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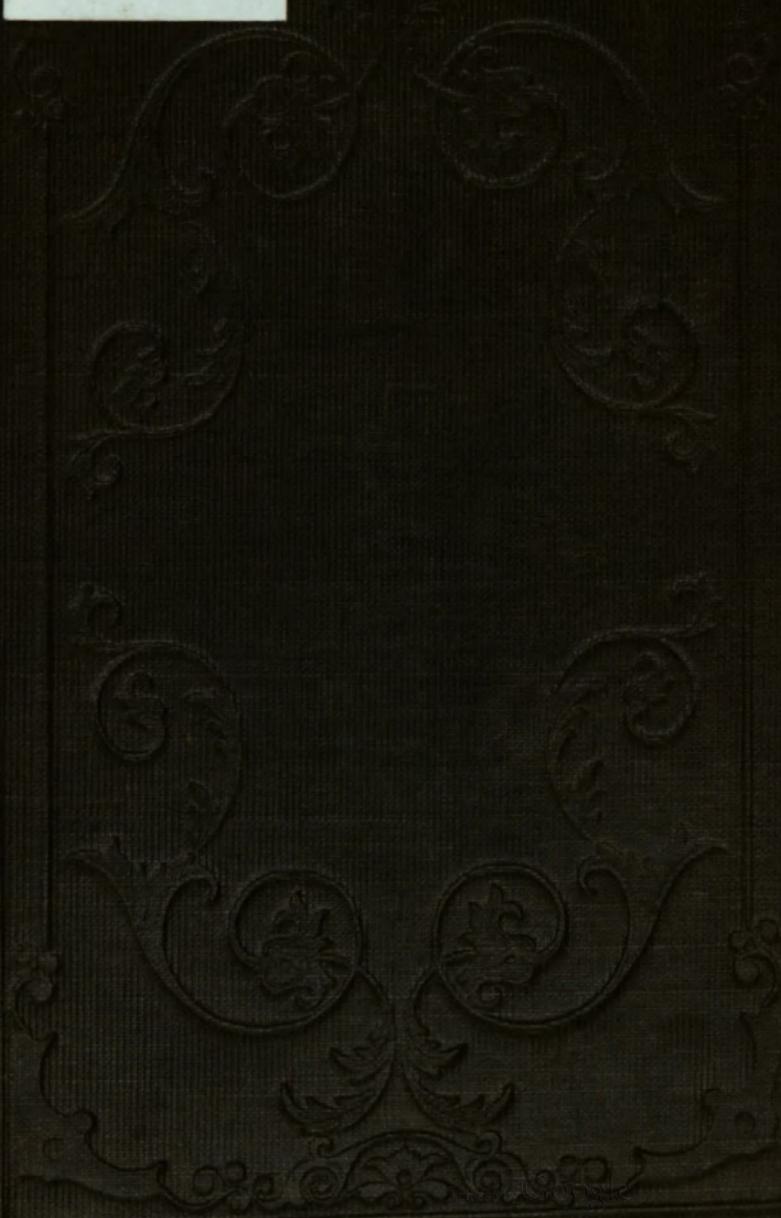
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THE

CHURCH AND HER ENEMIES:

OR,

Practical Reflections

ON THE

TRIALS AND TRIUMPHS OF GOD'S AFFLICTED PEOPLE.

Swan
BY
WM. S. PLUMER, D.D.

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CONTENTS.

	PAGE
CHAPTER I.	
THE NAMES AND TITLES OF THE CHURCH,	5
CHAPTER II.	
THE CHURCH IS CHRIST'S,	10
CHAPTER III.	
THE CHURCH IS SAFE BY COVENANT,	15
CHAPTER IV.	
THE CHURCH AND HER ENEMIES,	19
CHAPTER V.	
NEUTRALITY IMPOSSIBLE,	20
CHAPTER VI.	
A SUFFERING CHURCH,	32
CHAPTER VII.	
THE CHURCH A SPECKLED BIRD,	39
CHAPTER VIII.	
SONGS OF DERISION,	46
CHAPTER IX.	
ENVY RAGES AGAINST THE CHURCH,	52
CHAPTER X.	
MANY ARE THE AFFLICTIONS OF THE RIGHTEOUS,	56

	PAGE
CHAPTER XI.	
SILENCE IN SUFFERING,	62
CHAPTER XII.	
A DECLINING CHURCH,	70
CHAPTER XIII.	
A GROWING CHURCH,	76
CHAPTER XIV.	
A GLORIOUS CHURCH,	82
CHAPTER XV.	
GOD A SANCTUARY,	89
CHAPTER XVI.	
THE CHURCH CONQUERS BY FAITH,	95
CHAPTER XVII.	
THE CHURCH TRIUMPHANT,	99
CHAPTER XVIII.	
CHRISTIANS MAKE A WISE CHOICE,	105
CHAPTER XIX.	
DIVINE GENTLENESS TRAINS THE CHURCH,	110
CHAPTER XX.	
ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL,	114
CHAPTER XXI.	
THE TIME IS SHORT,	120

THE CHURCH AND HER ENEMIES.

CHAPTER I.

THE NAMES AND TITLES OF THE CHURCH.

IN the sight of Christ his church is comely and the fairest among women. She is his dove, his undefiled. To him her voice is sweet, and her countenance pleasant. She is a garden inclosed, a city sought out, a spring shut up, a fountain sealed. She is beautiful as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem. The King's daughter is all glorious within; her clothing is of fine gold. She shall be brought unto the King in raiment of needle-work, yea, her exalted head shall present her, as a chaste virgin, unto God. He shall present her a glorious church, having neither spot, nor wrinkle, nor blemish, nor any such thing.

All Christ's people are God's adopted sons.

Unitedly they constitute the assembly of the saints. Even those who now wet their couch with tears, shall soon be equal to the angels. All who are redeemed by Christ, are his bride, his body, his brethren. They are the blessed of the Father, the beloved of the Lord, the building of God, and branches of righteousness. They are converts, contrite ones, and fellow-citizens of the household of God. They are the called of God according to his purpose. They are the city of God, the church of God, which he hath purchased with his blood, the congregation of the Lord. They are corner-stones polished after the similitude of a palace. They are cedars of Lebanon. They are Christians, the children of the kingdom, and the circumcision which worship God in the Spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus. They are the delights, the disciples, the dearly beloved of Christ. Even when dead, they sleep in Jesus. They are God's elect. They are the election. They are the excellent of the earth. Believers are the flock of Christ, the fold of Christ, the fullness of Christ. They are the flock of God, the family of God named in heaven and in earth, the friends of God, the followers of God, the faithful among men.

They are the glory of God and the generation of the upright. Collectively they compose the

general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven. They are fruitful, holy, humble. They are heirs of God, the house of God, the heritage of God, the husbandry of God, the habitation of God through the Spirit. They are God's hidden ones. They are the just, the justified, the Israel of God, Jeshurun, the image of God, the joy of the whole earth, the jewels of the Lord, the inhabitants of Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem.

They are kings. They are lambs. They are the Lamb's wife. They are lowly. They are little ones. They are the light of the world, the lily among thorns, the lot of God's inheritance. They are his love. They are lively stones in the temple, which he is building. They are meek, mighty, merciful. They are mourners, members of Christ, the Mount Zion of God. They are poor and needy, and yet they are princes with God. They are precious in his sight. They are pure in heart, peaceable, and in many ways a peculiar people. They are pilgrims, and yet pillars of truth. They are palaces, plants of righteousness, and palm-trees which flourish most by hard usage. They are the portion of the Lord.

They are the ransomed and redeemed of the Lord. They are Christ's sheep, his sister, his spouse, his saved, his sanctified. They are stars

in the Redeemer's crown. They are strangers in the world where they were born. They are sojourners in a land where they commonly outlive their cotemporaries. They are the sons of God. They are spiritual, while others are carnal. They are the temple of God, the temples of the Holy Ghost, the treasures of Jehovah. They are virgins, the vineyard of the Lord, the vessels of mercy fitted to the Master's use. They are all wise unto salvation, all watchmen, all wayfaring men, all worshipers of the Lamb, all worthy to walk with Christ in white. They are all zealous of good works. They are the Zion of God.

Indeed, there are said to be more than a hundred and thirty names and titles given in Scripture to the church of God. Each of these expresses some important truth respecting her character, her safety, her conflicts, or her triumphs. They show that God loves her, provides for her, guards her, rules her, secures her the victory.

There never was stronger reasoning than is every where found in Scripture respecting the glory and eternal excellency of the church. Here are a few samples. "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want." "Because I live, ye shall live also." "If when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son; much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his

life." But conclusive as such reasoning is, the church rests not her faith on mere logic. The perfections of God, the person of Christ, the indwelling of the Spirit, are looked to by all believers.

The excellency of the church is not by birth, but by the new birth of all her members. They are naturally no better than others. By the grace of God they are what they are. All the light the moon has she borrows from the sun. All the lustre of the church is from the glory of her Lord. 'Tis he that makes her an eternal excellency, the joy of the whole earth. Without him she can do nothing. When she is weak, she is strong.

Men do therefore greatly err when they preach the Church and ignore Christ; when they exalt sinners saved, and pass by him who saved them. Christ puts the crown on his bride's head. His beauty alone makes her comely. All her springs are in him. She is washed in his blood, clothed by his righteousness, girded with his might, sanctified by his Spirit, leans on his arm, and is cheered by the light of his countenance.

CHAPTER II.

THE CHURCH IS CHRIST'S.

CHRIST and his people are one. They are vitally, mystically, indissolubly united to him. Their life is hid with Christ in God. He is the head: they are the members. He is the vine: they are the branches. He is the husband of his church: believers are married to him. He has an interest in them: they have an interest in him. He is their portion: they are his portion. He is the foundation-stone: they are built upon him.

By his sovereign, eternal, unchangeable purpose and grace he lays hold of them: by faith and hope and love they lay hold of him. Between him and them there is a covenant: he proposed it and they sealed it. He has pledged his word for their salvation: they have avouched him for their Saviour. He has bound himself by an oath to be their Redeemer: they have sworn, and they will perform it. He has betrothed them unto him forever; yea, he has betrothed them unto him in righteousness, and in

judgment, and in loving-kindness and in mercies. He has even betrothed them unto him in faithfulness. They have consented to his overtures. One has said, I am the Lord's; and another has called himself by the name of Jacob; and another has subscribed with his hand unto the Lord, and surnamed himself by the name of Israel. His faithfulness is the ground of their faithfulness. They are holy by the power of his Spirit. Because he is gracious they are gracious.

Thus God's people may make their boast in the Lord. They exult in the God of their salvation. Well does Pascal say: "No man is so happy as a real Christian; none so rational, so virtuous, so amiable. How little vanity does he feel, though he believes himself united to God! How far is he from abjectness, when he ranks himself with the worms of the earth." Under the teachings of the Holy Spirit, the brother of low degree rejoices in that he is exalted, and yet he is not puffed up; and the rich that he is made low, without being made mean. Nothing humbles like grace. Christ's people rejoice in him, and have no confidence in the flesh.

Believers belong to Christ as they belong to none else. They are all ready to say: "Lord, thou wilt ordain peace for us: for thou hast wrought all our works in us. O Lord our God,

other lords besides thee have had dominion over us ; but by thee only will we make mention of thy name ;" or, as it may be rendered, "thee, thy name only will we celebrate." All friends, all lovers, all rulers, are renounced, if adherence to them would imply disloyalty to Christ. His love for his people was stronger than death. Their love to him has in millions of cases taken away the bitterness of death.

Believers belong to Christ by creation. He made them men ; for without him was nothing made that was made. They belong to him by a new creation. They are created anew in Christ Jesus. They belong to him by all the ties of a tender, watchful providence ; for he upholds all things by the word of his power. They belong to him by redemption ; for he gave his life a ransom for them. He purchased them at a price far above their value. They are all blood-bought. Corruptible things, as silver and gold, could not redeem one of them. Not a largess, but a Lamb was demanded for their salvation. They are his by every right, by law, by love, by justice, by equity, by vow, by oath, by promise, by covenant, by all that is grand in divinity, by all that is authoritative in infinite majesty, by all that is condescending in the incarnation, by all that is humiliating in the agonies of Gethse-

mane, by all that is attractive in the cross of Christ.

Were it possible for a pardoned sinner not to own his indebtedness and allegiance to Christ, he would be the vilest of ingrates, the foulest of monsters, the most hardened of transgressors. No man can do anything more base than to say : "I do not belong to Christ." The holy soul says : "It is the joy of my life, the glory of my nature, the crown of my perfection, the consummation of my bliss, that I am Christ's."

Such an one claims an interest in Christ ; and He denies not his petitions. In health and in sickness, in joy and in sorrow, in honor and in dishonor, in poverty and in profusion, in life and in death, he is the unfailing friend. As he overcame and sat down with his Father on his throne, so he gives strength to his servants to overcome and sit down with him on his throne. Because he was tempted in all points, as we are, and yet without sin, so he knows how to succor them who are sore beset by the great adversary. Because he conquered, his chosen are sure of final triumph. They may lose a battle, but they shall gain the war. He is their all. They are complete in him. He is theirs for time and eternity. He has their heart, and they have his.

It shall always be so. Neither tribulation, nor

distress, nor persecution, nor famine, nor nakedness, nor peril, nor sword, nor death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate them from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus their Lord.

How blissful will be the day when Christ and believers shall be publicly married! No supper ever equaled the marriage supper of the Lamb. Its garments, its guests, its numbers, its refreshments, its songs, its duration, its Master, are all, all incomparable.



CHAPTER III.

THE CHURCH IS SAFE BY COVENANT.

