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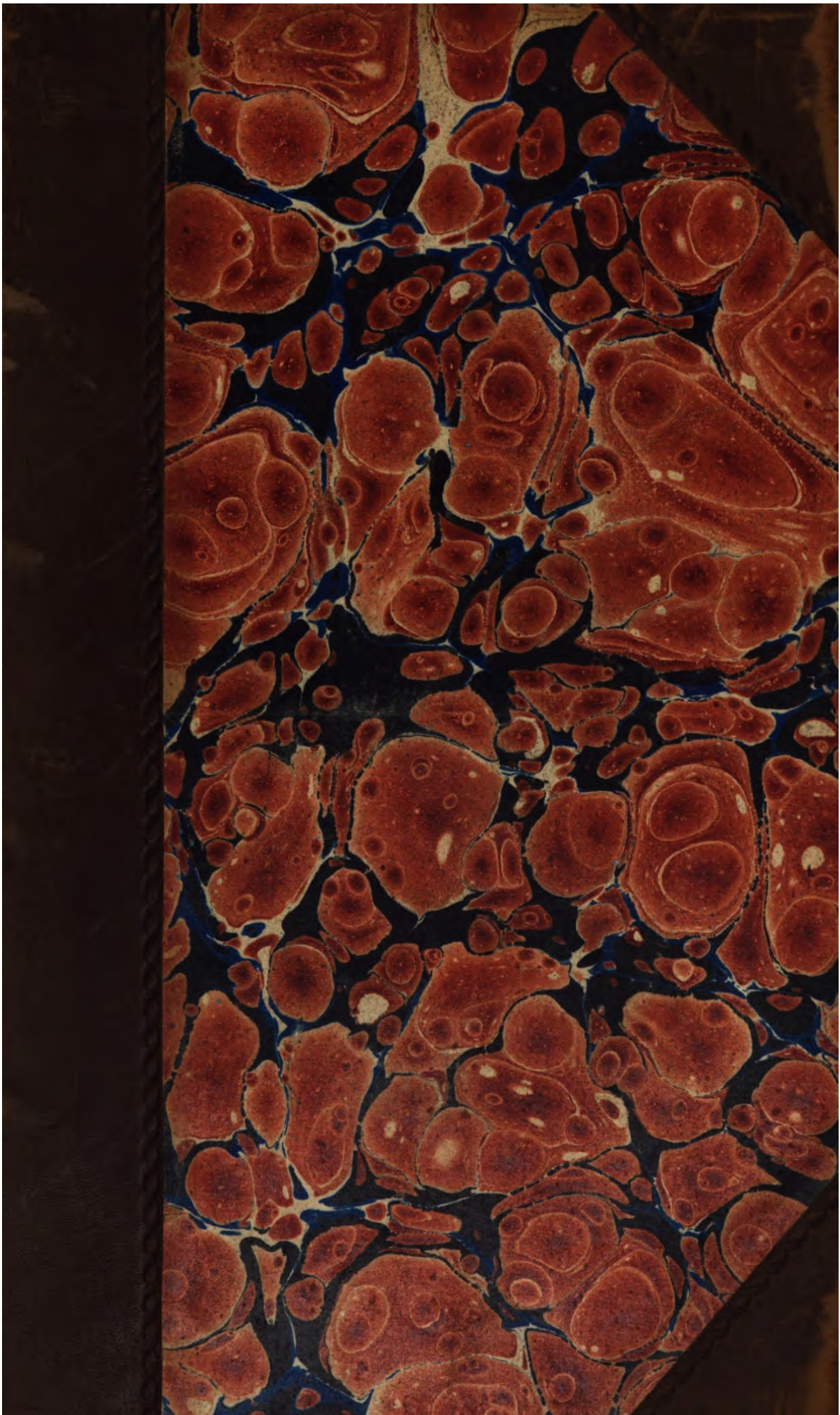
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SPIRITUAL LIFE 'DELINEATED ;
WITH THE
DETECTION AND EXPOSURE
OF SOME OF
THE POPULAR ERRORS OF THE DAY.

In Five Parts.

BY THE
REV. THOMAS WATSON, B.A.

MINISTER OF ST. PHILIP'S, PENTONVILLE.



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P R E F A C E.

IT may be justly remarked, that where our practical working ends, our theory begins; and what is last performed, is not unfrequently first designed.

This observation more especially holds good, as it respects the preface to any work, every part of which is, not unfrequently, executed before that is even thought of.

The Author of the following pages having, through mercy, completed what he intended, now proceeds to pay that tribute to public opinion which the circumstance of his appearing a second time in print demands.

He entertains the hope that, by the blessing of God, this publication will gain some little acceptance from the originality of its plan, which has neither been suggested to him by friends, nor chalked out for him by the labours of the living or the dead. The wants of his own people,—the situation in which he is providentially placed in this great metropolis,—the present posture of our ecclesiastical affairs,—and the abounding iniquity of the times in which we live, led him to see its necessity; but whatever disadvantages, in following up the original idea, the work may have suffered in his hands, it is not for himself to determine; suffice it to say, that he is as fully aware of its manifold defects, as any of his readers can possibly be: some topics are too much pursued, though comparatively of small consideration, while others, much more weighty and useful, are, in several instances, but partially touched; but the frequent interruptions which he met with, and the languor of mind which was often brought to it after the pressure of other duties, and a variety of other circumstances, might be pleaded in its excuse.

In the execution of his plan, the author has not scrupled to

use reely those magazines of spiritual wealth, viz. paraphrases and commentaries, &c. on all or any particular portions of the Bible, which form a sort of common property, and because they are open to all, and withheld from none, he makes no apology for so doing ; and as for the method pursued in other respects, he would refer to his volume already before the public, in which will there be found, in the outset, the most full and circumstantial statements.

In style, he has aimed at that variety which diversity of character and scene pre-suppose ; in general, however, he has preferred great plainness of speech to studied elegance of composition, and to excite interest more than produce elaborate disquisitions ; and he trusts there will be found a plain, perspicuous mode of dealing with topics, which, while it is unquestionably the most natural, is in general the most acceptable and useful, and this is a sufficient reason why, in most instances, it should be preferred.

On the whole, what the Author can safely aver is, that he hopes that the principles and tendency of the work are sound and scriptural throughout. If sins are discovered in practice, it is that they may be corrected ; if errors are exposed in doctrine, it is that they may be avoided ; and if any fellow traveller, who, like Philemon, has just set his foot on the land of promise, finds the experience of others embodied in his own, or their successes and failures made profitable to his own soul, — if, in short, this work of faith and labour of love is so helped and blessed of God as to help forward the best of causes, and the most important of all journeys, the ascription of the whole glory shall be given to the Lord, and the spirit of thanksgiving shall daily be excited in the mind of the Author himself.

69, *Myddelton Square,*
May 11, 1838.

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8,	29,	<i>for</i> such as this interest is, you will find in several, <i>read</i> this interest, such as it is, you will find in the several
50,	5,	<i>for</i> experiences <i>read</i> experience
52,	28,	<i>for</i> comforts <i>read</i> comfort
82,	20,	<i>for</i> holding <i>read</i> from holding
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101,	33,	<i>for</i> whom, I am now anxious, that he should, <i>read</i> whom I am now anxious should
102,	7,	<i>for</i> exercises <i>read</i> exercise
116,	5,	<i>for</i> proves <i>read</i> prove
126,	33,	<i>for</i> will <i>read</i> wish
154,	3,	<i>for</i> scaring <i>read</i> searing
172,	1,	<i>for</i> into hands <i>read</i> into the hands
185,	8,	<i>for</i> feeling <i>read</i> feelings
194,	29,	<i>for</i> inconsistent <i>read</i> inconsistently
227,	23,	<i>for</i> not without <i>read</i> without
239,	34,	<i>for</i> and omniscient <i>read</i> and the omniscient
240,	10,	<i>for</i> just <i>read</i> first
267,	18,	<i>for</i> safety-valve <i>read</i> vice
300,	28, 29,	<i>for</i> are, and gospels, <i>read</i> is, and gospel
313,	9,	<i>for</i> sanctities <i>read</i> sanctity
317,	2,	<i>for</i> institute <i>read</i> institution

BY THE SAME AUTHOR,

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THE COLOSSIANS. Second Edition, 8vo. 10s. 6d.

SPIRITUAL LIFE DELINEATED.



PART I.

THE INFANCY OF PHILEMON.



SECTION I.

INTRODUCTORY OBSERVATIONS.

ZIBA—*Slanderer*. 2 Sam. xix. 27.

TIMOTHEUS—*Clerical Assistant*. Rom. xvi. 21.

EPAPHRAS—*Pastor*. Col. i. 7.

Ziba.—"Of making books," says Solomon, "there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh." (Eccles. xii. 12.) Such is the decision of unerring wisdom, and yet there are those who will not be admonished.

Surely these are not days for writing, but working; active examples are the most impressive discourses.

Ministers specially should be unwearied labourers in the Lord's vineyard; for now is the time for doing; to be instant "in season and out of season," ought to be every one's motto; how blameable then are those who forget the true nature and import of their office, who lose sight of that which was intrusted to them, and meddle with other matters with which they have nothing to do.

Timotheus.—We must be careful not to form unrighteous judgments; your observation savours of uncharitableness; it proceeds upon the suppo-

sition, that the doing of one thing leads to the neglect of other, and still more important duties ; but they who do most, are capable of doing most ; besides, who can always be engaged in the same species of labour ? Diversity of employment suits some constitutions, and the desire of variety is inherent in all ; the functions of the mind, no less than the body, require change : where the mind is unhinged for some exercises, it is equal to others, and herein we discover the merciful design of Providence ; the vineyard of Christ is large ; it opens out a wide field ; it offers various employment : all may find enough to do, some in one way and some in another : none are born to be idle. In my judgment, therefore, our pastor (for to him allusion is made, I suppose) is above censure ; and whether he be preaching from the pulpit, or exhorting in private, or writing for our benefit, still he is in his work, and all is for our spiritual and eternal good.

Moreover it seems to me, that pious books with prayer for divine teaching, are good helps to a godly life : they are means of grace, and great lifts by the way ; their value lies mainly in the practical use we make of them : they are to remind us continually of our privileges and obligations to God,—to put us in remembrance of things already known,—to establish us in the truth,—to stir us up to the attainment of greater measures of grace, and excite us to more enlarged usefulness,—to lead us to detect all errors and abuses, and, by divine assistance, to reform them. In all these respects I look upon a minister's writings, circulated among his people, al-

most as useful in their line for edification, as his presence is in preaching.

Ziba.—Do I judge of the sacred scriptures aright? They appear to me chiefly intended for one object, to supply in some sort the actual presence of their authors; hence, when the apostles could not be with their charge in person, they helped them with their minds, and thus committed their thoughts to writing. But in the present instance, to which you have referred, is there any such necessity?

Timotheus.—Herein is your mistake: the apostles did not write so much with a view to conversion, (for conversion was effected in the first instance less by the means of writing, than by the foolishness of preaching,) their main purpose was to edify their hearers. They wrote to those who knew already the main truths of the Gospel, but were ignorant of its particular bearings; they did not address a people, as you appear to imagine, at a distance, to whom they had never been sent, and of whom they knew nothing, they addressed themselves to churches which others had visited, or where they themselves had laboured; whether, therefore, such communications are made verbally or in writing, whether in the shape of pastoral visits or through the medium of the press, they are, through God's blessing, likely to prove useful to those who receive them.

Ziba.—My observations (be it understood) are quite general, and no disparagement is intended.

But, as I hear the footsteps of our pastor himself, any scruples I may possibly entertain as to

the expediency of his publishing, may easily be removed.

Men in official stations, dear Sir, must not be surprised if they become a public talk: this is the usual tribute they are accustomed to pay.

Timotheus.—And not unfrequently the best intentions are exposed to the most uncandid constructions.

Epaphras.—You are right, my dear friend; no practice is more unbecoming, and yet none more common, than a spirit of censoriousness; and yet it requires no great insight into character to discover, that those who are the most eagle-eyed, as regards the intentions of others, and who insinuate most against the motives of others, are generally the worst themselves; they resemble the fabled harpies, which are always represented as the least sparing of all birds, because they are the most ravenous themselves.

Ziba.—The subject of our conversation turned upon publications generally; and to good books I can have no objection, so that they be really good, useful, and new: but where shall we find these qualities in the present day?

Authors may pretend to originality as much as they please, but few I deem are original; thoughts, like tints in the rainbow, are for the most part struck out of kindred subjects; some writers, like certain artists, are mere copyists, and follow servilely the style and method of their predecessors. Many, even if they try to shape any thing intellectual, must needs throw their reflections into the moulds of other minds;

how few give us any genuine specimens of thinking for themselves.

Perhaps, Sir, you will favour us with an outline of your forthcoming work ; and, if it be not asking too much, with the circumstances that led to its publication.

Epaphras.—An author is not obliged to gratify such curiosity upon points which are not necessary to be touched for the elucidation of his subject. Different reasons, of a public or private nature, may induce him to be more or less explanatory or reserved ; and, if he withholds the information desired, he may do so as much from regard to the feelings of his readers as to his own.

Ziba.—No offence, I trust.

Epaphras.—Certainly not : still I am of opinion it is not prudent to disclose all circumstances, where the disclosure might be turned to no good account, and when it is not necessary for the elucidation of the subject.

Were I affecting singularity in this respect, that circumstance alone might justly lay me open to censure, but I can throw myself under the shield of the great apostle to the Gentiles, who is a striking example of both methods of proceeding. In some of his epistles he satisfies every inquiry ; he enters much into detail, and assigns his reasons for his pastoral address to the churches ; at other times he studiously avoids all particulars ; he aims at concealment, shuns all explanations, and even withholds his signature. This obvious difference might arise either from private or personal motives ; but some have

thought, and this is the true solution most probably, that he knew too well the character of those by whom such information was sought; he was unwilling also that the fact of his being himself a Christian should in any degree offend his countrymen, and prove an obstacle and a stumbling-block in his ardent desire and prayer to do them good.

However, so far as is prudent and consistent with a sense of the propriety of what is due to others, your request shall be acceded to.

The following special motives have in great measure originated the present pages :

1. I trust the glory of God has been the uppermost feeling in my heart. It cannot be too much or too strongly impressed on the mind, that even the benefits and blessings of our common Christianity are not to constitute the principal motive even for diffusing true religion. Nothing short of love to Christ, and an eye to the divine glory, can sanction any undertaking : this is an evangelical principle, and would that it formed a rule whereby all men professing godliness were guided and directed—the gospel acknowledges no other : this is laid down for all classes of Christians, and ought therefore especially to influence every one of Christ's ministers : they are styled the lights of the world, but it is borrowed light in which they shine ; and as the greatest light always extinguishes the less, so they shine most when least of their own effulgence appears.

2. While, however, I would ascribe the motive, the means, and the end, to the glory of God,

there are other considerations which deserve to be taken into the account: it is the duty of ministers of the gospel to look well to the results of things, whether good or evil: if good, what kind and degree of good is springing out of their labours among their flock? if any evil begins to manifest itself, and to appear as tares among the wheat, what is the present amount of it in individual cases? and what is likely to be the aggregate, if it be permitted to continue unchecked?

I feel that I have not paid sufficient regard to this point hitherto. It is by no means sufficient to preach the truth as it is in Jesus, we must also guard the truth: it is our duty to anticipate evils, and, by the grace of God, to be ready to meet them; to foresee the tendency of things, and to try to disabuse the minds of our people of them; to watch with extreme anxiety whatever misconstructions or perversions may arise from any scripture doctrine not rightly apprehended; to know what course to take to remedy prevailing evils in society and general intercourse by a timely interposition; and if we are unable to prevent them, at least we may, by using every suitable means, try to heal or expose them. Such was the pious conduct of the aged St. John, when he saw that some would take umbrage to sin from his doctrine; anticipating the evil, he immediately wrote to them the salutary caution,—“that they sin not.” What a blessing were all ministers actuated by the like feeling and concern for their spiritual charge.

3. As far as observation and experience lead

me, there appears, in most instances, a striking analogy between the natural and spiritual man; in both, *the whole system, or spiritual economy*, must be attended to; and he who is wise to win souls will watch the progress of divine truth and the tendency of his preaching to the hearts and lives of those among whom his lot is cast; while, at the same time, he is by no means an unconcerned spectator of the openings of usefulness and beginning of grace in any soul. How often, if we look well to existing evils, shall we discover that some congregations are likely to suffer from fulness of privileges, no less than others from want of them! How often are the very benefits of a gospel ministry nominal rather than real! the reception rather intellectual than practical or useful! the light diffusive; and, like a flood, proportionally shallow! And whenever such effects appear, and they will appear more or less every where, they call for the utmost vigilance and wakeful energies of every faithful shepherd.

I wish to take no credit to myself in this effort. If, however, the Lord has bestowed on me any gift or grace—any wisdom or ability, it is only intrusted to me for a short season. Every such talent I would fain see put out to the best advantage, and would gladly return it to the Giver with some little interest: such as this interest is, you will find in several ways of grace in which I have lately been negotiating. How far this spiritual merchandize may suit the taste or meet the present feelings of the religious public, or how far it may hit the mark I have had

most in view, it is not for me even to throw out a conjecture ; one thing I may say, that amidst other and still more important engagements, it has cost me no little mental anxiety and painstaking, not a few privations, and much economy of time !

And now, in a spirit of prayer and simple dependance upon God, I send it forth ; being fully persuaded that He alone can procure it favour—give it acceptance—widen its circulation, and measure the full extent of its success.

SECTION II.

CONVICTIONS OF SIN.

TIMOTHEUS.—EPAPHRAS.

PHILEMON—*Babe in Christ.*

Timotheus.—Perhaps it needs some apology for my thus intruding, but I come in behalf of a dear friend I much wish to introduce to you; and it affords me real pleasure to do so, being fully persuaded we can never truly say—we have a Saviour in heaven whom we love, if we neglect any brother who is upon earth.

Epaphras.—You know how glad I am to see you, and all who deem it a privilege to co-operate with God in his great work of mercy—of spreading the Saviour's name;—of assisting in the smallest degree in building up the walls of Zion;—of serving the sacred cause of God in the world, and of helping forward and strengthening the hands of his ministers.

Timotheus.—The case is singularly interesting: it is that of an individual who is full grown in nature, but now a little one in grace, (for I do hope the work is begun) but there requires much wisdom to discern, as well as a clear judgment to direct.

Epaphras.—In such persons, I am aware there is usually great tenderness of spirit, which is to be gently dealt with; there is also not unfrequently great diffidence arising from their age

and previous habits ; but instances of the kind, with which you appear to have to do, are by no means rare.

Philemon.—Truly, Sir, I feel shame and confusion of face, in acknowledging my present and past ignorance both of myself and my Saviour, and it is but piteous comfort that I find I do not stand alone.

Epaphras.—There are thousands and tens of thousands who are in no better condition ; and if you could cast your eye over the whole vineyard of Christ, you would discover very many like yourself ; for, as in the wide field of the world, there are plants of various growth and different sizes, so it is in the kingdom of God ; there are babes, children, young men, old men, and fathers. A babe is described in Scripture by its food, its teachableness, and sincerity (1 Peter ii. 2.) ; children by their knowing their heavenly Father (1 John ii. 13.) ; young men by their spiritual strength and zeal for God (1 John ii. 13.) ; fathers as being the pillars of the church and patterns of the faithful (Gal. ii. 9.) ; and old men by their knowledge, grace, and experience (Psalm xcii. 14.)

Philemon.—As I desire to deal faithfully with my own soul, may I tell you honestly the reason of my coming ?

Epaphras.—You cannot be too plain or explicit.

Philemon.—Your sermon last sabbath (Rom. vii. 9.) I felt very much, and it has been on my mind off and on ever since ; many of your observations affected me as I never was affected before : it stirred up all my fears when you de-

clared that "self-righteousness in some shape or other was the whole world's besetting sin;" and afterwards, very pointedly, to myself, as I thought, "you will perish in your iniquities, and much of your iniquity is your moral goodness, and the sort of obedience you rely on;" this made me tremble, and if it be true, not only myself, but very many besides, are in a bad way.

Epaphras.—There can be no doubt but that multitudes are deceiving themselves; our blessed Saviour bore patiently with many abuses in regard to the world, but he could not bear the religious formality, Pharisaism, and empty profession of his own time. He preached more against the self-righteous, than against publicans and sinners; more against the professing sons of Zion, than against the Philistines: "he spared not, we are told, the tribe of Levi."

Philemon.—But till lately it did not appear to me dangerous to trust to ourselves in some degree, especially as so many do the same. I had been taught from early youth that good works procured the favour of God; and this is an opinion that still spreads far and wide. Moreover, does it not confirm the idea that some degree of merit does attach to us, because we find the word "recompense" in Scripture, and we read of persons "who shall in no wise lose their reward."

Epaphras.—But do not we read also, that when we have done all that is commanded us, we have only done what it was our duty to do, and nothing more than what we ought to do; we are still to look on ourselves as "unprofitable ser-

vants:" indeed, our best works on earth are but our debts to God; and surely we can never satisfy our sins by our debts!

Philemon.—Hitherto I had not viewed things in this light; nor did I consider it any harm to trust to a good life; one thing I am sure of, I have always intended well.

Epaphras.—There is much practical evil sometimes arising out of what are called good intentions: if men will try to make themselves holy and happy, and go to heaven in their own way, God often judicially leaves them to that way: it is only the grace of God in Christ that can produce saving effects; and it is only the Holy Spirit, who loathes sin, that can work in us a similar nature to himself, and make us to loathe it likewise: what you want, I perceive, is more of the regenerating, quickening, and life-giving influence of the Spirit.

Philemon.—I was in hopes formerly, that if I did but attend church, take the sacrament four times a year; that is to say, on all our great festivals, and keep the Sabbath, and not profane it, and lead a good and regular life, all must be well.

Epaphras.—If we go no further than the outward regularities of life, merely attend to the ordinary means of grace, and settle down there—or if you imagine that coming to church in a serious mood, is coming to Christ, or to a knowledge of ourselves, you impose upon none so much as upon yourself.

Philemon.—I greatly fear that this is but too true, and that we are all greatly in error.

Timotheus.—The object, dear friend, of our

pastor is to lead you gradually to more self-knowledge : it is to deepen your convictions of sin, and to give you to see that we might just as well trust to our sins as to our righteousness for salvation.

Epaphras.—If the example of others has any weight, it may be some consolation to your friend to know, that I am only dealing with others as the Lord has dealt with myself: He first emptied me of self, before he showed me “my all” in Christ Jesus: his gracious Spirit made me to drop all my goods and chattels (if I may so speak) which I had been laying up for many years, before he would relieve me of my burden. He prevailed on me at last, though not till after many years of painful experience, to renounce all human merits and deserts; yea, and to give up all preparations and qualifications, and other recommendations, which I had resorted to in my religious profession, without Christ in my soul.

Timotheus.—This, I am persuaded, is his usual method, as my own experience can abundantly testify: and if you now feel your sins, as you now see the unprofitableness of your past actions—if you know your own unrighteousness, and Christ’s righteousness, and if you can say to your own soul what the penitent thief did to his unhappy neighbour: “Dost thou not fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation?” surely the Lord, if he does not say to you, “This day thou shalt be with me in paradise,” at least you shall hear, and that soon, in the soft and silent whisperings of his Spirit, this day you have a just right and title to it.

Epaphras.—My dear friend and fellow-labourer,

it is good to wait events ; there is a time for every thing : every season is not a season for comfort.

Philemon.—Indeed, Sir, of this there is no danger ; for comfort seems unseasonable to me at present ; for though I feel much, I suspect more : not only the hollowness of my past moral virtues, but the unholiness of my nature too ; for I have felt, I confess, a strong inclination to evil at times, and, I suppose, if my soul was convinced thoroughly, as the law of God convinces and the spirit of Christ, then I should see that an inclination to sin argues that sin dwelleth in me, and that a proneness to evil is the existence of evil itself.

Epaphras.—Just so ; and I bless God with all my heart for such an admission ! the law must indeed do its work before we can welcome the gospel : impressions, like yours, may vary in kind and degree, but, for the most part, the law of God presented in one way or other is the instrumental cause ; and when the Holy Spirit shines in upon the law, and brings it home with all its spirituality upon the eye of the conscience, then the soul discovers a sight which it never saw before : it begins to see sin in all its deformity, not only in its actings, but as inherent in our nature ; as well in its greatness as in its littleness ; as well in its utmost excesses as in its most diminutive forms. The law has the same effect upon the understanding that the light of day has upon the organ of sight ; as in the one case, by the use of an optic glass, we can, not merely discern the greater objects of creation, but likewise the very motes and atoms flying about in the atmosphere, hitherto unob-

served ; so it is, with the assistance of God's holy Spirit, shining upon his law ; he gives us not only to see great and enormous delinquencies, but all the seeds and varied forms of evil within us, which, though not discernible by the eye of natural conscience, they seem so small, yet appear in their true colour in the light of the Spirit and in the eye of God. I would therefore urge you to pray for more spiritual illumination and grace, and to get a clear view of the law of God in all its bearings.

Timotheus.—My friend may in future, I trust, call on you whenever there is occasion to do so ?

Epaphras.—The ministers of God are a species of public property, and the household of faith are welcome at all times ; meanwhile, with yourself I would speak a few words privately.

Timotheus.—I shall be happy to wait.

Epaphras.—How much wisdom from above is needful to reprove aright ! and how much grace, that we may not wound the feelings of those we wish under God to befriend ! Oh, that I could reprove with the mildness of Moses—with the equity of Samuel—with the compassion of Peter—with the patience of Job—and the wisdom of Solomon !

Timotheus.—Your hint was not lost upon me ; neither did I take your reproof amiss.

Epaphras.—Thank you for receiving in kindness what was meant for the good of your friend : in parting, allow me then to offer you one word more of advice, for your own future guidance and for the good of others.

1. Beware how you comfort : it may be dealt out too soon : let the law always have its perfect work : many have been deeply and lastingly wounded by having their hurt healed too soon, and but slightly (Jer. vi. 14); the fittest time, indeed the only time, thoroughly to affect the soul with fear and dread, and to scare it away both from the spirit of bondage and from the reign of sin, is when it begins to feel its misery : it is when it sees the danger it is *in*, and not when it is *over*. If Joseph, for instance, tries to humble his brethren —if he intends to be an object of fear to them, he acts this part ; while they look at him as a *judge*, and before he reveals himself as a *brother* ; and this is the only time when it must be done ; when convictions are fresh and lively, it is then the work of grace takes root, and proves a work deep and abiding.

2. Beware also how you go before God, and anticipate Christ's gracious work of his spirit. God always suits his dispensations to the disposition of his children ; and this is as true of a whole nation as of one individual. He led the children of Israel, for example, by the way of the wilderness forty years about, when the journey might have been performed in a few days (there being but eleven days between Horeb and Kadesh-barnea." (Deut. i. 2.) Yet his own way of leading and of comforting them, though a long one, was the *right* way to rest. (Deut. viii. 2, 3, 16.) It is desirable, therefore, on all future occasions, while you neither relax your personal exertions, nor cease to strive in prayer for souls of men, not to precipitate the

work of the Lord ; but to leave the good and gracious Spirit of God, who has begun the good work, to carry it on and perfect it in his own time, by exercising that discipline, and administering that consolation, which is both safe and suitable, and most seasonable.

SECTION III.

GODLY SORROW.

PHILEMON — EPAPHRAS, &c.

Philemon.—The permission, dear Sir, to speak with you on the best of things, I greatly value; indeed it is a privilege for which I can never be sufficiently thankful; and latterly, oh! how much need has there been of your friendly counsel and advice!

Epaphras.—You know the Friend of sinners (Matthew xviii. 11.), the best of teachers (John vii. 46.), and also who is called the only wise God. (1 Tim. i. 17.)

Philemon.—True; but we read “the priest’s lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth.” (Mal. ii. 7.)

Epaphras.—It is easy to perceive you are unhappy.

Philemon.—I am truly miserable; harassed in mind and greatly perplexed—uncertain where to look, what to do, and where to turn for comfort; ever since I fell in with certain company (and this occurred since we last met), my conscience has been much more disturbed, and my soul has no peace.

Epaphras.—What company do you speak of?

Philemon.—To be short; there were present Ziba, and a man of the name of Abner (2 Sam. ii. 8.), and Joab (2 Sam. xx. 9.), and several others besides.

Epaphras.—Nothing requires more circumspection than the company we keep; the natural eye does not with more certainty catch a shade from every object presented to it, than we do from every object we come near; and as the understanding is naturally without even the form of a thought, and yet is capable of all forms; so it is with the whole man; something is sure to cleave to us from all we see, handle, and converse with: hence the greater need of continual watchfulness and holy jealousy over ourselves.

Philemon.—But in yielding a little to their wishes, there did not appear to be any mischief; besides, they all seemed well disposed, and as I had not as yet any particular acquaintance with them, brotherly love led me to hope for the best.

Epaphras.—It is not the first time that even the lambs of Christ's flock have been injured by worldly compliances; it is the nature of evil that it should be gilded over with the appearance of good. Men of the cast you mention, make a fair show in the flesh, but there sticks fast in them the root of bitterness; you were therefore quite in the wrong in listening to them; you know nothing as yet of the snares of the world, nor much by experience of corruptions from within. I cherish the hope, that your convictions will lead to a sound conversion; and even now you may, through mercy, be a little one in Christ, but you are very young in grace, and many snares and traps are laid for your feet: such compliances as you have been telling me of are most dangerous; the sin of them is not to be measured by the first act, nor yet by the present evil coming out of them: they are not

the less injurious, however, because they appear innocent; for many things seem innocent at first which do not prove so afterwards; they may even look specious and good, and still be fraught with injury to the soul. What, for example, more innocent than the representation of a man's likeness on canvass? and yet this very innocent piece of art, in days of ignorance, led to the deifying of dead men. Be, hereafter, more on your guard; watch against every enemy; go upon Christian principles, and you shall not err. (Rom. xii. 2.)

Philemon.—In all this my conscience approves, and also accuses for the past.

Epaphras.—Only, I repeat, gain wisdom by experience, and be more watchful in future; be shy of new acquaintances in religion; take not every man you meet for a brother. It was the high commendation of the apostles, that they would not admit even a Paul into their company till he was regularly commended to them by Barnabas. (Acts ix. 27.)

Philemon.—But how may I know these men, so as to mark and avoid them?

Epaphras.—By a little observation they are easily known; for they are all common characters in these days. The first in order is a man devoid of all proper feeling; this is owing to his ignorance of himself and the darkness of his nature; sin, saith the apostle, "hath blinded his eyes," and it hath so blinded him, that he can see no good in a brother with which he does not find fault—his usual method is to approve and then condemn: he puts a sinister construction upon every thing; he has a false surmise for all he hears

or sees, or has to do with, so that I hold Ziba to be a most insidious and dangerous character.

The next is a man in appearance a friend, yet he is a most subtle foe : he is most fertile in expedients and full of resources ; his power of mischief is only equalled by his art of persuading to do it ; you may know him usually by his first advances : he always throws out a long line with a good bait ; and if you incline to him but a little, he is sure to avail himself of that little, and to use it likewise to great advantage : he watches all opportunities, he takes great courage from little successes, and when he gains a point, he is loath to leave it.

As to the third gentleman, Joab, (who is a friend in name, but a supplanter in heart,) he is also a well known character ; he is in love with himself, and appears outwardly righteous unto men ; his outward conduct is without a blemish ; his general character is without a stain, his reputation is without a censure : he stands, as I have already said, fair with every body ; all is current with him, except his own soul, *that* is counterfeit : you may know him by all men speaking well of him during his life, but he has no hope in his death. But to advert to the cause of your distress.

Philemon.—Some remarks that fell from Ziba did me much evil ; though speaking of others, he seemed to have an eye to myself ; in his description of evangelical professors, I could read my own image.

Epaphras.—It is good to apply what we hear ; the end of instruction is application.

Philemon.—But in this case it has been and

still is the main cause of my distress, for it has nearly deterred me from serving God altogether, and to leave off doing what through mercy I was beginning to do: because I now see I cannot serve him *perfectly*; for, said Ziba, speaking of his absent friend, whom he yet acknowledged to be a good liver, and given to many good works; “All actions are of a mixed character, and some that are counted good, are done with the will, and some against the will. I will illustrate this point,” continued he: “a merchant, for example, casts his cargo out of his ship in a storm: he wills it, and yet he does not will it at the same time, and what credit can he take unto himself for such conduct, except the palm of selfishness? He quits his goods indeed, but it is still for his own sake, and such are most of our actions: much of what we do is of this mixed character; man at his best state acts by contraries, and is influenced by contradictory motives: he is full of impurity, and one feeling draws him one way and another in another: within us there are opposing forces, and we are pushed on by the very conflict that is going on between them: hence we are induced to do various things, which, after all, we have no great will to do. This I just felt was my case, as saith the word of God, ‘the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak; the good that I would I do not, but the evil which I would not, that I do. O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?’ ”

Epaphras.—If you are as you say, almost deterred from serving God in Christ, because you

cannot serve him perfectly, you might as well avow the sentiment at once, that you will never again serve him at all; at least the matter comes to that: for the picture drawn by Ziba, though meant for evil, is yet true; there is a mixture of divine grace and human weakness even in the best, but our God will accept an imperfect service; he has provided for such in the Old Testament dispensation and also in the New; in the latter by the intercession of Christ, in the former by the typical ceremonies of the Jewish law; for though it be true, that in the *expiatory* sacrifice nothing but perfection was admitted, there was to be no *leaven* there: yet in the eucharistical or service of the people, there might be *leaven*. This was to denote that God for Christ's sake accepts our offerings, though there be the inherent leaven of sin and much imperfection and human infirmity mixed with it.

Philemon.—I thank you, good Sir; while this view does not countenance sin, yet it greatly relieves a burdened conscience and refreshes a dejected spirit: but may I hear you further? There was another subject that harassed me not a little; the same man argued strongly, and in disputation I should think he stands almost unrivalled, that actions, forasmuch as the best was a mixture of good and evil, should not be attributed to grace, nor be regarded as glorifying God: he spake much also against the doctrines of Evangelist, and in many instances, he brought forward living examples of their bad tendency, and herein he excited in my breast painful feelings, great fearfulness and suspicion.

Epaphras.—And let me tell you without reason, for if deeds done imperfectly may yet be done acceptably through Christ, what reason is there for groundless misgivings? Besides, unless it be a sin to give all glory to God, then certainly the humble Christian never appears to such advantage as when he ascribes all he does, and all he possesses, to its proper source; it is then his greatness and excellence appears truly great and excellent; his actions, though at best of *mixed* character, never seem so brilliant and glorious, as when they are ascribed to grace, and reflected back to the honour of God; they then resemble the sun-beam when it strikes some watery cloud, (the rays reflected back to the sun,) they leave behind them a bow of a thousand colours; so when you do any thing in love to Christ, however imperfectly, if only it is referred back to divine grace, God looks upon and accepts it in Christ, however imperfectly accomplished: in judgment he remembers mercy. And as to this man speaking against free grace, that is no marvel: the doctrines of Evangelist, I am aware, are much spoken against (Acts xxviii. 22.), and to say the truth, some professors have given just cause for suspicion; and if we could not separate the doctrine from the failings of the men, such doctrine would appear dangerous and to have an ill tendency; and therefore it behoves all true Christians to be the more circumspect and careful in their walk; but though mere morality is not religion, (for morality may exist where there is no religious principle whatever,) still there is no piety where there are not the fruits of a good life:

christian morality, therefore, is essential not to his perfection, but to the existence of christian character: these two things are coupled together in the christian scheme; and both are necessary to the existence of "the man of God."

Philemon.—How much am I indebted for these explanations—all praise to God! And now may I open my heart as respects my inward distress by my converse with Abner?

Epaphras.—For the present we must waive the consideration of him: but if the Lord will, we shall resume the subject shortly; meanwhile in parting, a word or two of additional remark respecting Ziba, who spoke so censoriously, so that you may know the better how to deal with him, if you should chance to meet him again. That you may never suffer the like from him, or in future allow him to entangle you in talk, and lead you to speak many things, that he may thereby find occasion against you (Matt. xxii. 15.), be sure to avoid all perverse disputings with him, feel quite certain you have no common and equal data to go upon, unless he acknowledge the Holy Scriptures to be the alone ground of appeal: this will at once enable you to understand your real differences, and to reason on common grounds; but he will decline, I suspect, this proposal; for he deals with men's good name and reputation, and not with Scripture, nor even common charity; what can he intend by his perpetual appeals to men and their concerns? his soul is not upright in him; his heart is as full of mischief as his sentiments are erroneous and malignant: do you think that this, his uneven judgment, can ever make his crooked ways

straight? But if it can be done without rudeness and want of common courtesy to others, the safest method of dealing with him is, in his presence *always to be absent*: I mean to preserve a studied silence; for such is the evil constitution of his nature and the prevailing propensity of his heart, whether in good or evil, he is alike the object of terror; he always spoils the praise he himself gives by the manner of its bestowing, and always detracts and perverts to mischief the good he seems to offer: he will raise a man up in another's esteem for a little while, but in the end he will throw out something to swamp his reputation entirely: you cannot therefore be too much on your guard against such a man: he has the art of working himself into favour by blandishments, and pretended friendship and alliance in a good cause; but rest assured he is a bitter enemy to God; and remember, finally, that what he says of another, in his absence, is but a specimen of his dealings with yourself: as he treats their characters and vilifies their good name, so in your *absence* he treats your's.

SECTION IV.

POWER OF TEMPTATION.

PHILEMON.—EPAPHRAS.

ABNER—*Tempter.* 2 Sam. iii. 20. 25.

JOAB—*A plausible Man, yet a Betrayer.* 2 Sam. xx. 9.

Philemon.—How seasonable is this visit! and how early too! What shameful ingratitude that we should ever feel any symptoms of rising impatience. God is always better to us than our fears, yet Solomon well observes—that “hope deferred maketh the heart sick.” (Prov. xiii. 12.)

Epaphras.—Knowing your troubled state of mind, I have come the sooner. I wish to deal with you as with one of the lambs of Christ’s flock: to give you a little instruction at a time, and that little at no great intervals. Too much produces crudity in spiritual things as well as in natural, and we may suffer almost as much from fulness as from want.

Philemon.—Decision is repose; and the unburthening of the soul is great relief; and I can hardly tell you how great has been my burden, and how many have been my inward conflicts. For though I am sensible I must be in a better state now than ever,—yet I *feel* worse than ever,—and since, as you know, I have been in company with Ziba, Abner, Joab, and others, I have known little else than inward trials. But will this warfare continue? Shall I always be tormented in this way?

Epaphras.—So long as you continue in the body you must expect trials more or less (Job v. 7.), and the cause is the corruption of the human heart, men, and things; the eye, the hands, and the feet, are but the instruments.

Philemon.—They deserve, however, whatever they spring from, to be called “legion;” they are so many, and so diversified.

Epaphras.—The new-born soul has indeed many tribulations (Acts xiv. 22.), and they are of varied character; sometimes, and when it ought to be watchful, it is tempted to be slothful and at ease (Amos vi. 1.); sometimes it resembles a ship in a storm, it is full of boisterous zeal, and soon again it is a dead, desponding calm (Matt. viii. 26.); sometimes it resembles a stone upon an inclining plane, it fancies the first impulse given to it is to push it onward for ever (2 Kings x. 16.); at other times it entertains the notion, that spiritual life is like the natural; and that the soul will assuredly grow up in Christ without any weeds springing up, or even the necessity of watchfulness. Now I want you to see that divine life requires constant supplies of grace from above, for dangers seen and unseen beset us on every side; we may shelter ourselves for a time under the idea that when the seed is once sown in the soil of our hearts, as the parable (Matt. xiii.) seems to authorize us to judge, we may lay down and compose ourselves to sleep: we may flatter ourselves it will be sure to thrive and send forth the blade, and advance to the full ear; but this is all a delusion. That parable does not describe man’s experience,—it

only shows the malignity of the devil on the one hand, and the duty of the sower on the other ; who, when he has cast in the good seed, has done all he can do ; he can do no more, but commit it to the good providence of God.

Philemon.—It is a wonder I did not quake and tremble when I was in the presence of Abner ; to what danger must I have been exposed without knowing it.

Epaphras.—And no wonder ! For if we know not the face of a man—if we cannot distinguish his countenance, or read those parts that most prominently meet observation from another's, we are not likely to know the hand or any inferior part of him. Now Satan is the head of that man, and as you are yet but little acquainted with Satan and his wiles, still less are you able to detect his members—they wear so many disguises.

Philemon.—The way in which he distressed me exceedingly was this : he made me fear the work of grace was yet to be begun in my soul ; “ What is the use,” said he, “ of carrying yourself as though you were one of God's children, when, in my view, it is clear you have no spiritual existence. Certainly your piety may be all pretension,—your faith mere assent,—and your grace but the form of it. Tell me not this argues a great want of charity, or that it is taking upon me to decide what no man is equal to. I speak not of what a person may be ; the vilest sinner may become a saint, and the murderer a man of God. But I speak of things as they are ; and, until there is full evidence of spiritual life,

who can say he is a child of God? It is presumption,—it would be attempting impossibilities.”

Epaphras.—And I confess sometimes it is very difficult to say whether even a grown up professor be a little one in Christ. Mistaken charity often leans on slender evidences; and a little want of discrimination may lead to great error in judgment. And, on the contrary, often may we discover real grace, when, at first, there appeared to be none; but some trial, or calamity, or sifting season brings it out. In your own case, therefore, the very sense of misery you feel leads me to more than hope.

Philemon.—But he even raised a suspicion in my heart that there was between me and others, no manner of difference. (Exodus xi. 7.)

Epaphras.—It is well to know who maketh us to differ, and ever to bear in mind that we have nothing but what we have in rich mercy received. It is well also to mark wherein the real difference between us and others consists; otherwise, in the morning of the Resurrection it may be our misery to find we have had a dead child lying in our arms instead of a living one. (1 Kings iii. 25.)

Philemon.—I greatly wish my mind at rest on this point.

Epaphras.—Let me tell you then, if a babe in Christ, you have a double form of existence; a natural life, which is common to all; and a spiritual life, which is the privilege or possession but of a few. There is this striking analogy between them — both originate in a similar,

though not the same source. The natural life is derived from the blood within our own veins (Gen. ix. 4.), the spiritual from the blood of Christ; that the former is in ourselves, the latter is in Christ.

Philemon.—Another point he pressed me sore upon, and I laboured hard to answer him with arguments, but he in a measure succeeded; for at last he made me fearful lest all my sins were not yet forgiven. “Can you suppose,” said he, “that if you really had to do with Christ, as the Pearl of great price, and with his atoning blood, you would still feel a hard heart and a captive soul within you? You may endeavour to hide this from yourself, but can you succeed? You may try to read your interest in the Saviour, but can you do so always? You may not question his satisfaction for sin, but have you the comfort of believing it?”

While he thus spake my conscience responded within me, “I do feel a hard heart—a heart a thousand times hardened; it is like metal, it melts over the fire; but, as soon as removed, it grows as hard and unimpressible as ever. At times also, it feels so fast tied and bound with the chain of sin, that it will not stir, and all the terrors of earth and hell will not move it; and hence, I fear, I am not thoroughly forgiven.”

Epaphras.—It is very blessed always to remember what *Christ* has *done*, and not merely what *we feel*. Now the Saviour was manifested to take away our sins (1 John iii. 5.), and do you think he has failed of his errand? If Abner leads you to look at the burden of your sin, do

you look at a merciful and compassionate Father who laid that burden upon Christ (Isaiah liii. 6.); and if God laid it on him *really*, surely you may well lay it on him *fiducially* and *believingly*; and the burden which God laid upon him by his decree he bids your soul cast upon him by an act of faith.

Philemon. — May I still trust him for the pardon of all my sins past, present, and future.

Epaphras.—All the children of God have all their sins forgiven them always; and though it be true they are for their sins exposed to many miseries within, and meet with many chastisements without, and these are sometimes very grievous and difficult to be borne, yet they are always less than we deserve. (Ezra ix. 13.)

