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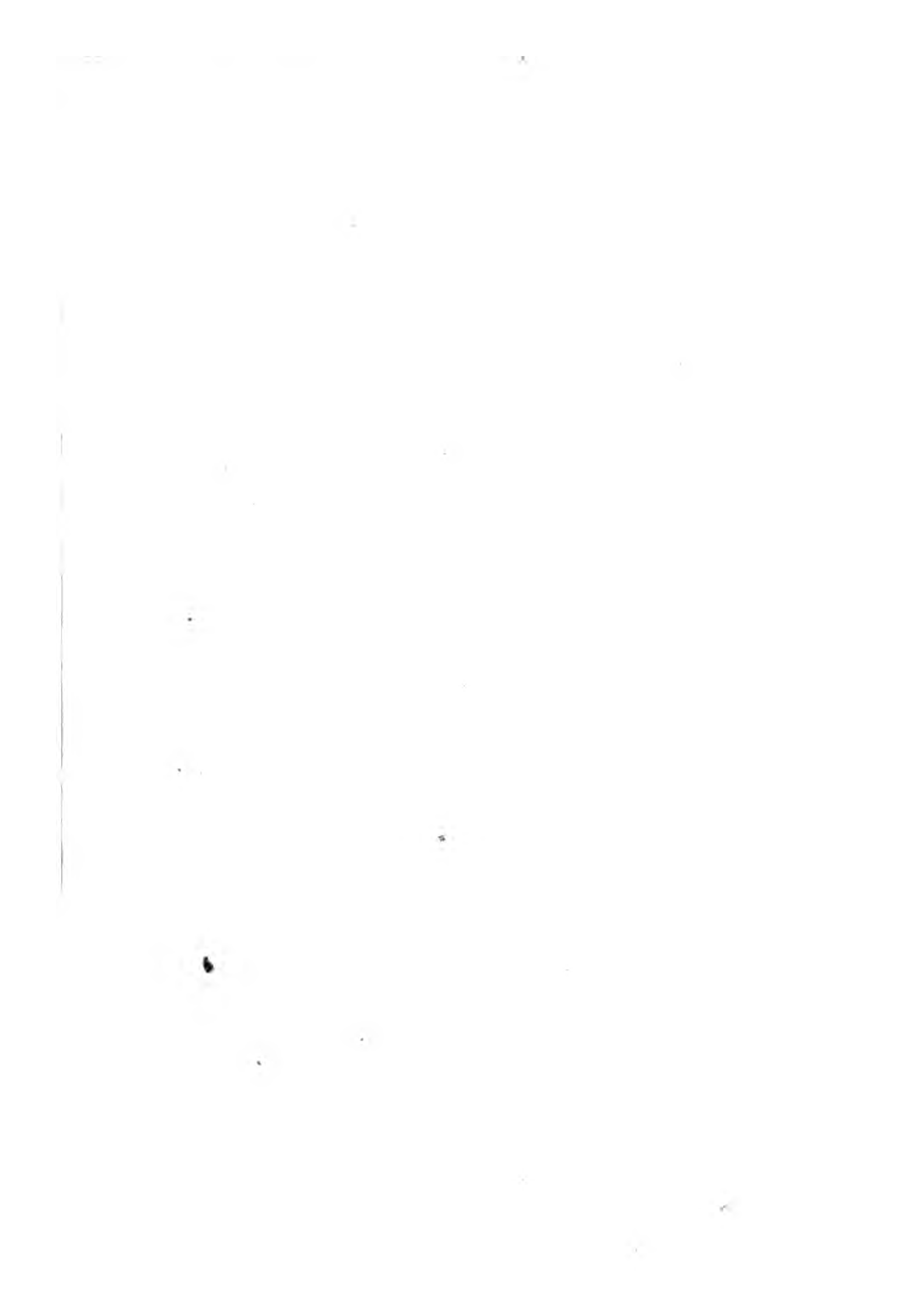


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THE HAPPY CHILDREN.

THE BEST THINGS

BY THE

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THE BEST THINGS.

I.

The Best Fountain.

‘There shall be a fountain opened—for sin and for uncleanness.’

ZECHARIAH XIII. 1.



IT is a beautiful thing to see a fountain playing! The clearness of the crystal water is beautiful. The different forms in which the water throws itself out are beautiful. The mist and spray which it makes are beautiful. The way in which the falling drops glitter and sparkle in the sunbeams is beautiful. The clear, liquid sounds, made by the streams thrown into the air, when they fall into the water beneath, are pleasant to the ear as sweetest music. Everybody loves to look at a fountain; and when, on a midsummer's day, we see one playing in some green, shady grotto, how pleasant it is to sit down on a soft, mossy bank, and listen to the music of the falling water, and feel the cool, refreshing influence which the fountain imparts to all the air about it.

The most remarkable fountains in the world are those which the Emperor of France has in the gardens of his palace at Versailles, near Paris. These fountains are very large. When in full play, they throw up several hundred

jets, or streams of water, at once. They are thrown into a great variety of forms. It cost several thousands of pounds to make these fountains ; and every time they play they cost 10,000 francs, or about four hundred pounds. They only play, however, on particular occasions. And when they are in full play, they are said to form one of the most beautiful sights that can be imagined.

But the fountain spoken of in our text is the *best fountain*. There is no other fountain in the world that can be compared to this. Now I suppose some of you are ready to ask, What is meant by this fountain? It means the blood which Jesus shed when He hung upon the cross. It is in consequence of what Jesus then suffered—the blood He shed, and the death He died—that God pardons the sins of men, and saves their souls. That blood is here compared to a fountain. When the cruel nails were driven through His tender hands, and the sharp spear of the Roman soldier was thrust into His blessed side, and ‘forthwith came there out water and blood,’ then this ‘fountain was opened for sin and for uncleanness.’ *This* is the fountain which we are now to consider. There is none like it in all the world. It is the *best fountain*. There are *three* reasons why it is so.

In the first place, this is the best fountain, because it is **EASY TO GET AT.**

If you wanted to see the fountains at Versailles, you would have to go to France. You must cross the Channel and take a long journey by railway to Paris. When you arrive at Paris, you must ride fourteen miles to the town of Versailles. And when you get there, you find that the fountains only play on Sunday. You must break the Sabbath if you want to see them. And only a small part of them are allowed to play on ordinary Sabbaths. The whole of the great fountains are only made to play on some special holiday or grand occasion. So that when you

arrived at Versailles, after your long journey, you would have to wait for weeks or months, perhaps, before you would have an opportunity of seeing them.

And it is very much the case with all the earthly fountains that you may wish to go to. They are all, more or less, hard to get at. You must take some trouble to reach them. You must pack your trunk and leave your home and make a journey, in order to get to them.

But it is very different with this *best fountain* we are considering. This is very easy to get at. You have not to cross the ocean, or take a long journey by railway, or by stage, in order to reach it. It is not necessary to leave home at all to find it. It is a wonderful fountain, because it is not confined to any particular place or country. You may find it everywhere. It is in this pulpit where I preach. It is in this chancel from which I am now speaking to you. It is in the aisle along which you walked to enter your pew. It is in the pew where you are sitting. It is in the street, through which you walk to your home. When your father or mother takes the Bible in the morning or evening, and you all gather round to have family worship, this fountain is near you, in the parlour or sitting-room where you meet for that pleasant service. And when you go to your own room, and kneel down in that quiet corner, by that chair, or beside the bed, and lift up your heart in earnest prayer to God, and say, 'O Lord, pardon my sins, I pray thee, for Jesus' sake,' then the fountain is close by you as you kneel. You cannot see it with your bodily eye. You cannot feel it with your hand. You cannot hear the splash and sound of its going. Still it is there; it is everywhere. It is in the splendid dwellings of the rich, and in the humble abodes of the poor. The king may find it in his palace, or on his throne; and the beggar may find it in his garret or his cellar. The prisoner may find it in his locked and bolted cell, and the farmer may find

it on the hill-top or in the quiet vale, in the broad, open field, or in the shady grove. The sailor may find it as he lies quietly in his hammock or berth ; or as, amid the darkness of the night, and the howling of the tempest, he lifts his heart in prayer to God from the mast-head. Dr. Kane found this fountain, all unfrozen, amidst the icebergs of the North ; and Dr. Livingstone found it all undried, and flowing freely, as he travelled over the burning plains of Central Africa. There is no other fountain like it in this respect. It is the best fountain, because it is *easy to get at*.

In the second place, it is the best fountain, because it NEVER CHANGES.

Other fountains change very much. Sometimes they are in full play, and look very beautiful. At other times they are very feeble ; then, again, they do not play at all. And if you go out into the country, and look at the springs or fountains which God has made to flow out of valleys and hills, you will find that they often change very much. Sometimes the spring will be very full, and flow out with great power, at other times it will dry up, and fail entirely. Sometimes the water in it will be clear and wholesome ; at other times it will be muddy, and disagreeable, and unfit to drink. Sometimes the water in a particular fountain will have the power to cure a certain kind of disease ; and then again it will lose that power altogether.

We read in the New Testament of the pool of Bethesda, at Jerusalem, which at certain seasons of the year, after a particular movement of the waters, had the power of healing the person who first stepped into it. But as soon as one person had stepped in, a change came over the water, and it lost its power to heal anybody else till another of those wonderful movements was made in it.

How different it is with the best fountain ! This never changes. It is flowing all the time,—by night as well as

by day ; in summer and in winter it is still flowing. It has been flowing for hundreds of years ; and in all that time it has never once stopped. This fountain has always been full, and the stream which flows from it has always been the same. The apostles, Peter and John and Paul, came to this fountain to wash away their sins ; and it did wash them all away. This was 1800 years ago. And what the fountain did for them it will do for you. How many millions have washed in this fountain since the days of the apostles ! But time has not spoiled the fountain. Use has not injured it. It is just the same now that it was on the first day it was opened. It is the best fountain, because it *never changes*.

The third reason why it is the best fountain is, because of its WONDERFUL POWERS.

We hear about fountains or springs in different places, the water from which is said to have the power of curing people who are sick with different diseases, and of making them well. There are the Bedford Springs in the State of Pennsylvania. These are very useful to persons troubled with bilious and liver complaints.

Then there are the Saratoga Springs in New York, and the Red and White Sulphur Springs in Virginia, all in America. People who are suffering from dyspepsia, and similar diseases, go to Saratoga. The Red Sulphur Springs are useful to those afflicted with bronchitis and some kinds of heart disease ; and the White Sulphur Springs to those who have rheumatism and gout, and some kinds of nervous complaints.

But these are nothing in comparison with this *best fountain*. If you could get the good qualities of all the springs and fountains in the world together, and put them all in one, still it would not begin to compare with this fountain.

The best fountain is designed for the souls of men, not

for their bodies ; but, oh, the powers which it exerts on those who wash in it are very wonderful ! Let us see, now, what these wonderful powers are.

This fountain has a **WONDERFUL CLEANSING POWER.**

Suppose there was a great king, who lived in a large and splendid palace. And suppose this king should resolve to make a great feast, and invite his people to attend it. He fixes the time for the feast, and makes his preparations. But he makes a law that no persons shall enter the palace, or appear at the feast unless they are dressed in pure white, without a spot or stain of any kind. The people set out to the palace, all arrayed in beautiful white robes. They move on in a long procession. But, see now ! the pathway to the palace leads through a forest. In that forest lies hidden an enemy of the king, with a company of soldiers. As the procession is moving quietly on through the forest, these soldiers spring out upon the people. They tear their white robes into rags, drag them through the ditches, and trample them in the mire. The people finally escape from the soldiers, and arrive at the gate of the palace. But what a sorry sight they present ! Not one of them is fit to enter into the king's presence. What can they do ? Their clothes are all spoiled, and they have no others to put on.

Now, suppose the king should hear of what has taken place. And suppose that out of love and pity to those poor distressed people, he should cause a fountain to be opened near the gate of his palace. Suppose that this fountain had such wonderful power that when any of these people plunged into it, just as they were, it would mend every hole and rent in their clothes, so that nobody could tell they had ever been torn ; it would take away every spot and stain from them, and make them stronger, and whiter, and more beautiful than they were when new. Suppose the king should direct them all to wash in this

fountain, and that all who did wash therein were made fit to enter the palace and join in the feast. We might well say of such a fountain, that its *cleansing power* was wonderful.

Now, what we have been supposing of this fountain is really true of the *best fountain*. The king referred to represents God. The palace is heaven. The white robes necessary to enter mean the righteousness of Christ. The procession of people marching to the palace are the inhabitants of this world. The enemy of the king, with his soldiers in the wood, represents Satan with his evil spirits. The condition of the people when they arrive at the palace gate, with their garments all torn and soiled, represents the state of our souls by nature. We are all sinners; and it is because we are sinners that the Bible speaks of our souls as having nothing to cover them but garments of 'filthy rags.' We never can go into heaven with these on. At the same time we cannot of ourselves put off these 'filthy rags.' We cannot mend them, or clean them. Then what are we to do? Oh, listen to the text! 'There shall be a fountain opened—for sin and uncleanness.' Jesus shed His blood to open this fountain. And now He says to us all: 'Wash and be clean.' These are His words: 'Come now, and let us reason together; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow: though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.' Those who wash in this fountain are cleansed from all their sins. Their souls are clothed in white raiment; they are ready to enter God's palace in heaven.

This best fountain has a WONDERFUL HEALING POWER.

The Bible represents sin as a disease. When it would show us the condition of a sinner's soul, it compares it to a man, whose head is sick, whose heart is faint, and whose body is covered all over, from head to foot, with 'wounds and bruises and putrefying sores.' If our bodies were in

such a condition as this, we should want, above all things, to get something that would heal them. Whatever could really heal our suffering bodies and make them well again, we should prize beyond anything else in the world.

Suppose a fountain should be discovered which had the wonderful power of certainly healing all kinds of diseases. Suppose it could cure all kinds of wounds and sores ; could make the lame walk, and the blind see, and the deaf hear : suppose it could cure all sorts of fever and agues, consumption and rheumatism and gout ; aches and pains ; head-diseases and heart-diseases, croup and measles, and scarlet fever and small-pox, and every form of sickness that people are troubled with. What a wonderful fountain that would be ! How people would go from all the ends of the earth to wash in that fountain !

But there never was such a fountain for bodily diseases, and there never will be. Yet if there was such an one, it would only be doing for the bodies of men just what this *best fountain* is doing for their souls. The blood of Jesus forms such a fountain. Its healing power is wonderful. It cures every disease from which the souls of men suffer ; or by which they are made sick. It makes dead souls live. It makes blind souls see. It makes deaf souls hear. It makes lame souls walk. It makes weak souls strong. It makes wicked souls good.

And then, it heals the *sorrows*, as well as the diseases of the soul. This is *God's* fountain, and He is called in the Bible '*The Father of mercies, and God of all comfort.*' What a sweet and beautiful title for God this is ! In one of the precious promises in the Bible, God says to His people, — '*As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you.*' In old times people used to believe that there was a river called Lethe, which it was thought had the power of making those who washed in it, or drank of it, forget their sorrows. But that was all a fable. It

was not true. But this fountain is better than the water of Lethe.

It does not make people forget their sorrows ; but it helps them to bear those sorrows, and takes away the pain of them.

Some years since, a Christian gentleman, who was passing a Sabbath in a retired New England village, made the acquaintance of a poor orphan boy. Kind friends had provided him with a comfortable home, with comfortable food and clothing ; but all their kindness could not take away the sorrow which lay like lead on the poor boy's heart. He always looked sad. There was no lightness in his step. He seldom wore a smile, or joined in the sports of his schoolfellows. All his family were in the silent grave, and he was sad and sorrowful. The gentleman of whom I speak had heard of the boy's sad history, and he felt as if he would like to have a little conversation with him, and try to lead him to the best fountain for comfort under his sorrow. When the services of the church were over, and the congregation were going home, he saw the boy walking slowly by himself towards that part of the graveyard where his parents lay buried. He walked quietly towards him, and when he came up to him, he laid his hand upon his shoulder, and said, in a kind way—'You have no father, John ?'

'No, sir,' he replied.

'Nor mother ?'

'No, sir, nor brother, nor sister,'—and the tears began to flow down his cheeks.

'Did you ever think, John,' inquired the gentleman, 'how kind a father God is to the orphan, and what a friend Jesus is to the friendless ?' John knew something of these matters. His dear mother had often whispered them in his ear when he was a little child ; but he knew not what to say to this question. 'John,' said the stranger,

‘do you know any one who has more need than you have of God for a father, and Christ for a friend?’

‘No, sir,’ he replied, ‘I *do* need such a Friend.’

‘And have you never yet,’ I continued, says the gentleman, ‘asked God to make up for the loss of father and mother by giving you Himself?’

‘I have prayed to God every day,’ he answered; ‘my mother taught me to pray, but I fear I have never prayed aright.’

His voice trembled with emotion; he looked earnestly into the gentleman’s face, as if to say, What must I do? ‘I invited him to my room. He willingly accepted the invitation. In a few brief words I told him of God’s promises to every returning and penitent sinner. He listened to every word with deep attention: he was evidently anxious to be saved.’

‘Do you think, sir,’ he asked doubtfully, ‘that I can become a Christian now?’

‘No doubt of it,’ I replied, ‘for God says, “*Now* is the accepted time, *now* is the day of salvation.”’ I turned to the fifty-fifth chapter of Isaiah, and read those precious words—‘Ho! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. . . . Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.’

His eye kindled with hope, and with great earnestness he asked—

‘Do you think, sir, that God means that for *me*?’

‘He means it for you, John,’ I replied, ‘if you are “thirsty.” The invitation is addressed to every one who wants to be happy.’

At his request I offered to pray that God would show

him the path of life, would help him to drink of the *best fountain* and be happy. When I had concluded, we both remained on our knees, waiting for a blessing.

‘ You must pray for yourself, John,’ I said.

He burst into a flood of tears, and said—‘ I can’t pray, sir, I’m too great a sinner.’

‘ Then you are just the one whose prayer God will love to hear. Do you not remember the prayer of the publican ?’

He paused a moment, and then, with his voice choking with sobs, he cried—‘ God, be merciful to me, a sinner.’

Thus this good gentleman took John by the hand, and led him, in all the sorrows of his orphan state, to the best fountain. John drank of its waters, and felt how wonderful was their healing power. They healed his sorrow. They comforted his heart. From that hour his life was changed. He became peaceful and happy. Before he drank of this fountain, his mind was like a landscape on a dark and cloudy day. Afterwards it was like the same landscape with the bright sunshine beaming all over it.

It has a wonderful PRESERVING POWER.

Some time ago a ship came into this port. The owner kindly invited me to go down to the wharf and see her. She was a new vessel, being only about three years old. She had been to the East Indies, and it was necessary to make some repairs in her before she went to sea again. But when they came to examine some of the planks, they found the worms had got into them and had done a great deal of damage. They had eaten their way through the hard oak wood, making great holes through and through it in every direction, so that some of the planks, which had been put into the vessel, solid and good, only a short time before, looked then almost like a piece of honeycomb. If these worm-eaten pieces of timber had not been found out and removed, that noble ship might have sprung a leak :

or in some storm the planks might have given way, and the vessel, with all on board of her, might have been lost.

Now suppose there was a fountain or stream discovered, the waters of which had the power of preserving the timbers dipped in it from the ravages of these destructive worms. How valuable that fountain or stream would be ! Ship-carpenters would be anxious to put all their timbers and planks in it, before they used them in the vessels they were building. But there is no water which can exert such a preserving power over the timbers used in ship-building.

And now, perhaps you are ready to ask, what has this to do with the *best fountain* ? It has a good deal to do with it. Our hearts may well be compared to the timbers used in building ships. And they are exposed to a danger very similar to that which attends those timbers. They are liable to become worm-eaten. What ! you ask, are there worms that eat into the hearts of people while they are alive ? Yes, there are. I do not mean, of course, real worms ; but I mean there are things which do our hearts the same kind of harm that those worms do to the timbers of a ship. I refer to the sins, and evil tempers, which belong to us by nature. There is a great swarm of these that will breed and grow in our hearts if we are not very careful to guard against them. There is *pride*, for instance : that is a great ugly worm. It makes the heart swollen, hollow, and unsound. Then there is *selfishness* : this is another ugly worm, which eats into the very core of the heart. Then there is anger, and envy, and hatred, and malice, and covetousness, and drunkenness, and a great number of others, that will eat all through the heart, unless something is done to preserve it against their ravages. But what can we do ! Washing in this fountain is the only thing that can preserve our hearts from being eaten

up by these worms. It has a wonderful preserving power. I might make a slight alteration in a verse from one of Dr. Watts' beautiful hymns, and it will suit this part of our subject very well :—

‘Twill save us from a thousand snares,
To use this fountain young :
Grace will *preserve* our following years,
And make our virtues strong.’

If we wash in this fountain we shall be effectually protected against this danger. These worms all die in the hearts of those who make a right use of this fountain. And nothing else can kill them. But the heart of every person who neglects to use this fountain, will be eaten through and through by these worms. It will be just like a worm-eaten piece of timber from an old vessel.

It has a wonderful BEAUTIFYING POWER.

If anybody should discover a fountain which had the remarkable power, by simply washing in it, of making old people look young, and ugly people look beautiful, what a rush there would be to that fountain ! If that fountain really had the power of making nice glossy hair grow on the heads of bald people—of taking out all the wrinkles from those who are waxing old—-and of actually removing spots and freckles from the faces of people, and of making their complexions white, their cheeks rosy and beautiful—why, the owner of that fountain might soon become one of the richest men in the world !

But there never was, and there never will be, such a fountain for the *bodies* of men. Yet there *is* such a fountain for their souls. The best fountain, which Jesus opened, has just this power. It makes the souls of those who wash in it beautiful. The Bible tells us they are so beautiful that God loves to look at them. It takes away all the stains and ugliness which sin left on them, and

makes them so pure and holy that Jesus can present them before His Father in heaven, 'without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing.'

We have all read the interesting account of the transfiguration of our Saviour, in Matthew xvii. 1-8. With His raiment white as the snow, and His countenance shining as the sun, how very beautiful He must have looked! Yet that was only intended as a pattern of what His people are to be. When He shall appear in His glory, they shall be all 'like Him.' What a glorious sight it will be to see the thousands and millions of Christ's people all looking so bright and beautiful! And there will not be one amongst them who will not have been made so, by washing in this fountain.

And then, it has a wonderful SAVING POWER.

It is a great thing to *save*. To save a pin, or a penny, is worth while. To save an animal, a dog, a sheep, a horse, is important. To save a child, a man, or a woman from drowning or from burning, is something noble. But that is only saving the *body*. And what is the body worth compared to the *soul*? To 'save a soul from death,' oh! that is the greatest, the best, the noblest thing that ever can be done. Jesus has taught us that *one soul* is worth more than the whole world. But all the men on earth, and all the angels in heaven, never could save a single soul. It is the work of Jesus to do this. Nobody but He can do it. He is the only Being to whom a sinner can look up and say,—

'Jesus! *Saviour of my soul!*'

But who can tell *all* that is meant by—*saving the soul*? It is easy to say it means to save it from sin, and from everlasting misery. But this is not the definition of *saving the soul*. This is only like looking at the title-page of a book, without reading all its chapters. Salvation is a great

volume. It will take us all eternity to read it through. It will only be when we get to heaven, and have been there for thousands of years, that we shall begin to know what it means to save the soul. But this is just what this fountain does. It has a wonderful saving power. All who wash in this fountain shall be saved. They become the sheep of Christ, and Jesus says of His sheep—‘I give unto them eternal life, and *they shall never perish, neither shall* any pluck them out of my hand.’

Wonderful indeed are the powers of this fountain. It has a wonderful CLEANSING power : a wonderful HEALING power : a wonderful PRESERVING power : a wonderful BEAUTIFYING power : a wonderful SAVING power.

And thus we have seen *three* reasons why this is the best fountain. It is so, in the *first* place, because it is easy to get at ; *secondly*, because it never changes ; and, *thirdly*, because of its wonderful powers.

My dear young friends ! I entreat you all to come to this fountain. If you want to destroy that swarm of sins that are found nestling in all our hearts by nature, and are ready to eat all through them, like the worms in the ship’s timber, bring your hearts to Jesus, and ask Him to wash them in the fountain of His blood. That will cleanse and heal them ; that will preserve, and beautify, and save them. That will make our hearts pure and good. Jesus charges nothing. The fountain is free.

I will close my sermon by quoting that beautiful hymn of Cowper’s which we often sing :—

‘ There is a fountain fill’d with blood,
 Drawn from Immanuel’s veins :
 And sinners, plunged beneath that flood,
 Lose all their guilty stains.

‘ The dying thief rejoiced to see
 That fountain in his day ;
 And there may I, though vile as he,
 Wash all my sins away.

THE BEST THINGS.

- ' Dear dying Lamb ! Thy precious blood
Shall never lose its power
Till all the ransom'd Church of God
Be saved, to sin no more.
- ' E'er since by faith I saw the stream
Thy flowing wounds supply,
Redeeming love has been my theme,
And shall be till I die.
- ' Then, in a nobler, sweeter song,
I'll sing Thy power to save :
When this poor lisping, stammering tongue,
Lies silent in the grave.'

II.

The Best Workers.

‘My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.’

JOHN V. 17.



IF you had a rich uncle abroad, whom you had never seen, but who was all the time sending kind letters and nice presents to you, how naturally you would desire to know how he looked ! You would often be picturing him to yourself, and be trying to think just what sort of a person he was. And if one day you should receive a package from him, and find, on opening it, that it contained a likeness of your uncle, how glad you would be ! What pleasure you would take in looking at it ! How often you would take it up and gaze upon it ! Perhaps you would be very much surprised when you first saw it. You would find it very different, it may be, from what you expected. You would be ready to say, ‘Well, I declare, can this be my uncle John ? He doesn’t look at all like what I supposed he was. Why, I always thought he was a short, stout, round-faced, rosy-looking man, with his hair and whiskers a little grey, and his face full of smiles and sunshine. But, instead of this, I find he is tall and thin, without any whiskers at all, with black hair, and a calm, sober, quiet-looking countenance. But, never mind, he is a right good uncle anyhow, and I love him very much.’

My dear children, you have a relative and friend whom you have never seen. He is the nearest, the kindest friend

that can be. He is sending you presents and doing you good all the time. This friend, this relative, is God. There is not a day, or hour, or moment, in which you are not receiving blessings from Him. But 'no one hath seen God at any time.' God is a Spirit; He has no body, or form, and therefore we cannot see Him. We are forbidden to form any picture or image of Him. This is true of God the Father, but it is different with God the Son. He comes nearer to us. He has a body. He took our nature upon Him. We can think of Him as our Elder Brother. He is a real man. He is the noblest and most perfect pattern of a man.

But though God will not allow us to make any image or picture of Him in bodily form, because He has no form; yet He has given us, in the Bible, pictures, or likenesses of His mind or Spirit. There is a very beautiful one which He gave to Moses, and sent to us through him. You can read about it in Exodus xxxiii. 18-23, and xxxiv. 4-8. This likeness is just as fresh and beautiful and life-like now as it was when first taken, between three and four thousand years ago. Moses wanted to see God. God told him he could not see Him and live. And then God put him in the cleft of a rock, and in some wonderful way, not explained to us, He made His glory pass before him, and told him what kind of a Being He was. He said He was 'the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth; keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.' This is very beautiful.