ALL the wants of the church are provided for in the covenant of grace. This is not a new edition of the law, modified to suit the necessities and weaknesses of fallen men ; but it is an absolutely gracious agreement on the part of God to bestow eternal life on as many as shall believe on his Son. Paul says expressly, " ye are not under the law, but under grace."

Grace is not works. The new covenant is not the old law newly sent out, with changes made to suit our imperfect nature.

There is hardly any form in which either the Scriptures or the best writings of theologians have presented so much precious truth, easily understood, and by faith easily apprehended, as that of the covenant of grace. It is, therefore, much to be lamented that some apparently good men have allowed so strong prejudices to take possession of their minds against this form of truth. It is not credible that any good man could read such works as Witsius or Boston or Bunyan on the Cove-

nants, without gaining clearer and richer views of divine truth than he had before. Boston's style is not very attractive, but it is terse and vigorous. Witsius wrote in Latin, and the English translation in common use is not a very good one. Indeed, some of our ministers, who are ripe scholars, and who are happy in the use of English idioms, could hardly do us a better service than to give us a new translation of Witsius, with a few pertinent notes. Still these works, as we now have them, are of great value, and may be read to great advantage.

In the covenant of grace, several things claim special attention :

1. The administrator, who is none else than the Lord Jesus Christ. He is expressly called its Mediator. All his offices relate to its execution. He is Head over all things to the church. He redeems his people by his most precious blood, which is in the highest sense "the blood of the covenant;" he justifies them by his righteousness; he secures their regeneration, sanctification, perseverance, and final victory, by his glorious intercession; he guides, teaches, and governs all of them. As the surety of this covenant, he has assumed the whole debt due by his elect to the justice of God; he is to them the strongest guaranty of the Father's love, and he

is to God the highest pledge that all his chosen shall finally come in the unity of the faith, and in spotless holiness, to the stature of perfect men. He is made of God unto them wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption. This covenant, without this Mediator and surety, would be of no avail. It would be powerless. But in his hands it is life from the dead, it leaves nothing uncertain, nothing loose and contingent.

2. It has better promises than any other covenant made with man. The great promise of the covenant of works was, "Do and live." The great promise of the covenant made with Noah was that God would no more drown the world. But a man may not be drowned, and yet he may be damned. A great promise of the Abrahamic covenant was that of a numerous offspring. But, "thus saith the Lord unto the eunuchs that keep my Sabbaths, and choose the things that please me, and take hold of my covenant; even unto them will I give in my house, and within my walls, a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters; I will give them an everlasting name, which shall not be cut off." No temporal blessing can compare with the spiritual blessings secured by this covenant to all believers, even the humblest.

3. The covenant of this peace shall never be broken. It is everlasting, and is so expressly styled in Scripture. It shall never be set aside. It secures to every believer the “sure mercies” it brought to David. It is called new, and it shall ever be so, for it will ever bring new mercies to God’s people, and it will never be superseded by another. It bears date from an eternity past, though not proclaimed till after the fall of man, and it shall be in force while eternity endures.

As Christ is its surety, he is the fountain of all our joys. To him believers naturally look. “The desponding Christian turns to his Saviour as surely as the needle to its pole, even though, like the needle, he turns *trembling*.” Christ makes all good that is promised, and he promises all that is good. Oh! that men would confide in him. “Oh! that the effect of all our troubles and dangers were to drive us more to him, to make us throng more to the throne of grace, to draw forth our King for our help. Amidst all disorders, he is ordering all wisely and justly, and to them who love him graciously.” He is just such a days-man as should be placed between us and God. He can lay his hand on us both. Under the provisions of such a covenant the church is safe.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CHURCH AND HER ENEMIES.

To which of the two great parties do you belong ? You may say that interrogatory is impertinent. But you ought not to be offended at a civil question. Perhaps you do not understand its import. Where no offence is intended, it is folly to get into a passion. If you are an Englishman, I do not ask whether your are a whig or tory ; if an American, whether a whig or democrat. This is not the place to discuss such subjects. In philosophy you may be an Aristotelian or Baconian, a Ptolemaic or a Copernican ; and yet you may be none the less happy or miserable here or hereafter. You may be a Baptist or Presbyterian, a Methodist or Episcopalian, a Protestant or Romanist, and yet you may go to hell. All these distinctions of names will soon vanish forever.

The question relates to the great parties, which embrace all the rational creatures of God. On one side are holy angels and redeemed men ; on the other, fallen angels and unregenerated men.

(19)

These are great parties. They include all rational beings. Which of them is the most numerous no mortal can tell. No man knows the numbers of either. There are thousands of angels. There are legions of devils. There is a prevalent opinion that the majority of the angels kept their first estate. This may be so, but cannot be proved. Rev. xii. 4, does not relate to this matter. Among men the majority has long seemed to be on the side of wickedness. But this shall not be so always. A time is coming when a nation shall be born in a day; when the ploughman shall overtake the reaper; when the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters do the sea; when the converts to Christ shall be like the drops of the morning dew.

To one or other of these parties belongs every soul of man. In Christ there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free, male nor female. All who love the Saviour are welcome to his mercy-seat, and to a share in his kingdom. The other party takes atheists, infidels, Turks, nominal Christians, murderers, moralists, blasphemers, hypocrites, all of every age, sex, color, and nation, who do not love the Saviour.

These parties date from a very remote antiquity. They are the oldest parties in the uni-

verse. They were formed when the rebellion first broke out in heaven. The questions that first divided their adherents were vital matters. They related to the divine sovereignty. Ever since man was formed, they have been gaining strength. Soon after their creation, Adam and Eve joined the rebels. But there is a general impression that they returned to their allegiance to God. Perhaps this may be so, but the day of judgment will declare the truth of the matter. But Adam's children were divided. Abel belonged to one party; Cain to the other. Ever since their day the lines have been run through successive generations.

The principles, characters, and practices of these parties are wholly diverse. There is no common ground occupied by them. On the banner of one is inscribed: "The Lord he is God, him will we serve;" on that of the other, "Who is the Lord that we should obey him?" The one eats, drinks, and does all to the glory of God. The other serves divers strange lusts and desires. With one it is a fundamental truth that Christ is Lord, to the glory of the Father; and that he is their strength, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, redemption, and all their salvation. The other says: "We will not have this man to reign over us;" and they reject his blood, his righteous-

ness, his intercession, his doctrine, and his authority. To one the Spirit is a comforter, a guide, a sanctifier. The other knows nothing of his saving power, and possesses none of his fruits. One delights in the law of God after the inner man, esteeming all his precepts concerning all things to be right. The other casts asunder the cords of divine restraint, and will not hearken to God, nor heed his reproofs. One profits by affliction, and from terrible chastisements gathers the peaceable fruits of righteousness. The other waxes worse under judgments. "Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more." "They made their hearts as an adamant stone." One counts most dear what the other abhors, and abhors what the other counts dear. One includes all the Timists; the other, the Eternists. One embraces the man of God; the other, the man of the world. One seeks to lay hold on eternal life; the other is eager after the things that perish in the using. One gives up all for acceptance at last; the other grabs at earth as if there was no other world.

Of course these parties are hostile. They can never be reconciled. The points between them are vital. The righteous can never approve of the ways, characters and principles of the wicked. Each one of them says with David: "Do not I

hate them, O Lord, that hate thee ? and am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee ? I hate them with perfect hatred : I count them mine enemies." But the wicked hate the persons of the righteous, and are bitter against them. It was so with Cain, when he killed his brother. " And wherefore slew he him ? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's good." As of old, " he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now." Age after age God's chosen have been counted as sheep for the slaughter. They have been tortured, not accepting deliverance ; that they might obtain a better resurrection. They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword ; they wandered about in sheep-skins, in goat-skins ; being destitute, afflicted, tormented, they wandered in deserts and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

In the strife between these parties there is a vast difference in the weapons used. The righteous resort to prayer, preaching, example, truth, love and good works. Their weapons are not carnal, though they are mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds. The wicked resort to slander, scoffing, lying, mocking, bonds and imprisonment. Satan's empire rests on de-

ceit, violence and usurpation. His children are like him. Does the following description best suit men or devils? "They did not like to retain God in their knowledge. God gave them over to a reprobate mind. They were filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, maliciousness. They were full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity, haters of God, despotic, proud, inventors of evil things, implacable, unmerciful."

These parties shall yet both appear in their strength, not only in the final contest for the empire of earth, but also in the final judgment. Then it shall be seen who is who. All pretences will be swept away. All masks will fall off. Suspicion shall attach to no man after the judgment day. All will carry their marks in their foreheads. Even the most cunning hypocrites will be well understood in eternity.

Both these parties shall continue forever. Their state shall be greatly changed in the next world; but their characters shall remain unalterable. Their conflicts with each other shall cease; but their works shall follow them while God has a throne, or eternity an unmeasured cycle. The law under which souls pass from time to eternity, is: "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still; and

he that is righteous, let him be righteous still :
and he that is holy, let him be holy still."

To which of these great parties do you belong ? What a solemn question ! Is it not seasonable ? Can it be too often repeated, or too urgently pressed ? To turn from sin to holiness, from Satan unto God, is now possible for the lost of earth. But soon the Master of the house will rise up and shut to the door. Soon you will cease to hear the Gospel preached. Soon you will close your eyes on all that is earthly. Behold ! now is the accepted time ; behold ! now is the day of salvation.

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CHAPTER V.

NEUTRALITY IMPOSSIBLE.

In human affairs cases often occur in which both wisdom and duty enjoin neutrality. One is not bound to take part in the low quarrels of his ill-tempered neighbors. The same is true of nations. It would be a miserable policy that should plunge a people into every contest between neighboring states. This would make every war universal.

Yet sometimes one is bound to take sides even in contests between two. So thought Moses when he slew the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. Ex. ii. 11, 12. By this act "he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them: but they understood not." He who sees the strong cruelly beating the weak, and comes not to the rescue, may at last find blood on his skirts. "If thou forbear to deliver them that are drawn unto death, and those that are ready to be slain; if thou sayest, Behold, we knew it not; doth not He that pondereth the heart consider it? and he that

keepeth thy soul, doth he not know it? and shall not he render to every man according to his works?" Pr. xxiv. 11, 12. In such cases neutrality is not lawful or innocent.

So also in violations of the public peace by wicked men, every member of society should do his duty. He should oppose their wicked attempts. He should make hue and cry after them. He should uphold the laws which punish them. The Israelites were required as a people to aid in the public executions of their commonwealth, that they might in this most solemn manner express their detestation of crime. In the case of murder we have the clear precept: "A man that doeth violence to the blood of any person shall flee to the pit; let no man stay him." Pr. xxviii. 17.

In like manner nations are often required by justice, by humanity, by sound policy, to say to the powerful, You shall not crush your weak neighbor, you shall not burn his towns, pillage his cities, devastate his country, massacre his people, enslave his princes. You shall not do it. Europe has yet to suffer for allowing the Waldenses and the Albigenses to be slaughtered. Many a crowned head will yet grow gray as in a night for the partition of Poland. Though the Christian world has for twelve centuries been

praying for the destruction of the Ottoman Power, yet now when Russia is ready to strike the blow, it is deemed suicidal by the commonwealth of European nations to permit her to proceed. Neutrality is not possible in such a case.

But a higher strife is now waging. For the strongest reasons it summons every man to play his part. The question before the world is one of public interest in all God's dominions. It can never be stript of importance. It relates to the person, glory and offices of Jesus Christ. It may be variously stated thus: What think ye of Christ? Have you received him? Have you believed on his name? Do you look to him alone for salvation? Do you take his yoke upon you? Will you be his disciples? Will you by the Holy Ghost call him Lord? Are you ashamed of him and his words? Are you on the Lord's side? Is Christ formed in you the hope of glory? What entertainment do you give to the Saviour of the world? All these questions are substantially the same. We cannot evade them. Not to decide upon them is a decision against the Lord of glory. On this matter we must plead to the counts of inspiration. Silence is confession of guilt. There can be no neutrality here. There ought to be none.

God says there can be none. "He that is not with me is against me: and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad." Matt. xii. 30. "He that is not against us is on our part." Mark ix. 40. "He that is not against us is for us." Luke ix. 50. Men will decide some way. The subject so comes up as to win our love or beget our hatred. The alternative everywhere presented is between the acceptance of Christ and perdition. There is no other way. "If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins." John viii. 24. "He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life." 1 John v. 12. "Behold this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel." Luke ii. 34. "He shall be for a sanctuary: but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel, for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many among them shall stumble, and fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken." Is. viii. 14, 15. So that the preaching of the Gospel always makes men better or worse. "We are unto God a sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: to the one we are the savor of death unto death; and to the other the savor of life unto life." 2 Cor. ii. 15, 16.

It ought to be so. Christ is a public person. He is the Lord of angels. He is the federal Head of all the saints. He is offered to the world as a Redeemer. He is set forth by God as a propitiation for sin. God has highly exalted him and given him a name above every name, to this very end, that to him every knee should bow, and every tongue confess. He is heir of all things. All judgment is committed to him. He who will not honor the Son shows a settled aversion to the Father that sent him.

All this is the more obvious and obligatory because Christ is so marvelous a person, so matchless a Deliverer. "His name shall be called Wonderful." He has two natures and one person forever. He is truly man. He was born, he ate, he slept, he was weary, he suffered, he died. He is very God, "The Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace."

There is also a covenant between the Father and the Son, in which God has secured to Christ the travail of his soul. Christ often calls his people those that were "given" him by his Father. If they were given him by God, they must come to him, must own him for their Lord and Saviour. Whoever would climb up some other way is a thief and a robber. It is agreeable to the counsel

of God that men should believe on the name of his Son.