Philemon.—How important to understand the nature of divine grace and the workings of the spirit of God.

Epaphras.—To be sure it is: and for want of more light, and grace, and experience, the enemy of God often succeeds in persuading young Christians, and those who have tender consciences, that they are still unforgiven, and lying under the hot displeasure and scalding wrath of the Almighty. But the Holy Spirit is so strong about the necessity of our believing in the full and free pardon and remission of all sin, that he puts it in almost every conceivable form to work in us the belief and credit of it. Thus, in one place, the remission of our sins is called the covering of them; so that God in Christ even refuses to look on them for evil. He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, nor seen perverseness

in Israel. (Numb. xxiii. 21.) In another place he is said to cast their sins into the depth of the sea (Micah vii. 19.), and God always casts out of sight what he cannot bear in his sight; and in Isaiah (xliv. 22.) we read, he blots them out as a thick cloud, which is a beautiful allusion to the phenomenon of nature; for, as when the sun appears in its brightness, the thickest clouds are soon cleared away, so it is with the real Christian when Christ, the Sun of righteousness, rises upon his benighted soul with healing in his wings, the mists of ignorance and sin are instantly dispersed.

Philemon.—How encouraging is the doctrine, that with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption. (Psalm cxxx. 7.)

Epaphras.—Yes; and there are such depths of mercy, and such fathomless resources of divine compassion in the Lord, that all our sins are thoroughly forgiven through Christ; our sins are imputed to him and his righteousness to us; and not partly, but altogether so—for there is no reservation; and, indeed, if God has covered them—if he has washed them away in the blood of the Lamb—if he has made them to sink like lead in the mighty waters—if he has so entirely blotted them out as if they had never been done—if he says he will remember them no more, then surely we should remember them no more as a curse, but with feelings of gratitude and thankfulness that they are wholly forgiven.

Philemon.—Thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift! and happy are those who can believe

that he truly forgives for his own sake, without any desert of ours.

Epaphras.—But while you keep the blessed truth treasured up in your mind and memory, that whenever God in Christ forgives, he freely and fully forgives; yet, at the same time, never forget, that if he *remembers our sin no more, we must be careful to sin no more.*

Philemon.—Other grounds of complaint I have against Abner, and specially how he turned against me the many sins, and infirmities, and short comings, which I readily confessed, and am indeed deeply sensible of.

Epaphras.—I should not be surprised if he contrives by some means to annoy you again; meanwhile, that you may the more profit by what you have heard, I will add a thought or so further by way of caution.

Abner has contrived to get a very large acquaintance, and he has been so long actively employed in the service of his master, that he is most skilful in doing the work that is laid upon him; and, though he is a man of all work, yet those branches of employment he is most at home in, and wherein he excels most, may be summed up as follows:

He is famous for his great ability to make young Christians distrust God; and he does this in such a way, that they seldom know how it is done till he makes them feel it is done; and as for any evil there is in it, or harm coming out of it, he has the happy art of persuading them that it is rather a mark of humility, and so far becoming. He quite hides from the mind the

gulf of despair to which this distrust in God leads. But the sin of it has always appeared to me the greater whenever I have tried to contrast it with the faithfulness of God ; for not to repose confidence in Him pre-supposes cause of distrust ; but who has ever trusted God and been disappointed, or leant upon his promises which he has not fulfilled? How ought we then to be profoundly ashamed of distrust, and how ought we rather to magnify his mercy in bearing with us continually?

He has also a peculiar method of his own in shaking the young Christian's belief in the promises of God. He so works upon their feelings, or corruptions, or both, that they are afraid to take the comfort the promises are meant to give. Nor is this so strange, for the seed of infidelity is sown in every heart : it is no exotic, it is a plant the root of which lies deep in our system, and it is quite natural to disbelieve, and herein the greater need of the prayer, " Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief " to work faith in us.

But his grand machination consists in stirring up the feeling of sin, and, at the same time, to keep out of sight the Saviour ; this he does by bringing the evils and diseases of our nature continually before us, while he labours to suppress the work of Christ—the grace of the spirit, and the tender mercy of God. But it is not wise always to look at one side of the picture, neither right, reason, or revelation recommend this ; but when, in future, your sinfulness is *ever felt to be great*, ever be thankful, and bless God that you have a *great Saviour to subdue it.*

SECTION V.

BURDEN OF SIN.

PHILEMON—EPAPHRAS—TIMOTHEUS.

Philemon.—If you did know my state, Sir, you would not think me singular, nor deem it strange, if, after so short a space, I make bold to return. But without entering into particulars, every day my situation is more uncomfortable; all my former acquaintances, in turn, have been at me, and try to tease me beyond measure and endurance: indeed, I fear I shall be kept from a place of worship altogether. This, I need not say, would be a great trial; but it is at present by no means the greatest.

Epaphras.—If a babe in Christ, as there is reason to hope you are, I am well aware you need all the Christian help you can get; and, blessed be God, that help is amply provided. The Lord is ever mindful of his people; of the weakest he is always the tenderest: the lambs of his flock are always the special objects of his watchful care. (Isaiah xl. 11.)

This blessed truth affects no less the whole body of the faithful than yourself: when the infant church entered into the wilderness, and began to take a few steps towards Canaan, the Lord immediately appointed a cloud to direct them by day and a pillar of fire by night; yet, notwithstanding this miracle of mercy, which was for their guidance, they had many other helps also:

Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, was specially raised up for that purpose; and while the church encamped in the desert, we are told, he became eyes to them. (Numbers x. 31.)

Philemon.—I am sure I need every assistance; I resemble a man neither walking in the light, nor yet groping wholly in darkness; I see partly, and yet I do not see clearly (Mark viii. 24.); so that I question whether ever any one felt as I do.

Epaphras.—Your feelings are not singular, neither your present anxiety respecting yourself; if the Spirit of God is working in you and for you, this anxiety probably may increase; the oldest Christians feel it, and if they are not troubled with increasing convictions, they have often to complain of pride, unbelief, and multitudes of sins: they think nobody like themselves, as you now do; but, I pray you, think it not strange, as though some new thing hath happened unto you; nor be discouraged. Remember the old proverb—"a dark morning is often the prelude of a bright day;" and let me add also, that the fairest day of grace has always at its dawn the darkest clouds in it.

Philemon.—But I wish to tell you the special cause of my trouble: it is not because I am tried in different ways, and from many causes, and in several quarters: it is not that I have none to sympathize with me, nor any who will listen to me, but because I now feel more than I ever did before, I am such a sinner.

Epaphras.—I am truly thankful to hear you say so, and would that all others were as teach-

able, and equally willing to be led; there would be less of misery and more of peace.

Philemon.—The feeling of sin, and the knowledge of ourselves, and exposure to wrath, I now see clear enough is not written out upon the natural heart; neither does the idea of it arise from any inward consciousness of evil, nor yet from that natural light “that lighteth every man that cometh into the world” (John i. 9.); but it arises from the law of God in its appeal through the Spirit to the conscience.

Epaphras.—Even so: and with this view the law is presented to us in Scripture as one great and universal taskmaster: it brings all into subjection (Gal. iii. 24.); it compels all to submit to its sway; to know hard bondage, and to serve with rigour: it is so clamorous for its work (James ii. 20.) and so strong in its claims, that it obliges all people, in all places and at all times; it binds its iron yoke round the neck of the inward as well as of the outward man: unlike that form of it imposed on the Jews, it allows nothing for the infancy of the church, and the peculiarities of national polity; but it holds on and is in full force under every dispensation, as showing the eternal bound of right and wrong, and being the open expression of the mind and will of the great Jehovah.

Philemon.—This frightens me still more dreadfully; and this description of it fills me with amazement. Little did I dream of such a state of things once.

Epaphras.—And hence it is that mankind in general form such erroneous conceptions of them-

selves: they hold up a flattering mirror, which reflects not the true figure of their sins: they do not understand the spirituality of God's law; they view its requirements through a wrong medium. Hence, sin does not appear to them in its proper light, nor in all its naked deformity, but divested of its heinousness, and in a false disguise.

Philemon.—Indeed, I confess with shame, (though I did it ignorantly and in unbelief, not knowing better,) that I used thus to deal with the law; formerly I made light of it; it was a point of charity with me to extenuate some sins; to explain away others, (they being so common and fashionable;) and if at any time pressed to consequences, so easy was my conscience, and so peaceful my soul, that I felt no great difficulty in making a clear riddance of them altogether.

Epaphras.—I rejoice it is not still so! You now feel that the law of God is the moral pulse of man; if that pulse beat not at all, nor once stirs within you, but is wholly silent, then you are dead in sin: if it is rapid or violent, it shows that the work of conviction is begun, and the soul is in a state of painful excitement: but it is only when its pulsations are equable and well regulated that it argues that the moral constitution is in a desirable state of health.

Philemon.—If it is a good sign when the law produces deep convictions, and stirs up feelings of every sin and misery within one, then I am sure I have that sign.

Epaphras.—There may be, and often are, deep impressions which do not prove lasting: these

often produce great changes in outward conduct, when they do not lead us to Christ, to God, or to a sound conversion. How deeply was Esau impressed, and how great the change in his manner, when he met his brother Jacob: instead of killing him, as he intended, he fell on his neck and kissed him (Genesis xxxiii. 4.): and yet of Esau and his posterity we have a sad account in Malachi i. 4; and how greatly was Laban impressed with the visit of God (Genesis xxxi. 29.); and how much changed in his deportment to Jacob; and yet there was no change of heart, and no deep or heartfelt religion.

Timotheus.—And from what I see in my various rounds, and through my much intercourse with many people, this also is quite my own opinion, and the private judgment I am come to: under the means of grace, I believe scarcely a sermon is preached which does not stir up some godly motions in the minds of hearers: but how frequently are they quite effaced by some foolish and flippant conversation between the portals of the church and their own door! or if such impressions survive the first breath of worldliness, how seldom do they continue any time, but are like the morning cloud or early dew.

Epaphras.—It is good, therefore, not to build too much on convictions, or to rest in expressions, however strong and lively at the time: the soul, like Aaron's rod, may be made to bud in appearance, though it want the root of saving grace: it may, under peculiar circumstances and extraordinary excitement, give fair promise, and appear

to blossom and to seed, but because it wants root, it must sooner or later wither and die.

Timotheus.—Oh! it does indeed require saving grace, not merely to begin, but to carry on the work of God in the soul: otherwise we all labour in vain, and to no purpose: we shall never see any “ripe almonds.”

Epaphras.—The longer life is spared, and the more of experience we have, the more we shall be persuaded that divine influence is essential to the work of salvation. Impressions may be made without that influence, but I have never known them in one instance to last: other expedients may be resorted to, but how often is there no impression at all. Thus we may urge the instability of riches, the vanity of honour, the fading of fame, the emptiness of pleasure, the uncertainty of life, and a thousand other pressing considerations; but what a small portion of mankind will believe us, or, at least, act on their belief: they will for the most part turn a deaf ear, and pursue perishing things as much as ever. Nothing short of a real work of grace (which every one may give some account of that have tasted of it) will answer in the end.

Philemon.—May I then give you some account of my present feelings, so that I may be put right, if I am still wrong, or be helped forward if I am now, through mercy, in the right way?

Epaphras.—It would assist me to form a better judgment, were I to know how far you have gone in divine life; for we can go no farther than we are led by the Spirit of God.

Philemon.—Not to occupy too much of your time, I shall be as brief as possible. I believe that *the soul has lost all knowledge of God by the fall*; previous to that event, I doubt not, intuitive knowledge was our birthright: it was innate and not acquired; it was as natural to see with the eye of the mind as with the outward eye; and the want of this spiritual faculty now is no proof of its non-existence: we know nothing of our capabilities but by their use. This spiritual sense or faculty of apprehending God, is shut up by the fall, and is only partially opened by Divine Grace (Eph. i. 18.); hence all our present misery, misconceptions of God, and wanderings from him.

The body is utterly depraved and debased from the same cause; indeed, I feel so sure of this, now that the Spirit of God has enlightened a little my eyes, that I cannot tell you the deep depravity I discover in my heart: it is prone to evil, and averse to all good; and it is harder than the rock, colder and darker than the flint; for if the flint be struck, though it may not send forth all its latent properties, or blaze forth with all its inward fires, it will send forth a spark at least; but my heart may be smitten again and again, but it emits not one spark of light or goodness.

I have an inward and heartfelt sense of sin continually. And did not the Lord come on purpose to call those who are made sensible of their death in sin to repentance? My experience in this respect is precisely that of St. Paul; he was dead before he was quickened, though he thought otherwise (Rom. vii.): but now he was made sensible of it, viz. he saw and felt he was dead; and

this is just my case : the law worketh death in me by that which is good. (Rom. vii. 13.)

I also feel the *spirit* of bondage : my former state, I now see, was a *state* of bondage, and that *is a state of nature* ; but is not the *spirit of bondage a beginning of a state of grace* ? I also feel at times a hungering and thirsting after spiritual things (Matt. v. 6.) : at other times I am broken-hearted (Psalm xxxiv. 18.) and heavy laden (Matt. xi. 28.), and I am very sensible of my misery and wretchedness always. (Rom. vii. 24.)

Epaphras. — You need not proceed. God has of a truth, in rich mercy, visited your soul : and in thus making you truly sensible of your sinfulness and misery, he is preparing you for the reception of much grace and glory. He is doing with you as he does with all his children—nay, with all his people everywhere that he takes into covenant with himself. Such has been the method of his mercy and grace from the very beginning : he did not bring the children of Israel out of Egypt without previously giving them the sensible experience of their then natural and bondage state, and that for many years together ; so that their lives were made even bitter to them through it. (Exod. i. 14.) And again, no Hebrew servants were set free without reference to, and experience of, *legal* servitude : neither were any of the Israelites healed, but those who were sensible of their being stung with the fiery flying serpents : nor were any among their nation released from Babylonian captivity without seventy years sad experience of it, and till all hope seemed lost. (Ezek. xxxix. 28.) Even so the Lord, by the

saving work of his Spirit, has made you feel your misery before he will make you happy ; and he will render you deeply sensible of your spiritual sickness, before in rich mercy he heals you and makes you feel perfectly whole and well. Meanwhile, search the Scriptures ; attend the public means of grace, and be much in prayer, and follow on to know the Lord ; for “ then shall we know if we follow on to know the Lord : his going forth is prepared as the morning, and he shall come as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth.” (Hosea vi. 3.)

SECTION VI.

REJOICING IN SPIRIT.

PHILEMON.—EPAPHRAS.—TIMOTHEUS.

Philemon.—It is sure to end in most blessed results when we can take the encouragement and put in practice the advice which the Spirit of God gives : I have tried through the help of my God to follow on to know the Lord, as you admonished : I have used sincere endeavours ; I have attended all appointed means of grace ; I have let slip no time nor neglected any opportunity, either public or private, whereby my last convictions might be deepened, and knowledge increased.

I have found great delight in the exercise of prayer, and “ what shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me ? ” My cup of joy is full to overflowing : O how precious are those words of the Lord to my soul, “ hitherto ye asked nothing in my name, ask and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.”

Epaphras.—It is good to trust God always, and to doubt his promises never : in their fulfilment there are never any insuperable impediments : what God undertakes, he is sure to do. There is no disagreement between his purpose and the performance, between his mind and the matter itself : nothing can resist his will, neither is there any obstacle or hindrance that can obstruct him in his way, and therefore there is

never just ground for suspicions: he is faithful to his word, and true to his promise; and remember, when he gave you (and all others who are sincere in seeking) the promise in question, it was given with the foresight of an all-knowing God; it was not a rash promise, but made deliberately.

Philemon.—Such has been its happy effect upon my heart, that I can now exclaim with Solomon, “a word spoken in season how sweet is it:” it has led me to seek his free favour, and thanks be to God I have found it: I am all joy and peace in believing: all former doubts are fled, all fears are gone, all misgivings subsided; and I possess such inward comfort and spiritual consolation as worlds cannot give, or take away: I am now ready to undertake any duty; prepared for any sphere of usefulness which may open; I long to spend and be spent in the work of my blessed Master; the love of God is shed abroad in my heart by the Holy Ghost (Rom. v. 5.), and that love constraineth me: it renders my service, once painful and irksome, pleasant and easy: I seem to feel towards my Saviour, what Jacob felt towards Rachel (Gen xxix. 20.); were I to be spared to serve him fourteen years, they would seem but a few days.

Epaphras.—There can be no doubt but that love to Christ is a master feeling in the bosom of every true child of God: it is to the soul of man, and to the performance of duties, what oil is to the wheels of a chariot: it enables us to run cheerfully and smoothly in the way of God’s commandments: it was this grace that put Peter

upon feeding Christ's lambs (John xxi. 15.): Paul, both upon doing and suffering, and all the disciples upon the jeoparding of their lives for his sake.

It is a great matter, however, for young Christians not to defer too much to feelings, nor trust too much to the ardour of their spiritual affections: it argues real grace to be able to maintain a happy equilibrium in divine things; neither to be uplifted on the one hand, or dejected on the other; not to be altogether insensible to the impulse of inward emotions, nor yet to be carried away by them. Nothing is more common than to witness contraries in young Christians; excess of one kind often leads to excess in another; and not unfrequently in the same character and sometimes in the same community, at different times, extremes meet: the Jews, who were at one period addicted to the grossest idolatry, and to the worshipping of graven images, at another would not so much as allow even a painter or carver to live among them.

While, therefore, my young friend, I would not seek to damp your present glowing zeal, much less cool your ardent love to the Saviour, still painful experience has taught me how necessary it is not to confound herein the inward work of the Holy Spirit with the mere ebullition of natural and perhaps even corrupt feeling: not that I suspect your joy to spring from an earthly source: nevertheless, nothing is more easy, at least in a susceptible mind, than that strong feeling should be called out into action, and such is the infirmity of our nature, that our professed love to the Saviour is rarely wholly pure: it partakes

for the most part of much imperfection, from various causes and different sources, and though you may not at present discover its want of purity, you will probably do so under *altered* circumstances.

Philemon.—But, dear Sir, surely we are not to take up with scanty measures of love to the *Saviour*: the store in him towards us is inexhaustible, and ours towards him capable of continual accessions: the most of love which any of us now bear to the Saviour is little in comparison of what we ought to possess, and the great stress which the sacred Scripture lays upon this quality in the renewed soul, sufficiently proves its vast importance. (1 Cor. xvi. 22.)

Epaphras.—What I would have you look to, is whether it is a grace of the Spirit; and whether it may prove lasting: if it is of the right sort, it possesses the two following qualities: it will enable you to prefer the will of God to your own will, and the good of the whole flock of Christ to your own good and particular advantage: an example or two here will show you more clearly what I mean than the most lengthened arguments: how prominently did this disposition stand out in the character of Moses, (Exod. xxxii. 32.) and what depth of this feeling in St. Paul, when it led him to wish that himself were accursed from Christ for his brethren, his kinsmen according to the flesh? (Rom. ix. 3.) What a rich display of disinterested love is here! what preference of the good of others to his own! Here is no ordinary feeling; nothing mercenary, and nothing of selfishness.

Timotheus.—Some of these remarks, I perceive, give you pain, but ought they to do so? Must we not be faithful? Are admonitions the less necessary, because they touch our tenderest feelings: our pastor speaks from experiences; he has been in the way long before you, and consequently has some knowledge of character; he knows well to what evils young Christians are most liable, and prevention in all cases is better than a cure: he sees that your natural sensibilities are great, your affection strong, your imagination quick and lively, and your inclination so powerfully drawn in one direction, that he fears it will blind your understanding, and warp your judgment concerning yourself.

We must all strive to cultivate more and more the grace of true humility; dread the risings of spiritual pride, and when we do rejoice in the Lord, it should always be accompanied with a measure of filial fear and trembling. (Psalm ii. 11.)

Philemon.—But, with all due deference to those to whom I am so much indebted, can I fail to rejoice in the Lord, who has dealt so bountifully with me? Where much is forgiven, do not we read the same loveth much? (Luke vii. 47.) and again, out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaketh; (Matt. xii. 34.) and can we suppose God for Christ's sake ever gives us a blessing which he would not have us enjoy, or that he ever sets up the light of his glorious gospel in the soul without bidding us discern and rejoice in it? Does not David say, "rejoice in the Lord, O ye righteous;" and also, "my soul shall make her boast in the Lord: the humble

shall hear thereof and be glad?" and Isaiah, (lxi. 10.) " I will greatly rejoice in the Lord ; my soul shall be joyful in my God ; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness?" and St. Paul—does he not urge the same feeling again and again ? (Phil. iii. 1. and iv. 4.) so that it appears from Scripture to be no less a duty than a christian grace.

Epaphras.—This happy frame of mind, my dear friend, is very blessed, and it is easily to be accounted for ; would that it might always continue : but still bear in mind, that you are yet but a babe in divine things, and proportionably weak ; the more so, *because you now feel so strong.*

Philemon.—It is indeed the joy of my heart, to believe that all my sins are freely forgiven, and with such superabundant grace and goodness as must be infinitely more than sufficient to blot them all out, however numberless or measureless they may be : and do you ask why I come to feel thus ? I have the inward witness of the Spirit (John i. 5—10.) ; a strong sense of pardoning love on my conscience ; and I am enabled no less to rest upon the efficacy of his blood, than upon the evidence of his truth : moreover, I now continually ask myself this question—how do I order my goings ? do I walk in the light of God's countenance ? or do I live in any known sin and so walk in darkness ? and my heart tells me there is no duty I know, which I do not desire to do ; and no privilege which belongs to any Christian anywhere, which I do not wish to possess, or any blessing I have ever heard of, or

read of in Scripture, which I do not aim at and strive after.

Epaphras.—For the present I wish you God's speed, and every blessing in the name of the Lord; go on and prosper.

In his absence, need I urge you, my dear Timotheus the necessity of keeping a wakeful eye upon this tender plant of great promise? the present stage of his experience is highly interesting: and there seems so much of inward comfort, that I am a little apprehensive that trouble may be at hand.

Timotheus.—After being filled with joy, we are often made to drink of the cup of trembling: even the holiest saints have experienced this, whose impressions of spiritual delight were doubtless from above: "The Lord hath lifted me up, and cast me down," says David; and St. Paul, after being caught up into the third heaven, found a messenger of Satan sent to buffet him, that he might not be exalted above measure—the agony and crucifixion of the Lord himself took place shortly after his transfiguration on the mount; but our joys are frequently chastened with sorrow, because we need rebuke, and this is to make us know ourselves, to give us at once the spirit of humility and of good courage.

Epaphras.—After much comforts, usually I am aware there are unexpected exposures: and after strong consolations, generally speaking, there are strong trials; Stephen saw the glory of heaven, and Christ standing at the right hand of God; shortly after he was stoned, and Christ, as you have well observed, was *transfigured* a little before

his agony : it was not long after that he was *crucified*.

The reason is, that when God is about to call any one to great services, and to make them fill important stations, and so to become extensively useful, it is his usual way to put them upon difficult work at the beginning of their christian course : this is to put them in possession of themselves : to prove what metal they are of ; if they endure and go through in divine strength, confidence is established : they may be trusted, for they have already given the assurance, they will not miscarry.

Nor ought either you or I to deem it an unlooked for circumstance, should Philetus incur any cross or trouble ; it is of no manner of use to plant the choicest vine unless you prune it : God corrects all his children : (Proverbs iii. 11.) he does so from a principle of parental love, (Proverbs iii. 12.) and because all his dear children need correction. (Hebrews xii. 6.)

I have, however, this confidence respecting him, that, by God's grace, he will neither shrink from the ways of his God, nor count present miseries (whatever they may be) equal to the future glory to be revealed, (2 Cor. iv. 17.) nor imagine for a moment, that the little privations we may be called upon to pass through in securing salvation, should be thought worthy of comparison with salvation itself : " for what shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul ? "

SECTION VII.

GROWTH IN GRACE.

PHILEMON.—TIMOTHEUS.

Philemon.—The public means of grace I now find increasingly profitable, and last sabbath especially was indeed a sabbath of rich blessings to my soul!

Timotheus.—The highway to more grace is to be found as much as possible in the beaten paths of grace and salvation; and when once, through mercy, we have entered within the strait gate, and the narrow way to heaven, we must continue in that way with constancy and perseverance to the end.

Philemon.—And is it possible to act otherwise? for after we know God, and are made sensible of our spiritual wants and necessities, assuredly we cannot rest there; we shall earnestly desire, and increasingly hunger and thirst after the free favour and love of God in Christ. Our blessed Saviour describes this feeling as true blessedness, though it be contrary to general opinion.

“Blessed,” says he, “are the poor in spirit;” and who but those who are made sensible by the Spirit’s teaching of their ignorance and nothingness—who but those who are made to see that they have neither spiritual life, nor strength, nor grace, nor any righteousness of their own, can truly feel their poverty-stricken condition? This

is my state, and I am humbled on account of it ; but I thank God, as much as I once laboured for the bread that perisheth, I now hunger after the bread of life, and thirst after the water of life. And is not this a good sign and a great mercy ? For if we never hunger after grace, we may be sure we never had any grace !

Timotheus.—True ; and ever bear it in your thoughts that the grace of God in Christ is the root and fountain of all grace in us : all other blessings flow to us through this channel. He that will receive fruit from the tree of life must first come to the root, and climb up by its stem ere he can reach the clustering branches. It is in vain to expect any blessing but in God's own way ; the grace of God in Christ is the well-head of all blessings ; grace brings all blessings along with it and in its train.

Philemon.—What a reproof to the world, that they should prefer every thing to the grace and free favour of God ! And what an unmerited mercy has God conferred on me ! For what am I that I should be made to differ ? I used at one time, like most men, to place the last things first—the body before the soul—earthly things before heavenly ; I deemed it right to labour, first for wealth and then for piety—first for riches and then for religion—first to be great and then to be good—first to be great in the world, I mean, and afterwards to be gracious, if need be, with God. Hence I sought all other things first, and vainly hoped to secure the kingdom of heaven last. The very reverse is our Lord's counsel, and it is only when the kingdom of

heaven is sought in the first place, and with sincere prayer and endeavour, that the promise holds good, viz. that all earthly things in the way of providence shall be added, as God sees them fit and needful for us.

Timotheus.—You are right, but I wish to know what were the subjects in particular that were made useful to you.

Philemon.—I found the discourses of our revered pastor last sabbath very precious to myself and to some others besides, for I now long to bring all my former friends and companions within the means of grace and salvation.

Timotheus.—Such is sure to be the anxious desire of every one who has himself a friend in the highest courts of heaven, and the friendship of the Most High—“a Friend that sticketh closer than a brother;” (Prov. xviii. 24.) and *He* is infinitely more esteemed, valued, and loved than all the world besides!

Philemon.—When the love of Christ constraineth us, we seek the good of others, especially that of relatives and friends; and who that has a spark of love to the Saviour, can be unmindful of those who are perishing in sin? When I think of the love of Christ to his Church! How dear to him! With how great a price he redeemed it! What time! What pains taking! What soul agony and bloody sweat! What depth of counsels!—plans of mercy!—daily intercession and expenditure in resources, in planting, watering, sanctifying, and saving it! Can I bear the thought that thousands are going out of the world before they know where-

fore they came into it? and, instead of employing their time and talents for God, they are all set in battle array against him! And when I think of many near and dear to me at present without Christ, and therefore, "having no hope;" who are living in utter ignorance of God, being under the reign of sin, and some of them passing their days in profanation and prodigality of temporal life, can I close my eyes or shut my heart against the claims of pity? Did not David's eyes run down with tears over such? (Ps. cxix. 136.) Did not Jeremiah wish his head waters, and his eyes fountains of tears for such? (Jer. ix. 1.) Did not St. Paul weep over the enemies of the cross of Christ? (Phil. iii. 18.) and our Lord, did not he weep over Jerusalem? (Luke xix. 41.) When any of our friends or companions are in temporal misery or sorrow, or at the point of death, does not natural affection call forth the tear of natural sympathy? Can we withhold the earnest prayer, the fervent zeal, the anxious soul, and throbbing heart in behalf of them who are on the point of eternal destruction?

Timotheus.—A well regulated zeal is essential to the very being, as well as acting of a real Christian; may yours never grow cool! We profess ourselves to be followers of the "living God," assuredly therefore we should never serve him as "dead men," and a living Christian is always a lively Christian.

Philemon.—Indeed, I look upon the whole world as upon a vessel in a storm; and can the sailor, who has been fortunate enough to survive it,

be so forgetful either of his own personal mercies, or be so regardless of the perilous situation of others, as not to throw out a line and put out the life-boat for the preservation of those who are still tossed to and fro in all the horrors of the deep?

Timotheus.—Certainly, if we have no desire for the safety of others, we can have no love for the Saviour himself. In the Lord's Prayer we are taught to call on God as our Father; and if he be our Father, then are all mankind our brethren; and if we do not respect them, and look on them as such, we virtually renounce God as *our* Father.

Philemon.—And so I think; and the conduct of all the faithful followers and servants of the Lord Jesus confirms the opinion. In them the love of God was not confined to the Saviour or to themselves: it led to a burning zeal for the salvation and good of others. Do we not read of ancient worthies who jeopardized their lives for others? (Judges v. 18.) Did not St. Paul long, for the benefit of his Philippian brethren, to be poured out as an offering? "Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you all." (Phil. ii. 17.) Does not the apostle Peter express the same feeling? (2 Pet. i. 14.) and does not this show, that the love of Christ, in laying down his life for us, is not recorded in Scripture as a miracle, but as a pattern for us to go by: as an epistle for us to copy; and as a living example for us to follow?

Timotheus.—But, waving other matters at

present, there are two things I wish to be certified of: the *discourses* you heard, and the *friends* you took with you.

Philemon.—Of the former I shall, God willing, send you an abstract, so far as my memory helps me to record them.

My friends on this occasion were a man of authority, (John iii. 1.) a man of wealth; (Matt. xxvii. 57.) and another, who, though nationally opposed to our country, was friendly disposed to our Saviour. (Matt. viii. 8.)

The first, being a personage held in great worldly esteem, he had many fears, and more scruples, to contend with. He had been the leader of a party; he now felt secret shame that one, who was reputed so wise, should require or receive instruction; besides, the fear of man, the dread of temporal loss, and, especially, the loss of high reputation among his countrymen, preyed on his mind so much, that it was with the greatest persuasion he could be brought to profess Christ and his gospel publicly.

But, through mercy, I was at last enabled to convince him, that it is not enough to be a Christian by profession; we must show ourselves Christians in our special callings; thus, a magistrate must not only be a Christian, but he must show himself a *Christian magistrate*; a ruler of the land must not only be a Christian, but a *Christian ruler*; a father must be a *Christian*, but he must make it appear that he is a *Christian father*. All Christ's disciples should manifest themselves to be his, no less in the admini-

stration of public affairs, than in the discharge of their more private callings.

The second had difficulties to grapple with, but they were of a different sort. His great influence arose from his great wealth. Though a believer at heart, yet the world had not yet quite lost its hold upon his mind. Oh, how ensnaring is the love of the world! A Christian tampering with the world and its wealth resembles a child playing with a boat: he is tempted to get into it; at last, after some few inward struggles and misgivings, he ventures himself: on a sudden the winds arise; the waves swell; the anchor is torn up; the frail bark is loosed from its moorings; and, by the violence of the gale, is carried out into the deep, never more to return to the harbour! Such is the case of a man who trifles with the snares and temptations of the world. The vortex and whirlpool of earthly things ever working and increasing within him, he is at last drawn out, beyond all his desires and intentions; and, in too many instances, such a man is drifted too far into the wide sea of life ever again to make the shore!

The last individual was remarkable for being a truly humble-minded disciple. He professed little,—he felt much.

Timotheus.—Reminding you of your promised favour, which I long to receive, allow me to end our present interview with one little piece of advice respecting these your friends. Where there is one redeeming quality, ever lean to the side of charity; the best men have often the greatest

difficulties to overcome. A right feeling may dictate, sometimes, privacy ; at other times, publicity in religion : but you well know the fault of the present day. Many are far more careful to appear religious than are truly so, whereas true grace does not always make an open show. As there is much riches in the bowels of the earth, which no eye ever saw, so there may be much grace in the heart of which the world takes no notice. And as to humility, it is a choice grace. May the Lord keep you humble-minded. Know this, that the heaviest ears of corn bend nearest the ground, and boughs that are richest laden hang the lowest, and the more direct the sun is over us the shorter is our shadow.

SECTION VIII.

DIVINE GUIDANCE.

OUTLINE ON MATTHEW ii. 2.

THE sacred Scriptures are not sent for the benefit of one age or nation; they are intended to instruct and convey the blessings of salvation to all succeeding ages and generations of men. The bare narration of facts, therefore, that occurred at any given period, must not exclusively demand our attention: the mind of the spirit must be taken into the account. Thus, that which is an old transaction in point of time, becomes new in respect of its use; and that which was done in reality, is done over again in the spirit.

Such, if I remember right, was nearly word for word the opening remark that fell from the lips of our minister. He then went on to show the analogy between an earthly and a heavenly journey in these three respects.

“Observe,” said he, “1st, There is a *beginning*: (Matt. ii. 2.) these wise men actually set out; they do not spend time in idle talk about their travel; they begin their journey in good earnest; they are well styled wise men, and much has been said and written about their wisdom: some have told us they came all the way from Chaldea; others, farther still, even from the farthest corner of Arabia; while some have shortened the length of their journey, and asserted

what neither the spirit of the narrative, nor even probability can justify, that they came only from the east of Jerusalem. But the Spirit of God makes no account, where we derive no benefit in knowing. He passes over with brevity what he intends to wrap up in obscurity, and, in so doing, teaches vain man humility, when in the pride of his heart he would aspire to be wise above that which is written.

“ Suffice it to say, that though the lip of unerring truth designates them ‘ wise men,’ yet of this be sure, that they were neither so wise in themselves, nor so skilled in the estimation of others, as to set out in their own wisdom and strength to seek Christ. Oh, no! it was not their natural wit, or earthly wisdom, nor the light of nature, or of conscience, nor their skill in astrology, or in the science of star-gazing, neither their midnight observations, or Chaldean traditions, but light supernatural and preternatural, that shone in upon their benighted minds from heaven; and hence, under the cover of an historical narrative, you have the gradual and spiritual illumination of the mind, and in their actual walking towards the earthly Jerusalem, can ye not discover the secret footsteps of the soul’s first spiritual breathings after its Saviour and God?”

The application here was pointed and forcible; it must, methinks, have made its way to many a conscience, as it did to my own; for he took occasion to assert, in broad and intelligent language,

1st. *Man’s universal blindness, and utter incapacity to seek Christ.* (John vi. 44.)

2d. *His natural ignorance of and enmity to God;*

(Rom. viii. 7.) and he fully substantiated these points, both from Scripture and the clearest evidence drawn from the human heart; and then, after making a solemn appeal to every man's conscience, which must have made the ears of many to tingle, he exhibited the wisdom of God in making salvation of free grace, and that the first dawnings of the Spirit, as well as the last workings of grace, must always begin on God's side; and, for my part, I could truly set my seal to his testimony; for I sought not the light of the Spirit, till that Spirit enlightened and convinced me. All I had done previously was but to abuse the light I had; to reject his mercy and to try his patience exceedingly.

The next point he went on to discuss was, as far as I remember, to the following effect:

“There was,” said he, “*progress*, (Matt. ii. 3.) having once begun; they went onwards: Christ is their aim, and the Spirit is their guide: others may argue about the nature of the star if they please; they may tell you it was a planet, or a comet, or they may even go so far as to impose a name, and chalk out the rotation of this shining orb; but what boots it? is it not folly to debate what we cannot decide? Sure and certain it is to the eye of reflection, that it was created and raised up for the purpose: could it be any other than a supernumerary which felt the force of no heavenly attraction whatever? Did it not, like the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night, advance as they advanced? did it not move onwards, fast, or slowly, as they were enabled to make head against innumerable difficulties?”

“Is not a star a luminous body? And what, I ask you, is the light of God’s Spirit? Is not its influence heavenly? And whence are we to expect the promised assistance and direction, but from the Spirit which is above? And what is all creation without the light of the sun? A dark chaos of confusion! And what is the condition of every unenlightened soul?”

In this part of his subject, how blessedly was our pastor enabled to open up the Scriptures, and to show daily, hourly, momentarily, the soul’s need of divine teaching, and at the same time how he set forth the sovereignty of God in the method of his teaching, and saving souls. “Ordinarily,” said he, “the Lord blesses the usual means of grace; but sometimes he steps out of beaten paths, and where there is no distinct revelation, and no searching ministrations, he can create means, and make them effectual too; but where there are the appointed means of grace, how vast is *our* responsibility! And what, I would ask you, are your baptisms, and confirmations, and sacraments?—what your litanies, and liturgies, and psalmody—are they not all so many stars of greater or less magnitude, shining in the heavenly firmament of grace to lead you to Christ? Yea, what is the whole visible creation, and its several component parts, but one vast stepping-stone to lead to the kingdom of grace—a faint and feeble representation of future glory!

“And as there was a beginning and a progress, so,” exclaimed he, “there was *an end*. (Matthew ii. 11.) Think you these wise men had no difficulties to encounter in their heavenly

journey? Were their perplexities less than yours? Can you not picture to yourself their many misgivings, arising from innumerable causes? Can you not believe they were set down for fools and madmen by their countrymen? Think you the length of their journey cost them no fatigue? Was not their route long and tedious in the extreme? Had they not many a rugged mountain to climb, dark valleys to pass through, and rivers to cross over? Were there in those remote times Macadamized roads, railways—sure passports for guidance? Suppose ye they had nothing to fear from wild beasts, and hordes of savage and uncivilized men? Were they not men, like ourselves, with similar passions, fears, and infirmities? Can you not believe, that one while they doubted within themselves whether the star they had seen was not some gliding meteor; at another, whether it was not an imaginary light of their own making; at another, the production of their own fancy? But yet, notwithstanding all their misgivings and difficulties, they pressed onwards against all discouragements; and such will ever be the spirit and stern resolution of every heaven-born traveller: the more of discouragements and opposition, the more of perseverance, and the more of spiritual resolution and heavenly daring. ‘The more they were afflicted, the more they multiplied and grew.’ The love of Christ constraineth us, and that love shed abroad in the heart is not easily overcome; it is not extinguished by opposition of men: the grace of God lifts up the mind to the difficulty, and eventually triumphs over it: and though the hope of resting in Christ

deferred maketh the heart sick, yet the desire accomplished is as a tree of life. (Prov. xiii. 12.)

“ But when these wise men approached their incarnate God, who can describe their feelings? ‘ They rejoiced with exceeding great joy;’ and what was the cause of their joy? Was it owing to the guidance of the star? Doubtless all means that conduct to the Saviour are near and dear to the believer; but it was the precious sight of the infinitely precious Jesus, that filled their cup of joy to overflowing!

“ Behold, now, deep and inward devotion! how strongly is it expressed by their outward demeanour: see the prostration of their body, the adoration of their soul, and dedication of their persons! ‘ they fell down—they worshipped!—they presented gold, frankincense, and myrrh.’ What is the posture of your bodies, my Christian friends, when ye enter into the immediate presence of your crucified Lord? Do you bend the knee of your souls in holy worship? And are you constrained to give him what excels gold and silver, the offering of your heart and the dedication of your lives? Then you are become spiritually wise now, and wise for the world of eternity hereafter!”

After having urged on his hearers the necessity of giving heed to the light of the Spirit while they had it, and faithfulness in the use of all appointed means of grace, and after having depicted the journey of spiritual life in vivid colours—“ The above,” he exclaimed, “ is but a rough draught of the soul’s spiritual movement towards

heaven! O! has the light of the Spirit shone upon your soul? then follow on to know the Lord. The first dawn of the morning is not a surer harbinger of the coming day, than the first outpouring of the Spirit is of that bright and unclouded day of glory, which awaits every humble-minded, contrite, and persevering believer.

SECTION IX.

SAVING RECEPTION OF CHRIST.

OUTLINE ON JOHN i. 12, AND THESS. i. 2—13.

“ THERE may be the full persuasion of the truth of Christianity,” said our beloved pastor, “ where there is no true grace in the heart : orthodoxy in religion is no evidence whatever that we are religious ; neither is light in the head any guarantee that there is life in the soul : the living principle is the alone enlightening principle.

“ I have known men almost angels for intelligence, and like demons in practice ; they were alive to God in words, but dead to him in their lives and conversations : they resembled that creature which wears the semblance of a pearl in its eye, but conveys poison in its heart.

“ How needful is self-examination ! how important the inquiry—have *I* duly received Christ ! If yours is mere head-knowledge of Christ, and not heart-experience, you may have the wisdom of a Solomon, the policy of an Ahithophel, the honour of Haman, the valour of Joab, the beauty of Absalom, or the gifts of Judas, it will profit you nothing ; it will all prove as sounding brass, or as a tinkling cymbal !

“ The saving reception of Christ is what you must all strive after—‘ As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God.’ And here we might reason on the subject,

and fill our mouths with arguments, but Scripture itself is the best expositor of Scripture; the Bible is its own comment; the spirit of interpretation is the best interpreter; and hence, if any doctrine is broached in one book, and spoken of succinctly or obscurely, it is made more manifest in another: if the mine of spiritual wealth is sprung in one place, it is deeply dug into in another; and thus by comparing Scripture with Scripture, we arrive at God's truth.

“ Now the third person of Jehovah explains the saving reception of Christ in another and kindred passage, if you consult 1 Thess. ii. 13, your judgments will, under God's blessing, be rightly informed, and your understandings clear. It consists in the *hearing*,—*the receiving*,—*the effectual working of the word*.

“ 1. *The hearing of the word*. ‘ Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God; and you know what the Apostle says of true faith, which is of the operation of God—‘ That without it, it is impossible to please God.’ (Heb. xi. 6.) To hear, therefore, the word of God, to listen to a full and free gospel, ‘ the glad tidings of salvation,’ this is the first step, this is one grand movement of the soul towards Christ. Not that the Lord is restricted even to means of his own prescribing: God is a Sovereign; he does what he pleases; yet he is not pleased to do whatsoever he can: he is omnipotent, therefore, but he is not omnivolent; yet such is his grace, and the love he bears to his people, that he sometimes works for their spiritual welfare without visible means, and sometimes goes beyond all means. (2 Kings

vi. 6.) Often he makes the advice of a brother, the epistle of a friend, an event in Providence, or the sanctification of a cross to do the work: still the hearing of the word, or a preached gospel, is the usual, the appointed, and therefore the ordinary channel of the introduction of Christ into the soul. Well might St. Paul exclaim—
‘ I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ,’ &c.

“ You have the gospel, and for a long time you have heard it, and, I trust, through divine teaching, you have found it what, in old Saxon language, means ‘ God’s spell,’ viz. good news, the best news ever proclaimed to man, or that men and angels ever heard. But there are others of you who do not hear to profit, and perhaps of the generality of hearers of the present day, the larger proportion is to be placed in this rank. ‘ The word preached did not profit them,’ says the Apostle, ‘ it not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.’ And the gospel, when it is faithfully preached, is not always the instrument of conversion; it is sometimes a savour of death unto death, as well as a savour of life unto life. Judas heard the living word, and went notwithstanding to his own place—the place of his own providing. The Jews heard the revealed word, and yet they stopped their ears, shut their eyes, and hardened their hearts, lest they should be converted, and God should heal them. (Isa. vi. 10.)

“ Sometimes, instead of becoming better, people grow worse for all their hearing. We read of a remarkable instance of this sort in the time of Hosea: when he began to prophecy in the reign of Jeroboam, the people did evil in the sight of

the Lord ; but, towards the end of his ministry, it is recorded, that the whole nation became so desperately wicked, that they caused their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire. Compare 1 Kings ii. 15. with 2 Kings xvii. 17." and here our beloved pastor, in impressive terms, described—

1. *The blessedness of those who have the word ;*

2. *The misery of those who have it not.*

He showed, with great force, the wretched state of those who are deprived of the gospel of the free grace of God ; their wretchedness and misery ; their blindness and infatuation ; their moral and spiritual destitution ; their mental and bodily degradation ; and yet, though the pitch of distress they are come to be so great, they know it not, but they are past feeling, and near to destruction. (Phil. iii. 19.)

