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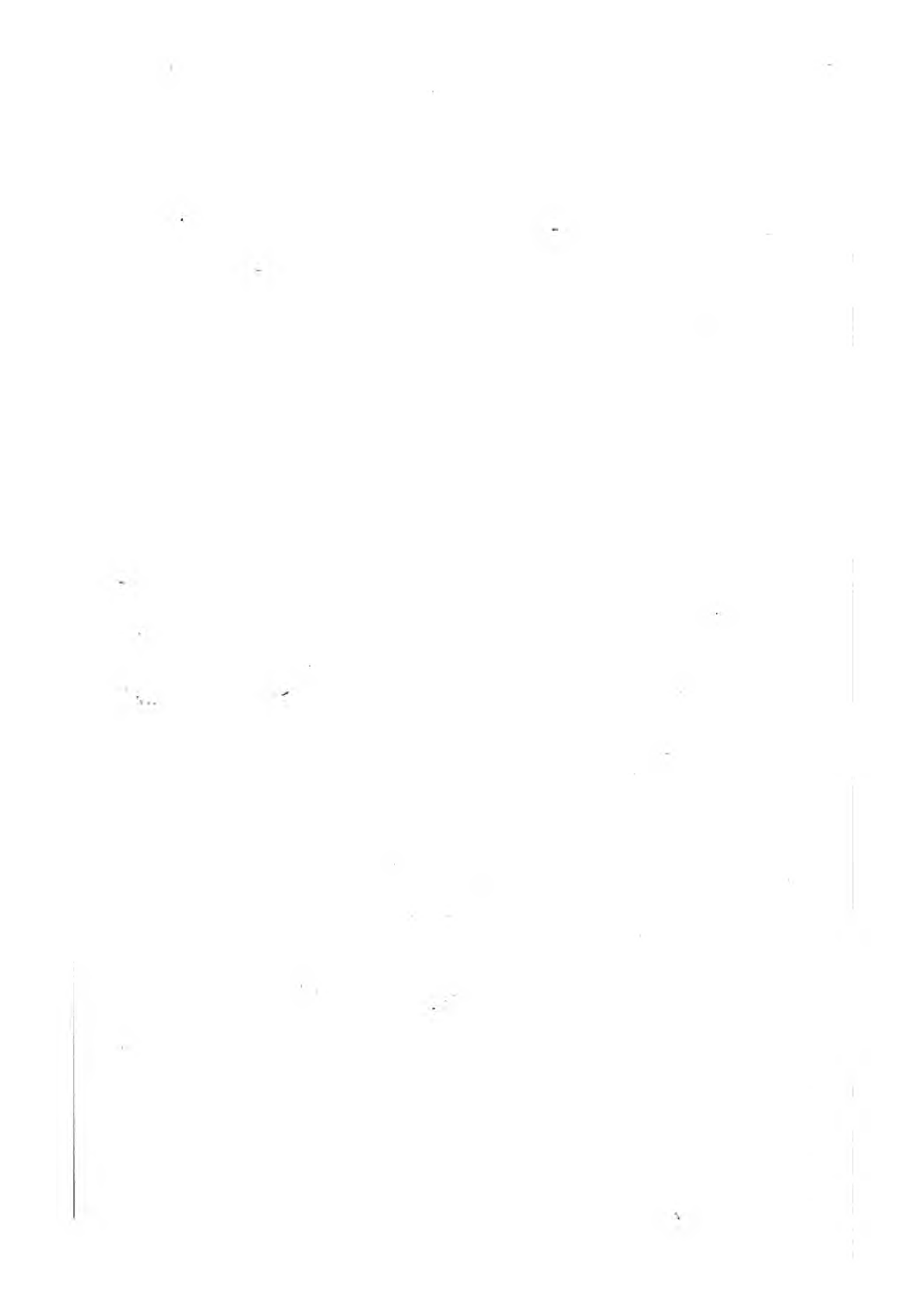
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THOUGHTS ON THE
PARENTAL CHARACTER OF GOD

PARRY







THOUGHTS
ON THE
PARENTAL CHARACTER
OF
G O D.

BY THE LATE
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New Edition, with Preface by his Son,
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PREFACE.

THREE years ago, I was encouraged and assisted to begin writing down, as they occurred, my Thoughts on the Parental Character of God, by One, who was not only the chief comfort of my earthly pilgrimage—the sharer of every joy, and the alleviator of every sorrow—but a faithful counsellor, companion, and friend, through many a rough and thorny path in our journey (as I trust) towards a better and more enduring inheritance. SHE has since been called to possess that inheritance, to behold ‘face to face’ the Saviour ‘whom not having seen

she loved,' and to realize the glorious promises made to the CHILDREN OF GOD. I now, in accordance with her expressed wish, print these Thoughts, imperfect and incomplete as they are, for private circulation among our friends, in the humble hope that considerations which have infused no small comfort into my own cup, may not be without their use to others; and, above all, that they may, in some degree, show forth the praise, and promote the glory of Him, who is emphatically 'the FATHER of mercies, and the God of all comfort.'

W. E. P.

LONDON, *May*, 1841.

EDITOR'S PREFACE.

THE following 'Thoughts,' which I have more than once been asked to reprint, were penned by my Father, nearly forty years ago, in the intervals of a busy official life at the Admiralty, and (as his own Preface states) under the immediate pressure of a severe personal trial. Those who knew him well will at once recognise the unaffected simplicity and practical influence of that intelligent faith in the Unseen, which was the moving principle of an honourable and useful career, no less than of a consistent and attractive Christian character. Further, I know not who can be better qualified than the survivors of the well-knit earthly Family, of which he was the loved Husband and Father, to bear witness how, in all the mutual relations of a happy home life, he unconsciously deepened the lines

of resemblance between the human and Divine Fatherhood, as portrayed in these pages.

We have fallen upon days when (not for the first time) the world, by wisdom knowing not GOD, adjures us to substitute for the God of revelation an unknown God of Epicurean device, caring not to intermeddle with the daily 'changes and chances of this mortal life.'

This little book may prove a humble contribution to the Christian's armoury of defensive warfare, as a weapon drawn from the rich stores of experimental religion. The writer was no theologian, skilled in the learned subtilities of the Schools, but an honest and devout layman, who in his own gallant profession proved himself a leader of men, and yet counted it the noblest privilege of his manhood, as a diligent and prayerful student of Holy Scripture, to show men the way through Christ by one Spirit unto 'OUR FATHER.'

E. DOVER.

CANTERBURY, *Dec.* 19, 1877.

The Parental Character of God.



CHAPTER I.

‘Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name.’—MATT. vi. 9.

AMONG the numerous proofs afforded us of the mercy and condescension of God, there is none perhaps more remarkable than the adaptation of the language of Revelation to the understanding and feelings, as well as to the wants and necessities, of man. It is true, indeed, that there are ‘some things’ in the sacred volume, which, upon more than human authority, we may pronounce ‘hard to be understood;’* while there are other parts, especially of the prophetic

* 2 Pet. iii. 16.

writings, which the deepest human research is unable fully to develop, and of which the true and entire meaning will perhaps remain to us as a sealed book, till the accomplishment of the prediction renders it clear and obvious, leaving us only to wonder and adore.

But after all that can be said, either by the humble inquirer, or by the presumptuous caviller, respecting those portions of the Bible, of which the language is obscure, or the interpretation doubtful, it may be confidently asserted that, in all that is *essential to salvation*, 'he may run that readeth it ;'* that 'the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein,' † *provided it be read with candour, teachableness, and, above all, with PRAYER.*

In no respect is the adaptation just alluded to more worthy of notice, or more entitled to our deepest gratitude, than in the frequency with which God is pleased to reveal Himself to us under the endearing title of FATHER. It is remarkable that, in the only form of

* Hab. ii. 2.

† Isa. xxxv. 8.

prayer bequeathed to us for our use by the Lord Jesus Christ, a mode of address to the Deity is adopted, which is peculiarly encouraging to our weakness, by at once admitting us to the throne of grace, as children into the presence of their father. This is a relation which is immediately intelligible to the meanest capacity ; which instantly commends itself to the warmest sympathies of our fallen nature, and enlists on its side the best feelings of the most obdurate heart. The very name of FATHER is intimately associated in the mind with one of the first and tenderest of those mysterious ties which bind man to his fellow ; ties which the Creator, in His wisdom and benevolence, has made so universal, that the exceptions to the rule are, by common consent, branded with infamy, as unnatural and atrocious.

It cannot but be interesting, and it may, by the Divine blessing, be profitable, to endeavour to delineate some of the features of that very striking analogy which subsists between the dealings of God with mankind, in His PARENTAL CHARACTER, and those of

earthly parents towards their children. The points of resemblance are numerous and remarkable; and an attempt, however feeble and imperfect, to trace out a few of the more prominent, if made in that childlike and teachable spirit to which alone the promise of a blessing is attached, can scarcely fail to elevate in some degree our conceptions of the Divine perfections, to kindle in our hearts some warmth of filial affection towards that blessed Being who is Love itself,* and to bring us unto somewhat closer communion and more intimate acquaintance with Him, whom to know is life eternal.†

Let us, however, remark at the outset, that, in any comparison between the dealings of the Omnipotent and All-pure Creator, and the conduct of His weak and sinful creatures, the subject must be approached with a deep and solemn conviction of the immeasurable moral distance between God and man. ‘For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For, as the heavens are higher than the earth, so

* 1 John, iv. 16.