And the love and sufferings of Christ, which are without a parallel, demand prompt and controlling love and obedience from us all. He who loves not such a friend as Christ, must be a very bad man. To resist his love is the worst of crimes. It is said that on the day of his crucifixion the darkness was so fearful that a learned Greek, happening to be in Egypt, remarked: "Either nature is dissolving, or a God is expiring." Eternal praise to him who loved us. Nature was not dissolved; but God the mighty Maker died for man the creature's sin.

Nor can we put too black a mark on the sin of unbelief. It is a voluntary act. "No man is an unbeliever but because he will be so." "Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life." Unbelief is contempt of all that is most kind and loving in the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. I marvel not that he who shall judge the world has said: "He that believeth not shall be damned."

Reader, will you have this Christ or no? Will you flee to Christ and be saved? Or will you despise, and wonder, and perish?

CHAPTER VI.

A SUFFERING CHURCH.

THOUGH God has promised that no weapon formed against Zion shall prosper, yet he has not promised that no weapon shall be formed against Zion. He has promised that the flame shall not kindle upon her, but he has not promised that she shall not walk through the fire. He has promised that the rivers shall not overflow her, but he has not promised that she shall not pass through the waters. He has promised to redeem her from her enemies, but he has not promised that she shall have no enemies.

On the contrary, he has always dealt candidly with her, and told her to expect tears, sighs, waters of a full cup, hatred, slander, contempt, temptation, tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, the sword. "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you. The servant is not greater than his

lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you." "We must, through much tribulation, enter into the kingdom of God." "Many are the afflictions of the righteous." Old Giant Pope cannot do as once he did ; but he has a good will to be at the saints, if he could. He bites his nails, he gnaws his tongue, and he grins and snarls at pilgrims as they pass right along. It is rather out of fashion, just now, to burn heretics ; but there have been martyrs even in this century. The world has not at all improved in its temper towards Christ and holiness, towards God's people or his commandments.

The mode of expressing this hostility varies according to circumstances. When chains, and dungeons, and faggots, are laid aside, slander, railing, and the denial of social rights succeed. Nothing expresses deeper malignity, nothing is harder to bear than those "cruel mockings," of which Paul speaks. "And they cast him out," expresses a world of wrong. The infamous Jeffreys has sent his name down to posterity as the embodiment of cruelty, not only for the innocent victims he doomed to death, but for the brutal revilings he heaped on their heads. He has on earth many petty imitators.

In this age and land of peace it is hard to form a conception of the sufferings of our breth-

ren in days of bloody persecution. We might get some idea of that “utmost thrill of agony, to which the flesh and blood of holy men were wrought;” we can fill our minds with strong images of scourgings, fetters, and racks. But who can tell the fears, the anguish, the torture of the mind, when government becomes a praise to them who do ill, and a terror to those who do well? “Persecution often does in this life what the last day will do completely—separate the wheat from the tares.” But even that good is gained at a fearful expense. O that the blood of saints might flow no more!

But at all times the true church of God is composed of a suffering people. They mourn, they weep, they sigh, and cry for the abominations done in the land. They have fightings without, and fears within. Temptations harass, and iniquities confound them. They are troubled on every side; they are perplexed; they are cast down; death works in them; and yet they faint not.

Why do God’s people thus suffer? To say that sorrow is the lot of humanity, is to speak like a heathen. Is there no difference between the righteous and the wicked? The Judge of all the earth does discriminate. To say that this suffering is unavoidable, means nothing, unless it

is intended that we should wrap ourselves in the mantle of sullenness, or find comfort in denying providence. God could avert any evil. He has twice averted death. Why are the saints sufferers?

One answer is, that the Lord chasteneth every son whom he receiveth. He doth not afflict willingly. As many as he loves, he rebukes and chastens. An enemy, a reprobate, a doomed man may escape correction; but a child is loved too tenderly to be indulged in sin. His soul's good is sought. On this point the Scriptures speak very fully. Heb. xii. 5-11.

So that all is sent in mercy. Thus we get our comforts; thus we get our crosses. The Lord thinks upon us, and gives us to-day a correction; to-morrow a cordial. We see not the mercy at the first; but at last it appears. Jacob thought all against him, till he saw the wagons. Then and thenceforward he read the book of providence with new eyes.

Nor is divine wisdom less apparent. "The Lord tempereth the wind to the shorn lamb." That is not found in the Bible, but here is something like it: "He stayeth his rough wind in the day of the east wind." Is. xxvii. 8. Blessed be God; "he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust." Ps. ciii. 14 Jere-

miah had good cause for praying, "O Lord, correct me, but with judgment; not in thine anger, lest thou bring me to nothing." Jer. x. 24. God has, with equal wisdom and mercy, promised, "I will not contend forever, neither will I be always wroth; for the spirit should fail before me, and the souls which I have made." Is. lvii. 16. God never goes too far. He never strikes a stroke too much.

God causes his church to suffer because he would be faithful. He has promised to finish the work of faith with power; he has pledged his word that his people's sanctification shall be completed; he has led them to hope that he will present them faultless before the throne of his glory. He will fulfill his word. His faithfulness is unto all generations. The work of grace progresses best under seasonable griefs, and the child of sorrow sings, "I know, O Lord, that thou, in faithfulness, hast afflicted me." Ps. cxix. 75.

All this is done in power. Everything is controlled, directed, restrained. Every lion is chained. Every wild beast is caged. Every spirit is let loose, or held back by the will of Him who filleth all in all. When Satan would afflict Job, he must first appear before God, and obtain permission. Did not Jesus say to Pilate, "Thou couldst have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above?" John xix. 11.

When the wicked afflict the righteous, they are God's sword—God's hand. Ps. xvii. 13, 14. They are his axe, his saw, his rod, his staff. Is. x. 15. Do Hadad the Edomite, and Rezon the son of Eliadah, become adversaries of Solomon? it is because the Lord has "stirred them up." 1 Kings xi. 14, 23. Does Shimei the Benjamite, curse King David? it is because "the *Lord* hath bidden him." 2 Sam. xvi. 11.

All the sufferings of the Church are productive of good; yea, "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." Rom. viii. 28. And is it not the distinct testimony of every saint who has passed through the furnace, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes?" Ps. cxix. 71. Blessed be the Lord, his afflicted people "know that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope; and hope maketh not ashamed." Rom. v. 3-5. "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he is tried he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him." Jas. i. 12. The fruit gathered at the tree of sorrow, whose bud is so bitter, cannot be surpassed for sweetness.

Much affliction is chiefly for the benefit of

others. It both instructs and animates them. "Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience." Jas. v. 10. The patterns set us by others teach us how to suffer and to die. The lessons taught by the martyrs will be profitable to the end of the world.

Besides all this, the Church is but following her Head, when she suffers. His sorrows were far greater than hers. He suffered for sins to expiate guilt. He was the man of sorrows. "If we suffer with him, we shall also reign with him." Therefore, let the modern Church follow the example of the Church under a darker dispensation, and say, "Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the *Lord* shall be a light unto me. I will bear the indignation of the *Lord*, because I have sinned against him, until he plead my cause, and execute judgment for me: he will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold his righteousness." Micah vii. 8, 9. "God's time to visit his people with his comforts is, when they are most destitute of other comforts, and other comforters." Marvelous are his tender mercies. Blessed be his great and holy name forever and ever.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CHURCH A SPECKLED BIRD.

God says of his church: "Mine heritage is unto me as a speckled bird." Jer. xii. 9. That which is here rendered "a speckled bird," is in the margin translated, "a bird having talons." William Lowth's paraphrase is: "My people, like a speckled or taloned bird, are only fit for prey and deeds of violence. And as all the rest of the birds flock about such a one, and are ready to pull it to pieces, so I have stirred up all the enemies of my people, to annoy them on every side." Many birds of prey are speckled, and so, whenever they appear, they are at once known by those of other species. The object of the prophet is not to describe the propensities of the church, but to show how she is marked and hated by others. The words next following are: "The birds round about her are against her."

The combinations of the wicked against the people of God are strong in numbers and strange in complexion. Diverse in origin, manners, colors, customs, and superstitions, they yet unite

against Zion. To each of them she is as a speckled bird.

In five different periods of the church's history we have the enemies of the speckled bird thus enumerated. In the days of Abram they consisted of the Kenites, and the Kenizzites, and the Kadmonites, and the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Rephaims, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Girgashites, and the Jebusites. Gen. xv. 19, 21.

With some variations, the same enumeration is made hundreds of years afterwards in the days of Moses and Joshua. These wicked nations went on hating the people of God from generation to generation until their iniquities were full, and their destruction beyond remedy. These seven nations are specially named, the Hittites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites. Deut. vii. 1.

After the destruction of this old league, another combination is thus described by Asaph : " Lo thine enemies make a tumult, and they that hate thee have lifted up the head. They have taken crafty counsel against thy people, and consulted against thy hidden ones. They have said, Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation ; that the name of Israel may be no more in

remembrance. For they have consulted together with one consent : they are confederate against thee : the tabernacles of Edom, and the Ishmaelites : of Moab, and the Hagarenes : Gebal, and Ammon, and Amalek : the Philistines with the inhabitants of Tyre : Assur is also joined with them : they have holpen the children of Lot." Ps. lxxxiii. 2-8.

At a later period we have an account of the people, who are spoken of as the birds that were against the speckled bird. They are bands of the Chaldees, and bands of the Syrians, and bands of the Moabites, and bands of the children of Ammon. 2 Kings xxiv. 2. This was the old party that sacked Jerusalem, robbed the temple of its treasures, and carried God's people into a long and hard captivity.

But when the old Babylonish party was broken up, and the persecuted people of God sent to build their temple and city, a new league was formed. If possible, this was made of a more motley crew than its predecessors. According to Ezra it consisted of Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabeel, "Rehum the chancellor, and Shimshai the scribe, and the rest of their companions ; the Dinaites, the Apharsathchites, the Tarpelites, the Apharsites, the Archevites, the Babylonians, the Susanchites, the Dehavites, and the Elamites,

and the rest of the nations whom the great and noble Asnapper brought over and set in the cities of Samaria, and the rest that are on this side of the river." Ezra iv. 7-10.

These and other combinations against God's people do not seem to have been formed on the ground of personal likings among those who entered the league. The tribes mentioned were often at war with each other. The wicked have very little love for each other, or confidence in each other. A fair trial always proves this. And in national origin no people are more diverse than those who gather around the speckled bird. Nor are they held together by a community of national interest. The prosperity of all nations is promoted by the prevalence in their borders of vital religion.

The common ground on which the enemies of God's people meet, is their enmity against God, and Christ, and holiness. On this platform Pilate and Herod met, shook hands, and "were made friends together; for before they were at enmity between themselves." Luke xxiii. 12. If Christ is to be put to death, the most devilish men will seem to be good friends. If his sheep are to be hunted down, wolves and dogs, bears and panthers, and all wild beasts will mingle their yells together.

What has been, may be again. Some now living may yet see an open powerful party, formed of unconverted Romanists and unconverted Protestants, unconverted High Churchmen, and unconverted Low Churchmen, unregenerate Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, Episcopalian, Quakers, Lutherans, Mennonists and Tunkers. The rude and the learned, the soldier and the citizen, the royalist and the republican, who are without conversion, are unanimous, and may soon combine, in opposing vital piety. In the days of the house of Stuart, the Charleses, the Jeffreyses, the Lauds were quite of one mind with the cut-throats, the rabble, the meanest of the people in hating goodness, in delighting in tyranny over the just, in making war on the true church of God.

So that God is very good in instituting and sustaining his church in the world. Her members cheer, strengthen and encourage each other. "When bad men combine, the good must associate; else they will fall, one by one, an unpitied sacrifice in a contemptible struggle." It was the cause and connection in which the martyrs bled, that made their deaths and their testimonies so renowned and so important to mankind.

Schism is a great sin, but few understand its real nature. Many think it consists in disowning a body that sets itself up as the Church of God,

however corrupt in doctrine and immoral in practice. Real schism is commonly committed by disowning God's people, or by taking sides against them. True Christians do love and own the image of God wherever they see it. And if any ask why they can but find their hearts knit to them who have the Spirit of Christ, they may say, "What was I that I could withstand God? For he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, that he who loveth God, love his brother also."

All the schemes of wicked men seem to give them but little confidence in their own ultimate success. They often see that the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him. How memorable and full of meaning were the words of Haman's wise men, and of Zeresh his wife: "If Mordecai be of the seed of the Jews, before whom thou hast begun to fall, thou shalt not prevail against him, but shalt surely fall before him." Es. vi. 13. And so it came to pass.

The doom of the church's incorrigible enemies is certain and dreadful. Jehovah "will do unto them as unto the Midianites; as to Sisera, as to Jabin, at the brook of Kison; which perished at En-dor: they became as dung for the earth. He

will make their nobles like Oreb, and like Zeeb ;
yea, all their princes as Zebah, and as Zalmunna.
He will make them like a wheel ; as the stubble
before the wind. As the fire burneth a wood,
and as the flame setteth the mountains on fire,
so God will persecute them with his tempest, and
make them afraid with his storm." O ye sons
of men, beware how ye come out against the
speckled bird.



CHAPTER VIII.

SONGS OF DERISION.

SOMETIMES it is an honor to have one's name heard in melody. Thus the women of Israel sang with joy and with instruments of music, "Saul hath slain his thousands and David his ten thousands." But at a later period the same David complained that he was "the song of the drunkards." And the sad, timid, gentle, loving Jeremiah, speaking of his enemies, said: "I am their music." They made free with his name. They made merry over his miseries. They poured upon him the utmost cruelty of their scorn.

