposed that the Messiah's Divine Sonship should be proved in a way contrary to the Divine will, by an arbitrary descent from the pinnacle of the temple, so he often endeavours to insinuate proposals of a similar kind into the minds of true believers. Thus he whispers, "There are certain persons of your Christian acquaintance who regard you as at best but a babe in Christ ; certainly they account you no

experienced Christian, if a Christian at all. Give them proof that their suspicions are groundless. Let them clearly see what you are." Then it is high time to take the sword of the Spirit against the tempter, and to meet him with the word, "The Lord knoweth them that are his;" and here to let the matter rest. But too often on such occasions precious souls are beguiled into a wrong track ; one uttering shameful untruths, by boasting of spiritual experiences which have never been his own ; another improperly assuming an elevated spiritual devotion, to which the Lord alone can raise the heart ; another unwarrantably professing to have an unction from the Holy One, though it has never been bestowed upon him for the occasion ; another committing fatal excesses, by doing, from his own spirit, things which he would have others regard as done by the teaching and direction of the Holy Ghost. What can be greater abominations in the sight of God than these ? And how scornfully may the adversary triumph, when he has succeeded in precipitating sincere Christians into such mire and impurity !

"Cast thyself down," said the devil to our blessed Lord ; and perhaps gave as a reason for it, that Christ might thereby speed the accomplishment of the Divine purposes. Satan's purpose would have been answered, could he have excited in the soul of the Lord Jesus, a momentary feeling of impatience at the slow advance-

ment of his great work of redemption. And oh ! how sedulous is he to provoke true believers to such impatience ; how eagerly would he stimulate them to perfect their holiness in a hurry, by exercises of voluntary humility and will-worship ; and to aim, by rapid strides, at high and eminent degrees of sanctity ! How prompt is he in this respect to cry unto them, "Cast yourselves down, and take the shortest way !" For the crafty adversary knows full well, that to advance in such a way is only to retrograde, it being a departure from the throne of grace, and from the blood of the Lamb ; and that in any way of our own choosing, no angels bear us up in their hands : that our feet must inevitably be dashed against a stone, and that we can settle down in nothing but falsehood, gloominess, pride, and self-complacency. Are the persons he would assault, ministers and witnesses of the truth ? How vigilant is he to observe, whether they account the time tedious, till God crowns their labours with success ; and how diligently does he foment this impatience in their hearts, and cry out unto them, "Cast thyself down !" What a gratification to him is it when they follow this advice ; as, when with passionate heat and false fire of their own, they set about forcing the conversion of souls committed to their charge ; when, with mere carnal raving, they would drive their flocks as by the force of a tempest, into the covert of the kingdom of God, and in-

vent a girdle, an unction, and a rod of God for themselves, because he has not bestowed such things upon them. All this is quite a triumph to the adversary, for he knows that now they have no chance of success ; because the Holy Spirit will not acknowledge such blind zeal of our own. Those whom he is pleased to make use of as his instruments are as broken vessels in their own esteem, and abide patiently in the Lord their God ; suffering themselves to be led, incited, carried, managed, and governed, as to Him shall seem good. These will speed far better. "He that believeth shall not make haste," Isa. xxviii. 16. No violence of man can be of any service here.

## XII. GOD'S WORD AS SATAN'S WEAPON.

The devil, in desiring Jesus to cast himself down, asked "a hard thing." And yet the children of God have been enabled to do greater things than this. Peter courageously stepped out of the boat, and walked upon the troubled waters to go to Jesus ; and the three worthies mentioned in the book of Daniel, walked boldly in the midst of Nebuchadnezzar's fiery furnace : nor did either of the parties suffer loss or harm. The promises which God hath given us are exceeding broad, so that any thing and every thing may be ventured upon them ; and that Divine assurance which Satan adduced with a show of

piety, to move Jesus to compliance, is far from being one of the strongest to be met with in the sacred records. Doubtless the angels are commissioned to bear us in their hands. They are given as an escort and body guard, on whose constant attendance and protection we are allowed cheerfully to reckon "in all our ways," provided they are the ways of God's appointing. Jesus therefore could have safely cast himself down from the pinnacle of the temple by virtue of the promise referred to; but he did it not; and why not? Why did he prefer descending in the natural way, by the staircase of the building? Because the other way was not Divinely pointed out to him. Satan's proposal was no sooner uttered than the Divine commandment was present to show, that the promise was never given for ways of our own choosing. Therefore, if Satan could say, It is written, "He shall give his angels charge concerning thee," Jesus could turn upon him with an equivalent weapon, and infinitely more to the purpose could reply, "It is written, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God."

What is it to tempt Him? It is to run of our own will into danger, that God may deliver us from it. To such vain and frivolous steps is the devil ever ready to seduce us, and for this purpose he has by rote the most powerful promises of Scripture, wherewith to din the mind, if possible, into compliance. Therefore, my brethren,

whenever a Divine promise is suggested to us, as an encouragement to any adventurous undertaking, let us be careful to inquire whether such promise was ever intended to meet a case like ours, and whether the circumstances we are in, give us any right to be encouraged by it. We shall thus perceive who it is that suggests it to us, and Satan will not so easily beguile us through his subtlety. Should it be suggested to you to venture out to sea in storm and danger, because you descry some person in great peril of a watery grave ; and should you feel encouraged at such a moment by that Divine promise, " When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee ;" or if, when you see a house on fire, it is suggested to you to ascend it amidst smoke and flame, because there is a child still left in it, who must otherwise quickly perish ; and God's promise, " Fear not, I am with thee ;" " when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned," occurs to your mind ; or if there is a cry in your heart, " Give to that poor starving person the last farthing you possess," for it is written, " Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these, ye have done it unto me ;" then, brother, venture in God's name, to go and do thus ! It is a good angel that talketh with thee, and thou mayest be confident of God's " very present help." But if another invite thee saying, Come with me, friend, and let us have no scruple about joining a merry party ; for you

know the Bible says, "The Lord keepeth the feet of his saints;" or if you have it suggested to you "to forbear working" in the path of duty, at whatever requires your diligence and perseverance; if you are thus invited to keep a holiday, because it is written, "The Lord giveth to his beloved sleeping;" then know that it is the crafty and old serpent that is now interposing: Answer him, "It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God!"