The objections also against hearing, were ably met and overruled. Some persons say, are not all things possible with God ? Is he bound and tied down to his own means ? Is he not free to work as he pleases ? Is he not able to save without preaching, without hearing, without prayer ?

“ The question is not,” said our pastor, “ what God is able to do, but what he will do ; not what he is tied to do, but what we are bound to seek. God is able to preserve life without food, as in the case of Moses ; but is omnipotency to be our rule ? Are we therefore to presume on his power ? to abuse his providence ? to neglect the means of nourishment, and rush into a ruinous temptation ? or, if you reject the hearing of the

word, will you prescribe how, and by what means God is to save you? Shall flesh and blood dictate ways and means to the Creator? and when God says, Give attention to the hearing of the word, shall we say, I will not attend, and yet hope for salvation as if we did attend?

2. *The receiving.*

The idea of receiving Christ is variously expressed in Scripture,—sometimes as a drawing to him, (John vi. 44.) sometimes as a leaning on him, (Canticles viii. 5.) sometimes as a staying upon him, (Isaiah xxvi. 3.) sometimes a looking to him, (Isaiah xlv. 22.) sometimes an opening to him, (Ps. lxxxi. 10.) and a believing on him, (John vi. 29.) but, whatever be the mode of expression, the reception is the same, for a saving reception of Christ is our having an interest in his divine nature by the communication of his Spirit, even as he had an interest in our nature by the assumption of our flesh; and, to receive him aright, we must see ourselves as in the presence of God; we must remember that he is either speaking to us or we to him; hence the word we hear is God's word, not man's; the promise is God's promise, the precept is God's precept, hence the whole Bible becomes the soul's pasturage, the food of our spirits, the support of our lives, the solace in our death, and the hope of immortality.

We must also look well to the state of our affections and dispositions, in order to receive the word aright and the first principles of grace; we must seek to be purified from all filthiness of

the flesh and spirit. So long as our corruptions dwell in us, and are unmortified by the spirit, they will choke the word, rather than receive it; it will only be like the descent of pure water into a filthy vessel; it rather becomes more muddy and corrupt, than clean and sweet by the process.

We must also bear in mind, that the end of all right receiving of Christ is not theory, but practice; not vain speculation, but practical godliness; not the bare knowledge of the will of God, but duty and holy obedience.

And when the word is thus heard and received, it possesses another property, "It effectually worketh also in you that believe;" it becomes mighty in operation, and sharper than any two-edged sword; it works powerfully and effectually, with inward energy and life-giving power; it convinces of sin, causes the sinner to tremble; it brings him under a bondage state, it breaks his false peace, and fills the mind with disquietude; and, so strong is the majesty of the word upon its recipient, that it never ceases its gracious influence till, under God, it works in him an effectual change.

And oh, what a change in depraved man does regeneration, or, as you read in the accompanying verse, the being born "not of blood, nor the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God," produce! It is the greatest in its origin, and the most momentous in its consequences we can experience in this world; it makes a person once unjust, ungenerous, and hateful to others—now good, and profitable, and

helpful. (Philem. 11.) Look at St. Paul,—who can be ignorant that, previous to his conversion, he was a bloody persecutor, a horrible blasphemer, and a cruel oppressor; he made havoc of the church, and wanted to overthrow the Christian religion, to dig it out of the earth root and branch; but, after his conversion, he became a new man and a martyr for the salvation of men; previously, as a roaring lion or raving wolf, he longed to devour the lambs of the flock; afterwards, as the lion of the tribe of Judah, he couched down with them.

“Now, let me ask,” exclaimed our pastor, “has the word been heard, and read,” and has it worked thus effectually in you? Then yours is the high privilege, the exclusive right, and royal prerogative to call yourselves the sons of God: others may call themselves so, but by what right, or on whose authority, I know not; certainly, until we have so received Christ, neither reason nor revelation, the laws of God or of man, entitle us to use the name we bear: it is an unjustifiable act, it is great impiety, it is an insult, a fearful indignity cast upon the sacred name of Jehovah. As well may you usurp the title of one of the king’s sons and aspire to the throne, which is treason, as a man usurp the right of calling himself a Christian, merely because he was born in a Christian country, and his parents were Christians before him.

“If this be so—how many Churchmen and Dissenters, Episcopalians and Non-Conformists ought to be unchurched and unbaptized! Should the Deist, who denies any written communica-

tion from God,—the Unitarian, who denies the Trinity,—the Socinian, who lowers the dignity of Christ,—ought any who lead the sinful and sensual lives they do, who are not afraid to rush forward into any open breach and violent transgression,—ought such to claim the right, and assume the high prerogative of being the sons of God—a dignity which elevates man from the dust, unto a nature which is divine?

“ Also let the ignorant be informed on this point: if you have not so received Christ, on what foundation of hope have you to rest? Have you stronger and better grounds for believing than the Pagan or Mahometan? Do not both rest on the same basis, viz. ignorance and superstition?

Lastly,—Let the wavering be confirmed. You are afraid you never yet received Christ as a Saviour; your faith is weak: but oh, let me tell you, a weak faith goes a great way; your faith may be so weak, that it is rather unbelief than faith; yet, for your comfort, know, that it may be as certainly saving, yet not so consolatory as the strongest; the weakest bud derives sap from the root as well as the largest branch, and he who sees at all, sees as truly, though not so clearly, as the man with the longest vision.”

SECTION X.

PATIENCE IN TRIBULATION.

DOEG—*A Whisperer.* 1 Sam. xxii. 22.

DEMAS—*A Time-server.*

SANBALLAT—*A Scoffer.* Neh. iv. 1.

RABSHAKEH—*A Sceptic.* Isaiah xxxvi. 7, and xxxvii. 10.

TIMOTHEUS.

ALEXANDER—*A furious Persecutor.* 2 Tim. iv. 14.

PHILEMON.

Doeg.—Wonders never cease! It has just reached my ears that another of our associates is gone over to the saints; and, as report would have it, there is a fine piece of work; family and friends, &c. are in great trouble.

Demas.—I really wish from my heart the present race of parsons was at an end; formerly we could live as we liked, and do what we pleased, and who dared to animadvert upon us, or to interfere in our private concerns? But now there is so much of puritanism, that good people are made uneasy, young people are unsettled, decent families are disturbed, business is interrupted, and through mere pretence of religion, and being righteous over much, that godliness is lost sight of, which is profitable unto all things.

Sanballat.—It was even ridiculous to see several of our old companions the other day; they have actually assumed a new name; their very manner is changed; they even look differently; and they have become so mopish and so demure,

that they are the very laughing-stock of the whole neighbourhood: for my part, I seldom trouble my head with such bigotry; a sneer or a jest is all they are worth; and so they do but keep away from me and mine, I care not; only, I must say, that this interference with long established friendships and customs, and this filling people's heads with novelties and enthusiasm, savours not a little of ostentation and vain glory.

Rabshakeh.—Surely none but men of weak understandings and shallow intellects can ever listen to them! With me it is more than a great question, whether or no the whole system of religion is not a mere fabrication—a mere work of priestcraft, and an imposition on the consciences of men in ignorant times: who, I should like to know, can take for granted their absurd dogmas? who can seriously believe in the doctrine of the Trinity? Things, say they, may be really and essentially distinguished from each other, and yet still be the same in nature and essence: surely this union of persons must end in the confusion of each; or, like some liquids, they must be mixed and swallowed up, one in the other, and then who can believe in the Divinity of Christ? in his power of working miracles, which in him (they would persuade us) was familiar as a habit? and who can give credence to his two-fold natures, “perfect God and perfect man?” And who shall make me believe in the Scriptures, as a work of divine inspiration, as a revelation from the great God?

Doeg.—And yet such is the effect of giving heed to novelties—I have come to know, that all this mischief has happened to our former friend

and others from this one circumstance ; they would go to hear new-fangled doctrines, and rumour is rife, that multitudes are inclined to do the same ; and hence it comes to pass, that their minds get warped and their feelings worked upon, so that they leave old places of worship, and run here and there, and never seem satisfied : indeed, it forms part of the system of these evangelicals, I am credibly told, to produce itching ears ; and what can be expected from such a succession of excitements, and when there are likely to be almost as many sects and preachers as there are sermons ?

Timotheus.—In our strictures or censures of men or things, it is well to discriminate on the one hand and to be charitable on the other. Remember, there are none so bad but that they may possibly have some good in them : some of the best things, you may chance to know, come out of the worst ; some of the most noisome creatures supply you with the most delicious perfume : many a poisonous plant yields the most wholesome medicine : it is desirable, therefore, to suspend judgment : for as even the hoarse ravens ministered to the wants of Elijah, so these evangelicals, as you call them, and whom you look upon as the vilest of their species, may still be made useful to others : they may be channels of mercy—instruments of great good, and promoters of others' happiness, though, as you imagine, they have many bad qualities, and are involved in many and great errors.

Alexander.—And pray who are you, and whence your wisdom and philosophy ? One of their brood,

I suspect: but it is high time this matter should be put a stop to. Where are our authorities, our penal statutes and enactments? and the justices of the peace? "for these men are common disturbers;" (Acts xvi. 20.) they are not a whit better than vagrants and itinerants, and should be treated with all the rigour the law allows. We must nip this sin in the bud, and check this evil, ere it grow up and spreads farther: it has already gone beyond endurance: things have come to such a height, that we can neither look, nor speak, or walk aright; such is the arrogance, and presumption, and intolerance of these men!

Timotheus.—Good men are often evil spoken of, (Matt. v. 11.) and truth represented falsely, and, therefore, before we ever censure, much less condemn, we are bound, in plain justice, to make ourselves acquainted, both with their manner of life and also with their tenets: we should always hear the other side, and go into particulars, and observe the standard ourselves would be judged by.

Alexander.—Enough of your preaching! who sought your advice or asked your defence of these men? Beware, lest it even fare worse with you than with them! But here comes the very man himself: and now, my friends, let us take him in turns, and use mild means first, and let us see whether we cannot shake this enthusiasm out of him, and bring him back to a sober mind. And you, master Doeg, who have brought us the information, will also lead the way.

Doeg.—I am angry with no man for differing in religious opinions and sentiments from myself,

or for even thinking unfavourably of me for those opinions which I merely privately entertain, but do not publicly express: freedom of thought is our birthright; but as for circulating peculiar views, so as to influence others, or rather to disquiet their minds and disturb their peace, as I do not claim the privilege of doing it for myself, so I do not readily concede it to others: but this, let me tell you, Philemon, is now the ground of complaint against you and others. It has been told us on good authority, that you are in league with this new sect, and that great disturbance has arisen to yourself and others therefrom: would it not be better to leave this matter alone, and not to interrupt the peace of our community?

Philemon.—Nothing can compensate for the loss of the soul; (Mark viii. 36.) and that the soul of man is infinitely precious in the eyes of the Lord, not one of you that are around me can doubt for a moment: the very provision of mercy made for the greatest of sinners, both in the Old Testament and in the New, is a proof of this; and how variously typified in the Old are those means of deliverance, which are more clearly opened out to us in the New. In the times of Moses there were not only cities of refuge, (Joshua xx. 4.) but every facility, and no interruptions given to the guilty to flee into: every means that could be devised, publicly and privately, was resorted to; every obstacle was cleared away, to help them to flee from the avenger of blood. To this end interruptions were demolished; crooked ways made straight; and bridges constructed over rivers; sign-posts erected at proper

distances, and standards lifted up on tops of mountains, that might be seen afar to direct them onward; and do not you suppose all this work going on, created much trouble, and also much disturbance and difficulty? and yet, let me ask you, what is all this to the value of a soul? It is the great business of life to save souls; it is the only evidence of increased civilization, and the great work of temporal and spiritual improvement, that we could wish to see prosper and advancing every where. Oh! that more spiritual labourers may be raised up, and serve the cause of God, and point us poor sinners, as with one voice, to the city of refuge!

Demas.—I cannot say that I like over and above well those evangelicals you are now associating with; they are always on the subject of religion, and broaching some offensive doctrines: but is it not far more preferable to speak of the benefits we derive for holding charitable notions, and to forego mysteries altogether? What does it matter, so that we get the good we are in quest of, from what quarter it comes? and so that we can go through life quietly and even, and be on good terms with all people, and have bright eyes and cheerful countenances turned upon us from all sides. I join in opinion, therefore, with Doeg, that it is better not to meddle with these matters; it is ten to one if they succeed; the more I think of attempting any thing new against the general feeling of any people, the less I like the project; it is like sailing without canvass, and against wind and tide: it is a scheme full of perplexity, and nothing but loss and great evil is likely to

come out of it; and none who consults well his own interests, will attempt what is sure to end in personal loss and much privation.

Philemon.—And are we to set about no real good for fear of the evil that is to come out of it? Strange doctrine this, surely! You might just as well hold the notion, that God ought not to send us genial showers from heaven, because, by doing so, weeds will be seen to spring up as well as useful herbs, and cockle as well as wheat. You may as well wish the sun might cease to shine upon and warm the weary earth with its refreshing beams, for fear of stirring up, by the same process, some miasma in some stagnant pool. What are all incidental troubles put together compared to the worth of the soul? They are all lighter than air and dust in the balance: but your reasoning is all in good keeping with your principles; the danger you have to fear lies not in evangelical religion, nor yet in its gracious developments in the life: the disease you labour under is, that of standing well with all parties, (Luke vi. 26.) and the rock you are likely to split upon is, the depravity of your nature and a divided heart.

Rabshakeh (scoffingly).—How do you stand affected towards such a speech, my friend? are you not ready to sink into hell flames from a sense of your sins? Can you be any longer bold or confident at what makes the most weary and reflecting tremble?

Philemon.—Fools make a mock at sin. (Proverbs xiv. 9.)

Rabshakeh.—And none but fools, and idiots, and infants, can ever believe in what these men

preach, or even in the Bible as an inspired volume. Can you be so credulous as to believe that the Bible could come from God, which makes him the author of sin? for do not we read concerning the selling of Joseph by his brethren, this confession—"It was not you that sent me hither, but God;" (Gen. xlv. 8.) and of the Egyptians' hatred towards the Israelites—"He turned their hearts to hate his people, to deal subtilly with his servants;" (Psalm cv. 25.) and of the sin of Absalom—"I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun;" (2 Sam. xii. 12.) and of the rebellion of the twelve tribes—"This thing is from me;" (1 Kings xii. 24.) and of Shimei cursing David; and yet did not God bid him curse David? (2 Sam. xvi. 10.) and can such a book be worthy of credit, which makes God the author of evil? It were blasphemy to think it.

Philemon.—God is not the author of evil, though he permits it: a man allows a stream of water to run in a certain course, but he does not make it subservient to another end, that of turning about the wheels of a mill, whereby some one is entangled and killed: we must therefore distinguish between an action and the evil of it. God permits the existence of certain things, but he does not ordain the evil that may proceed from them. Let me illustrate this point a little: a rider that causes a horse to go, is the cause of its going, but not of its stumbling: a man that writes upon bad paper is the cause of a letter, but not of its blots: a musician that plays upon an instrument out of tune, is the cause of the sound, not of the discord: the heat of the sun draws the

moisture out of the earth, but is not the cause of noisome exhalations : the upper wheel of any mechanical instrument, in turning about another wheel, is the cause of its going, but not of its going amiss : the child illegitimately born is the good creature of God ; its illegitimacy is owing to the wickedness of its parents. In like manner, while God permits, man is the sole cause of sin ; hence, when man is enlightened, he clears God, and ascribes all evil to himself. (Psalm xviii. 23.)

Alexander.—It is no manner of use, my friends, to reason quietly with these men ; it is wasting of words and loss of time, and nothing gained ; for these people always grow more bold and resolute as they are tolerated : other steps must be taken.

Timotheus.—There are two sorts of good men in the world ; one sort that deem themselves to be so, and blindly hope they are so ; another sort God knows to be truly so : and he does not stand by man's judgment. But all the grace of God makes good, will be saved. Whereas many that think themselves righteous, both themselves and others will be everlastingly mistaken in : therefore let no man take upon himself to decide for himself, much less to condemn others. (Rom. ii. 1.)

SECTION XI.

SEASONABLE ADVICE.

PHILEMON — EPAPHRAS.

Philemon.—Without one grain of grace in the soul, I now plainly perceive that a man may be a good citizen or a loyal subject, and yet, after all, by no means a good man : he may be a respectable member of a civil community, but at the same time possess no spiritual goodness, and consequently have no part in the commonwealth of Christ : so that we may, I imagine, assert without fear, that *where* no change of heart is, *there* is no Christianity.

Epaphras.—This is an observation most just : and there is nothing like experience to settle you in a right view of human character : experience in all things, natural as well as spiritual, produces conviction, and when the conscience is once fairly and fully informed through the medium of intercourse with man, it requires no further argument to adopt certain views respecting their disposition and state generally. This is the argument which the Spirit of God continually employs to show our perishing condition by nature ; (1 John v. 19.) and the necessity of the new birth : (John iii. 3.) and St. Paul, when he would define or represent to us his own character, at once appeals to experience : he argues from the blessed and transforming effects of the gospel

upon his own soul: it is its efficacy that gives evidence of its certainty, and this powerful method of sitting in judgment upon the heart, helps us to take a right gauge both of others and of ourselves.

Philemon.—On a former occasion you led me to judge of others cautiously and charitably; this I have been striving to do; but I find there is such a thing as mistaken charity: profound ignorance, want of discrimination, and compliance with common usage, are often substitutes for that truly christian grace.

Epaphras.—At that time I only meant that you ought to hope well of every one, where there was no positive evidence to the contrary: and even when there were suspicions, profession no less than our principles should lead us to put the best construction upon the conduct of others: you have a beautiful illustration of my meaning in the gospel of St. John, (xiii. 27.) when our Lord said to Judas, “what thou doest, do quickly.” Some of the disciples thought, “that he should give something to the poor;” for though Judas bore the bag, and though the Lord’s manner towards him at that time, and his address to him, were calculated to make all to stand in doubt of him, yet they would not harbour suspicions, nor yield to uncharitable surmises; they gave him credit for the purest motives, even though a by no means obscure hint was thrown out against him by the Saviour himself; a suspicious or uncharitable temper is ever prone to find fault, and sometimes without any foundation or reason.

Philemon.—In my own case, however, I speak

from experience, and this you admit is the best teacher: my former friends and acquaintance, who used even to flatter me with their courtesy, and court me with their friendship, are now full of the bitterest enmity towards me; the cruelty of some, the cavalier manner of others, and the persecuting spirit with which I have been treated by all, I should not have believed possible; but older Christians told me it would be so, and the word of God has prepared me to expect it; (Matt. v. 10.) yet, in the midst of provocation and distresses, you will be gratified to know, that I enjoyed many secret supports and comforts: that sweet passage in the Psalms was brought home with power, "in the multitude of my thoughts within me, thy comforts refreshed my soul." (Psalm xciv. 19.)

Epaphras.—God is a present help in time of trouble; (Psalm xlvi. 1.) when troubles are near at hand, yet God is always nearer; when multitudes of enemies surrounded the prophet Elisha, and were ready to take away his life, then were multitudes of friends prepared to defend and preserve it. Elisha, we are told, prayed that the Lord would open the eyes of his servant that he might see, and it is said the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw, and behold *the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.* (2 Kings vi. 17.) In like manner you will always find, when an army of enemies are *against*, there will be an army of angels *for* God's people: but what has occasioned you all this trouble?

Philemon.—The whole of my former com-

panions have tried me exceedingly, specially, Doeg, Demas, Sanballat, Rabshakeh and Alexander, these men have really publicly and privately suffered me to have no rest, and while I am thus an object of scorn in the world, I have no alleviation at home.

Epaphras.—I am not ignorant of the malignity of the human heart : but though such as you have hitherto kept company with may torment you, the Lord will comfort you ; and though you may be kept from ordinances, you cannot be kept from the Saviour ; when your friends leave you, he will take you up ; if you remember when the poor man was cast out of the synagogue, the Lord sought and solaced, and instructed him, (John ix. 37.) and such will be your happy lot, for, says Christ, “blessed are ye when men shall revile you,” &c.

But I have a mind to put you in possession of the several dispositions and characters of these men ; the information may be profitable, even though you never have a future occasion to use it.

The first gentleman is one of many : there is a large family of them : and branches collateral and direct almost innumerable ; in fact, there is hardly a city or town, or village or hamlet anywhere in which this Doeg does not claim kindred, few or many : and what is somewhat remarkable, some branches of them are to be found among all classes, high and low, rich and poor, learned and unlettered ; they are living on tolerably good terms among themselves ; their delight is in vilifying others, sometimes in pri-

vate conversation, at other times publicly among professed friends; often openly—and the great evil of this whole tribe lies in the manner in which they contrive to do mischief: they act their part so artfully, that while they inflict a deadly wound upon others, they contrive usually to avoid all harm to themselves; they are the newsmongers of every place in which they live; pry into every body's private affairs with the greatest dexterity, and their daily trade is that of constant exportation.

You may suspect the presence of Doeg and that of his fraternity by their usual method of speech; by the frequent use of nods and winks, and by their “buts and ifs,” and other inuendos of the like nature: they never speak out on any occasion, though they have nothing to be afraid of; when they literally know nothing, they would have you understand much is intended: while in the very act of betraying every secret they are acquainted with, they have the effrontery to impose a pretended secrecy on yourself: and on the other hand, when they ought to clear away suspicions, they will raise them by studied silence: their conduct is most reprehensible; it is a strange combination of weakness and wickedness; they resemble so many idle children who will throw a whole neighbourhood into commotion, by raising the alarm of “fire, fire,” and yet never name the house, or street, or direction where the conflagration is. It is well for this whole family, that their lot is cast in gospel days, for had they lived in olden time, the race had long ago paid the penalty due to their sin; for saith the Lord, “a

talebearer revealeth secrets;" (Prov. xi. 13.) and again, (Lev. xix. 16.) "thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people."

It is not the first time, neither are you the first individual who has been assailed and deeply injured by the malignant tongue of this man and this family tribe; but yet be thankful you have escaped from his grasp; for if there be, as the apostle tells us, a world of iniquity in his tongue, (James iii. 6.) what a world of mischief must be in his whole body? nothing short of a new creation by grace, can remove this old world of his corruptions.

The next getleman is wholly different from the one just described; and yet, strange to say, that though in the whole make and constitutional temperament they are totally dissimilar, yet, like Herod and Pontius Pilate, they agree in the work of mischief, and in their utter aversion to God and godliness.

The sort of mind which Demas possesses is hard to define with any degree of exactness. He is the sport of most conflicting and contradictory principles: he is so much acted upon by outward circumstances, or drawn aside by impurity of inward motives, that it is next to an impossibility to give even a rough draft of the elements of his composition. He is one thing to-day and just the opposite to-morrow; he catches the air of every company in which he chances to be thrown; he can go from gay to grave with marvellous ease, and play many characters in but little time; his whole life is fluctuation, at least ever since I knew him; it has been spent as

between two struggling currents. He is a man-pleaser and also a time-server; and, such as his name is, such is his nature. He is swayed by passions as contrary as billows, when the winds rolling between, are at variance with the tides. He is at heart a miser, yet he would be deemed liberal. He is generous to an extreme; and yet, if you watch him narrowly, his generosity always runs upon the wheels of carnal policy. If he does good, it is with a view to a greater good in return. To those who know him he appears a perfect anomaly. In the presence of the pious, he would seem to rise above the world; when that presence is withdrawn, he instantly sinks below it.

The worst feature in this man's character, and one against which we must be all on our guard, is that of self-love and self-seeking. All he does originates in self; his regard to his own interest amounts to a species of idolatry, though he would have you consider him a Christian. Yet he is a heathen: and here, for your admonition, let me observe, no idolatry is more common than that of a man's own self. The acts of self-denial some men in appearance are incurring,—the worthless sacrifices some professors seem to be making,—the empty offerings which they are laying on the shrine of their own personal and idol god, to flatter their vanity and please their self-love, are far more numerous and various than all the gifts that were ever heaped on any heathen altar, or sacrificed to any Moloch of greatest antiquity!

The characters of Sanballat and Rabshakeh

are alike abominable: their conduct is proverbially bad; and their principles, if possible, are worse than their conduct. In public and private life their habits are low and grovelling, and their manners are well nigh insupportable; but in the church of God, and in our religious assemblies, (for they are not ashamed to come and sit there in the scorner's seat,) nothing can be more painful. You may always single them out by their attitude, their gazing around, their apathy and indifference, and, not unfrequently, by their sarcastic smile. You cannot help pitying them, and praying for them, at such times, because of their doing what in them lies to draw down a curse, and not a blessing.

The former youth was the son of a man of the same name; and, for aught I know to the contrary, his grandfather and great grandfather were all of the same mind and way of thinking; and certainly, to all appearance, their connections are much on the increase. (2 Pet. iii. 3.) They are all of them wholly given up to the world; they rise early and late take rest. I have known many of this fellow's brethren struggle through a thousand difficulties to leave an inheritance to their children. The one has been left the habit of swearing; another, the way of falsehood and lying; a third, the sin of drunkenness; a fourth, sabbath-breaking and the profanation of the Lord's day; and, to a fifth, as in the present instance, the practice of laughing at every thing of a serious character or tendency; such an one is this scoffer. As his parent did before him, so he contrives to tread in his steps;

are not these awful legacies? Think you, when the son goeth the way of all living, and awakes in hell, he will rise up and pronounce the parent of his eternal misery blessed? The sin of these two men would be great indeed, even if its effects were confined to themselves, but they are also accountable for the influence of their example. They often do much harm to young converts, and to such as are, through mercy, beginning to make a consistent profession; it is, therefore, a very limited view of their iniquity to suppose, that it stands alone or is confined to themselves. This scoffing and scepticism of theirs does untold mischief: it unsettles others, and, more or less, troubles the whole body of the faithful. Their grand object is to raise doubts and suspicions, to the great prejudice of revealed truth, and the whole cause of Christianity. The injury done to others, by these men, is in proportion to their state in life, the office they hold, and the local influence they possess in society, which, unfortunately, at present, is very great.

As for Alexander, if you consider what giants his ancestors have been, and what a degenerate dwarf he is himself, you will heartily despise, or rather pity him. Even the toad has been slandered: we may safely allow him to be as venomous as he can, but the present race of persecutors are much in the same predicament as the serpents of the country, for the most part a harmless brood! Let them hiss as they like, and shoot out their arrowy tongues, for they would gladly poison us if they could, and the very sight of them makes us think of their father, the devil,

but there are no great red dragons among them. Even the sting of a viper has seldom any very prodigious consequences ; and if, now and then, they teach us to walk more circumspectly, and not needlessly to set our foot on the worm, so much the better.

But as frequent opportunities will occur hereafter, probably, to arm you against this man, I will only add one reflection more. You have nothing ultimately to apprehend from him. He is, to be sure, a bitter and irreconcilable enemy to the truth, but be not concerned on this account : a season of persecution is sometimes permitted for wise ends ; it is a winnowing season, and when there comes a strong wind you know it only carries away all the chaff ; whereas, the precious grain will lie on the heap more clear by this sifting process, therefore be not discouraged, but, rather, be thankful that by this means your every grace shall appear to greater advantage ; and, by God's help, you will yourself come out of the furnace purer and brighter than when you went in.

PART II.

CHILDHOOD OF PHILEMON.

SECTION XII.

IMPORTANCE OF CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP.

TIMOTHEUS.—EPAPHRAS.

Timotheus.—It is a judicious remark, I have read somewhere, that there is no greater danger in the end, than a too hasty profession in the beginning; not only is this observation completely verified in the experience of our friend, but I doubt not in thousands besides.

Epaphras.—You now see the vast importance of making sure of a real work of grace in the outset: the child of God always begins with life, (1 John v. 12.) and wherever there is a gracious beginning, a glorious ending may be expected; you have then firm ground to go upon; you can then entertain the pleasing hope that your instructions, if required, will not altogether be lost.

An actual beginning in divine things, however, amounts to more than mere favourable outward appearances; it is the seed of true grace planted in the soul by the Holy Ghost; it is Christianity itself; and, though it appear at first but very inconsiderable, as a little leaven, or grain of mustard seed, yet, rest assured, it will increase—"For," says the apostle,

“being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ. (Phil. i. 6.)

But where there is no such commencement, there is no certainty; it is impossible to tell how the most favourable appearances may terminate. We have no scriptural warrant to believe; there is no immediate hope whatever. As well might we guide one who has not yet set out upon his way as hold spiritual converse beneficially or usefully with one who is in his naturally dead state; but when the principle of life is engrafted, and the babe in Christ is born, the actual journey of life is begun, and there is every assurance and outward pledge given that the young traveller will one day, under the guiding of unerring wisdom and grace, come to the end of his journey.

Timotheus.—The wisdom of this opinion is every day more apparent. I am more and more convinced of the fallacy of building upon good wishes, good resolves, and words of fair promise; again and again it has all ended in the bitterness of disappointment, and who would be everlastingly deceived?

In all my intercourse with the different classes of society, I now prefer realities to uncertainties, and sure ground to distant, and, it may be, the greatest improbabilities; for who knows whether the individual in question is a vessel of mercy? and who will undertake to say, that it will ever please the Lord to bring the person right you are so anxious about; and who would, too early, put him down as even a hopeful Christian, and

so outrun the wisdom of God and his gracious providence?

I have sometimes thought that the conduct of the Jews offers us a most wholesome lesson: when in captivity, though counted as prisoners of hope, (Zech. ix. 12.) yet there was no immediate cause of rejoicing; but when actual deliverance came, and the yoke of the oppressor was broken, and the foundation of the second temple was really laid, then, and not till then, there was great shouting. (Ezra iii. 11.) And why? Because they witnessed a beginning; and, from that circumstance, they justly gathered there would be an ending. And so it is in religion and with the grace of God in the soul—to begin truly, is through mercy, to end safely.

Epaphras.—But what is the special drift of these observations?

Timotheus.—The steadfastness and consistency—the apparent humility and meekness,—the patience and endurance of our friend Philemon has delighted me much; he has been subjected to many trials, as you may well suppose, and yet bears the cross manfully. He would rather, I firmly believe, lose his all in this world than lose a good conscience, or make shipwreck of his immortal soul.

But he laments its absence, and seems greatly to want Christian society. He begins to be treated coolly by all his relatives: he is looked down upon by his former friends: he is persecuted by enemies: the world knows him no more.

Epaphras.—It has fallen out with him then as

the Lord says, "If ye were of the world, the world would love its own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." (John xv. 19.) So far, therefore, all is well: only, if the world knows him not, let him be *willing* to go through the world as *unknown*.

And is not this the lot of all Christ's followers? Need I remind you, however, that even the least of Christ's disciples is one of the great ones of the earth, being an "heir of God and a joint heir with Christ, who is heir of all things;" still, for the present, we must be content to be counted as nothing in the earth. (1 Cor. iv. 13.) Were even a prince to come among his subjects disguised, or, were his subjects so ignorant as not to recognize their lawful sovereign, ought he to mind it?—ought he to care how they jostled him, or spake roughly to him?—ought this to perplex him, or disturb his peace?—ought he not to be prepared for it all?—ought he not to *smile* at their ignorance *inwardly*, and so pass on?

Timotheus.—True; but does it not strengthen the hands that hang down to be introduced into the household of faith, and to be one with the great and growing family of our God. Surely it is a great means of growth in grace to use and seek the help one of another. Does not nature itself teach us this lesson? The limbs and senses of a man, you know, are not single, but twofold; and by this means they enjoy, as it were, sympathy and mutual fellowship. Our eyes assist each other to see, our hands to work, and our feet to

go, and thus must the man himself be assisted by his species. Stoics may imagine their self-sufficient maxims sage, and monks may betake themselves to a secluded life; but experience, not to say revelation, teaches us, that none but God himself is exempt from needing the help of another. And even the Most High delights in communion, and the most savage creatures of his power are not solitary; how much less is it good for man to be alone. The high require help of the low, and the rich of the poor, as well as the poor of the rich; the old of such as are young, and reciprocally of the young from the old; more especially do Christians require mutual help, for all the members of Christ are bound up by one mutual band of love; and does not the apostle say, "Let no man despise his brother;" and again, "neither let the foot say to the head I have no need of you." Moreover, all human beings and things are uncertain and unstable; we are all turned rapidly about, as by a wheel, in the course of Providence, and those who are on the pinnacle of elevation to-day, may be in the depth of misery and poverty to-morrow. When, therefore, any dear child of God wants comfort or counsel, aid or help, it is good to have both at hand. And is not the old adage true in a spiritual sense, no less than temporal, "a bundle of sticks bound together is not easily broken," and are not small measures of grace marvellously increased by constant fellowship, communion, and prayer; and do not we see the largest possessions wasted by distractions, or the want of strict unity? Christians should be like an army

of well disciplined troops ; as long as they encamp together, and march under one captain, and one banner, they are not easily overcome. But there is great danger to solitary or straggling soldiers if they go out into the field of danger to spy out the enemies' lines, or even forage out of order ; they sometimes fall a prey themselves ; they are still exposed to the fire of the enemy, and who knows, but for want of united strength and animation, produced by combined forces, even in the moment of victory, conquerors may become conquered, and the well nigh victors the vanquished.

Epaphras.—Well, my dear Timotheus, for I see the drift of your observations, there can be no objection to the admission of our young friend into the household of faith. Seeing his growth is such, he is entitled to all the privileges of his Father's house, whereby, I do not mean merely to external communion and spiritual advantages, which are open to all, but to the fellowship of the saints, and, specially, to the sacred ordinance of the Lord's Supper ; and yet, as you well know, we need much care here, and more circumspection, and an increased measure of christian discipline.

Timotheus.—That blessed institution, I well know, is liable to great abuse. Some partake of it from custom ; others, from a sense of decency ; nay, from mere ignorance, and not knowing better,—supposing it, if not the whole of religion, at least a needful passport to heaven. But in the case of him whom I am now anxious that he should be added to the professed ranks of our church, and be counted one of the children of

God, none of these evils are to be apprehended. He is fighting the good fight of faith; he is strong in the Lord and in the power of his might. He is full of zeal and love to his Saviour, and in every way most exemplary; and yet, while he feels his corruption and humiliation for sin, he lives in the exercises of faith; and, though he has been dealt hardly with by others, I think I may say he still deals even more severely with himself.

For he is thus continually searching his own soul, as I discovered in my late interviews with him. "Oh, what rebellion is in my heart? What depths of iniquity? What do I owe to my Father for all his mercies? If I have a part in his death, do I exemplify the merit of his life? Have I truly received another Spirit besides that with which I was born? Is it not still the spirit of the world, and not the Spirit which is of God; and doth the Spirit witness with my spirit, that I am now a child of God? Am I now hating sin?—loving holiness? Do I deny all ungodliness? and have I put away all carnal confidences? What does my profession of Christianity and my religion continue to cost me? What additional sacrifices am I making from love to God? What new acts of self-denial am I incurring for Christ? and, in comparison of whom, say, O my soul, art thou thinking not only meanly, but as insignificant, all things besides."

These, and other ejaculations of the same sort, are habitually with him: may he, therefore, now be admitted to the Lord's table, and so entitled to all the privileges of the children of God?

Epaphras.—You well know I am no friend

to precipitancy in divine things: make no more haste than good speed, is a good old motto; those who act in haste, or do first and think afterwards, have time to repent at leisure

I confess, however, the account you give of our dear absent friend makes me to wish for his presence. These few particulars respecting his progress have given me great pleasure, and may they form another theme of praise and thanksgiving to God. His increasing sense of his own sinfulness is most gratifying: this argues growth in grace, and of itself reports progress; but, though he feels his sinful nature much, yet, need I tell you, it is still much more sinful than he feels. Perhaps the mercy of God is as much shown in hiding the whole of sin from us as in any thing besides. If he were at first, or, indeed, at any one period, to grant what we often pray for, should we survive the sight? Would a weak conscience be able to bear the heavy burden? Would life be supportable if sin were at once seen in all its naked deformity?—should not we sink into despair? But it is a gradual discovery, and wherever there is true grace and spiritual progress, the *vilest* discovery of self is the *last* discovery. Moreover, his candid confessions of sins are also great proofs of spiritual growth, for unfeigned confession of sin is a Christian's duty,—it is demanded of every one of God's children, and it is accompanied with many benefits; it is the ready way to the pardoning and healing of them; “If we confess our sins, God is faithful to his promise, and true to his word, to forgive us

our daily infirmities for Christ's sake, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

But most cheering is the report which you give of the constant exercises of his faith; and, on this point also, I am now satisfied. Oh, may we never lose sight of this precious faith. When this grace is gone, all is gone: faith relies on all the promises of God,—it looks at all the promises as present,—it has the inward consciousness that they are all true. Let him but hold to this anchor,—let him, by faith, be built upon this rock of our salvation, even as a superstructure rests upon its foundation, and you shall not only be able to report progress of our mutual friend, but also his great spiritual comfort and strong consolation.

SECTION XIII.

THE SUPPER OF THE LORD.

EPAPHRAS.—PHILEMON.

Epaphras.—We need not the light of revelation, my dear friend, to prove to us our weakness: we Christians feel and lament over it daily: the very composition of our nature, without any other evidence, argues our manifold imperfections. We all stand in great need of mutual assistance and co-operation. Man, to adopt the language of architecture, is of the composite order: in his best estate, he is a mixture of animal and spiritual life: hence we infer his imperfection and impurity likewise. God alone is an essence simple and uncompounded; and, consequently, perfect and eternal; but every creature possessing a mixed nature, must, without the divine help, soon run to decay and dissolution.

Philemon.—But when I think, not merely of the rich provision of mercy, but of the whole body of the faithful raised up for mutual benefit, can we ever cease to admire the goodness of our Father in heaven? Once I used to look upon the Almighty in a different light; rather as a being of terror and wrath, than as a God of love; but now I see he is all goodness in Christ—goodness essential and communicative: his very nature is goodness, and he waits to impart it more and more to his creatures: his benevolence is like the

radiance of the sun in the firmament, which sheds light over the world, necessarily and inevitably ; and this very diffusion of his goodness is the natural, and, we may say, (without derogating from the divine freedom) the necessary result of its fulness : he pours it forth as a fountain sends out its refreshing streams ; as a plant yields all its latent virtues, its fragrance, or its fruitfulness ; as affection in parents inclines them irresistibly to love their little ones ; and as compressed liquor labours to expand itself, such, I believe, is our heavenly Father's goodness towards every member of his beloved family.

Epaphras.—Even so ; and this goodness of our God is over all his works ; (Psalm cxlv. 9.) it comes from and descends into that infinite and bottomless sea, whence all rivers of mercy flow, and whither they must return : and all the systems above you, and all the works of creation and Providence around you, are but the best means to the best end in promoting his goodness : they are but intermediate links of the chain that embraces all things and connects them with himself.

This being the case, how steadfastly ought we to cleave to God, and to trust to his goodness ; how entirely ought we to seek our happiness in him ; be distrustful of earthly dependences—of carnal confidence, and making flesh our arm. You remember the passage, and you know what God says in Jer. xvii. 5—8, “ Thus saith the Lord : cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord. For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good

cometh ; but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land, and not inhabited. Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is : for he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh ; but her leaf shall be green, and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit.”

Philemon.—I am aware there is no help or strength but in God ; and I know there is free grace enough in his covenant of mercy to enable me to run the race set before me ; (Heb. xii. 2.) and there is also comfort enough in his promises to support me under all trials of providence. But is not the society of the faithful, and the assembly of the saints, a blessing ? Is it not a privilege to be entitled to communion ? by which I mean specially the participation of the Lord’s Supper.

Epaphras.—These are both of them inestimable privileges, and to both of which I feel persuaded no less by my own observation than that of my fellow-labourer Timotheus, you are now entitled ; still, as I view you no longer a mere babe in Christ, but as one more advanced, it may be well you should be now fully instructed in these two great points.

As respects the sacrament, I would speak first. The whole value of ordinances depends upon their institution : what importance we attach to them should rest, not as some think, upon their fitness and appropriateness, but upon divine ordination and authority. The efficacy of the Lord’s Supper consists not in the thing itself, but in the

sanction with which it comes invested. (Luke xxii. 19.)

The same may be observed of every act of divine worship, and of every mystery in religion : of the sacred ministry of the word ; of the discipline of the church, and of our venerable establishment itself. Their value does not arise from expediency, or the policy of men, but out of their original institution by Christ.

The force and necessity of this remark will be more obvious to you hereafter ; for a bitter sarcasm may be thrown out to this effect : “ Can you go to the Lord’s table, when the minister himself is as dead as a stone ; and when the communicants are not what they should be, can you be a partaker with them ? ” Remember, the *virtue* neither of this nor of any other ordinance depends on those who use it, or those who abuse it, or those who administer it : though the pastor be vile, and the communicants be vile also : the profitable celebration is independent of both ; and neither the one or the other can hinder its efficacy to your own soul, or prevent the blessing of any one who rightly partakes of it.

I would impress on your mind that this institution, more than any other act of divine worship, carries much of the love of the Lord in it : it lays open the most endearing relation between the Lord Christ and his disciples : it is *there* you may discern the reciprocity of affection ; it is *there* Christ sets forth the riches of redeeming love ; *there* he is as the great Shepherd, leading his sheep to the green pastures and living fountains of mercy : there he sits in the attitude of an elder

brother, among his brethren, giving them, spiritually, his flesh to eat, and his blood to drink : (John vi. 54.) there, as the great husband of his church, he is eating and drinking with his spouse at one and the same table familiarly ; and at that ordinance there is to be neither dread nor distance ; no reserve nor any rival.

Hence this sacred ordinance may be styled, not improperly, a love feast : in this view it signifies far more than an act of commemoration ; it is a mystery of the highest spiritual import ; it denotes the mystical union there is between Christ and his church : it is an outward and visible pledge of his perpetually affiancing himself to her : it is the authenticating seal of an everlasting covenant ; it is the spiritual marriage contract legally celebrated between pledged parties, both of which are to continue steadfast in love, and to live for ever : (Mal. ii. 16.) and there is to be no more any divorce, or putting away, on any account.

Indeed, so clear is the allusion of this solemnity to the rite of marriage among the Jews, that the one throws light upon the other : it was a constant custom among the Hebrews, and in eastern countries generally, for the husband, at his nuptial ceremony, to break bread to his wife, to show that they were to live together in love and mutual sympathy : (Hosea ii. 5.) in like manner, at this holy ordinance, the Lord Jesus breaks bread for his true and spiritual spouse, the church. By this symbol he signifies that he has graciously made over himself, and all he has, to her.

And why, I would ask, does the Lord institute a visible emblem but to show his heavenly near-

ness and holy familiarity with our souls? for by the consecrated elements spread out before the faithful, the Lord Jesus was represented, under the Old Testament, as at the head of the table of mercy, inviting his children to partake of it, the fat of the sacrifices being called his bread, (Lev. iii. 11.) and it may be said of him as it is said of Job, that he would not eat his morsel alone. (Job xxxi. 17.) Delightful thought! he will have his followers to be constant partakers with himself; and if there is a lovely spectacle on earth, it is that of beholding God's numerous children as so many olive branches of adoption and grace, seated round about their Father's table.