But there are other pictures of God's character given to us in the Bible. What a sweet little miniature likeness of Him St. John gives us in three words, when he says (1 John iv. 8), 'God is love.' And here, in our text, Jesus gives us a likeness, or picture, of His Father and Himself, both together. He says, 'My Father worketh hitherto,

and I work.' Here God the Father and God the Son are set before us in the character of *Workers*. This is a different view of them from what we generally take. We are accustomed to think of God as a *Great King*, seated on a glorious throne. And this is correct ; He *is* such a King. He does sit on such a glorious throne ; and yet He is a *working* King. God the Father and God the Son are both workers. Their work is to preserve and govern all the worlds they have made, and all the people who live in them. These heavenly workers are—*the Best Workers*. There are several reasons why they are so.

In the *first* place, They are the Best Workers, because they work so EXTENSIVELY.

To do anything *extensively* is to do it on a large scale, or to a great extent. For example, if you had a flower-garden which covered twenty acres of ground, that would be an extensive garden. If you were a carpenter, or a printer, and giving work to four or five hundred men, then you would be carrying on that business extensively. If I could preach in all the churches of this city at the same time, then I should be preaching extensively. But I can only preach in *one* place at a time. And so it is with a carpenter, or a mason, or any other human worker.

But it is very different with these Heavenly Workers, of whom we are speaking. They can work in *all* places at the same time. They are working in heaven, directing the angels what to do, and making them happy. They are working here, in this world. They are working in this church. Each one of us is kept alive only by their power. And while working here, they are, at the same time, working in all our homes. In all the cities and towns and villages of the world ; in all the country places, in every house, in every room, they are working ; on the tops of the highest mountains, out on the broadest plains and prairies, in the middle of the thickest forests, at the bottom of the deepest,

darkest caves of earth, they are working. They are providing food and protection for beasts, and birds, and insects, and creeping things. When Jesus was on earth He referred to the fowls of the air, and said, 'Your Heavenly Father feedeth them.'

These Heavenly Workers are busy on the sea as well as on the land. It was their hand which dug out the great basin of the ocean. It was in 'the hollow of their hand' that all the waters poured into that basin were measured. And it is the same hand which controls every movement of those waters. Thousands of ships pass over the sea, every year, in safety. It is these Heavenly Workers who keep them safely. If it were not for their care and protection, no vessel that goes to sea would ever come home again.

Then there are myriads of fish in the sea. From the 'great leviathans,' the huge whales, made 'to take their pastime therein,' and which move about like floating islands, down to the little coral insects, and others, too small for the eye to see, all these engage the attention and employ the care of these Heavenly Workers. There is no corner of the ocean, however far down in its briny waters, and no particle of seaweed, floating on its heaving surface, however small it be, in which and about which they are not all the time engaged.

And then, look out upon the sky at night ; see all those twinkling stars and shining planets ! How bright, how beautiful they are ! And how numerous too ! They are numerous when we look at them with the naked eye, but when we look through the telescope thousands and millions more are seen. They are more than anybody can count. And we have every reason to suppose that they are all full of people. - In every one of those countless worlds these Heavenly Workers are present. They are protecting, keeping, providing for, and blessing, all the vast multitudes of

people who live in those worlds. They are the Best Workers, because they work *so extensively*.

Secondly, They are the Best Workers, because they work **SO QUIETLY**.

It is very pleasant to have things done quietly, but it is very hard for some people to do anything in this way. Many children get into a noisy habit of doing things. They seem as if they never could do anything quietly. They bluster about, all the time, like a March wind; and make as much noise as a young thunderbolt. From the moment they get up in the morning, till they go to bed at night, they keep up a continual clatter. On returning from school, you can tell in an instant when they enter the house,—there is such a slamming of doors, and calling of servants, and upsetting of chairs and tables, and such an unnecessary shouting and crying, that it is really a misery to be under the same roof with them. They are like alarm-clocks, going off all the time; they are like the silly hen, which, as soon as she has laid an egg goes cackling about, loud enough to be heard all over the barn-yard, and really makes more noise over a single egg than was made at first when the whole tribe of hens was created.

But God works very differently. Stillness and quietness attend Him in what He does. For example: it is early morning; the sun is about to rise—it is a great thing for the sun to rise—think how large a body it is! Its size is so great, that if it were empty it is large enough to hold more than a million of worlds like ours! When the sun rises, it is to give light to thousands and millions of people. And yet how softly, how quietly it rises! Did you ever *hear* the sun rise? No. Nobody ever heard it. There is nothing to hear; no shout, no noise, no sound of any kind attends it. He goes forth to his work of lighting up the abodes of men, but he goes with the silence and stillness of the grave. We make more noise in lighting a

match, or a rushlight, than God does when He makes the sun to rise and give light to all the world.

Look at another of God's great works. The sun has set. The evening shades are gathering round ; the *dew* is falling. In crystal drops it is forming on the grass, the flowers, the grain, and on the leaves of the giant trees. Their growth and beauty all depend upon the dew. If its gentle moisture were withheld, they would wither and die. But no noise attends the falling of the dew. If you go into the garden or the fields and listen ever so intently, you will not hear the slightest sound made by the dew as it falls. The most dead silence, the most unbroken quietness attends it.

Look again. There is a large field ; the farmer has sowed his wheat in it ; the grain has been harrowed into the soil. The rains have moistened it—the sun has warmed it. It is just beginning to grow. There are thousands and millions of grains of wheat in that field. Now, they are all at once bursting the husky shells that cover them, and thrusting out the little germs which are to spring up and grow, and bear the full ears of ripened grain. But did any one ever *hear* the grain growing? No. It is a great and important thing. The life of all who dwell upon the globe depends upon it ; but the large field of grain makes no noise when it grows. It grows in silence. This is the way in which these Heavenly Workers carry on most of their works. They are the Best Workers because they work *so quietly*.

In the *third* place, They are the Best Workers, because they work **SO POWERFULLY**.

The Bible tells us that 'all things are possible with God.' In another place it says : 'Whatsoever the Lord pleaseth, that doeth He, in heaven, in earth, in the sea, and in all deep places.' Oh, these Heavenly Workers are very powerful ! Look for a moment at some of the ser-

vants they employ. Who can resist them? There is the wind, for instance. This is one of God's servants. Sometimes it is soft and gentle as the breath of an infant; then again, it rises in its power, and rushes onward with all the fury of the tempest, or the hurricane; and now what can stand against it? Houses are thrown down, the largest trees are torn up by the roots, or their strongest trunk broken off as if they were pipe-stems.

The sea is another of God's servants. Sometimes it is as quiet as a sleeping child, and its wide surface is as bright and smooth as a looking-glass. Such is the sea in a time of calm; but oh, how different it is in the time of a storm! Then its waves rise and swell and roar with a voice like thunder. They chase each other like angry giants. They seem like mountains alive, and fighting one another; and how terrible their power is! The largest and strongest vessels that men can make, the huge ships of war, which look like floating castles, are tossed about like corks, or broken to pieces by their force, with as much ease as you or I could smash a glass vessel to atoms with a walking-cane.

The earthquake is another of God's servants, and it is a very strong one. It gives us a very alarming idea of the power of these Heavenly Workers. When it shakes the ground, everything trembles and falls before it. When it opens its mouth, houses, temples, villages, and cities are swallowed up by it. The united wisdom and power of all the people in the world could no more stop its progress than a mouse could roll back a falling mountain!

And there are a great many other servants of these Heavenly Workers, which show how great their power is: but I need only refer to the angels. These, we know, are all God's servants; they love to be employed for Him. Whatever He tells them to do, they fly in an instant to do it. They have no greater pleasure than to do His will;

and He has given them wonderful power. David says, they 'excel in strength.' We have one illustration of their strength, mentioned in the Bible, which is very interesting ; we are told (Isaiah xxxvii. 36) that Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, gathered together a great army, and went and besieged the city of Jerusalem. Hezekiah, the Jewish king, knew that it would be impossible for him to conquer this great army and drive it away, but he knew that the Lord his God was a powerful worker, and could do whatever He pleased. So he prayed to God to look in mercy on him and his people, and deliver them from the hand of their enemies. God sent the prophet Isaiah to the king to tell him that He had heard his prayer, and that He had determined to save them from the Assyrians ; but He did not tell them how He was going to do it. He might have raised a dreadful tempest, and destroyed them by lightning. He might have made the earthquake open wide its devouring jaws beneath the camp of the Assyrians, and swallowed them up in a moment ; or He might have sent the pestilence to destroy them ; but He did not choose to do it in this way. He sent an angel—a single one—to do it. But what is a single angel against a whole army of near two hundred thousand men ? He is enough to destroy them all, in an instant, if God tells him to do so. This angel came by night ; the whole army was asleep in their tents ; all was still and quiet among that sleeping host. The angel drew near—he blew no trumpet—he uttered no shout—he made no sound ; but,

'The angel of death spread his wings on the blast,
And breathed in the face of the foe as he passed ;
And the eyes of the sleepers waxed deadly and chill,
And their hearts but once heaved, and for ever stood still.'

It seems as if he did it with a single breath, just as easily as you or I would blow out the tiniest taper with a puff. This was done by *one* of the servants of these

Heavenly Workers. They have 'ten thousand times ten thousands, and thousands of thousands' of such servants. They are the Best Workers, because they work *so powerfully*.

In the *fourth* place, These Heavenly Workers are the Best Workers, because they work so CAREFULLY.

When God had finished the work of creating the world, he looked on all that He had made, and said it was 'very good.' When Jesus was on earth, the people who saw him working so many miracles of mercy, healing the sick, giving sight to the blind, and hearing to the deaf, making the lame walk, casting out devils, and raising the dead, cried out in astonishment, 'He hath done all things well!' And what was true of the miracles and cures which He wrought when on earth, is true of everything else that He does. Whatever God does is done as if He had nothing else to do, but just that single thing. Everything which He does is done in the very best way in which it is possible to do it; and so it has been from the very beginning. It takes us a long time to find out what is the best way of doing things. We have to try over and over again before we can tell this. Look at those splendid steamships which go across the ocean; how strongly they are built; how beautifully they are shaped; how much they carry, and how swiftly they sail! Everything about them is arranged in the best possible way. But then, it has taken people a long time to find out how to build such ships. Compare one of these modern ocean steamers with the largest and best vessels that were built at the time when our Saviour was on earth; how awkward, and clumsy, and inconvenient they were! How little they would carry! How slowly they would sail! Why, to have attempted to go across the ocean in one of them would have been like trying to cross the river on a plank, or in a washing-tub. It has taken men several thousand years to find out how to make one of our modern steamers.

And in the same way we may compare our steam-mills with the contrivance they used to have in old times, for every woman to grind her own meal by rubbing two stones together ; or the ancient way of threshing grain by turning the oxen upon it to tread it out with their feet,—compare this, I say, with a modern threshing-machine.

Why, a man would do as much work with one of these machines in half a day as a yoke of oxen would do in a week. But how many hundred years had to be spent in trying one thing after another, before these modern ways of building ships, and grinding and threshing grain were found out !

The works of man were not half as good in old times as they are now. But it is very different with the works of God. The sunshine which the people in old times used to have, was just as good as what we have now. And so it was with the air, and the rain, and the dew. So it was with the seasons ; our springs and summers, and autumns and winters, have not grown any better than they used to be. The first grass that grew on the earth was as green as any that has grown since. The first flowers that bloomed were as beautiful and as fragrant as any that have since been seen. And so it was with the trees, and the fruits, and everything that God made.

God is just as careful about the least things He has made as He is about the greatest. If we could compare an infant and an angel together, we should find that everything about the infant, even to its little finger, or its toe, was made and finished with as much care as the angel's head or limbs. And so we might compare a pebble and a planet, a grain of sand and a great globe, a humming-bird and an eagle, a mouse and a mammoth, and we should find that these Heavenly Workers had been just as careful in the least as in the greatest. The tiny moss-flower that springs out of the cleft of the rock, the down upon the

butterfly's wing, and the insect so small that it cannot be seen without a microscope, are all made with as much care as the wonderful hand of man, or the beautiful face of woman. Everything that God has made, whether on the top of the highest mountain, in the midst of the widest desert, or at the bottom of the lowest depth of the ocean, is just as perfect in its kind as the walls of heaven, or the wing of an angel, or the crown of a Christian. What a lesson this should teach us! These Heavenly Workers are the Best Workers, because they work *so carefully*.

There is only one other reason I would mention why they are the Best Workers, and that is, because they work **SO WISELY**.

It would fill a large volume if I should attempt to say all that might be said under this last head. The earth is full of God's wisdom; everything about us shows it. Look at our bodies; what wonderful wisdom was shown in making them just what they are! Suppose our hands had been put where the feet are, and the feet where the hands are, of what use would either of them have been to us? Suppose our arms had been made without the joint at the elbow, we never should have been able to lift a drink of water, or a morsel of food to our mouths, but should have been compelled to stoop down our heads when we wanted to eat or drink. And suppose the eyes put at the back of the head, and the nose on one side of it, how awkward and inconvenient it would have been! Then, every time we wanted to eat anything, we should have to carry it round to the back of the head for the eyes to see if it was clean, and then to the nose to find out if it was sweet, before we could venture to put it in our mouths. We should soon get tired of this. But now, the eyes and the nose are placed right over the mouth, like sentinels, to examine everything that enters there, and see that it is clean and wholesome. This shows the wisdom of God.

And then, when we look out of ourselves we see that wisdom just as clearly. We see it in the colour of the sky and the fields. Suppose the sky had been made white instead of blue, and the fields scarlet instead of green, how trying it would have been to the eye! It would then be very painful to look around when the sun was shining. But the beautiful blue of the sky is pleasing to the eye; and the rich green of the fields is really refreshing for it to rest upon. This shows us how wisely God works.

We see this wisdom in the way in which the sun rises and sets. It is done very gradually. God might have ordered it so that the sun should rise or set in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. Then in the morning the light would have burst upon us so suddenly, that we should have been blinded with its glare; and at evening we should have been plunged into total darkness in an instant, as when you blow out the candle in a room. This would be very inconvenient. Now we know when evening is coming on, and can prepare for it. If we are away from home when the sun is setting, we can hurry on and get there before night, because the twilight lingers around us long after the sun has gone down. But to be wrapt in instant darkness when our work was not quite done, or our journey not quite finished, would be always inconvenient, and often dangerous. But how wisely God has guarded against all these inconveniences and dangers!

We see this wisdom further illustrated in the way in which He provides for the preservation and protection of different animals. When winter comes, and snow covers the ground, most of our birds would perish from cold and want of food if they remained here. But at the close of the summer God teaches them to assemble together in large flocks and fly away to other places where the climate is warm, and there is plenty for them to eat. In these journeys they travel hundreds of miles, yet they never lose

their way ; they always know the right time for going and for returning. How wonderful this is !

Look at the ostrich. This is so stupid a bird, that when closely pressed it will hide its head under its wing, and then, because it cannot see its pursuers, foolishly think that they cannot see it. Yet even this silly bird is very wise in some things. It makes its nest in the sand, by simply scooping a hole large enough to contain a dozen or twenty eggs. These, when laid, are covered over with sand, and left for the sun to hatch them. But when the young ones are hatched, there will be no food fit for them to eat, till they can look round and help themselves. To provide for this, the old bird always leaves some six or eight eggs outside the nest, and when the young ostriches come out they break these, and live on them till they can set up for themselves.

In those parts of Africa where it is hot enough to hatch the eggs without the help of the parent bird, she leaves them without any attention. In other parts, where the nights are too cold to carry on the work of hatching, the ostrich always returns to her nest and sits on it through the night. And in other parts, which are colder still, she sits on her nest all the time, just like other birds. This is very remarkable.

What wonderful wisdom or cunning God has given to the fox, to assist him in making his escape when in danger. When dogs are pursuing the fox, he always tries to choose his path through marshy grounds, and across pools and rivulets, where the water will destroy the scent and make it difficult for the dogs to follow him. When he finds himself in sudden danger, without any prospect of escape, he will often pretend to be dead, and carry on the deception so well that it is never discovered till he has accomplished his object.

A clergyman in Scotland had a poultry-yard, in a part

of the country where, in consequence of the numerous foxes in the neighbourhood, it was very difficult to keep any poultry ; but he took especial pains to protect his feathered friends from sly Reynard's attacks. For years he never lost a single chicken by the foxes. But one morning there was company at the parsonage. The maid was sent to the hen-house for some eggs. The moment she opened the door a sad scene presented itself : every perch and nest-hold was covered with blood ; dead hens lay in heaps on the floor, and in the middle lay a large fox, stretched out at full length, and apparently as dead as any of the hens. The servant, of course, thought that the fox was really dead, and that he had killed himself with eating chickens. Full of wrath for the mischief he had wrought, she took him by the tail and swung him, with all her might, out upon a dirt-heap in the garden. The fox lighted safely on the heap, and then springing at once to his feet, made off for the neighbouring woods.

How wonderful the wisdom and skill which the beavers display in all their operations ! In the choice of situations which they make—in cutting down the timber required—in floating it down the stream—in the way in which they build their dams—in the manner of erecting their houses, and storing them with their winter's supply—they always proceed so wisely, that the most skilful mechanic or experienced engineer could suggest no improvement, considering the limited powers they have to employ. And the young beavers, who have never seen these things done before, and have never received a single lesson, know how to act just as well as the oldest.

The heron is a bird that lives by fishing. Its long legs and bill show how admirably it is adapted to carry on this business. But the fish on which it chiefly preys are very timid. The least shadow moving across the water frightens them. Ordinarily, therefore, the heron never goes a fish-

ing when the sun shines ; but when the sky is cloudy, and its body casts no shadow on the water, then it goes, and seldom without success. It is very singular that, when there has been a flood, the fish are caught in pools and holes in the fields, where they cannot get away, however frightened, then the heron will go forth without regard to sunshine or shadows. It seems to know that the poor fish have no power to escape then, shadow or no shadow. But how does the heron know anything about the difference in the position of the fish when in the stream, or in the pool ? All these things are very strange. They show the wonderful wisdom of God in the works of His hands.

There are many wonderful instances of the wisdom of these Heavenly Workers to be seen in the habits and histories of some of the insect tribes. I will only refer to one. In the early part of summer there is a large fly found on the shores of some of the lakes and shallow streams of America, which is commonly called the June fly.

These flies have a very curious natural history, which shows the wisdom of God in a very remarkable manner. They deposit their eggs in the shallow parts of the lake. The eggs sink to the bottom, and lie buried in the soft mud. There they remain till the next spring. Then, when the warm sun shines upon the water, the eggs are hatched. Out of each egg comes a little worm. This lives in the water till it grows to be about one inch long. Then it rises to the surface of the water. The change it has to undergo before it can become a fly, cannot take place in the water. It must reach the dry land to go through this change. But how is it to get ashore ? Why, God has furnished it with something on its body very much like the screw which a propeller steamer has to move it along. It is a sort of machine which is set in motion by the water which the worm swallows. By the help of this it goes skimming along, till it throws itself up on the shore, out

of the reach of the water. There it lies, as if asleep or dead. The sunbeams dry it. The skin or sack which covers the insect shrivels up. It cracks. It opens; and there is the fly ready to spread its wings and go buzzing about, to spend the short period of its life as God designed it to do. I never saw them go through this process myself; but a gentleman, who lives on the shores of Lake Erie, told me he had often wandered about the borders of the Lake, and watched these wonderful operations. How interesting it must be to see them! But, my dear children, we shall find similar wonders everywhere, if we only accustom ourselves to look for them; for all God's works are done in wisdom.

These Heavenly Workers are the Best Workers, because they work so extensively; so quietly; so powerfully; so carefully; and so wisely.

We may learn two things from this subject. In the first place, it teaches us that work is an honourable thing. Some people feel ashamed of letting it be known that they have to work for their living. This is very foolish. There is reason enough why we should be ashamed of being idle; but there is no reason in the world for anybody to be ashamed of work. The fact is, my dear children, we should never be ashamed of anything but sin. Work, honest work, no matter what it is, is an honourable thing. God works all the time. Oh, always remember, that it was the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, our glorious Saviour, 'the King of kings, and Lord of lords,' who said, 'My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.' This shows us that it is an honourable thing to work.

We may also learn from this subject how we should try to do our work. We should try to do it, as far as we can, in the same way in which God does His work. We have spoken of five things that mark God's way of working. We are not able to imitate all these. It would be folly

for us to try to work as extensively, or as powerfully, or as wisely, as God does. These three things about His way of working, we cannot imitate. But still there are two things in which we may try to work as He works. We should try to work *quietly* and *carefully*. It is very pleasant when young people get into the habit of doing things quietly. And it is a habit we should all try to form. It may help us to do this if we recollect how quietly God works. Think of the sun rising, or the dew falling, or the grain growing, and try as far as possible to do what you have to do in the same quiet, noiseless way.

And then do *carefully* as well as quietly whatever you have to do. It is an old saying, but a true one, that 'Whatever is worth doing, is worth doing *well*.' God does everything in this way; and so should we. The people who become distinguished in the world are generally those who start with the determination to do everything they have to do, in the very best way they can. Such persons are sure to succeed. A lawyer was once arguing a case in court. He was a very eminent lawyer, but when young he was very poor. The lawyer on the opposite side was a nobleman's son. He was very proud. He reproached the other lawyer with having once been very poor. 'Why, sir,' said he, 'I remember when you used to black my father's boots!' 'Well, what of that,' answered the other, 'didn't I black them well?' That was the secret of his success. *Careful workers are sure to succeed.* Then, whatever we do, let us do it in the best way we can. Let us be *quiet* workers, and *careful* workers, and then, by God's blessing, we shall be sure to be useful workers.

. III.

The Best Work.

‘Go work, to-day, in my vineyard.’

MATTHEW XXI. 28.

WHEN we read these words, we may regard them as God’s message to each one of us. It is a message about work. The world in which we live is like a great workshop. Everybody should be busy, for there is work enough for us all to do. We were made to work. Look at our arms, how strong they are ! Look at our fingers, how nimble they are ! Look at our feet, how quickly they carry us about ! Look at our eyes, how nicely they are placed to keep a bright look-out over everything we try to do ! And then, look at the mind which God has put in us, that we may think about our work, and try to do it in the very best way. All these things show that we were made to work. Jesus told us, when on earth, that He is working all the time. And the creatures He has made all work in some way or other. I remember reading a fable, once, of a little boy who ran away from school, one day, to play truant. But he had nobody to play with him, and finding that there was not much fun in playing by himself, he tried to get a playmate. There were no children near, however, but he thought even a dumb animal would be better than nothing. So he looked around, and saw a little squirrel sitting on the branch of a tree ; and he called to him, and said—‘ Little bunny, won’t you come and play with me ? ’ But the

squirrel said, 'No, I can't; I've got to crack nuts for my little young ones, and lay up a stock for our use in winter.' Then he saw a cow quietly feeding in a meadow, and he said—'Oh, cow, won't you come and play with me?' And the cow mooed out aloud—'No, no, my little man; I must be busy eating grass, or else when Betty comes to-night with her empty pail, I shall have no milk to give her.' Then he saw a bird flying away with a piece of horse-hair in its mouth, and he said—'Little bird, won't you come and play with me?' But the bird said—'No; we are very busy trying to get our nest finished; I can't stop to play.' Then he heard a bee go buzzing past him, and he cried after it—'Halloo, little bee, I want some one to play with; can't you come and help me?' And the bee said—'No, indeed, that I can't. My hive is not yet half full of honey. I must hurry home with what I've got, and then go and gather more.' At last he saw 'old dog Tray' go trotting by, and he said—'You are a nice fellow, old Tray; come, and let's have some play together.' But Tray wagged his tail, and said, as he trotted on, without stopping a minute—'Oh, I should like very well to stop and have a romp with you, but, you see, my master is away from home, and he has left me to guard the house, and I must hurry on to my post.' And then the little boy said to himself: 'Well, if everything is so busy, it's a shame for me to be idle.' And then he hurried back to school, and went to work to learn his lessons as hard as he could.

But if you look at the text again, you will find that it not only speaks about work, but it tells us where this work is to be done. 'Go work . . . in *my vineyard*.' God's vineyard is His Church. This Church means the whole company of God's faithful people all over the earth. Baptism is the door of outward entrance into this Church. Every baptized person may be regarded as, in some sense, a member of this Church. And the work we have to do

in this vineyard is, to correct everything that is wrong in our own hearts and lives, and try to get others to do the same. When we read and study God's Word, that we may know His will and do it; or when we are helping others to do the same, then we are doing vineyard work. In the preparations made for this anniversary, and in the offerings we are now about to lay on God's altar, we are doing vineyard work. This is the best work we can engage in. It is so for five reasons:—

Vineyard work is the best work—in the first place, because of its EASE.

Now, if you want to know whether any particular thing is hard or easy, you must look at two things about it; these are, the *motive* and the *power* you have for doing it. You must look at the motive. The motive for doing a thing means the reason, or feeling, that leads us to do it. If you were a slave, and had some one standing over you all the time, with a whip in his hand, ready to lash you at the very moment you didn't do just what he wanted you to do, then everything you did would be hard, because your only motive for doing it would be fear—the fear of the whip. But if you are a loving, obedient child, and you have a dear mother who is very ill, nothing that you can be asked to do for her will seem hard. And the reason is, that you love your mother so much. Love is the motive, or feeling, that leads you to do for her whatever is required of you—and everything is easy that we do for love.

We read in the Bible that before Jacob married Rachel, his wife, he agreed to work for her father for seven years, if he would give his consent to their marriage. It was real hard work that he had to do, but it seemed very light and easy to Jacob. Seven years are a long time. But they seemed very short to Jacob, only 'like a few days.' It was the motive which made it so. He was working for

love, and love makes everything easy. And if we are working in God's vineyard, as He would have us work, we shall be working for love. St. Paul was an earnest vineyard worker, and when speaking of the motive which led him to work, he said—'the love of Christ constraineth us.' If we are real Christians we shall love Jesus more than any one else in the world; and our love for Him will be the motive that will lead us to work in His vineyard, and this motive will make the work easy.

But then, we must look at the *power* or *strength* we have, to do anything, before we can tell whether it will be hard or easy. You may love your parents very much, but if they give you a bar of iron as thick as your wrist, and ask you to break it across your knee, you can't do it. Why not? Because you have no power to do it. Anything is easy if you have a good motive, and sufficient power to do it. Suppose I should tie your hands together with a single piece of thread; you could break it in a minute. You have power to do that. It would be very easy. But suppose I should tie your hands together with a piece of cord as thick as your little finger. You might wriggle and twist about all the day, and never get them loose. It would not be easy to do that—and why? Because you have no power or strength to do it.

If you should load a large waggon with wood or coal, and attach a team of dogs to it, could they pull it? No. Why not? Because they have no power. But put a team of four or six stout horses to it: could they pull it? Yes, with ease—because they have power to do it. And now, suppose you should take the horses from the waggon, and fasten them to a long train of heavily loaded railway trucks; could they move it? Not an inch. They have no power. But attach a large locomotive to it. Kindle the fire. Get up the steam. Start it. Hark! there's a snort—and a grunt—and a puff—puff—puff—and away it goes—just

as easily as you or I can snap our fingers. It is easy for the locomotive to draw the heavy train, because it has power or strength enough to do it. And this is what makes vineyard work easy. There is a good motive and plenty of power to do it. Jesus has promised to help us. He has said—‘I will help thee.’ He will put His grace and spirit in our hearts, and this will make everything easy. Jesus said—‘My yoke is easy, and my burden light.’ When St. Paul was on earth, he said—‘I can do all things through Christ strengthening me.’ This is the right way to do vineyard work. We must pray for Jesus to help us. There is a right way and a wrong way to do vineyard work, just as there is for everything else. The right way is easy : the wrong way is hard. Why, if you even try to plane a piece of board, or stroke the back of a kitten the wrong way, you will find it hard and disagreeable. But do it the right way, and it will be smooth and pleasant. And it is the same with vineyard work we do for God. Do it in the right way, and then you will have a good motive and plenty of power. This will make it easy. And because of its ease, we may say that vineyard work is the Best Work.