There are many devices of Satan, which are formed in this way of wresting and misapplying the word of God: and a very pernicious one is that whereby he would instigate us to try if some special promise of Scripture may not be fulfilled to our sensible experience; which is to put to the test or torture, the faithfulness and truth of God. A horrible piece of folly of the kind is said to have been committed by some professed Christians, who met together to test by their own arbitrary notions, the truth of our blessed Saviour's promise in Matt. xviii. 20, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." This promise the adversary held up before them, and indorsed it with another, alike wrested from the Scriptures of truth: "If two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven," Matt. xviii. 19. His suggestion then was, "Can it be even so?" Therefore those persons

thought they would try to ascertain it, and they appointed an hour for meeting together to pray that the Lord would personally appear to them. They met, and cried, "O Lord, hear us. O Lord, hear us! manifest thyself, and appear in the midst of us!" But the Lord appeared *not*! The adversary however triumphed, and the mischief sped. Afterward the Lord may be said to have appeared *indeed*, but in a different way from what those persons had expected: for he suffered leanness to come upon their souls; his special blessing seemed withdrawn; neither light nor joy nor peace in believing did they enjoy during the rest of their days; but they evinced such spiritual declension, and then such a decided falling away, as none of their fellow-Christians could prevent. May God by his grace preserve us from ever attempting thus to try his faithfulness and truth. Let the least thought of the kind be regarded as a certain sign that all is not right within us; and let us cry against it, and against its infernal prompter, as earnestly as possible, "It is written, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God."

One of the most common deceits of Satan is to make use of some part of the word of God itself, to beget in us a distrust of the rest. Strange things have God's children to encounter in this way. Thus "in a moment of time" will Satan bring before us a number of biblical, but comparatively insignificant circumstances; as that of

Paul writing to Timothy to bring with him the cloak that he left at Troas ; and, holding up this, and similar passages to our notice, he will ask maliciously, "Can such be the words of inspiration ? If not, surely the *whole* volume of Scripture is not inspired." He now inquires more boldly, "Which passages *are* inspired, and which *are not*?" in order to hurry us to his own conclusion, that "the Bible is loose ground to build upon." And indeed, by juggling of this sort, he is sometimes but too successful for a while, in pulling down the whole fabric of Scripture testimony about us, and burying us in confusion and uncertainty, till we can recollect ourselves. Not seldom will he bring suddenly to our remembrance some Divine declaration or promise, just at the moment of any occurrence that seems to confront and contradict such a part of the Divine word. For instance, are you in some great affliction, or perplexing trial, and ready to despair because no relief nor help arrives ? The Divine saying, of which he will then remind you, is such as this, "Like as a father pitith his children, so the Lord pitith them that fear him;" and then with a scornful smile will he suggest, "Where is now that Father ? And his pity to his children, where is it in your own case ?" And nothing will gratify him so much as to see your soul hereby defiled with despondency, unbelief, and impatience. When you have long supplicated and wrestled in prayer, whether it

be for bread for your starving family, or for direction in some great perplexity, or for a little relief and repose from bodily pain, or for one drop of consolation in anguish of mind, and you are still obliged to wait, the adversary will be at hand with his suggestion, "It is written, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you :" and he will inquire, What benefit in your present affliction have you, with all your pious prayers, derived from that promise ? Here then, except the Lord keep the citadel of your faith, some fiery dart of the wicked is likely to wound you.

The most dangerous manner in which Satan can employ the word of God as a weapon against us, is as follows : Having forced a saying of Scripture away from the context, he will interpret it so apart from its connexion and true application, that you may be led by it into presumption. Here, if any where, it is necessary to meet him with plain Scripture, and to use it as the sword of the Spirit. If he allege, It is written, "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound," Rom. v. 20, therefore give the rein to your lusts ; we must reply to him, It is also written, "Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound ? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein ?" Rom. vi. 1, 2. Does he suggest, It is written, Rom. vii. 17, "Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me ;" therefore be

easy, and not so concerned about your faults ; let him be answered with, It is written again, "O wretched man that I am ! who shall deliver me from the body of this death ?" Rom. vii. 24. When the children of God groan with their burdens of indwelling sin, then also is Satan ready with his citation of Scripture, saying, "It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy," Rom. ix. 16 ; therefore go more into the world, or go on in it, and wait till God *effectually calls* you off from it. Our answer to such perversions of Scripture must be, It is also written, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling : for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure," Phil. ii. 12, 13. Does the subtle adversary suggest, that it is written, "Known unto God are all his works, from the beginning of the world," Acts xv. 18 ; therefore you may leave off praying and supplicating, for your fixed condition is allotted you ; and what you are to receive, you will certainly receive, whether you pray or not ? Then reply, It is written again, "Ask, and it shall be given you—for every one that asketh receiveth," Luke xi. 9, 10. Does the old serpent, perverting those words of our Lord, "This is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me, I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day," insinuate, that consequently you may live on as you please, and enjoy

whatsoever your soul lusteth after ; that let the law of Moses remonstrate as it will, you are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ? Cry out, my brethren, in reply to every insinuation of the kind, Again it is written, " My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me," John x. 27. Thus will you disarm the adversary ; thus, in the strength of our God, you will triumph over him, and make a show of him openly, Col. ii. 15.

### XIII. THE ENCHANTING VISION.

The scene of action is now changed. The Son of God, by the power granted to Satan over his human person, is suddenly transferred from the pinnacle of the temple to the top of " an exceeding high mountain." By the same power, Satan here presents to Christ's human soul, the vision of unbounded scenery over the face of the globe ; for this seems to be implied in the words, " he sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them." As quickly as we can turn round, were all the kingdoms of this world shown to him in the field of vision, with every particular of their glory, pomp, pleasure, and decoration : and herein whatever scene was most alluring to human nature passed before him. The restrictions of what we call time and space, were done away : objects however remote, or concealed, were thus *in effect* near, unveiled, and disclosed, " in a moment of time." This was an

amazing sleight of Satan, and shows what he is capable of doing, if the Lord permit him. The fairest regions of the earth became opened to the view, and presented an enchanting panorama of the finest countries and most splendid palaces. Here, was stately Rome, the mistress of the world, the lady of kingdoms ; there, the spicy hills of the east, with Persia's lovely gardens ; Ophir, with its mines of gold, and stores of diamonds ; and India, that wonderful land, glowing in the coloured adornings of perpetual spring, and flowing with milk and honey. But not only whole empires and cities, innumerable other objects of every kind are now presented also ; not only the kingdoms of this world, but the glory of them. Whatever earth affords to invite and attract, whatever, as delightful and captivating to the senses, the children of this world regard as their paradise, is exhibited in full view. Villags listening in elysian pleasure grounds ; state, pomp and equipage, with every variety of courtly circumstance ; galleries of art and schools of wisdom : laurels of fame and monuments of renown ; sumptuous banquets in imperial saloons ; festal crowds listening to magic symphony and enrapturing chorus ; all that makes the heart of worldlings leap, that fires every nerve, and enraptures every eye, was exhibited in the liveliest manner before the human soul of Jesus ; and God only knoweth what that pure human soul must have had to witness. No spectacle of pleasure, no sense-

intoxicating scene, would Satan left undisclosed to the view of our blessed and most holy Lord.