In this rich and glorious feast a triune Jehovah is a participant. The Father is present, spiritually dispensing pardon: the Son, as the author and institutor; and the Holy Spirit applies its nourishment to the soul. The ministers of the Lord consecrate and distribute the elements, and the people of the Lord also participate with spiritual joy, with holy contrition, and inward thankfulness; and such a repast is said, in the sublime and figurative language of the Book of Canticles, to be delightful to God: "I am come into my garden, my sister, my spouse; I have gathered my myrrh with my spices: I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey: I have drunk my wine with my milk. Eat, oh, friends! drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved!" (Cant. v. 1.) But whenever this soul-refreshing feast was celebrated, either in a sacrilegious, carnal, or formal way, God called it *flesh*, in utter contempt; (Hos. viii. 13.) and in Isaiah he uses still stronger lan-

guage. (Isaiah i. 11—14.) On the other hand, when it is duly felt to be a remembrance of our Lord's death and suffering—when it is celebrated in faith, in contrition of heart, and with filial love to its great Author—when it is figurative as well as commemorative—no less retrospective to the Lord's passion, than a faithful voucher of the life of God in the soul, not yet fully unfolded—it in every sense answers the end of the institution: it is pregnant with the recollection of blessings past, and it recalls them vividly to mind: it also forms a channel for their present and future reception, and it opens wide to the eye of faith the substance of those great things it embodies and signifies, namely, the Lord Christ yet to come in his majesty and glory.

And until this happy and long-looked-for period arrives, my dear Philemon, we have the gracious promise of his spiritual presence; and that gracious promise of his being with us spiritually, goes to the full length of the performance of this and every other duty and privilege. I apprehend, when the Lord engaged to be with his church to the end of the world, he engaged on those very terms, that his true and spiritual church should continue to the end of the world: hence the forms of the covenant under the old dispensation, (Hos. ii. 19.) and hence the imperative obligation and duty under the new. (1 Cor. xi. 26.) “For as oft as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come.” In the act of celebration, particularly bear in mind these few things.

All divine institutions require faith to obey

them; and it is an exercise of faith to be commanded to believe what we see not: but surely, seeing is believing: what we always see with spiritual eyes, and is obvious to our spiritual senses, we verily believe. And how great a sight does the sacrament present to us! We behold in these visible emblems the Lord Christ as manifestly crucified before our eyes; his body broken, and his blood shed, to be our spiritual food and sustenance. “Oh! may we ever feed on Christ in our hearts by faith, with thanksgiving.”

All ordinances are but steps in the ladder of mercy, to lead us to himself. They are intended to elevate the soul to God: they are preparing us for greater nearness to his throne: they are a wonderful means of grace; sweet reminiscences of dying love; and great encouragements in our earthly pilgrimage, and most blessed channels to bring us to Christ. They one and all lift up their voices in the language of the Samaritan woman, and invite to the Saviour: “Come, see a man which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?” (John iv. 29, 39.) Yea, the Lord himself speaks to us as in them: “Come unto me all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” (Matt. xi. 28.)

All sacred institutions only have become truly blessed when they subserve to acts of self-dedication. It is a solemn and most important truth, and yet it is one which is much lost sight of, that it is a more awful act of sacred worship to come into the temple to present your body before the Lord as a “*living sacrifice*,” than to receive the *consecrated bread*, and *partake of the sacramental*

cup at his altar ;” and the reason is, that the former act is a *sacrifice*, the other a *sacrament* : in the one case we offer *ourselves* to the Lord ; in the other we receive *from him* : both require the pious exercises of faith, and when united, they form an epitome of all practical religion.

Philemon.—Many thanks for this explanation regarding that holy ordinance. May it please God to bless it to my soul. And now is there time to enter upon the other subject ?

Epaphras.—The household of faith, and the various members of which it is composed, I must leave for the present : our interview has already been somewhat protracted, and as it is my desire to profit, not to fatigue, and to interest no less than to please, we shall break off here, and after the holy communion, you will have the goodness to return, and we shall then, God willing, resume the subject at our mutual convenience.

SECTION XIV.

HOUSEHOLD OF FAITH.

PHILEMON.—EPAPHRAS.—TIMOTHEUS.

Philemon.—Need I tell *you*, dear Sir, that I have been at the Lord's Table; having received the consecrated elements from your own hands: and shall I add, that I found it a sweet and most refreshing season: never before did I feel with equal force that passage in Rom. xii. 1.; but now I clearly perceive, we may tender to God as much as we please of our substance; we may offer him as many duties, as much of our time, and strength, and talents as we are able, but unless we tender to him ourselves, our souls and bodies, as a living sacrifice, it will not do.

Epaphras.—And you may always assure yourself of the reality of your self-dedication to the Lord, viz. when love to him leads you to do that for his glory, which naturally you have a great dislike to do: when, instead of self-gratification, you are willing to engage in acts of self-denial; when, out of love to Christ, you can cross your own will, interest, pleasure, affections—in a word, *yourself*: that is true and unreserved dedication to God, because it leads you to do what nature would not have you do.

Philemon.—I trust “I shall be enabled to do all things through Christ, which strengtheneth me.” (Phil. iv. 13.)

I would have you know, likewise, that I have enjoyed a second privilege: our common friend Timotheus, (being aware of your kind intentions) has already introduced me into the household of faith.

Epaphras.—How thankful ought I to be for such pastoral aid! And pray what was the impression of your friend, and what the measure of good you derived from such christian intercourse.

Philemon.—I could perceive (as was to be expected from so great a body of the faithful) great diversity of character and many shades of difference in their sentiments and opinions: but oh what concord and agreement in all matters essential! what tenderness of spirit and mutual forbearance! what ardent desire after edification! what longings of heart to do good and get good! it seemed a little heaven on earth: never did I feel so truly happy: though the scene is departed, the sweets of it remain! Oh what a delightful spectacle to see the people of God united by bonds of Christian love, sacred and indissoluble. (Psalm cxxxiii.)

Epaphras.—I rejoice, my dear Philemon, that the Lord has bestowed on you the spirit of discernment, (1 Cor. ii. 15.) which is a christian grace, and even the family of God afford frequent occasion for its exercise.

The diversity of character you speak of, I must tell you, is a beautiful feature in Christianity; the church of Christ, as well as the general system of nature, contains much variety of character, and this variety, let me tell you, is itself an abundant source of beauty; it more or less per-

vades all the works of God: no two plants or trees are alike: not a leaf, or blade of grass; no two animals are precisely similar; each has its own identity. The variety and the analogy (taken together) of all created things, proves that they are neither the result of chance nor of necessity, but the work of one supreme and intelligent Being, who not only regulates his whole creation by uniform laws, but modifies them in peculiar operation as he pleases. God would have all things, visible and invisible, animate and inanimate, indebted to himself! He would have nothing ascribed to chance, or second causes; to the force of habit or imitation: he has made all things in this sense independent of each other, but all dependent upon himself, that he alone may reap all the glory.

But I would hear a little more, particularly of the several parties present on that occasion.

Philemon.—The names of those who edified me most I can give you; and also the feature of deepest interest in their character; this was their utter forgetfulness of self in their conversation: the work of man and human instrumentality was not trumpeted forth, while the Holy Ghost's work was concealed: neither did you hear among them (as is always the case in worldly society) the perpetual recurrence of the great letter *I*, but the *Lord* hath done so and so: they appeared to delight in recounting what *He* had done for them and wrought *in* them, not what they had done for *Him*: they seemed all humbled on account of their doings, rather than make a boast of them—to tell what they had done amiss,

or left undone and done against Christ than performed for Him!

Of this class I could plainly enumerate the following, viz.: Abraham, Apollos, Barnabas, Caleb, Cornelius, Cleophas, Deborah, Dorcas, Enoch, Ezra, Fortunatus, Gideon, Hannah, Isaac, John, Jacob, Joshua, Lazarus, Manasseh, Naaman, Obadiah, Onesimus, Peter, Quartus, Ruth, Samuel, Stephen, Thomas, Vashti, and Zaccheus.

Of their conversation you must be content with a mere outline; many of their remarks I pass by in silence, though well worth recording.

Abraham spoke much of the dealings of God with his soul: the parts in his history upon which this dear old saint seemed to dwell with most delight, related chiefly to his sojourning at Charran before he dwelt in Mesopotamia; it was *then* God called me first, said he, and where I had a wonderful manifestation of Jehovah: for *there* the Lord of glory appeared unto me, (Acts vii. 2.) and such was the display of that glory, that I immediately set out in quest of it; and though my friends and neighbours, and specially my relatives, were at a loss to account for my leaving my native country, (Heb. xi. 15.) and condemned me for such unaccountable conduct: yet, continued he, they saw what I gave up; but not what I was coming to; what I surrendered, but not what I was to possess. (Heb. xi. 16.)

He also alluded to the trial respecting his beloved son: where you might have read the depth of his feelings in the agitation of his soul,

and no wonder ; for who could adequately depict that awful scene? the father the sacrificer, the son the victim! who can tell which must have suffered most? and yet how tenderly, notwithstanding, did he urge on all present the duty of implicit obedience under all the dispensations of God, even the most trying : for there is nothing lost, exclaimed he, in our being willing to lose for God! “ God made me willing to part with my son, my only son, whom I tenderly loved : and now instead of one, he has given me thousands and tens of thousands, even as the stars for multitude ; and therefore to make sure of what we have, and far more, is only to be made willing to part with it.”

And then he told us how he was enabled to trust God, where he even could not trace him ; this was also most instructive ; for though his faith was often greatly exercised, it never wholly failed.”

“ It was a great exercise of my believing,” said he, “ when full twenty years after the promise of a child, I had never a child, and then, when the darling came, he is commanded to be slain! and when he grows up, *then forty years* elapse before he takes a wife! *then twenty years more* before Rebekah has a child by him, and all this while, what becomes of the gracious fulfilment of God’s promise! here are twenty years gone, and forty and twenty more, and yet but one solitary Isaac! still, I bless God, I could look upon his promise as good as possession ; and so I have not been disappointed !”

Isaac, the child of great promise, made an

observation or two here which struck me amazingly: being fearful lest he should contradict himself, he urged upon all weanedness from the world, and great moderation in all things; "you must not," said he, "my dear friends, count it a great thing to die to your lusts and passions, that is nothing; if by grace you go no further, you will perish notwithstanding; nay, if you would live hereafter, grace must teach you to die to your carnal mind and fleshly appetites now.

"In food and raiment you must seek as strangers and pilgrims only enough to warm and satisfy nature, to fit you either for your general or particular calling: in the use of all earthly things, you must have a single eye to the glory of God; and whether we *eat* or *drink* and whatever we do, it must be all with a view to love God more and to serve him better!"

This speech, I confess, for a moment a little surprised me; previously, and without just cause, I had considered Isaac somewhat given to self-indulgence, "the savory meat such as he loved" seemed to foster the opinion; but how necessary is it to hear good men out, and how wrong to detach any part or sentence from the full meaning; if Isaac wished for such a repast at any time, it was not to gratify an ungovernable appetite; (and therefore let no wicked or ungodly man yield to self-indulgence, or take shelter from his conduct;) no; but it was that he might better glorify God, and promote in a higher degree the best interests of his child, "that I may eat," said he, "and my soul may *bless* thee, before I die."

It was not a little interesting also to hear what fell from those two men of God, Caleb and Joshua: they gave us such bright and glorious views of the promised land, that I felt a longing desire to be there; (Numb. xiv. 7, 8.) it struck my mind most forcibly, that all our ideas of Jehovah are infinitely too low: and that our notions about "the land that is afar off," originates mostly in ourselves; instead of coming up to the subject, the views we take of both, go but a little above our weak and depraved state. (Psalm l. 21.)

But oh, if it be a great mercy and very refreshing to the heart to see the star of Bethlehem shining in the firmament of revelation: if it does the soul good, to contemplate the Lord Jesus in the gospel, how much more so to view him face to face! If to enjoy him in his ordinances is such a comfort, what joy to contemplate him face to face! to see him as he is! the life of the saint, the song of angels, the wonder of heaven!

Manasseh also, the son of good Hezekiah spake like a person of much experience: he at one time being emphatically styled the "man of sin," but now he is a miracle of mercy: and in him the old proverb is certainly true; "the greater sinner, the greater saint;" for he was full of love to Christ, and showed burning zeal in drawing souls to him: Oh, with what power did he open the leading truths of the gospel; with what astonishing richness and fulness did he show the freedom and plenitude of grace; the depths of mercy for the most abandoned sinners: he urged salvation doctrinally;

but he dwelt most on examples : “ publish salvation,” said he to all : “ tell them to go to Christ as they are ; wait not till you are grown better ; Christ graciously receives *all*, however deep in guilt or lost and undone :” he brought forward in confirmation of this sentiment, the woman taken in adultery ; was she not hurried into Christ’s immediate presence in her guilt, and did he dismiss her with the sentence of condemnation and wrath ? (John viii. 11.) then the manslayer, when did he hasten to the city of refuge : after moral improvement or delay ? did he not flee, might and main, to the city of refuge, when the avenger of blood was close upon him ? then Matthew the publican ; did not Christ pardon him when sitting at the receipt of custom, at his work of extortion ? Oh, the freedom of grace and sovereign mercy of God : he also instanced Zaccheus, and then himself, and concluded with this remark, which I hope always to treasure up in my memory as long as I live : “ Can it be thought wrong to go to Christ,” said he, “ in the midst of our sins and feeling of sin ? why the filth of sin has no relation to the Son of God in his *glorified* state : besides, it is no direct going to him in reality, but only believingly, and in looking at what he has done and suffered for sinners, of whom I am chief.”

Moreover, it had pleased you well to have listened to the warmth of feeling and unreserved devotion of Dorcas and Barnabas ; their whole soul was in the work of the Lord ; they seemed to live only for the sake of doing good, and how animating their mutual converse ! Can we refuse

to cut down our superfluities, said they, when our brethren want necessaries? can we behold their miseries, their poverty, their affliction, their deep distress, and all the while maintain a cold-hearted indifference?

“And why should we not do so?” replied Barnabas, “seeing the whole earth is the Lord’s and the fulness thereof; he need only open his hand, and all things are filled with plenteousness: moreover, all mankind receive the alms of the Almighty; the greatest men on earth should be but beggars at Zion’s gate every day. But how difficult, thought I, for those who have no piety, but amplitude of wealth to realize this feeling; and to know that they are but stewards of the manifold mercies of God!

And had you listened to Stephen, enlarging on the work of the Spirit, how the grace of the Spirit opens the eyes of the understanding; unfolds the glories of heaven; how it leaves on the mind the impress of certainty; and how his instructions carry with them their own internal evidence and conviction, and enable us to rejoice with joy unspeakable: or could I picture to you the holiness and personal piety manifested in Enoch, the inward joy and holy triumph of Deborah; the zeal of Ezra, or the courage of Gideon; the gratitude of Naaman, or the tender-heartedness of Josiah, and the sympathy and brotherly love of many others; could you realize the whole scene, you would inevitably conclude with me, that you were indeed in the assembly of saints, in the society of personages of heavenly origin, and with souls still more, if possible, exalted.

Epaphras.—My dear Philemon, may you never have cause to alter your opinion; those you have mentioned are bright specimens of the true and spiritual church of Christ; but remember, there is a mixed multitude; (Exodus xii. 38.) meanwhile I rejoice in your joy, and more especially as you more and more perceive, that as guilt has caused our misery, and the sense of that guilt is full of sorrow, so it is the way of religion and the path of holiness that establishes our happiness for ever!

SECTION XV.

ZEAL FOR GOD.

PHILEMON.—DEMAS.

APOLLOS—*A bold, successful Champion of Christ.* Acts xviii. 24.

BARNABAS—*The Son of Consolation.* Acts iv. 36.

Philemon.—When I contemplate the wonders of redeeming love, and lay to heart that it comprises, not the work of six days only, as in the first creation, but the work of more than six thousand years; and when I recollect also, that the Lord Christ gave, not his workmanship to finish it, but himself—not his resources, but his own body, what heart can be so insensible—what soul so dead to its importance, as not to desire to spend and be spent in profiting others, and in making it more and more his own by a personal and believing application?

Timotheus.—Though the believer's motto should be always "up and doing," still it is the motive and manner of doing a thing, more than the work done, which God respects and approves.

Demas.—Christianity requires zeal, but it must be zeal tempered with prudence.

Timotheus.—Undoubtedly; but a union of all the graces of the Spirit is needful, no less than prudence, to become a faithful soldier and servant of the cross; and graces, let me assure you, resemble individual members in the human body;

all of them are needed, and they have all enough to do; they have all their proper sphere of action chalked out; and in order to exhibit a finished christian character, let no man imagine that he may venture upon all duties with any one grace, however distinguished in that grace he may appear: and, on the other hand, were all the other graces of the Spirit in your possession, yet they would not supply the place of that one, wherein any professed follower of Christ is really defective.

Apollos.—It is easy to raise difficulties, and to throw obstacles in the way of usefulness; but I apprehend, that as soon as any soldier has been enlisted under Christ's banner, by the baptism of the Spirit, his whole soul should be fired with zeal for the glory of his name; he should instantly free himself from all earthly incumbrances, that he may be a more able champion in the open field of warfare.

Philemon.—Surely but for the want of zeal on the part of the church, and love to Christ likewise, the whole world ere this had been well-nigh evangelized; it is our indifference to the spiritual welfare of others that is the source of that flood of ignorance which still overflows the greater part of the globe: for from what cause comes all the ignorance we see around us of Christ and his salvation, but from the want of evangelical teaching, even as darkness proceeds from want of light.

Demas.—I am deeply conscious that every man has his allotted charge in the church, in the commonwealth, and in the world: but it is good to

consider what may be effected to the best advantage: home duties are always urgent, and it is well to consider the safest sphere of action; and if a man will make a conscience of doing that from which he has the fairest prospect of reaping the greatest advantage, he will often, from a sense of duty, be disposed to limit his operations to his own domestic circle: he will find the least flock enough for his feeding, and the least vineyard of the Lord enough for his tilling.

Philemon.—I have no patience with some professors: there are half-hearted Christians, who are ever ready to cry—“A lion in the way,” and pretend danger and detriment to themselves, even when there is none; there are others who are ashamed of Christ and his service, though they are not ashamed to meet in society his open enemies, who, with their brazen faces and iron foreheads, break out into all manner of ridicule against him. But the religion of Christ requires to be ever openly professed: (Mark viii. 38.) they who do not profess his holy name always, have no religion at all; and they who dare not make a confession of Christ, want the heart and the tongue to do so: “For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.”

Demas.—But is an open avowal of our creed at all times either desirable or necessary? Does not the Lord say—“Cast ye not your pearls before swine?” And does not St. Paul put the question—“Hast thou faith, have it to thyself alone?”

Philemon.—All I will to say for the present is,

that good men have always been good confessors of Christ, and in the worst of times they have shown the most zeal and personal devotedness. St. Paul was ready to suffer not only bonds and imprisonments, but death itself, for the profession and defence of the gospel. The Apostle, St. John, when the divinity of Christ began to be doubted, and perilous times were come, stood up manfully for his Lord and Master. Confession, therefore, and salvation go together: if we wait for the one we must express the other, and that too in the face of all danger, and in defiance of all temporal losses. (Matt. x. 37—39.)

Barnabas.—And with you, my friend, I altogether agree. Can we look on God and his cause in the world with lukewarmness? Can we see his anointed one trampled under the foot of ungodly men with tameness or indifference? Has a child filial dispositions, who can bear to see his Father so insulted? Does it not pain a child of God to the heart to see his Saviour blasphemed as he is in the world, and so little loved, as are his name and his gospel, his sabbaths and ordinances? Yea, not to mention the Saviour, can you hear of the miseries of your brethren on earth, their poverty, afflictions, and deep distress? Can you endure the thought, that many of God's dear children are lying on a bed of sickness, and suffering extreme misery, while others are so pampered and cherished in the lap of prosperity as scarcely ever to feel one rude blast blowing upon them?

Timotheus.—The more unreservedly we are

enabled to give ourselves to the Saviour in life, the more of comfort and consolation shall we have in the retrospect of life: the outward professor, or time-server, can have no inward satisfaction in his religion: the reason is obvious: he does not give himself unreservedly to God; he gives other things, but there is not a full surrender of himself; he always keeps something back; and hence his inward misery. He wants the approval of a good conscience, and this ultimately will lead to the torment of his soul. (1 John iii. 20.) But he who possesses that love to God which passeth knowledge, will delight himself in his service, give himself to it, and cheerfully spend himself in works of faith and labours of love.

Philemon.—Truly so; but should our labours be confined to any one section of mankind? Is our zeal to come under any prescribed rules, or under limitations of man's making? Are we not to view every man we meet as a brother, and those who are the farthest from God, should they not be sought out the first? Shall we Christians act on Pagan maxims? Plato, one of their greatest sages, said, "We are not born only for ourselves, but our birth is partly for our country, partly for our parents, and partly for ourselves, and this has been styled a golden sentiment: it has been much applauded and approved by most modern philosophers; but compared with the sayings of Christ, how meagre and miserably defective. Christianity teaches us to view the poorest, the vilest, the most outcast, as our brethren; but in their system, there is no mention of the poor; it mat-

tered not to them whether they sank or swam, lived or died, were fed or starved.

For my part, as the Lord hath enlightened my eyes, and filled me with joy and peace in believing, I purpose, with his help, to do some work for my God: and have I not bright examples of action, and zeal, and devotedness before me? Why, I would ask, does the Spirit of God in Scripture record the righteousness of Noah, the faith of Abraham, the prayer of Jacob, the patience of Job, the meekness of Moses, the zeal of Ezra, the activity of Josiah, the courage of Daniel, the faithfulness of Jonathan, the prowess of Gideon, the devotedness of Jephthah, the warfare of David, the labours of St. Paul, and the undaunted spirit of the Apostles? Why read we of particular acts of devotedness? the widow's mite, the anointing of the body of Jesus, the effectual faith, the patient hope, the diligent love of whole churches? Was it not that we should be followers of them, who through faith and patience inherit the promises? Is it not that we should "go and do likewise?" And God being my helper, I will try to stretch my wings of love wherever there is a believer to be comforted, or a poor sinner to be saved.

Timotheus.—And what greater joy can a minister of the gospel have, than to see the children of God giving themselves to the Lord, and to us, by the will of God? (2 Cor. viii. 5.) What greater comfort hath the husbandman in his work, than to see the fruits of the earth, which he has sown, not blasted or withered, but growing to maturity?

And what greater comfort hath the shepherd than seeing his flock not infected, but whole and healthful? And what greater joy to a mother than to see her child spring up, and increase in strength and stature? This, your zeal for God therefore, pleases me well. Go on and prosper.

SECTION XVI.

MORTIFIED ACTIVITY.

PHILEMON.—EPAPHRAS.

Philemon.—In seasons of trial and perplexity, dear Sir, I come to you for instruction. I have, since I last saw you, laboured much and spoken more, on the things that make for man's everlasting peace. I did hope that multitudes would flock to Christ, as Solomon says, "even as the doves fly to their windows," whereby, in very beautiful imagery, he meant, I suppose, not a few in number, but flights of them together. But, alas! few, if any, have been moved by my earnest intreaties. Some viewed me with suspicion, others, if I may judge from their manner, thought me forward and meddlesome; some openly resisted the truth as it is in Jesus, and many, of whom I might have hoped better things, and whom I had befriended, put an ill-construction on my good intentions, and have endeavoured to hurt my reputation, and injure my usefulness, by secret slander and open invective.

Epaphras.—Think it not strange that these things have happened unto you; many a man has been secretly slain by the unkindness of a pretended friend, just as many a bird has been shot by the arrow, whose feathers have come out of its own wing.

I would you could always remember, through all the steps of your future pilgrimage, the words of our Lord to his disciples, whereby it appears that the poison of serpents, and the deadliest draught, are less to be feared than the enmity of man, and their inveterate dislike to the gospel. (Matt. x. 17. and Mark xvi. 18.)

Philemon.—And, indeed, judging by their actions, persecutors do seem to be of the brood of serpents. (Matt. iii. 7.)

Epaphras.—And though the serpent may go upon his belly, and eat dust right humbly—he may even cease for a while to climb the tree of knowledge, and no more openly tempt men to good or evil; he may no longer occupy the upper regions of the air, and never again possess principalities and powers; still, after all that is said and done, he is a devil still; therefore, as you proceed in your spiritual journey, you will have frequent occasion for St. Paul's prayer, "That God may deliver you from wicked and unreasonable men." (2 Thess. iii. 2.)

But may I ask what plans of usefulness did you pursue?

Philemon.—I first of all ventured, in God's name, to speak to people individually, singly, and separately; hoping and praying that I might win them to Christ, and was I not warranted to cherish the expectation? For though I need not be told, that God can use whatever means and instruments of good he pleases, yet, ordinarily, that which comes from the heart goes to the heart.

Epaphras.—And so it would be always if spi-

ritual things were the counterpart of earthly ; but the more spiritually-minded any one is, and the more filled with the gifts and grace of the Spirit, the less he is likely to be received. The reason is, that the carnal mind is enmity against God. Nature helps not towards the work of God in any way : none are so opposed to Christ, and to divine teaching, as the men of greatest natural abilities. Natural men have no lever within them to reach to any supernatural work,—mere nature never works higher than itself and its own glory. (John iii. 31.)

Little do you know at present what we, the several pastors of christian churches, feel on this point. Widely is the seed of eternal life scattered, but how scanty to all outward appearance is the crop. Multitudes come to hear sermons one after another ; they have the covenant of grace opened to them in its fulness, the riches of God's mercy in Christ in its beauty, and the whole scheme of redemption in all its stately proportions ; and the invitations to mercy, and the promises of mercy, are spread before them in the firmament of revelation like one brilliant constellation, and yet how few of one's hearers are taken with them,—how few attracted by them,—or set out fearlessly in believing and pursuing, to the last, the land that is afar off.

Philemon.—Oh, it must be a sad day to some of them surely, when they go from a sermon, and there has not been a word spoken to their hearts in that sermon !

Epaphras.—And yet to encourage and comfort

the fainting spirits of the faithful ambassadors of Christ, God, in rich mercy, is now and then taking a word that falls from their lips and laying it upon the heart; and thus, sometimes, the most unlikely sermon, the discourse the most uninteresting in itself, and the most unfavourable season too, is the season of most mercy. The same man might have heard the same blessed truths before again and again a thousand times, and they did him no good. And why? The day of the Lord's power was not yet come; but, blessed be God, that day is a long day. It is not to be meted out by our measurement; it reaches from the beginning to the ending of the dispensation under which we live, and therefore our day of grace lasts while our life lasts.

Philemon.—The persons I called on and spoke to, belonged to various classes. Some of them were high in station, and, for their outward behaviour, held in very general esteem in their own community. One young man, for his natural amiability, sweetness of temper, and frankness and openness of disposition, was every where greatly and deservedly beloved, and I longed to bring him to saving knowledge; but he stumbled at the doctrine of justification by faith, and went away sorrowing. In vain I urged the consideration, that we only disclaim all good works as the procuring cause of our justification before God. “We do not disclaim,” said I to him, “any good works in themselves,—we do not discourage from them, but urge all to the practice of them; and is it no encouragement to walk in the light

of God's countenance, or to enjoy fellowship and communion with him? Is this not its own recompense,—is it not its own reward?"

And then I pressed home upon his conscience also the value, worth, and efficacy of the blood of Christ, and how it cleanses from all sin; and how good works clear us from the imputation of hypocrisy. They make it appear to man's self, and to others, that his is not a dead, but living faith. Yet it would not all do; he preferred parting with Christ rather than his self-righteousness,—with all his Saviour's spiritual wealth, than with his large earthly possessions.

Another man was one of the well-disposed, (so we call them,) and so well-disposed, truly, that brotherly love would have led me to hope for the best, but, on more converse, and closer examination into his principles, I found nothing satisfactory. There was no sensible experience of the evil of his nature, and no feeling want of Christ. When I saw his determination to have his own will, and pursue his own ends, I urged the fallacy of all his other evidences. "Unless," said I, "when your own natural will and way crosses the will and way of God, you can willingly leave yours and take Christ's way, you are no servant of the living and true God."

The religion of this man, notwithstanding his goodly disposition, went little further in creed than a bare assent to revealed truth; and, in practice, there was nothing but a Christless, and therefore a heathen morality.

He evidently felt much surprised when he

perceived that all his practical divinity was viewed by me only as a set of crude notions ; his views of Christ little better than conjecture ; his faith only as moral suasion ; and his piety superficial, and was not this the naked truth ? Whenever or wherever there is saving knowledge, is it not deep, practical, experimental ? it is not a notional, much less a dead or dormant principle, lying within a man's breast, but is associated with spiritual life and action.

I endeavoured to illustrate what I meant by the history of Job, "I have heard of thee," said he, "by the hearing of the ear, but *now* mine eye seeth thee," &c. All previous knowledge of God, when there is not experience of his pardoning love, is as by the hearing of the ear. It is by the report of others, and by the hearing of the outward ear, and not by inward persuasion and conviction of the heart. It is only when Christ's grace and spirit work a change in the soul that the eye of faith sees his worth and excellency, and the renewed soul derives spiritual health and healing from him.

A third instance I met with, was that of a person self-ignorant, self-deluded, and spiritually blinded beyond what you can imagine : he seemed to have no knowledge either of sin or of a Saviour.

Epaphras.—Yet if you read the description given of an unawakened sinner in Ephesians ii., your wonder will cease.

Philemon.—Yet how much more wonderful in its effects, and transforming in its nature, is the

true grace of God! It causes a man not merely to differ from his former self, but from all around him likewise. (1 Cor. iv. 7.)

Epaphras.—And hence the essential difference between a child of God and one who is dead in sin; both have natural, but one has only spiritual and supernatural senses. Natural men do at best but reflect themselves; their natural eye sees other men's faces, but not their own; their ear takes in other men's woes, but they cannot distinguish their own until the eyes of their understandings are enlightened. We are all born stone blind; we have no self-distinguishing properties within us; whereas, the spiritual senses of the spiritual man always look inward; and hence, one fruitful cause of their knowledge of themselves and of their Saviour.

Philemon.—With many others also I held converse. Indeed, I tried to bear my testimony against the flood of sin and irreligion which is fast overflowing our decayed, and almost worn out world. And though I opened out to many the dying love of Christ, in the pardon and redemption of sinners, yet, such was the profaneness of some, and the desperate wickedness of others, that it seemed to some as a mere fable; to others, as an idle tale. Oh, how I prayed that the Lord would pour out his Spirit from on high; that all unclean spirits might pass out of the land.

But the people that tried me most were those who refused all spiritual discourse whatsoever. Every other conversation found acceptance and a hearty welcome; but as for the Bible and its

sacred contents, it was a proscribed book. And yet, would you believe it, many of these people are regular attendants at church on the Lord's-day; nay, they appear in the assembly of the saints, I am told; they are great sticklers for hearing, but inwardly they despise the gospel, out of whose mouth soever it comes, or by whomsoever it is uttered.

I might now touch on other instances of my ill success, differing in kind, varying in degree, but I prefer rather leaving to the Lord those people whom I tried to instruct, but tried in vain.

Epaphras.—But had we not better defer the remainder of this conversation to another day, when we shall hope to resume it. In the mean time be not discouraged, but ever keep in the path of duty, and leave consequences with God; and then, though Israel be not gathered, yet shall you be of the number of those who shall be glorious in the eyes of the Lord. (Isaiah xlix. 5.)

SECTION XVII.

RESOLVING DIFFICULTIES.

PHILEMON.—EPAPHRAS.

Philemon.—It is an old saying, “that he who would go to heaven must travel close by hell’s gates,” and assuredly when any sinner is made deeply and sensibly alive to his danger through the Spirit’s teaching, or when afterwards he shall have fallen into any gross sin wilfully, and grieved the Spirit of God—if his conscience is made raw by the fire of divine wrath, it will be found most difficult indeed to comfort him; such an one oftentimes feels so keenly remorse of mind, the burden of sin, or his base ingratitude, that nothing short of grace that is omnipotent, can rescue him from despair.

Epaphras.—Such persons, however, should always remember, that they are only drinking the cup of misery which they have mixed for themselves: (Gal. vi. 7, 8.) if any child of God takes a course of sinning wilfully, the Lord will, sooner or later, as sure as he is alive, take a course of punishing, enough at least to chastise and to humble him for his sin, and to mortify it likewise: indeed the nearer any Christian has lived to the Lord previously, if he stumble in his walk afterwards, he shall have the rod of fatherly correction laid the more heavily upon him on that very account: the heaviness of his subsequent cross

proceeds from the greatness of God's love : God always hates sin most, when it comes nearest him : " you only of all the families of the earth," says he, " have I known, therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities." (Amos iii. 2.)

Philemon.—But what a consolatory reflection, that even the sins and manifold infirmities of believers are viewed rather as the chastisements of a tender Father, than as the rebukes and punishments of an angry Judge !

Epaphras.—God deals with his spiritual family always in rich mercy : whenever he sees occasion to chasten them, it is always in measure ; not to cast them off finally, or to destroy them, but to do them good.

Philemon.—And this view of the family of God by adoption and grace is very blessed ; for though a child of God may be permitted to fall far towards hell, he never falls into it : the cause of his preservation lies not in himself, but in the faithfulness and immutability of God ; and his immortality is secured not by any thing he has done or left undone ; eternal endurance is in the nature of gospel seed, not in himself.

Epaphras.—But though this be a scriptural doctrine, and most comforting in itself, it offers no encouragement whatever to a sinful course ; if, however, any member of the family of God takes occasion to sin " that grace may abound," cannot the Lord make him feel his error, and smart under the severity of his discipline ? cannot he make his sin infinitely more bitter to him in its fruit, than ever it was sweet in its enjoyment ? cannot he fill his inmost soul with diverse dis-

eases, and plague him with sundry kinds of death? May not tormenting fear, impure thoughts, lustful feelings, a spirit of pride, perpetual doubts and innumerable imaginary fears be let loose upon him? may not God in very faithfulness cause him to be troubled inwardly and outwardly, so that he shall find no peace? can he not hedge up his path with thorns, bring him into that incomprehensible state which no man on earth can know and fully enter into save himself only; so that in the writhing and anguish of his spirit he is forced to exclaim in the language of Job, "Oh that my afflictions were weighed in the balance;" (Job vi. 2.) or in the words of Jeremiah, "was there ever any sorrow like unto my sorrow," (Lam. i. 12.) "such sorrow as this is insupportable by the creature—who can bear it?" (Prov. xviii. 14.) the stoutest heart is unable to stand under it; no earthly applications can soothe the guilty conscience; no earthly comforts can blunt the edge of spiritual grief; no balm of man's making can heal the wounded spirit. Oh, it is the present feeling of God's wrath now; it is the full expectation of it all hereafter, and who knoweth the power of his wrath? (Psalm xc. 11.)

Philemon.—Chastisements and corrections for iniquity, such as these you mention, must make the best as well as the most unworthy of his servants to know what it is to wax wanton against the Lord: they will assuredly constrain them to walk warily for the future; to loath their past sin, and to curse all the temptations, and occasions, and avenues, that led to its commission.

But I would now, with your leave, proceed to

speaking about some of the painfully interesting cases I have lately met with, and respecting which I have sought your advice: the difficulty I feel is, my ignorance how to treat them. The instances of misery to which I allude, did not spring from any particular acts of unfaithfulness towards God, nor yet from remorse of mind, or stings of a guilty conscience, but from the oppressive burden of indwelling sin—the power of temptations—the great prevalence of unbelief, and, above all, from the fiery darts of the wicked one. So many of God's dear children were afflicted in this way, that I was utterly at a loss at times how to act, notwithstanding my sincere desire and prayer to comfort them, they refused all comfort, and I was constrained at last to leave many depressed in mind, fainting in spirit, and hanging down their heads like a bulrush. (Isaiah lviii. 5.)

Some of the weary pilgrims with whom I conversed were evidently suffering much from mistaken views of themselves: I could plainly see they were every thing but impartial judges of their spiritual state; any one, the least enlightened, could take a far better gauge of them than they could of themselves: many of their miseries, which they dwelt upon so unceasingly, and many of their greatest discouragements, constituted, as I tried to persuade them, their greatest encouragements. They formed the very best evidence of their conversion to God. On the other hand, those very feelings and frames of mind which some of them most desired, (*viz.* all joy and never again any sense of indwelling sin or sorrow) were

such, to the searching spirit of God, and to the discerning eye of faith, as would, if invariably possessed, tell most against them.

The female sex (for to them I now allude) are in general very sensitive: they are less exposed to actual sin and danger than ourselves: hence they frequently labour under a sense of spiritual maladies, that are more imaginary than real. One complained much and sore of her want of spiritual comfort: it was to no purpose I urged the consideration, that many had lived and died good Christians, who, during their lifetime, had enjoyed hardly any sensible comforts from the presence of God. It was in vain I pressed the thought, that neither the light you long for, nor the absence of consolation, over which you so grieve, are any satisfactory grounds of hope: neither the presence nor apparent absence of joy in Christ, affords any solid proof that the soul of the believer is far from God. The sun in the winter season, when the feelings are most chilled, is the nearest us: in the summer season, when all creation feel most its light and warmth, he is at the greatest distance: the moon, when she appears in her fulness, is the farthest off; yea, in direct opposition to that great luminary; and when is it that some professing Christians have shone forth with most lustre, and most of their own effulgence has appeared? Has it not been when they have been farthest from the Sun of righteousness, and their own souls have, like that body, been most opaque and darkened by sin?

Another, after having touched on other topics, without removing her difficulties, exclaimed—

“ Oh, Sir! I admire the brightness of others' views, but I lament the indistinctness of my own.” But what was my reply? and was it not scriptural and just? “ It is,” said I, “ in the very supposed dimness of your spiritual perception, that I can discover the free grace of God! Does not that flower appear the most delicate and lovely which is most sheltered from the rude gaze of others by the outstretched branches of the oak? Does not the glow-worm shine most brightly when it finds *itself* shut up in the darkest night? And when does the grace of the true Christian most appear? Doubtless when there is the least of ostentation, and when there is most of genuine humility; and when the spiritual condition of others seems far better and more prosperous than our own.”

The agony of mind others laboured under was, lest, after all their religious profession, they should go back again into the world!—“ The temptation I feel,” said one, “ to return to my former ways of thinking, to my past follies and vanities, and companions and pleasures, whom I profess to have abandoned, is so great, that I fear it will end some day in the awful reality.”

“ But is this your fear, your torment, well founded? Do we usually commit those things we so much dread and hate? Are not many things prone to fall headlong, which never do fall? Is there not great proneness in every massive body to roll downwards, and yet, with all this native tendency, may it not be kept up contrary to its very nature, by an adequately-opposing force? Is it not the necessary tendency of water to precipitate

itself down a sloping declivity; but does not the science of hydraulics teach us, that it may be forced upwards, and kept upwards, and made to run in quite another direction? Does this phenomenon occur in the world of nature? why then discard it in the kingdom of grace? Is the influence of the Spirit of God less powerful in controlling the soul of man, than earthly machinery in directing the currents of water? Hence you may learn that you have no just ground for fear, or any good reason for complaint whatever. If the Lord chose to leave you to yourself, doubtless you would fall, and that for ever; but your life is not in yourself, but in your Saviour, and your safe keeping is in him likewise; (John xiv. 19.) and, therefore, if you continue watchful and prayerful, the great temptation that tries you will not be permitted to hurt you: the strength of God, and the omnipotence of his grace, will form your under pillars, and these surely are strong enough to prop you up."

The cross which another individual had to bear, was the burden of evil thoughts: these were continually filling the imagination, and rushing into the soul like a flood. "But who," said I, "is the parent of evil thoughts? whence their source and origin—near or remote? Does not Satan himself often cast them into the soul? and are they not frequently so sudden and unexpected, as to prevent the exercise of reason, or even a moment's deliberation to escape from them? In such cases the sin is the devil's, and the punishment will be his likewise. Only do you resist them steadfastly in faith, and whenever they

do present themselves, lay you the sin of them at Satan's door, and do you claim the mercy of our God."

No sooner was this advice given, than a person known to me previously by name and general appearance, interrupted with much earnestness—"You have not touched on my case yet: I have one heavy cause of distress: I have the inward persuasion that I never can bear up against the load of care that is devolving upon me. Wants are increasing, and how to meet them or bear them, I know not." "But herein," rejoined I, "is your falsity both in feeling and in argument: you defer too much to your judgment of yourself, and too little to the promises of God: you lean too much to your own understanding, whereas, you should rely on the power of grace: you know not what you can bear, or suffer, or do: you know nothing of yourself, or your capabilities; but He who made each and every one of your members, knows well what each and every one of them can do and bear separately, and what altogether: He knows the strength and weakness of each, as well as the effect and power of all united; and he says—'My grace is sufficient for thee; my strength is made perfect in weakness.'" (2 Cor. xii. 9.)

Thus I reasoned with many persons in succession, but I fear not in the right way; for it was with ill success; in the hope that you may allow me to introduce to you one of these mourners in Zion, that she may reap the benefit of your greater experience and council, I took my leave of them, with increasing anxiety and fervent prayer, that

the Lord would preserve them from black despair.

Epaphras.—Of all evils, despondency is one of the greatest: better far to presume, than despair of mercy. In Scripture we have larger and greater manifestations of this attribute than of any other; all may cherish hope, and none yield to despair—as, however, you have made the request, and the impression is left on the mind, I will only add, that I shall be glad, so far as God helps me, to remove needless causes of distress, and with this view, it will give me pleasure to see your friend at her earliest convenience.

SECTION XVIII.

JEMIMA. Job xlii. 14.—EPAPHRAS.

CASES OF CONSCIENCE.

Jemima.—If all the various workings of my mind, dear Sir, could be pourtrayed in the countenance, or, if you could read my heart, you would perceive how anxious I am to receive your instruction in meekness of spirit, and to abide by it.

Epaphras.—There is but one great and all-sufficient Teacher; it was by his teaching that the disciples obtained a greater measure of knowledge than all their successors, (Mark iv. 34.) Have you applied to him? If Solomon's servants were happy in hearing his wisdom, how much more happy ought we to deem ourselves, who may sit at Jesus's feet, and hear his word. It is Satan's master-piece to keep us from Christ, as the great prophet of his church.

The bare supposition that he will not teach is one of the most efficient means that Satan employs to keep us from the school of Christ. If he can persuade any poor soul that she is unfit to go to him as she is, and that success is doubtful, of course, misery is protracted, and one great point is gained.

Jemima.—My frame of mind, I rather think, is already in part known to you; I am not sensible

of any flagrant act of transgression, nevertheless, my soul is a stranger to peace.

Epaphras.—Some believers have almost as much to fear from their graces as from their infirmities; few there are comparatively who can safely be trusted with any thing. If they do not abuse God's pardoning love and mercy, in some way or other, there is often a great and secret longing to trust in their gifts and graces, frames, and feelings; hence their very miseries often originate in their blessings.

Jemima.—How truly is this my case! God has given me outward mercies in abundance, and I feel my unworthiness of the least of them; but these I could bear to be without, if only I was free from inward buffetings, painful doubts, and from many a secret cross.

Epaphras.—God gives no blessing of a spiritual nature without a cross; all his children need it, and those who are most in favour are most in the furnace. If old Jacob is to be enriched with the glorious name of Israel, he must go halting all the days of his life to keep him humble-minded, and dependant upon his God. If the faithful disciples are to be blessed with a hundred fold, it is to be attended with persecution. If Paul is to mount up to the third heaven, he is to have a thorn in the flesh, to remind him he is on earth. Afflictions are therefore part of the spiritual patrimony our Father in heaven has bequeathed to all his children. (John xvi. 33.)

Jemima.—Would I could feel my burden less.

Epaphras.—But if we do not feel what the Lord in his good providence chooses to lay upon

us, it is no proof that we are the more religious on that account, neither may we take any comfort to ourselves because of our insensibility to natural emotions; all chastisements are meant to be felt; when we do not feel them they do us no good: all who have *profited* by them have *smarted under* them, and they have become, under God, blessings, and greatly sanctified to them.

Our Lord, in his sufferings, is presented to us in the twofold character of a Saviour and a pattern, when he sustained our chastisements judicially; (Isaiah v. 3.) and when his persecutors gave him wine mingled with myrrh, he refused it; (Mark xv. 23.) and the reason that may be assigned is, that he wished to feel the power of divine wrath. He was fully aware of the intoxicating nature of wine mingled with myrrh. He knew that it was intended to induce stupor, to deaden his feelings, and to render his body insensible to pain; but the Lord, who gave his soul a voluntary offering for sin, tasted death for every man, and drank the bitter cup of suffering to the dregs:—"he learned obedience by the things which he suffered." (Heb. v. 8.)