It is so, in the second place, because of its *VARIETY*.

In a vineyard there are a great many kinds of work to be done. The soil must be dug up, and raked, and smoothed. The vines must be planted, and transplanted. The straggling branches must be trained in the right direction, and tied to the posts which support them. The dead and useless branches must be cut off, and taken away. The weeds must be pulled up, and the stones gathered out. When the soil gets hard, it must be loosened. When it is dry, it must be watered. And all these different employments afford a great variety of work, which must be done if the vineyard is to be made fruitful.

And just so it is in God’s vineyard. There is a great

variety of work to be done here. There is work for angels, and work for men. All kinds of people may find something to do. The ministers of the gospel are doing vineyard work when they stand in their places and preach the unsearchable riches of Christ. The missionaries of the cross are doing vineyard work, when they go to heathen lands, and tell the benighted people there the wondrous story of the Saviour's love. Sunday-school teachers are doing vineyard work when they sit down with their classes to try to explain to them the wonderful things that are written in God's blessed Word. Sunday-school children and others are doing vineyard work, when by labour and self-denial they earn or save money, and make an offering to God, as we are doing to-day, in order to feed the hungry, and clothe the naked, and relieve the distressed, and to send the gospel to those 'who are sitting in darkness and the shadow of death.' Tract-distributors are doing vineyard work, when they scatter the seed of God's truth along the highways, or among the lanes and alleys of a crowded city. Visitors to the sick and poor are doing vineyard work, when, out of love to Jesus, they 'visit the fatherless and widows in their distress,' ministering to their wants, and speaking words of kindness and comfort to them. Each one of our own hearts is like a bed in this vineyard: and when we try to have our hearts cleansed from sin, through the blood of Jesus; when we are watching and striving against bad tempers, and cross, ugly dispositions; when we pray for grace to overcome these, and try to be kind and gentle to all about us, and to show obedience and reverence to our parents—*then* we are doing vineyard work. Surely there is plenty of work here. There is work of every variety. The kings, and governors, and rulers of the earth, may all find vineyard work to do. And all the people who are under them may likewise find employment here. Parents and children, young and old, rich and poor, learned

and unlearned, may all find something to do in God's vineyard. If we only have the *will*, we shall soon find the *way* for doing something.

'Uncle John,' said a little girl, about four or five years old, to her uncle,—a tall man, full six feet high, when he rose up to go away—'Uncle John, do let me help you on with your coat.' 'You are not big enough to do that yet, my dear child,' said her uncle. 'Well, then,' said little Mary, 'do let me fetch your hat and cane.' Mary was resolved to do something for her uncle ; and if she couldn't do one thing, she was quite ready to do another. And if we all had the same desire to work in God's vineyard that little Mary had to help her uncle, we should all find something to do. There is no other work in the world that can give employment to everybody ; but the work of God's vineyard can. People sometimes think, that because they only have a little time, or a little money, or a little strength, it is not worth while for them to try to do any vineyard work. But this is a mistake. There is great power in little things, and there is no place where the power of little things can be employed so well as in God's vineyard. What a little thing a threepenny piece is ! Now, let me tell you about two threepenny pieces. One was *not* employed in vineyard work, and it did a great deal of harm. The other *was* so employed, and it did a great deal of good.

There was once a threepenny piece lying upon the floor ; an idle boy picked it up, and though he knew it was not his, he put it in his pocket, and thought it was nice fun to spend it for his own gratification. Not long after this, he stole a shilling ; and so went on till he became a confirmed thief. At last in one of his robberies, he committed murder, and was condemned to death. In his confession, he said that he looked back to his first theft of the threepenny piece as the beginning of his downward course, and the cause of all his misery and crime.

There was another threepenny piece : this was not stolen ; it was given to a little boy, who resolved to employ it in vineyard work. He bought some tracts with it, and had them put into a box of things that were to be sent to a missionary in India. The son of a great chief in the interior of India, was stopping at the house of the missionary. The wife of the missionary taught the youth to read, and gave him one of the little boy's tracts. The reading of that tract made the young chief a Christian. When he went back to his mountain home, he took that tract, and many others, with him. He scattered them among the people of his native place. They were read by multitudes, and in one year from that time fifteen hundred people in that neighbourhood had given up the worship of idols, and were inquiring about the religion of Jesus. And if a little boy with a single threepenny piece could do so much good, surely nobody can be too young, or too poor, to work in God's vineyard. It is the Best Work, because of its *variety*.

It is so, in the third place, because of its USE.

Sometimes people engage in works that cost a great deal of money, and occupy a great length of time, and yet when finished they are of no sort of use to anybody. You have all heard about the Pyramids of Egypt. These are great works. They were built by some of the kings of Egypt, hundreds of years ago. It must have taken a long time to build them. I suppose that millions of pounds and hundreds of valuable lives were spent in building them. The largest of them covers an enormous space of ground. It is built of solid stone. The top of it is more than twice as high as the steeple of this church. And yet, after all the time, and money, and labour spent in building them, the Pyramids never were of the least use to any one.

But it is very different with work done in God's vine-

yard. This is always of great use. Look at that faithful vineyard worker, John Williams, the Martyr Missionary of Erromanga ! How great was the usefulness of his labours ! He began to work among the beautiful islands of the Pacific ocean. ' Darkness then covered these islands, and gross darkness the people.' They were full of cruelty and bloodshed. But before his death, for two thousand miles around from where he first began his labours, nearly all the islands had received the gospel. In one of his missionary voyages he left two native teachers on a certain island. The inhabitants of that island were all degraded heathen, and savages of the fiercest kind. Their only employment was war. Their highest delight was the cannibal feasts, in which they eagerly devoured the roasted bodies of their slaughtered captives. In eighteen months Mr. Williams returned to that island ; and oh, what a change had taken place ! The idols had been broken to pieces. The temples in which they were worshipped had been thrown down ! The people had beaten their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks. They learned war no more. They held no more cannibal feasts. But instead of these things, schools had been formed. A church had been built, and the people were learning to cultivate the ground, to practise industry, and live in peace.

At a missionary meeting held by Mr. Williams at one of those islands, a chief got up to make a speech. Hear what he said :—

' Praise to God well becomes us. We were dwelling formerly in a dark house, among centipedes, and lizards, and spiders, and rats ; nor did we know what loathsome things were around us. But the lamp of light—the Word of God—has been brought, and now we behold with dismay and disgust those abominable things. But stop ! some are killing each other this very day, while we are rejoicing ; some are destroying their children, while we

are saving ours ; some are burning themselves in the fire, while we are bathing in the cool waters of the gospel !'

There we see how useful this vineyard work is. But another chief is making a speech in one of their missionary meetings. Hear what he says :—

' Formerly there were two captivities among us ; one was a captivity to our gods, the other to the servants of our king. What the former of these was we all know. I know the very cave in which one person now at this meeting hid himself several times, when he was sought after to be offered up as a sacrifice to the gods. The other captivity was to the servants of our chiefs. These would enter our houses and take whatever they wanted. The master of the house would sit, like a poor captive, without daring to speak, while they would seize his rolls of cloth, kill the fattest of his pigs, pluck the best of his bread-fruit, and take the very posts of his house for firewood with which to cook them. But now, through the gospel of Jesus, all these customs are done away. We do not now hide our pigs under our beds, nor use our rolls of cloth for pillows, to secure them. Our pigs may now run where they please, and our property may hang in our houses, and no one touches it.'

Here, again, we see the use of work done in God's vineyard.

But see what good this work did for one man ; and there are thousands for whom it has done the same. There was an old chief in the island of Raiatea, whose name was Me. He had been a great warrior. He had fought many battles, and had often feasted on the flesh of his enemies. In the last battle he fought, before the arrival of Mr. Williams, he received a wound which left him totally blind. When the gospel was preached on his native island, the old blind chief was one of the first who felt its power and became a Christian. Then he was very

earnest to hear and learn all he could about the Bible. He was always in his place at church, and at the Sunday-school, that he might hear the Scriptures read and explained. And, by persevering diligence, in this way he managed to store his mind with many of the precious promises of God's Word. He lived a consistent, happy, Christian life for several years. On returning from one of his voyages, Mr. Williams missed old Me from church, and hearing that he was ill, he went to see him. On entering the blind man's hut, the missionary said, 'Me, I am sorry to find you so ill.'

The sick man exclaimed, 'Is that you? Do I really hear your voice again before I die? Now I shall die happy!'

Mr. Williams told him that he had not long to live, and asked him how he felt at the thought of dying. Mark his reply:—

'I have been in great trouble this morning, but I am happy now. I thought I saw an immense mountain with steep sides. I tried to climb it, but when I had got up some distance I lost my hold, and fell to the bottom. Wearied with toil, and sad with disappointment, I went to a distance and sat down to weep; but while I was weeping I saw a drop of blood fall on that mountain, and in a moment it vanished away.'

Here he paused. Mr. Williams asked him what he meant by this. 'That mountain,' said he, 'was my sins. The drop which fell upon it was one drop of the precious blood of Christ, by which the mountain of my guilt has been melted away.'

How clear! How simple! How true! How beautiful! The missionary often visited the old chief, and always found him cheerful and happy; longing to depart and be with Christ.

During one of these visits, Mr. Williams was sitting by

his bed-side ; the sick man had been repeating many sweet passages of Scripture. At last he exclaimed with energy : 'O death, where is thy sting ?' Then his voice faltered, his eyes became fixed, his hands dropped, and his spirit departed to be with that Saviour, one drop of whose blood had melted away the mountain of his guilt.

Thus died poor old Me, the blind warrior of Raiatea. It was vineyard work which carried the gospel to him. Was not that work useful ?

But some of you may say, 'Ah, yes, all this is the work of an ordained missionary far off among the heathen ; but what is the use of vineyard work here, at home, among ourselves ?' Now, this is just the point I want to come to. I am preaching to *you*, my dear children, and I want to speak of vineyard work that you may do. Well, then, the exercise of gentleness and forbearance between brothers and sisters is vineyard work, and there is great use in this.

There was once a man, whom I shall call Peter Peevish. That was not his real name, but the story is a true one. Peter was one of the most cross, ill-natured men that ever lived.

It was misery to be near him. He was all the time grumbling and snarling, and finding fault with everything about him. Nothing seemed to please him. He was unhappy himself, and he made every one about him unhappy too. There was no peace nor comfort in his home. Nothing was heard there but angry words and bitter speeches. His wife and children all seemed to partake of his peevishness ; and such a thing as a pleasant look, or a kind, gentle word, was unknown among them.

One day Peter was going home more peevish, if possible, than usual, owing to some disappointment that he had met with. But on his way he happened to meet a bright, sunshiny little girl, whose mild blue eyes and loving face

formed such a picture of out-speaking kindness as he had seldom seen. An incident occurred in connexion with this little girl, which led to a complete change in Peter's mind, and gave rise to an entirely new set of feelings in his unhappy breast. The little girl and her brother, somewhat older than herself, were playing with a small carriage, which belonged to the boy. In suddenly turning near a stone step, the child accidentally struck the carriage against the corner of the step, and broke it into atoms. In a sudden burst of anger the boy came up and struck his sister a severe blow in the face with his clenched hand, and stamped his feet on the ground in a great rage. But instead of hitting him back again, or calling him hard names, after a cry of pain which she could not help, the noble girl laid her head gently on her brother's arm, and looking sorrowfully into his flushed face, said softly, 'Oh, brother Tom, I didn't think you would do that.' In a moment, as if stung by a sharp arrow, the boy shrunk back, and hung down his head in shame at what he had done. Then he threw his arms round the little girl's neck, and burst into tears, as he said—'Forgive me, my dear sister, and I'll never do so again.'

Peter looked on in amazement while this took place. He knew not what to make of it. It was something quite new to him. He felt thoroughly ashamed of his own peevish, wicked temper. He saw how wrong it was to give way to such a temper. He prayed for help to overcome it, and by the grace of God he became an entirely different man. Now it was vineyard work which that little girl performed, when she exercised gentleness and forbearance towards her offending brother, and you see how useful that work was.

To show kindness to the distressed and afflicted is vineyard work, and there is great use in this.

A poor woman was sitting on the steps of a dark prison,

weeping bitterly over the sentence which had just been pronounced upon her ruined son.

‘What aileth thee, my friend?’ said a gentleman, stopping before her, and taking her hand kindly in his.

‘My heart is broken, sir!’ she replied.

‘Can I do anything for you?’ he asked.

‘No, sir, nothing,’ was her sad response.

‘Well, God can help you, my friend, and I will go home and ask Him to do it.’

It was a very little thing that he did; it neither clothed nor fed the poor woman; but those few kind words, gently spoken, fell like healing balm on the wounded spirit of that sorrowing woman. She arose strengthened, and went to her lonely home. And when she knelt in prayer to pour out her grief to Him ‘who careth for us,’ she felt that a brother had been there before her. Her prayers were answered—her spirit was calmed.

That gentleman was doing vineyard work when he spoke those words of kindness to that distressed and afflicted woman, and it was a useful work.

Self-denial for the good of others is vineyard work, and there is great use in this.

Little Johnny had a long Sunday-school lesson to learn, but he tried hard, and said it without a single mistake. So his father gave him a threepenny piece. A very happy boy was he when he ran down the street, to the toy-shop, to buy a nice top which he had longed to have for a good while.

He had not gone far when he saw a boy with a large basket of oranges on his arm, standing at the door of a small house. Johnny stopped to look; he did not mean to buy any, for he thought a red top was better than any orange that ever grew. A little cripple sat in the door of the house, looking longingly on the golden fruit. ‘O dear! I wish I had a penny to buy one,’ he said, ‘they

look so *nice*.' But the poor cripple had no money, and the orange-seller walked on. Johnny walked slowly after him. 'I'll buy that lame child an orange,' he said to himself; 'no, I won't though; for if I do I can't get that top. O dear! I wish I had four pence instead of three, then I would get him one; he can't play as I can.' Thus he went on thinking to himself; but soon he started off on a run after the boy with the oranges. 'Stop, stop!' cried Johnny, 'I want to buy three oranges;' and he held out his piece of money. The boy gave him the fruit and went on. Johnny hurried back to where the lame boy sat, with his head resting on his hands. He put the oranges in the cripple's lap, saying, 'Here they are, don't cry;' and ran home before the poor boy had time to thank him.

'Where is your top, Johnny?' asked his mother, when he got home. Then he told her how he had spent his money. 'God bless you, my dear boy,' said his mother, laying her hand on his curly head; 'and may He teach you, more and more, the blessed lesson of denying yourself, so that you may help them that need.' Johnny was far happier, in having pleased the poor helpless cripple, than if he had bought the prettiest top that ever was made. In doing so, he was denying himself for the good of others. This is real vineyard work, and there is great use in it. It is the best work, because of its use.

It is the best work, in the fourth place, because of its HONOUR.

Two things connected with any work make it honourable—if it is done for a great master; and if there are great helpers to assist in doing it.

Now, the work of which we are speaking is done for a great master. God is the Master of the Vineyard in which this work is done. He *is* a great Master. It is the highest honour to work for him.

You all know that England is governed by Queen Victoria. She is the highest person in the country. If she engages a shoemaker to furnish shoes for herself and family, very soon that man will have a new and elegant sign painted. And if his name is John Smith, then you will see the royal arms put up over his shop door, and words like these :—‘By appointment—John Smith, Shoemaker to Her Majesty and the Royal Family.’ And the Queen’s milliner will do the same ; and so will her dressmaker, and her glove-maker ; and so will the person who furnishes her with knives and forks, or crockery-ware, or books and writing-paper, or groceries, or other goods. If you ever go through the streets of London, you will see in different places, some stores of every kind, the owners of which will have on their signs—‘Makers to Her Majesty.’ And the reason is, that it is thought the greatest honour to make or furnish anything for the Queen. But what is any earthly king or queen compared with the Lord our God ? Every kind of vineyard work that we do is work done for Him. Every faithful minister preaches for God. Every true Sunday-school teacher is a teacher for God. And whether we are labouring in this way, or are visiting the sick, or relieving the poor, or making offerings to send the gospel to the heathen, we are working for God. He is a Great Master, and it is the highest honour we can have to do any work for Him.

But then, great helpers, too, tend to make a work honourable. Peter the Great, the Emperor of Russia, wanted to introduce shipbuilding and other useful arts into his kingdom. So he disguised himself, and went to live a while in other countries to learn them himself. He actually hired himself out as a shipbuilder. He was unknown at first. But when the workmen found out who he was, they thought it was a great honour to have an emperor working with them. And so it was. But when

we are doing God's work, the *holy angels* are our helpers. The Bible tells us that these happy beings are 'all ministering spirits'—this means *servants* or *helpers*—'sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation.' We cannot see them when they come or go; but they are about us continually. I have no doubt there are angels present in this church this afternoon. Yes, and if the souls of the departed are permitted to come back to earth, I am sure the spirit of our dear friend and fellow-teacher, who was with us at our last anniversary, is also present on this occasion. Surely, my dear children, it is an honour to have such helpers as the angels. God is our Master. In doing vineyard work we are working for Him. This is an honour. The angels are our helpers. They are working with us. This is an honour. Vineyard work is the best work because of its honour.

It is so, lastly, because of its PROFIT.

People sometimes have to work hard, and get very poor pay. There is no profit in such work. But it is not so with the work done in God's vineyard. The Bible tells us that 'in keeping His commandments there is great reward.'

There is profit in the work itself. God's people love His work, and find great pleasure in it.

A missionary once went out to India. He left a comfortable home and wealthy friends. He had to work hard and endure many trials. Some of his friends at home thought that perhaps he was sorry for having gone, and would be glad to come back. So they wrote to know how he felt about it. Here is an extract from a letter which he wrote in reply :—

'Our work is hard. It taxes both body and mind. What our reward will be hereafter we know not. But one thing we do know. If we receive no other reward than what is given us here every day, there is no other work on

earth that pays so well. In all the pursuits of this world, even in my childhood hours, I never have found so much real pleasure as in preaching Christ, the way, the truth, and the life, to these perishing heathen. It is a work that perfectly satisfies the cravings of my soul; and as I pursue it I can cheerfully sing—

“ Go then, earthly fame and treasure,
Come disaster, scorn, and pain :
In Christ's service pain is pleasure,
With His favour loss is gain.”

There is profit following the work in this life.

No one ever loses anything by working for God. ‘ He that hath pity on the poor lendeth to the Lord, and that which he hath given will he pay him again.’ This is God's promise. It never was broken yet. It never will be broken.

A gentleman once bought a beautiful new piano, and had it sent home to his house. Some of his friends met in his parlour in the evening to try it. Various tunes were played upon it. Every one admired it for the beauty of its appearance and the richness of its tone.

‘ Yes,’ said the gentleman, ‘ but the best part of it is, that it only cost me two pounds.’

This drew forth looks of astonishment and exclamations of wonder.

‘ Let me tell you the story connected with this piano,’ said he.

‘ A few years ago I went to Chicago. I had been there but a few days when, in one of my morning walks, I encountered a girl some twelve years old. She was an intelligent, bright-eyed child, but her face wore such a sorrowful expression that I almost stopped to speak with her as she passed. The morning air was raw and chilly. The ground was wet from a slight fall of snow; and I noticed, as the wind blew her thin garments about her form, that

she shivered with the cold. As she went by she half turned, and I had gone but a little way when I heard quick footsteps behind me,—and stopping, the girl lifted her hand as if to place it on my arm ; but, drawing back, she said :—

‘ “ Please, sir, if you could give me a little money to buy bread ? ”

‘ “ Are you hungry ? ” I asked.

‘ “ Yes, sir—real hungry ; ” and her lip quivered.

‘ “ Doesn’t your father work and bring home bread ? ”

‘ “ Father is sick, ” she said, “ and mother sprained her arm ; and my brother, who used to help us, was drowned not long ago. ”

‘ Something in my heart and in her face told me that her story was true. I took her to a baker’s shop, bade her hold out her tattered apron, and filled it with loaves. Then putting a sovereign into the baker’s hand, I arranged with him that the poor family was to have bread every morning till the money was used up. Then I slipped another sovereign into the girl’s hand, and turned hastily away from her tear-filled eyes.

‘ Well, then, two pounds were gone, and I was by no means rich enough to spare it ; but I felt as if no doubt the Lord would make it up ; and at any rate it was cheap enough for the rare pleasure of giving help and comfort to God’s poor. I went back to my hotel just in time for breakfast. I was no sooner seated than I felt a hand laid on my elbow, and, looking up, there sat an old friend I had not met for fourteen years. When I last saw him, he was a young man just starting into life, with little means and few friends.

‘ “ I have not grown rich, ” he said, after the first surprise was over, “ but I am able to pay my debts. Do you remember one day, fourteen years ago, you lent me two pounds in my extremity, and told me never to pay it unless

I was able? I have often tried to find your address, but could not. Here is the money, and I am sorry that I cannot double it, for your kindness to me when in trouble."

'I was very much affected, for I had totally forgotten his obligation; but I could not refuse the just return. Truly, I thought, giving to the Lord does not impoverish, even in worldly means; and I said to myself, "I will see what this money will bring me. So I made a little investment with it in new land, and went on my way. Three weeks ago I had an offer of one hundred pounds for my wee bit of land: I accepted it; and as we had long been wanting a piano, I have bought this with the fruit of my two pounds, given to the poor.'"

'Did you ever see the poor girl again, papa?' asked the gentleman's little daughter.

'No, my dear: but I have heard of her through a German missionary. She is a good scholar, and teaches a school herself now, in Chicago. She has become a handsome and refined young woman, and is educating her only brother, younger than herself. I learned that my little gift put new life into the sinking heart of the poor sick father, and the nourishment procured with some of the money gave strength to his weak frame. The father obtained employment; the little brother found work to do in an office; and the little girl obtained the favourable notice of a celebrated pianist, who saw that she possessed musical gifts of high order, so that by his teaching she became able to support herself. Thus, you see, that money made a whole family happy, grateful, and useful, and bought me this beautiful instrument.'

This was vineyard work, with profit following it in this life.

And then there is profit following vineyard work in the life to come. There is a beautiful passage from the Bible, always used in our burial service, when we stand at the

graves of our departed friends : ‘ Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord ; yea, saith the Spirit, for they rest from their labours, and *their works do follow them.*’ But how do their works follow them ? In the profit resulting from them ; in the rewards they will receive from Jesus, at the time of His coming again. Those rewards will be great, glorious, everlasting.

My dear children, I want you all to be engaged in this blessed work. You need not wait till you grow older. You are all old enough to engage in this work. God wishes you to begin at once. He says—‘ Go work, *to-day*, in my vineyard.’ There is work for the youngest of you to do. Let us all try to act according to these simple lines, with which I will close this subject :—

‘ I may, if I have but a mind,
Do good in many ways ;
Plenty to do the young may find,
In these our busy days.
Sad would it be, though young and small,
If I were of no use at all.

‘ One gentle word that I may speak,
Or one kind, loving deed,
May, through a trifle poor and weak,
Prove like a tiny seed ;
And who can tell what good may spring
From such a very little thing !

‘ Then let me try, each day and hour,
To act upon this plan,—
What little good is in my power,
To do it while I can ;
If to be useful thus I try,
I may do better by and by.’

IV.

The Best Warfare.

‘Overcome evil with good.’—ROMANS XII. 21.

TO overcome means to conquer,—to get the victory over some person, or thing. Before a person can overcome another he must have a struggle, or fight, with him, as David had with Goliath. The way in which fighting has been done has differed very much in different ages.

In old times, before a soldier went out to fight, he used to have his body covered all over with armour. He would have a sort of coat, made out of brass or steel, for the upper part of his body. He would have plates of brass or steel, fitted together like the scales of a fish, for his lower limbs. He would have a helmet or cap, of iron or brass, for his head, and a shield to carry before him. Then he would arm himself with a sword and spear, and so he would go forth to battle.

But now, since fire-arms have been introduced, this old-fashioned armour is laid aside. It will not protect men from bullets and cannon-balls, and so it is of little use. Our soldiers, when they go out to battle, are armed with swords, muskets, rifles, and pistols.

But it is a very different kind of warfare from this that St. Paul is speaking of in our text. No sword or spear, no gun or club, or even a sling and stone, is needed here; our text tells us to ‘overcome evil *with good.*’ The good here spoken of means kindness, or goodness. In the verse

before the one of which we are speaking, we read, 'If thine enemy hunger, feed him ; if he thirst, give him drink : for in so doing thou shalt *heap coals of fire on his head.*' This refers to the way in which hard metals are melted. They are put in what is called a crucible,—that is, a vessel made on purpose to bear the greatest amount of heat. This vessel is set upon charcoal, and charcoal is heaped up all around it, and over the top of it. The coal is then set on fire, a very great heat is raised, and the hard metal in the crucible is melted down into a liquid form, and the artist can do anything he pleases with it.

Now this is the way in which God would have us subdue our enemies. By surrounding them with acts of kindness, he would have us soften them down, just as the metal melts in the crucible, under the heat of the charcoal fire ; and this is the meaning of the words, 'overcome evil with good.' This is the *Best Warfare*. It is so for five reasons.

In the first place, to 'overcome evil with good' is THE CHEAPEST WARFARE.

War is one of the dearest things that men have to do with. It costs the United States Government *thirty millions* of dollars, every year, for the army and navy, to keep them ready to fight by land or by sea.

Some years since that Government found it necessary to drive a few Indians out of Florida. A small army was sent there to do it ; but before they got through, it cost *forty millions* of dollars.

When England was engaged in fighting with Napoleon Bonaparte, it cost that country *two hundred thousand pounds every day*. It costs the nations of Europe, to keep up their preparations for war, *two hundred millions of pounds* every year. We can form no idea how many a thousand millions of pounds are. But we know it is a frightful sum to pay, just for the sake of killing men.

Why, with a very small part of that money we could clothe and feed all the poor people in the world, and take care of all the sick, and teach all the ignorant, and build churches, and send missionaries wherever they were needed, and give a copy of the Bible to every heathen.

From all this we see what a costly thing war is. But, to 'overcome evil with good' is a very cheap warfare. It is not necessary to buy any guns, or swords, in order to engage in it. No powder or shot is needed ; love and kindness are the only weapons used in this warfare,—and this is what makes it so very cheap. Kind words cost nothing ; and kind actions cost next to nothing. If the whole world should engage in this warfare, and try to overcome all evil with good, it would not cost as much as our government has to pay for the support of a single regiment of soldiers. Overcoming evil with good is the Best Warfare, because it is the cheapest.

In the second place, this is the Best Warfare, because it is THE PLEASANTEST.

The other warfares in which men engage are very unpleasant. Many things help to make them so. Let us just look for a moment at some of these.