Not unlike this is the experience sometimes of many Christian brethren. Those who are of a fervid temperament and lively imagination, can tell of similar fascinations. The adversary is the readier to practise them upon persons of this description, because their natural love of excitement and the vividness of their sensations seem to promise him a surer triumph; indeed, he is often far too successful in bearing their spirits up to his enchanting heights. For this purpose he commonly employs some outward means. These he will gather, for instance, from the fine arts, as they are every where abused to worldliness and the pleasures of sin. Thus at one time it is a beautiful picture, at another the witcheries of poetry, at another, the sweetness of melody, or the sublimity of musical composition, whereby he dissolves their spiritual firmness. Sometimes, if only some sweet mazy melody softly undulating from a distance, be listened to, as one sits musing in the solitary chamber, his sorcery may prove successful. For now, as if created by his mighty fiat, will a new paradise of entrancing felicity suddenly arise in the imagination, and the soul is transported into an earthly heaven, as through a veil suddenly rent in twain. Youthful delights, and some of them not the most innocent, to which we had long ago bidden a final farewell, re-appear in all their strength

and freshness ; and forbidden gratifications, to which perhaps we had been for years crucified and dead, re-invite in their most attractive form, in their most captivating power of allurement. Here, hang wreaths of that glory, which fadeth away, but how honourable and desirable do they again seem to our imagination ! There, the merry faces of old worldly friends, around the loaded board of their hospitalities and luxuries, seem so to have revived, that we even hear again the loud laugh pealing at the railillery or ambiguous witticism of their remarks ; and perhaps in our very solitude we are excited to join the loud laugh once more. Are not unholy sympathies on such occasions rekindled within us, and often indulged, so as to supersede for awhile all relish of spiritual things ? In such a state of mind, perhaps, are unfolded to our imagination the scenes of mirth and song, where the harp resounds to the dance, and all is animation and mirth ; or our thoughts may flit over the enchanted meads and rosy bowers of lovely poesy, and in either manner be equally carried away. In a word, whatever of this world is beautiful or valuable, may in a moment captivate the fancy, enchain the thoughts, and seduce the heart. Trifling as such things may at first appear, a train of sin may commence from them ; the soul may hereby become untuned for converse with God and things divine, and the most lamentable consequences may ensue. Here are conditions of

mind that may easily befall you ; and when they do, you may consider it as the devil showing you the kingdoms of this world, and the glory of them, in a moment of time. For this very reason are the musical entertainments of the present day so dangerous a snare, because they are so available to the adversary for seducing us to declivities of sensual delusion. The symphonies and melodies, the concerts and operas, which are the charm of the world, serve, with him at least, as a powerful spell for transforming the perishable and worthless glories of this earth into an imaginary bliss, that supersedes all real delight in the present and prospective glory of God's kingdom. Even real Christians of considerable experience have confessed, that music, apostatized music, severed as it is from the service of God and inspired only by the spirit of the world, has at times so irresistibly fascinated them, that like persons infatuated, they have been half ready to regret having been brought out of Egypt, and have almost envied the children of this world—if not their “drunkenness, revellings, and such like,” yet at least their more refined and reputable enjoyments. Music frequently is one of the wings with which the adversary fedges the imagination of human souls, that they may be carried off to those mountains of enchantment, where the kingdoms of this world, and the glory of them, appear invested with fascinations and splendours that dissipate every thing like spiritu-

ality, generate false security, amuse with dreams of sublunary bliss, foster sensuality and all manner of excess, and, if almighty grace prevent not, decide the soul's course to irretrievable perdition.

#### XIV. SATAN'S DEMAND AND PROMISE.

At the moment when, by the working of Satan, the kingdoms of this world, and the glory of them, were presented to our Saviour's eye, the adversary, in spite of himself, and of his affectation of majesty and dignity, begins to betray his real character. For as if he had now forgotten his long-accustomed art of dissimulation, he addresses him, saying, "All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them : for that is delivered unto me ; and to whomsoever I will, I give it. If thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be thine," Luke iv. 6, 7. Here, then, the devil claimed as his own, the power and glory of the world. How dreadful, and yet alas, how true, that the whole world lieth in the wicked one ! Thus the father of lies himself spake truth for once ; for by the righteous sentence of God, the whole world is actually in the hands of Satan. Satan still remains at present "the prince of this world," John xii. 31 ; xiv. 30 ; xvi. 11 ; yea, "the god of this world," 2 Cor. iv. 4 ; for the vast majority of souls upon earth still remain willing slaves to his yoke. The greatest number of countries pay him tribute, and his dark banners wave on the ram-

parts of most cities. Who can number the hundreds of millions whose souls he secures in his manifold chains, in the bands of sin and ignorance, in countless spiritual prisons and cells, under Mohammedan imposture, or in pagan idolatry ; in the strong delusions of the Talmud, or under the dogmas of the seven hills ; in Heaven-defying rationalism, pantheism, or atheism. Surely without any arrogant claim Satan might say, " All this is mine !" For the little which is not his, the "lodge in the garden of cucumbers," the "worm Jacob," the despised handful of Israel, is, as compared to the giant domains of this prince of fallen angels, but as a drop to the ocean. What is there in the whole world that the devil has not usurped for the extension and establishment of his kingdom, and made subservient, especially in the present age, to his infernal plans ? Are not most of our pulpits and professional chairs still his ? May not the same be said of the greater part of our public journals and newspapers ? Are not our assemblies, associations, and clubs, chiefly devoted to his service ? And which of the sciences or of the fine arts is exempt from perversion to his interests ? Almost every thing in the world has he contrived to draw by little and little into subservience to his cause. Who deals out poetry in that deluge of romance and comedy which inundates the world with millions of infidel falsehoods, and unholy ideas ? Who is the invisible manager and con-

ductor of those sensual operas, elysian concerts, and other entertainments, whereby music, that gift bestowed to praise withal the perfections of Jehovah, stands prominent as the destroyer of souls, because it is now made to breathe subtle poison into human hearts ? Who is it that has stationed his camp behind the ramparts of modern *philosophy*, and aims from thence to inflict the most wicked and deadly blows on the gospel of peace ? Who is it that has schemed and palméd upon Christendom that fashionable modern religion sweetened with effeminate taste, and spiced with lax and godless morality, which lulls people into a deep spiritual slumber, from which but too late the thunder of judgment will awaken them ? From whom does all this originally proceed but from the father of lies, the old serpent, the dragon of the bottomless pit ? Nor let us be surprised that he even speaks of "giving" what is certainly within the compass of his power : "All these things WILL I GIVE THEE, if thou wilt fall down and worship me." There are gifts Satanical as well as gifts Divine ; and the world has always abounded with persons who have owed their enjoyments, treasures, honours, titles, and rank, to Satanical ministration or superintendence. For our great adversary has always his pay and his prize-money in readiness for any who will follow his banner, and he has various methods of handsomely re-numerating their zeal in his service. Nor is it

uncommon for God to permit his putting into the possession of worldly and abandoned persons such an abundance of the enjoyments and glory of this world, such large and fat pastures of fleshly delight, that at length almost the last trace of what is human becomes effaced in these vessels of wrath, and they go on their way to destruction, as the ox goeth to the slaughter, Phil. iii. 19.