Jemima.—My sufferings for the most part arise from manifold temptations.

Epaphras.—May I know their nature; and, if you choose, for the better understanding of them, may I hear them in succession?

Jemima.—One heavy temptation I suffer from is spiritual desertion: I feel myself, as it were, cast off and deserted for ever.

Epaphras.—If you were never sensibly de-

served of God, you would claim a privilege from which Christ himself was exempted ; but if the Lord of life and of glory was left for a season ;— if he could exclaim, “ My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me ? ” can you wonder if you are made to feel something of the same sort ?

Jemima.—Sometimes I am tempted to think I never had any firm ground to stand upon—never entered upon the life of grace at all—never possessed one grain of faith, or hope, or love,—so dead are my feelings—so darkened my evidences.

Epaphras.—But may not a person be a true Christian, and yet be under the hidings of God’s countenance ? Have you not heard, and read, and known many Christians who had true grace in them, and yet walked in darkness ? Does not Isaiah say, “ Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness and hath no light ? ” (Isaiah l. 10.) and does not this show that a man may fear the Lord, and obey the voice of his servant, and be a true child of God, and yet feel himself in this miserable plight notwithstanding ?

Jemima.—Frequently I have the inward persuasion that my heart is becoming harder, and more insensible to divine things than ever ; and the thought alarms me dreadfully, that, to me, the gospel is only a savour of death unto death, instead of a savour of life unto life !

Epaphras.—But let me ask you, is there no ground of hope even in this ground of complaint ? Would you feel the hardness and insensibility of heart of which you complain if you were dead in

sin? Wherever there is feeling there is life; in a state of mortification, either in a bodily or spiritual sense, we are past feeling, but *that* is a state of death. The best Christians lament their spiritual deadness; even the disciples of our Lord were dull, and insensible, and slow of heart to believe; but did not Christ take it away for that very reason, and is there any other soul-malady for which there is neither a Saviour nor a sacrifice?

Jemima.—Several passages of Scripture also distress me; that verse in the Proverbs of Solomon particularly, “The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways.” (Prov. xiv. 14.) I am sure I am a backslider in heart.

Epaphras.—But is it no consolation that you have not been likewise one in life? But supposing you have fallen into sin after conversion, is it no comfort that you have not quite and entirely fallen away? Every penitent backslider thinks his own case hopeless, others think so too. In the opinion even of some of his best friends, he may appear to have sinned past remedy; he may fall down, like Eutychus, from the third loft of a very high profession and be taken up dead; still the minister of the Lord, whose spiritual senses are kept in lively exercise, may discern life in him; (Acts xx. 9.) and, on the other hand, there is many a mealy-mouthed saint, who would leave on your memory the impression of much of the Spirit and of divine illumination, who has yet to learn the unrighteousness of all his spiritual righteousnesses, whose smooth tongue only bespeaks an unsound heart!

Jemima.—There is another burden that presses heavily always, and, need I say, this is in-dwelling sin. (Rom. vii. 24.) On this account, my soul, night and day, is, as it were, in a great fight of afflictions.

Epaphras.—And was not Christ in the same? and does not his conflict with sin, Satan, and the flesh, sanctify your combat? And does not the joyful intelligence, that he has gotten to himself the victory, inspire you with hope, and infuse into you fresh vigour? When the Israelite and the Egyptian strove together, (a type of sin and grace struggling together in the soul for the mastery,) which did Moses slay? Did he not save the Israelite and kill the Egyptian? Even so, though sin trouble you, it shall not torment you, for a greater than Moses will slay sin that dwelleth within you, and secure the work of grace which belongs to the true and spiritual Israel.

Jemima.—It is one thing to know what evil is, and another to indulge in it; yet, would you believe it, I feel a strong propensity to commit a sin others have fallen into a thousand times, and so great is my misery on this account, that I am sometimes tempted to believe that, in point of fact, I may as well drink in the particular sin to the full, as thus to sip it and indulge the thought. The crime is all one in the sight of God, and the result the same.

Epaphras.—I am no stranger to Satan's devices: I know a real Christian who once fell into gross sin, and to do the same, was his never-ending temptation; the devil strove hard to turn a

single commission of evil into a precedent. The wicked one knows well the force of habit, and what a scaring effect the repetition of evil has on the conscience; what a disposition there is to procrastinate, and how difficult it is to the mind to undertake the work of a melancholy retrospect. But when you are tempted to do that which is injected into your mind, and if you have done amiss, and are strongly led to repeat the same, remember there is but one alternative; there must be no parleying with Satan—no argument with your lusts. Take the sword of the Spirit, say, it is written, “ Resist the devil and he will flee from you.”

Jemima.—As I have already occupied so much of your valuable time, we will close the conversation for the present, and may it please God to bless what you have so kindly suggested to me.

Epaphras.—And a word of further advice in parting. Ever bear in mind, in all your temptations, these two things: the person of Christ, and the all-sufficiency of his grace. Is there any evil accusation in the mind of Satan which is not counteracted in the mind of Christ? Is he styled the destroyer? (Rev. ix. 11.) Is not Christ styled the Saviour? (Luke ii. 11.) Is he the evil one? (Matt. xii. 45.) Is not Christ the just one? (Acts iii. 14.) Is he the accuser? (Rev. xii. 10.) Is not Christ the advocate? (1 John ii. 1.) Is he the tempter? (Matt. iv. 3.) Is not Christ the comforter? (John xiv. 16.) If one is the old serpent to destroy, (Rev. xii. 9.) is not the other the brazen serpent to heal? (John iii. 14.)

And when you shall have well thought of Christ in all his relations, it may be well for you to try to take a gauge of God's mercy; see whether you can fathom it. It has heights and depths, and lengths and breadths, that pass man's understanding, "though your sins be as scarlet, it makes them white as snow, red like crimson," &c. and know you how crimson is obtained? not by one dip or two, but by many. Even so, though your sins be often repeated, and yourself tenfold dyed and stained by them, yet the mercy of God in Christ can fetch every stain and pollution entirely out. (1 John i. 7.)

SECTION XIX.

THE MIXED MULTITUDE.

TIMOTHEUS.

QUARTUS—*A sincere Christian.* Rom. xvi. 23.

EPAPHRAS.

Timotheus.—It is by no means a rare occurrence, that a remark passes away almost unheeded at the moment which acquires great importance from events and circumstances which afterwards follow.

I was not a little apprehensive but that this might be the case with our absent friend: he seemed not to notice the salutary hint which you threw out at the conclusion of a former interview, viz. that the visible church of Christ was “a mixed multitude:” but it would not surprise me greatly, were we to hear shortly, that his former sentiments and sanguine hopes are considerably modified.

The society in which he has moved lately, though professedly pious, must, I conceive, have opened his eyes a little; for many of them (whose names I could mention) though they mix with the people of God, neither possess their privileges nor hold their principles, nor are they clothed with their grace: some of them through the force of example; others through the mere light of conscience; and from what they can get by rote, are drawn to a religious profession, and to make

common cause with us; and some of them are so taking in their manners, refined in their spiritual taste, and so highly gifted in their understandings, that it requires great acquaintance with them to know them.

Quartus.—This is very true; uncommon gifts are found in many professors in these days; and it is to be feared many have singular fluency in prayer, and eloquence in preaching, and aptness in discourse, who are still strangers to the true grace of God: some like Jehu, show great zeal—others like Herod, listen for a while gladly,—while others, like Simon Magus, pretend to understand, and all the while they are formalists, and only depend upon themselves, and not one of them appears to know, that when a man is in himself, *all, all* must fall with him; his destiny, resting on his own pretended goodness, rests on nothing!

Such persons doubtless will wonder why they are not received at the last day; for they have prophesied, it may be, in Christ's name, tried to cast out devils and do many good works; but the impurity of their hearts, the vanity of their minds, and the hollowness of their profession, will appear in this, viz. that they were all led to entertain the high conceit of themselves, *that God would accept them for their services*; whereas he will say of such, I never knew you, either before time, in time, or for ever!

Epaphras.—We must always, as much as possible, avoid judging others, and, as Christians, be very careful how we condemn; (Luke vi. 37.) still there is, according to the word of God, great

truth in your remarks; and in confirmation of them I am bound to say, that even in the bosom of the church there are many professors who are all light in the head, and yet in the whole body they are full of darkness; and there can be no question, but that by intercourse with God's people, and the constant hearing of his word and by other means, you may come to apprehend much of the meaning of scripture and the ways of grace; you may enter very fully into the great scheme of redemption, and also be very learned in the most abstruse points of divinity; you may give your assent to them; you may even be an able disputant or a champion for the defence of sound doctrine, and mightily convince the gainsayers, and all the while in your own heart be like ice, very clear, yet very cold; you may know all this, I say, in the understanding, and yet not know heart religion, either by a sensible work of grace or the life of Christ in the soul; and this, it is to be feared, is too much the character of the church militant here on earth.

Timotheus.—When we excite suspicions or express our fears, it is due to others, and it is also needful to the clearing of ourselves, that we state the grounds of our apprehension.

Now Philemon has been lately to my knowledge, in company with Balaam, Dathan, Demas, Diotrophes, Esau, Felix, Festus, Gallio, Gehazi, Ham, Haman, Ishmael, Jezebel, Korah, Lucifer, Michaiah, Nabal, Shimei, Uzza, and Ziba, all of whom, in a greater or less degree, as you well know, have had to do with the family of God.

Now I look upon Balaam as a person greatly

to be dreaded: he wears the semblance of a courtier, with the heart of a traitor: with wonderful dexterity and self-possession, he can vary the meaning of his mind, so that you can hardly tell what to make of him: you do not like to view him as an *enemy*, yet you dare not trust him as a *friend*: he has the astonishing art of infusing into the most opposite parties equal assurances of friendship; (Numb. xxii. 8.) he can sow the seeds of discord by his very looks and manner; and it matters not what becomes of once loved, but now severed friends, or the most inveterate enemies, *so he can stand fair with both and serve his own interest at the same time.*

Quartus.—And I can bear testimony, that if you keep your eye upon him any time together, he sometimes favours one party and sometimes another; (James iv. 8.) and he always keeps, to a certain extent, friendly with both, and then he waits the issue of things; I also count such a man most dangerous company; and the more for this reason, because he conceals his real disposition, he hides from you his sinister aim, and by this means he renders you at once confiding and unsuspecting.

Timotheus.—The character of Diotrephes (John iii. 1, 9, 10) also, I look upon as presenting a most pernicious example: he speaks like a person of profound humility, but if you watch his movements among his brethren, you shall find that where either post or place of distinction is to be had, or any credit to be taken or given, he is with his presence invariably among the very first and foremost: and I have often witnessed, in the

fluctuations of his feelings, the *latent workings of ambition* in his soul: you might almost read, without any breach of charity, a thirst for priority and pre-eminence in the very colour of his countenance, so much does his countenance change and his eyes sparkle at the very naming of the words.

Quartus.—How different is the character of a true child of God; he is modest and retiring; circumstances may raise him outwardly above his fellow men, but he feels that he is really on a level with the lowest, and he takes the lowest place: he loves to hear nothing of his own commendation; and if he is under the necessity of speaking in favour of himself, he can truly say with the apostle, “ye have compelled me;” (2 Cor. xii. 11.) and that this apostle was compelled, may be gathered at least from the circumstance, that it was full fourteen years after that vision had been vouchsafed to him, when he ventured to speak of it, and even then, in mentioning it to the church, he suppresses his own name, and speaks only in the person of another. (2 Cor. xii. 2.)

Epaphras.—In your observations on Diotrophes, whose failing in respect to ambition is notorious, and has been the subject of open censure, you remind me of an anecdote concerning Diogenes; he was a personage of the like frame of mind; he would have it believed he was very humble, but those who knew him best, knew him to be most aspiring: it was the shrewd remark of Plato on one occasion, when he beheld Diogenes going about with an old tattered cloak full of holes, “See,” exclaimed that sage philosopher,

“see pride peeping through the holes of his cloak :” and the same may be said of the haughty Diotrophes ; he is so full of ambition and secret desire for the praise of men, that even his pretended cloak of humility cannot conceal it.

Quartus.—And who can tell the effect which the principles and the conduct of such men as Esau and Demas may have upon the mind of our absent friend ; these two men were never actuated in their lives by higher motives than carnal policy ; the one has been driven to sell his soul for a thing of nought ; (Gen. xxv. 33.) the other would hold Christ in one hand and Belial in the other , it often suits his convenience and his interest likewise, to try to make a compromise between his conscience and his duty, between the world and his God.

On one occasion, as I have been credibly informed, he left the company of christian friends, when his presence was most wanted ; (2 Tim. iv. 10.) and they have more than stood in doubt of him ever since ; and is this to be wondered at ? for he has been known subsequently to defend his conduct on the score of worldly conformity : he has the assurance to tell you he sees no danger in worldly compliances. “ As to the love of the world,” said he, “ I have ancient precedents in the best of men, and in following them ; I care not for modern censures ; our first parent, Adam, in paradise, had all the old world, and Noah all the new : were they not the sole proprietors under God ? And was not Abraham, the father of the faithful, rich in flocks and herds, and very much cattle, and was not Joseph governor over

all the land of Egypt, and does not David speak of his mountain being so strong, and therefore may I not copy the same?"

Epaphras.—When Demas thus speaks, he avoids the real distinction between the state of his own mind and theirs; he forgets that there is all the difference in the sight of God, between having worldly substance, and *loving* it *inordinately*, which is his besetting sin: for God nowhere condemns the *right use*, but only the *abuse* of the world: it is not the having it, therefore, but the loving it to excess that creates all the mischief.

Timotheus.—The love of the world, of which Demas is eminently guilty, is a strong and commanding principle in our fallen nature; and it is not so soon shaken off or rooted out of us as some imagine; many men will part with all else, rather than this; do not we read of a most promising youth in our Lord's days, who was high in station and higher still in moral worth; (Mark x. 20.) yet so deeply rooted was this sordid passion within him, that he chose rather to part with eternal life than with his wealth, and rather to forego the Saviour himself than his great possessions. (Mark x. 22.)

Timotheus.—And not to mention the character of others, for time would fail me to do so; yet all the rest of them are no better. Look at Jehu: his deadness in divine things forms a painful contrast with his former fiery zeal: there was a time in his life, when he could invite others to witness his forwardness in the cause of God. "Come and see my zeal," said he, on one occasion, to his com-

panions; at another, he would rebuke those who did not go the whole length of profession with him. "Enough of cold hearts," he would exclaim, "and dead wishes. Let us up and be doing: our enemies are lively and strong, and shall they be more lively and strong for Satan, than we for Jehovah? shall they be more active to do mischief, than we to do good? O! remember, ye sons of Zion, our God is not the God of the dead, but of the living!" But all this zeal and pretended love for God, where is it now? "it is as the morning cloud, and as the early dew, it goeth away."

Epaphras.—I am not insensible, dear friends, to your observations, when I express the hope that our friend will yet be enabled to persevere: for though many of the truly godly have suffered from unsound professors; though the fall of some, the insincerity of others, and the want of practical piety in all, have been very trying to the people of God; still there is every reason to believe, that he whom we are interested about, will hold fast that whereunto he has already attained; meanwhile, is it not encouraging to know, that he continues steadfastly in the Apostle's doctrines and fellowship, and is not this an appointed means of grace, an outward pledge of his continuance in the faith and of final perseverance likewise?

SECTION XX.

THE CHURCH MILITANT.

PHILETUS—EPAPHRAS.

Philetus.—The church of God is spoken of in Scripture, under the idea of a garden, redolent with spices, and full of choicest plants and flowers: (Cant. iv. 12.) but I now perceive it is only when the climate suits, and the sun shines, and the genial breezes blow upon them, that they regale the senses, yield their fragrance, and expand their beauties.

In the short interval of a few weeks, I have been led to see, that they who profess to belong to the visible church, and name the name of Christ, unless they bring forth suitable fruits, (Matt. vii. 16.) are but the outward form and image of Christians, and not the reality: we might apply to them the Psalmist's description of dumb idols, "Mouths have they, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not: they have ears, but they hear not: noses have they, but they smell not: they have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not; neither speak they through their throat." (Psalm cxv. 5.)

Epaphras.—Growth in grace is essential to the true Christian, and much of that growth consists in increasing knowledge of ourselves and of each other, and of God's word, his will, his sacred institutions, and all his ways.

The church is always substantially the same, though its outward phasis perpetually varies; nor is this to be wondered at, seeing it is formed of sinners and saints; of those who know and love God truly, and of those who love him not, and have no fear of God before their eyes.

Philetus.—But can you call such persons good men, or true churchmen? Can you look upon them in the light of believers?

Epaphras.—Certainly not: they stand in no sacred relation whatever to the true and spiritual fold of Christ; nor have they any interest in or union with it, any more than a wooden leg has with the rest of the body: it may be joined to it by bands or ligaments of man's making, but there is no adhesive property—no coalescing—no vital adherence to the muscles and sinews, and nervous system: there may be the faint outward form of the natural limb, but it possesses neither life, animation, nor motion; it is incapable of any vigour or increase: and however it may be strapped to the body, it is incapable of receiving spiritual nourishment from the living head, and, therefore, though forcibly joined with it, has nothing in common with it; and such are vast numbers, who are living in the bosom of our church; they are formalists, and nominal professors, and constitute no part of the living head: they are the wooden legs, if I may so express myself, of our ecclesiastical system.

Philetus.—But would it not be better far, either to seek a wholesome expurgation, or an entire separation from them? Does not our venerable establishment resemble too much a vast

mechanical instrument? are there not too many pins, and wheels, and screws, and human contrivances about it? would it not be less liable to go wrong, and subject to less danger, were its appendages fewer, and if it were less complicated in its officers and orders? Does not a small band of real Christians, and that for the most part sectional, go on extremely well and prosperously; while experience shows, that an established form of Christianity, however well constructed at first, must and does, in proportion to its enlargement and duration, increase in dissensions and divisions, as it progresses arithmetically in numbers?

Epaphras.—We must be very careful, how we sit in judgment upon the ordinances of God, and the collected wisdom and experience of ages; it is no difficult matter to bias the judgment, when the understanding is not sufficiently enlightened, nor the mind furnished with arguments.

Philetus.—To be candid with you, my dear Sir, I have my secret doubts as to the validity and claims of a church which permits so many irregularities, and suffers so many anomalies within her pale; and I really shall feel most thankful to have my scruples removed, and my fears dissipated, and my past confidence restored.

Epaphras.—It delights me still to discover in you a teachable disposition; search diligently, but still distrust yourself; diffidence and distrust of self, are sure marks of sincerity, and often of genuine piety; if we are not precipitate, but wait and pray for a right judgment in all things,

the Lord will not permit us to cherish any error either in our principles or practice.

The disorders in the church of which you complain, are not denied. I admit there are many defects in our ecclesiastical system, and in her discipline likewise, and this fact I neither wish to hide from you, nor yet from my own conscience; but does this furnish any just cause why she should not be considered a true church? think you, in the present dispensation, it was ever meant to be otherwise? What, I would ask you, is the wide field of the world full of, and which, in fact, is the arena to which the militant church is likened? Are there not tares and wheat growing up together into the harvest? are there not all sorts of animals indiscriminately abroad, sheep and goats, foxes and wolves, and dogs and serpents, some more treacherous and savage, and others more gentle and inoffensive? and in the same ocean, are there not good fishes and bad; and yet who can undertake the discovery and separation of them, but he who can draw the whole by the same net to the shore?

Your conscientious scruples respecting the church have arisen from your late intercourse with her professed friends, but secretly inveterate foes of our Zion; but, suppose you, other denominations of Christians are free from the evils which attach to us? It is a great question whether such evils do not vastly preponderate among those who have withdrawn themselves from her pale; if your objection arises out of these anomalies only, that objection holds in regard to those other denominations with an equal, if not

greater force: depend upon it, if you are in quest of perfect purity, earth is not the place to find it: the church triumphant alone is represented by a sea of glass; (Rev. iv. 6.) and in heaven only, it is freed from all dark and discoloured spots; here she is in the morning of grace overspread with clouds; there she appears in all her meridian splendor and unsullied glory.

Philetus.—Still bear with me when I say, that every disorder, and abuse, and scandal in a church, arising from various causes, and especially from the “mixed multitude” you spoke of, often lies heavy upon the conscience, and presses sore upon the spirit of the godly part thereof.

Epaphras.—In this I fully agree with you: at the same time consider the gracious purpose of God in this matter, and how by his merciful providence he can and does over-rule the most untoward events in his church, both for our spiritual and eternal good.

The church of God, need I remind you, is not a human, but divine institution: God gave the pattern of it to Moses, when he was on the mount with Jehovah for the space of forty days and forty nights: the ceremonial parts of his national church have long ago been abrogated and passed away, even as the shadow before the rising sun; but its nationality remains unaltered and unimpaired, and must necessarily run through every dispensation.

The national form of the church has not, and never had, any typical signification whatever: it rather partakes of a moral character, as it is undoubtedly the vehicle of the widest and most im-

portant moral blessings; and though it be objected, that no national church is to be traced in the New Testament, yet the reason for this apparent omission is not duly considered. What cause was there for a second enactment? Did God ever cancel the national form of his church? Does it not continue to this day unabrogated by the same authority which first established it? therefore it is binding and valid; and this reasoning holds good in all matters, both civil and religious. Is not the civil statute, however obsolete it may become by circumstances, still in force, while it stands in the statute book unrepealed? and hence the true secret why neither the church, in its national form, nor the moral law, which however is embodied in the New Testament, and expounded in our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, is again firmly established, inasmuch as neither the one nor the other were ever repealed.

To have added new sanctions, therefore, to institutions already in force, would have argued the imbecility of the Lawgiver, which, as regards God, can have no place. It would have been an act of supererogation, and, consequently, the doing of something in vain.

Our national church, therefore, to which you belong, though she admits within her external pale "a mixed multitude," yet she is not a political, but spiritual society; her spiritual members are a community of brethren: she is of divine appointment; her credentials are stamped with the broad seal of heaven; her claims to your submission are imperative and unqualified; she

rests upon the rock of ages ; she is solid in her foundation, rich in all her provision of mercy, comprehensive in her love, pure in her worship, apostolical in her formularies ; she opens wide the breasts of her spiritual comforts and consolations ; she extends the shield of her protection and unfurls the banner of peace, and throws her gates of mercy open for the edification and well-being of the whole spiritual commonwealth !

That the church was to shape her course in a national form, and the whole earth to become the place of its entertainment for a while, is obvious from another circumstance,—the old dispensation throws much light upon this subject. If you recollect, in the journey of the children of Israel, all the tents were pitched round about one and the same tabernacle ; those tents represented the whole nation. The tabernacle was the church militant on earth, and the design of God was to show, that the continuance of the world arose out of the continuance of the church ; and that if a nation wished either for peace or security, it *must naturally rally round about the ark.*

Nor is it any argument against a national establishment, that there are many abuses. God venerates his institutions for their own sake. He loves to look upon antiquity as the picture of himself, and as reflecting his own image. The prophet who dared to speak against them, and those who were in office, though in many respects deeply guilty, yet, for their office sake, they were still designated the head, and ancient and honourable ; while he, for his temerity, has had the contemptible name of the *tail* put upon

his person; and, as for his message, he is described as a teacher of lies. (Isaiah ix. 15.)

But why, my dear friend, listen to the insinuations of our bitterest enemies? Of the present spiritual prosperity, and most thriving state of our national church, we have every proof. We may find ample testimony of this on all sides; the conviction is forced from the declaration and admission of our foes themselves, nor can any dispassionate and reflecting mind doubt the fact, who is at all conversant with the history of our church for the last half century. There is a great and growing alteration for the better: irregular functionaries would not be tolerated, as formerly; nor the same worldly compliances be admitted for one moment. The churches would be deserted, as is even now the case in many places where the gospel is not faithfully preached, and where there is not a corresponding practice. But while I make this declaration in her favour, and believe our whole established system is on the advance, there is still much evil remaining, and many just grievances to be removed; and these should tend to humble us before God; to exercise our patience and forbearance; to draw out our souls in united prayer, that there may be a speedy and amicable adjustment in all matters subordinate; it should lead us to holy jealousy over ourselves, that we may ever be kept, as a nation professing godliness, from taking a hasty and precipitate plunge into projects without investigation of their merits; and never to yield up the ark of God, and the palladium of our

country into hands of faction, or give way to untried experiments.

Meanwhile, and in parting for the present, allow me to request that you will keep your mind free from every undue bias ; ever bear in your heart, as regards good or evil befalling the church, that the whole community are equally interested in the general result ; instead of cherishing prejudices, or listening to them who tell you that the voluntary system is the only responsible one, and that independent power in a church is abstraction from all responsibility—I say, instead of taking all this for granted, rather believe that such instructions are only base aspersions ; neither founded in facts, nor supported by experience.

PART III.

MANHOOD OF PHILEMON.

SECTION XXI.

NECESSITY OF GREAT WATCHFULNESS.

TIMOTHEUS.—EPAPHRAS.

Timotheus.—The distinctive features of real Christians are strongly marked in Scripture, and I have no great difficulty in reading them ; but in the world at large, and in particular instances, I know not how to judge aright.

Epaphras.—You mean, there are so many unconscious hypocrites in the world, and such multitudes of self-deceivers, who put on religion as a cloak, only to cover their shame, and to hide from us their besetting sins.

Timotheus.—Doubtless there are too many even of that class, and whatever may be their common talk and outward appearance, they hate inwardly the very name of purity ; but if they cannot endure the very name of purity in poor, weak, sinful creatures, like ourselves, how much would they hate the purity, and presence, and infinite perfections of Christ, even supposing them to go to him.

Epaphras.—Of such, however, and long before they go to the place of all living, times and circumstances make great discoveries ; the hope of

all such is well compared in Scripture to a spider's web, which is drawn out of its own bowels, and upon which it suspends itself; and what better condition is that of the hypocrite? however he may talk of Christ, and speak of his all-sufficiency in him, he has no hope in the world, depend on it, but what he spins out of himself: he builds his present and future expectation on the slender thread of his own formality and empty profession.

Timotheus.—With your remarks in respect of such persons, I quite agree; but here is my difficulty: I see the growth of real Christians, but I am at a loss to fix the precise stage of their growth: I feel my ignorance daily as it respects classification.

Epaphras.—And yet at this I marvel: in nature's works you have no difficulty whatever; decision is simultaneous with sight. Can you not tell whether any individual you meet is young, old, or middle-aged? Is there an animal, plant, or tree, the very beholding of which does not direct the judgment? When you are more conversant with the mind of the Spirit in the Scriptures, and with the inmost workings of your own heart, the want of discrimination which you feel will be sensibly diminished, if not wholly done away.

Timotheus.—I am well aware that the Lord adapts the teaching of his Spirit, not to our state as sinners generally, but also to the very age and circumstances of his people particularly.

Epaphras.—Would that there were always sufficient attention paid to this subject! much of the preaching of the present day loses great weight for want of adaptation: it is oftentimes just as fitted

to one congregation as another: things may be true in themselves, but wholly unsuitable. Would you give milk to a person of manly growth, or strong meat to babes?

Timotheus.—Much wisdom, I am more and more convinced, from above, is needful to adapt the doctrines of grace to the spiritual growth and strength of our hearers: it is easier far, I find, to shoot above them, than to come down to the level of their several capacities.

Epaphras.—Very true; and, therefore, he who can discriminate well spiritually, will in general preach profitably. But as it is in your heart to range the several members of Christ's mystical body, it is vastly important that you mark well what is recorded respecting each of them: thus, when the Spirit of God is speaking of evil passions and propensities, of wayward lusts and fleshly desires, he seldom directs himself to old men or children: hence you infer, that young men are principally intended, and for this reason, the former have outlived youthful lusts; the latter have not felt them: the one has passed them; the other has not come to them.

Timotheus.—I almost wonder the thought never struck me before; but now the thing is quite clear, and this method of judging of the state of Christians by analogy, is as true in itself as it must be convincing.

Epaphras.—Young men, for example, are possessed of many of the leading features in a spiritual, which are common to them in a natural sense: they are for the most part strong in weakness; it is their nature to be resolute and active,

headstrong and zealous, unsuspecting and confiding, and therefore easily taken in; their capabilities are great, either for good or evil; if they are not the subjects of mercy, they are the means of untold evil: but if the love of Christ has been shed abroad in their hearts, and they are become the receptacles of divine grace, then they have in them a principle which subdues their unruly passions, and brings them into subjection—a principle which not only enables them to bear the yoke in their youth, much to the glory of God and the riches of his grace; but also to do much for the promoting of his gospel, and the spreading of the Saviour's kingdom.

Timotheus.—I doubt not that this is the very reason why many young men are exercised with temptations, almost above measure.

Epaphras.—To be sure it is: the devil always attacks young men the most; he plies them most with temptations, and he sets many traps in their way, and marks out a devious path for their feet. Now is this surprising, seeing he loses more by one young man breaking off and away from his lusts, than by ten that are aged, or even a whole family of children together?

Satan cares not for numbers, provided they be indifferent and strictly neutral. He keeps his eye upon those who, from spiritual and natural vigour, and sanctified affections, are capable of inflicting on his kingdom the most extensive mischief. What instances in point, either in the history of Josiah, on the one hand, or of bloody Manasseh on the other!

Timotheus.—I verily think, by your descrip-

tion, we may now place our friend Philemon, who has gone through the two previous stages of christian experience, among those whom the Scriptures emphatically designate "young men;" for certainly his zeal is great, his feelings strong, and his temptations proportionably great likewise. I pray with him, and for him, and entreat him with many tears: I have urged upon him again and again, that if he would overcome, there must be a conflict; and you know the hardest fight for victory is usually when we are most liable to fall, and most easily overcome.

Epaphras.—Satan doubtless bears him a special grudge: he is the avowed adversary of all mankind; but he is the special enemy of manly, spiritual zeal. Where you have heard of one old man tempted, a dozen youths shall have been plied hard: every avenue to ambition, or pride, or any besetting lust, has been assailed in their turn. When was it the devil made his formidable and successful attack upon our first parent, Eve? Was it not when she was in the freshness of youth, and soon after her first creation? When was it that our blessed Lord became the subject of sore and most bitter temptations? Was it not when he had just entered upon the period of his manhood, and commenced, in the ardour of his soul, his public ministry? When was it that Peter was marked out as his victim? Was it not in the prime of life, when he was burning with zeal in the cause of his Master, and ready to put his life in jeopardy for his sake?

The truth is, that young men of religious experience are prone to strong temptations; they

have, therefore, need of great grace, for they are the subjects of many hurtful lusts, any one of which, secretly indulged, relaxes their spiritual vigour, and while it lays them open to the tempter from without, it diminishes the power of resistance within, for it is in the nature of evil to gain strength by each succeeding act of sinful gratification.

Let Philemon then henceforth be viewed in the manhood of religious experience, and tell him from me, that one of the greatest of victories for any young man to achieve, is to overcome the world, the flesh, and the devil; but it is a greater achievement still, when he is enabled, by divine grace, to subdue himself: he brings a greater revenue of glory to God by so doing, and performs a nobler conquest than ever a Cyrus or an Alexander could pretend to.

SECTION XXII.

SELF-CONFIDENCE.

TIMOTHEUS.—EPAPHRAS.

Timotheus.—It is a grand source of rejoicing to all faithful ministers and pastors of churches, when they see their beloved flock growing in grace and prosperity by those means and spiritual advantages which they possess.

Epaphras.—Truly, of all earthly sources of comfort, this is one of the greatest; how ardently does St. Paul speak on the subject! you may even gather the fervency of his spirit from the strength of his expressions; he counted the prosperity of his converts his crown, their advancement in divine things his highest honour, their increasing in saving knowledge his brightening hope, and their fruits of righteousness as a never-ending ground of glorying

And I think I may venture to say, that such is the footing and feeling of every faithful shepherd among the dear people intrusted to his charge, and such is his longing desire for the prosperity of our Zion, and the spiritual commonwealth of Christ throughout the world, that he cannot take comfort to himself in any thing besides, unless he has some evidence of their souls prospering, the blessing of God resting on the ordinary means, and the gospel answering the great end of

its institution, viz. : the conversion and salvation of men.

Timotheus.—And why should not the minister of God derive consolation from subordinate motives, as well as other men? does it not delight the husbandman after all his toiling, his ploughing and sowing, to witness the fruits of his labours, and to behold the increase of the earth in yielding her fruits? and shall not the spiritual husbandman, whose labours are infinitely more important, and whose hopes are vastly higher, look forward with inward satisfaction to a rich harvest of immortal souls?

Epaphras.—Oh, Sir, who can tell the joy that every humble, devoted, pious minister must feel, when he sees the children of God increasing daily in vital godliness—abounding in works of faith and labours of love, and witnessing them cheerfully running the race of christian duties,—their pious zeal and great forwardness, their rising not merely up to his expectation, but going far beyond it; not only doing that which he desired, but more than he ever requested.

Timotheus.—It must indeed afford him matter of real happiness, and prove a great occasion of secret and public thanksgiving, and praise to God.

Epaphras.—He alone can realize the feeling whose lot has been exactly the reverse. How many labourers are there in the vineyard of Christ, who seem to be spending their strength for nought. How many have had their spirits refreshed, and their hopes excited for a while, but never realized.

How many hearers of the gospel promise fair, but act foul; they resemble streams of water in the desert, which, after copious showers of rain, run swiftly, and promise plentiful supplies, and sweet refreshment to the traveller who wanders in the wilderness, but, in the hour of need, fail and utterly desert him! And thus it is with many promising plants in the Saviour's kingdom; they appear to have received into their desert hearts, the dews of grace from above, and the out-pourings of the Spirit, and plentiful supplies of mercy, and they are zealous for a while;—but alas, time belies the hope conceived of them, and their ending is worse than their beginning.

Timotheus.—Such painful exercises we have hitherto been mercifully spared,—others have gone back who never inspired our minds with full confidence; but those as yet remain steadfast and immoveable, of whom we once entertained sanguine hope: still where there is much zeal, and but little experience in the depth of Satan's devices, and the deep depravity of the human heart, there may be just grounds of serious apprehension. I have great fears for our friend Philemon; spiritual pride, and unsuspectedness of danger, and the subtlety of Satan, and his own utter weakness, must, I feel sure, be impressed more and more on his mind: would that he would believe steadily, and always act upon the belief, that the wicked one is continually making the circuit of the whole universe, is ever and anon going to and fro in the earth, and walking up and down in it; (Job i. 7.) is always busy in

contriving, subtle in ensnaring, expert in decoying, unsparing in spoiling, and cruel in destroying; and that against the most zealous he is the most fierce; and against the most active in good he is the most evil, and unrelenting in pursuing.

Epaphras.—In all stages of experience, there needs great watchfulness; (Mark xiii. 37.) in the manhood of religious feeling, this grace of God is specially required; indeed it is the want of it in some places, that many even of God's people here have been defiled with abominations; in others, that they have been seduced from the path of duty by evil men; and in all places, that they have lost their first love, and at last loathed the heavenly manna and become cold and careless.

Timotheus.—What makes me fear for Philemon, I will be candid and tell you; for where the soul is concerned, and a man's everlasting welfare, surely plainness is best; if my suspicions are unfounded, and my fears never realized, it is all the better; the greater the subject of thankfulness to God, and the more of inward joy to ourselves on his account.

I fear lest his zeal get the better of his judgment; and is there not a zeal without knowledge?

I have my fears, in the first place, whether his mind is not already warped somewhat from the simplicity of Christ;—whether his zeal and warm feelings are not getting an undue ascendancy over his judgment;—whether, in cultivating the vineyards of others, he is quite as attentive as formerly

to his own;—whether he is as often in secret prayer with God, and as much given to self-examination.

His views of Christ's doctrines are still apostolical and scriptural; but he seems not enough to regard their practical tendency; much as he has been exhorted on this head, he needs more exhortation still; for the longer I live, the more I see the necessity that evangelical doctrines must be tested by evangelical fruitfulness; it is a good sign when I observe a growing attention to the precepts of Scripture; "a new commandment," says Christ, "I give unto you;" this assuredly requires a new obedience, and a new obedience requires a new spirit; and therefore, wherever there is a new creation, great heed will be paid both to the life and heart.

Epaphras.—On these points there cannot be a difference of opinion; in every article of faith, in every promise of mercy, in every word of love, no less than in every particular duty, precept, and command, God requires not only the hearing by faith, but the doing by practice.

Timotheus.—I spoke to him much and earnestly on the subject of closet prayer, and, would you believe it? though he holds the grace of prayer, yet he seems to count little on the means and helps to the profitable exercise of prayer, such as reading the Scriptures, retirement from the world, &c.

"Prayer," said he, very properly, "is the secret converse of the soul with its God; it is often inexpressible, and when it is highly spiritual, it condescends not to use language to give it utter-

ance; I don't discard all means and helps to prayer altogether," added he, "but is God tied down to means? Is he never to step aside, and out of his promise? May he not act in a sovereign way? Does he not give to his children many things, out of love to Christ, for which they never asked, and of which they never thought? Is not the Lord himself always praying; (Heb. vii. 25.) and are not all his prayers answered?" The stress he laid on the Saviour's intercession, and his unwillingness to touch much on his own private duty of prayer, raised my suspicions.

Another of his speeches to me was very similar in its tendency; this referred to the great doctrine of assurance, and the final perseverance of the saints; on the former topic, his words were to this effect:

"I now believe, blessed be God, that the Saviour is all-sufficient in himself, and in his own nature, yea, I now see He is all to me; He is my life, my peace, my hope, my salvation! What is the use of my saying, He is all to others, if I am not sure and certain He is all to me? blessed be his name, his mercy pities me; his power defends me, his providence cares for me, and watches over me, and his grace unsought and unbought now saves me, and therefore I fear not what men and angels can do unto me, 'for if God be for me, who can be against me?'"

And as for final perseverance, the observations he made, struck me most forcibly, "I believe," said he, "every man that is born again, will be as surely sanctified as ever he was born, and finally saved also, for Christ died for none, but

for those only for whom he gave himself, and he died for none but those who were given him of his Father; but assuredly, he has redeemed every one eternally for whom he died."

I laboured much to excite in his mind the spirit of filial fear, but I regret to add, it seemed to be of no manner of use: he was too strong in feeling to listen to sober judgment, and he preferred rather to be swayed by them, than be guided by any advice from me, and therefore we parted with one more remark—"It is not enough to believe these things," said I, "of which you speak; we may know the privileges of the gospel, and take to ourselves the promises; we may hear of the remission of our sins, and believe that eternal life is laid up in the covenant, but can we feel any joy in these things, any interest in them, or derive any comfort from them, if we do not the will of God, without which evidence we have no hope of mercy, no assurance of pardon, or as yet any well-grounded expectation of salvation?"

SECTION XXIII.

PRESUMING.

PHILEMON.—EPAPHRAS..

Philemon.—Why is it so few professing Christians trust wholly to Christ? Is he not all-sufficient and self-sufficient? Are we not perfectly safe by holding simply to him? Is not a naked Saviour enough for our salvation? For my part, I hate the working system: a self-righteous spirit I cannot endure. I love the freedom and perfect liberty we have in Christ: “if the Son, therefore, shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed;” (John viii. 36.) and St. Paul says, “Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.” (Gal. v. 1.)

It is the doubting of the perfection of Christ's merit—it is the distrusting of his plenary grace; it is the depending on something in nature or grace received, that forms the bitter root that is springing up and troubling and rendering uneasy many real Christians: but it is a great source of comfort to my soul, that I can take up the language of David and say, “I will be glad and rejoice in thy mercy, for thou hast considered my trouble; thou hast known my soul in adversities, and hast not shut me up into the hand of the enemy: thou hast set my foot in a *large room*.” (Psalm xxxi. 7, 8.)

Epaphras.—Yet nothing is more dangerous than the absence of self-distrust, overweening confidence, and a presuming spirit. Solomon says, “Before honour is humility,” (Prov. xviii. 12.) “and pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.” (Prov. xvi. 18.)

Ever bear it in mind, my friend, that as the seed of a tree is always in the root, though it bring forth no fruit, even so the seed of all evil is wrapped up and enfolded in every man’s heart; the fountain of iniquity may not overflow, but it is not because it has no turbid streams in it: the best man alive needs much watchfulness.

Philemon.—Will you excuse me, dear Sir, but is there not great danger of falling into a legal spirit? Will those who enjoy everlasting freedom from nature’s thralldom and bondage, voluntarily entangle themselves again? Will a man let out of prison return cheerfully to the door of his confinement? Do we not learn in the history of a whole Jewish nation, what bondage their captive souls were in? and would you have poor sinners sent back again all over the land of Egypt, to procure straw for themselves, and make bricks therewith, to build a foolish pyramid of pride and vain-glory? Is not Christ perfect, without any working of our own? and are we to question his finished salvation? are we to be sent out a second time into nature’s field for working or evidence?

Epaphras.—“Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.”

Philemon.—Oh, Sir, I must ever cleave to the freedom of the gospel: gospel freedom comes by

virtue of the Saviour's whole merit : its blessedness is, that we should have glorious liberty to call God by the endearing name of Father ; that we should view him only as a God of love ; that we should enter into his sanctuary with joy ; that we should be divested of all fear ; that we should have confidence in our prayers to be heard ; assurance of life in death, and a glorious welcome and entrance into the new creation when this life is ended.

Epaphras.—It forms also part of God's revelation, that we “ work out our own salvation with fear and trembling,” (Phil. ii. 12.) and that we “ give all diligence to make our calling and election sure ;” (2 Peter i. 10.) and further in Peter, it is enjoined, “ that we add to our faith virtue ; and to virtue knowledge ; and to knowledge temperance ; and to temperance patience ; and to patience godliness ; and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity :” (2 Peter i. 5—7.) so “ an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” (2 Peter i. 11.)

Philemon.—Very true : still we must avoid the charge of being considered by the world as *too strict*, and *righteous over-much*. The Colossians, you know, were blamed for not holding the head : they were very exact and scrupulous about other things ; they even gave more respect and paid more honour to angels than was meet ; (Col. ii. 18.) but we must depend wholly upon Christ for life, and not upon any working of our own, or any means : it is all nothing worth without

Christ: his gracious influence we may expect in the use of his ordinances; but it is himself we must look to, and depend upon, for every blessing.

Epaphras.—Whether we may be considered too strict or not, one thing I am sure of, that unless every one of us attend to duty, as well as to doctrines, we are in a most unsatisfactory and unsafe state. Is not every one expected to make Christ his pattern? and is there any other a hopeful Christian, but he who is a growing Christian?

Philemon.—It strikes me, dear Sir, that all your remarks are personal: have they not an individual bearing, and may I not ask, am not I the mark you are aiming at?

Epaphras.—It is the truth—I stand in doubt of you; and I begin to tremble for your future spiritual welfare: I perceive a frame of mind which is not under the controul of salutary fear.

Philemon.—A heart possessed of the love of God is dispossessed of all fear. “I will not be afraid,” says David; “though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear:” (Psalm xxvii. 3.) and again, “Wherefore should I fear in the days of evil;” (Psalm xlix 5.) and in another place (Psalm xxiii. 4.) “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, (i. e. though I walk in the near danger of death; for if the shadow of it follow me, the body and reality of it is not far off) “I will fear no evil.”

Epaphras.—Still allow me to observe that a godly filial fear tends much to the preservation of saints in Christ; it is a salutary check in sudden surprisals and temptations to sin; it is a great

bulwark against inward apostacy; and if any one, especially a young man in grace, boasts that he is without any fear, all I can say is, that he is in every fear of falling.