The *toil* and *labour* of war make it unpleasant. Soldiers often have to make long and fatiguing journeys, with heavy burdens on their backs. This was the case in a remarkable manner with the English army, in putting down the recent rebellion in India. The poor soldiers had to march many miles a day, under a burning sun, and carrying their heavy muskets and knapsacks. Great numbers of them were so overcome by the heat of the sun, and the fatigue of their journey, that they dropped down dead, as they went toiling on their way.

But, perhaps, nothing ever occurred to show the unpleasantness of war, in this respect, so sadly as what we read about in the retreat of Napoleon's army from Moscow.

It took place in the midst of a Russian winter,—and winter there is much more severe than with us. The army lost all their baggage, and without shelter or food, the poor fellows, who had followed their Emperor on this expedition, were obliged to begin their long and dreary homeward march, with a powerful enemy hanging about them, and shooting them down as they went, by hundreds and thousands. And with frost and snow, and all the horrors of a Russian winter let loose upon them, they were frozen stiff, or killed by hunger and fatigue. The roads by which they passed were strewed thick with the dead bodies of miserable men, left unburied, to be food for the hungry wolves. Oh, how dreadful this is to think of! This shows, indeed, how unpleasant a thing war is.

But there is no toil, or labour, like this connected with the warfare of which we are speaking. Here, the enemy against whom we have to fight is 'Evil.' But where shall we find this enemy? We may find it in the ugly tempers and dispositions, either in our own hearts and lives, or the hearts and lives of those around us. We have no toilsome journey to undertake in order to find our enemy. That enemy is with us, or about us, at all times. In church, at home, by the wayside, at school, when playing, when working, wherever we go, whatever we do, the enemy is always at hand, and we may be carrying on this Best Warfare continually. It is the pleasantest warfare, because it is free from the toil and labour which generally attend all other warfare.

Another thing which renders ordinary warfare unpleasant is the DANGER which attends it.

War is a very dangerous employment. During the time of battle hundreds of cannons, and thousands of guns, are fired off all the time. Every moment the soldier is in danger of having his head taken off by a cannon-ball, or his heart pierced through with a bullet. Sometimes the

bullets fly like hail, and men are mowed down before them like grass beneath the scythe. This must be very unpleasant. How strange it is that men are willing to face all this danger, and oftentimes for the merest trifle.

But there is no such danger as this in the best warfare of which we are speaking. Those who engage in it are perfectly safe. Sometimes Satan, or wicked men, try to injure those who are seeking to overcome evil with good ; but God takes care of them, and will not suffer them to be hurt. This is the reason why St. Peter asks the question, 'Who is he that can harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good ?' The Bible represents God as keeping His people in the hollow of His hand, and guarding them as a man guards the apple of his eye. It was the knowledge of this which led David to say, 'The Lord is my light and my salvation : whom, then, shall I fear ? The Lord is the strength of my life ; of whom shall I be afraid ?' This Best Warfare is safe and free from danger, and this makes it so pleasant.

And, then, another thing which makes war unpleasant is, *the pain and suffering* which it inflicts.

If we were to walk out on a field of battle, after the fight is over, what horrible sights we should see ! There would be great heaps of the slain. Some, perhaps, had been killed in a moment, without much pain. Others had been shockingly wounded, and died in lingering agony. We should find mangled bodies, and arms, and legs, lying about in every direction. We should see poor wounded men, with broken limbs, all cut and gashed, sighing, and groaning, and crying for help. Hospitals would be filled from that battle-field, and hundreds would be crippled and lamed for life. This is one of the things which makes war so unpleasant.

But, in '*the Best Warfare,*' nothing of this kind takes place : no blood is shed here ; no bones are broken ; no

wives are made widows ; no children made orphans. This warfare heals wounds, but never inflicts them. It saves life, but never destroys it. There is no toil, no danger, no suffering, in overcoming evil with good. This makes it very pleasant. It is the *Best Warfare*, because it is the pleasantest.

But, it is so, in the third place, because it is the MOST EFFECTUAL.

Perhaps you remember the fable of the dispute which once arose between the wind and the sun, as to which of them was the more powerful. They argued the matter for a long time, without coming to a satisfactory conclusion. At last they resolved to decide the matter by trying which of them could first induce a traveller, going along the road, to part with his cloak. The wind tried first. He began to blow as hard as he could ; but the harder he blew the tighter the poor traveller wrapped his cloak around him. The wind blew till he was tired, and then gave up ; but still the traveller held on to his cloak.

Then came the sun's turn. He shone with all his might. As it grew warmer and warmer, the traveller held his cloak more loosely about him. At length it grew so hot that he was glad to throw it aside altogether. So the sun proved stronger than the wind.

Kindness will conquer when nothing else can.

' Children,' said a kind father to his little family, as he took a seat by the fireside, and gathered them round him for a pleasant talk, ' which is the best way to kill an enemy ?'

' Why, shoot him, to be sure,' said one.

' No, stab him,' said a second.

' No, starve him,' said a third.

' But, I think,' said their father, ' I can show you a better way than this. An enemy may be killed without taking from him his life, or shedding a single drop of his

blood. Let me tell you a story to show how it may be done.

‘ There was a farmer, once, who was a very cross, surly, disagreeable man. Everybody in the neighbourhood knew him, and everybody disliked him. He was sure to make the most of whatever went wrong about him, and the poor offender always met with severe punishment. There was not a boy in all the neighbourhood who didn’t feel uncomfortable as he passed his gate ; and the poor dog that barked at his geese, or the neighbour’s rooster that crowed on his wall, was speedily visited either with the lash of his whip, or the shot from his gun. The very cat knew his footsteps and slunk away from him in terror. He was a complete pest, as much so to himself as to those about him. Every day brought him some fresh trouble, and found him in continual “ hot water ;” indeed, his very life was made up of broils.

‘ After a time, a good Farmer Green came to live near him, and, as you may suppose, he was soon told the character of his not overpleasant neighbour.

‘ “ Well,” said he, “ if he ‘ shows off ’ on me, I ’ll very soon kill him !”

‘ This remark of Farmer Green’s soon got afloat, and all sorts of things were said about it. He seemed the very last man to “ *kill*” any one, for his looks, and words, and actions, all told of a loving heart, which throbbed in his bosom and directed his life. Nobody could think for a moment of his becoming a murderer. Mr. Green’s intention, at length, came to the ears of the ill-natured farmer, and you may be very sure he was not at all pleased about it. Everything he could do to tease, annoy, and even injure Mr. Green, was done ; but, somehow or other, the man who was to “ *kill*” this ugly-tempered farmer took it all in good part, and spoke as calmly and looked as kindly as ever.

‘ One day Mrs. Green sent to the wife of our surly friend a basket of nice plums ; but her husband wouldn’t let her have them. He told the person who brought them, very gruffly, that “ it was only done to get some of his pears in return, and he wasn’t going to give any of them away.”

‘ At another time Mr. Green’s team of oxen stuck fast in a bog, and when he asked his neighbour for a little help, he told him, in a very rough way, that “ he had enough to do to mind his own business,” and refused to help him.

‘ “ Never mind,” said Green, to some one standing by, — “ *I’ll kill him very soon,—see if I don’t.*”

‘ Soon after this the team of the ill-natured man was in the same plight that his neighbour’s had been in. Mr. Green saw it. He ran for his oxen and chains, and set off to the bog. He spoke kindly, offered his help, and began to render it ; but what did he receive in reply ? Why, a fierce look, and an angry word, “ I don’t want any of your help ! take your oxen away.”

‘ “ No,” said the other, “ I *must* help you, for the night is coming on, and what is bad enough by day, is ten times worse in the dark.” Away pulled the oxen and the men, and soon all was set right again.

‘ A strange feeling did that rough, cross man carry home with him that evening ; something which he had never felt before. And a strange look did his wife give him, as he said, “ Peg, Farmer Green *has killed me !* He said he would, and he has done it.”

‘ Yes, the “ enemy ” was “ killed,” without the loss of a single life, or one drop of blood. He went in the morning to confess his ingratitude to his kind neighbour, and to ask his forgiveness ; and the very man who had been noted for nothing but his wickedness, became the friend of all.’

There is the greatest difference in the world between conquering by power, and conquering by kindness. The former is like building a dam across a stream of water. It may stop its flow for a little while, but presently the dam may give way, and then the stream will rush on with more force and fury than ever. Conquering by kindness is like drying up the springs which feed the stream. Conquering by power is like keeping a lion from doing harm by chaining him ; conquering by kindness keeps the lion from doing harm, by changing his nature and turning him into a lamb.

Let me give you an illustration of the power of kindness in effectually subduing a hard heart.

In a certain town in France there is a school for the instruction and improvement of poor boys, who are found wandering about the streets of Paris, without parental care. It is supported by voluntary contributions. The boys are taught all sorts of out-door and in-door work, and have regular seasons for play and recreation. When any one commits a fault requiring serious punishment, all the boys are assembled, as a sort of council, to deliberate and decide on the kind of punishment to be inflicted ; which generally consists of imprisonment in a dungeon for a number of days, without, of course, having any part in the recreations of the school.

There are more than a hundred boys in this institution ; —and there is one thing very singular in the discipline there used. After sentence is passed by the boys on any offender, under the approval of the director, the question is put, ‘ Will any of you consent to become the patron of this offender,—that is, to take his place now, and suffer in his room and stead, while he goes free ? ’ And it seldom happens but that some one is found to step forward, and ransom the offender by undergoing his punishment for him. In this case the offender is required to act as

porter to his substitute, and carry his bread and water to him, in his dungeon, during all the time of his captivity. The effect of this is generally found to be, that the most hard-hearted boy is softened and subdued, by seeing another actually, and willingly, enduring what he deserved to suffer.

A remarkable case occurred there not long ago. A boy, whose violent temper and bad conduct had caused him to be turned out of several schools in Paris, and who was likely to become an outlaw and a terror to all good people, was received into this institution. For a time the new scenes and society about him, and the constant variety of pleasant occupations, seemed to have subdued his temper; but, at length, his evil disposition showed itself; and, in a fit of anger, he drew a knife on a boy with whom he had quarrelled, and stabbed him in the breast. The wound was severe, but not mortal, and while the bleeding boy was carried to the hospital, the rest of the inmates were summoned to decide on what was to be done with the offender. The boys agreed, at once, that he should instantly be dismissed from the school, and never allowed to enter it again. The director opposed this. He said this would certainly ruin the boy, and bring him, in a little while, to the penitentiary, or the gallows. He asked them to think of some other punishment. They fixed upon a long imprisonment. The usual question was asked, but no one offered to take the place of the wicked boy, and he was marched off to prison.

After some days the director reminded the boys of this case, and asked, 'Will no one become the patron of this unhappy youth?' After a short silence a voice was heard, saying, 'I will.' The astonished boys looked round, and saw the very youth coming forward who had been wounded, and who was just discharged from the sick ward. He went to the dungeon and took the place of the would-be mur-

derer (for had the boy's strength been equal to his passion, the blow would have been fatal, both boys being only nine or ten years old). At first the hardened offender seemed unmoved by the strange kindness shown to him ; but after he had carried the food to his generous patron for some time ; after he had seen him still pale and feeble from the effect of his wound, suffering for *his* sake the loss of light, liberty, and enjoyment, his stout heart began to melt. He struggled against it for a while, but it was no use, and at last he gave up,—and, casting himself at the feet of the director, he confessed, and bewailed with bitter tears, the wickedness of his heart, and expressed the determination to lead a different life for the time to come.

Now, no force or power in the world could have produced such an effect upon this boy as this kindness did. He might have been locked up in dungeons, or loaded with chains, and yet have had a murderer's heart all the time. But when the '*evil*' in his nature was '*overcome with good,*' it was effectually overcome.

To '*overcome evil with good*' is the Best Warfare, because it is *the most effectual*.

But, in the fourth place, this is the Best Warfare, because it is THE MOST HONOURABLE.

Beasts and men conquer by force, or power, but God conquers by love. The eagle and the hawk conquer weaker birds, how ?—by power. The lion, the tiger, and the bear conquer weaker animals, how ?—by power. Strong nations conquer weaker ones, how ?—by power. If we try to conquer others by power, we are imitating animals, or men. If we try to conquer by kindness or love, we are imitating God.

Those great men-killers, Alexander, Cæsar, and Napoleon, tried to conquer the world by power. They destroyed thousands and millions of their fellow-creatures, but they did not succeed in conquering the world. Jesus is trying to conquer the world by love. He *is* succeeding. He *will*

succeed. Jesus has more power than all the men in the world, and all the angels in heaven, put together. But He does not conquer men by telling them of His power. He has a dreadful prison into which He will put His enemies. But He does not conquer men by telling them about that prison. Jesus has wonderful love for sinners. He came from heaven to show it. He was born a poor child, and cradled in a manger, to show it. He was nailed to the cross, in bitter agony, to show it. And it is the power of this love which makes people Christians. Jesus conquers by love. It was the love of Jesus which conquered St. Paul, when he was hastening to Damascus to persecute the Christians ; and millions on millions since then, both young and old, rich and poor, have been conquered in the same way. Jesus is the most honourable of all persons. Whatever tends to make us like Him is honourable. But nothing does this more than the exercise of kindness.

Let me give you an illustration of two kinds of revenge. The one was returning evil for evil ; the other was overcoming evil with good. You may judge which is the more honourable of the two.

Two men, living in the southern part of Africa, had a quarrel, and became bitter enemies to each other. After a while one of them found a little girl, belonging to his enemy, in the woods, at some distance from her father's house. He seized her and cut off both her hands ; and as he sent her home screaming, with her bleeding wrists, he said to her, ' I have had my revenge.'

Years passed away. The little girl had grown up to be almost a young woman. One day there came to her father's door, a poor, worn-out, grey-headed old man, who asked for something to eat. She knew him at once as the cruel man who had cut off her hands. She went into the hut, and ordered the servant to take him bread and milk, as much as he could eat, and sat down and watched him eat it.

When he had finished she dropped the covering that hid her handless wrists from view, and holding them up before him she exclaimed, 'I have had *my* revenge!' repeating the very sentence he had uttered when he so cruelly maimed her. The man was overwhelmed with surprise and humiliation. The secret of it was, that, in the meantime, the girl had become a Christian, and had learned the meaning of the verse just before our text:—'If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink; for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.' How beautiful the conduct of this injured Christian girl appears, in contrast with that of her heathen enemy!

In the courts of earthly kings it is always esteemed honourable to do as the king does. Jesus is our King. He conquers by kindness. When we 'overcome evil with good,' therefore, we are like Jesus. There is no honour in the world like this. This is the Best Warfare, then, because it is the most honourable.

There is only one other reason of which I would speak. To 'overcome evil with good' is the Best Warfare, because ALL MAY ENGAGE IN IT.

When they are enlisting soldiers for an army, they will only take men. And these, too, must be men of a particular character. They must not be too old, or too young. Generally they will not take any under eighteen years of age, or over fifty. Women or children, the lame, the sick, the blind, the aged, will not answer to go to war. They must be men of a proper age, strong, able-bodied, and hearty.

But it is very different with the warfare of which we are now speaking. In this, any and all may engage. Old and young, women and children, sick and lame, may take part here, as well as strong men. The smallest child may engage in it. A visitor once went into a school in the city of Boston. There he saw a boy and girl, who were

brother and sister, sitting on the same seat. The little boy was vexed at something his sister had done, and struck her a blow. The little girl was provoked, and raised her hand to strike him again. Her face was red with anger, and her clenched fist was aimed at her brother, when the teacher caught her eye. 'Stop, my dear,' said he, 'you had better kiss your brother than strike him.'

The look and the word reached her heart. Her hand dropped. She threw her arms round his neck and kissed him. The boy was moved. He could have stood against the blow. He expected that; but a kiss was unexpected. He could not stand against a sister's kiss. He thought of the wrong he had done her, with the return she had made, and the tears rolled down his cheeks. His sister wiped away his tears with her little handkerchief. But her kindness only made him cry the faster; he was completely subdued. This little girl had engaged in the Best Warfare.

The most ignorant and weak-minded persons may engage in it.

There was once a half-witted young man, named Amos. The gentleman for whom he worked had a little boy named Willie. Poor Amos was feeble-minded, and could not think much for himself; yet he was tender-hearted, obliging, and affectionate. No matter how tired he might be, he was always ready to help any one who wanted help. His temper was so cheerful that a few pleasant words would make him happy, and it took but little kindness to win his love.

And yet, because he was weak-minded, some bad boys would make fun of him, tease him, and frighten him. Willie did so. He played a great many provoking tricks upon Amos. Among the rest, he would sometimes frighten him by slyly creeping under his bed at night, moving it, and making strange sounds. This would alarm Amos so, that he would moan, and cry, and pray, in his own way,

most pitifully. It is very sad that Willie should have done so cruel and wicked a thing.

It was so ordered that Willie had a long and painful sickness. He was by turns in great distress, and delirious. He would have no one do anything for him but his parents and Amos. It was touching then to see the tenderness, self-sacrifice, and devotedness of the ill-treated Amos. He shrunk from nothing which might relieve or gratify the sick boy ; he taxed his feeble powers of thought and invention to the uttermost, to try and please him. Night after night he watched faithfully by his side ; and when the little invalid was restless and weary of his couch, he would take him carefully in his strong arms, and walk up and down with him, and soothe his weariness.

But the most touching thing of all was to hear Amos pray for him. When he thought he was alone with Willie, he would kneel down and pour out his heart to God for him. He had never been taught to pray ; but though his words were incorrect, he could express his reverence for the great Being whom he addressed, and tell Him his wants. In the most solemn and earnest tones he said, 'Oh, Holy Spirit ! please don't let Willie die ! please don't ! Make him good first. Oh, please ! for sake.'

Willie's heart was softened by the tenderness and devotion of Amos ; but most of all by this imperfect yet heartfelt prayer from one whom he had looked upon with contempt ; whom he had ridiculed and ill-treated. 'Oh,' thought he, 'how could I have been so bad ! I'll never ridicule and abuse this kind, good fellow again ! How earnestly he prays for me ! Poor thing ! he thinks I need prayer ; he is afraid to have me die. And sure enough I've need to be afraid to die.' And roused to his danger and sin, he prayed fervently for himself.

One night, when Amos had brought him a cool, refreshing drink, Willie drew him towards him, and putting his

arms around his neck, kissed him. 'Oh, Amos,' he said, 'your prayer has saved me. I have prayed too, and God has given me a heart to hate sin. I'm very sorry that I've been so bad to you. I'll never frighten you again, and I won't trouble you any more.'

Poor Amos knew not what to say, but he wept, and kissed Willie, and prayed again more fervently than ever, 'Don't let Willie die!'

Willie did not die; and when he grew better he said to Amos, 'You taught me to pray with my heart, though I knew the words before;' and with gentleness and patience, he taught that poor dull youth to call aright on the name of Him who 'heareth prayer,' and also to urge his petition 'for the sake of Jesus Christ our Saviour.'

'I shall always love to hear you pray. Let us pray together,' said Willie to Amos; and what a contrast was the scene when they bowed together in love, to that in which Willie had acted as the cruel tormentor, and Amos as the patient sufferer! What a change had been wrought! and all by the love and tenderness of that poor youth as the instrument. Amos, ignorant and weak-minded as he was, was engaged in the Best Warfare.

Persons in the very humblest circumstances may engage in it.

'When I was a small boy,' says the poet Southey, 'there was a black boy in the neighbourhood by the name of Jim Dick. A number of my playfellows and myself were one evening collected together at our sports, and began to torment the poor black by calling him "Nigger," "Snowball," "Blackamoor," and other degrading names. The poor fellow appeared very much grieved at our conduct, and soon left us.'

'Not long after we made an appointment to go skating in the neighbourhood; but on the day of the appointment I had the misfortune to break my skates, and I could not

go without borrowing Jim's skates. I went to him and asked him for them. "O yes, Robert, you may have them, and welcome," was his answer. When I went to return them, I found Jim sitting by the fire, in the kitchen, reading the Bible. I told him I returned his skates, and was much obliged to him for his kindness. He looked at me as he took the skates, and, with tears in his eyes, said to me, "Robert, don't ever call me blackamoor again," and immediately left the room. The words melted my heart. I burst into tears, and resolved, from that time, never again to abuse a poor black.' That negro, in his humble position, was engaged in the Best Warfare.

And then, too, persons in the most exalted positions may engage in this warfare.

A Chinese emperor once heard that his enemies had raised an insurrection in one of the distant provinces. 'Come, my friends,' said he, to those about him, 'follow me, and I promise you that we shall destroy our enemies.' He marched forward, and the rebels submitted on his approach. All now thought that he would take the most signal revenge. Instead of this, however, they were surprised to see the captives treated with mildness and humanity. 'What!' cried one of his officers, 'is this the way in which you fulfil your promise? Your royal word was given that your enemies should be destroyed, and, behold, you have pardoned them all, and even showed special favour to some of them!'

'I promised,' replied the emperor, with a generous air, 'to destroy my *enemies*. This I have done. For see, they are enemies no longer; I have made them my friends.'

How well might Christian people learn to imitate so noble an example, and learn to 'overcome evil with good.' That Chinese emperor was engaged in the Best Warfare.

And thus we have considered five reasons, why 'overcoming evil with good' is the Best Warfare. It is so

because it is the CHEAPEST warfare ; because it is the PLEASANTEST warfare ; because it is the MOST EFFECTUAL warfare ; because it is the MOST HONOURABLE warfare ; and because it is a WARFARE IN WHICH ALL MAY ENGAGE.

Well then, my dear children, let me entreat you all to enlist in this warfare. I wish you all to join the great army of those who are trying to 'overcome evil with good.' Jesus, the Prince of Peace, is the Captain of this army. Love is the badge which His soldiers wear. Here are some of the short standing rules which He requires all His soldiers to mind : 'Never get angry,' 'Never speak crossly,' 'Conquer by kindness,' or, to unite them all in one, we have this one great rule, which Jesus expects all His soldiers to mind, in the words of the text, 'OVERCOME EVIL WITH GOOD.' You cannot do this by yourself ; but if you pray earnestly to Jesus, He will help you, and then you will find it an easy, pleasant rule to live by. It will make our earth like heaven, when all people learn to mind this rule. And then the words of the prophet shall be fulfilled : 'The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid ; the calf, the young lion, and the fatling together ; and a little child shall lead them.'

V.

The Best Loan.

'He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord.'

PROVERBS XIX. 17.



HIS text speaks about pity. Now let us see what pity is, before we go any further. Pity is the feeling of sorrow we find in our hearts when we see a person in trouble, or distress. For instance, it is a very cold day, and the ground is covered with snow ; and as you go along the street, with your nice warm clothes around you, you see a poor little girl with no shoes or stockings on. Her dress is thin and ragged. Hungry and cold, she trembles as she goes, and her teeth chatter as the wind sweeps by her. When you look at that poor child your heart swells, your eyes fill with tears, and you feel as if you would like to take her home and set her down by the fire to warm herself, and give her something good to eat, and get her some better clothes to put on. And this feeling, which you have, when you look at this poor child, is what we call *pity*.

There are two kinds of pity : there is a wrong kind, and a right kind. The wrong kind of pity makes people *feel*, without making them do, or give anything. The right kind makes people do, or give as well as feel. For instance, there was a poor man who got his living by driving wood from the wharf. One day, as he was driving his cart along the street, his horse fell down and died. This was a great loss to him. That horse had been his only dependence. He

had no money to buy another with. And when he thought of his family being left without bread, in the middle of winter, he couldn't help crying. A crowd of people soon gathered round the poor man and his dead horse : and when they saw how much distressed he was—' Poor fellow,' said one, ' I'm very sorry for him.' ' So am I,' said another. ' I pity him very much,' said a third. But still none of them *gave* him anything. This was the wrong kind of pity. It was *feeling* without *giving*. Presently, however, a gentleman stepped up to these persons, and said, ' Here, my friends, I pity the poor man a sovereign ; how much do you pity him ?' That was the right kind of feeling. It not only led the man to *feel*, but to *give*.

And this is the kind of pity that Solomon speaks of in our text. He says, ' He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord.' This means that if we have the right kind of pity for the poor, we shall want to do, or give something to help them, and that what we do or give to them, God regards as done or given to Himself.

Now, what we lend to another we call a *loan*. There are places in this city called loan-offices. Suppose a person is very much in want of money. He has a silver cup, or a gold watch, or any valuable article, and if he takes this to one of these offices and leaves it there, they will lend him some money, or give him a loan for what he leaves. And so we may call the Church of Christ *God's loan-office*. All that is done or given in this Church, God is pleased to consider as lent to Him. And in presenting our offering here, we are lending it to the Lord. There are many different kinds of loans, but that which is lent to the Lord is—*the Best loan*. We may consider *three* reasons why this is the Best Loan :—

In the first place, to lend to the Lord is the Best Loan, because HE RECEIVES THE SMALLEST SUMS.

One day, when Jesus was on earth, He was going into

the temple at Jerusalem. Near the door of the temple was a large box with a hole in the lid of it. It was placed there on purpose for the people to put their offerings of money in it for the use of the temple. While Jesus was looking at it, a great many rich people went by, and they threw in their gold and silver by the handful. But presently a poor old widow woman came tottering along. All the money she had in the world was *two mites*, which make a farthing. She untied the corner of her napkin, took out her two mites, and cast them into the box. Now some of you might be ready to think that a farthing—a single farthing—would be lost and overlooked among the heaps of gold and silver, which the rich men had cast in. But it was not so. Jesus saw it. Jesus accepted it. He said, that widow's farthing was worth more to Him than all the large sums which the rich men had cast in. He received that farthing as a loan. He put it down in His book. He has kept an account of it, and at the Day of Judgment we shall all hear about it, and see how much that poor widow has gained on the farthing she lent to the Lord.

At another time, when Jesus was on earth, He said, that if anybody should give 'a cup of cold water even' to one of His people, He would give a reward to that person. Now suppose you should go to a banker's office where they are accustomed to borrow money or make loans, and offer to lend them a *farthing* if they would open an account in their books, and put your name down—what do you think they would say? Why, they would be very likely to say, 'Pooh! pooh! pooh! get away, you foolish child. We don't want your farthings. We don't do business in such a trifling way. You must come with your hundreds or thousands of pounds, if you want to open an account at our office.'

But it is very different with God's loan-office. He is

willing to receive the very smallest sums. He is willing to open an account with beggars, with poor widows, with little children. He will let people lend to Him anything they have to spare, no matter how little it is. He will put down in His book a penny, a farthing, the smallest mite, a cup of cold water, a gentle deed, a kind word, a sweet smile, a pitying look, anything whatever that His people have to give. Oh, how wonderful it is that God, who is so great, so rich, who owns all things in heaven and earth, should be willing to take loans from His people at all! And how still more wonderful that He should be willing to take such small loans! Lending to the Lord is the Best Loan, because He receives the smallest sums.

Lending to the Lord is the Best Loan, because it is so SAFE.

Sometimes people build houses with their money, and think then it is sure to be safe. But the fire may burn up these houses; and even if they are insured the insurance office may fail, and then all their money ends in smoke.

Sometimes people lend their money to their friends, and feel sure that it is safe with them. But those friends may fail in business and lose all their own money, and what they have borrowed too, or those persons may not be really honest people, and then they may cheat their friends of all the money which they had lent.

Sometimes people turn all their money into gold and lock it up in a strong box, or hide it away in some secret place, and think that in this way they can certainly keep it in safety. But there the robber's hand may reach it and take it all away.