"All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me." What a proposal ! that the Son of the living God should be solicited to bow the knee of adoration to "the old serpent!" The blasphemous demand, audacious as it was, we hardly know how to reconcile with the craft and subtlety of the devil, till we have considered the desperate and infatuated state to which he had arrived. He felt his assumed veil of angelic light gliding from off him, and he presaged with a painful certainty who the Person was with whom he had undertaken to contend. The decided triumphs which the Lord had already obtained over his most refined and subtle artifices, permitted him no longer to doubt that the Holy Person he tempted was the very Messiah, the Only Begotten of the Father. The prospect, therefore, of dangers now threatening the dominion he had so long maintained, put him to no little embarrassment. Thus, impetuous hate dictating his last decisive stroke, his recollection is impeded by passion, and his usual wise self-possession is lost in the waves of

despair raging horribly within him. Indeed it was not till he was assured respecting the person of his antagonist, that he became conscious of the whole importance and eventfulness of the conflict, and that one or the other *must* fall. Yet this his last assault, great as is the art and power displayed in it, was the worst conducted. It was like the impetuosity of a combatant giving up all for lost, who blindly rushes upon the point of his enemy's sword. Satan here appears to have hoped for nothing more than to outrage the Messiah's dignity, by the most insulting refusal to acknowledge it. In this desperation he displays the kingdoms of this world and the glory of them, saying, "All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me."

From the circumstance of Christ's refusing to exhibit those miraculous proofs of his Messiahship which Satan had required, it is possible that the devil had imagined him to be, not the God-man, but only some great and holy person merely human, upon whom, therefore, he could still make some further demand, and whom he could approach in a more undisguised and unreserved manner. But the explanation already given appears far the more probable. As, therefore, the present demand of Satan was an act of desperation, so it was probably rather a sudden ebullition of blasphemous rage and diabolical scorn than a plotted temptation. Christ's faithful followers have in every age been assaulted in much

the same manner. Their souls have had to recoil at the most horrible and impious requirements, and to shrink at many a thought so blasphemous and dreadful, that they shudder even to remember it. But be of good courage, my tried and tempted brethren. Consider, that though the devil may rage against you with these buffeting and onsets, it is because of his vexation and chagrin, at knowing that he never shall be able finally to prevail or have dominion over you. Regard, therefore, such temptations as nothing more than the impotent resentments of a disabled adversary, who, because he is no match for you with sword or stratagem, would fain pelt you with stones and mire to display his insolence and give vent to his rage.

#### XV. THE ISSUE OF THE CONFLICT.

The blasphemous demand, grounded on the glory and pleasure which Satan had the effrontery to offer, had now very evidently betrayed the character of its agent. Were these the good things which Satan had to bestow, and did he even require homage and adoration for them? Jesus knew him. The holy soul of our unblemished High-Priest turns away with disdain and abhorrence from the imagery of vanity and lust which Satan had presented to him. The majesty of the Only Begotten, to whom all power is given in heaven and on earth, breaks forth like

the sun from behind a cloud, and utters, "Get thee behind me, Satan : for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve." The devil was silenced ; the conflict ended for a season ; and the Lamb of God came forth triumphantly, pure and without spot. By his own obedience of faith in the written word, he vanquished the tempter.

Similar temptations are still not uncommon. Even the holiest persons have had to acknowledge that there are seasons when manifold pleasures, possessions, and relative circumstances, to which they had considered themselves, through the grace of God, long ago dead, have suddenly revived in the most attractive form to their imagination, and that the senses and worldly lusts of our fallen nature have thus again been stirred to a very dangerous degree. For at such seasons the devil leaves no means untried for making the soul his victim once more. He suddenly and surprisingly suggests, before we have time to recollect ourselves, what is much the same as if he said, "All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me." It is only some little difficulty that we have to surmount, or some little compliance that we have to make, in order to become possessed of glories and golden mountains, honours, riches, and pleasures. It is only a little deviation from rectitude, which no human being perhaps may know of, only some slight and momentary act of homage to bē

paid to the wicked one, and then all is ours. O my beloved brethren, the falls of David and of Solomon are not the only instances in which God's children have yielded such obeisance to the devil for the sake of a single draught from the intoxicating cup of sin. Now, in whatever manner this may have been done, we pity our brethren who have submitted to the degradation ; we despise them not. Our own heart tells us very plainly what we are in ourselves, how attractive to us the things of the world can be made to appear, and with what beguiling charms the adversary can disguise its vanities and lusts. We know it, and therefore we pray every hour, "Lord, lead us not into temptation!"

And who can doubt that it is a temptation from the wicked one, when we are plied with such enchanting visions and shameless demands ? The very nature of those possessions and enjoyments so plausibly offered to us, and especially the ways and means proposed to us for their attainment, betray their author. *Here* he cannot be said to come to us as an angel of light ; therefore in so far is our conflict the less difficult. And yet we do not quit the field without receiving some wound. We rarely, if ever, turn away from the world's fascinations without some stir of unholy desire : nay, it is well if we do not depart from the conflict naked and wounded ; and why ? because the weapon with which Jesus so easily repelled the tempter is not employed by

ourselves on every similar occasion. We do not insist enough that it is written, "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve." This word embraced as the word of God, and used in faith, will make the strongest darts as stubble; and the enemy beholding the lightning of this armour flashing from our bosoms, loses all hope of persuading us to the smallest compliance, or the least act of homage.

"Then the devil leaveth him; and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him." Such was the final issue of that great and eventful conflict with Satan, who never went away in more confusion, discomfiture and chagrin, than now from the most dreaded enemy of his kingdom. To be so totally defeated, was as intolerable to him as it was unusual. Like a dark thunder-cloud of night driven away by tempestuous winds, so did he depart in wrath and despair, ready to call on the mountains to fall on him, and the hills to cover him, and hide from him the heavens above, and the abyss beneath, that he might no longer hear the halleluiyahs of heaven, nor the murmers of hell, at his ignominious overthrow.