Nor was his case solitary. Job said: "My friends scorn me." Asaph said: "We are become a reproach to our neighbors; a scorn and derision to them that are round about us." Other Psalmists sang the same dirge. His enemies called Paul a babbler. Of Christ it was said: "He hath a devil and is mad." This is an old weapon of the adversary. To be acute is well, but to be malevolent is devilish. To see faults requires penetration; but to deride men requires

malignity. Scorners often invent an evil report and imagine a mischievous thing. Though we may ridicule that which has been proven to be evil or foolish, yet scorn itself can never prove any one wrong, or unwise, or unprofitable.

True, derision is hard to bear. Few have courage to endure it. Under its stroke thousands quail. The natural temper of most men quite unfit them for this kind of suffering. They are of a shrinking spirit. They dread the finger of scorn more than they do the warrior's steel. It ought to be, though often it is not, a part of education to teach the young to bear scorn without being moved from their settled convictions. To make ridicule of any degree the test of truth, of right, and of honor, is to sap the foundations of all stability of character. The principles of those who thus believe will bend before every wind of temptation. So potent is scorn in unsettling men's minds, that divine grace is the only infallible guaranty against the surrender of a good conscience to the demands of the witty wicked.

Yet, by the grace of God, the contempt of the wicked can be borne. Many have endured it without wavering. When the people of God have been compelled to sing, "Our soul is exceedingly filled with the scorning of those that are at ease,

and with the contempt of the proud," they have been able with the same breath, and with strong confidence, to plead for mercy, and cast their care upon the Lord. Thus David meekly bore the cursing of Shimei. Thus the martyrs bore cruel mockings and scourgings. For the joy set before him, Jesus endured the cross, despising the shame. To give as good as is sent, to return railing for railing, and scorn for scorn, may express fierceness, but not constancy. When Cato was vilely insulted, he calmly said: "A contest between us is very unequal; for thou canst hear ill language with ease, and return it with pleasure; but to me it is unusual to hear, and disagreeable to speak it." When Stephen was insulted, gnashed upon and stoned, he said: "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." A good conscience is the best support in such seasons of trial.

If by God's grace we can quietly bear scorn and contempt, we shall find them quite harmless. All praise and all censure of man is but the breath of worms. The applause of the world cannot save, and the denunciations of the world cannot damn a single soul. Up to this time men have commonly lauded the wicked, and condemned the just. Of him who made all things, who spake as man never spake, who dealt great blessings all around him, they said: "Away with

this fellow. Crucify him, crucify him. Not this man, but Barabbas." When men are dead, the world often builds the sepulchres of its victims and consigns to infamy those whom it has flattered while living. And even in this life

"Applause

Wafts on success; the fickle multitude,
Like the light straw that floats along the stream,
Glide with the current still, and follow fortune."

The very men who one moment pronounced Paul a murderer, the next moment said he was a god. He was neither the one nor the other in their sense of the matter.

Scorners are among the most hopeless offenders. They are fearfully hardened. Their doom is commonly among the incorrigible. This is so true that good men often cease to attempt their conversion by any words of solemn warning. In this they are borne out by Scripture: "He that reproveth a scouter getteth to himself shame. Reprove not a scouter, lest he hate thee." "A scouter loveth not one that reproveth him: neither will he go unto the wise." The only good that usually comes of reprobating scorners is that others less hardened may be deterred from following their pernicious ways. "Smite a scouter, and the simple will beware."

Fierce, terrible and triumphant as scorners may

for a long time be, their day of doom will come at last. The triumphing of the wicked is short. Jehovah scorneth the scorner. Judgments are prepared for him. For a while they delight in their scorning, but the day is coming when they will sore vex themselves that they ever shot out the lip. Were they at all wise, they would now weep and howl for their miseries that shall come upon them. There is but little hope of the conversion of such. There is, of course, but little hope of their salvation. It was to such Jesus said, "How can ye escape the damnation of hell?" See also Lamentations iii. 64-66; where the words are "*all future, not imperative . . . a prophecy, and not an imprecation;*" so that we may read those verses: "Thou wilt render them a recompense, O Lord, according to the work of their hands. Thou wilt give them sorrow of heart, thy curse upon them. Thou wilt persecute and destroy them in anger from under the heavens of the Lord."

Let all the servants of the Lord remember that it is but a little while they have to bear the taunts and gibes and contempt of the malignant. Soon the wicked shall cease from troubling, and the weary shall be at rest.

"There is an hour of peaceful rest,
To mourning wanderers given;

There is a joy for souls distressed,
A balm for every wounded breast,
'Tis found alone in heaven."

How sweet will that rest be! And it shall be
uninterrupted forever. Nothing that defileth
shall ever enter the portals of the upper sanc-
tuary. The Lamb is the light thereof.



CHAPTER IX.

ENVY RAGES AGAINST THE CHURCH.

“What makes the man of envy what he is
Is worth in others—vileness in himself,
A lust of praise with undeserving deeds,
And conscious poverty of soul.”

ONE of the most obvious remarks respecting envy is its universality. The Scripture saith not in vain that the spirit which is in us lusteth to envy. All nations afford very striking examples. In families how hard it is to repress the risings of this wicked spirit! An infant is born. It necessarily, to some extent, takes the place, and engrosses the attentions, which formerly belonged to another, next older. How much care and address are necessary to prevent the little one from becoming the object of envy to the very one that ought to rejoice in its birth and being! Among adults this sin has fearful sway. It is a master-passion.

Nor does envy ever tire. Lord Bacon well says it has no holidays. It is like the malice of fallen angels. It always rages. At times it is hypo-

critical, and pretends friendship. But in this there is oftentimes deeper malice, and always more meanness, than in undisguised hatred.

It is very violent. It is a rottenness of the bones. "Wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous ; but who shall stand before envy?" It hath a most vehement flame. It disregards public usefulness, unparalleled meekness, and heavenly wisdom, as in the Jews towards Christ. Its breath is always murderous. It tends directly, constantly, vehemently, towards bloodshedding and all maledictions. It has no pity, no relentings. To it all restraints are irksome. It is full of deadly venom.

Yet it sometimes pretends to do good things. It sometimes gives alms. It has even preached the Gospel. Phil. i. 15. It does not like to be outdone. It is as self-righteous and boastful as it is malicious. It readily adopts forms and pompous vanities in religion. It abounds in will-worship. It loves to make a display. But it will not lie down in the dust. Cain rejected the only religion which befitted him—the religion of a sinner. He refused bloody sacrifices and penitential confessions. If God would accept other offerings he might have them. But no sin-offering would Cain present. He was too proud for that.

There is no way of effectually curing this evil principle of our nature but by the abounding grace of God. Love, begotten in the soul by the Holy Ghost, casteth out this unclean spirit. "Charity en vieth not."

What a mercy it is that God controls the strong passions of men! When he takes off his hand, and lets loose their powerful violence, earth soon becomes like the bottomless pit. It is always so in a long siege, in a wasting famine, in the prevalence of dreadful maladies. It is often so in neighborhoods which become excited, man against man, and family against family. Wickedness rages till wrath and malice want a name. But in mercy God commonly controls men's hearts. He restrains them. He holds them like chained lions. Blessed be his holy name. We cannot be too thankful if allowed to live quiet and peaceable lives. Peace is God's blessing. To dwell safely in the midst of the envious is a rich inheritance.

We cannot be too free from vainglory, from pride, from all boasting. With the lowly is wisdom. Our humility must be genuine; then our behavior will be modest and kind, and if men rage against us they will the sooner appear to be in the wrong. An acute servant in an old university, said he always knew which disputant was

worsted, by his loss of temper; although he was ignorant of the Latin in which they held their discussions. It has long been noticed that he who does a wrong is much harder to be reconciled than he who suffers wrong.

But envy and all malice greatly torment those in whom they reign. Lord Clarendon says: "If envy, like anger, did not burn itself in its own fire, and consume and destroy those persons it possesses, before it can destroy those it wishes worst to, it would set the whole world on fire, and leave the most excellent persons the most miserable." What a mercy that in all cases wickedness is followed by misery!

Let good men be jealous of their own hearts. It is generally admitted that drunkards, liars, and unchaste persons will come short of heaven. The envious are in no less peril of perdition. Gal. v. 21.

But let not the righteous be moved. "The truly great and good, in affliction, bear a countenance more princely than they are wont; for it is the temper of the highest hearts, like the palm tree, to strive most upward when they are most burdened." Quit you like men. Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.

CHAPTER X.

MANY ARE THE AFFLICTIONS OF THE RIGHTEOUS.

"EVILS seldom come single." Often the isles of the sea are found in clusters, and the stars in constellations; commonly birds of prey go in flocks, and wolves in packs. So the ills of life often come in swarms. In one dark day the contents of an angry cloud, long gathering, are poured upon us. Sometimes a volley of calamities mows down all that seemed pleasant in our eyes.

"When sorrows come, they come not single spies,
But in battalions."

Those to whom Peter wrote were in heaviness through *manifold* temptations. Over David all God's waves and billows passed. Yea, God's waterspouts were emptied on his head. In rapid succession four messengers announced to Job the extinction of his earthly hopes. One told him that the Sabeans had taken his five hundred yoke of oxen and his five hundred she-asses, and slain those who had them in charge. And while he was yet speaking, another told him of the de-

struction of his sheep and shepherds by lightning from heaven. And while he was yet speaking, another brought him tidings of the capture of his three thousand camels, and the slaughter of his servants, by the Chaldeans. And while he was yet speaking, another announced to him that he was childless. Satan so arranged his plot that Job "might not have leisure to consider and recollect himself, and reason himself into a gracious submission, but might be overwhelmed and overpowered by a complication of calamities." Every succeeding message was sadder than its predecessor. "One calamity may succeed another, and each be heavier than the preceding. They may come on us from all quarters, with every circumstantial aggravation; we may be entirely impoverished and bereaved; indeed none can say all that we may suffer; and yet our grand interest may be safe, and all things working for our good."

One calamity may sometimes be a relief from another, but then it must be lighter than the first. The sickness of one child has often animated a mother who had been petrified by the death of another. Solicitude for the sick one aroused her when nothing else could. Thus her mind recovered its tone.

We must not be startled at our sorrows being

awakened for things the dearest to us. Joseph, the favorite son, was sold into Egypt. A right arm must often be cut off. A right eye must often be plucked out. Our adversaries love to torment us by wounding us in the tenderest part. Our heavenly Father saves us by taking away the dearest idols we have known.

These afflictions are useful in many ways. If they were never tried, we should not know what good men are. As the successive strokes on the chisel of the sculptor form out of a rude block a beautiful figure, so the successive strokes of affliction fashion a child of God and show what he is.

“As night to stars, woe lustre gives to man.”

But for their sufferings, what would the world have known of our Washington, of Job, of any of the great characters of the present or of former ages? Yea, “it became him for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.” It is right that we follow our Leader.

Nor will ills ever lack swift messengers. If duty suppresses them, officiousness will publish them. In this world good news is often lame, and travels neither far nor fast; but evil tidings have wings. The very means used to conceal

them betray them. When David saw his servants whispering, he knew that the child was dead.

In mercy to our frailty, most of the ills of life are unexpected. This fact we often ungratefully mention as an aggravation of present sorrow. In a sense it may be so. Not expecting affliction we are unprepared for it; yet long anticipation of evils would vastly multiply their power. It was a terrible peculiarity in the sufferings of our Lord that he died, as it were, a thousand deaths. "I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished." It is a great mercy that we foresee not all these things as did our Master.

Nor should we be surprised to find our ills coming in multitudes. Our afflictions are always lighter than our guilt, and fewer than our offences. We may always say with Ezra and his contemporaries, "Thou our God hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve." It is true this is not the world for adequate retribution. Yet if God loves one who has many and great faults to be corrected, we may be sure that slight chastisement will hardly answer all the great ends of purification. There must be rod upon rod and stroke after stroke.

Nor is it right for us ever to look on anything earthly as stable. We brought nothing into this

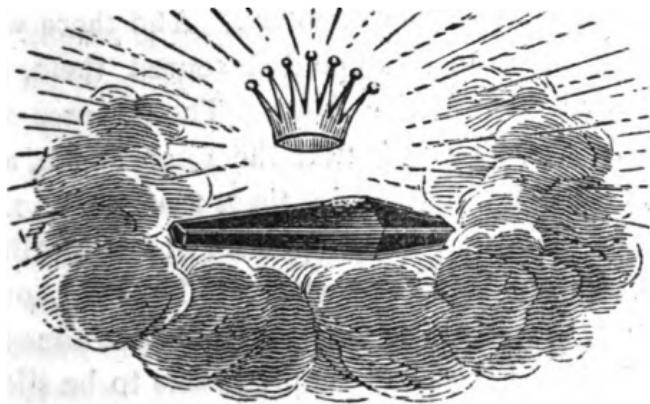
world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. Surely riches may take to themselves wings and fly away as an eagle towards heaven. No man can ever be poorer than he was when born. There is nothing below that cannot be shaken. The next world has fixedness. Here all is fickleness. In the morning one may own the cattle on a thousand hills, and by night be as poor as Job.

Let not the righteous marvel at the prosperity of the wicked. It is the incorrigible that God abandons. When a father disowns a son he chastises him no more. It is a great wonder that innumerable multitudes do not become alarmed at the prospect of receiving all their good things in this life; for "the prosperity of fools shall destroy them."

Nor let us forget that Satan is ever an accuser of the brethren. As of old, so now he maligns the people of God. He professes that he has no confidence in their motives. Being himself supremely selfish, he declares that God's servants adhere to his cause for sordid reasons. So far as he can, he persuades the wicked to believe the same. He even accuses the righteous, and declares them hypocrites before their Maker. But this is our joy: "The Lord knoweth them that are his."