I remember reading about a man who did this very thing, and was served just in this way. He had a sum of money which he was afraid to lend to any one, or trust out of his own keeping. So he had it all changed into

gold pieces. Then he went into the woods near his house, and chose out a retired spot, shaded round with trees, where nobody would ever think of looking for money ; and there, at the foot of a large tree, he dug a hole, and put in some flat stones so as to make a kind of box. There he put his money. He got a broad flat stone to lay over the box, like a lid, and then covered the dirt and leaves all over it, so that nobody would ever suppose that there was anything hid away there. Then two or three times a week he would steal away there all alone, when he thought nobody saw him, to open the stone box and see if the money was there, and then cover it up and go away again.

Now it happened that there was a bad man who lived in the neighbourhood. He had seen this person several times going into the woods, and he was curious to know what he went for. So one day he watched him cautiously from a distance ; and after the owner of the money was gone he went and took it all away. He put a pebble stone in the box for every gold piece he took out. A few days after the man came again to look at his gold. He lifted up the lid of the box—but lo ! his gold was gone ! Then he wrung his hands and tore his hair, and cried as though his heart would break. Yet, it all did no good.

But nobody ever loses what is lent to the Lord. Let me show you a boy's experience of this. Here is a story about 'The lent half-dollar.'

'What are you crying for ?' said Arthur to a little ragged boy that he overtook on his way home from the village school. There was something in his way of crying, which made Arthur think there was a cause for it.

'I am hungry,' said the boy, 'and can't get anything to eat.'

'Why does not your mother give you something to eat ?'

‘She is sick and can’t get up, and hasn’t anything for herself.’

‘Where’s your father?’

‘I haven’t any. He was drowned at sea.’

‘Where do you live?’

‘Down there,’ pointing to a miserable hut in a distant lane.

‘Come with me, and I’ll get you something.’

Arthur turned back and the boy followed him. He had a few coppers in his pocket, just enough, as it proved, to buy a loaf of bread. He gave it to the boy, and told him he would go home with him. The boy took the loaf, and though he did not break it, he looked at it so wistfully, that Arthur took the knife and cut off a slice, and gave him to eat. He ate it in a manner which showed he told the truth, when he said he was hungry. The tears came into Arthur’s eyes as he saw him swallow the bread with such eagerness. He remembered, with some self-reproach, how he had sometimes complained, because he had nothing more than bread and butter for supper. On their way to the boy’s home, Arthur learned that the family had moved into the place about a week before:—that his mother was taken sick the day after he came, and was unable to leave her bed—that there were two children younger than himself—that their last food was eaten the day before—that his mother had sent him out to beg for the first time in his life—that the first man he asked told him beggars would be put in jail: so he was afraid to ask anybody else, but was returning home when Arthur overtook him, and asked him what he was crying for.

On arriving at the house, Arthur went in and saw a good-looking woman on the bed, with two small children crying by her side. As he opened the door, he heard the oldest say, ‘Do, mamma, give me something to eat.’ They stopped crying when Arthur and the boy came in. The

boy ran to the bed, and gave his mother the loaf ; and pointing to Arthur said—‘ He bought it for me.’

‘ Thank you,’ said the woman, ‘ may God bless you, and give you the bread of eternal life.’

The oldest girl jumped up and down in her joy, and the youngest tried to seize the loaf, and struggled hard to do so, but did not speak. Seeing that the widow’s hands were too weak, Arthur took the loaf and cut off a piece for the oldest first, and then for the girl and boy. He then gave the loaf to the widow. She ate a small piece, and then closed her eyes, and seemed to be engaged in silent prayer.

‘ She must be one of the Lord’s poor,’ thought Arthur. ‘ I’ll go and get something for you as quick as I can,’ said he, and departed.

He went to a kind neighbour who lived near, and told her the story ; and she immediately sent some milk, and bread, and butter, and tea, and sugar, and said she would come herself as soon as she could get the baby asleep.

Arthur had half a dollar at home, which he wished to give the poor woman. His father gave it to him for watching the sheep, and told him he must not spend it, but put it out at interest, or trade with it so as to make something. He knew his father would not let him give it away, for he was not a Christian, and thought of little else than making and saving money. Arthur’s mother died when he was an infant ; but with her last breath she gave him to God.

When Arthur was five years old, he was sent to school to a pious teacher, who cared for his soul : and knowing that he had no teacher at home, she took unusual pains to instruct him in the principles of religion. The Holy Spirit helped her efforts, and before he was eight years old, he gave good evidence of being a Christian. Arthur was now in his tenth year. He thought a good deal about how he was to help the poor widow, and at last he hit upon a plan which proved successful.

His father was very desirous that he should begin to act for himself in business matters, such as making bargains. He did not wish him to ask his advice in doing so, but to go by his own judgment. After the business was done, he would show whether it was wise or not : but he never scolded him for these things, lest he should discourage him from acting on his own responsibility.

In view of these facts, Arthur formed his plan.

‘Father,’ said he, ‘may I lend my half-dollar?’

‘To some spendthrift boy, I suppose?’ said his father.

‘No, sir, I won’t lend it without good security.’

His father was quite pleased with his idea about good security, but he did not inquire what it was, for he wished Arthur to decide for himself. He told him to lend it, but be careful not to lose it.

‘I’ll be sure about that,’ said Arthur.

So he took his half-dollar, and ran to the poor widow, and gave it to her, and came away before she had time to thank him.

At night his father asked him if he had put out his money.

‘Yes, sir.’

‘Who did you lend it to?’

‘I gave it to a poor starving widow in Mr. Harvey’s house.’

A dark frown gathered on his father’s brow, as he said—‘Do you call *that* lending? Did you not ask my permission to *lend* it? Have I a son that will deceive me?’

‘No, sir,’ said Arthur, ‘I did lend it.’ He then opened his Bible that he had ready, with his finger on Prov. xix. 17, and read—‘He that hath pity on the poor lendeth to the Lord, and that which he hath given will he pay him again.’

‘I lent it to the Lord, father, and I call that written promise good security.’

‘Lend it to the Lord! This is all nonsense,’ said his father. ‘He will never pay you.’

‘Yes, He will; He says He will pay again.’

‘I thought you had more sense,’ said his father. But this was not said in an angry tone. The truth was, the old man was pleased with the *ingenuity*, as he called it, of his son. He did not wish to discourage that. So he took out his purse, and handed Arthur a half-dollar. ‘Here,’ said he, ‘the Lord will never repay you—so I must, or you will never see your money again.’

‘Thank you, sir,’ said Arthur. And then he said to himself—‘Now in *my* way of thinking the Lord *has* paid me, and much sooner than I expected too. I didn’t hardly expect He would pay me back in money. The hearts of all men are in His hand, and the gold and silver are His: He has put it into my father’s heart to pay me back my half-dollar. Money lent to the Lord is safe. I’ll lend it again.’

Lending to the Lord is the Best Loan, because it is so safe.

And then there is a third reason why lending to the Lord is the Best Loan, and that is, because HE PAYS GOOD INTEREST.

We hear business men talking a great deal about *interest*. Interest means the profit they get on their money when they lend it.

Now the question is, what interest does God pay on what people lend to Him? This is an important question. Who can answer it? Jesus will answer it. I have said the Church is God’s loan-office. The Bible is the book kept in this office, to tell us the terms on which God takes loans from His people. You want to know what interest God gives to those who lend money to Him by giving it to the poor, or using it to send the gospel abroad in the world? Well, let us open the Bible and see. Here is a

passage in which Jesus is speaking on this very point. Listen to what He says. Peter had asked Jesus this very question. He said—‘Behold, we have forsaken all and followed thee ; what shall we have therefore ? And Jesus said, Every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands for my name’s sake, shall receive an *hundred-fold*, and shall inherit everlasting life’ (Matt. xix. 27-29).

Jesus promises to pay His people at the rate of an ‘hundred-fold’ in the present life, and then take them to heaven when they die. This does not mean that for every shilling we give to the poor, or to the Bible or Missionary Society, God will directly give us back again a hundred shillings: but it does mean that for all we so give to His poor, and thus lend to Him, He will pay us back again, in one way or another, what will be equal to a hundredfold, or a hundred per cent. interest, or profit, on all we have given to His cause, or lent to Him.

Now let me give you some examples of the way in which God pays again those who lend money, or labour, to Him. And God takes labour as well as money on loan.

Some years ago, a gentleman was travelling in the country. A thunder shower came on suddenly. This led him to seek shelter in a cabin by the wayside. During his short stay he conversed with the woman who lived there, about God and her soul. Presently, the rain was over. As he rose to go on his way, he thanked the good woman for her kindness, and begged her to read her Bible daily and try to follow its instructions. With tears in her eyes she said—‘Ah ! sir, we have no Bible. We never have been able to buy one.’

‘Could you read one if you had it ?’ he asked.

‘Yes, sir, and would do it gladly.’

‘Poor woman,’ said he, ‘I heartily pity you. Farewell.’

But after starting, he felt so much for this poor woman that he turned back again. Yet, what was he to do? He had more than two days' journey still before him and barely enough money left to pay for his meals on the way. He thought about the words of the text, 'He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth to the Lord.' He said in his heart—'I will trust the Lord for getting home.' He took a crown from his purse, and gave it to the woman to buy a Bible with. He then went on his way. At night he took lodging at a private house. As he had very little change left, he thought he would make his supper on some cold provisions he had with him. But when the family came to the table, he was urged to take a seat with them, and invited to ask a blessing. Then he felt himself at home, and spoke freely about Jesus, and the happiness of His service; and the family listened with pleasure to what he said. In the morning he offered to pay for his lodging, but the people would take nothing. He travelled on till late in the morning, when, finding no hotel, he stopped at a private house for breakfast. While waiting, he spoke a few words to the family, recommending the service of Christ to them. When ready to start, the mistress of the house would take nothing for his breakfast, or for the oats which his horse had eaten. And so he went on, asking for, and receiving refreshment when he wanted it, and offering to pay for it as any other traveller would do; but no one would take anything, although they did not know but that he had plenty of money.

'What does this mean?' said he to himself. 'I was never treated so on a journey before.'

Then he recollected the crown he had given to the poor woman, and the words of our text which had induced him to do it: 'He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth to the Lord, and *that which he hath given will he pay him again.*'

‘Surely I have been well paid,’ said he. ‘It is safe to lend to the Lord: and profitable too.’

Until he got home he had nothing to pay. God put it into the hearts of the people to be kind and hospitable to His servant, and to ask no pay for what they gave him.

But that was not all. About a year and a half after this, the gentleman referred to found on inquiry, that the woman, to whom he gave the crown, bought the Bible, and began to read it earnestly. The result was, that she became a Christian, and through God’s blessing on her efforts, between *thirty and forty* persons had been converted to God in that neighbourhood! Ah! then that good man felt that he was paid back again. Then he felt that he had received more than a ‘hundred-fold’ for his crown lent to the Lord. He was satisfied that lending to the Lord is the Best Loan, because He pays good interest.

But God takes what people *do*, as well as what they *give*, on loan, and He pays good interest on this too. Let me tell you about a little boy who had nothing to give; but who tried to *do* something, and God paid him well for it.

‘Children, those of you who will bring new scholars to school shall be rewarded with some nice books,’ said the superintendent of a Sunday-school to his scholars one day.

‘I *can’t* get any new scholars,’ said several of the children to themselves.

‘I’ll *try* what I can do,’ said one little boy. He went straight home to his father, and said—

‘Father, will you go to Sabbath-school with me?’

‘I can’t read, my son,’ said the father, with a look of shame.

‘Our teachers will teach you, dear father,’ said he, in a respectful and affectionate manner.

‘Well, I’ll go,’ said the father.

He went. He learned to read. He became a Christian. Then he felt so much interested in the Sunday-

school cause that he engaged himself as a Sunday-school colporteur, and in four years that man had established *four hundred* Sunday-schools, into which *thirty-five thousand* children had been gathered. Only think of all this amount of good resulting from the one effort of that little boy, when he said—‘I’ll *try*.’ God paid him again more than a hundred-fold.

I could go on, ever so long, telling you cases of this kind ; but I will mention only one more. Nearly half a century ago, long before railroads were invented, a stage-coach used to run every day between Glasgow and Greenock, in Scotland. One day, a lady, who was travelling in this coach, noticed a boy walking barefooted, and looking very tired as he struggled to get along. She asked the coachman to take him up and give him a seat, and she would pay for it. When they arrived at the inn at Greenock, which is a seaport town, she asked the boy what he had come there for. He said he wished to be a sailor, and hoped some of the captains would engage him. She gave him half-a-crown, wished him success, and told him to be a good boy, and try to love and serve God.

After this, twenty years passed away. One afternoon the coach was going along that same road, returning to Glasgow. Among the passengers was a sea-captain. When they reached just about the same spot above referred to, the captain observed an old lady on the road, walking very slowly, and looking very tired and weary. He asked the driver to put her in the coach, as there was an empty seat, and he would pay for her. Shortly after, as they were changing horses, all the passengers got out except the captain and the old lady. As they were alone, the lady thanked the captain for his kindness in giving her a seat, as she was unable to pay for one. He said he had always felt a pity for poor tired foot-travellers : for twenty years ago, when he was a poor boy travelling on foot, near this

very place, some kind-hearted lady ordered the coachman to take him up, and paid for his seat. 'I remember that very well,' said she; 'for I am that lady, but my condition is very much changed. Then I was very well off; but now I am reduced to poverty, by the bad conduct of a prodigal son.' Then the captain shook hands with her, and said how glad he was to see her. 'I have been very successful,' said he, 'and am now going home to live on my fortune; and now, my good friend, I will settle twenty-five pounds upon you every year as long as you live.' God paid her back again more than a hundred-fold what she gave, in pity, to that poor boy.

Well then, for these three reasons, lending to the Lord is the Best Loan. It is so, because He receives the smallest sums: because what is lent to Him is safe: and because He pays good interest.

Now, my dear children, let us all believe in our hearts that God means what He says, when He makes this promise; and let us show by our conduct that we do believe it. We are now going to make our offering. In doing this, we lend it to the Lord. 'This is just what we do with it when we give it to the poor. How wonderful it is that God, who owns all things, should be willing to borrow of us. Yet, it *is* so. Oh, what an honour, what a privilege, to be permitted to lend anything to Him! How willingly, how gladly we should lend to Him! I know we make our offering willingly, and that is one reason why we have such happy anniversaries. God makes us all feel that 'It *is* more blessed to give than to receive.' May God accept this offering, and reward you all a hundred-fold for what you give!

'He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord, and that which he giveth He will pay him again.'

VI.

The Best Lesson.

'I have learned . . . to be content.'

PHILLIPIANS IV. 11.



THE places to which we go to learn are called schools. The things we learn there are called *lessons*. This world in which we live, is like a great school. All the people in it are scholars. Every infant born into the world is a new scholar. Some new scholars when they enter a school know a great deal. They have been to other schools before. But when an infant is received, as a new scholar, into this great school of the world, what does he know? Only one thing. He knows how to *cry*; but that's all. Everything else he has to learn. He must learn to know his father and mother, his brothers and sisters. He must learn how to eat and to drink; how to sit, and stand, and walk; how to see, and hear, and feel; how to speak, and think, and act. He must learn to read, and write, and cipher. He must learn how to play, and how to work; and then he must go on learning as long as he lives. He never will get through with all his lessons. Methuselah was the oldest scholar that ever was in our world's school. He was nearly a *thousand years* old before he left the school; and I suppose he was learning some lesson or other, till the very day he died.

How many lessons we have to learn here! some are hard and some are easy. Some are bad and some are

good. But there is none more important than that which St. Paul speaks of when he says—‘I have learned to be content.’ This is *the Best Lesson*. I wish to give you *two* reasons why this is the Best Lesson, and *three* reasons why we should all learn it.

To learn to be content is the best lesson, because **IT MAKES THOSE WHO LEARN IT HAPPY.**

Nothing in the world can make a discontented person happy. There was a boy once who only wanted a marble ; when he had the marble, he only wanted a ball ; when he had a ball, he only wanted a top ; when he had a top, he only wanted a kite : and when he had marble, ball, top, and kite, he was not happy.

There was a man once who only wanted money ; when he had money, he only wanted a house ; when he had a house, he only wanted land ; when he had land, he only wanted a coach ; but when he had money, house, land, and coach, he wanted more than ever.

I remember, when I was a boy, reading a fable about a mouse that went to a spring with a sieve to carry some water in it. He dipped the sieve in the water, but, of course, as soon as he raised it up the water all ran through. He tried it over and over again, but still no water would stay in the sieve. The poor mouse hadn’t sense enough to know where the trouble was. He never thought about the holes in the sieve. The fable said that while the mouse was still trying, in vain, to get some water in the sieve to carry home, there came a little bird and perched on a branch of the tree that grew near the spring. He saw the trouble the poor mouse was in, and kindly sung out a little advice to him in these simple words :

‘Stop it with moss, and daub it with clay,
And then you may carry it all away.’

Trying to make a discontented person happy is like trying to fill a sieve with water. However much you pour

into it, it all runs out just as fast as you pour it in. If you want to fill the sieve, you must stop the holes up. Then it will be easy enough to fill it. Just so it is with trying to make discontented people happy. It is impossible to make them happy while they are discontented. You must stop up the holes ; you must take away their discontent, and then it is very easy to make them happy. Let me tell you a story.

Mary Miller went out to take a walk in the fields, one Saturday afternoon. She had been to school all the week, and she was very glad to have a nice ramble. She soon left the dusty road, and roamed about from hill to hill, gathering the pretty flowers which she saw. Sometimes she watched the glassy brook, and listened to the merry birds. Sometimes she bounded after the gay butterfly, and then ran to pluck some especially bright flower which met her eye. In a word, wherever her light heart prompted her to go, her nimble feet carried her.

She was near the roadside, when she saw a glittering coach pass slowly by. There was no one in it but a little girl about Mary's age. A driver sat in front, driving the sleek horses, which trotted in their rich harness. When the girl wished to stop, he instantly checked them ; when she wished to go forward, they started at his word. A footman was on his stand behind. If the girl saw a flower in the field, or by the roadside, she had only to speak, and the carriage stopped, while the footman ran to fetch it. In short, she seemed to have no wish ungratified. As Mary looked at the coach, her heart sunk, her feet lost their lightness, her spirits their gaiety, and her face its smiles. She walked gloomily along, and with sour looks and pouting lips, she entered her mother's humble dwelling.

'Have you had a pleasant walk, my child?' asked her mother.

'Oh, no,' said Mary pettishly. 'I should have enjoyed

it very well, but Helen Parks came along in her carriage, and when I saw how happy she appeared with her coachman, and her footman to wait upon her, and remembered that I was a poor girl, and must always go afoot and wait upon myself, I could hardly help crying. If she wanted anything she had only to speak, or point to it, and the footman instantly ran and brought it to her. But when I saw something I wanted, if it was ever so far off, I must go and get it myself. I don't mean to walk out by that road any more.'

Her fretful voice was scarcely hushed when Mrs. Parks came in.

'How did your daughter enjoy her ride this afternoon?' said Mrs. Miller to her rich friend. Here it should be told that Helen was lame. She had not walked for several years.

'She would have enjoyed it very well,' said the lady, 'but just as she came to where she had the finest prospect, she saw a little girl skipping about the fields. She watched her happy movements as she ran wherever her fancy led her, and when she remembered that she could never enjoy herself thus, she said she could scarcely keep from crying. "You cannot think," she said, "how sad it is to feel that I must be lifted into the carriage whenever I wish to take the air; and when I see a pretty flower, I can never pick it myself, but must wait till some one, who works for money, can go and fetch it to me. I watched the happy girl for a few minutes, as she danced so gaily among the birds and flowers, and then ordered the footman to bring me a few daisies which grew by the wayside; but I soon threw them away, for I could not bear to look at them."

'She then directed the coachman to drive home, that her feelings might no longer be tried by the sight of pleasure which she could not share. When the footman brought

her in, and placed her carefully upon the sofa, she laid her face on my lap, and wept. "Mother," said she, "I will never ride by those fields again."

Now you see that each of these girls had enough to make her happy if she had only learned this *Best Lesson*.

If we were in Paradise, as Adam and Eve were, we should not be happy unless we learned to be content. Nay, if we were in heaven even, as Satan and the fallen angels once were, we should be unhappy without contentment. It was because Paul had learned this lesson that he could be happy, and sing for joy, when he was in a dungeon, and his back was all bleeding from the cruel stripes laid upon it.

Learning this lesson will have the same effect now that it had then. Let me give you a case to prove this.

There once lived, in an old brown cottage so small that it looked like a chicken-coop, a solitary woman. She tended her little garden, and earned a very plain, simple living by knitting and spinning. She was known all round the country by the name of 'Happy Nancy.' She had no money, no family, no relations—she was half blind, quite lame, and very crooked. To look at her you would think there was nothing about her for anybody to love; and yet, in that deformed and ugly-looking body was a soul greatly beloved by that God whom the angels worship.

'Well, Nancy, singing again?' said a gentleman who stopped at her door one day.

'Yes, sir, I'm for ever at it. I don't know what people will think,' she said, with a sunny smile.

'Why, they'll think as they always do, that you are very happy.'

'Well, I'm just as happy as the day is long.'

'I wish you would tell me your secret, Nancy;—you live here alone, you work hard, you have nothing very pleasant about you—what is the reason you're so happy?'

‘ Perhaps its because I haven’t got anybody but God,’ replied the good creature, looking up. ‘ You see, rich folks like you depend upon their families, and their houses ; they’ve got to keep thinking of their business, of their wives and children, and then they are always afraid of mighty troubles ahead. I haven’t got anything to trouble myself about, you see, because I leave it all to the Lord. I think—well, if He can keep this great world in order, the sun rolling day after day, and the stars shining night after night, if He can make the garden things come up the same, season after season, He can certainly take care of such a poor simple thing as I am ; and so, you see, I leave it all to the Lord, and the Lord takes care of me.’

‘ Well, but Nancy, suppose a frost should come after your fruit-trees are all in blossom, and your little plants are out ; suppose—’

‘ But I *don’t* suppose ; I never can suppose ; I don’t want to suppose, except that the Lord will do everything right. That’s what makes you people so unhappy ; you’re all the time supposing and supposing. Now, why can’t you wait till the suppose *comes*, as I do, and then make the best of it ?’

‘ Ah ! Nancy, it’s pretty certain you’ll get to heaven, while many of us, with all our worldly wisdom, will have to stay out.’

‘ There now, you’re at it again,’ said Nancy, ‘ always looking out for black clouds. Why, if I was you, I’d keep Satan at arms’-length, instead of taking him right into my heart : he’ll do you a desperate sight of mischief.’

And so you see that this is the Best Lesson, because it makes those who learn it happy.

But, secondly, it is the Best Lesson, because it **MAKES THOSE WHO LEARN IT USEFUL**, as well as happy.

When people, or things, are content to do, or be, what

God made them for, they are useful : when they are not content with this, they do harm. God made the sun to shine ; the sun is content to 'do just what God made it for, and so it is very useful. God made the little brooks to flow through the meadows, giving drink to the cattle, and watering the grass and the roots of the trees, so as to make them green, and help them to grow. While they do this they are very useful. But suppose they should stop flowing, and spread themselves over the fields, they would do a great deal of harm. God made our hearts to keep beating, and sending the blood all over our bodies. While they are content to do this, they are very useful. Let them only stop beating, and we should die.

God made the flowers to grow all over the earth. They are content to remain just where He put them, and they are useful in beautifying the earth and affording comfort to many people.

God made the little birds to fly through the groves, and 'sing among the branches.' They are content to do this. And though they know not where their food is to come from for the next winter, or the next day, yet they sing away as merrily as though they understood all about that kind 'Father in Heaven, who feedeth them.' And very often do their cheerful songs do good to the sorrowing hearts of some who are bowed down with care and grief.

'Mamma, does it not annoy the angels to see you fretting so much?' This question was asked by a blue-eyed, curly-headed little boy, named Georgie, as he saw his mother enter the room where he was playing. He had seen her hurried and anxious, with a dark frown upon her brow, all the morning, and wondered what it meant.

'Why, Georgie! what ever put that thought into your head?' asked his mother, taken quite by surprise.

'Oh, nothing, I guess ; it just happened to come in

there as I was thinking what a beautiful morning it was, and how everything seemed to be smiling, except you, mamma,—and you looked so troubled. Was it naughty to say so?’

‘Not at all, my dear; I was the naughty one. But do you know why I have felt so fretful and troubled this morning?’

‘Yes. I heard you say that uncle and aunt, and Mr. and Mrs. Cheever, and a young lady, were to come in the noon train, and that your wood was poor, and there was no rice at the grocer’s, and Biddy had gone off to the circus, besides. I suppose, as pa says sometimes, you are in “a peck of trouble,”—ain’t you, mamma?’

‘Why, Georgie, I thought that I was; but since you have come to name it over, and mention the causes of my trouble, they seem rather small after all.’

‘That was just what I thought. And it seemed to me that such things must look so trifling to them—I mean the angels, mamma—if they can see our actions, and as if it must worry them to see us so unhappy about trifles.’

‘They are trifles, darling—the least of trifles. And a big, grown woman like me ought to be ashamed to make myself miserable all the morning for them, turning the brightness of this glorious day into clouds and gloom. Now, Georgie, have I scolded myself enough?’

‘I should think you had, mamma. Your forehead don’t scowl as it did. But I wish I could help you. I can stone the raisins, and wash the potatoes, and flour the tins for you to bake; and what else can I do? something, I guess.’

And Georgie rolled up his apron-sleeves, and went to work to help his mother. See how useful a contented spirit made that little boy!

And so the learning of this lesson will make any one useful. Now, let me give you two nice pictures. One is

of a little girl ; the other of a little boy. They are not painted pictures, but *word-pictures*.

The first is a picture of 'Thoughtful Susan.' She lived in the country. One day the minister of the church which her parents attended, called at their house. He took Susan on his knee and asked her some questions. In answer to his questions, this is the account which she gave of herself :—

' I am a very little girl, but I am growing larger every year, and by and by I hope to be more useful than I am now.

' Father works hard out in the fields, and mother works hard at home ; for she has a great deal to do among so many of us. What a great many pennies it must take to buy all our clothes, and bonnets, and shoes ! and then our breakfasts and dinners ! Father had need to work, and mother too.

' I cannot work and get money to buy a loaf, but I take care not to waste a single crumb ; let the crust be as hard as it will, I eat it all up.

' If I can't buy wood and candles, I take care not to waste them. I am too little to poke the fire and to snuff the candle ; mother says I might set my clothes all in a blaze.

' I don't know how much mother paid for my last shoes ; it took all the money at the corner of the cupboard, so I take care not to get into the wet and dirt, that my shoes may last the longer.

' I have had my bonnet a long while now ; I never swing it about by the strings, nor crush it up together, nor leave it lying about, and mother says that is the reason it has lasted so long.

' I have not got many playthings, for they cost money and wear out ; so I play with pussy ; pussy doesn't cost anything, and pussy *never wears out*.

' Mother says time is as good as money, and that if I

cannot help her much, I should not hinder her by being untidy ; so I keep everything about me as tidy as I can. I put my little chair in the corner when I have done with it, that nobody may tumble over it. I try to learn to sew a little. Many a time mother has sent me with father's dinner into the fields. It would not do for mother to go, and carry the baby too, while I was doing nothing. Sometimes I go to the store on an errand ; so that if I earn nothing I try to save something, and mother says that is the same thing.