As for our blessed Lord, it was well with him: oh how well, after forty days of dreadful destitution in a wilderness, amidst the powers of darkness, (for during the whole forty days, as St. Luke informs us, was he tempted,) to find himself restored at once to *his own* element, amidst the affectionate and reverend ministrations of  
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holy angels of God ! Now, indeed, was fulfilled what Jacob had prophetically uttered on his death-bed, "Judah is a young lion ; thou hast become exalted, my son, by great victory. He kneeled down, and he reposed as a lion, yea, as a lioness ; who shall rise against him ?" Gen. **xlix. 9.** But this "repose" was not the grand termination of the conflict ; it was only a brief suspension. "Satan," as St. Luke relates, "departed from him *for a season*," Luke iv. 13. It was not long before he exerted his utmost against him, continuing to persecute him by stratagem and war, till at length the mighty Captain of our salvation, by his death upon the cross, wrested the dominion for ever from his hands. No sooner had the blood of the Lamb of God been shed upon the accursed tree, than the head of the old serpent was bruised for ever.

Our own Christian life, too, my brethren, can throughout be no other than a conflict. We shall have in this our wilderness some days of respite and even of jubilee ; but the complete uninterrupted sabbath can only be beyond. While sojourning in these frail tabernacles, we must ever be exposed to the assaults of the adversary. Though his power is effectually broken, still he will not cease in this world to make us feel his "great wrath," and hatred, in various ways. But "fear none of these things," my brethren. Rejoice rather with thankfulness unto God, who giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus

Christ. All the triumphs obtained by our Surety become our own by faith. In Him we already anticipate the final triumph. We triumph in Christ in the midst of the conflict, and in the arms of death. At our latter end, if not before, we are found more than conquerors through Him that loved us. Oh the blessedness of this truth, and the blessedness of that faith which receives it! Wherever such a faith *lives*, courage will not be wanting to stand in the evil day; for though in the heat of trial we may droop for a moment, yet will the feeble knees be quickly re-invigorated by such a faith as this. Happy then art thou, O Israel! who is like unto thee, a people **SAVED** by THE LORD, who is the shield of thine help, and the sword of thy victorious excellency? Thine enemies shall fail in their assaults on thee; but thou shalt walk at liberty upon their high places! Deut. xxxiii. 29. Amen.

## THE ROCK OF SALVATION.

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ROMANS iii. 25—26.

Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.

THESE are important words, my friends, which we have before us. They form a ground-work and a principal pillar, which upholds the most essential article of the Christian faith. I know of no passage in the whole of Holy Writ which is of more importance in order to a clear, correct, and complete apprehension of the Scriptural doctrine of the atonement, than this. It may certainly not appear to you, at first sight, that such is the case; and it is remarkable, that for several centuries this passage continued in the church as if sealed up, and under lock and key. It is true, that in former times it might have been less necessary in the Christian church than it is in the present day. With respect to the manner in which Christ accomplished the reconciliation between God and the sinner, there was only one opinion and one doctrine; it was

preached in every pulpit, and was the general confession, and whoever deviated from it, would not, with his heresy, have escaped the tribunal of the church. In the present day, the case is otherwise. Many views of the work of atonement are become current, which deviate from the doctrine of the church—views, which all tend to divest the doctrine of the cross of its foolishness, and to bring it somewhat nearer to human ideas and rational comprehension. But it is in its foolishness that the peculiar sweetness of the doctrine of the atonement lies concealed ; therefore we will not suffer ourselves, on any account, to be deprived of this foolishness.

In the passage we have read, there lies a gigantic sword against these false and derogatory views of the doctrine of the cross, which overturns them all ; and it shall be the object of our present meditation briefly to expound it according to its original meaning. Our discourse will attain a two-fold aim : first, as a preparatory discourse for the passion-week, it will elevate us to the only correct point of view, from whence we ought to contemplate the whole history of our Lord's passion ; and secondly, as a monitory discourse, it will display to the sinners amongst us, who have no Saviour, that throne which burns with flames of fire, and if it please God, kindle in their soul a salutary dread—not indeed to urge them to despair, but to a godly sorrow. We consider Christ crucified,

- I. AS THE PROPITIATION ;
- II. AS THE MANIFEST PROOF OF THE  
RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD ;
- III. AS THE SOLUTION OF THE GREATEST  
PROBLEM IN THE WORLD.

I. The chapter from which our text is taken, contains a powerful discourse on the righteousness which is by faith. Amongst other things it is said, "But now the righteousness which is by faith of Jesus Christ, is unto all, and upon all them that believe—for there is no difference; for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; hence they are justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Of this redemption the Apostle goes on to speak in our text, and tells us, first of all, that "God has set forth Jesus Christ to be a propitiation through faith in his blood." Some are of opinion that the Apostle here alludes to the ark of the covenant; and of this there is no doubt. But I cannot concur with the view usually taken, according to which the ark itself is regarded as a type of Christ. This ark, concealing within it the law, like a threatening sword in its scabbard, stood behind a double veil, in the solitary darkness of the marble sanctuary, overshadowed by the wings of golden cherubim, which are every where emblems of Divine majesty and dignity, and concealed from every eye. No one was permitted to approach it, and

he that touched the ark was put to death. Even the high-priest appeared only once a year near it, on the day of atonement ; and then, also, not without sacrifice and sprinkling of blood. All which are indications of estrangement and variance, and not of reconciliation and favour.

The ark, in itself, was a symbol solely of the majestic and irritated Deity ; and the golden lid which covered it, and which is generally regarded as a type of Christ—inasmuch as Christ covers the law, and is the end of the law—was only a figure of the Divine holiness, which insists, with inexorable firmness, on the keeping of its laws, and cannot desist from its commandments. If this covering had typified Christ, the approach to the ark would then have been more free and less dangerous. But the approach to it was only free from danger, when the high priest drew near to it, with the blood of the sacrifice, and seven times sprinkled with it the golden covering. God then revealed himself favourably above the ark. By this sprinkling of the lid or mercy-seat with the sacrificial blood, it became a type of the Divine holiness, which was appeased by the sacrifice of Christ ; and thus God—of course typically—was reconciled ; and then the consolation of forgiveness was connected with the believing view of the mercy-seat. Now this was the shadow ; but here, Paul intends to say, is the true propitiary—the holiness of God, appeased by blood in Christ Jesus. He

who looks at him shall live : he that approaches to him has nothing to fear. His name is Immanuel, God with us in Christ Jesus.

The Apostle therefore means to tell us nothing else than what John announces, in plain terms, in his first epistle, "Jesus Christ is the propitiation for our sins." He is the propitiation—not merely a propitiator, but the propitiation itself. Not by this means or that, but by his own person, he filled up the gulf, which was fixed between us and God ; with his own flesh he healed the dreadful breach which sin had made ; with his own self he built the golden bridge, which re-united heaven and earth. The reconciliation of God with the sinner has its foundation in him ; not in the doctrine which he has brought us, nor in the regeneration which he has wrought in us ; but in his own person, and that exclusively. Before even a spark of the new life glimmered in me, and religion was still a stumbling block and foolishness to me, the eye of God had already looked upon me in love ; how should I otherwise have ever been converted, and incorporated into his people ? And whilst I was any thing else than reconciled to God, but was still his enemy, God was already reconciled to me, because Christ had accomplished the reconciliation without me.