† John, xvii. 3.

are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.' * Indeed, even with the best and wisest of earthly parents, it is rather in the *principles* which they acknowledge *ought* to regulate their conduct to their offspring, than in their actual *practice*, that the comparison will bear to be instituted at all. Every right principle of action in the education of our children must be founded in holiness, justice, wisdom, mercy, and truth; all which attributes are, in the Deity, perfect and unchangeable in their nature, and unceasing in their operation. It is only in proportion as we are enabled to approach the perfect standard of the Divine nature, by acting upon these heavenly principles—very far as we must ever come short of them—that we can in any measure lay claim, even among our erring fellow-creatures, to the character of good and judicious parents. But here the comparison must end. In the *degree* in which these principles are carried into practice, the analogy may be said entirely to fail. The Almighty has been pleased to designate Him-

* Isa. lv. 8, 9.

self and us relatively as Parent and children, because we may best derive our conceptions of His parental character from the feelings and conduct of earthly parents; and, therefore, the appellation of Father was the best suited to our limited capacities in expressing something of His tender love to man; not because it conveys—for no human language *can* convey—any adequate idea of the real nature or boundless extent of the Divine love. While, therefore, we adore the goodness and condescension of God in calling us His children, and freely permitting us to address Him as our Father, let not the familiarity of the relation, and even its very tenderness, betray us into any low and irreverent conception of the parental character of Jehovah, lest we justly incur that reproof of the Almighty, ‘Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself.’

There is another circumstance which in entering on this subject, it is especially necessary to notice; not as constituting a feature in the analogy we are about to trace, but

* Ps. L. 21.

rather as forming an exception to it. It should be borne in mind, that so long as we remain in this world, we are, in the sight of the Omniscient God, only in the childhood, and even in the infancy, of our being.

There are, doubtless, to be observed, during the short span of human existence, and among the countless modifications of human character, very different degrees of progress in virtue, various shades of advancement in moral excellence, and, what is of much greater importance, a nearer or more remote approximation to that 'holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.'* This advancement is, indeed, the very object for which, if we know our children's true interest, we constantly labour. It is the very result we are encouraged to expect, and anxiously hope to obtain for them, as the consequence of early education and judicious discipline; and happy the parents who are allowed to see in their offspring, as their years increase, not merely an improving development of the intellectual faculties, but likewise those better 'fruits

* Heb. xii. 14.

of the Spirit,'* which none but the Spirit can produce, and by which alone they can become meet for a glorious and eternal inheritance.

But yet the best, and wisest, and holiest of the children of men was still, up to the latest moment of his sojourn here, as much under the teaching of God's Spirit, and as dependent on the bounties of His grace, as when he drew the first faint breath of His existence. He was still but a child journeying towards his Father's home, and as little able as ever to dispense with the watchful eye, the supporting arm, the unerring guidance, or the bountiful provision of his Almighty Parent. We do not rightly appreciate this world, if we consider it as more than the *nursery for eternity*. As concerns this life, and the things of this life only, we are not long in arriving at maturity; such maturity at least as is compatible with our present finite and imperfect capabilities, and necessary for the appointed purposes of this brief and preliminary state of being. For these purposes *only*, the teaching and expe-

* Gal. v. 22. Eph. v. 9.

rience of a few short years enable us to 'put away childish things.' * But there is no period of our mortal existence at which, with reference to our eternal welfare, we can be said to have passed the infancy of being, or be safely left to shift for ourselves. Our state here, even to the close of the longest life, is but a state of continued tuition and dependence, when viewed in relation to the ultimate object, and the never-ceasing duration, of our existence.

Nor is it sufficient merely that we feel this world to be only a nursery for eternity. It is essential, also, that we should be duly impressed with the infinite superiority of the Teacher and Guide over those who are to be taught and led,—superiority in wisdom, goodness, truth ; in short, in every attribute which qualifies one intelligent being to be the director of the destinies of another. For we may assume it as a truth, which no reasonable person will be disposed to controvert, to which certainly no well - informed Christian will object, that the difference, as to helplessness

* I Cor. xiii. 11.

and want of capacity between a new-born babe and the most intelligent of earthly parents is inexpressibly less than between that parent and the Supreme Being. It would greatly assist our meditations on the parental character of God, and His dealings with man in that character, if we kept this truth constantly in view ; not as a barren, though undeniable, fact, to be recognised only in theory, but as an active operative principle, exerting a daily and hourly influence on all our conceptions of the Deity. However humbling the consideration may be to the proud and presumptuous spirit of the natural heart, however prone we may be to imagine that our moral or intellectual Babel may be made to approach very near, if not actually to reach, the heavens, the Word of Truth invariably sets forth the strength of man as utter weakness, and his wisdom as mere ' foolishness ; ' * and why ? Because it speaks of these in relation to Him who is ALL-wise and ALL-powerful ; so that the declaration would have been incomplete, the description inadequate,

* 1 Cor. iii. 19, 20.

had it ascribed to man any strength or any wisdom of his own, when compared with Him who sitteth in the heavens, and ' filleth all in all.' *

* Eph. i. 23.

CHAPTER II.

‘While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen : for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.’—2 COR. iv. 18.

IF the foregoing truths be fully admitted, not merely as a portion of our creed floating in the head, but as a living principle of action influencing the heart, we shall readily perceive that the real business of life, to a reasonable and responsible being, is EDUCATION FOR ETERNITY. This will furnish us with the only rational and satisfactory clue to the dealings of God with man. Those dealings have reference mainly, if not entirely, to a future and more important, because an eternal, state of existence. They overlook the narrow bounds of time, and overstep the contracted limits of space, stretching forward to the regions of infinity, where time and space are

known no more. They have for their principal object, not the ephemeral span of human existence in a dying world, but the countless ages of a never-ending eternity.

ETERNITY! how easily said! how little contemplated! how impossible fully to conceive! how faintly pictured by the utmost stretch of the most vivid imagination! And yet it is for this that we are here to be trained. We are under tuition here for a state of existence hereafter, compared with which the longest life is but as a moment, and the dearest objects on which we now set our affections lighter than dust in the balance. This is a truth indeed which few, if any, persons would be found to deny *in words*; for if there be any meaning in the language, or any truth in the declarations, of the Bible, the denial would involve at once the most palpable absurdity and the grossest infidelity. Yet do we not, *in fact*, deny it many times in every waking hour? Do we not practically doubt it, or at least are we not so continually unmindful of it, as to prove that we have little faith in its practical importance? But while *we* are ha-

bitually as forgetful of this truth as if we actually disbelieved it, while *we* are incessantly directing our most earnest attention, and lending our best energies, to 'things temporal,' and only admitting eternity into our thoughts as an unwelcome intruder, at some vacant moment, on some fixed day, or at some stated hour of formal service, how stands the matter in the estimation of Him who sees 'the end from the beginning,'* in whose infinite comprehension 'a thousand years are as one day?' † With whatever pertinacity *we* continue, day by day, and year after year, to magnify into undue importance the veriest trifles upon earth, by viewing them through the delusive medium of prejudice and passion, with HIM there can be no false estimate. Every event and every circumstance is, in His sight, invested with precisely its proper degree of importance; nothing is distorted into a deceptive shape; nothing dressed in borrowed colours. The flimsy veil of earthly objects, which obscures *our* perceptions of eternal realities, cannot hide a single ray of

* Isa. xlvi. 10.

† 2 Pet. iii. 8.

truth from His all-seeing eye. In the unerring apprehensions of the Divine mind, eternity is ever the prominent feature, ever occupies the foreground of that mighty picture on which the destiny of our fallen race is portrayed.

Nor is the principle of preferring the future to the present, of giving more weight to consequences than to the passing events of the moment, confined exclusively to the operations of the Deity. The same principle is not only recognised, but to a certain extent, adopted, by every judicious earthly parent, in training up his child, as he fondly ventures to hope, for a life of future usefulness to others, and of happiness to himself. Does not such a parent strive to keep his eye steadily fixed *on the future*, disregarding, as comparatively unimportant, the petty trifles of the present hour except as they appear to bear on the ultimate welfare of his child? Is he not continually called upon to forego, sometimes with a painful sacrifice to his own feelings, the immediate gratification of conferring pleasure, lest the indulgence allowed, or the evil temper

unsubdued, or the wrong motive unreprieved, should tend to form a habit injurious to the future character, and therefore to the best worldly interests, of the child of his affections?

You, who are Christian parents, say, whether the moral training of your children is not a process involving a continual struggle, between the impulse of inclination on the one hand, and the sterner obligations of duty on the other; between what is at the time perhaps agreeable to them and to yourselves, and what you feel, you know, to be really conducive to the permanent welfare of your offspring? Is not some such conflict as this daily, and almost hourly, passing in your minds? And among the supplications which you offer at the Throne of Grace, when bending beside the bed of your sleeping little ones, is there any more fervent, any more sincere, than this, that you may be led by a better wisdom and better strength than your own, to do simply *what is right* for your children, whatever may be the cost, whatever the present sacrifice, to them or to yourselves?

Then, Christian parents, whenever this occurs ; whenever you resolutely resist, or only feel that you ought to resist, some present impulse for the sake of the future, though perhaps, distant result ; whenever your better judgment or your moral principle gains a victory, however slight, over your natural tendency to indulgence ; do not let the matter rest here, but carry out its application to yourselves as children of God. Consider that your Father which is in Heaven is continually dealing with you, as you desire to deal with your own beloved children on earth. Is it too much to give God credit for acting on a principle, which you acknowledge to be a right and just one, and on which, therefore, you earnestly desire to act yourselves ? You will not venture to say, nay, you will shrink from the very idea of suspecting, that God loves you with an affection less deep, less ardent, in one word, less *parental*, than that which you bear to the children He has given you. And, while you feel that your own love to them is, at the best, defective in its nature, variable in its degree, and inconstant

in its operation,—generally blind, too often partial, and, with all its tenderness, never wholly free from some taint of selfishness, or some alloy of passion,—will you not be ready to acknowledge, and earnestly strive to act on the acknowledgment, that no such defect, impurity, or inconstancy, *can* belong to the love of Him, whose every attribute is perfect and complete ?