And if we have sorrow upon sorrow, we also

have promise upon promise, comfort upon comfort, deliverance upon deliverance. "Many are the afflictions of the righteous; but the Lord delivereth him out of them all." Glory be to him that was, and is, and is to come.



CHAPTER XI

SILENCE IN SUFFERING.

IN Leviticus x. 1-3, we have this record : “ And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire thereon, and offered strange fire before the LORD, which he commanded them not. And there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD. Then Moses said unto Aaron, This is it that the LORD spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified. And Aaron held his peace.” To hold one’s peace is a phrase that occurs nineteen times in our English Bible, and simply means to be silent. If in any case more is implied, it must be gathered from the context, or from the known character of the person spoken of. In the awful circumstances mentioned above, Aaron held his peace.

How is this ? Why did he hold his peace ? Not because he was not deeply afflicted. To have felt no grief on this occasion was impossible.

"With what anguish must the heart of Aaron have been torn! and what dismay must have seized upon him at this unlooked-for and most afflicting stroke! His own sons—his eldest sons—just consecrated to so high and important an office—concerning whom he had doubtless formed the most pleasing hopes; cut off suddenly, in such a state of mind, by the immediate judgment of God, for presumptuous disobedience, and publicly, as an example to all Israel." From the pinnacle of paternal joy he at once descended to the depths of parental anguish. He had cause for deep sorrow. He was sorely smitten and grieved.

Nor did Aaron hold his peace because he was stubborn. Sulkiness is a sin. Resignation is a duty. A mule may stand still and take a beating, but that does not prove that it is a lamb. Grumpiness and moroseness are never pleasing to God. To keep silence because one is angry with God, or because words will do no good, is not to imitate Aaron.

Nor did Aaron maintain silence because he was prostrated by the divine terrors, or petrified by his grief. The scene before him was very awful, yet Aaron's mental faculties remained. He knew all that had been done. Nothing was

hid from him. He was not superannuated. He was not insane. He was not stupified.

Nor did he hold his peace because he looked for early deliverance from his affliction. Such a hope often sustains men. But Aaron saw that his gray hairs must go sorrowing to the grave. The stroke that was upon him was never to be abated in severity. In its very nature his affliction was permanent. Nor is it likely that he expected the event ever to be forgotten. A stigma was indelibly fixed on his family. The matter shall be told to the latest generations.

Nor was Aaron's attention turned away from his affliction by some absorbing scheme of worldly aggrandizement. To relieve their minds of sorrow, many play a diversion. In Aaron's case this could not be done. It was not attempted. Even Aaron's duties rather reminded him of his affliction than aided him in forgetting it.

Nor did he quiet himself by remembering the afflictions of others. He was not a malevolent man. It would not have relieved his feelings if any father in Israel could have rehearsed far sorcer trials to which he had been subjected. Such things could not meet his case. What did control him?

Aaron kept silence because his afflictions

were from the Lord. He was dumb, he opened not his mouth, because Jehovah did it. He saw God's hand and kissed it. He saw God's rod and bowed to receive its stroke. Even if we have hope of deliverance, our submission should be total and unqualified, because it is to God we are to yield ourselves. Even as David, driven from Jerusalem, "said unto Zadok, Carry back the ark of God into the city : if I shall find favor in the eyes of the Lord, he will bring me again, and show me both it and his habitation : but if he thus say, I have no delight in thee ; behold, here am I, let him do to me as seemeth good unto him." 2 Sam. xv. 25, 26. With or without hope, he submits, as did Aaron.

Aaron held his peace because all his sufferings were the deserved consequence of sin. His sons had acted wickedly. Without orders, rashly and presumptuously, both at once, with strange fire, and at an hour not appointed for this service, they attempted to burn incense before the Lord. The whole proceeding seems to have been the fruit of pride and ostentation. From verses 8-11, Bishop Patrick and Dr. Scott think it probable that they were in some measure heated with wine. Their punishment was just. To Aaron the affliction was less than he deserved. He was a sinner, and anything short of eternal death was less than

might have been justly inflicted. In the matter of the golden calf, he had publicly, grievously, and officially sinned. No doubt he now wondered that God had not smitten him to death at Mount Sinai. If we, who deserve wrath, escape under the rod, we should hold our peace.

Aaron knew that the Judge of all the earth would do right. His views on this point seem to have been settled. It is a great thing for us to have our ideas of God's justice clear and fixed. He cannot be dismayed who can sing, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments. It is easy for such to add, Alleluiah! for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. By a fiction of law, the king of England can do no wrong. By the infinite, eternal, unchangeable rectitude of his nature, God can do no wrong.

Aaron held his peace, expecting God in due time to explain what was now perplexing. In this life much is dark. In the next, the sun will shine. We should be no more amazed at some providences being incomprehensible, than at some seas being unfathomable. Here we know but little. "Were we called to exercise dominion over the universe, it would indeed be necessary that we should be omniscient. But for those whose business it is to obey and submit, omniscience is not necessary." Nor will it ever be

necessary. But by and by we shall gain much light on things now wrapped in darkness.

Aaron held his peace because, like the great High Priest of whom he was but the type, he committed himself to Him that judgeth righteously. His judgment was with God. His cause was in good hands. He who made us is the fit one to be trusted with all our secrets and sorrows.

In all this silence Aaron had help from God. Of himself no man could under such circumstances behave aright. But this good man murmured not. "Indeed, in all respects, he seems to have been peculiarly supported by divine grace on this most trying occasion." "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he will show them his covenant." How sweet the promise, "My grace is sufficient for thee!"

On this sad occasion Moses acted well his part. He was a brother born for adversity. He did not aggravate the affliction. He did not deny it, or make light of it; but at once pointed Aaron to God's word. That is the great source of comfort to the sorrowing people of God. "Unless thy law had been my delights, I should then have perished in mine affliction." Nor did Moses wander from the matter in hand. The truths he presented were pertinent: "This is it that the

Lord spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified."

Let afflicted ministers remember Aaron and Eli. God's pious servants of former days have left us an example of suffering affliction. We count them happy that endured. Let us behave as they behaved. "Aaron held his peace." Eli said, "It is the Lord: let him do what seemeth him good." 1 Sam. iii. 18. Mr. Henry well says: "Ministers and their families are sometimes exercised with sore trials, that they may be examples to the believers of patience and resignation to God, and may comfort others with that with which they themselves have been comforted." If God's ministers were never in deep waters themselves, what miserable comforters they would all be! Fathers and brethren: Let us suffer on a little longer. Soon our warfare shall be accomplished. Soon the Lord God will wipe away our tears. Soon shall we be in the presence of the Lamb; for "if we suffer with him, we shall also reign with him."

Silence is often a duty. It is a virtue not sufficiently commended. When men wrongfully withhold the honor due us, let us imitate Saul. He held his peace. 1 Sam. x. 27. When malicious men are carrying on their plots against us,

though they may cry, "Answerest thou nothing? What is it which these witness against thee?" we are not bound to speak. Under such circumstances Jesus held his peace. Matt. xxvi. 62, 63. When God's hand is upon us, and we feel nothing honorable to him and proper to be said, let us glorify him by our silence. Many a man will in eternity wish that the power of speech had been denied him on earth. "True silence is the rest of the mind, and is to the spirit what sleep is to the body, nourishment and refreshment. It is a great virtue; it covers folly, keeps secrets, avoids disputes, and prevents sin." It does more. It is a great honor to God. To the end of the world, the example of Aaron will guide and encourage the saints, and glorify Jehovah.



CHAPTER XII.

A DECLINING CHURCH.

GALATIA (or Gallogrecia) was a district of Asia Minor. It was settled by portions of different tribes from ancient Gaul. Its inhabitants first heard the Gospel from Paul and Barnabas, about fourteen years after Christ's ascension. Up to that time they had preserved the language and idolatrous practices of their forefathers. At first, the truth seemed to have free course among them, and miraculous gifts were bestowed on many. This pleasant state of things was soon marred. Sad declensions occurred. They gave up the simplicity which is in Christ Jesus. Their career was no longer one of triumph.

The steps which led to this sad state, and the signs of its existence, should be known. They give us salutary warnings. Modern churches should acquaint themselves with these ancient troubles. Human nature is ever the same. The same or similar causes of deterioration are continually at work. The entire history of religious distraction and apostasy shows but slight varia-

tions from the facts recorded concerning the churches of Galatia.

A degenerate church is sure to have lax notions concerning the truth. Men let go the grace of Christ, and go after another Gospel, which yet is not another. The sorcery of error is of the most bewitching kind. Like wine, it is a mocker. It promises strength, pleasure, victory; but behold weakness, misery, disaster. It holds out false lights. It begets false hopes. It deludes many. It promises them liberty, while it makes fast their fetters. They are ever learning, but never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. Error is full of sleight, and cunning adroitness.

In particular, a declining church is sure to err respecting the vital doctrine of justification. Her members forget that as many as are of the works of the law, are under the curse: for it is written, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them." They remember not that salvation by the works which we do, is impossible. If men could be persuaded to stand fast in all the liberty wherewith Christ has made them free, and not be entangled again with the yoke of bondage, what churches we should have! He who errs respecting justification, is easily led into other

errors. Well did Luther call this the article of a standing or falling church. He who seeks pardon and acceptance otherwise than by atoning blood and imputed righteousness, is in the highway to ruin. The light that is in him is darkness.

A declining church will hearken to false teachers. Eloquence, novelty, plausibility will be more potent over them than truth, reason, Scripture. Woe to him who gives up substance for forms, spirituality for ceremonies, the Saviour for the sacraments. He may seem to begin in the spirit, but he ends in the flesh. He may multiply observances of days, and months, and times, and years, and rituals ; but inward, hearty piety he will lightly esteem. Whenever any man prefers visible signs to invisible grace, he throws away the kernel and keeps the shell. False teachers may flatter his vanity, and he may dote upon them ; but they will do him no good.

Like the Galatians, he will also lose confidence in God's real ministers. For their fidelity he will count them harsh, severe, inimical. The very man who was once received as an angel of God, even as Christ himself, the man for whom he once seemed ready, if it had been possible, to have plucked out his eyes, and given them to him, is now esteemed an enemy if he dares to speak the truth. One of the most distressing

spectacles is that of men forsaking the safe guides of their earlier days.

Nor can a declining church long be happy. Misery follows transgression. To forsake God, to let go Christ, is to bid farewell to the blessedness experienced by those who find the Saviour and are washed in his blood. He cannot long rejoice whom the truth makes sad. Sin is a lie. Sinners love darkness rather than light. They are like the troubled sea.

Great declension is not inconsistent with much false zeal. One may be mightily stirred up, but not in a pure, peaceable, benevolent way. Some men think that the wrath of man worketh the righteousness of God. When bitterness takes the place of kindness, and fierceness the place of charity, we know whence such tempers come. In a declining church a better spirit will be but temporary. The most carnal men are often zealous of denominational peculiarities.

Nor can pure brotherly love be long maintained in such a church. In the ears of its members he would speak as a madman who should say, "I would not give one hour of brotherly love for a whole eternity of contention." Some men are salamanders. The fire is their element—strife is their pastime. Brotherly love perishes, with the love of the Father and of the Son. "If ye bite

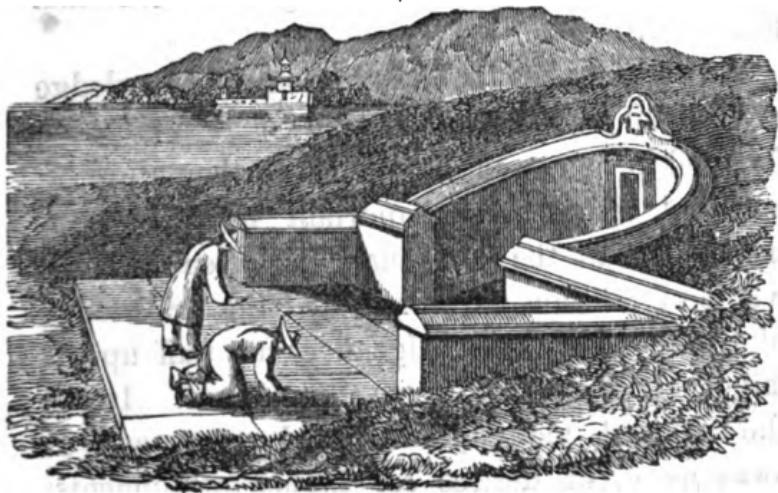
and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another. * * Let us not be desirous of vainglory, provoking one another, envying one another." And now old sins will revive. Evil habits will regain their former ascendancy. The works of the flesh will begin to be manifest. Conformity to the world will give pain to all Christian spectators.

And the fruits of the Spirit will be sadly lacking. Love will shed no genial warmth. Joy will sing but few songs. Peace will take wings and fly away. Long-suffering will give place to severity; gentleness to irascibility; and goodness to bad tempers and bad manners. Faith will begin to stagger at the promises; meekness will be supplanted by fretfulness; moderation will yield to extravagance. Rash and hard judging will succeed the charity which thinketh no evil. In such a church many will forget that with what judgment they judge, they shall be judged, and with what measure they mete, it shall be measured to them again.

If in this state of things a brother be overtaken in a fault, he will not be restored in the spirit of meekness. Nor will the members bear one another's burdens. The bond of tender sympathy will be broken. They will think themselves something when they are nothing. They will be slow

to prove their own works by sure, infallible tests. They will grow weary in well-doing. Little things will keep them from the closet and the sanctuary, from the Sabbath-school and the prayer-meeting.