Philemon.—I see more and more, we are not all alike taught from above, or led in the same way; the Spirit of God divideth to every man severally as he will; “and he that is spiritual judgeth or discerneth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man.” (1 Cor. ii. 15.) And I now perceive there may be a legal and self-righteous spirit where it was least suspected; surely it is our high privilege to live upon Christ. “For me to live is Christ,” says the great apostle to the Gentiles; and again, “the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God;” (Gal. ii. 20.) and therefore I infer that we must steer alike clear of nature, of legal precepts, and the covenant of works.

Epaphras.—And yet, unless we make a conscience of good works, of precepts and commandments of Christ, our soul is in the utmost peril and danger.

Philemon.—Is not the grace of God sufficient? Can we do God’s will perfectly? Can we answer him one word in a thousand?

Epaphras.—Though we cannot perform a single commandment perfectly, yet we may make a conscience of every commandment; “then shall I not be ashamed when I have respect unto all thy commandments” (Psalm cxix. 6.) He does not say, when I *keep them all fully and perfectly*, for we all fail in *that*: but Christian’s, though they cannot keep all, may pay a consis-

tent respect, and a sincere deference to all, and such was David's confession.

The commandments of Christ are like so many links in a chain: if we break any one of them wilfully, we break them all; and therefore he that has not respect to all God's commandments, has (it is more than probable) respect unto none of them.

Philemon.—Surely it argues a legal spirit thus to bind the commandments of God on the conscience. Having begun in the Spirit, are we made perfect in the flesh? If life comes by believing, can it be maintained by doing?

Epaphras.—I clearly perceive, my friend, your present situation. Time is a great discoverer, and experience a great teacher, and both seem needful to produce conviction.

Meanwhile, allow me to suggest a few thoughts in parting; which, if I mistake not, you will find great realities, and you will do well to remember them.

The *path of duty is the alone path of safety*; if you sit loose to the performance of any known duty, be that duty what it may, rest assured that, ere long, you will sit loose to every one of these privileges you now so much appear to value, viz. the pardon of sin, the covenant of mercy, the peace of your conscience, and the comfort of your soul.

If ever you become indifferent to the means of grace, or to the duty of private prayer—if you neglect watchfulness, and reading the sacred Scriptures,—if you are only strong in doctrines, and lukewarm and indifferent in practice, rest

assured you are sowing the seeds of future sorrow. God will not be trifled with on the subject of religion; either we must acknowledge him in precept, and serve him in our living, or our religion is hypocrisy, and our profession worth nothing at all. Coldness or indifference in the performance of our duty to God, is a very great sin; it injures the souls of others and wounds our own; it forfeits God's favour and procures his wrath. Whom did the gospel pronounce accursed? not the man that believed, but them who did the work of the Lord negligently. (Luke xii. 47.) Whom did he threaten to spue out of his mouth, but those possessed of a Laodicean spirit? (Rev. iii. 14.) Better, therefore, never to have known true religion, than know it theoretically and acknowledge it sentimentally—without profit, without a conscience, without love, and without filial obedience.

Suffer, I pray you, this word of exhortation: it is the bounden duty of a true friend to deal thus plainly with you; for, though there is hardly a more important christian duty, or one that is more difficult and disagreeable in itself;—though there be no Christians without their faults, yet few can bear to be told of them; yet, to warn and reprove in meekness of spirit is incumbent on all, and especially on the pastors and teachers of God's word; and therefore, whether you will hear, or whether you will forbear, I warn you, in affection and love, “be not high-minded, but fear.” “Blessed is the man that feareth always.” (Prov. xxviii. 14.)

SECTION XXIV.

BACKSLIDING.

TIMOTHEUS.

EPAPHRODITUS—*A faithful messenger.* Phil. ii. 25.

EPAPHRAS.

Epaphroditus.—We can understand nothing more and we can go no further in spiritual things, than we are spiritually and practically taught of God.

Timotheus.—True, we may admonish and warn as much as we please, but it is not any degree of consideration paid to mere human advice, that will enable a man to make head against the strong tide of his waywardness, and beat down his corruptions or divert the strong currents of them into another channel ; it is the grace of God alone that can do this, and it is self-knowledge, which, for the most part, is gotten by painful experience, that can teach to any good purpose, this humiliating truth.

Epaphras.—No doubt your remark is generally true ; but pray what is the special bearing of it ?

Epaphroditus.—I am not insensible to the intense anxiety you feel, and the deep interest you take in Philemon, once so promising,—nor am I ignorant of the many cautions and salutary admonitions which from time to time you have given him.

Epaphras.—He has strong claims of friendship

upon me, and it is the property of a true friend to deal faithfully with a brother : we must admonish and reprove, comfort and exhort, without flattery and without partiality : for there is no one, however great his knowledge may be, however extensive his attainments, however multiplied his gifts and graces, however much he may have profited in the school of Christ, but sometimes has need of all the faithful offices of a Pastor, of a sincere friend and brother in the way of caution, admonition, and warning.

Epaphroditus.—I fear Philemon is going back.

Epaphras.—But tell me in what respects you discover declining piety in our absent friend.

Epaphroditus.—In the first place, I have discovered in him a growing fondness for mixed society, even for that very sort of society he at one time so much dreaded and professed to have abandoned ; sometimes he is to be found in close intercourse with Evangelicals as they are called : sometimes with Papists : sometimes with mere formalists : he has even been known to go latterly, where there have been scoffers, practical atheists, and those who for the sake of a better name, and because they join themselves to no sect or party, we may call “neuters.”

Now I would ask you, dear Sir, can any professing Christian, who aims at the least consistency, act so inconsistent ? can he keep company with Christ and his followers, and with his enemies ? can he hear God dishonoured, and his name blasphemed ? can he listen tamely and sit quietly when his disciples are scandalized, and his servants reviled and evil spoken of ? can he tolerate

that our holy religion should be turned into a ridicule and a by-word? into a taunt and proverb? and still be present and listen as a mere idle spectator!

In the next place, I have it on the best authority that he is no longer the timid, teachable, and retiring disciple he once was:—forwardness, a dogmatical spirit, and great officiousness, now characterize his temper, general conversation, as well as outward demeanour. A scene of this kind, I am creditably told, took place at a common friend's house, where there were older men, of much greater weight and standing in the Church; yet his dogmatism was much remarked upon: would you believe it? he even dared to censure Artemas for his low views of doctrine, Barnabas for his low standard of piety, and Clement for his legal spirit.

Speaking to Fortunatus, who is a truly pious man, he said, with an air of confidence, can the truth of God have done much for you, and you do so little for the sake of the truth, as it is in Jesus? how can the word have free course and be glorified, while the liberty and light, and the saving doctrines thereof, are so suppressed or shut out from your pulpit ministrations? who can be loosened from their chains, when the gospel is thus bound?

And when Gaius expressed his opinion that we require discriminating preaching in the present day, because there is more of head-knowledge than heart-grace; and because there is a flood of light which is correspondingly shallow; and that, therefore, men should be particular in their re-

marks, and go much on the inward witness of the Spirit, and outward evidences of a humble, and self-denying life.

What think you was the reply of Philemon? Do not trifle, Sir, exclaimed he, somewhat loud and rudely, either with your own soul or that of other men; if you would gladly convince your people of sin, why do you not first convince yourself of the sin of preaching such a *lean* gospel? I hate your milk-and-water preaching, your tinsel passes off for the gold of Ophir! your interpretations and expression of feelings, for the mind of God's spirit! I long to see all man's high imaginations pulled down; but he pulls nothing down, whatever you may think to the contrary, who runs down and utterly despises all your self-righteous schemes of getting an interest in Christ, and all your fallible tests and marks of grace: but he breaks down all, both in prospect and design, and that with a sacrilegious hand too, who trenches on the foundation of Christianity, who labors to beat down all that God has set up from everlasting, viz. :—the salvation of the elect and the damnation of the reprobate! those who hold your sentiments and promulgate them, whether ministers or people, are the alone workmen in the Lord's vineyard, that needeth to be ashamed. (2 Tim. ii. 15.)

In the third place, I have observed in him a growing tendency to turn every useful conversation into matter for disputation; instead of being a quiet listener, he is now an *arguer*, simple piety is not cherished; every topic must needs assume the shape of an argument; you can hardly

express a religious sentiment, or offer a religious opinion, but it must needs be questioned, canvassed, and brought to his own standard, and it is of no manner of use to vary the existing turn of thought, or to pass it by, or to give the lines of thought another and quite new direction, so entirely is his mind bent upon unprofitable disputation, rather than godly edifying, which is in Christ Jesus; (1 Tim. i. 4.) that he really renders *himself very offensive*, and *others*, in converse with him, *most uncomfortable*: and wherever I have observed this spirit of disputation—and a disposition of the soul to shift itself from simple piety, and to forego savoury discourse for idle talking, it has always proved, by after consequences, that the love of Christ was fast ebbing out.

I might add, without the least breach of charity, that I fear he is not so given to his religious duties as formerly; his private devotions are less frequent; the scriptures are less read; he is too much of a busy-bustling Christian; he seems wholly given up to the cultivation of *other men's vineyards*; his time is always wholly occupied in attending meetings, hearing new preachers, and forming new societies or associations; there is a round of official duty from morning to night.

I need not tell *you*, dear Sir, that in such a manner of life, there is much that leads to declension in religion; you soon discover the effects of popular favour, risings of unconscious pride, and self-importance, high thoughts of self, and low thoughts of others; you may soon see such a man, like many others in the present day, living, in a measure, on each other's good opinion, and

laying a flattering unction on the soul, by a comparison of themselves with each other; "but," says the Apostle, "comparing themselves with themselves, they are not wise." (2 Cor. x. 12.)

Timotheus.—If Philemon would compare his present with his former state, I doubt not, such a comparison would show him, pretty clearly, what spirit he is now of; it would also, (under God, produce the conviction, that he has not been advancing, but receding, both as it respects growth in grace, and the whole mystery of godliness.

Epaphroditus.—Painful and distressing as it has been to my feelings, to make these communications respecting him thus openly, yet I could not withhold them from you: my sole object, I trust, is to prevent his further mischief and misery: and it is not, I know my own heart, that secret spirit of scandalizing a brother in his absence; much less the propagating of groundless charges against him, which I abhor; but it is an earnest desire, under God, to see him brought back to his former state of mind, and an anxious and increasing solicitude which I truly feel for his present and eternal welfare.

Epaphras.—There is no surer mark of your real Christian love and faithful friendship for him, than the anxiety you feel for his salvation; let us, however, hope for the best; and believe that God's grace, may still preserve and keep him from falling; but how needful is the Psalmist's prayer in his behalf, "hold up my goings in thy paths, that my footsteps slip not." (Psalm xvii. 5.)

SECTION XXV.

REPENTING.

PHILEMON.—EPAPHRAS.

Philemon.—What, my dear Sir, do you understand by that passage of Scripture, “ Godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of.” (2 Cor. vii. 10.)

Epaphras.—I apprehend by it, that whenever there is a sorrowing *towards God*, it is not repented of *by God*; for he graciously accepts it; nor *by us*, for we shall ever have abundant cause to be thankful for it.

Philemon.—Oh, Sir! I find it an easy thing, comparatively, to confess sin; for it soothes the burdened conscience to do so; but it is a hard matter to repent of sin.

Epaphras.—It is a high privilege to taste the sweetness of godly sorrow, and this privilege is not enough thought of: we had deemed it a hard case, if the grace of repentance had never been offered us; harder still, if after we had fallen we had been rendered utterly incapable of repenting; and yet, what has been, might have been.

The angels that fell, lie under a moral incapacity to repent in the very nature of things: the reason is, because they have no new ground upon which they can alter their mind; they do not gain wisdom or additional information as we do; they know nothing of knowledge possessed through the various channels of reading and writing; ex-

ample, observation, and experience; what they know, they know correctly: they see things as they are, and they see them at once; and whatever they do, is not only in the full blaze of superior intelligence, but with deliberation and choice; they have no indistinctness of apprehension from ignorance within, and no temptation from without. Hence they can never have any additional source of information to alter their mind, and, therefore, in sinning, they committed, in the highest sense of the word, the *unpardonable* offence; and when, by transgression, they died the first, they died the second death at the same time!

Philemon.—How dreadful is their condition!

Epaphras.—And yet their condition, dreadful as it is, is irremediable; for as they could not rebel against God, from inward depravity, (there being no seeds of evil within them) nor sin from error of judgment; so they are utterly and hopelessly lost; because their sin was from *malice propense* against the Holy Ghost, and probably from a spirit of jealousy, because they could not bear to see a worm of the earth raised above themselves, and bearing the moral image of God!

Man, on the contrary, is a creature formed for repentance; what he sees, is as through a glass darkly; what he does, is done most imperfectly; what he believes at the time to be best, does not prove so, though he thinks so; his mental vision is often darkened by sin; his affections are captivated by lusts and strong passions; his heart is prone to go astray by the evil of his nature, and his whole frame, from within and from without,

is acted upon by a variety of untoward circumstances: hence every man has ground to alter his mind; and repentance is a change of mind.

Philemon.—Such a view encourages. Oh, that I could feel what and all I could wish! I mean compunction for actual sin, into which I have been betrayed.

Epaphras.—Would that you had listened to the voice of warning! Saving repentance, let me tell you, with all ministerial love, is far more than a mere temporary compunction for sin, or a transient remorse of conscience; it is the being inwardly afflicted and heavy laden with a sense of sin; it is the soul's sinking under its burden; it is the heart melting under deep and inmost sorrow.

Philemon.—May I ask whether all that have fallen into sin, must feel alike and equally deeply.

Epaphras.—The grace of repentance manifests itself in persons in the same circumstances very differently, and sometimes under different circumstances, very similarly: Lydia's heart was opened by grace, and wounded by contrition for sin, and healed under the same sermon; the hearers of Peter were alike pierced by the arrow of conviction; but the process of healing, was in all probability, very different: some, like the thief on the cross, are moved with the fear of God with one look, and receive the full assurance of salvation the next; while others are drawn to the very precipice of despair and never find comfort, but hang down their heads like a bulrush: (Isaiah lviii. 5.) but though the experience of repentant sinners varies, and God's dealings

towards them differ widely, yet all must be brought to feel heartfelt sorrow, when they have grieved the spirit of God, and sinned against their own soul: they must all be under the law, as their school-master; and all be made to feel its oppressive bondage; and it is only a feeling sense of the misery of sin, that constrains the soul cheerfully to take upon it the yoke of Christ.

Philemon.—I do now feel an inward abhorrence of sin, and loathe myself for it; would that I could repent in dust and ashes; but abhorrence of sin is one thing, and repentance another.

Epaphras.—It is even so, and you must be careful to distinguish between “the horror of sin,” and sin itself: “godly sorrow, and the sorrow that worketh death;” the horror of his sin, was so bitter to Judas, that it made him prefer death to life, and the torment of his guilty conscience was so great, that he could not bear his existence, and to rid himself of the feeling of remorse, he hanged himself; but had that traitor been moved by the grace of repentance, and loathed his sin in an evangelical way, surely he had not helped forward one enormous sin by another; if he had hated sin for itself, and on its own account, he had hated, above all things, *self-murder*, and therefore it is very important to distinguish between the remorse of a polluted and deeply guilty conscience, and abhorring the evil itself.

Philemon.—And this difference arises I perceive, from our being led or not led to repent in “an evangelical way.” O may I pursue this course, and may I take this thought away with me, whatever else I forget.

Epaphras.—And if we do seek pardoning mercy *evangelically*, we are sure to find mercy ; for it is God's own promise, (Matt. vii. 7.) and it is our privilege to expect its fulfilment, for all the promises of God in Christ are yea and amen. (2 Cor. i. 20.)

But we do not seek the pardoning mercy and returning favor of God necessarily when we seek it *sincerely*, for many seek sincerely, and yet very ignorantly and almost blasphemously ; but when we draw nigh to God according to the tenor of his gospel, and after the manner of his own appointment, when we seek God for pardon, with the price of pardon in our hands, when we claim liberty from our soul's oppression, and plead the cancelled debt of freedom—when we ask the grace of returning mercy on the plea of promises, and offer up the whole merit of Christ for entire satisfaction to justice, and our plenary redemption ; this let me assure you, is the great mystery of Godliness, and the great duty of every penitent Christian, and the high prerogative of a living and true faith.

Philemon.—But when I look at the character of that God whose goodness I have so shamefully abused, I am afraid : you know he hates sin, and is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity.

Epaphras.—To be sure, he is, and if he did not hate iniquity with a perfect hatred, what encouragement should you have to come before him in Christ's name, with a sense of sin for relief against it and deliverance from it ? it is because he hates it, that it is his gracious purpose to destroy it ; and he has the appointed ways and means of doing so, and his power is equal to his

hatred of it, and the moment *we hate our sins and plead Christ*, God looks at them no longer as ours, but as debts paid by Christ.

You remember the encouraging passage, “the reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me.” (Rom. xv. 3.) and when once the soul of the believer has closed with the Saviour, from that time there is a community of interests; there is a communion of evil things as well as of good: hence the very sins and infirmities of the whole church become chargeable on the Saviour, and if the question be asked, how can this be? the reply is at hand, it is just in the same way, as the debts of a wife are chargeable upon her husband, after the marriage-contract is signed and sealed. she is subject to no pecuniary arrests, the debts of her contracting fall on her husband and he pays them to the uttermost farthing: in the same spirit, and after the same manner does the Lord Christ act towards his people; he is the great husband of the church, all her debts which are her daily sins, are charged upon him: if the law threatens, if conscience accuses, if justice demands payment, it is the privilege of every one of his disciples to refer to him for payment; neither does he take it ill, or view it as something amiss, nor love you less for so doing; on the contrary, it is honouring him in his high office as Redeemer; it is setting our seal to his power and ability, both to heal and to save as the great Physician.

Philemon.—But if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth—

Epaphras.—There is, as we read, a sin unto

death, and that is the unpardonable sin; but none have so sinned since the time of our Lord, and consequently none are so rejected, as that they need conclude that they shall never again find mercy. (Psalm xxxii. 10.)

Philemon.—My feelings and my words are those of David: “pardon my sin for it is great,” and my desire is to fall into the hands of the Lord: for his mercies are great. (2 Sam. xxiv. 14.)

Epaphras.—It is indeed a great deep! it is so deep and fathomless that it covers and swallows up all the evil of all sin, (Psalm xcii. 5.) your sin appears in your eye what it is, yet in the eye of mercy, though in its nature the same, it assumes another aspect; I would thus illustrate what I mean, if you throw a pail of water over your room it seems like a little sea, but cast it into the ocean it seems as nothing: even so the least sin is in itself a great sin, and when it breaks out, if we are graciously awakened, we see it as a sea of iniquity, but when it is viewed in the depths of God’s mercy, it is instantly swallowed up and it never again appears.

Philemon.—You do indeed, my dear Sir, give me great hope of returning mercy, and I know that there is mercy with God that he may be feared.

Epaphras.—We must not permit Satan to gain an undue advantage over us; a real child of God may be overtaken with sin, and it is our duty to try to restore him in the spirit of meekness, (Gal. vi. 1.) yea, he may be defiled with many sins of weakness, infirmity, sudden temptation, and fall again and again into his former

frailties, and all the while, strange as it may seem, maintain a loving heart towards God, his passions may be wrought upon, while his heart all the while condemns!

David confesses that "multitudes of evils compassed him about: his iniquities had taken such hold upon him," (Psalm xl. 12.) and yet his heart in the main is right towards God, and St. Paul does the same, ("what I would that do I not,") and yet both were kept by the power of God unto salvation.

Think then I pray you upon the following reflections after my leaving you to-day.

The Mission of Christ. The Lord Christ was manifested to take away our sin, and do you think he has failed of his errand? He became our surety to bear the burden of our sins, and God has laid that burden upon him: "with his stripes we are healed."

The Reconciliation of God! God is fully reconciled by the atoning blood of Christ, and when any soul is taken into covenant with him, there is *not only all* sin pardoned which had been previously committed, but in that relation there is made a wise provision *for all infirmity and sin to come!*

Lastly, I would ask you, is it not a *great* mercy, that you have yet a *time* of mercy; that hell has not swallowed you up quite as it has done others, (Isaiah v. 14.) and that the grace of God has stirred you up to escape, that you may never come there, but find mercy while the day of mercy lasts.

SECTION XXVI.

MORTIFYING SIN.

PHILEMON.—EPAPHRAS.

Philemon.—How different is sin viewed as we are sinners or saints : as we are in the covenant of mercy or out of it : and how difficult is it to get right views of our own depravity ; surely there are depths of iniquity, as well as deep things of God.

Epaphras.—Nothing is more true : and of all lessons, the hardest is to know one's self,—when the Lord would give the whole Jewish nation a realizing view of their depravity, and when he would make them see the vileness of their hearts, he ceases to reason with them as heretofore ; he carries the prophet on the wings of the spirit, he brings him at once to the holy place, he introduces him into the temple, and causes him to descend into the chambers of iniquity, (Ezek. viii. 10.) and to observe the foul transactions there : and if, my dear friend, we would fully understand the depravity of our hearts, its filthiness, its defilements, and its impure imagery, we must go down with the torch of God's spirit in our hands, as it were, into the inmost chambers of the soul, and then, as in their case, we shall discover in ourselves, “ a cage of unclean birds,” and all manner of creeping things in the shape of lusts and passions, which we have served, and of which we have been the unconscious worshippers.

Philemon.—I feel sure there is no sin I am not at times tempted to commit; the more I strive against it, the more I seem to have to contend with, and the less I appear to make head against it; indeed, I almost despair of ever overcoming my evil nature.

Epaphras.—Never despair of victory through Christ. “I can do all things through Christ, which strengtheneth me,” says the Apostle, (Phil. iv. 13.) though you have been betrayed into some sin, there is still a Saviour,—and if you have wounded your peace, he is a physician, and remember always, there is a great difference in the character of offences committed against God, though the moral turpitude be the same; it makes all the difference whether we fall into sin through infirmity and surprisal, and in a sudden fit of passion, or whether we have done amiss and dealt wickedly, if not from choice, at least, with deliberation; deliberate sins are sins of reprobation, whereas, others are common to the best of men, (Rom. vii. 15.) and the Lord knows whereof we are made.

Philemon.—O! sir, it would give me joy beyond expression, were I able to mortify the besetting sin of my nature.

Epaphras.—The great means, under God, to mortify sin and to keep it down, is to hate it: we are sure to loathe what we hate, and to mortify that we cannot endure, and if you will but think again and again on the evil nature of all sin, that in one place in Scripture it is compared to a vomit, (Prov. xxvi. 11.) in another, to mire and dirt, (Isaiah lvii. 20.) in a third, to a sow wallowing

in the mire. (2 Peter ii. 22.) I am persuaded you will find, through mercy, a growing indisposition to commit any wilful sin.

Philemon.—I have the will, but want the ability to mortify my besetting sins, “the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.” (Matt. xxvi. 41.)

Epaphras.—The strongest resolution is nothing worth, if grace is wanting; the duty of self-mortification requires much grace, and the inward consciousness that you daily need it, should move you to earnest prayer, holy expostulation, and intense wrestling with God for its habitual exercise.

Philemon.—But why is it, dear Sir, that sin is not mortified, when it is pardoned by God? why are we so often permitted to fall into the same sin? was not this the case with many of the patriarchs, and prophets, and holy men of old? why are the godly thus permitted to become ungodly? is it not wonderful that Peter should fall again and again? that Abraham should be guilty of the very same sin to Abimelech, he had previously been guilty of among the Philistines? (Gen. xx. 13.) does not David confess, even after his election of God, and being elevated to the throne, that he had a way of living, which not only implies the *act* occasionally, but the *evil habit*: is not this surprising? Oh, why is it we are not sanctified when we are forgiven?

Epaphras.—God would have us know by painful experience, the malignity of sin, the evil of it may be mortified, but the being of it is never eradicated in this world, it resembles the phenix of old, it may be cut down, but ere long, it grows up again.

Philemon.—Of what use is it then to try to mortify sin and strive against it, seeing, do what we can, we retain the being of it within us, and are prone to sin, though not wilfully, yet continually.

Epaphras.—The difference is just this: either we must by the grace of God mortify it, or it will prove mortal to us; either you must kill your lusts or they will kill you, were your lust as near and dear to you as a right eye, were it as necessary and convenient as a right hand, though the loss of that evil possibly might be felt in your calling, your pleasures, and your profits, yet it must be cut off; better far to be spoiled of your guilty pleasures and lame in your business, than unsound in your life, and cursed in your soul!

Philemon.—It is indeed but too true, and I have found it so by painful appearance, that our unsanctified lusts hinder every duty to God, prayer in secret, hearing the word to profit, and reading the scriptures, and enjoying the means of grace and salvation, sinful lusts war against the soul, (Rom. viii. 13.) and therefore, unless as you have justly said, we are able to fight against them, they will fight against us; either we must slay them, or they us, either we must lead them captive, or they will captivate us, pierce us through with many a sorrow, and finally drown our souls in perdition.

Epaphras.—How glad am I to hear you express such abhorrence of sin.

Philemon.—I do now look upon every sin as I do upon a tyrant, the more servilely you submit to him, the more tyrannical he grows; even so

the more any sin is indulged, the more authority it will exercise over you; only once yield to any darling lust and let loose restraints, and it soon brings body and soul into the most oppressive servitude.

But though I know these things and my conscience testifies of their truth, still what I hate I am prone to do: I can truly say with St. Paul, that "I delight in the law of God after the inward man:" but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members, (Rom. vii. 22, 23.) and how to gain the mastery I know not. "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

Epaphras.—And can you not add, I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Rom. vii. 25.)

Philemon.—Is it proper to couple thanksgiving with self-mortification? what say you, dear Sir, of natural fastings and humiliations as a means of mortification?

Epaphras.—Too frequently have they been like the ancient Saturnalia, a season for nocturnal riot and revelry; how often have professing Christians, during solemn fasts of their church, thrown the reins of licentiousness on the neck of their lusts and tried by every species of outward temptation, to revive the dying organs of intemperance and gluttony, and how many are there who keep holydays by excesses, and wear out their bodies by the lustings of their sensual spirits, add bitterness to their bitter cup, weight to their

crosses, and the damnation of hell to their never-dying souls?

Philemon.—But what is your view of Popish mortifications during the season of Lent?

Epaphras.—They may refuse all animal food during that period, and withhold all superfluities from themselves in every way, and yet all the while only be stirring up carnal desires and earthly appetites by such denials; they may yield to their voluntary and self-imposed fastings, all the authority and deference due to a divine law, and yet defeat the very spirit of the law by their self-righteous methods of keeping it; they may impose the duty on themselves, and break it in the very act of performing it!

Philemon.—This being the case pray put me in the right way of overcoming every unmortified sin.

Epaphras.—Give diligent heed to the following advice.

Grow in grace. There is no better way to mortify sin than growth in grace: the tide of corruption and of holiness never run together, or at the same time; they are opposite currents; ever bear in mind, therefore, that you must either daily increase and grow strong in faith, or else decrease and grow weak in faith, you are every day getting better or every day worse, you can never be at one stay; like the water of the sea, if it does not flow, it ebbs, or like the life of man, if it increases not in vigour, it gradually decays; aim at progression in piety and you will secure the great object you have in view.

Use all the means of grace, viz. :—

Private prayer. The spirit of supplication forms part of the believer's armour, (Eph. vi. 18.) the prayers of Moses prevailed more than the sword of Joshua, and more than all the ammunition and accoutrements of war, with which he was provided against the Amalekites; (Exod. xvii. 11.) you have nothing to fear as regards the outward practice, if you have the grace of prayer as an inward affection, but how can you overcome and cease from any evil, if you never retain any love of this duty in the heart?

Public worship. It is not enough to serve God alone by ourselves, to pray in secret, or to cultivate piety in our hearts alone; you must discharge your duty to God, frequent his house of prayer, enjoy his temple service, and while you thus use the public means of grace, you should hang upon the Lord of the means, and like an infant upon its mother's breasts draw sweetness, comfort, and nourishment from them.

And lastly, in order to mortify sin, "be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might," remember, there is nothing gotten by departing from Christ: it is always going from better to worse whenever you go from him, "what fruit," says the Apostle, "had you in those things whereof ye are now ashamed." O my soul! shall you ever have more pleasure in a lust than in your God, more delight in sin than in your Saviour, who is the glory of heaven, the praise of angels, and the salvation of unnumbered worlds?

SECTION XXVII.

GREAT MISGIVINGS.

PHILEMON.—TIMOTHEUS.

Philemon.—Notwithstanding all the kindness I have experienced, at the hands of one who has always most tenderly watched over my best interest, and his present desire under God, to comfort my wounded spirit, the remembrance of my past sin and ingratitude perpetually returns upon me, and renders my state, if possible, less hopeful than ever.

Timotheus.—I am glad to hear you thus speak of your absent friend and pastor: truly he deserves well of you, for his faithfulness in exhorting you, his diligence in instructing you, and his anxiety and prayer for keeping you from evil, have been unwearied; moreover, he has an additional title to your respect, for his office and for his work's sake; and it is very blessed when there is the same affection between pastor and people, which there ought to be between father and son—parent and children.

Philemon.—Though I have forfeited his favor, made shipwreck of a good name, and a good conscience likewise, yet the idea of parental feeling inspires me with hope.

Timotheus.—Beware how you lean on an arm of flesh; remember you are not without knowledge.

Philemon.—But if a man has all the knowledge

in the world what good would it do him, or what use is it to him without a saving knowledge of Christ, we may rest for a time in other's good opinion of us, we may lay the flattering unction upon our soul, that they hope and speak, and are persuaded well of us ; but, what ! if there is the inward consciousness—an inward monitor—what ! if our heart condemns, and if the voice of conscience speaks louder than the loudest clap of thunder !

Timotheus.—Perhaps you mistake the real nature of, I do not say your past, but present discomfort, who knows whether it may not originate in some mistaken view of yourself or of the freeness and fulness of gospel truth ? Nothing is more certain than that the Lord leads his servants to heaven by different routes, but——

Philemon.—The result is the same.

Though the Lord does bring men near to himself by means and ways sometimes the most unlikely ; does he ever bring them to heaven through the very gates of hell ? does he ever lead them to immortality through the sea of their own corruptions ?

When you have answered these questions, you can enter into my feelings.

Timotheus.—Sure I am that whom the Lord would comfort, he terrifies, and when he would raise up, he casts down, and when he would revive, he usually mortifies, and whomsoever he truly exhorts, he first makes low.

Philemon.—What think you then is the source of my present misery ?

Timotheus.—I think that our spiritual misery frequently arises from other sources, than those we suspect ; the very same sort of process we see going on in nature a man often experiences in his own soul ; the well-head of our misery is often so far from what we conceive it to be, and in our ignorance believe it to be, that it is quite the reverse.

Philemon.—Will you favor me with more explanation ?

Timotheus.—My meaning I can illustrate after this fashion ; when a child is very young, the parent watches over it with extreme tenderness : it knows not its own weakness, because it experiences sensible aid every moment, but when it grows older and stronger, it is left, to all outward appearance, more to itself, not that it is less dear to its parents or less loved, but only by its own increasing growth, it needs less sensibly their guardian care. May I not venture to hope that this is your situation ; when you were young in divine things your heavenly Father was good and gracious and very tender of you, he gave you very many tokens of his care and watchfulness ; these you will remember, but the *cause*, viz.—your own weakness you forget, and hence possibly your present sense of discomfort ; you are without the sensible helps you once had, but the reason is because you no longer need them.

Philemon.—Would that my present sorrow were traceable to no other source : but I have sinned as you well know, and all sin is most odious in itself, most loathsome in the eyes of

God, and destructive of all comfort to the soul, and in my case, it has been greatly aggravated by circumstances.

Timotheus.—There is, however, one redeeming quality in your case; *your open and ingenuous confession.*

Philemon.—And where would be the use of concealment? the Lord sooner or later will trace up all evil to its source; and though now I might have shifted the sin from my own shoulders, or even permitted it to be charged on others, yet the time is coming, when the complete exposure must only have ended the more in my own confusion; for while the immediate agent in any sin shall not be overlooked at the coming of Christ, the prime mover, and original instigator shall feel the fullest weight of God's righteous indignation; you have an instance of this in our first parents, though neither of them goes unpunished; yet when the transgression was traced up to its proper source and author, the punishment fell the heaviest where it was most deserving: another instance you have in David, though it was the hand of the Amorite that killed Uriah, the Hittite; though it was Joab that set him in the forefront of the battle, yet God, by Nathan, soon made bare the well-spring of the whole plot; "Nathan said unto David, thou art the man;" and "the sword never departed from his house." A third instance of the impossibility of hiding our sin, and the true source of it, when God, in his providence, is pleased to reveal it, occurs in the history of Ahab; that wicked prince, to all outward appearance, had no

part in the death of Naboth; Jezebel writes letters of accusation against him; men of Belial convey them to the elders of the city; they are signed in the king's name, and sealed with his seal; false witnesses are suborned for the purpose, yet, how does the spirit of God address Ahab: "hast thou killed, and also taken possession?" and hence seeing there can be no subterfuge, or suppression of guilt hereafter; it may argue grace, but it shows no merit to make an open and candid acknowledgment.

Timotheus.—Would that all sinners were equally sensible of sin, and equally open in confessing it: then one might cherish hope; but alas! the guilt and fearful demerit of sin is extenuated by those who know not the malignant nature of sin, and dread not its consequences; people of the world endeavour to gild over the ghastly image of iniquity; they try to blanch away all the foulness and filthiness of it; among themselves, they speak of sins, as you would speak of little insignificant moats in the atmosphere, and if they cannot approve them, or altogether sanction the profane vices of the age in which we live, they will soften down their enormity, by gentle phrases, or slang terms; thus they will speak of fornication, as a frailty of youth; of adulterers, as men of the world, &c.

Philemon.—But, if I may interrupt you, my dear Sir, however they may account of sin, or whatever they may call it, they will find this lessening of it, the way to increase it; and such a diminishing of it in words, as you describe, only making it greater in reality.

I can only confess to you my own misery—it seems almost greater than I can bear : it follows me whithersoever I go ; it haunts me with births of evil thoughts continually ; with gripings of conscience ; with sense of shame ; with the agony of misery, and with the horrors of hell : these sensations are worse than death. “ The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity ; but a wounded spirit who can bear ? ”

Though I do not desire a personal interview with my beloved pastor, still I long to have his counsel, advice, and experience, and cannot this be obtained through the medium of correspondence ?

Timotheus.—How grievous is the sin of backsliding.

Philemon.—O ! Sir, I have shown others the way to heaven, and now I have turned out of the way myself ; I have long been teaching others according to my ability, and yet I have not taught myself. I have stirred up others to go forward, and have gone backward myself ; I have been the means of kindling zeal in the minds of others ; alas ! now, my own soul, is as cold, and insensible, as the regions of the grave.

Timotheus.—The falls and sins of our brethren are not to be magnified ; their sins are to be hated and lamented ; themselves are to be pitied ; and when there is godly sorrow, we must try to bind up the wound ; we must not make the most, or worst, or speak the hardest of their case ; but act the part of a skilful physician, who only probes to heal ; and gives pain that he may effect a cure.

Philemon.—I thank you much for your friendly advice, but my desire is to hear from one, who, under God, led me first into the narrow way; should you see him shortly, urge on him my anxious request; the topics on which I long for information are as follow:—

On Backsliding.

1.—Its commencement in the soul.

2.—Its afflictive consequences.

3.—Its subjection to an overruling providence.

4.—Its nature as distinguished from apostacy.

5.—The difficulty and means of recovery.

Timotheus.—God willing, I will communicate your desire to him, and also describe your state of mind in the best way I can; your suspense will be short; for I doubt not, he will forward to you, in his own hand-writing, suitable and satisfactory answers to all your enquiries.

SECTION XXVIII.

BACKSLIDING.

ITS COMMENCEMENT IN THE SOUL.

The queries you have put to me, respecting Philemon, I am very ready, under God's blessing and guidance, to do my endeavour to answer; you must be aware, however, that it is often no easy matter to define the precise occasion of many things; the spirit of religious decay partakes of this character; the evil itself is obvious, and so is the source whence it springs; but the rising symptoms, the precise point of time when it begins, and the proximate causes whereby it makes its appearance; these are for the most part hidden from the backslider himself, and he often labours, for a great while, under the inroads of an insidious disease, of which he has no suspicions, nor indeed any inward consciousness.

All sin, and especially that of religious declension, appears little or nothing at first; hence its deceitfulness; it grows gradually, and shows itself in its true colours afterwards. If any backslider were told beforehand of what he was capable, or of the sins that he might afterwards commit, probably he would exclaim in the language of Hazeel, "What! is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?" (2 Kings viii. 13.) So little are any of us acquainted with ourselves, and the depth of our iniquity, that we shrink back with horror and remorse of conscience, at the bare

mention of crimes, into which we might afterwards be plunged by the sudden impulse of passion, the force of temptation, and favouring circumstances; of this we have a signal instance in the case of Solomon, and his example may serve for an apt illustration: there was a time in the history of that great man, when he seemed to dread nothing so much as idolatry; he was afraid of that sin above all others, he would not suffer his own wife, (the daughter of Pharaoh,) to dwell in the house of David, the king of Israel, (2 Chron. viii. 11.) and why? he was apprehensive lest himself, or his people should follow after strange gods, and because the places were holy, whereunto the ark of the Lord had come; such reverence had he at that time for the name of Jehovah, and such respect for the ark, the mercy-seat, the temple-service, and all the ordinances of divine worship; but Solomon did not perceive that the evil was already begun; the seed of idolatry was sown in his heart, the moment he formed an alliance with an idol-worshipper, and the sequel of his history proves how the seed thus sown, spread apace, "for Solomon went after Ashtoreth, the goddess of the Zidonians, and after Milcom, the abomination of the Ammonites. (1 Kings xi. 5.)

Undoubtedly the seat of this fearful disease is in the heart, and its first symptoms will be found in its deceitful workings: indeed this, as also every other species of evil, commences always with the world within, it takes its rise in the soul, and begins with a secret apostacy in the heart, and in the affections from God—and this deteri-

orating process is often going on a great length of time before it breaks out, and appears openly in the life, and so blinded are we by Satan, so depraved and full of self-love, that not unfrequently, even with the secret consciousness of declension within, we can live in the practical disbelief of it; we can so far conceal from ourselves our real condition, as to allay all immediate fears, and it is only when the spirit of decay within is made to stare us in the face by some gross act of delinquency, that we begin to suspect its existence, and if that sin is undiscovered, and we are withheld from exposure—even then, such is the blindness and infatuation of man, that we are often disposed to look on it, rather as the result of unfavourable circumstances, than as a disease deeply-rooted within, and preying upon the very vitals of the renewed soul.

Of particular cases and individual instances of backsliding, it may as I have already observed, be very difficult to fix the precise data: it does set out in so little and so unostentatious a way, that it is hardly discernible—it eludes the discriminating eye of the keenest observer; but when declension assumes a more public and national shape, there is no difficulty whatever in ascertaining the period of its commencement.

It is deserving of remark, that backsliding on a broad scale, runs as far back as the days of Enoch, *then* we are told, men began to call on the name of the Lord, or, as the margin has it, *call themselves* by the name of the Lord; (Gen. iv. 26.) in other words, all men began then to make a profession of religion: *that* was the age of *religious formality*, and *backsliding likewise*:

their calling on the name of the Lord, is there meant in a profane sense: in the days of Enos, whose family was influential, and whose embracing of true religion, rendered religion itself fashionable, many were so taken with it, that they conformed in the way of accommodation; they called on the name of Jehovah, but it was profanely, hypocritically, and as Ezekiel has expressed it, using the same word, and in the same sense, *they polluted it.* (Ezek. xxxix. 7.) This is no uncommon occurrence, for wherever there are a few influential in station, who receive the truth of God in the love of it; they are sure to draw others along with them into outward conformity, and hence, wherever there is a knot of godly persons, there is usually a multitude of hypocrites, formalists, and high sounding professors. Indeed it may be put down as a sort of axiom in religion, that wherever real religion spreads, formality spreads likewise, and it is the contact of real religion with this pretence of it, that exposes true believers to so much danger: suspicion is often lulled to sleep under such circumstances; Satan himself assumes another shape! his nature, however, remains the same, and it is the more malignant, the less it seems to partake of the character of malignity; the odium also of worldly compliance is in such cases greatly abated, if not quite taken away, profession becomes the order of the day, and an outward show, thought decent and respectable.

Hence, the people of God have always had less to fear from open enemies, than from the professed friends of their most holy faith.

Never was there a time of greater danger

than the present; the world, depend upon it, is at its old game, and Satan also is at his old work: where he cannot prevent the spread of true piety, he will' try to neutralize it, by a national conformity.

Wherever the Lord has living temples, he will have painted sepulchres, and the condition of the professing world in the times of Noah, is to a great extent, the position and condition of the world now, nations of professors, and if the truth were told, nations of formalists likewise.

Would indeed, my dear Sir, we could all see the evil of the condition in which we now are, whether that evil be individual, as in the instance to which I shall hereafter have occasion to address myself, or whether it be of a more public nature. Would that the solemn thought were more deeply impressed upon all our minds—that religion is not profession, but possession—it is not the receiving of a name, but the formation of the soul after the image of Christ, not the outward calling, which only leads to the naming of Jehovah with the lips, which is pollution and profaneness; the sin of formality was punished in the old world with the waters of a flood, it will be visited in the new, with a flood of fire. Similar delinquency can anticipate no less than sameness of punishment.

SECTION XXIX.

ITS AFFLICTIVE CONSEQUENCES.

Some persons never derive any profit from all they suffer, they reap no advantage from their tribulations and crosses in this life, nor indeed, from any of those numerous dispensations with which God, in his providence, permits them to be exercised. The reprobate is a man of this description: he only becomes more daring in his apostacy—his heart more steeled against convictions, the more he feels the misery of his own misdoings. It is far otherwise with the temporary backslider; he derives much instruction in the school of affliction,—he is taught many a lesson there, which probably, he had never learned elsewhere, and which no other discipline had ever taught him: in this one respect, he resembles his great Lord and master, “who learned obedience by the things which he suffered:” in all his sufferings, *He* derived benefit to himself: *He* profited by his being buffeted and spit upon: by his agony and bloody-sweat, by his cross and passion; there was no trial that befell *Him* as man, and no sea of trouble that he waded through as our surety,—but he gained a vast accession of benefit from them; his perfect obedience depended upon the taste and experience he had of the bitterness of sin in his sufferings. (Heb. v. 8.)

In the case of all backsliders, one source of

their suffering arises out of their ignorance : they look upon their misery as punishments of God which fall upon the wicked, and not as chastisements which come from the hand of a tender and compassionate father, who pities, whilst he chastises ; for though the difference between the two may, in effect, seem little to the sufferer, yet in the eye of God, it is inconceivably great. The apostate is punished for his offences, in like manner, with those who are to be condemned with the world ; the backslider is chastised, as a son by his parent, as those were, who are now in heaven, and eternally saved ; his sins are corrected as diseases of the soul, his very decay in religion, and his misery, his backsliding, and the very troubles into which he has brought himself, whether they refer to body or soul, spirit or estate, those very troubles are to be regarded as wholesome medicines ; they come not out of the fulness of God's wrath, nor are they the results of retributive justice in the way of revenge ; they are the fruits of real mercy towards the soul, and blessings in disguise, and not without any mixture of wrath.

Still, while I would deal thus tenderly with our friend, and try to put the best construction upon your statements respecting him, I must also deal faithfully with him, for he cannot be made to think too humbly of himself, or too strongly of his sin ; he is a man of no ordinary calibre, and his standing in the church only renders his fall the more conspicuous in itself, and more pernicious in its tendency. I am sure he will not think the less of me, for thus speaking home ;

would he not *thank* a person, who would tell him of a spot of filth *on his garments*, and shall he take it *amiss* when a faithful friend shows him, as in a mirror, the foul spots *on his soul*? any one of which, from its evil nature and magnitude, more soils and pollutes, than all earthly blemishes put together: it is the misery of some persons, who are evidently declining in their Christian course, that they want a faithful friend; they have no one who have the will or spiritual daring to reprove them, they have only to follow their present lukewarm course, for aught others care for them, till, unheeded and unreprieved, they may step into the very pit of destruction; from such pretended friends and advisers, I trust Philemon may ever be preserved.