It would seem important, therefore, in forming our estimate of the dealings of God with man, and especially in reconciling ourselves to those dealings, when they seem for the time to press heavily upon us, that it should be our earnest endeavour and fervent prayer, first, to obtain something like a clear and well-defined conception of the PERFECT NATURE OF GOD'S FATHERLY LOVE, and then to assure ourselves of ITS UNCEASING OPERATION. If our faith could but embrace these two truths, so as to apply them in practice, as fully as our intellect admits them in theory, there would be an end of every murmur under disappointment, and all impatience under trial. There would be no more of that pas-

sive submission to dispensations which we cannot avoid, that mere bending with a bad grace to some hard necessity, which enters too largely into our best efforts at resignation. We should not even be satisfied with feeling and saying, 'It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth good unto him ;' for if faith performed her proper office, and exercised her rightful power, within us, whatever seems good to HIM would also seem good, entirely and indisputably good, to *us*. We should not be content to rest in the general admission, often playing fluently, it may be gracefully, on the lips, but too seldom proceeding from the depths of the heart, that the Judge of all the earth must do right.* But, bringing the matter close home to our own individual case ; receiving the trial as the deliberate appointment of a most tender as well as All-wise Parent ; the filial language of our inmost souls would be, 'I KNOW, O Lord, that thy judgments are *right*, and that thou *in faithfulness* hast afflicted me.'†

* Gen. xviii. 25.

† Ps. cxix. 75.

CHAPTER III.

‘As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten.’

—REV. iii. 19.

BUT if it be true that God, in great mercy, maintains an inflexible determination to have regard to the ultimate welfare of His rational creatures, making the events of this transitory life subordinate and subservient to the paramount interests of a state of being that will never end, so likewise is it true that, in the exercise of His infinite wisdom, He exactly suits the means to the end. Not only does our Heavenly Father pursue a system of never-ceasing moral discipline, but, with the tenderest care and the nicest circumspection, He mercifully adapts that discipline to the case of each individual member of His family on earth.

In this respect, also, a wise and judicious

earthly parent *endeavours* to act towards his children upon the principle continually exhibited in God's dealings with man. From the first moment that the respective dispositions and tempers of his children begin to be developed,—and such a parent cannot fail to perceive this in very early infancy,—from that moment does he begin his anxious task of counteracting what is evil, and cherishing what is good, in each. Parents need not to be reminded how various those tempers and dispositions are in different children ; all, indeed, agreeing in the innate tendency to moral evil ; all indisputably proving the corruption of our fallen nature, and confirming, by universal experience, the truth of the Divine declaration, that 'the imagination of man's heart is evil *from his youth* ;'* yet differing very widely as to the form which this corrupt tendency assumes in different individuals. How common and how just a remark it is, that the discipline which is absolutely necessary for one child, would entirely ruin another of the same family ! The bold and turbulent

* Gen. viii. 21.

spirit of one must be met by a firm and vigorous control ; the apathetic indolence of another needs to be roused to life and energy ; while the quiet retiring diffidence of a third demands all the gentlest encouragement, and all the tenderest endearments, of a parent's love. Such, too, is the moral constitution of our nature, that even some qualities, amiable in themselves, if not duly regulated, and seasonably directed to their proper and legitimate objects, may run into extremes, or engender habits most injurious to the future character of their possessor. It is indispensable, therefore, to judicious education, that the peculiar tendencies of each child be narrowly watched ; that due correction be applied, or encouragement given, or advice afforded, just when and where it is needed. The great leading and immutable principles of moral discipline must, indeed, be steadily kept in view with all children alike ; but the application of these principles requires to be carefully managed, and nicely modified, according to the various subjects with which we have to deal.

But, while nothing is more easy than to

reason thus, nothing more obvious and undeniable than the theory of such a system as this, how difficult it is to put it into practice, to carry it into execution in the routine of every day's experience, let those who have tried it candidly say. Let them say what want of circumspection, what errors in judgment even when most circumspect, what failures in temper, what indulgence of caprice or selfishness, they continually have to bewail *in themselves*. Let them say, how often they are brought to a humbling sense of their own incapacity to train an immortal being for his high and holy destiny, and constrained, by the utter failure of their own best efforts, to exclaim, 'Who is sufficient for these things?''*

Now, in the parental dealings of God with man, there can be no such doubts and difficulties as these. While an earthly parent has little or nothing on which to found his own fallible judgment, but the outward and visible actions of his offspring, the Omniscient Father looks *into the heart* of each of His

* 2 Cor. ii. 16.

children, exploring, with a scrutiny which nothing can escape, its inmost recesses, and tracing, with accurate precision, the spring of every action, ere that action has its birth.* The Heavenly Physician has no need to watch the symptoms which are palpable to man. His skill penetrates much deeper than this, going to the very root of the disease, and developing its hidden cause, before any outward symptom has made its appearance. 'For *out of the heart* proceed evil thoughts, &c. ;' † and 'The Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts.' ‡ And while Omniscience is thus looking, with unerring eye, into the very fountain-head of all moral disease within us, Almighty power and infinite goodness are equally engaged in prescribing the remedy ; adapting, with infallible skill, the means of cure to every particular case, and administering to each sin-sick soul among God's children the medicine which is precisely the most ap-

* 'Thou understandest my thought *afar off*.' —Ps. cxxxix. 2.

† Matt. xv. 19. ‡ 1 Chron. xxviii. 9. Rev. ii. 23.

propriate for fulfilling the designs of His mercy.

We require no very long acquaintance with the world to perceive, even within the limited sphere of our own experience, how great is 'the sad variety' of human trial. The *main* sources of suffering, all emanating from sin as their fountain-head, are indeed comparatively few, and not very difficult to enumerate. The list would not perhaps be a long one of those afflictive dispensations which may be considered as making up, in ordinary life, 'the ills that flesh is heir to.' But who can trace the infinitely varied streams of bitterness flowing from these few prolific sources of earthly suffering—who can recount the innumerable changes continually rung upon that brief catalogue of human woes? Do we presume too far in saying that this variety of trial, in all its countless and complicated forms, constitutes the ingredients, which, prescribed by the unerring wisdom, mixed by the skilful hand, and administered by the tender love of the Almighty Parent, are intended to meet the case of each of His children, labouring as

they all are, more or less, under the fatal malady of sin? Is it too much to believe that He, without whose permission not even a sparrow falleth to the ground, whose providence is so minute that even the very hairs of our heads are numbered, condescends to appportion and apply these ingredients with the most scrupulous regard to the actual necessities of each individual case? Christian parents, would you like to have it doubted that this is your own plan of proceeding with the children of your best affection? Would it not grieve you to have it supposed, that you do not take any pains—nay, that you do not take incessant pains, to diversify your management, to adapt your discipline, to regulate your indulgence or your correction, according to the peculiar faults, or infirmities, or wants, of each particular child? Can you then hesitate, let it again be asked, to give God credit for acting on a principle so sound, so just, so *paternal*, that you desire to make it, every day and every hour of your life, the basis of your own parental conduct?

Again, are we impatient under trial, be-

cause, while its immediate pressure lasts, we cannot see *the precise and specific reason* of its infliction? Is it necessary, is it probable that we should? Would not the wonder rather be, if we did see clearly all the complex movements of that vast moral machinery, by which the Governor of the Universe makes 'all things work together for good to them that love Him?'^{*} Is it astonishing that, seeing as we now do, 'through a glass darkly,' † the eyes of our faith bedimmed by every object of sense that flits before them, we cannot perceive each link of the chain by which, with ceaseless impulse, He draws His children towards Him? Should it not rather be our comfort and privilege to rest, with child-like confidence, on the gracious assurance, 'What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter?' ‡

On the other hand, while we admit that the ways of God are indeed often inscrutable, let it be remembered that there is *one* inquiry which we are not only allowed, but bound, to make, in scanning His designs. We acknow-

^{*} Rom. viii. 28. † 1 Cor. xiii. 12. ‡ John, xiii. 7.

ledge that the ways of God are 'past finding out.'* So far all is right, for nothing can be more true. But, let us beware lest we use this acknowledgment as an excuse for not finding *ourselves* out; lest, lulled by this admission, as a cheap and easy opiate to our consciences, it cost us nothing but the breath employed in pronouncing it; lest, in short, we put it in the place of that honest, faithful self-examination, which may often lay open some portion of the otherwise hidden meaning of a Father of mercy, in the trials with which our earthly path is strewed. We are not unwilling to say *of* the Deity, 'Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty to perfection?'† But are we as ready, when speaking *to* God, to inquire of Him, with sincerity of purpose, and with all the importunity of heartfelt supplication, 'Show me WHEREFORE Thou contendest with me?‡' This is an inquiry which may perhaps be made to some practically useful purpose, and is therefore always worth the making. It is a question which God will ever

* Rom. xi. 33.

† Job, xi. 7.

‡ Ib. x. 2.

faithfully answer, if we will but faithfully ask it ;—and an eternity of bliss or woe may possibly hang upon it.

Instead of being fretful and impatient under trial, we have indeed great need to beware lest it harden us ; and this it probably will do, unless it bend our stubborn hearts into filial submission to the Divine appointments. There is a thing much more to be dreaded than affliction itself, even in its severest earthly form ; and this is, lest the gracious intention of a God of mercy, in sending the chastening dispensations of His Providence, be frustrated. These dispensations are often the surest tokens of a Father's love, the evidence of His paternal care—*certainly* His appointed messengers*—*it may be*, the very proofs of our adoption into the family of His Son. Well we may be exhorted not to 'despise the chastening of the Lord,' nor to 'faint when we are rebuked of Him.' Well may we be animated by that encouraging declaration, which sets aside all

* 'Affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground.'—Job, v. 6.

conjecture as to the *design* of trial: 'whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth.' Well may our hearts be touched with tenderness, our spirits melted into willing submission, by that most tender assurance, conveyed in language that no despondency can mistake, and (blessed be God!) no sophistry can pervert—'If ye endure chastening'—if ye look upon it and bear it as sent by a Father, 'for your profit, that ye may be partakers of His holiness'—the highest boon that man can desire, or, with reverence be it spoken, God bestow—*then*, indeed, 'God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?'—*then*, indeed, however 'grievous' be the 'chastening for the present, nevertheless afterwards it yieldeth,' in rich abundance, 'the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.'*

The afflictive dispensations of the Almighty will doubtless often bear the aspect of severity, when, if we could 'know even as we are known,' we should perceive that

* Heb. xii. 11. See also Job, v. 17. Prov. iii. 11, 12.