Christ is therefore the propitiation ; and the matter is by no means to be considered as if he first made the reconciliation by inclining my

heart in love to the Almighty ; in that case the reason would lie in me, why God was my friend. But it lies out of me, in the person who bleeds on the cross ; and this is my consolation, my anchorage, and the rock of my confidence. Christ is the propitiation, because he, if I may so say, is the storm which has dispelled the clouds of wrath from the brow of the Almighty ; because he endured the punishment we had merited, and, atoning Divine justice with himself, unfettered the stream of love in the Eternal breast, which now flows down uninterruptedly upon the world. The consuming fire upon the throne he has changed for us into a gracious God ; has transfigured the countenance, in which we read the sentence of death, into a blissful fatherly countenance, without us, and entirely by himself ; and has thus rescued his chosen people as a brand out of the burning ; hence he is called the propitiation.

The Apostle now states further respecting Christ, this living propitiation, that "God hath set him forth" as such. Doubtless the Apostle had here something more in view than the manifestation of Christ : he does not merely intend to point out how God set him forth, by sending him into the world, afterwards by exhibiting him upon the cross, and finally, by the preaching of the gospel before the eyes of the heathen. The stone on which it was intended that all the world should unhesitatingly erect the edifice of their

salvation and their hope, was not to be moveable, but firm as the everlasting hills, and receive from the throne of the Divine Majesty, a solemn and unequivocal sanction ;—and such also was the case. I remind you of the voice of God from heaven respecting him, and of the testimony of the angels, that he was the Saviour ; of the witness which the skies bore to him when hanging on the cross, by clothing themselves in mourning, and of the sun, when he veiled his face ; of the earth, which trembled with joy under the dew of his blood, and of the graves which opened themselves beneath it, and yielded up their prisoners. And then also of the glory of the third day, and of the resurrection of the sleeping lion from his couch ; of the victorious plaudits of the rending rocks, of the glory of God around the re-awakened bleeding form, and of the crowning of this sacrificial lamb with glory and honour. These are the loud blasts of the trumpet during which the mercy-seat was erected ; this the Divine character and name by which the rock of salvation was countersigned and sealed. God has established, proclaimed, and verified Christ as the Man of our hopes. This is also what the Apostle gives us to understand.

Christ, as the propitiation, says the Apostle further, is given to faith, “ Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood.” Faith places us in the enjoyment of the

blissful fellowship of this man, who is himself the propitiation. This faith is a powerful inward process, and an act of the soul which surpasses all human power. In this faith the man lets go of himself, and throws himself helplessly upon the merits of another, like a shipwrecked mariner catches at the plank. In this faith, the individual becomes totally powerless, according to the spirit, and sinks into Jesus' arms, or else he would sink into despair. In this faith, the man capitulates, like a fortress in flames, and exchanges the honour of being able to help himself, for the blissful disgrace of living by grace. In this faith we cast ourselves down a precipice, and on the way we catch hold of a root—the root of Jesse. "Lord Jesus preserve me, have mercy upon me!"—this is the act of faith; something violent, and, without God, impossible.

Paul discriminates real faith still more minutely. He calls it a belief, not on, but in the blood of Christ. This blood is the peculiar element of faith, and the atmosphere in which it lives its real and complete life. Its home is on the sacrificial place of the great High Priest, and its abiding residence on the blood-stained altar of Immanuel. In Gethsemane are the arbours in which it most loves to rest, and it keeps its festivals beneath the cross. It is a bee—and the wounds of Jesus are its flowers; a dove—and on Calvary is its olive tree; a swan—and Jesus' blood is the lake, on which it glides in proud re-

pose. The death of the Son of God is the spring which nourishes and refreshes it; the passion of the Mediator, the green pasture on which it feeds; in the mystery of the cross it lives and moves; and as long as it has not found that resting-place, the sparrow has not found its house, nor the swallow its nest. Wherever this faith in his blood resides, there Christ is a propitiation. The man becomes conscious that he is now reconciled, and thus he reposes on the bosom of God. His pacified conscience tells him so, and the peace in his heart. He perceives it in the paths of his life. He feels that he is led by the hand of Eternal Love, and by the leading-strings of Divine Mercy: and daily does he receive, in a manifold manner, the most unequivocal proofs, that he is now made acceptable to God in the Beloved.

II. After the Apostle has informed us that Jesus Christ is our propitiation, he shows us how he became so. And, lo! near the throne of grace appears the throne which blazes with flames of fire. Tremble, ye sinners!

“God hath set forth Christ to be a propitiation through faith in his blood”—it is now said, farther, “to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God.” Do you hear? Calvary is a scene of vengeance, the cross a gibbet, and the bleeding form upon it a living proof of the retributive justice of God. My God! how well thou art

able to demonstrate and to vindicate thine honour !

It is true, that until the death of Christ, the holiness and retributive justice of God were obscured. Notwithstanding all the storms of wrath, which at various times darkened the horizon of the earth—the patience and forbearance of God still beamed in a much clearer light than his fiery indignation and his vengeance. The whole heathen world, which had long merited a second deluge, had prosecuted its abominations, unhindered, from century to century, under the shield of Divine forbearance. The people of Israel—that stiff-necked race!—worthy of the fate of a Sodom and Gomorrah, was still treated as a favourite child, and borne by the Lord upon eagles' wings. Reprobate hordes, like those at Nineveh, at length repent; and immediately all is well, the sin is covered, and they are pardoned without delay. Sinners, such as Rahab, David, Solomon, and a thousand others, are called children of God; are watched over as the apple of his eye; receive testimony that they please God, and are at length received as saints into heaven without hindrance. Such a mode of Divine procedure was certainly intended to represent him to the world as a God, who causes his sun to shine upon the evil and the good, and his rain to descend upon the just and the unjust; who does not take any very particular notice of sin—and, generally speaking, cannot possess such an un-

conditional and inexorable abhorrence of sin. This long-suffering forbearance was less fitted for magnifying his holiness in the sight of the world, and imparting to it a feeling of awe for his majesty. This the Apostle also intimates, when he says, "God hath set forth Christ to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;" thus giving us to understand, that this righteousness was not only not rendered apparent by such forbearance and patience, but, on the contrary, was obscured and veiled from the eyes of the world; and, on this very account, in order to be seen and acknowledged by the world, a new declaration and demonstration of it was requisite.