If any are found in this state, let them awake to righteousness. Let them do their first works. Let them repair to the one Shepherd and Bishop of souls. Their life, their honor, and the glory of God are at stake. Return, ye wanderers—*Return—RETURN!*



CHAPTER XIII.

A GROWING CHURCH.

FOR a Christian or a church to stand still, is impossible. In spiritual things men either advance or recede—either go forward or backward. The Bible never speaks of a stationary church, though it often mentions a backsliding or a thriving church. Let us speak of a growing church—a church whose members are increasing in all that constitutes and distinguishes Christian character.

As all piety has its basis in a sound knowledge of God, so all increase of vital religion must be founded in increased discoveries of the nature of spiritual things. So important is this attainment, that in the Scriptures we often find the whole of religion expressed by “the knowledge of God.” This knowledge does not puff up the mind. It is not for display, but for use. It fills the soul with modesty and awful reverence. It awakens great desires for higher attainments. It “is not a couch whereon to rest a scorching and restless spirit; or a terrace for a wandering

and variable mind to walk up and down with a fair prospect; or a tower of state for a proud mind to raise itself upon; or a sort of commanding ground for strife and contention; or a shop for profit and sale; but a rich storehouse for the glory of the Creator, and the relief of man's estate." "Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth." "Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." Advances not based on saving knowledge are deceptive.

A growing church is constantly making new attainments in reliance upon the truth and faithfulness of God, and especially in confidence in the Lord Jesus Christ. Other graces cannot grow, if faith withers. In that great epistle to the Romans, Paul says:—"First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world." To the Thessalonians he uses similar language:—"We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth." Nothing should be matter of greater joy than an increase of faith in ourselves or others. The disciples never spoke more wisely than when they said:—"Lord, increase our faith." "Faith is not only a means of obeying, but a principal act-

of obedience. It is not only a needful foundation —not only an altar on which to sacrifice, but it is a sacrifice itself, and perhaps, of all, the greatest. It is a submission of our understandings; an oblation of our idolized reason to God." He who is strong in faith, cannot be weak in other graces.

A growing church gains clearer and clearer views of sin, its guilt, and its odiousness. Repentance is deepened every day. Any thing that awakens our pious grief for sin is good for us. Paul says to the Corinthians: "I rejoice not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance. Godly sorrow worketh repentance not to be repented of." He adds that this sorrow produced surprising effects: "What carefulness it wrought in you; yea, what clearing of yourselves; yea, what indignation; yea, what fear; yea, what vehement desire; yea, what zeal; yea, what revenge!" He who would have his soul flourishing, must practice daily repentance.

Of course, humility will be more and more profound. "With the lowly is wisdom." "Be ye clothed with humility." "Humbleness of mind" will, in one day, make more solid progress in divine things than pride will do in a whole eternity. Self-conceit is the worst foe to grace. It precludes even the desire of improvement. "God resisteth the proud."

The humble will surely grow in love. "There is a consanguinity between humility and benevolence." In all its exercises love is an admirable grace. It begets magnanimity towards enemies, pity towards the wretched, and complacency towards the upright of our race; and gratitude, delight, and obedience towards God. This grace is immortal. It will flourish forever in the souls of all the redeemed. "Charity never faileth." A man may be a bishop before learning that "charity is above rubrics." We are all naturally good haters. But love in the human heart is an exotic.

A church that grows in these things will not fail to increase in all other virtues. There is nothing more certain than that true piety will always exhibit a pleasing symmetry. It does not overact its part. It does not substitute stinginess for economy, meanness for self-distrust, pride for spirit. It knows the difference between dumpishness and seriousness, levity and cheerfulness, cringing and courteousness, austerity and strictness, stubbornness and decision, laxity and moderation, stupidity and calmness, superstition and devotion, harshness and inflexibility, bitterness and true zeal, tameness and meekness. True piety boasts not, presumes not, rails not, reviles not, pretends not, is not crafty, cunning, guileful,

malicious. It flatters not. It dissembles not. Whoever has one genuine trait of Christian character has all the rest in some good degree. There are no hideous monsters in the Church of God triumphant. They all bear all the features of the second Adam. They are like him. So, in their measure, and so far as sanctification has progressed, they wear his entire image here. It is defective in degree, but not in its parts.

Such a church will grow in comforts. Her peace will be like a river, and her righteousness like the waves of the sea. On her the light of God's countenance will fall. To her he will be a sun. Waters shall break forth in the desert, and springs in dry places. She shall even learn the great mystery of "rejoicing in tribulation."

She will also increase in usefulness. She will be the salt of the earth, the light of the world, the guide of the lost. Her teachings will be clear and earnest; her example safe and instructive; her prayers fervent and importunate; and her God will abundantly bless her provisions, satisfy her poor, and convert her foes into friends. "Oh that my people had hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways! I should soon have subdued their enemies, and turned my hand against their adversaries. The haters of the Lord should have submitted themselves; but their time should have endured forever."

Such a church will also grow in numbers. She will not pray in vain, nor live in vain. Her preachers will not beat the air. God's word shall not return void. Sinners shall be converted. "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord." Glory be to him that is, and was, and is to come.



CHAPTER XIV.

▲ GLORIOUS CHURCH.

MAN is full of shame, folly, and weakness. All his glory is as the flower of the grass. But in the new creation he is redeemed and disenthralled. His relations are changed, his prospects grow bright, his destiny becomes grand. The whole body of regenerate men constitutes a wonderful community. In thrilling interest its history is unparalleled. Its members shall attain the highest honors. The whole Church of Christ is glorious.

She is not the less so in his eyes, because what she is, she is by the grace of God. Her pre-eminence is not by blood or birth. It consists not in wealth or power. She was taken from the hole of the pit. In her original elements she was by no means stainless. Her honor and excellency are from Jehovah. In God is her salvation and her glory. When David fled from Absalom, he said, "Thou, O Lord, art a shield for me; my glory, and the lifter up of my head." He is the same to all that look to him. All this

is in the promise, "I will be the glory in the midst of her." "The Lord will give grace and glory." The church is the woman clothed with the sun. In herself she is black. In her God she is comely. Her God is her glory. O Zion, rejoice in thy King! Without him, thou diest—thou art nothing. But thou art a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God.

The Lord Jesus Christ is peculiarly the glory of the church. He is God in a form that we can approach without despair. His presence made the glory of the second temple greater than that of the first. He is a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of the people Israel. Because he is the Captain of their salvation, he shall bring many sons unto glory. Nor is he slow in putting beauty and honor on his chosen. The largeness of his gifts nearly exceeds belief. Almost any faith staggers at the vastness of his engagements and endowments. "The glory which thou gavest me, I have given them." Who comprehends the import of such language? Who believes all it is designed to convey? Christ is all, and in all. He is the first and the last. In him the church is safe, in him she glories, in him she is glorified.

Still the glory of the church would be dim

without the Sanctifier. The very dispensation under which we live, is the ministration of the Spirit; and we all, with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord. Nor could we offer a kinder prayer for any one than that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto him the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of heavenly things. With this Comforter, nothing can effectually dishearten the righteous. With this Sanctifier, no sin shall retain dominion over them. Persecution shall not harm them, for, "if ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you."

In consequence of these things, the church is gloriously adorned with righteousness. She receives the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of her salvation. Her nakedness no more appears. She is clothed in linen, white and clean. The merits of Christ become hers by her faith in him, and by the imputation of God. Not unfallen angels have a righteousness so glorious as this. The heavens are not clean in the sight of Jehovah; but through Christ "he beholds no iniquity in Jacob, neither sees perverseness in Israel."

Another blessing enjoyed by the church is purity. She washes her hands in innocence, and so she compasses God's altars. Her heart is the best part about her. She loves holiness. She is all glorious within. The beauty of the Lord her God is upon her, and his salvation reigns within her. She is not saved *in* her sins, but *from* her sins. Holiness to the Lord is written on all her works and desires. She is never satisfied till sin is extirpated. With national and personal enemies she may be reconciled; but her hatred of sin is an inextinguishable animosity.

Neither is her hope dim or feeble. All her members have been begotten again unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for them. "Had mankind nothing to expect beyond the grave, their best faculties would be a torment to them; and the more considerate and virtuous they were, the greater concern and grief they would feel from the shortness of their prospects." But hope opens a boundless field before the whole church.

Nor is her peace easily disturbed. It is like a river. Her Head said, "Peace I leave with you, my peace give I unto you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you." How great this peace

is, may be judged from the fact that inspiration calls it "the peace of God, that passeth all understanding."

In such a society gladness cannot be a stranger. Nay, the church has joy unspeakable and full of glory. Never are men more mistaken than when they look upon the people of God as a sad and melancholy set. Zion is the joy of the whole earth, and within her walls more than anywhere else are found songs and gladness, thanksgiving and the voice of melody.

She is also glorious in her contests and triumphs. Many and mighty are her foes. Her conflicts are terrible. All nations have compassed her about like bees. Of her foundation they have often said, "Raze it! raze it!" But she staggers not at the promise of God through unbelief; but is strong in faith, giving glory to God. Her history abounds in the records of astonishing victories, so that glorious things are spoken of her. In none of her battles does she appear more glorious than with the last enemy. "If ever Christianity appears in its power, it is when it erects its trophies upon the tomb; when it takes up its votaries where the world leaves them, and fills the breast with immortal hope in dying moments." "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord."

In this life, indeed, imperfection clings to the knowledge, the holiness, and all the attainments of God's people. The church has spots on her face. But the intercession of Christ shall carry her through. "Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me." The humblest and most sorrowful child of God may say, "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory."

Nor shall the church's inheritance in glory be small. It shall be such as to blot out the memory of earthly sorrows. Long since one who called himself the least of all saints said, "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us." The same man spoke of our "riches in glory."

The glory of the church shall endure forever. God will eternally be her God. Christ will be her Prophet, Priest, and King forever. The gifts and calling of God are without repentance. Paul said, "I endure all things for the elect's sake, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory." And Peter says the God of all grace hath called us unto his eternal glory. There is one congreg-

gation that shall never break up, one society that shall never be dissolved, one city that shall be an eternal excellency.

And all the glory of the church is according to an ancient plan. In the counsels of eternity God purposed to make her illustrious. He has dealt with her as he has, "to the intent that now unto principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God." That the whole scheme of a church, saved by grace, and glorious through her God, is no new thing, is evident from Scripture:— "We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory." 1 Cor. ii. 7. *O Lord of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in thee.*



CHAPTER XV.

GOD A SANCTUARY.

How condescending is the Lord ! He stoops to our poor capacities, our low conceptions, and so he teaches us. Sometimes he compares himself to the hen spreading her wings to protect her brood. Anon he likens himself to earthly parents. "As a father pitith his children, so the Lord pitith them that fear him." "Can a mother forget her sucking child that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb ? Yes, she may forget, but I will not forget thee."

In like manner God promises to be to all his people a rock, a fortress, a refuge, a high tower ; and in one place he says, "I will be to them as a little sanctuary." How well chosen are these words !

Sanctuary was a name first given to places devoted to religious worship. A sanctuary was a temple. Where true piety existed, there God's people used to have much joy in glorifying him in his house of prayer and praise. The temple built by Solomon was amiable in the eyes of all

the saints. It was the dwelling place of the visible glory. It was the place where God revealed himself. "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple."

In many ancient nations, places of religious worship were a protection against pursuers of every kind. It was not lawful to arrest a man in any temple, whatever might be the crime charged upon him. In the institute of Moses this law of sanctuary was denied to murderers. Joab himself was slain while holding fast to the horns of the altar. Still God provided sanctuary even for murderers, in the cities of refuge, until a fair trial could be had. He would not have his house made a den of felons. But he would give sanctuary to all who needed it, in a manner much more accessible than the one temple in Jerusalem. So God is the refuge of all. He is very pitiful. He is full of compassion. In him the fatherless findeth mercy. He executeth judgment for the oppressed. He giveth food to the hungry. He preserveth the stranger. He sheweth mercy to thousands of them that fear him and keep his commandments.

But God says, I will be for a *little* sanctuary. As a man in a *vast* temple alone would feel lost in the awful silence and dreariness; but would feel very cheerful in a neat, commodious apartment, suited to one person; so the soul finds the Lord a sanctuary suited to it. The chickens find warmth under the wings of the hen. The place just suits them. So the soul dwells in the secret place of the Most High, and abides under the shadow of the Almighty. He is a *little* sanctuary.

This promise is good to all the people of God. However dispersed, however distressed, however tempted, however hated, in God is their help. He says, "Although I have cast them far off among the heathen, and although I have scattered them among the countries, yet will I be to them as a little sanctuary in the countries where they shall come." Ezek. xi. 16. Yes, in captivity God is a refuge and a joy to the prisoner. He is the hope of them that are nigh, and of them that are afar off. Joseph was sold for a servant; his feet they hurt with fetters. He was laid in iron, until the time that his word came. The word of the Lord tried him. But all the while Jehovah was to him as a little sanctuary. He never forsook him. He girded him with strength, and held him in the hollow of his hand, and when

the ends of his imprisonment had been gained, then the king sent and loosed him, the ruler of the people let him go free. "He made him lord of his house, and ruler of all his substance. To bind his princes at his pleasure; and to teach his senators wisdom."

And how kind was God to Paul and Silas in the jail at Philippi! A night more memorable for joy and deliverance they never spent on earth. Some of their nights may have passed from their recollection, but while eternity endures, they will not forget the midnight, when with their flesh torn by scourging, and their feet made fast in the stocks, they were yet so borne above all their sorrows, that they prayed and sang praises to God, and the prisoners heard them. The Lord was to them as a little sanctuary.