‘ Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.’*

The cloud of sorrow may seem ready to pour its fury upon us, when in reality it is only commissioned to ‘burst in blessings on our heads.’† The present trial, heavily as it now lies upon us, *may be* the very turning-point of our eternal destiny, and therefore the very crowning mercy of a God of love. The bitter cup which our heavenly Father now presents to our lips, ‘shall we not drink it’‡ without a murmur? It is unquestionably a cup of His own mixing and His own prescribing. It *may be* the very draught which is intended to heal our souls, to infuse new life and health and vigour into our spiritual frame, to impart strength for the conflict that is to give us the victory.

Moreover, it *may be* the LAST striving of the Spirit of God within us;§ the LAST flame of heavenly fire which He will ever kindle in our hearts; the LAST effort of Divine constraint,

* Olney Hymns. † Ibid. ‡ John, xviii. 11.

§ ‘My spirit shall not always strive with man.’—
Gen. vi. 3.

soliciting our souls by 'the cords of a man, with the bands of love; '* appealing to all the warmest affections and tenderest sympathies of our nature, and addressing us in accents of deep, strong, *paternal* expostulation, Ye wayward children, 'why will ye die?' †

Child of many sorrows! in this new trial you are called to bear, the alternative *may* now be before you. This 'light affliction, which is but for a moment,' *may* be intended to 'work for you a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.' ‡ Say then if you had your own free choice, which would you, in the exercise of your deliberate judgment, prefer; the sufferings under which your agonized body or your wounded spirit has been made to writhe; the pain of disease—the disappointment of hope—the bitterness of bereavement—or to hear pronounced upon you that short but awfully-significant sentence, once applied of old as a national judgment—'Ephraim is joined to idols; LET HIM

* Hos. xi. 4.

† Ezek. xviii. 31 ; xxxiii. 11.

‡ 2 Cor. iv. 17.

ALONE?'* Terrific denunciation! involving all that even Almighty wrath can heap upon us! The man on whom this sentence has gone forth, has a weight of woe upon him, to be borne too by his own unassisted strength, compared with which the utmost conceivable extremity of earthly suffering is but a trifle light as air. For if, instead of exercising over us, at every instant, the unwearied vigilance of a watchful Parent, the Almighty were indeed to LET US ALONE for a single moment, the arch-enemy of souls would quickly do the rest--would claim us as his own for ever, and plunge us into the abyss of endless, hopeless, irretrievable despair!

* Hos. iv. 17. See also Matt. xv. 14; Ps. lxxxi. 12.

CHAPTER IV.

- ‘As new-born *babes* desire the sincere milk of the Word that ye may grow thereby.’—1 Pet. ii. 2.
‘Put on the whole armour of God.’—Eph. vi. 11.
‘Strive to enter in at the strait gate.’—Luke, xiii. 24.

THE work of human education is not only progressive, but generally slow. Much may be and has been done to smooth the way, by removing some of the stumbling-blocks ; but it is still proverbially true that ‘there is no royal road to learning.’ The full development of the intellectual faculties in man is usually a gradual operation, the result of much time, patient study, and laborious application. Now and then, indeed, we see an instance of precocious intellect, at least in some one branch of human acquirement, which seems, at a very early age, intuitively to advance at once almost to the utmost perfection of which the human mind is capable ; spurning the tedious

intermediate steps by which ordinary capacities arrive, if ever, at the same result. But these are rare exceptions to the general rule ; a sort of prodigy gazed at with wonder, but not looked up to as models which we expect, or even endeavour, to imitate. In the training of our children for a life of usefulness and credit, we are usually content to proceed by slow and almost imperceptible gradations.

And so also, in the *ordinary* course of God's dealings with man, education for eternity is not suddenly, nor even quickly, accomplished. Vital Religion—by which we understand the principle that leads the soul to seek GOD, in spirit and in truth, as its CHIEF GOOD,—is not usually the work of a day. On the contrary, both Scripture and experience testify, that there is generally an A, B, C, in religion, as well as in human learning. The expressions in the Bible, especially in the New Testament, conveying the idea of true religion being a gradual process in the soul of man, are numerous and striking. Take for instance, the following :—

‘ And I, brethren, could not speak unto you

as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto *babes in Christ*. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat, for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able.'—(1 Cor. iii. 12.)

'As *new-born babes*, desire the sincere milk of the Word, that ye may *grow* thereby.'—(1 Pet. ii. 2.)

'Ye are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat; for every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness, for he is *a babe*. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of *full age*, even those who, by reason of use,* have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.'—(Heb. v. 12-14.)

'*Grow* in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.'—(2 Pet. iii. 18.)

Until we all come, in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto *a perfect man*, unto the measure of *the stature of the fulness of Christ*.'—(Eph. iv. 13.)

'That we may *grow up* into Him in all

* *Margin*—habit or perfection.

things, which is the Head, even Christ.'—
(Eph. iv. 15.)

These expressions, borrowed from images familiar to every mind, clearly denote a regular gradation in religious acquirement, a growth in the spiritual life, and imply that the soul, at the commencement of that life, requires to be fed, and nourished, and upheld with as much care as the body of the newborn infant from the cradle to maturity. And this is just what we might reasonably expect from analogy. For if a long and slow and gradual training be needed, where this world's limited acquirements, its poor preferments, and its fading honours—things that 'perish with the using' *—are the only prize to be obtained, how much more, when the object to be accomplished is, to rear an immortal spirit for the Paradise of God!

In a spiritual, as well as an intellectual sense, we do occasionally, indeed, see an instance of what may be called precocious spirituality—some more than ordinary miracle of God's converting grace, because

* Col. ii. 22.

accomplished without apparent means, and at so early an age as to set aside the idea of any human instrumentality. We say *a more than ordinary* miracle, because every true conversion to God is a stupendous display of His power ; as wonderful an exercise of the might of Omnipotence as that creative energy, which first called man into being, and infused into his nostrils the breath of life. God *might* indeed, if it so pleased Him, prepare His children for heaven in a moment, either with or without the intervention of any obvious instruments, or any palpable agency. By an easy act of His sovereign will, the very chief of sinners, even though ‘a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious,’* might, like Saul, be struck to the ground in the noon-day of his presumptuous rebellion, and compelled awhile to grovel in darkness, till brought by prayer† and meditation into God’s marvellous light,‡ called to ‘receive His sight,’ to be filled with the Holy Ghost,§ and to testify to thousands,

* 1 Tim. i. 13.

† ‘Behold he prayeth.’—Acts, ix. 11.

‡ 1 Pet. ii. 9. § Acts, ix. 17.

that Jesus, whom he persecuted, is indeed the Christ, the Son of the living God. But these are not the *ordinary* dealings of God with man. In the acts of His grace, as well as in the operations of His providence, He usually condescends, though He does not actually need, to work *by means*—means, too, that are often not only intelligible, even to our limited capacities, as obviously adapted to the gracious end, but occupying time, and appearing to require seasonable opportunities, for accomplishing the purposes of His love.

Without presuming to pry, with unhallowed curiosity, into ‘the secret things’* of God, or to be wise ‘above that which is written,’† we may perhaps venture to affirm that at least *one* important object of this gradual process in the spiritual life seems sufficiently clear and obvious. Is it not apparent that, without it, this world would not be, what it is evidently designed to be, a state of probation ;‡—that there would be little or no opportunity for the

* Deut. xxix. 29.

† I Cor. iv. 6.

‡ ‘To humble thee and to prove thee,’ &c.—Deut. viii. 2.

exercise of those Christian graces which form the peculiar and distinguishing characteristics of the children of God?—that there would be no occasion afforded for the display of faith, patience, resignation, obedience, or any other of the ‘fruits of the Spirit,’ which are of great and inestimable price in the sight of God, not as a meritorious cause of salvation, but as the evidence of a heart no longer at variance with Him, but reconciled and ‘made nigh by the blood’* of His crucified Son?

In considering the analogy which subsists between the training of God’s children for heaven, and the education of our own children upon earth, with reference more especially to the *time* usually occupied in each process, may we not, moreover, be allowed to remark on the unreasonableness of those who, if they do not maintain it by positive argument, at least imply by their conduct, that, of all the concerns to which man’s attention can be directed in this life, the business of the soul’s salvation, though confessedly the most momentous of all, is the only one requiring no

* Eph. ii. 13.

very strenuous effort of the mind, no peculiar control of the will, no very careful employment or extraordinary husbanding of the time! For not only will some thus act themselves, but they will be ready to look upon those who differ from them in this respect as objects of surprise, if not of ridicule and contempt. The world finds no fault with a man for straining every nerve to become a good tradesman, or a skilful mechanic, but counts it monstrous that any peculiar pains should be taken, or any considerable time occupied, in the earnest endeavour to become a good Christian. All other professions are universally deemed legitimate objects for the employment of our highest capacities. None will reproach us, if, in order to attain eminence in any of these, we 'rise early, and late take rest, and eat the bread of carefulness.'* But to strive for distinction in the highest and noblest of *all* professions, to labour for the richest inheritance that even the treasures of heaven can furnish, to be ambitious to become 'Children of the Highest,' 'heirs of God, and

* Ps. cxxvii. 2. Prayer-book version.

joint-heirs with Christ,' is too often set down at once as the cant of hypocrisy, the wildness of fanaticism, or the ravings of a disordered imagination. In the attainment of any worldly good, in the achievement of any human enterprise, even that dreaded thing *Enthusiasm*—which, after all, is but another word for more than ordinary zeal displayed in more than ordinary effort—if it be not actually lauded as praiseworthy, is at least tolerated as a harmless and even amiable excess. But apply it to that ONE object, for which *no* zeal can by possibility be too great, *no* effort, however mighty, can be disproportioned to its overwhelming importance ; and instantly the word comes to mean a different thing, the thing that it does mean becomes a reproach, and he that dares to practise it, not unfrequently a mark for the finger of scorn to point at.