' Oh, I forgot to tell you, that when I sit on my little stool, mother often puts baby in my lap. I hold him as carefully as I can ; when he smiles I kiss him, and make him smile again. Mother says in time I shall nurse very well, but I can't toss baby about as she does.

' Mother has taught me two verses to sing to baby, and she says she'll teach me some more :—

" Hush, my dear ! lie still and slumber ;
 Holy angels guard thy bed ;
 Heavenly blessings without number,
 Gently falling on thy head.

" How much better thou'rt attended
 Than the Son of Man could be,
 When from heaven He descended
 And became a child like thee !"

I am not sure that baby knows yet what they mean.

' Mother says, before another year has gone by, she will get me into the Sunday-school ; and if she does I will try to be always in time, and mind all that is said to me.

' But mother says I must never trust my own heart, for it will deceive me. I must ask God, for Jesus Christ's sake, to pardon all my sins, and help me in everything. I know that mother is right, and I hope I shall do as she tells me.'

What a beautiful picture this is of a contented little

girl! She had learned the *Best Lesson* well, and how useful it made her! Let all who read or hear about her, try to imitate her example.

But now for the boy's picture:—

One morning a gentleman was riding by himself. He got off his horse to gather a plant which he saw in the hedge, and while he was doing this his horse got loose and ran away. He followed, calling to the horse by name, when he stopped; but as the gentleman came up he set off again. At last, a little boy in a neighbouring field, seeing the affair, ran across where the road made a turn, and getting before the horse, took him by the bridle and held him till the owner came up.

The gentleman looked at the boy, and admired his rosy, cheerful countenance. 'Thank you, my good lad,' said he, 'you caught the horse very cleverly; what shall I give you for your trouble?' putting his hand into his pocket.

'I don't want anything, sir,' said the boy.

'Don't you? so much the better for you. Few men can say as much. But pray, what were you doing in the field?'

'I was rooting up weeds, and tending the sheep that are feeding on turnips, and keeping the crows from the corn.'

'And do you like this employment?'

'Yes, sir, very well this fine weather.'

'But would you not rather play?'

'This is not hard work; it is almost as good as play.'

'Who sent you to work?'

'My father, sir.'

'What is your name?'

'Peter, sir.'

'How old are you?'

'I shall be eight at Christmas.'

'How long have you been out in this field?'

'Since six in the morning, sir.'

‘And are you not hungry?’

‘Yes, sir; I shall go home to dinner soon.’

‘If you had sixpence now, what would you do with it?’

‘I don’t know; I never had so much in my life.’

‘Have you no playthings; such as balls, nine-pins, marbles, tops, and wooden horses?’

‘No, sir; but our Tom makes foot-balls to kick in cold weather; and we set traps for birds; and then I have a jumping-pole, and a pair of stilts to walk through the dirt with; and I had a hoop, but it’s broke.’

‘And do you want nothing else?’

‘No. I have hardly time for those; for I always ride the horses to the fields, and bring up the cows, and run to town on errands: and that is as good as play, you know.’

‘Well, but you could buy marbles or ginger-bread at the town, I suppose, if you had money.’

‘Oh, I can get apples at home; and as for ginger bread I don’t mind it much, for mother gives me a piece of pie now and then, and that is as good.’

‘Would you not like to have a knife to cut sticks?’

‘I have one,—here it is; brother Tom gave it me.’

‘Your shoes are full of holes,—don’t you want a better pair?’

‘I have a better pair for Sundays.’

‘But these let in water.’

‘Oh, I don’t care for that.’

‘Your hat is torn, too.’

‘I have a better hat at home; but I would as soon have none at all, for it *hurts my head*.’

‘What do you do when it rains?’

‘If it rains very hard, I get under a hedge till it’s over.’

‘What do you do when you get hungry before it is time to go home?’

‘Sometimes I eat a raw turnip.’

‘What if there are none?’

‘Then I do as well as I can. I work on and never think of it.’

‘Are you not sometimes thirsty this hot weather?’

‘Yes, but there is water enough.’

‘Why, my little fellow, you are quite a philosopher.’

‘Sir?’

‘I say you are a philosopher; but perhaps you don’t know what that means.’

‘No, sir—no harm, I hope?’

‘No, no! Well, my boy, you seem to want nothing at all, so I will not give you money to make you want anything. But were you ever at school?’

‘No, sir; but father says I shall go after harvest.’

‘You will want books then.’

‘Yes, sir; the boys all use a Testament, and a Spelling-book, and Easy Lessons.’

‘Well then, I will give you them; tell your father so, and that it is because I think you a very *good, contented boy*.’

‘I will, sir. Thank you.’

‘Good-bye, Peter.’

‘Good-bye, sir.’

Now this little boy had learned this *Best Lesson* well, and you see how useful it made him. I hope all the boys who read about him will try and imitate Contented Peter.

Contentment is the Best Lesson, because it makes those who learn it happy and useful.

And now we come to speak about the reasons why we should learn this lesson. Three reasons may be mentioned for this. We ought to learn to be content—

Because God puts us where we are. God puts all things in the places where they are. God put the sun and moon and stars in the sky. God put the birds in the air, and the fish in the sea. God put the trees in the woods,

and the grass in the fields, and the stones and metals in the earth. He knows best where to put things. When people try to change what God has done, because they think they can arrange things better, they always make a mistake.

God has chosen our places for us all. He knows what is good for us much better than we do. It is much better for us to learn this Best Lesson, and try to be content with our lot, than to be all the time wishing for changes.

Did you ever hear the fable of 'The Three Silver Trout?'

There were once three little silver trout, who lived in a clear stream of water which ran between two high green banks. It was protected from the winds and the storms; and the sun shone there, so that it was a very pleasant place. Besides, these fishes had plenty to eat, and nothing to trouble them; so that you would have expected them to be perfectly happy. But alas! it was not so; they were so foolish as to be discontented and unhappy. God heard them complaining, and he told the little fishes that each one of them might wish for whatever he pleased, and it should be granted.

Then the first little trout said, 'I am tired of moping here in the water; I should like to have wings and fly in the air as the birds do.'

The next said, 'I am a poor, ignorant little fish, and do not know how to protect myself from danger. I should like to know all about the hooks and nets, so that I might always keep out of harm.'

The other trout said, 'I too am a poor, ignorant little fish, and for that reason I do not know what is best for me. My wish is, that God would take care of me, and give me just what He thinks best; I do not want anything that He does not choose to give me.'

So God gave wings to the first little trout, and he was

quite happy, and soaring away into the air, felt very proud, and despised his companions whom he had left in the river. He liked flying so well that he flew away off, till he came to a great desert, where there was nothing but sand, as far as he could see. By this time he was tired of flying, and was faint and thirsty; but could see no water. He tried to fly farther, but could not; his wings failed, and he fell down panting on the hot sand, where he died miserably.

God gave the other little fish knowledge, as he desired, to understand all kinds of danger; but instead of being happier, he was all the time in terror. He was afraid to go into deep water, lest the great fishes there should swallow him up; and he was afraid to go into the shallow water, lest it should dry up and leave him. If he saw a fly, or anything he would like to eat, he did not venture to touch it, lest there should be a hook concealed under it. So he pined away and died. But God loved the other little trout, and took care of him, and kept him from danger, so he was the happiest little fish that ever lived.

God puts us where we are, and the place in which He puts us is the best for us.

But the next reason why we ought to learn this lesson is—*because God wants us to learn it.*

There are two ways in which we may know that God wants us to learn this lesson. *We know this from WHAT GOD HAS SAID; and we know it from WHAT HE HAS DONE.*

We find in the Bible what God has said about this lesson. Now let us open our Bibles at 1 Tim. vi. 8. Here we read—‘Having food and raiment let us be therewith content.’ This is one of God’s sayings about this lesson. Let us open the Bible again, at Hebrews xiii. 5. Here we read—‘Be content with such things as ye have.’ This is another of God’s sayings about this lesson. It is

not necessary to read any more about it. This makes it quite clear, from *what God has said*, that He wants us to learn this lesson.

And then, *what God has done* shows the same thing. He has filled the world with examples of contentment. All things that God has made are content to be where He has put them, except the children of Adam. God has done more for us than for any other of His creatures. We ought to be the most contented of all, and yet we are generally the most discontented.

The fish are content with the water ; the birds are content with the air. The eagle, as he soars to the sun, is content with his position ; and so is the worm that crawls in its slime, or the blind mole that digs its way in darkness through the earth. All the trees of the forest are content to grow where God put them. The lily of the valley is content with its lowly place, and so is the little flower that blooms unnoticed on the side of the bleak mountain. Wherever you look you may see examples of contentment. Only think of the grass. It is spread all over the earth. It is mowed down continually ; it is trodden on and trampled under foot all the time ; and yet it always has a bright, cheerful, contented look. It is a beautiful image of contentment. And so, whether we stay at home and read our Bibles, or walk out through the forests or the fields, we see everywhere proof, in what God has said, and in what He has done, that He wants us to learn this lesson. And surely when we know God wants us to do a thing, that is reason enough why we should do it.

But there is yet one more reason why we should learn this lesson, and that is—because **JESUS LEARNED AND PRACTISED IT.**

It must have been very hard for Jesus to be content with the way in which He lived in this world, because it

was so totally different from what He had been accustomed to before He came into it. A bird that has been hatched and brought up in a cage may be contented with its position, and live happily in its little wire prison. The reason is that it has never known anything better. But take a bird that has been accustomed to its liberty in the open air, and shut it up in a small cage. It cannot be contented there. It will strike its wings against the cage, and stretch its neck through the wires, and show in this way how it longs for the free air of heaven again.

Just so a person who was born and brought up in a garret or cellar, and who has never known anything better, may manage to be content there. But one who has lived in a beautiful palace for many years would find it very hard to live in a damp, dark cellar, among thieves and beggars.

But Jesus lived in heaven before He came here. There He had everything that He wanted. All the best and purest pleasures that could be desired were enjoyed by Him. The angels were His servants. They waited on Him, and worshipped Him. But oh, what a change it must have been when he came to live on earth! Here He was poor, despised, and persecuted. He suffered hunger, and thirst, and fatigue. He was the Lord of all things, and yet had nothing to call His own. 'The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head.' And yet, poor and persecuted as He was, He was content. He knew all He would have to suffer before He came, and yet He would come. He could have gone right back to heaven at any moment, had He wished to do so, but He would not. He was willing to come, and He was willing to stay. He never murmured; He never complained. Oh, how beautiful is the example of contentment which Jesus left us! Who would not be willing to follow in the path which He

has trodden before? 'He left us an example that we should follow His steps.'

And thus we have considered two reasons why contentment is the Best Lesson: *it makes those who learn it happy, and it makes them useful.*

We have also considered three reasons why we should learn this lesson. We should learn it because **GOD PLACED US WHERE WE ARE**; because **GOD WANTS US TO LEARN IT**; and because **JESUS LEARNED AND PRACTISED IT.**

But there is one thing, my dear children, I wish to speak about before closing. Suppose some of you are not Christians. Suppose you have never truly repented of your sins, and learned to love Jesus. Suppose your hearts are not changed; should you try to be content while you are in this state? Certainly not. When St. Paul said he had 'learned to be content,' he was a Christian. Nobody ought to be content who is not a Christian. Only those who love Jesus have any right to be content. They have enough to make them rich and happy.

A Bible distributor was once going through a country village in England. He came to a cottage which seemed to be in a wretched and miserable condition. The windows were broken, and stuffed with bunches of straw and old rags. The hinges of the door were broken, and everything about it seemed to be going to destruction. As he came near to the door, he heard loud angry voices, with oaths and curses. The children had crept away frightened into the corners of the room, while their father and mother were quarrelling.

The stranger spoke to the father of the family, and said, 'My friend, how unhappy you must all be to live in this way! I wonder you don't try and make yourselves more comfortable.'

'Ah, sir,' said the man, 'it's very hard for us poor

people to be comfortable, when we can't get bread enough to eat.'

The Bible agent then asked for a drink of water. The man very readily gave him a drink out of a broken mug. As he was drinking the water, his eye wandered round the room. In one corner of it, all covered over with dust and rubbish, he saw a large family Bible. He thanked the cottager for his drink of water, and said to him, in a low tone, as he handed back the cup,---'My friend, I have a secret to tell you. There is a neglected treasure in your cottage, which, if you only find and make a right use of it, will make you rich and happy. Good-bye.'

When he was gone, the man and his wife thought a great deal about his words. At first they were inclined to think he was only making fun of them. But still they could not forget what he had said. 'A treasure that would make them rich and happy'—what could it be?

Each of them thought a great deal about it, though neither of them would say anything to the other on the subject. When the man was by himself, he would search all through the cottage, and ransack every corner to try and find the treasure. And when she was all alone the woman would do the same. But no treasure was found.

One day after she had been searching until she was tired, she sat down, thinking to herself what the treasure could be. As she sat thinking thus, her eye happened to light on the Bible. She said to herself, 'I wonder if that can be it?' Immediately she arose, and wiping the long-gathered dust from the back of it, she opened the book. It was many a long day since she had done so before. It was the gift of her departed mother. And the first words which met her eye as she opened it, written with her mother's hand on the inside of the cover of the Bible, were these—'The law of Thy mouth is dearer to me than thousands of gold and silver.' 'This must be the treasure.

of which the stranger spoke,' she said ; and then she sat down to read the book. It showed her her sins. It told her of the Saviour who could take those sins away. She sought Him, and became a Christian.

One day when her husband came home, she said to him, ' Husband, I have found the treasure of which the stranger spoke.'

' Where is it ?' said he.

' In this blessed book,' she replied. ' Let me read to you about it.' She did so. The result was that he too became a Christian.

When the Bible agent came round the next year, he found the house changed, and everything changed about it. He could hardly realize that it was the same place. They gave him a cordial welcome, exclaiming—' We have found the treasure of which you told us, and it has made us rich and happy.'

No person ought to be content until they have found this treasure. There is enough in it to make anybody content.

My dear children, have you found it ?

VII.

The Best Flower.

‘I am the Rose of Sharon.’—SONG OF SOLOMON II. 1.



THIS world is fully of beauty. The blue sky overhead is beautiful. The clouds which float in the sky are beautiful. The sun is beautiful when it rises in the morning and sets at night. The moon is beautiful when it shines in the sky, after the sun has disappeared. And when there is no moon, the stars, that twinkle quietly there, all through the night, are very beautiful. The fields are beautiful, with the green grass covering them, like a carpet. The woods are beautiful, with the trees waving and rustling in the summer's breeze. The hills are beautiful, as they rise in gentle swellings like the waves of the sea. And the mountains are beautiful, in their grandeur, as they rise up, like great giants, and lift their heads to the skies. Everything that God has made is beautiful. But, among all these beautiful things, there is nothing more beautiful than the flowers—the sweet, gentle flowers, which God has scattered, like jewels, over the earth. God has made them beautiful, on purpose that we should love to look at them—and that when we look at them we should think how wonderfully wise, and kind, and good He is, to make so many lovely things for our comfort and happiness. How beautiful are their shapes and forms! How beautiful their colours are! How pleasant their fragrance is! Jesus, who made the flowers, spoke about them when He was on earth. Do you

remember what flowers He particularly spoke about? The lilies. Yes, the beautiful lilies. He said—‘Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they toil not, neither do they spin; and yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.’ And this is one out of many places in which the Bible speaks about flowers. Why, there are more than three hundred places in the Bible in which flowers are referred to!

How great the number of flowers is! Of roses alone, there are thousands of different kinds. And of all other kinds of flowers there are hundreds of thousands. Indeed, their number is so great, that it can hardly be told. And no two of them are exactly alike. How wonderful the variety of flowers! In shape and size, how astonishingly different! You have seen the green weed called Duckweed, on the surface of the ponds in the fields. If you should take up a small portion of it on the end of your finger, and examine it with a microscope, you would find it made up of very small plants, with the tiniest little flowers, that cannot be seen with the naked eye. And then from this exceedingly small specimen, there is every possible variety of size and shape, up to the great water-lily called the *Victoria Regia*. This has a leaf which spreads out, on the top of the water, six feet across, and eighteen feet around. One single leaf is about large enough to make a boat in which a boy might sail. And the flower, when open, is three feet round.

We find flowers of some kind or other growing everywhere. They spring up in the sandy desert. On the tops of bleak and snow-capped mountains, where even trees will not grow, the little flowers may be seen. Travellers who have gone near the North Pole, where ice and snow last all the year, have been surprised to find in some places *red* snow. And when they came to examine it with a microscope, they were still more surprised to find that the

colour of it was owing to an exceedingly small kind of plant, bearing a flower too little for the naked eye to see.

But among all the multitude of flowers which grow on the earth, there is none like this which Solomon speaks of in the verse before us. 'I am the Rose of Sharon.' This, we suppose, refers to Jesus. He is the 'Rose of Sharon.' Sharon was the name of a large plain, or level tract of country in Palestine, famous for the number of flowers which grew there. And if we consider this 'Rose of Sharon' as referring to our blessed Saviour, then we may well say that this Rose is *the Best Flower*.

We may speak of *five* reasons why this is so:—

The 'Rose of Sharon' is the Best Flower, in the first place, BECAUSE IT WILL GROW EVERYWHERE.

This cannot be said of any other flower. It is very true, as I have said, that flowers of some kind or other may be found almost everywhere. But, these are of many different kinds. There is no other *one* flower that will grow everywhere. The Alpine rose, which grows so beautifully on the tops of mountains, where the snow may be seen all the year, and where the winds are cold and piercing, will wither, and die, if you take it home, and plant it in your well-kept, fertile garden. And the flowers that grow so finely, and bloom so sweetly in warm countries, like Italy or India, will perish at once if you take them to Greenland or Labrador. Take a water-lily from the pond where it spreads its leaves so broadly, and plant it in a dry, sandy soil, and it will soon shrivel up and die. And so, if you take any plant or flower, accustomed to grow in a rocky or sandy soil, and set it in a marsh, or by the borders of a pond, directly it will begin to decay and perish. Some plants will die if they are removed even a short distance from the place where they first spring up and grow.

But ah! how different it is with this Best Flower, the 'Rose of Sharon!' This will grow everywhere. Yes, and

it will not only *grow*, but flourish and blossom too. This flower does not grow in the ground like other flowers. You must not look for it in the beds of the garden ; nor in the fields, the valleys, or the mountains. The soil in which it grows is the human heart. And when any person learns to love and serve Jesus, and is made happy by Him, then we may say that the 'Rose of Sharon' is growing in that person's heart. This flower is sometimes found growing in the hearts of very young people. And the old as well as the young—the poor as well as the rich, may have it if they will. It is growing now in the hearts of people in all the different nations of the earth. This is the meaning of that verse of the hymn which says—

'Go, messengers of Christ ! proclaim
Salvation through Immanuel's name ;
To distant lands the tidings bear,
And plant the *Rose of Sharon* there.'

This Rose is flourishing in every part of our own land. All over England too, it is growing beautifully. In different parts of Europe it may be found. John Williams, the martyr-missionary of Erromanga, planted it in the sunny islands of the South Seas. Robert Moffat has planted it far up into the southern part of Africa ; and other missionaries are planting it all along the western coast. The celebrated Dr. Livingstone is carrying it into the very centre of Africa, from the East. The great wall of separation, which kept the missionaries so long out of China, has been thrown down, and now all that vast country is waiting to receive the gospel. The servants of Jesus are going about over the burning plains of India, and planting this Best Flower there. The heat is dreadful there sometimes, but still it is not too hot a climate for the 'Rose of Sharon' to grow and flourish in. The Moravian missionaries have carried it to Greenland's icebound shores ; and that climate, even, is not too cold for it. For above a hundred years it

has been blooming sweetly there. And now, this very day, it is growing and flourishing equally well in all these different countries. Oh, what a wonderful flower this is! There is no other like it in all the earth.

The 'Rose of Sharon' is the Best Flower, because it grows everywhere.

It is the best, in the second place, because of its MANY USES.

Most of the flowers that grow in this world are useful for only one or two things. They are useful for their beauty and for their fragrance—but, generally, that is all. We can look at them, and admire the beautiful forms in which they are made, and the variety of colours which they put on; and we can delight ourselves, too, with the pleasant fragrance which they shed around them,—but that is all.

One morning in spring a mother went out with her little daughter to walk among the mountains. On their way, the child rejoiced at the abundance of flowers and herbs which bloomed by the roadside.

One flower she liked better than all the others; it was small, and delicate, and of a beautiful rose-colour. Minna—this was the little girl's name—picked the flower, and looked at it with delight, kissing it, and smelling it, and praising it all the time. But she soon became tired of this; she wanted to derive more pleasure from the little flower. She was not satisfied with its beauty and its fragrance. She thought it was so pretty, that it must be useful for more than *two* purposes. She said to herself, 'If it is so pleasant to look at and so sweet to smell of, it must certainly be *good to eat* too.' So she put it in her mouth and began to chew it.

And what was the consequence? She soon spit it out, and ran crying to her mother, saying—'Oh, mother, the flower was so sweet, and looked so pretty, that I was

tempted to eat it! but it tastes so bitter, and draws my mouth up so! Oh, the nasty ugly flower!

But her mother said to her, 'Fie on you, my dear child, for speaking so naughtily of the flowers! They are just as beautiful, and smell as sweetly as ever. And that is all they are intended for. God did not make the flowers to be eaten.'

Ah! my dear children, there are a great many people in the world, just as silly as this little girl. I often see grown men and women *eating flowers*. Whenever people make a different use of things than God intended them for, they are eating flowers. For instance, here is a man who thinks that money is all he needs to make him happy. He makes gold his god. Yet he finds, sooner or later, that he is *eating flowers*. But we cannot stop to talk about this.

Other flowers are only useful for *two* things; but the 'Rose of Sharon' is useful for a great many purposes. It is beautiful to look at. When Jesus was on earth, most people saw no beauty in Him, that they should desire Him. But those who learn to know and love Him, find Him to be 'the chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely.' The greatest happiness of heaven will be to 'see His face.' There is nothing in all the world half so beautiful as the sight of Jesus will be in heaven.

The 'Rose of Sharon' is useful for its *fragrance*, as well as for its beauty. Every one knows how sweet it is to smell a beautiful rose. And we read in the Bible, that the name of Jesus is 'as ointment poured forth.' This means, that it is just as pleasant to the souls of those who love Jesus to think about Him, as it is to their bodily senses to smell the sweetest flower, or the most fragrant ointment.

But these are two uses which belong to many other plants besides the 'Rose of Sharon.' There are other uses

for this flower, however, in which it is very different from all other plants which ever grew.

The 'Rose of Sharon' bears *fruit* as well as flowers, and its fruit is wholesome and pleasant. It is made to be eaten, as well as looked at, and its 'fruit is sweet to the taste' of those who partake of it.

The 'Rose of Sharon' yields pure water to drink, as well as food to eat. There is a singular plant in the East Indies called 'the pitcher plant.' It has leaves, or flowers, in the form of small pitchers. Each pitcher has a lid to it, and at certain seasons these pitchers are filled with a sweet, pleasant liquid, which is very good to drink.

The 'Rose of Sharon' is a pitcher-plant. It is full of pitchers. These are not only always full, but they never can be emptied. The water of salvation flows into them as fast as it is taken out. And oh, it is delightful water! It is cool, clear, and refreshing. Jesus said of it—'Whoso drinketh of this water shall never thirst. It shall be in him a well of water, springing up into everlasting life.'

The 'Rose of Sharon' is *good for medicine*, as well as for food and drink. When Jesus, who is this 'Rose of Sharon,' was on earth, He opened the eyes of the blind; He unstopped the ears of the deaf; He made the lame to walk, and went about 'healing all manner of sickness and disease among the people.' Then, He cured all kinds of *bodily* diseases. Now, He cures all kinds of *spiritual* diseases. Sin has made our souls sick with a great many different complaints. But the 'Rose of Sharon' is better than medicine. It can heal all the diseases of the soul, and heal them for ever.

The 'Rose of Sharon' is *good for clothing*. This is a very singular use to make of a flower. We often hear of people making wreaths of flowers to ornament or dress the head with. But no one ever heard of an earthly flower that was good to make clothing of. Adam and Eve, when

they had sinned, tried to make clothing out of fig-leaves. But it was good for nothing. The 'Rose of Sharon,' however, *is* good for clothing. We read in the Bible about 'garments of salvation'—about 'robes washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb'—about 'clothing of wrought gold—all glorious within.' These all mean the same thing. They refer to that righteousness of Jesus, which He puts upon all His people as the dress they are to wear in heaven. Oh, the clothing which is made out of the 'Rose of Sharon' is very beautiful! It is so in God's sight. There never was any like it.

And then the 'Rose of Sharon' is *good to make people rich*.

Nobody ever thinks of feeling rich because he has a rose. Why, you may have a bunch of roses; yes, a whole garden of roses, and yet not be very rich. Sometimes we hear of a king making a present of a *golden* rose to one of his friends. Yet that would not make him rich. But every one who has the 'Rose of Sharon' *is* rich. If all the gold in the world could be made up into one great rose, and all the diamonds and jewels in the world could be set in a circle round it, the owner of that rose would be only like a poor beggar compared to the riches *he* has who can truly say—'Jesus, the "Rose of Sharon" is mine.' Nobody can tell *how* rich Christ makes His people. The Bible says—'They shall inherit *all* things.' What more could they have?

We are speaking of the *many uses* of this Rose. We have seen that it is useful for *beauty*,—useful for *fragrance*,—useful for *food*,—for *drink*,—for *clothing*,—for *medicine*, and for *riches*. Here we have *seven* uses. And the half is not yet told. Oh, the 'Rose of Sharon' is the Best Flower, because of its *many* uses.

But, thirdly, it is the Best Flower because it **MAKES PEOPLE HAPPY WHEN NOTHING ELSE CAN.**

What a dreadful thing it must be on board a burning ship, far off on the ocean! We all heard about that dreadful calamity which happened not long ago,—the burning of the steamer *Austria*. She was full of passengers. The fire spread almost like lightning. The engine could not be stopped, and the vessel went blazing and roaring on her path like a burning mountain, *alive* and *mad*. Oh, what tears, and groans, and cries, and shrieks were there! How wildly some tore their hair! How frantically others ran about not knowing what to do! Numbers leapt into the water to escape the fire. What a dreadful situation to be in! Could anything make persons calm and happy on board that burning vessel? Yes, there were some there who loved Jesus, who had the ‘*Rose of Sharon*’ with them, and that made them happy.

A Christian gentleman who was saved from that vessel has written an account of it. He describes the distress and terror of many who were not Christians, in that trying hour. Then he thus speaks of some who were Christians, and how they felt!

‘Our little Christian company,’ says he, ‘numbered eight persons. We were on the quarter-deck. We took a last farewell of each other, and then went to the side of the vessel, resolved to cling to it as long as possible. What a contrast there was between our little band, and those who knew not the preciousness of having Jesus for their best Friend! We were sustained in that hour by our Saviour’s presence. We were all composed and calm, not fearing death, though it met us in so fearful a shape. We thought not of the merciless ocean beneath, but of God and heaven overhead.’

He thus speaks of a dear Christian friend who was with him, and who perished in the sea:—

‘We bade each other farewell, and stood conversing during the few moments that remained to us on the wreck.