All the evil effects which arise out of the backsliding of our friend, are known only to God; I can only enumerate a few of the most obvious; these, however, may, under God, put the sins and transgressions of believers in a true light.

In regard to God himself, the sins and falls of the saints are most odious. He hates iniquity in all, but it is the more abominable the nearer it comes to him, hence when any of his people by their conduct make it appear, that they deem nothing more worthy their forsaking than their Saviour, and everything more worthy than keeping the divine image; he speaks of them in terms of the utmost contempt, and compares them to things the most loathsome and polluted; (2 Peter ii. 22.) the very thought that God thus thinks of all backsliders, is enough to humble our friend in the dust, and to lay him low under the foot of his

own spiritual pride; if he reflect moreover, of what his former elevation in the favour of God was, and of what his present degradation now is, what multitudes of feelings must rush into his mind! if he ask, what heart could be so base as to sin wilfully against so many mercies? he has only to lay his hand upon his own; he need only consider what the love of the Lord has been towards him all the days of his life, enough of love, not merely to keep the feet of a saint, but almost to break the heart of a devil; yet, when the suitable temptation offers, he turns aside as a broken bow, and O! the black ingratitude!

In regard to the Church of God, it is impossible to describe the present injury; and who can tell its ultimate bad effects? A time-serving and a gain-saying world is emboldened in sin; it takes courage by the falls of the people of God; the young christian has a stone of stumbling thrown in his way, the weak believer is scandalized, old christians become a very scorn, and like so many outcasts and hypocrites, the hearts of the godly are wounded, the mouths of the wicked are opened, and the feet of the impious are hardened in the paths of iniquity; who can tell the number, or describe the malignity of those opprobrious epithets and hard words that our friend has caused to fall on the people of God? Can he not picture to himself the scoffer, who will draw out his tongue of ridicule—the sceptic, who is launching out against him his atheistical sarcasms? Can you not conceive their running under the fostering wing of the enemies of the gospel, and adding

strength every moment to the open enemies of Christ, and the free-grace of God?

In regard to professed friends, who can adequately paint the bitterness of their evil speaking and enmity? Here, believe me, our unhappy friend has in store a sad trial! Some of his quondam friends will now become his open enemies; others will act towards him as if their former friendship were now to be wholly forgotten; many of them will look at him with an eye of suspicion, others, with an eye of flesh and a carnal mind, may think he ought to be forgotten, and his very name buried in the grave of oblivion, and thus, by their very manner, and inuendoes, and silence, will they leave others to surmise many things which they know to be untrue, and to conjecture even what need never have been surmised—while a certain class will fill up the measure of his bitter cup, by speaking of him privately, or perhaps publicly, or even among some of his relatives, in language the most insinuating, instead of attempting to heal the breach, and doing the part of a good physician, who if he use the knife at all, only uses it that he may heal.

In regard to himself, you may also infer that these three evils at least will assuredly befall him, and the Lord alone knows how long it may be, ere he, through mercy, recover from any one of them.

1. *The loss of his former reputation:* a true saint of God may often suffer unjustly; he may suffer the sacrifice of all that is near and dear to him; the jealous may be envious of him; his

very elevation may become a sore trial to him : the man of a narrow mind may carp at him, and the wicked may make things here, a mark to shoot at him ; false professors may defame him, and some of the giddy may look shy at him, but such a man has nothing to fear ; God will undertake the protection and preservation of him, and no earthly power or malignity shall take away either the one or the other ; but where there is open sin, open shame is the just recompence ; the harvest in any such instance is answerable to the seed-time ; our friend will assuredly reap as he has sown.

2. *Loss of a good conscience* : and this wounded conscience, gnawing, and uttering its condemnation against him continually, he will have to bear the shame of seeing others religious, and to feel the inward conviction of being irreligious himself, of seeing and believing others godly, and to feel himself without godliness, seeing many graces showing in his brethren and without any in himself.

3. And what is still more painful to be borne is, the *loss of all his comforts*. The expression of his inmost soul will now be, “ Before I went wrong I was happy in God, the ways of religion were ways of pleasantness and peace ; I had free access to a throne of grace ; I could approach with humble boldness my God ; I could pour out my soul in fervent prayer and supplication before him ; such a place, such a church, such a minister, such a sermon, could all, if they had the power, bear witness to my inward peace of mind, and joy unspeakable. Now, alas ! I may come to

ordinances, but I return dead and empty-handed; the windows of heaven are shut, and I experience no enlargement of soul."

In a word, our friend has little else to experience, than a fearful looking for of judgment, and fiery indignation; he possesses the fear that has torment: not such as is in hell, but such as is similar in kind, though not in measure. The spirit of a man may sustain his infirmity, but a wounded spirit who can bear? it fills a man with himself; his evil spirit flies inward: his heart experiences the remorse of his own conscience, and his eye beholds nothing but his own corrupt image, and these, though some of the ordinary effects of backsliding, are neither the worst, nor the severest.

SECTION XXX.

ITS SUBJECTION TO THE OVERRULING HAND OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE.

The doctrine of a special providence in disposing of all events, whether good or evil, is of great importance; it forms a fundamental truth in our holy religion; it is the strong pillar of the believer's faith, it is the cardinal point in Christian experience, and contains one main ground of practical godliness.

Indeed, till we have given to this doctrine, not a cold assent of the head, but a cordial reception in the heart, it will be impossible for us to live as we ought in any condition, and specially in a scene so shifting as the present; we may content ourselves for a while, but we have no lasting or solid basis whereon to rest; we can never be thankful for present mercies, nor be patient under any troubles, nor cherish a scriptural hope of deliverance out of them.

The great Apostle of the Gentiles has often recourse to the doctrine of a special providence, when he would comfort the people of God under trial; this is one of the topics he usually insists upon; he takes care to assure them that the pressure of afflictions, of whatever sort, will not ultimately prove hindrances, but if sanctified, help forward their salvation; the scope of argument of which he makes use, (Rom. viii. 28.) is of the greatest possible latitude; he there asserts

in broad language that, "all things shall work together for good to them that love God,—to them that are the called according to his purpose."

Some have made great objections, as you are aware, to so sweeping a declaration. The sceptic vents his venom against it as usual; he asserts, with daring effrontery, that such a notion of an overruling providence, puts an end to all human responsibility, "for if God," says he, "works in all, and overrules all things, then it matters not what we do, good or evil, for all must be overruled and come right at last; the secret purpose of God must be carried out into effect, and his revealed will must be most fully accomplished." And these assertions are quite true, but the inference drawn from them is most false; they are based on his own corruptions, and only supported by his own vile sophistry; for as there is no necessary connexion between the Creator and the creature, I mean, God might have been without an intelligent creation for ever, and yet have been God blessed for ever; and hence his creatures may be created at liberty, not merely to act without God, but against his will; and yet though thus acting, they may do most perversely, still their actions may be disposed of most mercifully, for how often do men mean one thing, and God brings another to pass? How often do they pursue wicked schemes, and yet how often are they so far frustrated, that something quite different from their intentions is the result!

The infidel also, who maintains in words a heartless morality, and who opposes the taper of his own bewildered reason, to the pure and steady

lamp of God's revelation, cannot bear this view of divine Providence; the doctrine is most obnoxious to him; in his conception it is a lowering of the divine character thus to interfere in the littleness of man; he supports his notions in a most plausible way, he exclaims with an air of triumph, "if God rules all specially, then how is it there is so much sin, disorder, and confusion in the world? how is it evil is so rampant? bad men prosper, and the good go to the bottom, or to the wall?" He forgets, or rather the thought never entered his head, that though in this world, and to the limited eye of the creature, there may appear much of disorder, there is no disorder and no confusion with respect to God; all that is apparently irregular, respects only ourselves; with God there is the greatest harmony possible, and that which we see to be deformed and misshapen, as it were, is among the all things to work out, one day, what shall prove the most beautiful and glorious.

The practical atheist also, (I say practical, for there are none intellectually.) "The fool says in his heart (in the bad, corrupt, fleshy part of him, not in his understanding and intellect), there is no God;" (Prov. xiv. 1.) but the practical atheist, he who would fain reduce all to blind chance, spurns the idea of a special providence, he will argue the point stiffly as he thinks, he will maintain stoutly that if all comes to pass by the unchangeable will of God, then there is nothing done but from a blind necessity, the liberty of action is entirely taken away, and the freedom of the human will is utterly at an end; but this

is by no means an impartial statement of the case, for though God overrules all things in the course of his providence, he appoints human means for their accomplishment, and it is a great piece of impiety, and shows great self-ignorance of the whole subject, to separate the providence of God from the endeavour of men.

Rebecca knew well how the special providence of God depended upon, and would work with human agency, for though she had it from the mouth of God, that Jacob should be the father of many nations, and consequently that he would not fall by the hands of Esau, still did she tempt God? did she presume on providence? did she sit still, fold her arms and do nothing? did she not act as if all depended on her exertions? did she not employ every means for his safety, and use every persuasion and entreaty to save his life?

On the whole then, you perceive, that the objections made to a special providence, are only worthy of those who make them; the doctrine is very comforting in itself, and most true; and though a question may arise as to its extent, and comprehensiveness (*viz.* what things are included, and what excluded,) still I am inclined to think, that this doctrine reaches farther than we are apt to believe. I will not go so far as to say with Augustine, that the sins of men are among the all things to work together for good; that assertion, however true in itself, might prove a dangerous proposition to some, it might appear like putting a premium on vice to others, and it might seem like an undervaluing of moral virtue to all;

neither would I agree with the Antinomian, that the permission of sin will be overruled for a greater good, than sin itself is an evil; still I believe, that many of the sins, and slips, and falls of the godly, have been so overruled, that God has received more glory; the riches of grace have been more magnified, and they themselves, by humiliation and self-abasement, have become better men, and better christians, than if they had been holden up, and had never been permitted to fall into any gross sin whatever.

It ought to be sufficient for my purpose that the Bible declares this, and, "thus saith the Lord," ought to be all authority with every one of his creatures; but instances of the affairs of man being so overruled are in great abundance, and they confirm and establish a doctrine which the Scriptures plainly reveal. I might refer you to many of the old patriarchs for illustration of this remark, but we have two well-known instances of meditated evil overruled for good in the cases of Job and Onesimus; was there ever more evil centred against any one than against Job? were there ever more engines, or wheels at work to run over him, and crush him? were there ever more workers of mischief to lay waste his comforts? to destroy his children? to kill his servants? to consume his substance? to wound his body? and to pain his soul? yet, what was the result? God blessed Job in his latter end, more than in the beginning. (Job xlii. 12.)

And in the case of Onesimus, who was a villain and a robber of no common character; yet see the special providence of God respecting him;

by running away from his master, he came to Rome, by coming to Rome, he falls in with St. Paul, and by falling in with St. Paul, he falls in with the gospel, and the gospel becomes to him, the power of God unto salvation.

Afflictions, you know, are said to be God's strange work, but effects such as these are strangest of all, where by his unseen hand, he thus, in rich mercy, brings good out of evil, holiness out of sin, and life out of death!

I do not assert, for the assertion could not be borne out, that evil things in themselves have a good tendency, or can even work together, *independently*, for good—this would be giving to vice, what does not belong even to virtue, and to dead matter, what is not properly in living men; but where the believer's falls and sins are so made to work together for his good, it arises from another process, widely different from the working and tendency of the things themselves, the allusion is to chemistry, where opposite things meet, and where bitter and sweet, wholesome and deleterious, work together for the good of the whole system, the constitution is thus improved, and the patient is restored to health.

It is, therefore, only when the grace of God is in the heart of the believer, that we may venture to hope for such a result; the grace of God working in and through our corruptions, may bring out a good result; the backslider is put in possession of himself, and the knowledge of self is second only to the knowledge of God, the crest of pride falls, the unrighteousness of all his past righteousnesses is clearly seen, sin is now loathed, and vanity and all boasting for ever excluded, the

body of sin is crucified, the soul is quickened and saved.

Having thus discussed the subject of God's special providence, as it bears in the case of our friend; I would now urge his own individual consideration of it more in detail, and meanwhile, let him take the comfort of that passage in Romans to which I have alluded, and rest assured, there is a special providence still watching over him; the Lord's eye is upon him for good, and whether he can believe it or not at present, still let him know that the whole universe, from the highest heaven down to the centre of the lowest earth, is the subject of the great doctrine of which I speak; God is working in and by, and through, and below, and above all things; he is disposing of them *all*, by wisdom that is unerring, by mercy that is fathomless, and by power that is infinite, and, whether they be things with or without life, endowed with reason or bereft of reason, animate or inanimate, general or particular—beings good or evil, angels or devils—properties good or bad—*all, all* are ruled and directed as the wisest means to the best end!

The words "chance, accident," &c. are only to be found on the lips and in the phraseology of Gentile nations, who know not God, or are used by nominal christians, who only abuse the name they use—but the Bible christian believes that the providence of God is not only universal, but so minute and particular, that not the least good or evil can occur without the divine will and permission, without the overruling hand which is omnipotent, and omniscient eye which can guide all things to his own glory!

SECTION XXXI.

ITS NATURE, AS DISTINGUISHED FROM APOSTACY.

The difference between a partial decay in religion and a final apostacy is immeasurably great, the result, at the very outset, is known only to God; all things are always in the present tense to him, they are only future to our imperfections; we are near-sighted beings, we have no notion how things may turn out at last, we see at best as through a glass darkly; God sees clearly the ending, from the beginning, and he knows full well whether the just step in religious declension, shall end in utter destruction, or in a merciful recovery.

There are, however, some features in both these cases, whereby we may be led to form a tolerable judgment; and as our friend is most anxious for information, I shall do my best in relation to both of these, to throw out a few hints, which under divine teaching, I trust may serve to guide him in his enquiries, and may enable him to follow them out more in detail, to apply them to his own conscience before God, and to test his present principles and state of feeling by them, to which exercise he is quite equal, as he is an enlightened Christian, for the power of discrimination is a gift of the spirit, and this spirit of discrimination often remains a long time, even when

grace in its lively exercise in the soul is quite extinguished.

It is ever to be borne in mind in all instances of departure from God, whether for a season or for ever, that there is none to blame but ourselves: when God brings us within the hearing of the joyful sound of the gospel, he was *first* in love to our souls, and whenever he departs, the withdrawing always begins on *our* side; we always begin first with God, in our backsliding and apostacy, before he begins with us in our rejection, and, generally speaking, such is the mercy of God, that no evil is thus first permitted to befall us without many previous warnings, for, as in nature, so with respect to ourselves, though it be the last stroke that fetches down the tree, yet it must ever be remembered, that the stem has been greatly weakened by many previous strokes, and so it is with great declensions in religion, it is not the last act, but much of former unfaithfulness, that has opened and paved the way to present ruin.

Whatever be the sin into which our friend may have fallen, his state before God appears more or less promising as his mind was more or less enlisted in the transgression: sins of deliberation are sins of reprobation; a wilful and deliberate transgressor is a wilful and deliberate apostate; a child of God may fall into sin, but then it is not with deliberation and premeditation, he condemns with his conscience, what he seems to approve in his life, like Peter he may deny with his lips what he holds in his heart; the godly may be overtaken with a fault, but it is one thing to

be *overtaken* with sin, another thing to *overtake* sin, one thing to be surprised into it, another deliberately to commit it and to continue in it ; a gracious heart may, from neglect of prayer and watchfulness, suffer some sin to overtake it, but it is the property of an unsanctified mind and of a reprobate heart, to devise means beforehand, and to go in search of fuel for transgression.

This distinction between sudden impulse in sin, and deliberate sinning, should be well considered by our friend, it will help him to ascertain the precise nature and exact type of his spiritual disease, it was one of the main tests to which the priest under the law, brought the people in all cases of partial or total apostacy ; when in the ceremonial law any man was afflicted with the leprosy in the head, the priest at once and for ever pronounced him utterly and hopelessly unclean, (Lev. xiii. 44.) he was from that moment driven from the society of men to herd with the beasts of the field, it was that symptom that was incurable ; the plague was no doubt mortal, it was also as infectious as incurable ; and when any professor falls away from God, if it has originated in the heart, through sudden temptation or unruly passion, he is unclean, but he may be cured ; but if the plague be seated in the head, if his judgment, conscience, and understanding are enlisted under the banner of crime, if his sinfulness reaches not merely to the sensitive part, but comes up to the intellect, the centre and seat of thought, if his deliberate judgment and will are wholly against the ways of God, then the sin of such a man is the sin of reprobation, his soul's disease is

not that of the temporary backslider, his plague is that of the confirmed leper, pronounced both by God and man, incurable.

If, on the other hand, our friend can assert the freedom of his conscience from compliance with his sin, and also his judgment can sit upon his delinquency, and pronounce his transgression an abomination; if he can say that in his heart, he hated himself, for it, even unto loathing; if his understanding ever did, and still does hold with God and his ways, then there is still hope; he is a poor guilty sinner, but is no confirmed leper; he is a backslider, but he is no apostate; he has lost his standing in divine favour, his growth in divine life, and has done infinite damage to his soul, but he has not sinned beyond the pale of mercy, beyond the power, and pardon, and the means of grace, and the hope of recovery.

Clearness on such a point as this is vastly important, a misapprehension here, leads to two mistakes equally dangerous, the one leads to presumption, the other to downright despair; let our friend know, then, that if ever he was a real child of God, and never sinned wilfully, and with the concurrence of his judgment, there is yet mercy in store for him, even though there is yet much that is faulty in his present and past life; he has, by this awful act of transgression, lost his comforts in the favour of Christ, but he has not lost his relationship; if he was ever, as we believe he was at one time, a true child of God, he never can be a child of the devil, for being in the purpose of God given to Christ, he never shall be given

hereafter to Satan. A child, whether that child be a son, or a daughter, can never cease to be its own father's or mother's child; to be sure, it may enter a stranger's service—it is true it may be another man's servant—it may engage in his duty—it may do this partially or wholly, and at different periods; but while thus out of the bosom of its own family, and doing the business of another, it never belongs to, or partakes of their character, it never loses its own relationship, and therefore, our friend, though at present a lost and wandering sheep, is a sheep still, and can never belong to the goat's herd of reprobation.

If this twofold view of declension is kept clearly in view, I imagine this knotty point in experience is set at rest; one class of backsliders may fall grievously, but it was only through manifest temptations, or unruly affections, and whilst in the very act of sin, their judgment, and conscience, and every right feeling was on the side of God, and strange as it may appear, in thus sinning against God, they yet judged his ways best, his ordinances best, and all his ways holy, just, and good; but it is not thus with reprobates, they are like right lines proceeding from the centre of a circle, there never is any disposition to return; they only live to go farther and farther from God, they have turned away from the right path, from God and his ways with their hearts and judgments; at length they deem religion a mere fancy or fabrication, their spirit becomes impenetrable, their heart steeled against conviction, their conscience seared as with a red-hot iron, their state irrecoverable, and their hope

gone for ever. Had such been our friend's case, I could only exclaim in pity, "the Lord have mercy on his poor soul," for in the judgment of men his condition is hopeless indeed!

In all sins and falls of believers there is then, you perceive, an analogy between nature and grace. In the natural world, there are some falls so tremendous, that they are deadly; persons fall down headlong and never rise again, while in the case of others, it is widely different; he that fell, may be lifted up and set upon his feet, and he may walk as well and more warily than before; and so it is in religion, there are weaknesses, and infirmities, and sudden surprises into sin, common to all the saints; there are other acts of transgression which promise no recovery, and the very doing of them with the entire will, (though their final apostacy may not at once appear,) shows clearly enough that they can never end in any spiritual good; men may return from one false way, but it is only to enter upon another, they may hear much, but they do little, they know everything in the head, but if you come to the evidence of their life, they practise nothing at all.

If our friend should ask why I think thus favourably of his case, the reasons may be given in a few words:—

1st. He appears to me, notwithstanding his fall, to be the very opposite of a false professor; he has never any thing to say in his own favour, he neither pleads palliatives, or offers excuses, he makes no account of his situation, or of unfavourable circumstances, and if allusion is made

to similar backsliding, he takes no comfort from it, but is always able to give a fuller, a fairer, and better account of their case in question than his own.

2nd. From your private communication, the root of the matter still appears to be in him; what, I would ask, constitutes the essence of a final apostacy? and why do some endure for a while, and then fall away? why is it that the reality and the profession seem to go together? why is it so many can make a fair show in the flesh, and it turns out but a vain show? why is it they neither hold out in believing or doing, but survive the reputation of the one, and lose all pretension to the other. The truth is, they resemble a land flood, it is a rapid for a moment, —nay, it is a full flowing stream, you might suppose it would continue overflowing, and ever full; but alas! it is fed by no spring, therefore it soon runneth apace, loses itself in the sandy soil, or is dried up by the summer sun.

Such, sooner or later, must be the end of all outward professors in religion; their professed fellowship with God, is no more a sign of true fellowship with him, than a mere orthodox opinion in religion, is religion itself

SECTION XXXII.

DIFFICULTY, AND MEANS OF RECOVERY.

When the heart has once shifted from its proper centre, its recovery is very difficult; it requires no less a power to restore it, than that which at first created it: time, some people say, is a great restorer, and so it is; but regeneration, in the first instance, by the grace of God, and secondly, in cases of backsliding, renewal of heart by the same Spirit, are, we find, the only true restoratives from all our misery.

It is the grace of God in Christ alone, that gives back all that we lost by the fall, and infinitely more; in proportion as the divine image is replaced in the soul, the blessings of all our long-lost and long-forfeited privileges will certainly be recovered; but the victory will never be fully accomplished in this world: we shall all have to say, at the close of life, what the Lord said to Joshua,—“Thou art old, and well stricken in years, and yet there remaineth much land to be possessed;” even so when we shall have grown old in the ways of grace, and well stricken in years of experience, still such are the frequent relapses of the best, and the little way gained by the most exemplary; such is the unholy nature of the carnal mind, the many obstacles it plants in the way of spiritual growth, that we shall all have to exclaim, in a dying hour, “there remain many corruptions to be mortified, and much of the

spiritual soil to be recovered from the hands of the enemy.”

The difficulty of our full recovery to God, either in regeneration, or conversion from sin, arises from our vile nature: the very substance upon which the law of Moses was written, was typical of our nature, God commanded Moses to write it on two tables of stone; this was to intimate to all succeeding generations of men, the rocky nature and the flinty substance—the blindness, and obduracy of the human heart: it was to show how unfeeling and impenetrable it is in spiritual things, and it must be confessed, that this figurative representation of it, falls far short of reality, for however hard and impenetrable to impression some stones are, (and perhaps the most precious are the most so,) all of them come indescribably short of the stubbornness and utter insensibility of every Christless and graceless soul.

This view of the hearts of all men by nature, and of the backslider's in particular, will pave the way for my insisting much on the necessity of supernatural influence in the recovery of all that have gone astray; for though I do admit, in a general way, that some preparatory work is, without doubt, going on in the heart before its ultimate recovery—there may be comparisons of former comforts with present misery; there may be inward consciousness of untold compunction, grievous soul-upbraidings, the writing of bitter things against self; there may be other favourable symptoms of a returning sinner before he does actually return, such as growing serious-

ness of manner, more of thoughtfulness than of late, an increasing desire for privacy, and a greater seriousness of deportment in the house of mercy, and greater punctuality likewise ; but these are but the reflux of the sea, the harbingers of the coming tide ; they are only as the polishing of the stones that were afterwards to be laid and built up in the temple ; a preparation, which was nothing in itself, but vastly important as it respected the future building ; still, nothing but a great and saving work of the Spirit, in quickening, reviving, strengthening, &c. can bring back any prostrate soul to God ; the prayer of David, therefore, must be his prayer, “ my soul cleaveth unto the dust, quicken me according to thy word.” (Ps. cxix. 25.)

I am so fully persuaded of the necessity of an effectual work of the Spirit, in restoring the fallen to spiritual health, that were they to have recourse to every other expedient, they would, I hesitate not to say, all necessarily fail : some persons there have been, in every age of the world, who have fancied, that if God did but speak to them from heaven, they would repent of their backsliding, believe, and turn to Him ; but depend upon it, no means, human or divine, not even the voice of God himself will be enough for the purpose ; the backslider can resist the warning voice of God himself, and continue in the face of revelation and warnings, in his headlong course. When Cain conceived malice, and murder in his heart, the Lord spake to him and reasoned with him, and set his sins before him, but did he repent of his wicked purpose ? Did he not go on adding one

sin to another, till at length he filled up the measure of his iniquity by slaying his brother; and you may rest assured, when the soul of any backslider has been secretly languishing for some time, and consuming its energies and graces, little by little, when all that was good and gracious in it, has manifested, not a partial or particular, but universal decay, nothing in the world can repair the breach, nothing will be found harder than the soul of such a man.

It was a saying of Martin Luther, in regard to cases of this sort, that it was harder to restore, or comfort backsliders, labouring under afflicted consciences, than to raise the dead; and while those who think little of grieving the Spirit of God, and declining from God, will do well to think much of such a sentiment, it may be desirable, to enforce on penitent backsliders, the important doctrine, that the grace of God is *always free*, yet the twofold difficulty which our friend, I conceive, will have to contend with, will be, first, to discover, in the riches of grace, its reference to himself, and then, it will be impossible for him to take comfort from it, till the Lord apply it.

If our friend, or indeed any other man in the like situation, fancies he can get consolation, or abiding comfort by hearing, or listening to the sound of pardoning grace, he will find himself egregiously mistaken; a bare declaration of mercy may satisfy the conscience of the formalist or hypocrite, but it never can pacify or allay the fears of a man who is in earnest; the grace of God in Christ must be sensibly felt in the soul to

be efficacious, and nothing short of this experience can render essential good; the reason why so many, even of professing Christians, are without consolation in Christ, is, because they merely approve the gospel in the eye of their enlightened reason, but never have felt its healing power in their hearts; but where the soul is restored by grace, it resembles bodily health, it is a gracious frame of spirit towards God, better known by its actual possession than expressed in any form of words.

Whilst, however, I maintain this exclusive ground as regards his restoration, I do not mean to exclude his having recourse to any, or all the means of grace which the Spirit of God might bless, nor would I put a stop to any other enquiries he may choose to make; on the contrary, there is nothing in enlightened reason, or in Scripture, to hinder the spirit of honest enquiry; indeed, the desire itself is commendable, and deserves to be cherished; it is conducive to the best interests of man; the Spirit of God is given with that view, he is to conduct us aright in our enquiries after truth, he is to guide our understandings to a right apprehension of elementary principles, and he undertakes to help to search out the deep things of God.

But, notwithstanding this admission, and its importance generally, we must never lose sight of the fact, that it is the sole prerogative of the Holy Spirit, both to create anew in Christ, and to restore. The reason why so few were born again, and truly brought home to God during our Lord's ministry, can be resolved on no other

principle; it was because the Holy Ghost was not yet given in his plenary influence, the Lord Jesus not being yet glorified; but when he came forth to public view in his mediatorial character, and ascended to God as the great Captain of our salvation, then the light and life of the Spirit and of the gospel too, broke forth with uncommon lustre and power; no less were converted at once than three thousand souls. (Acts ii. 41.)

The Holy Spirit in his sanctifying and gracious influences is the alone self-sufficient, and all-sufficient teacher; when he graciously condescends to teach our friend, he will teach him with profit, he will open his heart; he will enlighten his blinded eyes; he will enable his soul to receive the truth in the love of it; he will impart to him the power to hear to edification; he will tell him what to make of all he hears and reads; how to read his interest in the covenant of mercy; how to apply the promises; what to receive; what to reject utterly; and what only to avoid: one hour's saving instruction of the Holy Spirit, will produce a greater effect on his mind, and it will lead him into more gospel truth than a thousand sermons.

It is not the words, or persuasion of men, that will bring any wandering sheep back to the fold, it is power derived from the Holy Ghost, a power not proceeding from a loud voice, but according to the Lord's promise. "At thy word," said Peter, "I will let down the net," and then the result was a great multitude of fishes.

If he rest on any other pillar it will break under him; all besides are but means to an end; if he

relies on any other agency, he leans upon he knows not what; if he does not honour God the Spirit in his restoration, he wants a cordial, not the truth; he is seeking a flattering unction, not a heart-felt experience; and he plainly shows that hitherto the Holy Ghost has never opened his eyes, and showed him what there is in Christ to rely on; he is still in his sins, and the gospel and its saving truths are unknown.

SECTION XXXIII.

RESTORATION THROUGH ELECTING LOVE.

EPAPHRAS.—PHILEMON.—APOLLOS.

TIMOTHEUS.

GAMALIEL—*A self-righteous Pharisee.* Acts ii. 23.

Epaphras.—The whole framework and superstructure of Christianity is based on the great doctrine of Election; and whether we speak of the history of private individuals, or whole nations, it makes no difference: it amounts to one and the same thing; they only serve to confirm the same great truth: it is all, as Saint Paul argues, (Rom. xi. 5.) according to “the election of grace;” so that whatever be God’s purposes of grace and mercy towards man individually, or in a national form, it all rests on this firm footing.

Election and predestination unto life, we are told, in Article xvii. of our church, is the everlasting purpose of God: the godly consideration of it is full of sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comfort to godly persons, and such as feel in themselves the working of the Spirit of Christ mortifying the works of the flesh, and their earthly members, and drawing up their minds to high and heavenly things.

Philemon.—Indeed, ever since I have recovered the love of God in Christ, this doctrine has been a source of unutterable consolation to me: I have found it a hold-fast for my soul, when in any sub-

sequent temptations; an anchor for my sinking spirits, when buffeted and sorely cast down. I see it in the firmament of divine revelation as immoveably fixed as the poles of the earth; and I have now as full an assurance of the truth of it, as I have of mine own consciousness: nothing but the electing love of God in Christ could have recovered and kept me from utter despair: if the Lord Christ had not had a faster hold of me, and a greater interest in me than I in him, I must have gone for ever! But, blessed be his name! his interest in his church and people is the oldest interest in the world; it was before my birth, “for in his book all my members were written, which, in continuance, were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them:” (Psalm cxxxix. 16.) before the existence of our first parents; yes! before the birth of time, or the utmost bounds of thought; and as all interest between Christ and his church are reciprocal, consequently, *if* he had an interest *in me* for ever, I had *in him* for ever!

Epaphras.—Blessed reflection! and yet as true as it is blessed! How often has the contemplation of it lifted up my depressed spirit! how often has it brightened the ministerial scene lying before me, and added new life and vigour to exertion! Were it not for God’s purpose, what would become of us? what would be the fruit of our labour? Were it not for his will going with ours, who would ever receive the gospel in the love of it, or having received it, hold out even unto the end?

Apollos.—Well therefore does Saint Paul lay

the foundation of final perseverance of the saints, both nationally and individually, upon this corner-stone. Speaking of the history of God's ancient people, how does he argue the point as respects the impossibility of their final rejection? "Hath God," says he, "cast away his people?" What people? Whom he foreknew? God forbid! He lays their perseverance at the door of his foreknowledge; he puts it on the firm ground of God's electing love—a love which never wholly lost sight of them nationally, notwithstanding the changes of nature, and grace, and infidelity they had to pass through; he establishes his point, and entrenches himself in his position by a most appropriate illustration of the doctrine; he instances himself as a standing proof of it. "Am not I an Israelite of the tribe of Benjamin?" the least of the tribes! and last of Israel's sons! and yet he was a standing monument erected to God's mercy! he was in his own person an undeniable witness, that God had not cast away nor cut off his people wholly!

For though the tribe of Benjamin was well-nigh put an end to, (Judges xx. 47.) for none escaped on that melancholy occasion, save six hundred persons, who fled to the mountains, and hid themselves in the rock Rimmon for shelter; and had it not been for the everlasting love of God in Christ, they all might have been cut off; and hence that great Apostle himself not even had a being, much less a well-being in Christ.

Timotheus.—I subscribe most willingly to every point that has fallen from our dear pastor on the subject. I have long held election unto life a

cardinal point in the spiritual compass; it is our life-boat amidst the stormy and tumultuous seas of the world; and all that weather these storms, and all that cut their passage through them, and are saved from them, do so under the canvas of that great ark of mercy.

Gamaliel.—But, Sir, if it be so, what becomes of the justice of God?

Epaphras.—There are some persons (and it grieves me to find you are one of that number) who are in the habit of comparing one attribute of God with another; the justice of God, for instance, in destroying multitudes of sinners, with his mercy in saving a few. But this exhibits much presumption on the part of the creature, inasmuch as it shows a tendency to be wise above that which is written; to pre-judge the cause of God, rather than, in a child-like spirit, to submit to all his providential dispensations, whether those refer to creation, providence, or the kingdom of grace.

It is sufficient for you to know, notwithstanding such comparisons, that God has had but one grand and gracious design from eternity, and that is, not to *make bare the arm of his justice*, but to *display the riches of his grace*, and to unfold the infinitude of his love, in saving everlastingly the vessels of his mercy.

All his other gracious designs are many and great doubtless, but they are all subordinate to this, they depend upon this for their fulfilment, and were it not that God really designs to show the riches of his mercy in Christ, it is far more than probable, that he had continued for ever in

the enjoyment of his own happiness, he had never spoken a world into being at all, much less created man to be not only a vessel of mercy, but a medium, through which that attribute was to be most signally manifested, and therefore you have no cause for the contrast you have made.

Gamaliel.—With permission, I will put one more question. How can you, taking this view of election, reconcile it with the doctrine of man's free will? how can you ascribe to us any freedom of the will at all, if every thing must needs fall out just as God would have it? if the circumstances of our whole life are thus written out in the mind of God, before even one feature of it appears in this world of time and sense? at this rate, do you not implicate God as the author of sin, both in commission as well as omission, whereas, it is a truth from everlasting, that as God is not the author of any sin or evil, so he is the originator of all good.

Epaphras.—The elective love of God in Christ is antecedent to, but it is not the *cause* of any sin in us; it goes before it, it is true, but it does not produce it; should you say that the fall of the Jews, because it was anterior in date, was therefore the *cause* of the calling of the Gentiles? or the death of man, because prior to, was, on that account, the *cause* of the resurrection? would you hold the absurd notion, that the day going before the night, or the night preceding the day, were the proximate causes one of another? a humble mind, a teachable spirit, and a diligent attention to the difference between a mere an-

tecedent and an imaginary effect, will resolve every difficulty, and rid your mind of all prejudice against the doctrine and tendency of election.

Gamaliel.—But is it not desirable on such a knotty point of divinity, as that of election and free will, to consult the best divines, to study commentaries, to make one's self master of all polemical writings, to weigh well the arguments on both sides; is it not, above all, necessary to bring such subjects to the test of common sense, or, at least, to the tribunal of enlightened reason.

Philemon.—Few controversialists have had grace enough, and fewer still, the wisdom and ability, to reason out the subject dispassionately; most writers upon it have mixed up their own preconceived notions with the simple truth of God, they tell you what their thoughts are on the matter, instead of holding by faith what God says: hence this great variety of sentiment, and discrepancy of opinion. Some controversialists, rather than overthrow a particular article in their own creed, prefer to scrape together and strain every passage in the whole Bible that seems to favour their own view; others, again, though right in the main, have only the great fault of proving too much on this subject, they extend their notion about the doctrine of free will beyond all due bounds; while others are such sticklers for free grace only, that they have actually left man neither freedom of will, nor any liberty at all, with them he is no better than a stock, or a stone, he is a mere puppet or automaton, he is left even without a moral power,

and therefore, deprived of moral responsibility; but this is just going to the opposite extreme.

Timotheus.—We must not so stand up in the defence of election and free grace, as to destroy the human will, neither must we ascribe to election what is due to a gracious will only; it is the *description God gives of every doctrine*, we must take, and what God hath joined together, and made to stand together, we must in no wise put asunder.

Gamaliel.—But may not electing love be resisted?

Epaphras.—If I am asked, whether a man may or may not resist the grace of God, and withstand all the drawings of electing love, my long experience of my own heart, and my observation of others, lead me to the result, both nationally and individually, that man may resist all offers and invitations to mercy—are not the Jews at the present day—were not Chorazin, and Bethsaida, and Capernaum, and many others, guilty of such resistance? But in all such cases, there was nothing beyond the mere offer of mercy; but none can resist that they never had, and how can that be electing love, or an effectual calling which never takes effect? No one can be saved by any doctrine which was never made effectual, and on the other hand, where it is effectual, who can stand out against the election of God? “Who in earth and in heaven can resist the Almighty’s will?”

Philemon.—If it be true (which I firmly believe), that the will of man is wholly against the will of God, then, if the grace of God in elec-

tion were not *stronger* than our corruption, none could ever be convinced of sin, and brought home to Christ ; if *equal* in power, neither would be victorious, but, as in the conflict between David and Saul, the former waxed stronger and stronger, and the other weaker and weaker, so it will be found in every one's history, that without Christ, we can do nothing, but with him, all things.

PART IV.

THE PATERNAL STATE OF PHILEMON.

SECTION XXXIV.

POWER OF UNBELIEF.

THOMAS.—*Slow of heart to believe.* Luke xx. 29.—TIMOTHEUS.

Thomas.—I long to open my heart to a father in Israel, but, in the best sense, I fear such persons are seldom to be met with.

Timotheus.—Many, I grant you, who affect the name of father in Israel, were never the means of introducing spiritual children into the kingdom of God; some who aspire to the character have nothing but a sectarian spirit, and the heading of a religious party to show for it; others, in Popish countries, call themselves fathers, who make no other use of the term, than to stretch their authority beyond all due bounds, to entrap the unwary, to delude the unsuspecting, and to proselyte and draw disciples after them.

Thomas.—Surely if our Lord tells us to call no man father, on the earth, least of all are such men deserving of the name.

Timotheus.—And yet there are some fathers in the household of faith who can confirm the weak and strengthen the wavering, and who may be justly styled, the pillars of the church, and great supports to their respective pastors.

Their parental character is recognized in Scripture, and St. John informs us, they are distinguished chiefly for their great knowledge and experience, (“I write unto you fathers because ye have known him from the beginning,”) and you know religion is nothing without experience, can a man live under a sunbeam for any length of time, and neither be sensible of its light or heat? and can a real Christian live half a century under heavenly sunshine, and be much in fellowship with his God, and not possess much of the light and teaching of the Spirit, and more of the power and warmth of his grace within him?

Thomas.—It requires, I am certain, great acquaintance with Christ, and our spiritual senses must be well exercised by use, to form a correct judgment of many truths that are brought before us in Scripture; we cannot judge of men, however fair and promising outwardly, either for good or evil, by a step or two they may take in a good cause, (for it may wholly originate in a blind and sudden impulse,) neither can we speak positively of religious doctrines, or credit any truth which we have never satisfactorily tested, or made out by an inward experience and persuasion.

Timotheus.—It is a great matter to possess faith; true faith substantiates and realizes that which sight and sense could never discover, it produces a full persuasion and implicit reliance, which any believer entertains in his own mind, upon the credit of divine testimony.

Thomas.—If we build on man’s testimony merely, that is credit, and if we entertain the notion of a thing only in our mind, that is an

opinion, but if we rest on God's sole authority, and make it the sole foundation of our believing, that must be true faith, because it proceeds on sure grounds, it argues a thorough acquaintance with certain fixed principles, and all besides, in my mind, is but mere conjecture.

Timotheus.—When we hear anything from the undoubted testimony of the Lord himself, we may well believe it; and has not the Lord given you in his written word all the testimony you want? can omnipotence in performing, and unchangeableness in promising, ever disappoint you?

Thomas.—A christian father I confess, (though I know none are possessed of infallibility,) I much wish to converse with, because such an one will speak, not from theory, but from the effects of things; for example, if he knows that his conscience is purified from dead works, or his heart freed from immorality, or his corruptions mortified, or his lusts grown abominable, or his temper cleaned of wrath, impatience, or fretfulness, that knowledge is all from his experience, and in like manner, and by the same rule, he will speak and write, and judge of all other religious duties.

Timotheus.—Still, I would have you never lose sight of faith, it is to the soul, what an anchor is to a ship, and though the cable may be moved to and fro, up and down, yet it holds it fast.

But may I know the subject matter of your anxieties?

Thomas.—I honestly confess, I stand in doubt of many things, it is all well enough what you have said, but every thing in religion, turns upon evidence that does not satisfy sin, and all outward

appearances at present make against some things that are held as sacred verities, think you it is right to risk our immortality on bare probability? Shall worldly men, when they make sure of an estate, have it conveyed in writing, and signed and sealed on parchment, and shall they put these writings in a place of safe keeping, and in the hands of those whose sole office it is to see to those records and rolls; and shall we be content, without the best testimony in our power, when our eternal all is at stake in this world and to eternity?

In all transactions with my soul, I desire to make a safe trust, and then there is safe-keeping. I am one of those who have great remains of infidelity, I am perfectly bewildered with doubts; scepticism and infidelity alternately take possession of me. I sometimes think, I must be lineally descended from him who disbelieved the Lord's good promise, and who staggered at the truth of his resurrection, and would not listen to the chosen witnesses thereof. (John xx. 25.)

Timotheus.—It is great injustice to ourselves, and a great dishonour done to God, to disbelieve his word and the testimony of his servants; we are privileged to build on the same promise; we have also the written word and the oath of God, which are the two unchangeable witnesses; (Heb. vi. 18.) we have likewise the two sacraments, which are the authentic seals of the covenant of grace; (1 Cor. xi. 26.) we have, moreover, the covenant and pledge of the Spirit; (Rom. viii. 16.) we have the testimony, that heaven and earth shall pass away, rather than that one jot or one tittle of

God's word should remain unfulfilled. Seeing, therefore, that we have such a cloud of witnesses, why should we be faithless and unbelieving; or rather, how can we, with such inward and outward demonstrations of truth, disbelieve?

Thomas.—There are some evils of our nature which we outlive, and some which will outlive us; but there are others, which always cleave to us till our dying day, and which, under all circumstances, will prove a trial to us, and, as I have already said, a distrustful spirit is my besetting sin.

Timotheus.—And unbelief is a great sin; it is also the very reverse of the faith which never errs, whereas unbelief, is short sighted, or rather stone-blind; the one can see at a great distance, and see clearly too; the other is for ever floundering and at fault. Joseph thought his father was blind, because he could not see with his naked eyes; but Jacob's faith, which guided his hand wittingly on the head of Manasseh, showed that his moral vision was much stronger than Joseph's sight. (Gen. xlviii. 19.)

Thomas.—The tendency of your observations is good, and to some extent convincing; would that all my doubts were cleared up, and my weak faith, on certain points, confirmed by some one who has had the experience of a father in Christ.

Timotheus.—The Spirit of God, in his quickening, reviving, strengthening, and sanctifying influences, is what you need; and I am by no means sanguine that any human instrument, however suitable, will either satisfy you on some points, or establish your wavering mind on others. I per-

ceive in you great proneness to unbelief on all points, and this proneness is increased by physical circumstances; you read the word of God, but your natural character is such, that there is little attention paid to what you read, and hence there is left little or no impression; the best Christian has often to complain of this fruitful source of unbelief; how often do we forget those incontrovertible truths of Scripture we should always remember, and, strange to say, we suffer our minds to dwell on certain captious points and objections, which it is both our wisdom and duty to put away from us, and try wholly to forget; and hence it is, that we are often carried away by every wind of doctrine, and remain unstable and unfixed.

Thomas.—Such is my case; my memory and the frame of my mind resemble a safety valve, as it respects some things, which are not worth retaining; it is like an hour-glass in respect of others, which are of infinite value; indeed, the most weighty matters no sooner find an entrance into one ear, than they find an aperture through the other. I shall be glad, therefore, if in writing, I can have the mind of one of the fathers in Israel, on some topics (such as the divinity of Christ, his twofold nature, and the sacred Trinity, &c.) which now greatly perplex and trouble me.