And so also of *experience* ;—an advantage which men are so little disposed to undervalue in any object of temporal interest, that it is looked up to, by universal consent, with respect, and submitted to with deference. There is not a single object of human desire or am-

bition, in which, if we can lay claim to an ordinary share of worldly wisdom, we are not ready to derive caution and guidance for the future, from our own or others' experience of the past.

But only apply the word to *religious* attainment, the result, perhaps, of a whole lifetime of anxious inquiry, holy meditation, and close communion of the soul with God;—only speak of it as *Christian* experience, and you will often find it sneered at as an unreal thing, or, if real, not worth the possessing. Strange perversion of the boasted reason of man! that a principle universally approved and admitted in the evanescent concerns of earth—in 'the things which are seen and temporal,'—should be utterly disregarded, or wantonly despised, in all that pertains to heaven—in 'the things which are not seen, and are eternal! '*

How then is this inconsistency to be explained? Is it that we entertain low and inadequate conceptions of the work which has been given us to do, or of the inheritance to which we aspire, as children of God? Do we

* 2 Cor. iv. 18.

esteem our task so light, as not to demand any peculiar effort? Do we count salvation so easy an achievement, that we may safely neglect the Apostle's exhortation, and try to 'work it out,' *without* 'fear and trembling?' Has the standard of Gospel purity been fixed so low in the scale of moral excellence, that there is no conflict to be maintained, no battle to be fought, no warfare to be accomplished, in reaching it? Has it not, rather, been *purposely* placed so high above and beyond our grasp, that we can never fully attain to it on earth; and yet with the wise and gracious intention of inducing us to be always looking upwards, and continually moving onwards, towards it? The holiest man that ever lived came still far short of the requisitions of the Gospel. The corruptions of sinful humanity were still cleaving to his most holy things; 'the body of this death'* was still clinging even to his highest attainments and his best performances, to the latest hour of his mortal existence. And there is evident mercy, as well as wisdom, in this. For if any man could

* Rom. vii. 24.

ever attain a point of holy perfection, at which he might be tempted to say, in the confidence of self-complacent security, 'Now I am safe—soul, take thine ease;' from that instant spiritual pride would begin to be fostered, and Satan, transformed into an angel of light, would have effected half his conquest. But this can never be the language of the heaven-taught child of God. The higher his spiritual attainments, and the greater his progress in the Christian life, the more do his eyes become opened to perceive how arduous the task that still lies before him, how unwearied must still be his efforts to accomplish it; the more unceasingly does he live in the humble, diffident spirit of St. Paul's acknowledgment: 'Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect.'—'Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended; but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I *press* towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.'*

* Phil. iii. 12-14.

CHAPTER V.

‘The Law is holy, and the Commandment holy, and just, and good.’—ROM. vii. 12.

IF we conceive the case of an earthly sovereign displaying his clemency towards a rebellious subject, or of a rich and powerful individual bestowing some munificent token of his liberality upon an object of evident destitution, but doubtful worth ; or,—to come still closer to our present subject—of some fond, though offended, father receiving to his arms his once disobedient, but now repentant child, we should admit it as just and reasonable that, in these several cases, the clemency should be exhibited, the favour bestowed, the affection testified, in any manner most agreeable to the feelings of the benefactor. There might, perhaps, be much of fancy and caprice, nay, possibly of apparent harshness, in the method chosen for conferring the favour ; but still, as

it *is* a matter of favour and not of right, the delinquent would be slow to quarrel with, much less to refuse, the benefit, or to question its advantage to himself, because it happened to be bestowed in a manner not precisely in accordance with his own notions or wishes.

How much more readily, then, must we admit the right of the Almighty Father to show His parental and pardoning love, to manifest 'the exceeding riches of His grace,' in His own way; in any manner which He chooses to select as most pleasing to Himself! For, in the first place, it must be remembered, that we have not the slightest claim upon God, as a matter of right, for any one good thing that we ask or desire to have. The veriest criminal soliciting a reprieve has not less claim, on the score of right, than we have. All that we want may, in fact, be comprised in one word—MERCY; and Mercy necessarily implies the entire absence of all right. A man has always a right to justice, but he never can have a right to mercy. It is a contradiction in terms to talk of *deserving* mercy; and we must first get rid of this too common idea, in

our conceptions of the Deity, and in our contemplations of the Divine dealings, before we can rightly understand the true relation between sinful man and his offended Father and God. We must be ready and willing to come to Him as suppliants, not as claimants, if we hope to prevail with Him.

But, besides this, in proportion as the benefit proposed to be bestowed by God is inconceivably greater than any which man can possibly confer upon man, should we be thankful to receive it in any manner which His wisdom appoints. Now, the benefits that God offers, and has been offering to each successive generation of man for nearly two thousand years, are the very greatest which human imagination can conceive ; nay, much greater, for ‘ eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, *neither have entered into the heart of man*, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him.’* They are nothing less than restoration to his own moral image, and the possession — not of an earthly paradise, such as Adam forfeited — but of an eternity of

* 1 Cor. ii. 9.

glory, purchased for us, as an inheritance, by His own dear Son. If we do not sufficiently appreciate these inestimable benefits, it is not for want of intrinsic value in *them*, but from our own cold indifference and faithless apathy.

For, consider in what relation we stand to God ; by nature, very far gone from original righteousness ; by practice, continually adding to our load of actual sin, and widening the distance which separates us from God. And this it is which constitutes our wretched moral and spiritual condition ; for it is utterly impossible, in the very nature of things, that there can be any true happiness for man, while alienated from his Creator. As well might we expect the earth to be blessed with genial warmth, or to glow with cheerful light, if the sun were blotted from the heavens, as that man can be happy at a distance from God, the source of *all* happiness, the fountain of *all* enjoyment. And the benevolent object of all God's dealings with men is, to reconcile and bring them near to Himself, to reclaim them from the wanderings to which they are so prone, to lead them back, with a firm though

gentle hand, to the fold whence they have strayed, to 'deliver them from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the CHILDREN OF GOD.'*

In both these respects, then,—the entire absence of any just claim to favour on our part, and the immensity of the boon which God offers,—He has an unquestionable right, upon every principle of reason and equity, to choose His own method for man's redemption. He might justly have made the offer, if He made it at all, on some severe conditions, hard to be performed, even conveyed to us in the language of indignation, and accompanied by the frowns of offended Omnipotence. It would have been no impeachment of His equity, had it pleased Him to propose some measure for this purpose, calculated to alarm us by an aspect of terror, without any mixture of love discernible, to temper the severity of His righteous judgment. But what is the fact? What is really God's appointed method of man's salvation? And in what language communicated? Let prophets

* Rom. viii. 21.

and apostles, and the Saviour Himself, furnish the reply, in language dictated by the Spirit of truth :—

‘ In all their affliction, He was afflicted, and the angel of His presence saved them ; in His love and His pity He redeemed them, and He bare them and carried them all the days of old.’ (Isa. lxiii. 9.)

‘ Like as a FATHER pitieth his *children*, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him.’ (Ps. ciii. 13.)

‘ A FATHER of the *fatherless*,* and a Judge of the widows, is God in His holy habitation.’ (Ps. lxviii. 5.)

‘ Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. (Isa. xlix. 15.)

‘ Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.’ (Matt. xi. 28.)

‘ The Son of man came not to be ministered

* John, xiv. 18 : ‘ I will not leave you ORPHANS.’—*Marginal Reading.*

unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many.' (Mark, x. 45.)

'The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.' (Luke, xix. 10.)

'Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.' (John, xv. 13.)

'God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.' (John, iii. 16.)

'As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.' (John, iii. 14, 15.)

'For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die, yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.' (Rom. v. 6-8.)

'When the fulness of time was come, God

sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the *adoption of sons*. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, *but a son*; and if a son, then *an heir of God* through Christ.' (Gal. iv. 4-7.)

'God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him.' (I Thess. v. 9, 10.)

'Christ hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, *that He might bring us to God*.' (I Pet. iii. 18.)

'The blood of Jesus Christ His Son, cleanseth us from all sin.' (I John, i. 7.)

'Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the *Sons of God*.' (I John, iii. 1.)

'Beloved, now are we *the Sons of God*, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when He shall appear, we

shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.' (1 John, iii. 2.)

'In this was manifested the love of God towards us, because that God sent His only-begotten Son into the world that we might live through Him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.' (1 John, iv. 9, 10.)

Is there anything offensive or discouraging, is there anything but tender solicitude, to be discovered in such a scheme as this, or in the language in which it is conveyed? Is not the value of the proffered boon enhanced by the gracious and *parental* terms in which it is communicated? Surely, if we 'turn away from Him that speaketh' thus 'from heaven,'* if we quarrel with the method which God has chosen for conferring on us an eternity of blessedness, or murmur at the process which His wisdom appoints for its accomplishment, it must be the pride of our hearts which is rankling within us; and to *this*, it must be freely admitted, both God's scheme and His

* Heb. xii. 25.

language are indeed highly offensive. But this very fact is in reality one of His greatest mercies. For pride, as it lay at the root of Adam's first transgression, so it continues still to engender every lofty 'imagination,' and to foster 'every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God.'* And therefore God will no more spare man's pride, when He designs to save his soul, than any parent among ourselves would suffer his unconscious child to run after a toy to the brink of a precipice. He *will* eradicate this canker-worm, that preys upon the very heart's blood of man's spiritual life, however painful may be the operation. In this, as in all other cases, like a wise as well as tender parent, He steadily opposes everything that militates against the best welfare of His children.