So also blessed John, who was the brother of the early Christians, and their companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, when he was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ, was not left alone. He was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind him a great voice, as of a trumpet, saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last. The Lord is very merciful and full of

compassion. He is as a little sanctuary to all his persecuted ones.

What consolation is thus held out to the sick who are shut up in chambers, and kept from the house of God! The Lord is to them for a little sanctuary. How often do God's people testify that at such seasons they have learned wonderful lessons of his goodness and kindness! Where is the old Christian, who would be willing to yield the memory of blessed experiences on a sick bed? There are comforts given to the bed-ridden children of God that surpass all the conceptions of those who never felt a bodily pain. God comes down, and makes his people happy in suffering, strengthening them upon the bed of languishing, making all their bed in their sickness, putting underneath them the everlasting arms, making the chamber of their sickness the house of God, and the gate of heaven. Some ends in our sanctification are often best answered by our bodily sufferings.

Nor let the child of God be *drowned* in any sorrow. The grace of God is *sufficient*. He would not have his chosen sorrow as those without hope. He bids them look up, and make him their sanctuary. His power, his wisdom, his truth, his love, his providence, his word, his grace can do all things. Thou afflicted one, be joyful

in God. Trust in the Lord, and do good ; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed. Delight thyself also in the Lord ; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart. Commit thy way unto the Lord : trust also in him ; and he shall bring it to pass. And he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noon-day. Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him ; and he will be unto thee as a little sanctuary.



CHAPTER XVI.

THE CHURCH CONQUERS BY FAITH.

THERE is no more necessary grace than faith. Well does an apostle call it "precious." It is one of God's best gifts. It unites to Christ. It purifies the heart. It works by love. It overcomes the world. It walks in darkness and has no light, and yet trusts in the Lord. Some of the true saints on earth are destitute of genius, of personal beauty, of wealth, of health, and of fame; but they all have faith. No faith, no piety. "He that believeth not, hath made God a liar." "He is condemned already."

The necessity for the growth of faith is laid in the fact, that it is at first feeble. It is like a grain of mustard seed. It is like a *little* leaven, which a woman hid in three measures of meal. Its first cries are faint: "Lord, I believe, help thou my unbelief." "Lord, save, I perish." The stoutest oak was once small and tender.

But a weak faith may be as genuine as a strong faith. A drop may be as truly water as the ocean. A spark, and the smoking flax, are

genuine fire, though in quantity they are nothing like Vesuvius. A little infant is as truly a human being as a giant.

But where faith is genuine, it will grow. The true leaven will leaven the whole lump. It will not surprise any one to see the little infant growing. It ought to be so. Babes in Christ ought to become young men, yea, strong men in Christ Jesus. Happy is he whose religious character is not like the picture of a child, which never grows any, but like a living, healthy child, which waxes greater and stronger every day. The right kind of faith always grows.

To this end trials are sent. The farther we advance, the sharper these are. He who at first was discomfited by a railing world, shall yet be unmoved by the blazing faggots. He who, for fear of the Jews, will at first be a disciple secretly, shall in due time beg the body of Jesus, and lay it in his own sepulchre. He who cries out, "all these things are against me," shall yet pronounce in faith wonderful blessings on all the chosen seed. The Lord knows what is good for us. He stirs up our nests. He lays waste our pleasant things.

It is therefore a great thing to exercise one's self to godliness; to be thoroughly tried. Luther said, "Three things make a good theologian, Meditation, Temptation, and Prayer." We can-

not get along without trials. "My brethren, count it all joy, when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." Blessed is he, who is put up to all he knows and a little more; for then, if he be not given over to sin, he will cry to the Lord for help, and it shall not be denied him.

But faith must have nutriment as well as exercise. Hence the word of God is of constant use. All its lessons are good to the believer. Its warnings make him afraid to sin. Its invitations encourage him to march boldly on, and to be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might. Its precepts form a perfect rule for the guidance of his life. They are light-houses to prevent a shipwreck. Its doctrines are heavenly manna. The word of God strengthens faith so as nothing else can do. For this it has a natural fitness. But by the power of God's Spirit this fitness is made efficient. This is also a pleasant process. God's word is sweet to the believer.

Faith is also much strengthened by examples. Paul gives us many such in the *eleventh* chapter of Hebrews. The history of the martyrs is mighty in strengthening the faith of God's elect. One patient sufferer in a community often does

more to inspire confidence in his brethren than many sermons. We could not do without patterns of piety, examples of living faith. Many an afflicted one suffers as he does, that he may do good to others. In him they see what God's grace can accomplish.

The happy effects of such growth of faith are abundantly declared by Paul: "We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all aboundeth, so that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God." Such Christians do exploits, and that in a loving way. Their confidence is not presumptuous. Their boldness is not impudence. Their zeal is not bitterness. Their boasting is not vainglory. They are ready for life prepared for death, thankful for mercies, submissive to hardships. Their hope, as an anchor of the soul, is cast in heaven, from whence also they look for the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall make them like himself. When the world shall be filled with such Christians, universal joy will soon prevail.



CHAPTER XVII.

THE CHURCH TRIUMPHANT.

We ask God to scatter our enemies ; but we are slow to think that they will ever be gone. In the midst of the battle it is difficult to anticipate the peace and the pleasures of decisive victory. We must learn to trust the Captain of our salvation. We walk by faith. In our journey through this wilderness, our great support is seeing Him who is invisible. By Him we are bidden to look forward to the glory that shall be revealed.

In this we are greatly aided by the exaltation of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our forerunner has entered the eternal city. He has gone up with a shout. Though his sacred head was laid as low as ours shall be, yet it was not possible that he should be holden of the bands of death. He burst the bars of the grave. As he overcame and sat down with his Father on his throne, so shall his people overcome and sit down with him on his throne. His resurrection is the sure pledge of their resurrection. His entrance into life

(99)

makes certain their eternal repose on the bosom of God.

Many of the redeemed already stand on the banks of deliverance. They beckon to us, who are still warring with flesh and blood, with principalities and powers. They assure us of final and complete victory. What has been done can be done. Saints in glory are ensamples to us.

Part of the host have crossed the flood,
And part are crossing now.

We must fight the good fight. We must resist as they resisted. Then we shall conquer as they conquered. Blessed be God, some have entered into rest.

God's word makes sure the final triumph of all his people. Now they sigh and cry; they wet their couch with tears, and have sore travail; but soon the angels shall bear them home to Abraham's bosom. The thing is sure. The mouth of the Lord hath spoken it. "In my Father's house are many mansions. . . I will come again and take you to myself, that where I am, there ye may be also." "We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God—a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." The Scripture cannot

be broken. Heaven is revealed. The victory is foretold by Him who will accomplish it.

But what is the triumphant state of the church? Attaining to it, her foes no more insult, her warfare is accomplished. The wicked cease from troubling. Temptations cease. There blows are no more dealt, and wounds no more bleed. Without are dogs. At God's right hand conflicts never rage. The strife of battle is over forever.

There her wishes are gratified. She longed to see Christ and be like him. Now she has her desires. She is with Christ and beholds his glory. She sees him as he is. She is like him. She wears his image on her heart. She beholds that blessed face, which was smitten and buffeted, but is now far beyond the reach of the malignant. She sees the eyes that poured out tears, the side that poured out water and blood, and the lips that poured out grace and truth. How great the deliverance which rescues her from all fears, and gives her all the blessings of spotless purity, all the raptures of the beatific vision! No wonder the blessed sing the song of Moses and the Lamb. They have palms of victory in their hands.

There too is rest; the opposite of all that wearies, alarms, perturbs, sickens, or saddens.

Robert Hall's highest conception of heaven was that of rest. The idea is scriptural. "There remaineth a rest to the people of God." How welcome will be the repose of that blessed world ! The shore was pleasant to Jonah, and Ararat to Noah ; but heaven will be far more delightful to redeemed souls. There is no rest like heaven.

But there shall be no dullness in heaven. Its rest is not torpor. Heaven is full of activity. They that sleep, sleep in the night. But there is no night there. Heaven is no hive for drones, no place for opium-eaters to dream away a long eternity. The ransomed are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple ; and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more ; neither thirst any more ; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters ; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.

In heaven is found the best society. Myriads of choice spirits are there gathered. God himself has chosen, scoured, fashioned, and glorified every vessel of honor. "Heaven is attracting to itself whatever is congenial to its nature ; is enriching itself by the spoils of the earth, and collecting within its bosom whatever is pure, perma-

nent, and divine, leaving nothing for the last fire to consume but the objects and slaves of concupiscence ; while every thing which grace has prepared and beautified, shall be gathered and selected from the ruins of the world to adorn that eternal city." "Every Christian friend that goes before us from this world, is a ransomed spirit, waiting to welcome us in heaven."

The employments of the church triumphant are of the most elevating kind. There knowledge is pursued with eagerness, success, and certainty. We shall know even as we are known. Here we get glimpses of Christ by faith ; there we shall gaze upon him with unutterable wonder. Here discord mars our songs ; there shall be the perfection of harmony. There we shall have a key to unlock many mysteries which here sadly perplexed us. There are no low employments in heaven.

The perfection of the church triumphant is absolute. Nothing can be more pure. She is without spot, or wrinkle, or blemish, or any such thing. And her stability is as great as her perfection. She shall go no more out. She shall no more be black, like the tents of Kedar. She changes only from glory to glory.

God himself is the glory of the church triumphant. She hath no need of the sun or moon

to shine in her, for the Lord God doth lighten her, and the Lamb is the light thereof. God is her sun and her exceeding joy. She has such discoveries of him as far exceed all earthly conceptions. He is the portion of every redeemed soul.

Of that happy state we know but little. Even if men were sent to that world for the express purpose of reporting its glories, not one of them could say more than Paul, "I heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter." The light and language, the joys and experience of that blessed abode must be possessed, in order to understand its amazing sufficiency, its infinite fullness.



CHAPTER XVIII.

CHRISTIANS MAKE A WISE CHOICE.

It is confessed that the people of God give up much. They relinquish honors, pleasures, and riches, so far as the pursuit of these things is inconsistent with the moral law, or with the highest love to God and man. And they welcome reproach, poverty, self-denial, when it is the will of God to send them. Do they act wisely? Have they good cause for such a course? Will there ever be an adequate return? Let us see.

God's people have mercies in hand, and mercies in prospect. All these are precious, inestimable. Let us look at some of them. One of their present mercies is pardon of sin. This is itself worth more than all the wicked ever enjoy. Existence itself is not so costly, or so invaluable. The ungodly themselves would at times give all their wealth for the blotting out of even one of their sins. But to have God cast all our sins behind his back, bury them forever in the sea of forgetfulness, remove them away from us as far

as the east is from the west, is a blessing beyond all price, beyond all estimate of mortals.

This is the more true, as with pardon God always sends acceptance,—acceptance in the Beloved. So that the believer is not merely pardoned ; he is fully justified. He receives authority to become a son of God. He has a right to the tree of life. To all the ends of a complete justification, the righteousness of Christ becomes his by imputation. So that he is never again found naked, but clad in linen white and clean. He has received the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation. Not angels in their robes of innocence stand more beau teously arrayed than does the believer in Christ Jesus.

The consequence of all this, is the adoption of sons. And what a mercy is that ! This is accompanied by the Spirit of adoption. He works in his chosen all the graces, beautiful in themselves, beautiful in their symmetry and harmony. Among them is Faith, which recalls the past of all ages, and learns what has been ; looks steadily at things invisible ; and reveals a glorious future unequaled by any thing known in the annals of time. There too is Repentance, which hath wept her bottle full of tears, as she gazed on the cross, and remembered sin. Hope, too, is not wanting.

Her anchor is strongly fastened to the pillars of the throne of God, for she never casts her anchor downward, but upward. There too is Love, with her hand full of offerings to the Lord, and of gifts for men. She stands with her cup of mercy running over. There also is Joy with her mirthful face, her sweetest songs, and her instruments of music. By her side stands Patience, so gentle, so ready to endure all that shall be laid upon her. And Meekness, which never curses, but wishes well to friend and foe. And Temperance, with her strong reins over every desire and appetite, spreads health all around. Forgiveness, too, casts out all malice, all wrath, all bitterness, even all sourness, and bids the bones grow fat, and makes the eye sparkle with joy to see an enemy blessed, a brother promoted, and all flesh rejoicing.

And all these virtues grow. Increase of grace is made sure to all, who have the beginning of grace. They grow like young trees in a good soil, in a well watered region. They go from strength to strength. They tend Zionward. They wax stronger and stronger. They gain victory after victory. They are upheld every hour

Therefore they stand. They flee not in the day of battle. Their leaf fadeth not. Their fruit withereth not before it is ripe. They hold on

their way. God, who has begun a good work in them, is performing it until the day of Jesus Christ. He will never leave them, nor forsake them. He is their God.

They have a right to Paul, and Apolles, and Cephas, and the world, and life, and death, and things present, and things to come : all are theirs. Carnal men would prefer that some of these things be left out of the inventory, e. g., such as death. But the death of the believer is precious in the sight of the Lord. It is precious also in the eyes of his people. They would not live always. It is sweet to fall asleep in Jesus, and rest from all works and toils.

But the believer keeps his eyes on the recompence of the reward in a future world. He does not forget the crown, the crown of life, the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give him at that day. Nor is the crown for pageantry. He who wears it is enfeoffed in an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, unfading. That inheritance is a kingdom that cannot be moved.