And, behold! he points us to Calvary, and says, There he hangs, who is the living proof of the retributive justice of God! We direct our eyes thither, and the most dreadful and horrible spectacle which the world ever beheld, presents itself to our view. The fatal waves of the deluge do not announce it so loudly, nor is it so prominently written in the smoking ashes of the vale of Siddim, the flames of Sodom and Gomorrah do not publish so impressively to the world, how righteous the Almighty is, as is manifest here, in a manner sufficient to cause a stone to melt. The man who is bleeding yonder, is God's Isaac—his other self, his only-begotten child—his sole, whole, and entire love. It pleased this Son to take our part, to burden himself with our sins, to

suffer our transgressions to be imputed to him, and to present himself with this blood-red burden before the tribunal of God. Brethren, I beseech you ! if it had been any way possible for God to let mercy take the place of justice, and retract his "Cursed be every one!"—would he not have done it, when his only beloved Son, the Son of his heart, stood before him as a sinner, laden with our iniquities ? Ah, if there were any thing capable of touching his heart, of appeasing his wrath, of bending his adamantine justice, and of inducing him to a free amnesty and overlooking of sin—would it not have been the sight of Him who was the apple of his eye, his Jedidjah, his Christ? Doubtless, my brethren ! But it was not possible.

What occurs ! Good God, what a scene ! The Father seizes the sword. Though his heart bled within him, yet it avails not. He waves it, turns away his face, and—oh, we are ready to cover our eyes and to break out into a cry of horror !—his only beloved Son is struck down into the dust, like a worm that is trodden upon, and no longer like a man ; wretched to an extent that no mortal had ever been. How he writhes and struggles, groans and moans ! "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death ! Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me !" He utters the words ; falls upon his face ; reiterates them ; trembles in every limb, and the bloody sweat presses itself from his veins. He

is given into the power of Satan's instruments. The pit has no execration, hell no blasphemy, which is not spit forth against him. How is the fairest of the children of men abused ! His visage spat upon and wounded ; his back bleeding from the scourge, and his hands bound. With a crown of thorns upon his bleeding head, he totters to the place of execution. O horror upon horror ! Nails are driven through his hands and his feet. Fastened to the accursed tree, he is lifted up between heaven and earth ; and his blood, like a rosy dew, trickles down upon his murderers, in order—O wondrous recompence ! —to wash away from them the impious deed at the moment of its commission. Languishing in his solitary elevation, behold him now surrounded by obscurity and darkness,—outward and inward night. The torture reaches its utmost extremity. O distress unparalleled ! His soul is in agony and flames, and experiences the torments of the damned, " My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me ?" He moans enough to move a stone to pity. He is hurled into the pit, in the spirit, and the most horrible of all thoughts assaults him—that of the hole of the pit closing upon him ; and then—O woe ! woe ! if this last ray of light were to vanish—all would be lost, and he would fall into the jaws of despair. The king of terrors approaches, enveloped in all his horrors—death, the power of which Satan possesses. He opens his jaws, and the Lord of all

lords is a bleeding corpse. My God ! how appalling, how terrible !

And what is this, my brethren ! and for what purpose these torments ? Is this love on the part of God ; or mercy, indulgence, or forbearance ? "To declare his righteousness," exclaims the Apostle ; and we now know the meaning of these horrors,—fearful and terrible ! But the Scriptures state it unequivocally, definitely, and repeatedly. Our tongue would else not venture to express it. They are not purifying flames, which break in upon Jesus ; they are not chastisements unto life, and strokes of the rod of love. They are the thunders of offended majesty, the fiery billows of eternal wrath, the flames of Divine vengeance. It is the blow of the beheading sword, curse, condemnation, judicial execution, and the recompence of transgression on the part of Him, who will not suffer himself to be mocked, "to declare his righteousness." The costs are now demanded from the Surety, for the ~~un~~-bearance which God had previously exemplified towards sinners ; the debt is now paid, which the Almighty had remitted till that moment. The ransom is now presented, in virtue of which Adam, Enoch, Abraham, Moses, and whatever other name poor sinners may bear, are absolved from the merited punishment. Here the abominations by which Rahab, David, Solomon and others had merited hell, and which were at that time remitted them, receive their full and due

reward. All to prove that God is just, and does not act in an arbitrary manner, nor according to weak, illegal, and irregular love. It was on this account that Christ became a curse for sin, and was made sin ; was plunged into the floods of woe, and given up to the torments of hell.

"Now what say ye to this declaration of the living God respecting his righteousness ? Behold, the cross is transformed into a tribunal, and Calvary becomes the scene of the glorification of that God, who does not suffer himself to be mocked. Yea, tremble, ye sinners, at such a sight ! How shall the God, who could not spare nor overlook sin when he beheld it upon the sole-beloved of his heart, overlook it in you, who are so deserving of his hatred ? Let the long-suffering and patience he has hitherto exercised towards you, not deceive you. The vials of wrath are filled for you ; and before you are aware, forbearance is at an end, justice takes the place of mercy, and retains the field. See how the storms which had slumbered in the heavens for thousands of years, discharge themselves on Calvary ; and how iniquities, which had long been regarded as forgotten, and which during the course of centuries had experienced the most gracious forbearance, are subsequently rewarded. But forbearance is not forgetfulness, and if the flame of wrath was delayed, it was not on that account extinguished. Our God is a consuming fire, and his judgments in due time overtake the

aggressor. Listen then to the voice of alarm and thunder which is directed to you from the cross of the Lamb. Tremble at the fiery billows, which you here see roaring and going over the head of God's Mediator ; they are the same that shall devour the adversaries. Rise up, therefore ! lay hold of the horns of the altar, and save your souls in the wounds of the Man with the crown of thorns. Here, where you hear with horror the rolling of the thunders of Divine wrath—here is your city of refuge,—here, and no where else !

III. Calvary is therefore a place where all the terrors of Divine Majesty concentrate themselves ; the cross, a scaffold, and a place of the horrifying revelation of that wrath, which burns down to the lowest hell. Certainly so it is. That bloody scene has however another side. Viewed from the latter, Calvary appears as a hill, from whence cometh our help, and as the mountain of our peace ; the cross as the standard of our liberty, and the true tree of life. The greatest conceivable problem is solved in the cross of Christ, and a contradiction reconciled, than which there could not have been invented one more striking. He that dwells in Heaven is faithful, just, and holy, and a consuming fire ; and yet he must pronounce the wicked pious, and treat transgressors as righteous. Is he able to do this ? Not without denying himself, and being at variance with himself. *We cannot judge otherwise but*

in this manner ; we must regard it as impossible, and the understanding of the most enlightened seraph would have been unable to discover in what manner this impossibility could ever have become possible. Nevertheless, blessed be the highly exalted and only wise God ! the greatest of all enigmas is solved, and the way to render possible that which is impossible discovered. Hear what Paul says, with an emphatic repetition, "To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness, that he might be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus." Have you understood it ? The bloody execution is the basis on which God, without infringing upon his holiness, truth, and justice, can now really justify the ungodly, absolve the accursed, and beatify those who are worthy of death ; this is the meaning of the Apostle.