By the impatience we sometimes manifest under the afflictive dispensations of God's providence, it would almost seem as if we expected that God would take us into His councils in deciding what is best. A moment's consideration will show how unreasonable

* 2 Cor. x. 5.

this is, when viewed with reference even to our own parental conduct. God does not inquire of His children whether they approve of this or that method of accomplishing His designs in their favour. And what *earthly* father does? Parents, do we ask the opinion of our little ones upon those points on which we deem their future health and character and well-being to depend, and which, therefore, engage our daily and hourly care? Do we consult *them* as to the food they are to eat or to avoid, the medicine they are to take, the places they are to frequent, the school at which they are to be educated, the course of instruction they are to pursue? Do we not take upon ourselves to settle all these things for them, in the way we think best to secure their ultimate welfare? What should we say of a parent who did not? Should we not impute to him, either want of love, or want of wisdom, or both? Whenever, then, our rebellious hearts are disposed to repine at the discipline which God thinks fit to impose upon us, it may perhaps serve to check the risings of discontent, and to subdue our

stubborn wills into filial submission, to consider which, if either, of these grave imputations we would dare to lay to the charge of Him who is at once perfect Wisdom and perfect Love—

‘ Too wise to err, too good to be unkind.’

We may, indeed, sometimes think proper to explain to our children the reasons we have for denying what they wish, or insisting on what they dislike. In some cases we do this at the moment, to give a stimulus to obedience ; in others, it may be done afterwards, by way of exemplifying the benefit resulting from cheerful obedience to a parent’s will. But in all cases, whether we give our reasons or not, we expect compliance for its own sake ; and none but a very weak parent fails to demand it ; none but a spoiled child hesitates long in yielding it. And here the coincidence is very striking between God’s parental dealings with man, and ours towards our children. There are times when, in the ordinary course of His providence, He is pleased to discover to us, in a manner too

plain to be mistaken, some of the reasons and results of His trying dispensations. There are occasions, when the benefit follows so closely, as well as so palpably, on the trial, that resignation, if so in this case it may be called, is its own immediate reward. But this is rarely to be expected—and why? Because God will usually have our *faith* exercised. He will have His children trust Him for the event, though the way appear dreary, and clouds and darkness overspread the horizon. Moreover, as there are many occasions on which our own children could not understand, much less appreciate, our intentions in their favour, even if it were expedient to endeavour to explain them, so doubtless it often happens that God's ways—the ways by which He purposes to avert an evil or to confer a good—are altogether too intricate for our comprehension. Nay, still further, perhaps God, by casting a veil over His ultimate designs, sometimes spares us, as we often spare our children, the anticipation of those painful intermediate steps which are necessary for fulfilling the designs of His

lovingkindness. Oh ! what a world of trouble, what a load of 'vexation of spirit,' should we be spared, if we could only think continually of God as of a Father engaged to do for His children, 'exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think,'* and be content and thankful to 'cast *all* our care upon Him who' indeed, 'careth for us!' †

These considerations apply, not only to the moral *discipline* which the Almighty Parent maintains with His weak and erring children, but likewise to the bountiful and never-failing *provision* which He makes for their actual wants. In this respect, too, what means our continual distrust, so dishonouring to God, so comfortless to ourselves? Again let us inquire how this matter stands, as between our children and ourselves. Do they thus doubt a parent's willingness or power to provide all that they require? Should we be pleased if they did? Are *they* accustomed to perplex themselves about their food, or raiment, or habitation, or any other of the numberless comforts with which God's bounty enables us

* Eph. iii. 20.

† 1 Pet. v. 7.

to supply them? Do they not leave it all to us, knowing that we care for them quite as much as they care for themselves, and confident that, as a matter of course, we shall leave nothing undone to secure their comfort and happiness? It would be well for us to copy the example of their fearless, confiding faith. We are bound, indeed, to use all the lawful means of providing for our wants, which the Almighty Parent puts into our hands; but having done this, is it fitting, is it reasonable, that we should trust God less implicitly than our children trust us? 'The Christian Parent knows what he has need of, much better than he knows himself. Let him then leave to the Parent, what it is the Parent's business, and what it will assuredly be His care to provide.'* 'Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass.'† How is it that, while God is continually giving proof of His desire to 'deal with us as with sons,'‡ we are so backward in dealing with Him as with a father?

* Bishop SUMNER'S *Commentary on St. Matthew*.

† Ps. xxxvii. 5, and Prov. xvi. 3. ‡ Heb. xii. 7.

Great encouragement is afforded to the exercise of 'assurance of faith,' by the circumstance of our Lord's holding up to our imitation, on more than one occasion, the example of a little child, whose spirit is no less distinguished by CONFIDENCE IN PARENTAL LOVE, than by the qualities of humility and teachableness. And this confidence arises—not from the child's sense of his own merits, much less of any return he can make for the numberless kindnesses he receives—but simply from his natural claim, *as a child*, on all the tenderness of a parent's love. For as, on the one hand, nothing could give such pain to a parent's heart, as that his love should be doubted by his child, so, on the other hand, nothing could be more unreasonable, on the part of the child, than to imagine his parent's affection dependent on any equivalent he has to offer, or measured by his own deservings. And here the analogy we are endeavouring to delineate applies with peculiar force and clearness. THE CHILDREN OF GOD advance no claim to His Parental Love on the score of merit; much less do they expect that Love

to be exercised towards them in proportion to what *they* can 'render unto Him for all His benefits.' Theirs is only the simple, but unanswerable, claim of ADOPTION INTO THE FAMILY OF HIS SON. Their confidence in God is FILIAL, because they know that His Love to them is PATERNAL.

As the whole scheme of our salvation, as revealed in the Gospel, is evidently a PARENTAL scheme, contrived by the loving-kindness of a most tender Father, and especially designed to adopt us into His family as children, so also should our reception of it be FILIAL; not the result of mere self-interest, much less of slavish fear, but flowing from hearts grieving to have offended, yearning to return to a parent's home, longing to regain a place in his affections, to possess the privileges which belong to sons, and to be received as 'dear children' into the household of God. As a parent's love always precedes, and usually produces that of his child, so likewise are we bound to 'love God because He first loved us.'*

* 1 John, iv. 19.

proofs of love to his offspring as God, through Christ, has given to us. The surpassing extent of this love is wonderfully, though mysteriously, manifested in the respective offices of the several Persons in the blessed Trinity ; GOD THE FATHER, creating and preserving us, and devising such a plan for our redemption as ‘angels desire to look into ;’* GOD THE SON, descending from the throne of that glory which He had with the Father before the world was, fulfilling in man’s nature the law of God, that by ‘Him all that believe might be justified from all things from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses,’† atoning by His own most precious blood for the sins of the whole world, ‘wounded for our transgressions,’ ‘bruised for our iniquities,’ and now sitting at the right hand of God to intercede for His believing people ;—GOD THE HOLY GHOST, infusing into our hearts those comforting and sanctifying influences, whereby alone we can be strengthened to run the race that is set before us, and ‘made meet to

* 1 Pet. i. 12.

† Acts, xiii. 39.

be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.'*

What but PARENTAL LOVE could have contrived a plan like this for man's redemption? Oh! let us not presume to meddle with its management. Our limited and beclouded vision cannot embrace a thousandth part of that mighty mechanism which Omnipotence employs to save a guilty world. Let us thankfully leave its working in the hands of Him who contrived it, who comprehends at a glance all its apparent intricacies, and controls, with undeviating precision, every complicated movement, for the ultimate and eternal welfare of all who love and trust in Him.

* Col. i. 12.

CHAPTER VI.

‘Behold, what manner of love the FATHER hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the SONS OF GOD!’—1 JOHN, iii. 1.

‘As many as are led by the Spirit of GOD, they are the SONS OF GOD.’—ROM. viii. 14.

IT is essential, however, to inquire *with whom* it is that God promises to ‘deal as with SONS.’* The inquiry is important, because an error here would terminate, not only in disappointment, but despair.

In whose favour, and on what conditions, does an offended earthly sovereign publish a proclamation of pardon? Is it in favour of those who persevere in rebellion, and without any condition, direct or implied, as to future obedience and loyalty? Or, to follow up our more immediate train of thought, what erring child is it, that an earthly parent is

* Heb. xii. 7.

ready to receive once more to all the affection of his bosom, and all the privileges of his house? Is it not he who, having learned by bitter experience what it is to feed on the 'husks' of disobedience, 'comes to himself,' 'arises and goes to his Father,' confesses that he has 'sinned against heaven and in his parent's sight, and is no longer worthy to be called his son? '* Indeed, when we think of the yearning of an earthly parent's heart over his erring but repentant offspring, with what overflowing thankfulness should we contemplate the fact, that this is but a feeble picture of the parental tenderness of our Heavenly Father towards His offending but contrite children! And how beautiful is the analogy between a son returning in penitence and sorrow to his father's home, and those who, being brought by God's grace to see the error of their ways, at length embrace with thankful joy the offers of the Gospel, and become 'followers of God as *dear children!*' †

* Luke, xv. 16-19.

† Eph. v. 1. There is perhaps nothing, even in the whole compass of Scripture, more calculated to awaken

And this leads us to consider, what are the characteristics of the children of God ; wherein consists that sonship, on which depend such mighty consequences to every immortal soul.