None who have entered on that inheritance, regret any sacrifices they ever made here. Some took joyfully the spoiling of their goods. Some went into banishment. Some toiled in the mines. Some were cast into lions' dens. Some were

sawn asunder. Some had cruel mockings. Some were crucified. Some were burnt alive. But they had set their faith and hope in God. When one of them saw the wild beasts, he said, "Now I begin to be a Christian." When Paul thought of them, he said, "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear."

They all made a wise choice. Every succeeding cycle of eternity will more and more prove it wise. God pronounces it wise. Eternity will put the seal of confirmation upon it. "He that is wise shall be wise for himself." "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come."

Oh that we all had a lively sense of eternal things! One said to an aged friend, "I had a letter from a correspondent the other day, who inquired if you were in the land of the living." The venerable saint replied, "No; but I am going there. This world is alone the world of shadow; and the eternal is the only one of living realities." All the redeemed shall find it so.

CHAPTER XIX.

DIVINE GENTLENESS TRAINS THE CHURCH.

“Thy gentleness hath made me great.”

SUCH was the language of David after long and terrible hazards and afflictions. It befitted the day when the Lord delivered him out of the hand of all his enemies. His soul was filled with comforts in view of all that had occurred. The farmer youth, who had been hunted like a partridge on the mountains, had taken his seat on an established throne. God had lifted up his head above all his enemies round about. No marvel that he should recount God’s dealings with him in so remarkable deliverances. “Thy gentleness hath made me great.” 2 Sam. xxii. 36.

Pious people can but acknowledge that every good and perfect gift comes from above. They love to feel and confess their dependence on God, in the past as well as the future. It is a good thing to bless the Lord, and sing praises to him. From no hand flow mercies so sure, so large, so free from all admixture of evil, as those which he

sends. His mercies reach unto the heavens. They are above the clouds.

In all the forms of love, nothing is more admirable than the divine gentleness. In the midst of turmoil, it secures confidence. Great peace have they, who keep God's law. The work of righteousness is peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever. It is the testimony of David and of thousands of others that, even when their way was rough and dark, the Divine hand that led them was gentle. God will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are stayed on him. Bunyan was never more free from perturbation than in Bedford jail.

The Lord knoweth our frame. He remembereth that we are dust. As a father pitith his children, so the Lord pitith them that fear him. He is more tender than a mother. His repentings are easily kindled. None loves as he loves. None is gentle as he is gentle. Oh how softly he carries his chosen! It has always been so. It shall be so to the last. His people shall have boldness in the day of judgment. It is wonderful to think how poor timid mortals shall stand in perfect composure, when the world is dissolving.

Large numbers of men expect to make all their advancements by noise and bluster. Others expect to help on those around them in the same

way. The master of many a vessel in a storm, or in battle, the leader in many a bold enterprise, and the teacher of many a diffident youth, have supposed they would best succeed by rough, or harsh measures. But desperation rather shocks than emboldens. It always gives pain, if it does not inspire terror. Rage is as foolish as it is brutal. *Ira brevis furor est.* Alarm and agitation make no one great.

The Lord knows this, and so he produces the most blessed results by encouraging his chosen, by making them see how safe they are at all times. He covers their head in the day of battle. He teaches their hands to war and their fingers to fight. By him they slay lions and bears and giants. By him they break through a host. By him they leap over a wall. He gives confidence, and with it success. His loving-kindness knows no bounds. His gentleness makes his people great.

David sets a good example. He boasts not of his greatness before men. He makes thankful mention of it before God. "He only is great who has the habits of greatness; who, after performing what none in ten thousand could accomplish, passes on like Samson and 'tells neither father nor mother of it.'" Vain boasting is a sign of weakness and littleness of mind. We

cannot be too far from self-applause. We cannot be too often engaged in recounting divine mercies. It is a great weakness to tell what great things we have done; but it is a part of true piety to tell what marvelous things God has done for us.

It is therefore well for all to remember the hole of the pit whence they have been digged. It was well for the Jews to be required to say, "A Syrian ready to perish was my father." The vanity which leads men to boast of their original is great. They all come of dust. They are as nothing till God exalts them. And he who lifts them up, can easily cast them down. Let them not be high-minded, but fear.

And let us imitate Him who by his gentleness makes others great. As a teacher, Jesus was meek and lowly, and so he was eminently qualified to save the ignorant and wayward. Blessed Saviour! How can our hearts be so cold to him? A word of encouragement is better than a thousand of an angry tone. Be of good courage, all ye that fear the Lord.

CHAPTER XX.

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL.

A FARMER bestowed much labor on a crop. Yet it was unpromising until near harvest. Then, being favored with seasonable rains and weather, it grew apace, and shot forth heads full of plump, heavy grains. The crop was excellent. It turned out better than was expected. "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him."

A father loved his son, and sought many ways to arouse his dormant faculties. But his sluggishness seemed incurable. He hated books. He slept away all his mornings. He seemed to desire just to be let alone. At last he was roused. His mind began to develop. All his mental habits were changed. He became a man of the highest character. It turned out better than was expected.

The history of the human race is full of cases where results were far better than previous fears

would admit. Esther went trembling into the presence of Artaxerxes. He held out the golden sceptre. She had her desire. Haman was hanged. Her nation was saved. It turned out better than was expected.

The four leprous men outside of the walls of Samaria were in a bad strait. Inside of the city were their countrymen. But there too was the famine. If they should succeed in entering Samaria, they would but find the tongue of the sucking child cleaving to the roof of his mouth for thirst ; the young children asking bread, and no man breaking it unto them ; and the hands of the pitiful women seething and eating their own children. If they fell to the host of the Syrians, they were national enemies, actually waging a cruel war. They would probably put to the sword even these poor lepers. But then they might have pity on them. And they had bread in abundance. So the lepers went to the camp of the Syrians. And the Lord had made the host of the Syrians to hear a noise of chariots, and a noise of horses, even the noise of a great host : and they said one to another, Lo, the king of Israel hath hired against us the kings of the Hittites, and the kings of the Egyptians, to come upon us. Wherefore they arose and fled in the twilight, and left their tents, and their horses, and

their asses, even the camp as it was, and fled for their life. And when these lepers came to the uttermost part of the camp, they went into one tent, and did eat and drink, and carried thence silver, and gold, and raiment, and went and hid it; and came again, and entered into another tent, and carried thence also, and went and hid it. So it turned out better than was expected.

The same thing is often experienced in the Christian life. Conversion itself is frequently preceded by dismal fears and forebodings. The awakened soul feels its total ill desert. It sees justice against it. It confesses itself vile and exposed to fiery indignation. It is persuaded that others whose sins were less heinous and less numerous, have terribly perished. It anticipates ruin. It sees how justly God might visit it with desertion, and his hottest displeasure. It wonders that he has not already done so. It renounces all hope of escape by personal innocence, by any of its own doings or deservings. It passes sentence of terrible self-condemnation upon itself. Knowing itself to deserve the worst, it expects the worst. The prodigal confessed that he was not worthy to be called a son. He would have been thankful for the place of a hired servant. Yet when he was a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on

his neck, and kissed him ; and said to his servants, bring forth the best robe, and put it on him ; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet : and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it ; and let us eat and be merry. It turned out better than was expected. So every soul that is brought back to God, and is reconciled to him by Jesus Christ, finds results better than it fears. When God turns its captivity, it is like them that dream. Then is its mouth filled with laughter, and its tongue with singing.

*When it reviews its dismal fears,
'Tis hard to think they've vanished so ;
With God it left its flowing tears ;
He makes its joys like rivers flow.*

So also in the afflictions of the pious : deliverance, exceeding expectations is granted. The approach of every storm is with black clouds. The bow appears not till the storm is past. Many are the afflictions of the righteous. And none of them are joyous. They are all grievous. No man ever yet hated his own flesh. The Christian often has loathsome diseases, dreadful bodily pains, which produce uncontrollable sadness and depression. Then too he is bereaved of his loved ones. Those to whom he had looked for defence in his old age, are taken away, and the light of his eyes is no more. Then property takes to

itself wings and flies away like an eagle towards heaven. Penury stares him full in the face. Then those friends who were such for selfish ends, like the leaves of autumn, drop off as soon as the frosts of adversity begin to fall heavily. Some, like Job's friends, become accusers and maligners. One's good name is threatened. Wave follows wave. Billow succeeds billow. But to the righteous this shall not last always. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord, that the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy. The Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning. He will in due time appear for his servants, and bring forth their righteousness as the light, and their judgment as the noon-day. Stephen dying in a shower of mingled stones and execrations, yet obtained a good report, as well as a glorious inheritance.

The Lord can clear the darkest skies,
Can give us day for night,
Make drops of sacred sorrow rise
To rivers of delight.

Let not the righteous be cast down with over-much sorrow at their affliction. It will turn out better than was expected.

So the love of life and the fear of death are natural. The future is a world of spirits. We shiver on the brink of Jordan. Its waters are

cold and turbid. Saints often fear they will be swept down the stream, and so never reach the banks of the happy Canaan. Or they fear that in dying they may be tempted above that they are able to bear; or that in some way they will at last come short, or at least disgrace their holy calling, by manifesting cowardice, or inordinate love of life. But let them not yield to despondency. He who has begun a good work in them, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ. Jesus has plucked out the sting of the monster.

If sin be pardoned, I'm secure :
Death hath no sting beside.

It is a fact that many who are most timid in the early stages of their Christian life, near the close are often the most heroic. Millions of such have sung : " Death is swallowed up in victory." And when they have reached their rest above, they have reviewed all their journey with wonder, love and praise. In heaven we shall know much that was quite hid to us here. Many a doubt will there be solved ; many a perplexity vanish ; and many a mystery be fully and satisfactorily explained. Heaven will be more glorious than was anticipated. All things will have a happy issue. Of every thing it shall be said, it turned out better than was expected. ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE TIME IS SHORT.

PERHAPS not one in a million of mankind live one hundred years. All things change but God. All duration is short but eternity. All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof as the flower of the field. He was not a foolish or melancholy man, who on reading the words, "And he died," which occur so often in the fifth chapter of Genesis, began to seek salvation, and never rested till he found it. He is not wise, who is not made better by so solemn a thought.

THE PAST! How full of mercies and of wonders! How many cups of cold water, how many narrow escapes, how many marked providences, how many timely warnings, how many seasonable rebukes, how many sweet encouragements God has sent us! Count up his mercies, that were at the time felt to be such, and they are more than the hairs of our heads. Looking only at the Divine kindness, it is hard to believe that earth is in a state of rebellion against God. The difficulty is all gone, when we remember that God is long-

suffering, not willing that any should perish. It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed. Less than Divine goodness and mercy would have denied us any blessing.

Among the richest blessings sent us have been our crosses and afflictions. They were not in themselves blessings. They were grievous. But in their design, and when sanctified, in their effects they were precious. How have they stripped earth of her deceptive garb! how have they humbled us! how have they caused us to search our hearts! how have they brought us to our knees! how have they lifted our thoughts to things above! Is not that a blessing which has such fruits? Nature weeps, but does not grace thrive? Affection bleeds, but hope has new visions of celestial joy.

“Is resignation’s lesson hard?
Examine, you shall find,
That duty calls for little more,
Than anguish of the mind.”

THE PAST! How full of marvelous displays of God’s kind care over the Church! How many nefarious schemes have been laid for dishonoring herself and her God! How marvelously has he defeated one machination after another! How strangely has he converted foes into friends!

How abundantly has he showered his mercies on us !

THE FUTURE ! How little of it remains to us on earth ! It cannot be called ours. We cannot grasp it. We may never reach it. 'In a little time many of the best and wisest and most useful will have closed their career. And how soon many will pass into a rueful eternity, and be forever undone ! They are now invited by all the mercies of God to cease to do evil, and to learn to do well. But their foolish heart is darkened. They will not come to Christ that they may have life. O that they would ! How they will soon wish that they had !

THE FUTURE ! How many blessed opportunities it will present to the living to do good ! Some will seize the fit moment, and lay up treasure in heaven. They will be sober and watch daily. They will not be weary in well-doing. They will win souls, and be wise. They will convert a sinner from the error of his ways, and hide a multitude of sins. Others will let their hours roll away in inglorious ease. Sloth will tie up their hands. Timidity will unnerve them. Covetousness will make them close and selfish. A deceitful heart will persuade them that they are not called to do much. They will not work while it is day,

and the night will soon come when they cannot work.

THE FUTURE ! What changes it will witness ! Men shall die. New actors shall come upon every stage. Prophecy shall be fulfilled. The Gospel shall achieve new triumphs. Thrones shall fall. New phases shall be given to society. Science shall advance. The arts shall be improved. The wicked shall do wickedly. The righteous shall be bold as a lion. Solid freedom shall gain inch by inch. Coming years shall witness changes, which, were they now told and believed, would make the ears of many bad men to tingle, and the hearts of millions of good men to rejoice.

TIME ! To each of us it shall soon be no longer. Yea, to all the earth it will soon be gone. No wonder a lady of fashion wept when she saw the word, ETERNITY. A child of time, who has no hope beyond this life, may well weep. But he who lives as seeing Him who is invisible, who looks at the things which are unseen and eternal, and who longs to be clothed upon with his house which is from heaven, would not live always. He seeks a heavenly country, and so cares little for this. He is a stranger and a pilgrim in the earth. To him Time is the vestibule to Eternity, the seed-time for the everlasting harvest. His

times are with God. Nothing can harm him. He is a follower of that which is good. But he who despises the riches of God's goodness, and will not count the long-suffering of God, salvation; who puts far off the evil day, and makes light of atoning blood and redeeming mercy, will perhaps leave the world, as one such did long ago, saying, "O Time! it is right thou shouldst strike thy murderer to the heart."

"Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen."