"Him that believeth in Jesus"—says the Apostle; he who, as it respects his spiritual life, has sprung up from faith, as the plant from the kernel, and is come forth out of faith, as from a bath of regeneration ; he that has let go of himself, and leans upon the shoulder of Christ, either in the way of appropriation, or by longing and ardently desiring, is declared by God to be righteous, guiltless, and worthy of eternal life. The man was ungodly ; but it is now said to him, There is no condemnation to thee. He is dust, and nothing but sin in himself, and yet he receives this testimony that he pleases

God. He is worthy of death, and yet God takes him to his heart, embraces him as a favourite, and promises him paradise for an inheritance. And this is done freely and unconditionally to all who possess true faith in the blood of Christ, and without reference to what the individual may subsequently do for his God, or how far he may advance in sanctification.

Justly would we abhor such a doctrine if no cross stood upon Calvary. It would then be as absurd as it would be blasphemous to invent such a mode of procedure as applicable to the supremely perfect God. God cannot call darkness light, nor bitter sweet. The doctrine of justification would be the most outrageous lie, the maddest and most absurd delusion, which was ever heard of in the world, if no cross stood upon that hill. But the cross! the cross! 'Tis that unites the most striking contrasts, and solves the greatest and most difficult of all riddles. Far be it from God to pronounce a sinner righteous in his sins. It is thus the devil justifies, and not God. God declares me just because there is no longer any thing damnable in me—consequently he does so in truth. The Surety is become my sin—I his righteousness. He has atoned for my transgression. He has elevated it upon the cross, and endured in his own body what it deserved. The threefold punishment with which God threatened sin, fell upon him and crushed him *in my stead*. Hell was let

loose against him. He who dwells in heaven forsook him. Death swallowed him up. All my iniquities were laid upon him—all, whether already committed, or which may in future be committed. Even that which still sleeps in my veins, as a germ in embryo, has lost its culpability, because it has already received its desert in my representative. No ungodly thought can be excited in me, which did not lay upon my Surety, and the strength of sin, its damning and destroying power, is broken and for ever done away. The whole sum of my guilt and crimes stand registered in that hand-writing which the Saviour nailed to the cross; and if I am one of his members, who in heaven or earth might dwell more safely than I, or who more quietly await the appearing of the great Judge?

Be not offended at these statements, my friends. What we now bring before your eyes, is the very Gospel of our text, the mystery of godliness, and the sweet and excellent kernel, without which the whole Christian religion, notwithstanding all the truths it otherwise offers us, would only be an empty shell to the poor sinner, and a well without water. And if he had left one of my sins unatoned for, the whole of his sufferings would not have availed me, since one transgression renders me not less liable to eternal death than a thousand. It was necessary, therefore, to atone for all or none. And we know that God has cast all our sins upon him, and his obedience

upon us. Now when God commands and glorifies us as righteous—He is perfectly justified in doing so, after the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us. In the crucified Christ, therefore, lies the actual reason why God, even when he justifies the ungodly, is still righteous, and continues so ; and why the atonement is not a mere arbitrary matter, but rests upon a profound basis of equity and justice.

You now understand, my brethren, what is the Apostle's meaning. It is in reality a sublime and unfathomably profound expression.; an immovable rock and pillar supporting the most consolatory doctrine of the whole of the Christian religion, and the article of faith of the representative satisfaction of our adorable Surety, and the bleeding atonement, by which, appearing for us in judgment, he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified. In fact, that individual must be blind, or false and deceitful, who mistakes this scriptural doctrine. We are well aware of the artifices, with which such characters are able to pervert such passages as the one before us, notwithstanding their unequivocal nature, and to fit them into a system of their own inventing. But these artifices are not from God, but elsewhere ; and sincerity is not their parent.

Christ, our representative, advocate, surety, and Goel, obedient in our stead and in our place, and made sin and a curse—is the inmost vital marrow of evangelical religion, the ground on

which the edifices of our hopes are erected. We therefore preach the cross to you, in order that we may not weaken, neutralize, and annihilate it; and, whilst vitally apprehending it in such a signification, we become conscious why the Apostle calls the cross, and the mystery of the cross, a power of God. For is it not evident to you what an abhorrence to sin a cross must, first of all, impart to us, on which we see the Son of God, the sole-beloved of the Father, expiring in infernal torments, because it was not possible for the Almighty—however willing he might be—to remit the punishment to transgressors, against whom his whole wrath and fiery indignation was inflamed. Cannot you imagine to yourselves what penitence and contrition the sight of a scaffold should occasion, where the Ancient of Days protests against sin in such a manner, that mountains might quake with horror at it. Cannot you form an idea what a flood of the most substantial consolation must rush into a contrite soul from a tree, to which we behold a handwriting nailed, in which all our sins—all, all, from first to last—are registered, and upon which those vials of wrath are poured out to the last drop, which we had filled by our transgressions, and which stood, ready to be poured out upon us, near the throne of Eternal Majesty? Cannot you have any conception what a flame of the most ardent reciprocal love must issue forth from the heart of a poor sinner, at contemplating

an event like that on Golgotha, where he sees the Lord of glory, in unsearchable compassion, present his own faithful breast to the fiery darts of vengeance, which were intended to have consumed the sinner; and when he beholds him, urged by the most disinterested love, arresting the lightnings in their course, which were about to destroy us for ever in hell, and turning them upon his own head? For my own part, I know nothing, either in heaven or on earth, so calculated to annihilate man on the one side, and elevate and raise him up on the other—to humble him in the dust and thoroughly tranquillize him, and bind him firmly to the heart of God with the fetters of the most lively and ardent love, as the cross, regarded in a Scriptural light.

May He himself initiate you in the mystery of his cross, in order that the self-confident may feel a salutary alarm, and that the soul of him who is thus alarmed may be for ever tranquilized. Whoever of you is still lying amongst the sleepers on the borders of the pit, let him awake under the thunders of that terrible righteousness, which manifested itself upon Calvary; and whoever cannot be awakened, even by these thunders, let that love smite him, which bathes itself in its own blood, to save a world of hell-deserving sinners from destruction.

The blood of the Son of God will decide the lot of all of you. It will come upon you either in the way of eternal vengeance or eternal grace.

It will descend either upon your hands to cleanse you, or upon your head eternally to condemn you. Arise therefore, ye who are groaning under the load of your guilt ; hasten and save your souls. Sink weeping upon the heart of the mighty Saviour, and embrace his feet. Flee into those wounds, which ye inflicted upon him ; there is your city of refuge ;—and bury all your burdens beneath his cross ; and when his complaint has broken your heart—“Thou hast made me to serve with thy sins,”—then imbibe heaven into your souls from the words that follow : “But I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins.” Amen.

THE END.

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