We delivered our farewell messages to each other, so that if either were saved our dear friends would know they were not forgotten by us at the parting hour. My friend looked round at the flames which were rapidly approaching us, then at the vessel coming to us from the distance, and said—"If it is God's will, we shall be saved;—we may be; but I think not. He knows what is best. Brother," said he, "my only hope is in the Saviour; how precious He is! Tell my friends, if you are saved, *I die happy!*"

Ah! what else would make people happy under such trying circumstances? Jesus, the 'Rose of Sharon,' was with them. And the thought of Him made them happy when nothing else could.

Now let me tell you about a poor suffering child, who was made happy by the 'Rose of Sharon,' when nothing else could have made him so.

'Papa,' said Edward Thompson to his father, 'you don't know what beautiful things James Robertson has, of all kinds!'

'O yes,' said little Robert, 'when we were there yesterday, he took us up into a little room that was full of playthings, just like a toy-shop!'

'He had little guns, and two drums, and a trumpet and fife,' said Edward, 'and one of the drums was a real one, papa, such as men play on!'

'And, papa, he had carriages with a little railroad for them to go on, and steam-engine and all!' said Robert.

'And a whole company of wooden soldiers!' said Edward.

'And all sorts of blocks, to build houses!' said Robert.

'And besides, papa,' said Edward, 'he has a real live pony to ride on,—such a funny little fellow you never saw,—and he has such a splendid riding-whip, and a splendid saddle and bridle!'

‘ Really, ’ said their father, ‘ you make out quite a list of possessions. ’

‘ Oh ! but papa, we have not told you half ; he has a beautiful flower-garden, and a gardener to cultivate it for him, so that he don’t have to take any trouble with it, and he can do anything with the flowers he chooses ! ’

‘ Oh ! and papa, he has rabbits, and a beautiful grey squirrel, with a nice cage, and the squirrel plays so many droll tricks ; and he has a parrot that can talk and laugh, and say a great many funny things ! ’

But in spite of all the nice things he had, the boys had to confess that James Robertson was one of the most uncomfortable and unhappy little fellows they knew of. Their father told them it was just having so many things, and being so much indulged, and so selfish, which made him so unhappy. And then he promised to take them with him a riding in the afternoon, and to show them a very happy little boy.

‘ I wonder if this can be the house ? ’ said Edward to Robert, as the carriage stopped before a very small brown house. Their father got out and asked them to walk in with him. It was a very little house, with only two rooms in it ; and in the one they entered they saw a very pale, thin little boy, lying on a small, low bed in front of the door. His face was all worn away by disease, and his little hands, which were folded on the outside of the bed, were so thin one could almost see through them. He had a few playthings lying by him on the bed, and on a little stand by him was a cracked brown mug, in which were a few flowers, together with a well-worn Bible and hymn-book.

It was more than a year since this dear child had been able to sit up ; for four months he had been unable to be turned at all in bed ; he had to lie all the time on his back, just as he was.

‘What’s the matter with him?’ asked Robert, of the little boy’s mother.

‘Why, the doctor says it’s a complaint of the bone; it began more than two years ago, down in the foot, and they had to cut the foot off, in hopes that it would stop it, but it didn’t; then they cut off the leg above the knee, and that didn’t stop it; it’s creeping up and up, and finally it will be the death of him. He suffers dreadfully at night; sometimes he has no sleep at all for two or three nights together.’

‘Oh, father, how dreadful!’ said Edward, pressing close to his father’s side.

‘Father,’ said Robert, looking up and whispering, ‘I thought we were going to see a little boy that was very happy.’

‘Wait a little,’ said Mr. Thompson, ‘and you will see.’ Then he turned to the sick boy and said—‘My little fellow, don’t you find it very tiresome lying here so long?’

‘A little so, sir,’ said the boy, smiling very pleasantly; ‘but then I have so many things to make me comfortable.’

‘What things?’

‘Oh, I have a knife, and I can whittle a little at a time, and I have this nice little china dog that a lady gave me; I play with that sometimes,—then don’t you see my flowers?’ The little boy pointed to a small bed of flowers just before the door, where there were some pinks, and larkspurs, and marigolds. ‘Mother planted all those flowers for me in the spring,’ he said, ‘and she has watered them and weeded them every night, after she has done her work; they grow very beautifully, and as I lie here I love to look at them. And every day mother puts some in a mug to stand by me.’

‘But don’t you suffer a great deal of pain?’

‘Sometimes I do; but then, sir, I know that God would not send it if it was not best for me, so I am willing

to bear it ; besides, I know that the Lord Jesus Christ suffered more pain for me than I suffer. There are some beautiful hymns about it in this book ; and then I have my Bible : oh, I don't know how I could get along if it were not for that.'

' But are you never unhappy when you see other boys jumping and playing about ?'

' No, I am not ; I know God knows what is best for me—besides, my Saviour comforts me. I love to lie here, when it is all still, and think about Him.'

Ah ! my dear children, that was being refreshed and comforted by the fragrance of the ' Rose of Sharon !'

' Don't you hope sometimes, that you will get well and be able to go about again ?'

' No, I know that I can't ; I shall not live a great while ; they all say so.'

' And don't you feel afraid to die ?'

' O no ; I feel as if I would be glad to. I long to see my Saviour. All that I feel sad about is, that mother will be lonesome when I am gone.'

' Well, my little boy, if there is anything I can send you to make you more comfortable, I shall be glad to.'

' Oh, thank you, sir, but I don't know as I want anything.'

' I wish I could relieve your pains, my little fellow,' said Mr. Thompson.

' God would do it in a minute, if it was only best for me,' said the boy ; ' and if it is not best, I had rather He would not do it. Besides, I think I am happier now than I used to be when I was well.'

' Ah ! how can that be ?'

' I did not love God so much then, and I used to forget to read the Bible. I had not so much pleasure in thinking about heaven,' said the little boy.

' You remember,' said Mr. Thompson, ' it says in the

Bible, "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I have kept Thy word."

'That is just it, sir,' said the boy, 'just the way I feel. Oh! I've been so happy since I have been sick here.'

Edward and Robert looked at their father when they heard this. Mr. Thompson now rose to go.

'If you please, sir, perhaps the boys would like some of my flowers; there is a beautiful row of pinks there, and some roses,' said the sick boy.

'O no,' said Edward, 'we won't take them away from you.'

'Oh, I like to give them away,' said the boy earnestly, — 'do take some.'

'Take some, my dear children, it will please him,' said Mr. Thompson, in a low voice, as he picked a few, and gave them to each of the boys, and then added aloud, — 'We will keep these to remember you by, my dear little fellow.'

As they parted with the little boy, he smiled sweetly, and put out his hand and said, — 'If you will come when my latest rose-bush is in blossom, I will give you *some* roses.'

'Father,' said Edward, as they turned away, 'that poor little boy really does seem to be happy, and yet he is poor, and sick, and in pain, and he has so very few things too. It's very strange, but he certainly is a great deal happier than James Robertson.'

'Well, I can tell you the reason,' said his father. 'It is because James Robertson is a selfish boy that he is unhappy. From morning till night he thinks of nothing *but* how to please himself; and a selfish person can never be happy.'

There is another and a better reason than this which Mr. Thompson might have given, to explain the difference between these two boys. One of them had learned to love

Jesus, and the other had not. It was this which made the sick boy happy. All the money in the world, and all the playthings that were ever made, could not have made that poor suffering child happy. But the love of Jesus in his heart,—the fragrance of the ‘Rose of Sharon,’—did make him happy. This is the Best Flower, because it can make people happy when nothing else can.

The fourth reason why it is the Best Flower is, that it NEVER FADES.

All earthly flowers soon fade. However beautiful they may be, however sweetly they may smell, we know they cannot last long. If you take them out of water and hold them in your hand for even a very little while, you may see them begin to droop and wither. We do not love our flowers very much, or care a great deal about them, because we know they will so quickly perish.

And not only the *flowers* of this world, but all the other things belonging to it, must soon fade away too. Everybody has had some such feeling as the little boy and his sister, of whom I am going to tell you.

‘Mary,’ said George, ‘next summer I will not have a garden. Our pretty tree is dying, and I won’t love another tree as long as I live. I will have a bird next summer, and that will stay with me all winter.’

‘George, don’t you remember my beautiful canary? It died in the middle of summer, and we planted bright flowers in the ground where we buried it. My bird did not live as long as the tree.’

‘Well, I don’t see how we can love anything,’ said George, in a sorrowful tone. ‘Dear little brother died before the bird, and I loved him better than any bird, or tree, or flower. Oh, I wish we could have something to love that wouldn’t die!’

The day passed away. During school hours George and Mary had almost forgotten that their tree was dying; but

at evening, as they drew their chairs to the table where their mother was sitting, and began to arrange the seed they had been gathering, they began to think again about the tree.

‘Mother,’ said Mary, ‘you may give these seeds to cousin John ; I never want another garden.’

‘Yes,’ added George, pushing the papers, in which he had carefully folded them, towards his mother, ‘you may give them all away. If I could find some seeds of a tree or flower that would never fade, then I should like to have a garden. I wonder, mother, if there ever was such a garden?’

‘Yes, George, I have read of a garden where the trees never die.’

‘A *real* garden, mother?’

‘Yes, my son. In the midst of the garden, I have been told, there runs a pure river of water, clear as crystal, and on each side of the river is the tree of life—a *tree that never fades*. That garden is heaven.

“There the sunbeams are ever shining ;
There is no sorrow, nor any sighing,
Nor any sinning, nor any dying.”

Nothing fades there. There you may love and love for ever. And there—oh ! there, this best of flowers, the ‘Rose of Sharon,’ grows and blooms in all its beauty. Its beauty never decays. Its leaves never fall off. Winter never comes there. The flowers are blooming all the time there. And chief among them is this beautiful ‘Rose of Sharon.’ Ah ! my dear children, if you want to love one who never dies and never changes, then love Jesus. He is the ‘Rose of Sharon,’ and this is the best flower, because *it never fades*.

There is only one other reason I will mention why this is the Best Flower, and that is, because its BEAUTY IS ALWAYS INCREASING.

There never was another flower known of which this could be said. You take a small rose-bud and look at it. How beautiful it is! As it grows larger its beauty increases. Every day it swells to a greater size. You see more and more of its lovely crimson colour. Presently the bud begins to open. You can almost see its leaves expanding as you stand and gaze upon it. How interesting it is to watch it! Gradually it unfolds itself, till all its many leaves have opened themselves, and now it stands before you a fragrant, blushing, beautiful, full-blown rose. How sweetly it looks! Can anything in the world be more delightful? But now it's all over! You have seen all there is about the rose worth seeing. Very soon it will wither away, and you won't care to look at it any more. Its beauty went on increasing up to a certain point, and then it stopped. There is no more beauty in it after that. This is the case with every rose that springs out of the earth. And it is the case with every other flower that grows in this world. Their beauty increases up to a certain point, and then stops. Beyond that there is no increase.

But it is very different with the 'Rose of Sharon.' This will be always growing and always blooming. And its flowers will be always increasing in beauty. I do not mean that some of its flowers will die, and others, more beautiful, come out upon it. Not one of its flowers will ever die. But they will all go on increasing in beauty continually. Why, how very wonderful this is! Only just think of it. Suppose you had a rose-bush of this kind in your garden, that would go on increasing in beauty for a hundred years. Suppose its leaves would never wither, and none of its flowers would fade. You look at every rose upon it to-day, and admire the beauty of each. You look at it again to-morrow, and you find them all changed. But there is no worm at the bud. They are not beginning

to decay. No, they are all more beautiful than they were before. The colours are richer, the tints are more delicate, the form and shape are more graceful. The next day it is changed again—yet still more beautiful. Suppose it should go on thus, day after day, all the year round, in summer and in winter, for a hundred years together. What a wonderful plant that would be! How anxious people would be to get a slip from it to plant in their gardens! And how much money people would be willing to give in order to get a slip!

Now you all know that there never was such a plant growing in this world. But the 'Rose of Sharon' is such a plant. Only instead of increasing in beauty for a hundred years, it will go on increasing for thousands and millions of years. Yes, it will be increasing in beauty for ever and ever. Oh, wonderful plant! How glorious it will be, if we get to heaven to look on and to watch its increasing beauty to all eternity!

The 'Rose of Sharon' is the Best Flower, because IT GROWS EVERYWHERE; because of its MANY USES; because it MAKES PEOPLE HAPPY WHEN NOTHING ELSE CAN; because it NEVER FADES; and because its BEAUTY IS ALWAYS INCREASING.

Now there is one solemn question I wish to ask you, my dear children, before I close. Do you love Jesus? Is the 'Rose of Sharon' growing in your heart? If not, your heart must be like a wilderness, or a garden overrun with weeds and briars. This is what the Bible compares our hearts to, until they are changed by Jesus. But when they are thus changed, it compares them to a rose in bloom. Hear what the prophet Isaiah says about it, when he is speaking of the effect produced on people by the grace which Jesus gives: 'The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad: and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose.' Cross ugly tempers are the briars and thorns which

spring up where the 'Rose of Sharon' is not growing. But when this Rose begins to grow in the heart of a boy or girl, these briars and thorns will be rooted up ; that is, these bad tempers will be overcome. What we read about it in another part of Isaiah will take place in their hearts : ' Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir-tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle-tree.' The ' Rose of Sharon ' will never grow along with unsightly briars and thorns.

How pleasant it would be if this Best Flower were growing in each of your hearts ! And why may it not ? Jesus is willing to plant it there if you only ask Him aright. Whenever you are tempted to be cross, or ill-tempered, say to yourself, ' This is an ugly brier or thorn. If I let this remain, the " Rose of Sharon " will never grow in my heart.' And then go and tell the Lord Jesus, in prayer, how sorry you are to have these briars about you. Ask Him to help you to root them up. Pray for grace to overcome them, and to learn of Him who is meek and lowly in heart. Let David's prayer be yours : ' Create in me a clean heart, O God ; and renew a right spirit within me.' Then the ' Rose of Sharon ' will grow in your heart, and you will be truly happy.

VIII.

The Best Robe.

‘Bring forth the best robe and put it on him.’

LUKE XV. 22.

THERE was an elderly gentleman once who was a farmer. He had two sons ; one of them was a sober, steady, industrious lad, who liked nothing better than to stay at home and work for his father on the farm. The other was a wild, lazy, good-for-nothing fellow. He was fond of bad company, and of staying out late at nights. The father was a pious man, and it was a great grief to him to see his youngest son turning out so badly. He often used to talk with him about his bad habits, and tried to show him what sorrow and trouble it would occasion if he did not do better. But the wicked youth would not mind a word his father said. The more he talked to him the worse he seemed to get. At last he became so tired of the reproofs and checks of his good father, that he resolved to go away from home. So after he had gotten all the money he could from his father, he started from home, and went to seek his fortune in the world.

At first he felt very glad to think that he could now do just as he pleased, and there would be no one to find fault with him. He expected he was going to have a royal nice time, but he soon found himself mistaken. Everything went on very smoothly while his money lasted. Then he

seemed to have plenty of friends. They swarmed about him like flies in the warm sunshine of a summer's day. But after a while his money was all gone. He expected that his friends would help him ; but, to his great surprise, he found that they all disappeared as soon as it was known that he had no more money. When hunger and distress came upon him, and nobody helped him or took the least notice of him, he found that he must work or starve. Then he went to work. But the only employment he could get was that of feeding pigs. This he thought was a very poor business. But there was no help for it ; so he had to make the best of it. His wages were very trifling ; they would not buy him enough to eat. He was so hungry that sometimes he was almost ready to rob the swine of part of their food.

Then he began to think of that dear, comfortable home, which he had been so foolish as to leave. He thought of the abundance of nice things he always had while there ; and at last he made up his mind to go back.

But how was his poor father feeling all this time ? Sadly enough, you may be sure. He had a nice large house, and a beautiful farm, with plenty of everything he wanted to eat, or drink, or wear. But still he was unhappy. Why so ? Suppose you should see a man with a serpent coiled round his body, and gnawing away all the time at his breast, don't you think *he* would have enough to make him feel unhappy ? Indeed he would. But this young man's father was worse off than this. He was feeling all the time, 'how sharper than a serpent's tooth is an ungrateful child.' Think of this, my dear children, and take care that you do not cause your father or mother to know by experience what this pain is. The father of this young man was thinking about him all the time. He thought of him the last thing when he went to bed at night, and the first when he awoke in the morning. He

thought about him when he sat down and when he rose up ; when he went out and when he came in.

One day he was sitting on the porch thinking about him. Presently he saw a young man, in poor, ragged clothes, coming along the road. He looked at him for a while, and then he said—‘ Why, bless me, how much that young man looks like my poor boy ! But it can’t be he ; yet he *is* like him. Can I be mistaken ? ’ He rubs his eyes and looks again. ‘ ’Tis he, ’tis he, ’ he exclaims, and then he ran to meet him, and ‘ fell on his neck and kissed him.’ Then he brought him to the house, and said to one of 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 let us eat and be merry. For this my son was dead, and is alive again ; and was lost, and is found.’

The father in the parable represents God. The treatment which this father gave his son is intended to show us how God will treat sinners such as we are, when they repent of their sins and return to Him, through Jesus Christ. He receives them kindly. He has a robe for them to put on. It is a robe not for the body but for the soul. It is called a ‘ garment of salvation ’—‘ a robe of righteousness.’ It is made up of all that Jesus did and suffered for us when He was on earth. It is very common to speak of the actions of men as if they were clothing. If we see a very humble person we say that he is ‘ clothed with humility.’ If we see a person very zealous in some work, we say he is ‘ clad with zeal as a garment.’ Just in the same way, all that Jesus did and suffered when He was on earth, is called ‘ the righteousness of Christ.’ This is compared in the Scripture to a robe. This robe Jesus puts upon all His people, who truly repent of their sins, and believe in Him as their Saviour. He puts this robe on them to make them fit to enter heaven when they die. *This is the Best Robe.* It is so for several reasons.

In the first place, it is the Best Robe, because it is so NECESSARY.

If we were going to attend the coronation of a king or queen, it would be necessary for us to have a particular kind of dress. This dress would be particularly described by law. It would be called 'the court dress.' Nobody would be allowed to go into the presence of the king or queen without it. Suppose some person in the ragged dress of a beggar should try to enter. Would he get in? No. For even if, instead of being clothed in rags, he should put on the richest and handsomest dress that could be procured, a dress all sparkling with silver, and gold, and gems, and jewels, yet, as it was not the court dress which the law required, he would not be allowed to go in. Everybody who expects to enter that palace, and see the king crowned, must have on the court dress. This is absolutely necessary.

And just so it is with the robe of which I am speaking. God is a great King; heaven is His palace—the palace where He holds His court. He has appointed a particular dress for everybody from our world to have on, who expects to enter that palace. It is a dress for the soul, not for the body. This dress is 'the righteousness of Jesus Christ.' This is the court dress of heaven. Without having this on, we are told nobody will be allowed to enter heaven. We read in the New Testament that the apostle St. John once had a vision. It seemed as if a door was opened before him, and he was allowed to look right into heaven. He saw many wonderful things there. Multitudes of people from this world were there; but he noticed that they were all dressed alike. They all wore robes which had been 'washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb.' These robes were of 'fine linen, clean and white;' and this he was told was 'the righteousness of the saints.' It is necessary to have this robe on

if we would enter heaven. Nobody can get in without it. The youngest infant needs it just as much as the oldest man.

If you were going to the North Pole, a robe of furs would be necessary for you. If you were going to travel in India or Africa, where it is very warm, a thin, light robe would be necessary. If you were going through a country where it was raining all the time, you would want an india-rubber or waterproof robe. If you had to walk through flames of fire, you would need a robe of asbestos,—that is, a substance which will not burn, even in the fire. If you were going to a feast in a king's palace, the court dress of that king would be necessary for you. But if you are not going to any of these places, then the different dresses I have spoken of are not necessary for you. You can do very well without them. But, my dear children, do you not all hope to go to heaven? Yes. Well then, if you do, you must have on the robe of righteousness which Jesus puts upon His people. Without this it is *impossible* for you to enter heaven. This is the Best Robe, then, because it is *so necessary*.

In the second place, it is the Best Robe, because it is **SO VALUABLE**.

Some robes that are worn in this world cost great sums of money. There was an account in the newspapers some time since, of the marriage of the daughter of the Baron Rothschild, who is supposed to be the richest man in the world. It was stated in this account, that the wedding dress of that young lady cost *one hundred thousand pounds!* She wore a pair of slippers which alone cost ten thousand pounds. Sometimes robes have been woven out of threads of gold and silver, and the robes, when finished, have been covered all over with pearls and diamonds and precious stones. But the dresses which people generally wear do not cost very much. Sometimes we see foolish people spending a great deal of money on their dress, and feeling

quite proud about it. This is very silly. Really wise and sensible people never do so. When people think a great deal about their dress, it shows that their minds are too little to think as they ought about other things.

One Sunday last summer I was at the Isle of Wight. I attended worship in the village church of Whippingham, not far from Osborne, where the Queen generally spends a part of the summer. The Queen and her family were at church, and I was very much surprised, and pleased too, to notice how plainly and simply they were all dressed. If I had not known who it was, I should never for a moment have supposed that nice, neat-looking little lady was one of the greatest sovereigns in the world—the Queen of Great Britain!

But I was saying that the ordinary dresses which people wear do not cost much. They are not very valuable. But it is very different with this robe of Jesus. The value of this robe no one can calculate. All the gold, and silver, and jewels in the world never could have purchased it. It was not to be bought with money. Jesus had to come from heaven to make it. It took Him all His lifetime here on earth to finish it. It cost labour and toil, and sighs and groans, and tears and blood. All the holy obedience of His life, and all His dreadful sufferings and death, were the price He paid for it. These were the materials out of which this robe was made. A good old writer says:—

‘ Kind Jesus spent His life to weave
This robe of perfect righteousness.’

One drop of His precious blood is worth more than all the wealth of the world. But Jesus poured forth freely all His heart's blood to procure this glorious robe for our souls. All the men in the world and all the angels in heaven never could have procured it for us. Jesus only was able to do this. It cost Him more than we can tell. And it is the Best Robe, because it is *so valuable*.

It is the Best Robe, in the third place, because it is so SUITABLE.

It is a great thing for people to get suitable clothing. As one kind of dress has never been invented for the body which would be suitable for all people, boys and girls cannot wear the same dress. One kind of dress would not be proper for a minister and a soldier ; for a prince and a ploughman ; for a gentleman and for a chimney-sweep. Every one should try to dress in a way that is suitable to his age or position. By neglecting to do this, people sometimes make themselves ridiculous.

Some time ago there was a clergyman in Ireland who was a very singular man. He is known as Dean Swift. He was very much opposed to extravagance in dress. He particularly disliked to see persons in humble life try to ape the dress of those above them. The following instance is given of the way in which he reprov'd this folly in a person whom he really esteemed :—

The Dean had been publishing some of his works in London. A printer by the name of George Faulkner had been getting subscriptions for these works ; and he called to pay his respects to the Dean, and tell him how he was getting on. Before doing this, however, he dressed himself up like a fashionable gentleman of those times, with a long waistcoat covered over with lace, a great powdered wig, and other follies. Swift saw him coming up to his house, and knew him in a moment, but resolved to teach him a lesson. He pretended not to know him, and received him with as much ceremony as if he had been an entire stranger.

‘ And pray, sir,’ said he, ‘ what are your commands with me ?’

‘ I thought it was my duty, sir,’ replied George, ‘ to wait on you immediately on my arrival from London.’

‘ Pray, sir, who are you ?’

‘ George Faulkner, the printer, sir.’

‘ You George Faulkner, the printer ! Why, you are the most impudent, bare-faced fellow, for an impostor, I ever met with ! George Faulkner is a plain, sensible man, and would never trick himself out in lace and other fopperies as you have done. Leave my house this instant, sir, or I will have you sent to prison as an impostor.’

Away went George as fast as he could. He was mortified exceedingly. But having put off his finery, he went back to the deanery in his usual dress, and was received with the greatest kindness. ‘ My friend George,’ said the Dean, ‘ I am very glad to see you safe returned from London. Why, would you believe it, there was an impudent fellow here a little ago, decked out in a laced waistcoat like a fine gentleman, who wanted to pass himself off for you. But I sent him out a good deal faster than he came in, I assure you.’

The differences between people in age and size, in condition and climate, are so many and so great, that it is quite impossible to get any one garment that will be suitable for the bodies of all. But it is different with the soul. The robe of righteousness which Jesus gives is suitable for all. Persons of *all ages* may wear it. It suits the infant of few days, on whom death lays his cold hand, just as it was beginning to live ; and it suits equally well the grey-headed man, who has lived on to threescore years and ten. Persons of *all conditions* may wear it. Male and female, rich and poor, high and low, kings and subjects, princes and beggars, may put it on, and it will be found to suit them all equally well. People of *all nations* may wear it. The civilized and the savage, the Indian and the Negro, the Chinese and the European, the Greenlander and the Hindu, may put it on, and they will find it suit them all alike. It fits all, and it becomes all. It is the Best Robe, because it is *so suitable*.

This robe is the best, in the fourth place, because it is SO BEAUTIFUL.

It is the robe which God's children are to wear in heaven. Nobody in this world has ever seen it. It cannot be looked on with our bodily eyes. I hope that the souls of many that I am talking to are wearing it now. But we cannot see the soul in this world ; neither can we see the robe which it wears. Nobody can see it in the present life. But we can think about it, and talk about it, and try to form some idea of its beauty. We can do this in two ways. We can judge of what its beauty is *by comparison*, and we can do so *from description*.

We can judge something of the beauty of this robe by comparison. For example, suppose we were visiting the grounds of a great prince. We are not permitted to enter his palace and see the splendour of his own apartments, or the richness of the dress in which his children are arrayed. But we are allowed to wander through the garden, and examine the outbuildings of the establishment. We find his dogs and his chickens are kept in beautiful houses made of ivory. We enter the stables. The floors are all laid with marble ; the stalls are made of the finest mahogany, all nicely varnished ; the harnesses for the horses are mounted with gold and silver ; the coverings thrown over them, as they stand in the stalls, are made out of silk and satin, and are all beautifully worked ; and everything about the place is in the same style of grandeur. After seeing all this, how natural it would be for us to reason with ourselves in this way : ' Well, if this prince can afford to make his outbuildings so fine, what must his palace be ! If he can afford to have such rich coverings for his horses, how beautiful the garments must be which his children wear ! ' This would be judging of their clothing by comparison. Just in this way we may judge of the beauty of this Best Robe.

God is a great King. Heaven is His palace. We are not permitted now to enter there. This world in which we dwell is one of God's outhouses. We can examine this, and from what we see of beauty here, we may judge of what there must be in His palace above.

Let us look now at the *birds* which God keeps in this world. How beautiful they are! There, for instance, is the peacock, or the humming-bird, or the bird of paradise. How rich the colours of their feathers! How soft and delicate the down upon them! How brilliant the gloss upon them as the sunbeams play around them! No king upon his throne was ever arrayed in robes so beautiful!

Let us look again. Here is an ugly-looking, crawling worm. It weaves a kind of shroud, or coffin round it, and now it seems to be dead. But watch that little bag, or coffin, till next spring. Something in it seems to be moving. Presently a little opening may be seen at one end of it. It grows larger and larger, and now you see something creeping out of it. It is not a worm now. It creeps about a while. It stretches out its wings and is ready to fly. It is a butterfly. And look at its wings! How beautiful their colour! How soft and silky the down that is on them! The richest lady in the land has no dress that can compare with that of the butterfly.