The New Testament describes it to consist in FAITH IN CHRIST as the only and all-sufficient atonement for sin, and the one only Mediator between God and man : not the mere naked assent of the understanding to certain facts, which are matters of undisputed history, nor an admiration of certain moral precepts of unquestionable intrinsic excellence ; but a heartfelt conviction of our own deep corruption and utterly lost estate by nature ; godly sorrow for sin ; ‘repentance not to be repented of,’* for having offended a God of Love ; a lively apprehension of the indispensable necessity of a Saviour ; and a

contrition in the hardest heart, than the Parable of the Prodigal Son. I knew a convict in New South Wales, in whom there appeared no symptom of repentance in other respects, but who could never hear a sermon or commentary on this parable without bursting into an agony of tears, which I witnessed on several occasions. Truly, He who spoke it ‘knew what was in man.’

* 2 Cor. vii. 10.

cordial submission of the whole heart and will to the Gospel scheme of salvation through the sacrifice of a crucified Redeemer. The child of God earnestly desires that 'Christ may *dwell* in his heart by faith;' that he may be 'rooted and grounded in love'* to the Saviour who died for him, and is ready to 'count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord.'†

Nor is the faith of a child of God a barren and unproductive principle. He strives to show by his works, that he is a true member of that mystical body of which his Lord and Master is the Head; that he is a fruitful branch of the Living Vine: his continual endeavour, in dependence on the promised aid of the Holy Spirit, is to show forth his faith by his works; to '*adorn* the doctrine of God his Saviour in all things;‡ to let his 'light shine before men,' and thus to 'glorify his Father which is in heaven.'§

The child of God places his entire dependence on the Saviour for every blessing he

* Eph. iii. 17.

† Phil. iii. 8.

‡ Tit. ii. 10.

§ Matt. v. 16.

hopes to enjoy in time and through eternity. He knows that, before any benefit can be derived from what Christ has done and suffered for us, we must view Him as the appointed medium, through which it has pleased God to make His only offer of reconciliation, pardon, and peace—through which, alone, therefore, we can appropriate that offer to ourselves. He has learned, that God's 'blessed Son was manifested that He might make us the SONS OF GOD, and heirs of eternal life;'^{*} that through Him alone God dispenses every blessing to guilty man, and he knows not how to admire sufficiently the gracious condescension of that marvellous arrangement, whereby the Lord of all pours forth His richest mercies by the hand of AN ELDER BROTHER,— 'the first-born among many brethren,'[†]—One who, notwithstanding that He is exalted far above all blessing and praise, 'is not ashamed to call us brethren.'[‡] He feels, that, taken in connexion with these assurances, the very title given to the Re-

^{*} Collect, 6th Sunday after Epiphany.

[†] Rom. viii. 29.

[‡] Heb. ii. 11.

deemer as the SON of God, even His own 'beloved SON in whom He is well pleased,'* evinces great mercy to our race; for it establishes between God and man a tenderness of relationship,—a closeness of connexion,—which, perhaps, no other mode of expression could so emphatically have conveyed. And that this Son of the Most High should not only condescend to be called our Brother, but undertake to be our Advocate at the right hand of God, pleading in our behalf the efficacy of His own precious blood as an all-sufficient satisfaction to the justice of offended Deity, excites in his mind the liveliest gratitude, and fills him with holy admiration and thankful joy. Well may the child of God count it his highest privilege, and make it his continual aim, to promote his Father's glory. Well may his heart respond, with the warmest emotions of filial love, to that touching question of his Heavenly Parent, 'If I then be a Father, where is mine honour?'†

It is a very solemn and momentous consideration, that of the countless multitudes of

* Matt. iii. 17.

† Mal. i. 6.

human beings 'naming the name of Christ'* with which, in the succession of ages, this earth has been, or may be, peopled, there is not a single individual who shall not finally be made to contribute, *in one of two ways*, to the glory of Almighty God; the one, by willing submission and filial love towards a tender parent; the other, by the enactments of a violated law, in the uncompromising sentence of a just but offended judge. The Glory of God is the centre, towards which every line of human action is now continually converging;—the focus, in which every human thought, and word, and deed, shall be ultimately made to concentrate. We are not unwilling to admit this in the case of man's salvation—that is, his final and eternal happiness—because we easily persuade ourselves of the truth of what we desire to be true. There is no man that does not wish to be saved, if that can be called a wish which produces little or no effort; and we are but too ready to rest upon a comfortable, though perilous, persuasion that we *shall* be saved at the last,

* 2 Tim. ii. 19.

because God's glory is concerned, we had almost said involved, in our salvation. But surely this persuasion is consistent neither with reason nor Scripture. For Jehovah can never be robbed of one atom of His own inherent and ineffable glory, on account of the moral delinquency of man. God will be glorified no less by the condemnation of the obstinate and unrepenting sinner, than by the redemption of those who 'have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.*' 'The Lord hath made all things for Himself; yea, even the wicked for the day of evil.†' It is true that the Scripture declares that Mercy is what God specially delights in, while Judgment is called His 'strange work;‡' but not a word is said to warrant a belief that the one will ever be set up to the disparagement of the other, or the balance between them ever, in the slightest degree, disturbed. Whether we 'will hear, or whether we will forbear,' § the attributes of the Deity must remain unchangeable and in-

* Rev. vii. 14.

† Prov. xvi. 4.

‡ Isa. xxviii. 21.

§ Ezek. ii. 5.

finite, and all equally so. Each must be eternally upheld in its unsullied purity and its essential perfection ; and each will bear its part in the final triumph of the Creator's glory. Man indeed, fallen as he is from his first estate, could never have devised a scheme for his restoration to God's image and favour, consistently with the exercise, at one and the same time, of perfect justice and of perfect mercy in the Deity. And even now, it is not uncommon to hear advanced a pretence of magnifying and exalting the mercy of God at the expense of His justice, by way of furnishing a loop-hole for the final escape of the unrepenting or unbelieving sinner. But this is not God's scheme. It bears upon it the impress of an origin not Divine. It would not be worthy of the Divine lawgiver thus to let down His legislation to the level of His fallen creature's morality ; to detract from the perfection of His own nature, and to sully the honour of His own government. Such maimed and mutilated glory as this could never constitute the light of heaven.*

* Rev. xxi. 23.

It is clear that God *can* reconcile the two apparently opposite attributes of justice and mercy, without impairing the lustre of either ; for He has shown us this in ONE illustrious instance, when ‘mercy and truth met together,’*—not to clash in jarring discord—but to unite in harmonious beauty, in the person of His own beloved Son. In showing that He ‘can be just, and yet the justifier of them that believe in Jesus,’† He has given us, by one act of stupendous love and inflexible justice, a solemn pledge that His attributes can never change—that they are ‘the same, yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.’‡

The question, then, for a reasonable, responsible, and immortal being, is this ; ‘In which way am *I* likely to contribute to the glory of God?’

It is the fact of there being *only* two ways here, and only two states hereafter, that makes the question so important. And yet is there not much self-deception often practised on this point? Are we not virtually loth to admit that there *are* only two ways, in one of

* Ps. lxxxv. 10. † Rom. iii. 26. ‡ Heb. xiii. 8.

which we must of necessity be every moment walking, leading to two ends, towards one of which we must be every moment advancing? Yet there is no warrant in the Bible for more than these. We read of 'the broad road,' and 'the narrow way ;'—'eternal life,' and 'everlasting death ;'—a blessing and a curse ;—heaven and hell ;—God and the devil ;—'pleasures for evermore,' and 'the worm that never dieth, the fire that never shall be quenched ;'—awful extremes, indeed, yet nothing between them ;—no middle course now, no middle state hereafter. The line of demarcation between them is as broad and well defined as human language, written with the pen of inspiration, can make it. Indeed, there is, we are distinctly told, '*a great gulf fixed*'* between the two. There is, in Scripture, no blending of one state into the other by an imperceptible gradation of colouring ; no compromise between principles and conditions as opposite in their nature and tendency as light and darkness ; no amalgamation of ingredients utterly inconsistent

* Luke, xvi. 26.

with, and repulsive of, each other. As the natural body cannot be alive and dead at the same time, so neither can the spiritual body. We must either be 'dead in trespasses and sins'* or 'alive unto God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.† As soon might the 'fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter,'‡ as we be in a condition to be partly blessed and partly cursed.

In short, to return to our own subject, the Word of Truth speaks only of 'children of grace,' and 'children of wrath,'—'obedient children,' and 'children of disobedience,'—'children of the kingdom,' and 'children of this world,'—in one word, 'children of God,' and 'children of the devil.‡ We find no mention made in the Bible of any third state, or of any intermediate parentage. If we build our hopes on any such imaginary relationship, it is the creature of our own fancy, the offspring of our own invention ; we adopt the notion at our own risk, and at our peril must abide by the consequences.

* Eph. ii. 1. † Rom. vi. 11. ‡ Jam. iii. 11.

§ Eph. ii. 2, 3, and v. 6 ; 1 Pet. i. 14 ; 1 John, iii. 10 ; John, viii. 41-44.

CHAPTER VII.

‘The entrance of Thy WORDS giveth light ; it giveth understanding unto the simple.’—PS. cxix. 130.

‘ASK, and it shall be given you ; SEEK, and ye shall find ; KNOCK, and it shall be opened unto you.’—MATT. vii. 7.

‘Lord, I have loved the habitation of Thy HOUSE, and the place where thine Honour dwelleth.’—PS. xxvi. 8.

‘This do in remembrance of ME.’—I COR. xi. 24.

‘As many as are led by the SPIRIT of God, they are the SONS of God.’—ROM. viii. 14.

NOT only is it the pleasure of our Heavenly Father Himself to work *by means*, in accomplishing the purposes of His mercy towards His children, but He is also pleased to prescribe to *them* the use of certain means, which they are bound to employ in co-operation, as it were, with Him, for the attainment of the same gracious end. These have been properly designated the ‘means of grace,’

because they are the appointed channels by which every spiritual blessing, and therefore all substantial happiness, which God's favour can alone produce, is conveyed to the soul. In this, as in the case before considered, He *might* fulfil the counsels of His will, and accomplish the designs of His parental love, without the intervention of any such means. It is self-evident that Omnipotence can require no intermediate agency. The seed might be made to spring up, and produce fruit for the use of man, without his own labour, and unaided by the genial warmth or the fertilizing rains of heaven, just as easily as, in the barren wilderness, the manna dropped from the clouds to feed a multitude of God's hungering people. But as we know that this is not the ordinary operation of His providence, and therefore do not expect it, so neither, in the operations of His grace, are we to look for a spiritual harvest, without the diligent use of those means with which His goodness has provided us.

The principal among these means are, **THE WORD OF GOD and PRAYER.**

The Bible is given to us as 'a lamp unto our feet, and a light unto our paths.'* It is intended to 'guide our feet into the way of peace.'† Containing, as it does, a revelation from 'the High and Lofty One that inhabiteth eternity,'‡ and that revelation a message of tender mercy to our race, it must surely be entitled to our deepest reverence, our constant study, and our most cordial acceptance. Can a message from heaven be safely refused or slighted? Shall the Omnipotent condescend to speak, and to speak in accents of pity and love, and yet man, 'miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked,'§ as he spiritually is, venture to turn a deaf ear to His communications? There is no limit to the mighty effects which the inspired writers attribute to the Word of God. St. Paul calls it the 'Sword of the Spirit,'|| the mighty instrument by which that Spirit achieves His conquests in the souls of men. He describes it as 'quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder

* Ps. cxix. 105. † Luke, i. 79. ‡ Isa. lvii. 15.
§ Rev. iii. 17. || Eph. vi. 17.

of soul and spirit, and a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.’* St. James and St. Peter ascribe to its instrumentality the commencement of that spiritual life in the soul, on which all our hopes for eternity depend. ‘Of His own will *begat* He us with THE WORD OF TRUTH, that we should be a kind of first fruits of His creatures.’† ‘Being *born again*, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the WORD OF GOD, which liveth and abideth for ever.’‡ And how beautiful, as well as abundant, is the testimony borne by David, to the never-failing supplies of guidance, illumination, comfort, peace and joy, to be derived from the inexhaustible treasury of the Word of God! Well might his experience of its value and its blessedness—the experience of thousands and tens of thousands of God’s children in every age—lead him to exclaim, ‘Oh, how I love THY LAW! it is my meditation all the day.’ ‘Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever; for they are the rejoicing of my heart.’§

* Heb. iv. 12.

† 1 Pet. i. 23.

‡ Jam. i. 18.

§ Ps. cxix. 97, 111.

Great, however, as is the privilege of possessing a revelation from heaven, inestimable as are the benefits to be derived from an attentive and reverential study of the Word of God, the privilege and the benefits will not be ours, unless they are continually sought by earnest, heart-felt PRAYER. God *might* bestow them, if He pleased, without our asking, for He 'knoweth what things we have need of before we ask Him.'* But this is not His appointed method. He *will* have His children ask for what they want, and 'ask in faith nothing wavering.'† It is one of the special attributes of God's parental character, that He *will* be 'inquired of' by those who entertain the desire, or claim the privilege, of being His children. Our Lord Himself reminds us of the striking analogy subsisting, in this respect, between earthly fathers and our Heavenly Parent, and founds upon that analogy an irresistible argument for earnest supplication to the Throne of Grace for the supply of all our wants, whether spiritual or temporal. 'What man is there of you, whom if his son

* Matt. vi. 8.

† Jam. i. 6.

ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or, if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that *ask* Him!* And may we not add, on the other hand, What child is there among us, who hesitates to ask a loving parent for what he wants, and to plead for compliance with his wishes and desires, with all the earnestness of eager importunity? Prayer is to the soul of man what respiration is to the body; without it, there is not merely a decay of those principles and graces which betoken life and vigour in the soul, but an utter extinction of them; not merely languor, but death. Justly has it been called

‘The Christian’s vital breath,’†

for there can be no spiritual existence without it.

But all who reverence God’s Word, and

* Matt. vii. 9–11; or as in Luke (xi. 13), ‘give the Holy Spirit’—the best of all good things.

† Montgomery.

value the privilege of communion with Him in prayer, as the principal means of grace, cannot fail also to appreciate the Ordinances of His appointment, which are intended to strengthen and give effect to them, and are, therefore, to be reckoned in themselves as no unimportant means to the same end. They cannot fail to 'love the habitation of God's House, and the place where His honour dwelleth.'* They will 'be glad when it is said to them, Let us go into the house of the Lord ;'† and they will ever be ready to say with the royal Psalmist, 'A day in Thy courts is better than a thousand ; I had rather be a door-keeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.' ‡

And most especially will they count it a privilege and refreshment to be permitted frequently to come to the Saviour's table, and receive the sacred pledges of His dying love—that crowning ordinance of the Christian Church—to comply with that most tender and touching injunction, 'This do *in remem-*

* Ps. xxvi. 8. † Ib. cxxii. 1. ‡ Ib. lxxxiv. 10.

brance of ME ;'* to 'eat the flesh and to drink the blood of the Son of man ;'† and to 'feed upon Him in their hearts by faith with thanksgiving.'

Such are the principal means of grace which God is pleased to appoint and to bless, in order to reconcile us to Himself, and to adopt us, as 'dear children' into the family of His Son. By the honest and persevering use of these means, our union with the Redeemer is often begun and always maintained, our spiritual frame invigorated, and we 'grow up into Him in all things, which is the head, even Christ.'‡

But it must never be forgotten, that while none, who sincerely desire to attain the end—even the salvation of their souls—will object to the appointed *means* of attaining it, or be backward in employing them : while the true child of God, acting in the spirit of St. Paul's exhortation,§ will use as much effort as if all

* 1 Cor. xi. 24. † John, vi. 53-56. Eph. iv. 15.

§ 'WORK OUT your own salvation with fear and trembling ; FOR it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do, of His good pleasure.'—PHIL. ii. 12, 13.

depended on his own unaided exertion ; we have no warrant for expecting a blessing on any external means, or on any efforts of our own, without the instrumentality of that Divine Agent, whose office it is, as ‘the Spirit of Truth,’* to ‘guide us into all truth,’ to ‘take of the things of Christ, and to show them unto us.’† The Bible is a sealed book and a dead letter, prayer is lifeless, and ordinances useless, till the Holy Spirit give them efficacy. Like the dry bones in Ezekiel’s vision, even with the sinews and the flesh upon them, the most abundant means of grace are wholly inadequate, and every effort of our own entirely powerless, till the Spirit of God ‘breathe upon them that they may live.’‡ That Spirit must descend, like the showers and dews of heaven, upon the dry and unproductive soil of the human heart, ere the seed sown can spring up, and bring forth any fruit to perfection. If it be indeed true, as we know it is, that ‘as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they (only) are the

* John, xiv. 17 ; xv. 26.

† Ib. xvi. 13, 15.

‡ Ezek. xxxvii. 9.

sons of God,'* how important must it be to pray for His vivifying and sanctifying influences, and how encouraging the assurance, that those influences, if sought 'in spirit and in truth,' shall not be sought in vain! †

If the considerations that have now been humbly and affectionately offered, tend in any degree to show that the severer trials of life should be viewed by the Christian sufferer as coming directly and deliberately from the hand of an all-merciful as well as all-wise Father, that they are intended for his profit, and, therefore,—though 'for the present not joyous, but grievous'—to be received in a spirit of filial and unrepining submission, how much less should he be affected by the many *smaller* trials that cross his daily path, and constitute so large a portion of his 'vexation of spirit!' We smile at the numberless little nothings which make the daily distresses, or form the infantine amusements of our children.

* Rom. viii. 14.

† Luke, xi. 13.

But oh! the time will shortly come, when, the film of sense being removed from our eyes, and every temporal object reduced to its true shape and its just dimensions, we shall view in the same, or even in an inferior light, the many tiny trifles that now engage our own attention; those Lilliputian cords, which, making up in number what each wants in strength, fetter the wings of faith, bind down the immortal spirit to the dust, encumbering its heavenward flight, and too often preventing even one holy aspiration.

But though the children of God, while living in the world, are ever striving to rise above it, and to breathe, as much as possible, the atmosphere of heaven, they are careful to neglect no one duty of that station, in which God's providence has placed them upon earth. Nor let it be supposed that, while they hold as paramount the concerns of a life that will never end, they are slow to appreciate the attainments of intellect, the discoveries of science, or the achievements of human enterprise. They only desire to see these kept subordinate, and, if possible, rendered sub-

servient, to higher and nobler objects than any that a perishing world can furnish. They have as keen a relish as others for the elegancies of art, the beauties of poetry, or the pursuits of literature; but they know, too, that 'whether there be tongues they shall cease, whether there be knowledge it shall vanish away;'* while 'the word of our God shall stand for ever.† None are more ready to pay their just tribute of admiration and respect to those who, taking the lead in all that promotes the temporal interests of their fellow-men, may well be reckoned among the benefactors of our race; but, forming their estimate by a more than human standard, they know that there is a still loftier flight to be aimed at by the candidates for an eternity of glory; and that, after all, 'a Christian is the *highest* style of man.' And while they have as much ambition as others to become eminent in every quality which tends to raise man in the scale of excellence, as an intellectual and social being, their *chief* ambition ever is, to be among the number of those

* 1 Cor. xiii. 8.

† Isa. xl. 8.

whom the Saviour has 'redeemed to God by His own blood; '* to be permitted to approach the Deity in the spirit of adoption, 'crying Abba, Father; † to 'read their title clear' to 'an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away; ‡ in a word, to attain the highest dignity of which man's nature is capable, in becoming the SONS and DAUGHTERS OF THE LORD ALMIGHTY. §

* Rev. v. 9.

† 1 Pet. i. 4.

† Gal. iv. 6.

§ 2 Cor. vi. 18.

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