And then look how beautiful the rainbow is! Look at the flowers of the garden in all their blooming loveliness, or the clouds at sunset in all the radiance of their glory! If God can make His footstool so beautiful, what must His throne be! If God can put upon His birds and His butterflies robes so rich and radiant, how beautiful must that robe be which His dear children are to wear in His presence! Thus, we may judge of the beauty of this robe *by comparison*.

And then, *from description* we can judge of it too. One day, when Jesus was on earth, He took three of His

disciples and went up to the top of Mount Tabor. While there He was transfigured ; that is, a great change came over Him. His countenance became bright and shining. It was more dazzling than the sun at noonday. His clothes changed too. They became as white as snow, and yet they glittered like burnished gold. And then Moses, who had been dead about fifteen hundred years ; and Elijah, who never died at all, but went to heaven in a chariot like fire, nine hundred years before, both appeared to our Saviour. They were dressed in the same way, and looked just like Him. Oh, how beautiful they must have been ! What a glorious sight that must have been to look upon ! Well, this was a picture of what we shall be if we get to heaven. Jesus just put on this Best Robe for a little while, and Moses and Elijah put it on too, in order that the disciples might look at it for a few moments and then give us a description of it. This is the kind of robe that all His people will wear in heaven. David says it is 'of wrought gold, all beautiful within.' No one can tell how beautiful this robe is. But it is the same robe that Jesus wears in heaven. His people will be all like Him. They will think, and feel, and speak, and act, and look like Him. Yes, and they will be *dressed* like Him too. They will wear the the same robe that He does. This is the Best Robe, then, because it is *so beautiful*.

The robe that I have been talking about is the best, in the fifth place, because it is SO LASTING.

When the children of Israel were travelling through the wilderness, we are told that the shoes on their feet and the clothes which they wore did not grow old, or wear out, for forty years. That was very wonderful. It would be a bad thing for tailors and shoemakers if clothes and shoes lasted so long now. But it is not so. Why, I have known some children to tear a new suit of clothes the very first day on which they were worn. Some boys will wear

out a pair of the stoutest shoes they can get in less than forty days, to say nothing of years. The best clothes we can get for our bodies will not last very long. The colour soon fades ; the freshness wears off ; they get thin and bare, holes appear in them, and we have to give them away and get new ones.

But it is very different with the robe which Jesus gives. If we put this robe on now, it will last as long as we live. Nay, more than that, it is not necessary to put it off even when we come to die. It is a robe which our souls will require after death ; and then, if we have it, we shall wear it through all eternity. It will never wear out, and never grow old, or look faded. This is very wonderful ; but yet it is true.

But perhaps some of you are ready to ask, ‘ Well, but does not this robe get soiled and spotted, if we wear it every day ? ’ Yes, it does. In this sinful world everything is liable to get stained and soiled. And this Best Robe is so pure and white that it is easily sullied. Every sin we commit leaves a spot upon it. And our hearts are so weak and wicked that there is not a day of our lives in which we do not sin many times. How, then, can this beautiful robe be kept clean ? Just in the same way in which the clothes for the body are kept clean. If John finds a spot of grease or paint on his coat, he takes it to his mother. She has a preparation for removing spots, and that soon takes it all away. If Mary finds her white dress soiled after she has worn it a day or two, it is sent to the wash, and when it comes back it is as clean and nice as ever. And when the robe of righteousness is soiled and stained, it is to be dealt with in the same manner. Our blessed Saviour has left a preparation which will remove every spot from it. We read in the New Testament that ‘ The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin. ’ He has opened ‘ a fountain for sin and uncleanness. ’ Here we can

bring the white robes which He gives us for our souls whenever we find spots upon them, and wash them clean. And of those who come to this fountain God says: 'Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.' This fountain is always open, and as often as we need we can come and wash in it. And in this way we may keep this robe always clean and bright. Oh, it is a wonderful robe, that will last for hundreds and thousands of years, and never wear out. There is a beautiful hymn about this robe. It speaks of it in this way:—

' Jesus! Thy robe of righteousness
My beauty is, my glorious dress;
'Mid flaming worlds, in this arrayed,
With joy shall I lift up my head.

' This spotless robe the same appears,
When ruined nature sinks in years;
No age can change its glorious hue;
The robe of Christ is ever new.'

How strange it seems, to think of wearing the same robe for millions of years, without getting tired of it, or wanting to have any other! It is the Best Robe, then, because it is *so lasting*.

I have now given you many reasons why this robe is the best. I have only one other reason to speak of.

This robe is the best, because it is so CHEAP.

It would be cheap at any price. If Jesus should ask a hundred thousand pounds from every one who wanted it, it would only be like buying a splendid palace for a farthing. But then very few would be able to get it. However, the blessed thing for us to know is, that Jesus asks no price for this glorious robe. He gives it away. He charges nothing for it. He invites poor naked souls to come and 'buy' it from Him; but He says they must buy it 'without money and without price.' Lazarus, the poor beggar,

who sat at the rich man's gate, desiring to be 'fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table,' had gotten one of these robes. The dying thief, who was crucified with Jesus, got one of them before he died. Thousands of poor slaves, without one farthing to give in exchange, have obtained it. And all who desire to have it must be willing to receive it in just the same way. Rich men and wise men, princes and kings, may have it if they will, but they must be willing to receive it just as the very poorest do, without giving anything for it. Every one who desires to get this precious robe, must come to Jesus, saying, in the language of that beautiful hymn—

' Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling :
Helpless, look to Thee for grace ;
Naked, come to Thee for dress ;
Foul, I to the fountain fly ;
Wash me, Saviour, or I die.'

If you are really sorry for your sins ; if you are willing to let Jesus put this robe on you, and are desirous by His grace to love and serve Him, then He will say in reference to you—' Bring forth the Best Robe, and put it on him.'

Here, then, we have six good reasons why we should consider this as the best robe. It is so, because it is so NECESSARY ; because it is so VALUABLE ; because it is so SUITABLE ; because it is so BEAUTIFUL ; because it is so LASTING ; and because it is so CHEAP.

Now, the important thing for each of you to do, my dear children, is, to try and get this robe. Every one needs it. Try to get it *now*. If you put it off it may be too late. It never can be *too soon* to begin to love and serve God, and seek the salvation of our souls ; but sometimes it is *too late*. An old man one day took a child on his knee, and talked to him about Jesus, and told him to

seek the Saviour now, and pray to Him and love Him. The child knew that the old man was not a Christian, and he felt surprised. Then he looked up into the old man's face and said—'But why don't you seek God?'

The old man was much affected by the question, and replied—'Ah! my dear child, I neglected to do so when I was young, and now my heart is so hard that I fear I never shall be able.'

An intelligent, well-educated boy, about twelve years of age, was once attending a meeting where a minister of the gospel was conversing with and praying for some of his people, who were anxious about their salvation. When the meeting was over, the little boy went up to the minister and asked the solemn question—'What must I do to be saved?' He was told to 'go home and read the Bible, and pray for a new heart.' 'But, sir,' said the little fellow, with great emotion, 'I am afraid I might die before I get home, and then it will be too late.' 'True, my dear child,' said the minister. And then he explained to him what it means to believe in Jesus. He told him he must be sorry for his sins, and trust that God would forgive them on account of what Jesus had done and suffered for him. Then the good man kneeled down with the little boy, and prayed God to pardon and save him for Jesus' sake. The boy complied with the advice given him. He began that very moment to believe in Jesus, and he went home feeling quite comforted and happy. Jesus put the Best Robe on that boy then; and he has now been for more than thirty years a consistent member of the Church of Christ.

My heart's desire and prayer for you all, my dear children, is, that Jesus may put this Best Robe upon all of you, and make you happy in wearing it for ever!

IX.

The Best Helper.

‘I will help thee.’—ISAIAH XL. 10.

TWO persons are spoken of here : *I*, and *thee*. ‘I,’ the person speaking, is Jesus, our God and Saviour ; and ‘thee,’ the person spoken to, means everybody who needs His help, and seeks it. This is one of the promises of Christ. He says, they are *all* ‘exceeding great and precious ;’ and this promise is one of the *most* precious in the Bible.

It is precious, because it belongs to so many people. Suppose it had said, ‘I will help the Queen of England ;’ it would then only belong to *one* person in this country. Suppose the promise had been, ‘I will help the ministers of the gospel, or the Sunday-school teachers,—the rich, or the poor,—the young, or the old ;’—then, it would refer only to a small number of persons. But it does not mention any particular class of people. It says, ‘I will help *thee*.’ This means you and me, and everybody who needs it, and comes to Jesus for it.

In this passage, Jesus is presented to our notice as a *helper*. We may have many helpers, but Jesus is the *best*.

There are *four* reasons why Jesus is the Best Helper ! He is so, in the first place, because He is ALWAYS NEAR TO HELP.

It is of no use to have a helper, unless he is always near when we need him. If we were hungry, it would not help us to know that a hundred miles off there was a

nice loaf of bread. If we were travelling in the desert of Arabia, where it is very hot and sandy, and we were parched, and almost dead with thirst, would it help us any to remember, that in America there were many cool and sparkling springs of water? We might own a hundred such springs in this country, but they could do us no good then,—we want help near us when we need it.

You have all heard of Sir John Franklin and his crew. Some years ago they went off towards the North Pole, and they have never been heard of since. I suppose they got through the first winter pretty comfortably, but the second was very severe; and when it came, it found them entangled in the ice, without wood to make fires and keep out the cold, and without food to eat. What was to be done? There were many desiring to help them, but they were far off in England. There was the wife of Sir John Franklin, a rich lady; she would have parted with all she had in the world to bring back her husband. There, too, was Queen Victoria; she would have taken the brightest jewel from her crown, if that would have relieved the sufferings of the lost crew. There were the officers of the British navy; they all would have gone to their relief; the American navy, too, would gladly have helped them. And there was that good man in New York, Mr. Grinnell, who would have given thousands of pounds to find them; and that noble-hearted American, Dr. Kane, who went in search of them,—but it was all in vain! They had plenty of helpers, but they were not near enough to help them.

And here, perhaps, some one may be ready to ask, why God, who was near these perishing men, did not send them help. God is always near when people are in trouble. He always *could* help them if He saw it best. But sometimes He sees good reasons for not helping those who are in need.

For instance : there are the wicked men, nailing Jesus to the cross. He is God's own dear Son. God loves Him as no other father ever loved a son. God is near. He sees all His sufferings. The angels of heaven see it. Multitudes of them would fly, in an instant, to His relief, if God would let them. But no ! He suffers not one of them to move. God would not send help to His only begotten Son when the men were putting Him to death. And *why* was this ? Ah ! there was reason enough for it. If Jesus had not died, none of us would have been saved. Was not *that* a good reason ? And just so in every case where God does not help people, there is always a good reason for it, though we cannot always tell what the reason is.

There was once a poor woman, the widow of a clergyman, who trusted in God and served him. In times of trouble she often used to say to her children and friends, 'Do not fear ; *God lives*, and He will take care of us.' But after her husband's death, she was left to struggle with sickness and poverty. Her trials were very great. She tried to bear up under them with the patience and cheerfulness of a Christian, and, generally, she was successful. But on one occasion, when she was particularly afflicted, her faith seemed to fail for a little while, and giving way to her feelings of grief and sadness, she burst into tears.

Her little son, who was just able to talk, saw her weeping, and putting his hand in hers, and looking into her face very sadly, he said,—'Mother, is God dead now ?' Taking him in her arms, she said,—'No, my son, God is not dead. I thank you for asking that question. He always lives. He is an ever present help in every time of need. He will help us.' She wiped away her tears, and went cheerfully to her duties. She sought and found help from Jesus.

Thus, my dear children, Jesus is the *Best Helper*, because *He is always near*.

The second reason why He is the Best Helper is, because **HE IS ALWAYS ABLE TO HELP.**

Sometimes there are many helpers, and they are near at hand, but they are *not able to help.*

A wealthy gentleman has a darling child, a little girl, five or six years old. She is the joy of her parents' hearts, the light of their dwelling. Like a sunbeam she gladdens all around her. But this dear child is taken sick; the doctor is sent for; he comes, he sees her; he looks at her flushed face, he feels her pulse, he examines her symptoms, and says she has the scarlet fever.

Her father and mother feel very anxious about their dear child. But as the fever increases, the doctor looks very sad, and says: 'I'm afraid I can't help her.' Her mother is almost distracted. They call in other physicians. These gather round the bed; they try different medicines; they do everything that can be thought of, but they cannot save her. The fever becomes higher and higher, and at last death takes the little sufferer away. Many helpers are there, but they are not able to save.

Some time ago, a man was carried down the Niagara river, among the rapids above the great Fall. He soon lost command of the boat. His oars were swept from his hand, and at last the boat was upset. He was seen, for a while, to struggle with the rapids, which bore him on toward the fearful gulf. In his swift course he passed by a clump of trees whose branches hung over into the stream from a little island. He caught one of the branches, and hung a while in the midst of the foaming waves, and finally succeeded in getting upon the island. Soon the cry was heard,—'A man in the rapids! A man in the rapids!' People come in crowds to the banks of the river. They look upon the poor man with intense interest and pity. Many sympathizing hearts and willing hands are there; but they cannot reach the unfortunate man to help him.

At last they get a little boat, fasten a strong rope to it, place it in the rapids, and let out the rope. It goes, gradually, down toward the island on which the poor man stands, trembling on the brink of ruin. He watches eagerly the preparations his friends are making for his rescue. He sees the boat which they are letting down to him. He prepares to catch hold of it ; he knows it is his only hope of safety. If he misses that, he is gone.

Ah ! how intensely he watches the boat as it comes near him ! How earnestly, too, the sympathizing people on the shore watch it, as the rough waters tumble it about. See ! . . . it reaches him. He gathers all his strength,—he makes one plunge,—but, alas ! he misses the boat ! The foaming waters receive him, and ‘Lost ! Lost !’ is the heart-rending cry from the multitudes on the shore, as he rushes over the fearful precipice.

Now, you see, hundreds of kind hearts and strong hands were there, willing and anxious to rescue that poor man, but they *were not able*. It is very different, however, with Jesus. He is *always near* and *always able* to help us.

We read a great deal, in the Bible, about those whom Jesus has helped. There we find how He helped Abel, when he offered an acceptable sacrifice to God. He helped Noah to build the ark, which saved himself and his family. He helped Moses to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt. He helped David to slay the great giant, with nothing in his hand but a sling and a stone. He helped Daniel, when he was cast into the lions’ den, and shut the lions’ mouths, so that they did not hurt him. He helped Daniel’s three friends when they were thrown into the burning fiery furnace, and enabled them to walk up and down in the midst of the flames without being scorched. He helped Paul to preach the gospel ; and, in the days of cruel persecution, He helped the ‘noble army of martyrs’ to bear with patience the chain and the dungeon ; yea.

and even to sing for joy when the flames were kindling around them and the fire consuming their bodies.

And there, too, was Martin Luther, that brave soldier of the cross, who carried on the work of the Reformation, when the Pope, and the Cardinals, and the Emperor, and all the kingdoms and powers of the earth were trying to put him down. Jesus helped him, and made him bold and courageous, so that he never feared or faltered in his course. And it was because of the help that Jesus gave him that he was able to go on successfully with his great work. The Pope and the Priests of Rome were full of fury against him, and tried with all their might to stop him, but they could not.

Rich men can help us with their money, wise men with their counsels, and Christians with their prayers; but Jesus can help us in everything. He can help you, my dear children, in studying your lessons, and in all your daily duties.

A gentleman once said to a little girl, 'Mary, do you have to learn very hard lessons?' 'O yes, sir,' she replied; 'but before I begin to study them I pray to God to help me, and that makes them easy'—and so it will make everything easy. Try it for yourselves. Jesus will help all who ask Him to resist temptation; He will help them to repent, and to believe in Him, and to forsake all their evil ways.

He can help kings and governors to rule, and subjects to obey. He can help ministers to preach, and people to hear. He can help parents and children, teachers and scholars. He is able and willing to help all who feel their need of help, and truly seek His aid. Paul said, 'I can do *all things* through Christ strengthening (or helping) me.' And you and I may say and do the same, if we look to Him for His help. Jesus then is the Best Helper, because *He is always able to help.*

The *third* reason why Jesus is the best helper is, *because He IS ALWAYS WILLING TO HELP.*

He may not always be willing to help us just at the time, or in the way we desire,—that may not be best ; but in His own time and way He is always willing to help.

We read in the Bible about the rich man and Lazarus. The rich man was *able* to help, but he was not *willing*. The poor beggar sat at his gate every day. The rich man had an abundance of this world's goods, and could have given him comfortable clothing and plenty of food, but he would not give him anything. The helper, in this case, was near at hand, and able, but not willing.

There was once a ship that took fire at sea. Fire is a fearful thing to encounter anywhere, but it is never so fearful as at sea ; for, although in the very midst of water, there are no means of using it to put the fire out. There were about two hundred people on board this ship ; and as the flames increased, and roared among the masts and rigging, they all crowded to one end of the vessel, screaming, and running to and fro in dreadful distress. As night came on, a vessel hove in sight. It came nearer and nearer, until it was close enough to hear the shrieks of the people calling for help, and to see them wringing their hands in despair. The sailors on board the approaching ship were ready to go to the assistance of those distressed people, waiting only for their captain's order—but no order was given. At last the mate said to him, 'Sir, had we not better lower the boat?' But all the answer he received from the inhuman captain was, 'Mind your own business, sir.' He had a rich cargo of goods to sell, and he was in great haste to reach the port for which he was bound. He saw the burning ship, and two hundred people threatened with an awful death ; yet he steeled his heart against every feeling of pity, and would not allow the man at the helm to alter his course. He turned from

his fellow-creatures, and left them to perish by water, or by fire. This wretched man was near enough to help, and able enough to help ; but, ah ! he was *not willing*.

Now, Jesus is always willing. He may not send the help just in the way we wish, but, in one way or other, He is sure to send it. He tells us in the Bible that He is more willing to help those who come to Him, than parents are to give bread to their children. When you are hungry, and go to your father or mother for something to eat, you know how readily they give it to you ; yet Jesus is more ready to help us than earthly parents are to feed their children.

When General Washington was fighting for his country, he called upon the name of the Lord, and the Lord heard and answered him. When the first Congress of the United States met, in the Hall of Independence, to frame the Constitution and make the laws by which they were to be governed, they had a difficult task to perform. They met, time after time, but could not agree about the Constitution, or the laws, and they were likely to break up in confusion. One day, that wise and good man, Benjamin Franklin, rose and said, in substance : ‘ My friends, we need some one stronger and wiser than we are, to help us. I move that we have a minister of the gospel to pray for us.’ The motion was seconded, and they secured a chaplain. He prayed to God to help them in their trouble. His prayer was heard. Jesus helped them. He gave the wisdom they needed to enable them to frame the Constitution and laws under which we live, and by which our country enjoys so many blessings.

Two men were once associated together, during their young days, and through their college life ; but, leaving college, they were separated from each other. One resided in a large city, and was prospered by the hand ‘ that maketh rich.’ He became wealthy, and ever sought

to honour God in the use of the means bestowed upon him.

The other became a clergyman, and went as a missionary to the far West. On the Sabbath, he was engaged in breaking the Bread of Life to the hardy but poor settlers around him, and during the week he toiled for earthly food, to sustain a young family. Years had passed since the two friends had met ; nor had news of one reached the other. They were ignorant of each other's circumstances—almost of their location.

One day, while the merchant was engaged in his business, the thought of his absent and almost forgotten friend came suddenly to his mind. During the day, at every interval from his busy cares, he found himself thinking about his old friend. He tried to find out what it was which had led him to think about him, but in vain. In the evening, when he returned home, the image of his early companion was still before his mind. That one so long almost forgotten should come so vividly to remembrance, he felt was singular. He mentioned the circumstance to his wife, and asked if she could account for it. She suggested that his friend might be in need of assistance, and, at all events, it would be well to write him, enclosing a sum of money ; it might prove a great help to a poor missionary toiling in the West.

The letter was sent. Weeks rolled on, and an answer was received. In the humble home of the missionary, fever had laid its hand upon every inmate. Mother and children all lay upon beds of sickness, unable to assist each other. The father, in the intervals of his attack, was nurse and provider for his sick family. Ill and feeble himself, yet he must ride many miles to a mill, carrying with him the Indian corn, to procure for his little ones the only food they had to keep them alive. At last even this supply was gone, and without money, or food, or the means of

obtaining either, he betook himself to his knees, praying that the God 'who feedeth the ravens,' would provide for his children. Trusting in a covenant-keeping Father, he arose from his prayer, cheered and comforted. Shortly after, there came a knock at his door. He opened it, and received a letter. With a heart swelling with thankfulness, he read the warm and affectionate greeting from the friend of his boyhood.

Enclosed in it he found a sum sufficient for himself and his children for some months : and want was again driven from his dwelling. Ah ! how welcome it was to him. It came just in the right time—in his greatest need,—and he felt that Jesus was indeed willing to help His people in every time of trouble.

Yes ! He is *near to help, able to help, and willing to help.*

There is only one other reason I will give you why Jesus is the Best Helper. Because He is ALWAYS KIND IN HELPING.

Now, there are some people who are willing and able to help others, and who do help them too ; but it is done in a very rough manner.

Even ministers are sometimes harsh in their way of giving counsel or reproof.

There was once a minister who had a kind heart, and who was very anxious to do good ; but he did it in a very rough way. He reproved people about trifling things with unnecessary severity. Upon one occasion, when several ministers were assembled together, one of the company made some remarks which he did not approve, and he rebuked him with so much violence and harshness, that another minister present begged him to stop, saying : ' Why, brother, if you attempt to correct a person for the most trifling fault, you take a sledge-hammer and beat his brains out.' But this is a kind of help no one likes to receive.

I was reading lately an account of the very kind way in which a gentleman belonging to the Society of Friends once helped a man who had injured him. He was a preacher among the Friends, but a tanner by trade, and known to all as one 'who walked humbly with his God.' One night a quantity of hides was stolen from his tannery, and he had reason to believe the thief was a quarrelsome, drunken neighbour whom we may call John Smith.

The next week the following advertisement appeared in the county newspaper :—

'Whoever stole a quantity of hides on the fifth of the present month, is hereby informed that the owner has a sincere wish to be his friend. If poverty tempted him to this false step, the owner will keep the whole transaction secret, and will gladly put him in the way of obtaining money by means more likely to bring him peace of mind.'

When the thief read this advertisement, his heart was quite subdued, and he felt very sorrowful. A few nights afterwards, as the tanner's family were about retiring to rest, they heard a timid knock, and when the door was opened, there stood John Smith with a load of hides on his shoulder. Without looking up, he said, 'I have brought these back, Mr. Savery; where shall I put them?'

'Wait till I can get a lantern, and I will go to the barn with thee,' he replied; 'then, perhaps thou wilt come in and tell me how this happened. We will see what can be done for thee.'

While they were gone, his wife prepared some hot coffee, and placed other refreshments on the table. When they returned from the barn, she said, 'Neighbour Smith, I thought some hot supper would be good for thee.'

He turned his back towards her and did not speak. After a few moments, he said, in a choked voice, 'It is the first time I ever stole anything, and I have felt very bad about it. I am sure I didn't think once that I should ever come

to what I am. But I took to drinking—then to quarrelling. Since I began to go down hill, everybody gives me a kick. You are the first man that has offered me a helping hand. My wife is sick and my children are starving. You have sent them many a meal—God bless you,—and yet I stole the hides. But I tell you the truth, when I say it is the first time I was ever a thief.’

‘Let it be the last,’ replied William Savery; ‘the secret still remains between ourselves. Thou art still young, and it is in thy power to make up lost time. Promise me that thou wilt not drink any intoxicating liquor for a year, and I will employ thee to-morrow on good wages. Thy little boy can pick up stones. But eat a bit now, and drink some hot coffee. Perhaps it will keep thee from craving anything stronger to-night. Doubtless thou wilt find it hard to abstain at first; but keep up a brave heart for the sake of thy wife and children, and it will soon become easy. When thou hast need of coffee, tell Mary, and she will always give it thee.’

The poor fellow tried to eat and drink, but the food seemed to choke him. After vainly trying to compose his feelings, he bowed his head on the table and wept. After a while, he ate and drank, and his host parted with him for the night, with the friendly words, ‘Try to do well, John, and thou wilt always find a friend in me.’

He entered into his employment the next day, and remained with him many years, a sober, honest, and faithful man.

Now, this is an instance of help rendered with great kindness; and if we desire to help any one, we must always try to do it in a kind way. This is what Jesus does. He is always kind, ‘even to the unthankful and to the evil.’

On one occasion, while Jesus was on earth, the Pharisees brought to him a woman who had been guilty of a great sin. They wanted him to say that she ought to be

stoned to death. Jesus said, 'Let him that is without sin among you, cast the first stone at her.' Their consciences told them that they were all sinners; and they went out, one by one, till 'Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst.' And he said unto her, 'Hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee. Go, and sin no more.'

And in that dark hour, before Jesus was delivered to the Jews to be crucified, when His heart was sad and sorrowful, He took His disciples into the Garden of Gethsemane, and desired them to watch, while He went a little way from them to pray. When He returned, He found them sleeping. Many persons would have reproached them for what looked like ingratitude and want of kind feeling; but Jesus only said: 'What, could ye not watch with me one hour?'

Jesus tells us in the Bible that He 'will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax.' He compares Himself to a good shepherd, 'who carries the lambs in His bosom,' and gently folds them in His arms. The help He gave to those who sought it when He was on earth, was always kindly given.

If any came to Him for instruction, He taught them kindly,—never upbraiding them for their ignorance and dulness. If any came with their troubles and afflictions, He sympathized with them and helped them.

He gave health to the sick—sight to the blind—hearing to the deaf—strength to the feeble—comfort to the sorrowing—life to the dead. And what He gave was always given with kind, gentle, loving words. If any came confessing their sins, He received them graciously, and forgave them tenderly. And even when reproof and rebuke were necessary, 'the law of kindness still dwelt upon His tongue.'

And He is the same now, as when in love and in meekness He moved among men. He is still always *near to help, always able, always willing, and always kind in helping*. These are the four reasons why Jesus is THE BEST HELPER.

My dear children and friends, let us seek the help of Jesus. We all need it in everything we have to do. We need it in all the engagements and occupations of daily life ; but most especially do we need it in the important business of seeking our soul's salvation.

Ah ! let us all begin *to-day*, and ask help from Jesus. He is ready to give it if we pray to Him for it. He has power enough and love enough to grant all we need.

And let us try to imitate our blessed Saviour. Let us seek His grace, to make us like Him, in helping one another. We cannot, like Jesus, be *always near*, nor are we *always able* to help ; but we can be like Him in being *always willing* and *always kind*, and in seeking in every way to do good to our fellow-creatures.

‘ To do His Heavenly Father's will
Was His employment and delight ;
Humility and holy zeal
Shone through His life divinely bright.

‘ Oh, how benevolent and kind,
How mild, how ready to forgive !
Be this the temper of our mind,
And these the rules by which we live.

‘ Dispensing good where'er He came,
The labours of His life were love ;
Then, if we bear the Saviour's name,
By His example let us move.’