Timotheus.—On these points, God willing, you shall be satisfied; meanwhile, beware how you lean to man's wisdom. What! are the thoughts of a poor miserable sinner to be admitted into the presence chamber of your soul, and the Spirit of God to be excluded? is a poor worm of earth to occupy

the place of the great eternal? is not the bare idea an errant trespass against the Majesty of heaven; and calculated, in righteous judgment, rather to increase and multiply our difficulties, than to meet or remove them?

SECTION XXXV.

ON THE DIVINITY OF CHRIST.

It is of the highest importance that we form right views of the Lord Christ : our first business is to know him in the dignity of his person, before we can have any thing to do with him in his work. Sanctifying views of the Saviour are saving views ; “ this is life eternal,” saith our Lord, “ that they might know thee,” &c. (John xvii. 3.)

The divinity of our Lord, on which you seek information, is far too knotty a point for human reason to solve : I would not have you discard all reason in matters of religion ; rather pray that it may be held in subjection to religion. Some sincere inquirers of the present day suffer on two accounts ; one portion of the community make too little, the other too much of the reasoning faculty : there is danger on both sides, and it is difficult to say which party acts the most foolishly, those who undervalue, or those who overrate any of God’s gifts. Every thing is good in its place ; and so that we can but keep things where God left them, all will be found good for the end for which they were made.

For my part, such is my desire to have every thing consecrated to God, and laid on the altar of religion, that I long to use all arts and sciences, all earth-born philosophy, all that comes within the range of man’s wisdom, and the compass of his discovery, in the service of Christ : if I had

my own way, they should all be spared, like the Gibeonites, for the use of the sanctuary. I would just treat them as the Jews did that tribe of old : they did not slay them as they deserved, much less did they reject their works ; but they made them hewers of wood, and drawers of water for the sanctuary ; but they would never allow them to interfere or meddle with the ceremonies of their worship, with the statutes of their religion, with the priest's office, nor with any of their sacrifices ; (Joshua ix. 23.) and only let your reason, and sight, and sense, which you are so prone to follow, not sit in judgment on matters too high for them : let them not usurp a province, and sway a sceptre they were never meant to grasp, and you have nothing to fear from their exercise. So long as your reason is the handmaid of religion, it is to be cherished ; the instant it oversteps its own land-mark, and would soar above faith, that instant you must become a fool for Christ's sake, that you may become truly wise.

I doubt not, but that on the subject of our Lord's divine nature, if you can submit your reason to the superior light of revelation, you will find the sacred Scriptures conclusive. To multiply quotations would prove an endless task ; you need only consult the following passages at your leisure : Isa. vii. 14, and ix. 6 ; and Micah v. 1 : Matt. i. 22, 23 ; John viii. 58 ; i. 1. ; x. 30 ; 2 Cor. v. 19 ; Col. ii. 9 ; 1 Tim. iii. 16 ; 1 John v. 20, and I think you must allow that Christ's *glory was with God before his incarnation was with men* ; he enjoyed from everlasting a secret and incommunicable existence with the

Father before his open birth ; he had an endless life of Godhead before his visible life of suffering. Ignorance on this point was the great stumbling-block of the Jews ; they overlooked every divine credential that preceded the Lord's birth : the stable and the manger, the ignominy of his life, and the agonies of his death, they kept perpetually in their view, and because they seemed to stand in direct contrast with his pretensions as their Messiah, they could not reconcile it with their reason, that one who appeared in so much poverty, in his birth, could expect a magnificent reception in his life, any more than a prince who should travel into the distant parts of his empire "*incognito*," should expect the usual formalities and dutiful attentions of his loyal subjects.

In St. Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews, it appears that the supposed humble origin of Christ was a sore trial to some, and made hard work for faith in others. Many of the Hebrew professors wavered much in their minds whenever they thought of it ; some were afraid they had taken a false step in forsaking Moses and embracing Christ ; others were ready to enter upon a fearful compromise, and to unite Judaism with Christianity ; not a few of them were ripe and ready for an absolute apostacy ; (Heb. x. 38.) and it was only when the Apostle put our Lord's divinity upon a firm footing, that they were persuaded, that instead of being what some of them thought him, viz. the *child of yesterday's growth*, he was the same yesterday, (i. e. *from creation*) to-day, (i. e. *under gospel preaching*) and for ever, (i. e. *under every future dispensation of glory*.)

No created being could thus lay claim to existence before all time; no mere creature can be eternal, because all have their beginning in time; but Christ existed before all time, as the great self-existent: he appeared in many previous communications to the children of men: he manifested himself oftentimes to patriarchs and prophets of old: he always might have been seen by the eye of faith in the ceremonial law of the Jews, which was the gospel of the then day: he showed himself in their types, and ceremonies, and varied emblems, all of which shadowed him forth like so many rays of light, breaking forth from a cloud, the harbinger in after ages of his meridian day of divine glory.

In the foreview of his incarnation, the Lord Christ was the believer's sole pattern to go by; to copy his example has been the practice of the church in all ages; it was his image Adam walked after in innocence; it was his example Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob imitated; in after time, when the children of Israel were led out of Egypt, Christ, as the ark of the covenant, was their great captain and conductor; he was the way they walked in, the truth they walked by, and the life they walked with; in the visible representations of deity, he went before them in a pillar of cloud by day, and a pillar of fire by night; and when, through grace, we walk after him, we do as all that ever lived and died in the faith, have done; we are travelling with our faces Zionwards, as did Adam, Enoch, and Moses, and all they who are now with him in his kingdom of glory; one and all followed the same

divine footsteps; they all clave to the same heavenly rule; the paths in which they trod, were the old paths of Christ's divinity; and therefore, when you are tempted of Satan to doubt the existence of Christ before all worlds, or his eternal power and Godhead, or when you are assailed by the voice of scepticism, or the sneer of the scoffer, bear in mind, that the divine nature of our Lord is the sole pillar and ground of our faith, and if objections are raised against your creed, go upon the antiquity of the doctrine; no article of our faith is ancient. If you are charged with credulity, at least you have the comfort of knowing, that all our fore-fathers, living and dying, entertained the same hope that you do, and if fears and misgivings spring up sometimes in your mind, and give you uneasiness, you have only to buckle on the sword of the Spirit, and by this weapon you will easily defeat all Satan's machinations.

I look upon the divine character of our Lord as the sole ground of all our present encouragement and future hope; if you raze this corner stone, the whole fabric of Christianity must crumble to pieces; the continuance of the gospel in the world can be satisfactorily accounted for in no other way; all the antiquity of the pagan world was against it; the universal consent of mankind likewise; nothing, in reason, seemed to justify the expectation, that one who was despised, and rejected, and execrated, could be any other than mere man; and yet, notwithstanding all the combined force of wicked men and devils, the gospel of the ever blessed God continues to

flourish, and spread to this day ; it has been impeded in its progress, its free course has been retarded, yet, because divinity is stamped upon it, it has never been wholly stopped ; but if it were the invention of men, and the offspring of human pride and policy, long ago it had been unable to bear up against earthly resistance ; it would, in lapse of time, like all other of men's contrivances, have fallen down of itself, and run to decay ; but whoever has opposed the precious truths of the gospel, (and of all truths none are so important as the divinity of its Author,) they have always found as great a difficulty in the attempt, as though they had tried to stop the passage of the winds, to bind the hurricane in chains, or to still the raging of the tempest.

It is owing, I am persuaded, to the loose manner in which this great doctrine is held, that multitudes of professing Christians content themselves with such a low spiritual stature ; high thoughts of self, and low thoughts of the Saviour, is the real cause of all their stunted gifts and graces ; herein verily we are all guilty ; we do not contemplate, as we ought, the Lord Jesus in his divine character. What is the cause that temporal good things are withheld from us ? Is it not because we do not view Christ as the God of providence ? whereas the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof ; (Ps. xxiv. 1.) and why, at any time, do we doubt his satisfaction and propitiation for sin ? Is it not because we do not eye him as the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world ? Is it not because we do not see him by the eye of faith, as travelling in the greatness of his strength, mighty

to save? (Isaiah lxiii. 1.) And why do we disbelieve the promises? Is it not because we forget divinity is pledged for their fulfilment, and that God knows nothing arduous, and that with him all things are possible?

Oh, that we all could look to Christ, as the great Emanuel, God with us; that we could discern the hand of his omnipotence working in every movement of providence, and his almighty spirit discovering itself in every manifestation of his grace; then would every dispensation be welcomed, whether pleasing or painful, and the full persuasion that you are living continually under his universal government, would constitute no inconsiderable part of your chief joy!

SECTION XXXVI.

ON THE TWOFOLD NATURE OF CHRIST.

We must be careful how we indulge an idle curiosity in religion, and how far we permit our carnal reasoning to interfere with our believing; enlightened reason never concludes that to be false which is above its reach, nor deems that incredible which it cannot comprehend; it admires the superior light of revelation, when it transcends its weak faculties; it believes that to be possible with God, which is inconceivable and incomprehensible by man, it holds the necessity of mysteries in religion, and indeed, a religion without a mystery, is a religion without a God! Heathen worship has nothing mysterious in it, and from this cause it is all abject idolatry; try, therefore, to have your reason always under the influence of revelation, and pray that it may become its best hand-maid; yield it up cheerfully, and with entire subserviency to the doctrines of free grace in Christ. You do well to seek correct views of the person of Christ, they are essential to your comfort; unworthy thoughts of him form one fruitful cause of our perpetual wanderings from him, but when in all things Christ has the pre-eminence, and is seen by the eye of faith, in all his beauty and excellency, our souls are much drawn out to him in love, and we are gra-

ciously disposed to follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. It was a glorious view of the true character of Jehovah that formed an influential principle in the mind of Abraham; the reason assigned by the Holy Spirit for his forsaking his country, his kindred, and his father's house, is that the "*God of glory* appeared unto him;" and nothing in a higher degree influences the conduct, or leads to greater acts of self-denial, than exalted views of the person and glory of the great Emanuel.

In whatever respect we contemplate the twofold nature of Christ, its practical bearing will be found of the last importance; indeed, it is a cardinal point in the christian system; our salvation, no less than our present comfort, depends upon its full admission. If our Lord had never assumed our nature, it is evident he had remained what he was before the world began, namely, the second person in Jehovah; in that case, he had always been our enemy, for in the Trinity of persons, there is unity of design and purpose; what the Father feels or determines, so does the Son, and the Holy Ghost likewise; hence Christ, instead of being our elder brother and our friend, had continued from everlasting to everlasting, without reconciliation, through the obstinacy of our will, the depravity of our nature, and corruption of our hearts; on the other hand, if the Lord Jesus were no more than mere man, in that case, like ourselves, he had been the party offending, he had been under the covenant of works, and in the self-same condemnation with ourselves; and far from meriting eter-

nal life, he had only deserved eternal death; and instead of being the alone all-sufficient and self-sufficient Saviour of the world, he would only be the greatest impostor in the world, and, therefore, the circumstance of his possessing a twofold nature, “perfect God and perfect man, of a reasonable soul, and flesh subsisting,” was necessary, in order to constitute him a mediator, to go between two parties,—the offending and the offended—and by this means to unite heaven and earth, and so make peace; for, as God, he could treat with the God of heaven, and as man, he could undertake our redemption, being capable of suffering, and making full satisfaction to an offended law for our sin.

This union also, which he has with the Father and with us conjointly, enables him to bring the mind of God down to us, and to convey our minds, circumstances, and case to God; according to the fulness that now dwells in him for distribution, and so far as the capacity of the reasonable soul of Christ can go, he can enter into our finite capacities and wants, and, partaking of both natures, he can be a constant channel of communication between both; in *his humanity*, he knows what is in man, and in *his divinity*, he knows what is in God, and this gives him the high prerogative which he claims, viz. of showing, and making all that he has heard of the Father known to us; and assuredly, as the God-man, he must have heard both great and glorious things of the Father, inasmuch as he is the wisdom of the Father, and the living epistle of his love; he had a secret being with

him, before he had an open and visible being with us ; he was with him from all eternity, and he shall be with him to all eternity ; he is the Alpha and Omega, the first and last of all God's words and thoughts, all have their beginning and ending in him,—who, therefore, would not wish to know such a Saviour, and, by that means, know the mind of God ?

It is difficult to say from which of the above relations, we, as Christians, derive most instruction, or reap most of comfort ; our happiness lies in neither of his natures, separately considered, but only in the union of both, for if Christ had been presented to us in Scripture only, as the great self-existent God, we should all in that case have stood as if we were anatomized before him, our every vein and sinew of thought had been exposed to his view ; he who made our hearts, had known what was in them ; but what encouragement could we have derived from this consideration ? the thought might have raised our ideas, as it respects his greatness ; it might have filled us with an overpowering sense of his majesty, or have struck us with reverence and awe ! but where had been the well-head of spiritual consolation ? where our encouragements ? and where could we have gone for the unfailing tides of heavenly bliss to overflow the soul ? But in the assumption of our nature, we can rest on him, not only as the sure foundation of all hope, but he by this means becomes a part and parcel of ourselves ; he is clothed with our flesh, he is “ bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh ;” he is now, not only, if I may so speak, in the inside

of us as God, but he feels for us as man feels! In his *divine* nature, we cannot move without him, being the great supporting cause of our being; and in his *human* nature, we cannot suffer without a correspondent feeling being excited in his soul, and on this union our happiness, no less than present comfort, depends.

We may not be able to understand this mystical union, but shall we on that account dare to disbelieve it? Do not we all, in subordinate matters, *believe* things to be true, daily, far more than we *know* to be true; and are we not quite right in so believing? And does not this circumstance show that perfect knowledge is unnecessary, and not an integral part of belief? Are not things of greatest magnitude taken upon credit? Is not this universe itself a great object? and is it not by faith, which is the perfection of reason, that we understand that the world that now is, was not made of things that do appear? (2 Peter iii. 5.) but if we are to believe nothing but what we can fully understand, and bring down to the level of our capacity, our alphabet must henceforth be shortened, and our vocabulary of words very contracted indeed.

Moreover, it must ever be remembered, that what are insuperable difficulties with us, are none whatever with God; every thing above, beneath, and around, is surprising, and many things we come in contact with, are almost incredible; but though they may seem incredible, are they therefore impossible?

While, therefore, on the one hand, we are apt to conceive of difficulties which do not exist, we,

on the other, overlook the consideration, that no such word as difficulty has any place in the mind of God; therein lies the distinction between a finite mind and the Infinite: Omnipotence knows nothing difficult: in nature, the Almighty can with as equal ease call forth a universe into being, as he can one insect; the same creative energy is exercised in both cases, and the same power of sustentation; we have no notion what a God can do, any more than we can conceive the birth of a thought, how he subsists. All that we may well believe, is that he is infinite perfection; all impossibilities are excluded as well from his mode of subsistence in Christ, as from his dealings with the children of men.

Rather, therefore, than pry into things which are too high for you, let me urge your cleaving to a whole Christ, as perfect God and perfect man, and to say, as Hushai said of David, (who was the Lord's great antitype,) "Nay, but whom the Lord, and this people, and all the men of Israel choose, his will I be, and with him will I abide." (2 Sam. xvi. 18.) Oh, that every saint on earth, as well as every saint in heaven, could thus speak of Christ, "He whom the Father hath set over all things, his will I be, and with him will I abide; his word, his promises, his sceptre, and his love, I prefer above all; whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth like unto thee."

In matters of faith, cease from the wisdom of man; however correct their reasoning may be in other things, and however correct their premises, they offer no ground of faith. What!

shall the precious doctrines of Scripture be abandoned, when they confront our reason? shall we prefer its uncertain glimmering light to the full blaze of the revelation of Almighty God? Rather take the comfort of what is revealed, than sit in judgment on revelation itself. It must afford unspeakable consolation to the believer to have such a Saviour, as can save to the uttermost; and if he saved his own manhood, when judicially laid under the full pressure of the curse of the whole world, does he not show power and ability to save all that come to him? Is he not rich in mercy towards all that come to him? are not all that repent and believe in him, accepted? And who are rejected, but those who have neither the will nor desire to be saved?

SECTION XXXVII.

ON THE GLORY OF THE TRIUNE JEHOVAH.

The subject of your anxiety refers not to the *existence*, but to the *mode* in which Jehovah subsists : the enquiry is reasonable, and I am glad there is no bitter root of practical atheism lurking unconsciously within you ; indeed, to a thinking mind, there is nothing more evident, than that there is a God ; at the same time, when we consider his greatness, and our insignificance, it ought not to seem surprising that we can, in this stage of being, form but most inadequate conceptions of his mode of subsistence.

The whole of God's essential character is incommunicable to any creature, and for this reason ; there is nothing in God but himself ; whenever he works, it is with the whole of his Being ; his essence is simple and uncompounded, pure and unmixed, and it is only because of our finite and limited understandings, and the dulness of our natural apprehensions, that *He* has been pleased to give himself various names, and titles, and attributes in Scripture : this bespeaks infinite condescension on his part ; it is an accommodation to the frailty of our nature, and intended to be a great help, whereby we may the better conceive of him.

There is this peculiarity in the divine character, God exists from necessity, he is the alone self-existent being without any cause, there is no

possibility by which he might not have been, or may not be; even his mode of subsistence, whatever it may be, must always be the same—it is necessary in itself, and independent of all other things, so that it can never be the subject of any change; nothing can be taken away from it, and nothing ever can be added, for there are no adventitious properties in God.

He alone is without admixtures; he is of himself, to himself, from himself, and for himself always; and the end of all that is visible and invisible, is for the manifestation of his own glory, and, forasmuch as all things that do exist, emanate from himself in some way or other, either immediately or consecutively, it inevitably follows that all things *besides* God, come from nothing, and of themselves are nothing; they are mere appendages or adjuncts, the incidental circumstances connected with the great reality; creatures of yesterday, in comparison—branches bursting forth from the tree of life—things that exist by the fiat and will of the great Eternal. It is clear, therefore, that such a God, with whom we have to do, had been just the same, perfect and blessed for ever, even if there had been no creature, animate or inanimate, for ever!

All the attributes of Jehovah are of a piece with himself; we may allude to them, speak of them, and try to describe them, but they are one and all incomprehensible: his OMNIPRESENCE is immensity itself; it may be compared to a sphere, whose centre is everywhere, and whose circumference is nowhere; it is every where *essentially*, as the universal cause of being, and it is every-

where *spiritually* and *providentially*, as supporting and upholding all beings: this attribute in God may manifest itself diversely, it may fill the manhood of Christ with the Spirit out of measure, it may fill the Saints as the Shekinah did the material temple, it may fill heaven itself with visible, and sensible, and glorious manifestations, and hell with sensible obscurations and withdrawals, which is wrath; but in what way soever it works, it distinguishes Jehovah from all creatures; from men who are bounded by time and space; from angels who, though not hedged in by any dimensions we know of, yet are never in two places at one and the same time; and from all things conceivable besides, which if in one place are not in another—but such is God's omnipresence, he is everywhere, at once, and always. His *Omniscience* is alike wonderful; it is like the sun right over our head, when it has reached its perpendicular and meridian altitude, and seems to look down upon all at once, and doubtless, could the whole globe be presented to it at one and the same moment of time, and supposing it to possess the faculty of vision, it would with one look take in all at once; and so God, by one glance of his all-seeing eye, comprehends all things and all events always.

Of his *omnipotence* also who can entertain the thought? In God it is the doing whatsoever he pleases, or what his infinite wisdom may conceive, or his will suggest; it is that perfection in the divine character, that can do all things whatsoever he chooses, and yet is not pleased to do whatsoever he can. It is his being omnipotent, therefore,

and yet not omnivulent: *his knowledge* also, how vast and how inconceivable! he knows all things by his esesnce; angels probably by distant acts of his providence, man by creation and revelation, and devils by wrath; it is the exclusive attribute of the Deity to know all things by knowing his own will. We know nothing but just so far as we know his will; we gain knowledge by ascending upwards from effects to causes. God knows every thing in its cause, and he knows all things always, because he always knows his own mind, in which all is comprehended. *Eternity*, as applied to God, is as immeasurable as are the voids of space: all I can say of it is, that it is the measure or duration of God's Being; what Peter asserted of one day, as it refers to God, may as truly be spoken of one moment. "One day," said he, "with the Lord, is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day," and one moment with the Lord is as all duration of time, and all duration as one moment.

And if you ask me to show cause why I have made this digression respecting God's attributes, and shifted from the main question, the answer is at hand: I want to humble proud reason, and to exhibit to your judgment such elevated views of God, that you must clearly see, that what is revealed of *Him* in his written word and other works, is only just so much as we can bear: higher and clearer views we could not comprehend in our flesh: our blessedness consists in the power there is in God, by Christ, to darken his character, and more than a dark and distant view in Christ we could not even behold, and live!

It is of great importance to take all our knowledge of God from his revealed word; for though the impression of the divine image be left upon every reasonable soul, (Gen. i. 26.) and though the print of his footsteps be upon the whole irrational creation, (Rom. i. 20.) yet there is no true knowledge of God, but that which he reveals of himself. Surely God best knows *himself*, and therefore he can best describe after what mode he subsists, in the unity of the same essence. There are many amongst us, who just do as the Samaritans of old; they think and speak of God as their limited faculties conceive of him. Our Lord, in his conference with the woman of Samaria, in consequence of this, charges the whole nation with worshipping they knew not what: how many professing Christians of our day do the same! They worship a Being, of whose real character they entertain no just and scriptural notions; they call upon God after their own fashion, but they have no particular definition and saving knowledge of him at all. Now, if we would know God, serve him, and worship him aright, we must conceive no otherwise of him in *our mind*, than he has revealed himself *in his word*: if we proceed on any other principle, we turn the truth of God into a lie, and set up in our hearts, instead of ideas of a triune Jehovah, only so many dumb idols.

A sacred Trinity of persons is plainly revealed in Scripture: it would be a waste of time to occupy your mind in quoting passages bearing upon the subject; suffice it to say, that *beginning-works*, as creation, are ascribed principally to the

Father, though not exclusively : the *carrying* on of them to perfection, as redemption, &c. to the Son, and the *applying* of them to the soul, to the Holy Spirit. The manner of working in a triune Jehovah, is answerable to their mode of subsistence in the divine nature. The Father worketh from himself; (Eph. i. 11.) the Son from the Father; (John vi. 38.) the Holy Ghost from the Father and the Son; (John xiv. 26.) so that if we lose sight of a Trinity of persons in the great scheme of redemption, the whole of that glorious and blessed work falls to the ground. It is reduced to a chaos of confusion; it is without plan, or purpose, or method, or any system of operation.

It absolutely needs, therefore, a Trinity of persons for the accomplishment of our salvation. The Father commits the work of redemption to the Son: (John xiii. 3.) the Son readily and cheerfully undertakes it; (Heb. x. 7.) and so does the Holy Ghost likewise, who delivers by his grace and influence from all the evil of the curse, and makes us meet by regeneration and renewal of life for all the blessing of the promises: hence all the three persons are equally interested in the covenant of mercy, and they all can put in the same claim: "All mine are thine, and thine are mine, and I am glorified in them." (John xvii. 1.)

In this Trinity there is perfect unity; they act conjointly, even from the very beginning of creation to the last line of thought, and in the finishing stroke of salvation. In the work of *creation*, all three were engaged: the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost upheld and sustained the rude lump to be the material of a future world:

in the work of *redemption*, the Father wills and elects; the Son merits and deserves. The Holy Spirit appropriates and sanctifies: the same great truth is observable in every separate and distinct part of redeeming love: if the Father forgives sin, it is through the blood of Christ, and through the sprinkling of the Spirit; and if he mortifies sin, it is by the power of the death of the Son of God, and by the working of the Spirit; and if he raises us up to newness of life, it is by the power of Christ's resurrection applied by the Spirit, so that both in plan and system, in end and aim, in purpose and execution, the manifestation of grace is answerable to the revelation which we have of a Trinity in Unity, and a Unity in Trinity.

If there be objections raised to either one or the other, on the ground of impossibility, all I can say is, that many things, even in this world, may be readily distinguished from each other, and yet possess oneness in nature and essence: but I would carefully avoid subtle arguments; they tend to no good. To try to be wise above that which is written, is a great evil; it has done the revelation of God no end of mischief. My prayer is, that confusion may be written on the face of all such dogmas and systems of man's making, that tend to nothing else than bringing all things into confusion!

SECTION XXXVIII.

ON THE SUPPOSED INCOMPLETENESS OF THE DIVINE RECORD.

It is a sad thing, my dear Sir, when unbelieving doubts and fears occupy the place of simple faith; you do not doubt, I perceive, the inspiration, but only the fulness of the divine record.

The circumstance that appears to stagger you most is, that the Bible is nothing more than a brief memoir; a mere abstract of God's gracious dealings with his church and people; you think that but little is recorded of what was once delivered, and the writings of the prophets, you conceive, are but a mere compendium; and as for the epistles of the Apostles, nothing more has been handed down to us, than a very small portion indeed; hence you are tempted to think, that to view the Bible in any other light than as an incomplete composition, goes no less against its inward sense than its outward evidence; you imagine, that what wise men, as you are pleased to call them, wrote, was only for the time being, and for the profit of the then illiterate age. "Did not Solomon," say you, "speak three thousand proverbs," (1 Kings iv. 32.) and yet, of all these, not a fourth part is to be found in the canon of scripture; and of the same man, are we not told, that he wrote ten thousand and five songs, and yet of that number, how many

are come down to us? one solitary piece! which is styled the Song of Songs, and it is preserved, because it is the best of them.

But what is the inference, I should like to know, that you draw from the supposed want of fulness in the divine record? or rather, what ground have you to expect, or what reason to hope for more fulness? Is it not a great mercy that so little, rather than that no more is recorded? Holy men of old wrote about salvation; neither the writers themselves, nor their writings, are meant to satisfy idle curiosity; they do not meddle with men, and things, and times, which, were they known, would do no good; they contain enough for edification, but not enough to meet the wishes of men who would never be satisfied; I admire the Holy Ghost's method of putting unreasonable desires to the blush; when sufficient is stated for all saving purposes, "as for the rest, it has been said, is it not written in the Book of the Chronicles, of the kings of Persia;" as much as to say, if you want more information, or greater particularity, and more of detail, leave the sacred records, and go and consult the archives of heathen princes.

Moreover, when you consider the antiquity of this blessed book; when you reflect that it speaks, when all mere human records are silent; that it attests verities before the flood, when as yet nothing of human tradition could be relied on. When you bear it in mind, that the word of God begins with the beginning of the world, and ends with the end of it; when you remember, that God spoke thus by the word of his holy prophets,

ever since the world began, the subject of surprise will not be, that this record is so brief, but that it is so full in all its statements. Is any thing, I ask, wanting, which was either fit for man to know, or God to reveal? Is it not clear in its enumeration of facts, sufficiently explanatory of proximate causes, and sufficiently particular in its details and enumeration of all accompanying circumstances? If, therefore, any difficulty arises, it is not from any obscurity in the things themselves, but in the blindness of our minds, and the dulness of our apprehensions.

Can any one excuse himself from understanding the Scriptures on the ground of their supposed brevity? Who has taken so much pains to make himself fully understood? Reflect upon the sundry times and divers manners in which the Lord has spoken; he has not only expressed his will in words very fully, but also in types and figures; not only by statutes and laws, but by grace and a rich gospel; so that if we live and die in ignorance of pardon of sin, and a Saviour, what excuse can we make? what plea can we offer? Surely not the scantiness of information; much less the inadequacy of the means to accomplish the end.

I have long thought, and every day confirms the opinion, that every error proceeds from ignorance of the whole drift and bearing of the sacred Scriptures; well did the Lord say to the Scribes and Pharisees, "Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures;" the Holy Scriptures have but one object; they are to make men wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus; and were

men to keep this object in view, would they run into the deep labyrinths of error? would they cherish unfounded doubts and fears, if they had a certain light to guide them?

All infallible truth is contained in the pages of the sacred volume; there is certainty there, which you may look for in vain elsewhere; the opinions and maxims of men are most fallible, and often contradictory; human theories in religion have long ago been exploded; at best, they can be looked upon as chimeras of fancy and as mere probabilities; they are continually changing and giving place to others, as short-lived, and as precarious as themselves; but whether the written word of God be perfect or not, it has this excellence, and this advantage over every other composition whatever—all it professes to teach, and all you can derive from its divine teachers, is infallible truth; you learn no lessons in the word of God, hereafter to be unlearnt. To whom can you go for wisdom, if it is not contained here? Does it not reveal the word of eternal life? To whom apply for instruction, but to him, who, in the proverbs of Solomon, is designated the substantial wisdom of God, and who, in the books of the Evangelists, spake as never man spake.

I look upon the Bible as superior to every other composition, as the blessings it contains surpass all others in magnitude and duration. The blessings of grace and salvation, which the Scriptures open up to the eye of faith, not only accompany their possessor through this life, but furnish him with strength and support as he enters into the strait passage which leads through the dark

valley of the shadow of death. It shows poor lost sinners the way of mercy by Christ :—it points us to the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world :—it gives us to see the evil we ought to shun, and the good we ought to follow,—what is to be done, and what avoided ; and, therefore, if we have only grace to hold fast the written word, it will steer us safely to the haven of rest, where we would be.

Instead, therefore, of complaining of the want of fulness in the sacred record, the great question and subject matter of enquiry is, Have you received all that is recorded? Ever bear in mind that it is not the reception of a part, but the whole word that saves ; there is no portion of Scripture without its practical bearing and its special use. Commandments are given to obey, threatenings to awe, promises to encourage, privileges to comfort, good examples to follow, and bad examples to deter.

Many of those who take the greatest umbrage at the sacred Scriptures are those who have least reason to do so ; they object frequently for objection's sake ; their actions run counter to their words ; and where they find fault, on the score of supposed omissions, there is already far more revealed than they have ever attentively read, or ever sought grace to put in practice. For my part, I look upon the sacred volume as finished in every way. The perfection of God is more seen in its composition than in any other of his works. It is full and compact, and I am persuaded that a man may just as well go about to create a new creation as to create a new opinion in reli-

gion, either as it respects the doctrines of the gospel, or the precepts of grace. It is so entirely fitted as a means to an end, and so complete in itself, that a curse falls on the head of him who either diminishes from it or adds thereto. (Rev. xxii. 18, 19.)

SECTION XXXIX.

ON THE MEDIATORIAL OFFICE OF CHRIST.

THOMAS.—PHILEMON.

HYMENEUS—*A Papist.* 1 Tim. i. 20.

Thomas.—A few words in public or private conference do more to settle any matter in dispute than the most laboured written communications on the subject. A man may be clear in his own views, but his statements may fail to produce conviction in the minds of others; one is frequently at a loss for verbal explanations; difficulties oftentimes arise in the mind of the reader which were never contemplated by the writer; and, for my part, I adopt the old maxim, “seeing is believing,” and nothing short of actual converse gives me full satisfaction.

Philemon.—Most ready and willing am I at all times to do my best to impart to others what the Lord has taught me by long experience, nor, indeed, do I attach any credit to myself for so doing. To do good to others, is at the same time to do good to one’s self. To break to them the bread of life is to be fed one’s self. To give much spiritually is to receive more; nothing is ever lost which is laid out for God. There is a divine retribution both of good and evil; whoever has a mind to lay himself out for God, shall

have ample returns into his own bosom, grace for grace, mercy for mercy, and blessing for blessing!

Thomas.—It rejoices my heart to find that an occasion has at last presented itself, which I have long wished for. Your written communications I cannot fully receive, because they contain mysteries I do not understand.

Philemon.—But may we not believe much we cannot understand? You do not comprehend the mode of your own existence, and yet do you disbelieve in your existence on that account? The universal church believes that Moses's rod brought forth almonds without any root, and that our first parent Eve was created out of the side of Adam, and Adam out of the dust; why then may we not believe in many things—such as the Divinity, the twofold nature of Christ, the sacred Trinity? &c. Though these are verities that exceed our comprehension, is there any thing more hard to be believed in one case than in another?

Thomas.—Waving other topics, I seek information respecting the several offices of Christ. A gentleman here present holds doctrines on this head widely different from the church to which we belong; my conscience is disturbed and made uneasy, and my mind seems suspended between truth and error. On which side the truth lies, I am unable to discover.

Hymeneus.—I maintain nothing but what the Holy Catholic Church has ever held, and what reason seems to confirm, viz. that a variety of offices pre-supposes more mediators than one,

and diversity of employments, a multiplicity of persons in the great work of interceding.

Philemon.—Never was there a more fatal mistake; for there is but one, and only one Mediator: (1 Tim. ii. 5.) we may multiply the work of a Mediator, and our relations to God, as much as we please, but it alters not the case, nor destroys the nature of one Mediator. Cannot a man be a father, a brother, an uncle, a husband, at the same time, and yet in all these various relations be but one and the same man? Even so Christ, though he sustains a variety of offices—that of advocate and intercessor, redeemer and shepherd, &c., yet there is the peculiarity, that he sustains all relations in one.

Hymeneus.—But what great harm is there in applying to departed saints for their intercession with God? Surely it evinces pious feeling; it stirs up delightful reminiscences of gone-by days, and the thought pleases me, thus to unite the living with the dead. Can we doubt that those who have wrought for us when alive, will not continue their endeavours for us in their higher, though separate state of existence?

Philemon.—Can we believe that any act attempted to be done *now* to a poor sinful worm, and rejected with abhorrence, would prove less hateful *hereafter*? Surely, if the saints *on earth* reject homage done them, as Barnabas, and Paul; (Acts xiv. 13, 14.) if they were so horror-struck and inwardly moved by the profane attempt when on *earth*, much more would they refuse it now in *heaven*.

Therefore, to pray to saints, or angels, or the

Virgin Mary, or to look to any other Mediator than the Lord Christ, is antichrist and blasphemy: it is contrary to the doctrine delivered by Christ himself; he teaches us no where to offer ignorant worship. How can we call on them for help of whom we know nothing? It is contrary to the Scriptures, which render the intercession, and, by consequence, the invocation of saints perfectly useless; for they tell us, we have liberty of access and boldness of approach to God through Christ, without other intercessors; (Eph. ii. 18; iii. 12.) and it is quite contrary to the articles of our religion, where all such mummery is excluded, and should be banished out of the world.

Hymeneus.—But does not St. Paul ask the prayers and intercession of saints? and may not others do the same? If there is simplicity in such a request, that is all the evil it can be charged with.

Philemon.—When St. Paul asks the prayers of saints, he is speaking of saints that are living, not of those that are dead; of the church militant, not of that which is triumphant; of the soul on earth, not of souls in heaven; and that makes all the difference. From St. Paul's writings you have no such practice proved, or any of your invocations established.

Hymeneus.—We have the universal consent of the church from the beginning, and all antiquity, on our side; the unwritten and the written word; and where the Bible is silent, and the Bible is but an extract—for did not Hosea prophesy at least seventy years? and yet how few of his prophecies are extant in writing? Only fourteen

short chapters! Where the Bible, I repeat, is silent, the unbroken tradition of the church hands down what the written word does not supply.

Philemon.—You speak of universal consent from the beginning; but who can appeal to a universal tribunal? Is infallibility written out upon numbers? Is not this an improbable standard to set up? How can we come to universal agreement but from a universality of particulars? And will you undertake to say, that all that have ever lived and died, did agree in your view, when the religious opinions of many never survived their own time? The works of thousands died with them; and multitudes never wrote at all: therefore, when you refer us to universal consent, you only throw us back upon a universal assumption; and if you have no other data to go upon for your plurality of Mediators,—if you cannot proceed on higher ground, call in a longer antiquity than you do for your oral traditions, the sooner you cast them out of your supposed ark of mercy the better.

Thomas.—But to advert more particularly to my enquiry, can you, independent of certain passages of Scripture, show me Christ as sustaining the whole office of mediator in his own person?

Philemon.—That various offices of Christ are sustained by himself only, are as fully established by the ceremonial law of Moses, as by the gospels. His *kingly* office was illustrated by the crown Aaron wore; his *priestly*, by the breast-plate, which carried the names of the twelve tribes; his *prophetical* by bells, whereby there was announcement of things pertaining to God and

men. Nay, all his offices, borne by himself alone, were typified in almost all their sacrifices; so that in consequence of his being all-sufficient in all things pertaining to God, he was typically styled the meat offering, which was a sort of offering, wherein consisted all the necessaries of life, bread to eat, water to drink, oil to gladden, and incense to regale; and such is Christ, as the one mediator and redeemer; he is the whole meat offering to every immortal soul!

But, surely, it is enough to ground your faith upon, that Christ is propounded in Scripture as the alone mediator between God and man, even if the written word had been silent upon the mode of his operation; there is no doctrine true, which does not derive its origin from the word of God. We Protestants give no heed to traditions, any more than St. Paul did to endless genealogies and Jewish fables; all the doctrines of our church are scriptural; nobody ever dreamt that the multifarious doctrines of the Romish church were such; search as much as you please, you can find no footsteps or traces of them in the word of God. What authority in Scripture have you for the worship of the Virgin, for purgatory, and the prayers for the dead? &c.

These many years I have watched the working of your church, and because we live in times of spiritual profligacy, and abandonment of many scriptural principles, it is high time that those who have age and experience should speak out.

The system you hold is monstrous; it dares to speak of the infallibility of the Pope; surely it must be infallibility as it regards the workings of

evil? Is he not in Scripture justly designated the man of sin? Oh! the blindness of your church, and the arrogancy of its temporal head. What! a sinful worm infallible and immutable as the Great God! Why then did Jehovah appoint a sin offering, and sacrifices for prophets, priests, and people? Was it not to show that the whole visible church might run out into soul-destroying error? Can you suppose the all-wise God does any thing in vain; or think you, that your vicegerent on earth is so perfect, as to require no Saviour?

And why withhold the sacred Scriptures from the common people? Is not this an act no less cruel than unscriptural and ruinous to their souls? and has not the Holy Spirit penned down the sacred word for the use of all mankind? and has he not specified that intention, by inditing it to all classes of people? viz. to babes in Christ, children, young men, old men, and fathers; why then thrust your great political wedge between the two great sections of our community, to the unspeakable damage and certain injury of both; and though you may lift up your ceremonial eyes of forced devotion as much as you please, never will I cease, so long as I live and breathe, to disclaim against your whole system; for Popery denies every office of my Lord; his *priestly*, by offering the daily sacrifice of the mass; his *prophetical*, by supplying supposed defects of Scripture, by unwritten traditions; and his *kingly*, by ascribing power and authority to the Pope over the conscience, which is the sole prerogative of God.

SECTION XL.

ON THE CORRECT INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE.

THOMAS.—PHILEMON.—EPAPHRAS, and JEHUDI. *An Unbeliever.* Jeremiah xxxvi. 23.

Thomas.—There is hardly a doctrine, or the nature of a duty in Scripture, which is not liable to a doubtful interpretation; some persons, by taking certain passages of God's word literally, have run out into the greatest extravagances; others, again, by trying to find out some spiritual meaning, have obviously lost sight of its plain import; while many, who seem to be somewhat in the church, (Gal. ii. 9.) entertain such conflicting sentiments and views, that one is at a loss to know what to believe.

Philemon.—A clear exposition of Scripture, and a correct interpretation, is always that which the Spirit of God gives; the teaching of the Spirit ought to be carefully sought in all the ordinary channels, as well as in all the appointed means of grace, and prayer will be found one of the chiefest means.

Epaphras.—Unless the Spirit of God teach, there is no telling whither a man may be led. In the desire to do his duty, he may step out of the path of duty; he may embrace sentiments which are pernicious in their tendency, enter upon practice which is uncalled for, and incur acts of austerity and self-denial, which savour

more of superstition than piety ; and besides inflicting a deep wound on his own soul, he may plunge others also into the wide sea of error and uncertainty.

Philemon.—My long experience approves your remark ; unless we keep in view the mind of the Spirit, we sin against the truth of God ; we make even God himself speak what he never meant, we wrest the Scriptures to our destruction. (2 Peter iii. 6.)

Epaphras.—Nothing is more true, and the very thought of wresting Scripture from its lawful interpretation, makes me shudder. That form of speech is borrowed from a horrid practice—it is an allusion to the rack ; an innocent man, in ancient times, in the dark ages, and in some papal countries still, was put to torture through calumny and secret suspicion ; and from the mere force of pain and want of courage, he was made to speak a language not his own, and to make confessions not voluntary, but extorted. In the same way, some persons put the sacred Scripture to the rack ; they wrest its meaning, they draw out of it a sense it never intended, they compel it, by this means, to speak a language, and to utter sentiments of which it never dreamt, and such an interpretation grieves the Holy Spirit, and draws down a curse, and not a blessing.

Jehudi.—Granted that it is possible to divert Scripture from its scope and right sense, how do you reconcile passages that directly confront each other ? Are you so great a stickler for Scripture consistency, as to go to all lengths in its defence ?

At this rate, you may as well try to persuade me that black is white, or any thing else you please.

Epaphras.—Scripture must be received as a whole; isolated and detached passages, which seem to differ, will not answer your purpose in argument, nor profit your soul in the end; one part of Scripture must be carefully compared with another part, and when two passages come in direct collision, we must take the obvious meaning of each, and determine the sense, and discern their perfect agreement accordingly. Examples of such discrepancy as those to which you allude, are manifold, but the knot of difficulty you wish to tie is easily solved; in one place our Lord says, “If any man smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also;” (Luke vi. 29.) but when he himself was smitten, he exclaimed, “Why smitest thou me?” (John xviii. 23.) St. Paul forbid the Corinthians to go to law with one another, (1 Cor. vi. 7.) and especially dissuades them from going before a heathen judge, or to plead their cause before their tribunal, and yet he himself appeals unto Cæsar. (Acts xxvi. 32.)

Jehudi.—And is not that a contradiction of himself? does not Scripture thus become at variance with itself? is not one part giving the lie direct to another?

Epaphras.—By no means; general rules are laid down in such cases for the general course of our conduct: the spirit of such passages is preserved, though the letter, as you think, seems to be broken; there are no rules without exception; there is always a discretion arising out of circumstances.

Thomas.—The word of God, I should suppose,

may always be taken in a twofold sense ; it adapts itself to man in his double capacity, as he is a natural or spiritual being, and there is enough of instruction for both.

For my part, I do not go so far as Jehudi ; he is unbelieving on all points, and he cares not a rush for any part of God's word ; it would please him well, were all of it committed to the flames ; still I am tempted to think there are many interpretations in common currency among us, which are of doubtful acceptance ; a few instances out of the number must suffice.

(Gen. iv. 7.) How doubtful is the received interpretation of that passage, " sin lieth at the door : " some refer it to the punishment of Cain's sin, or his inward vexation, and the pangs of a guilty conscience—others make it allude to a speedy exposure, so that the moment he stepped out of the door of his house, every eye should be upon him for evil, and vengeance be ready to swallow him up every instant : whereas that text, I have heard you say, bespeaks the infinite and fathomless mercy of God, even to those who have not done well, if they only repent : it shows them that they need not perish for ever in their sins, or die miserably and beyond hope : for if they have not done well, there is a sin-offering at hand, a ram at the door of the sheepfold, ready to be pleaded and offered up for them.

(1 Chron. xxii. 8) How diversely understood, or, rather, misunderstood ! Some tell you, that David, because of blood-guiltiness, was not permitted to build the temple ; but the true reason in your view was, not because he was a " man of blood ; "

for (speak we of the matter of Uriah) was not the shedding of his blood freely forgiven? Speak we of others, was not their's shed by God's express command? But he was kept from building the temple because his *bloody wars* were not *accomplished*, all the enemies of God not subdued, and his victories not fully achieved and triumphs acknowledged; there was no time, therefore, for its erection; hence God preferred a shifting tabernacle to a temple, and inquietude to rest; for in all our afflictions he is afflicted. (Isaiah lxiii. 9.)

(Psalm lxxxiv. 7.) What a lively representation of the Israelites hastening to Jerusalem to worship; "they go from strength to strength." They set out from one place a small band; a few miles further on, a few more are added to them; at length they increase in strength and numbers; the larger the company the farther they advance. But how often is the literal and true meaning of this passage merged in the spiritual? thus Scripture language is left undefined, and its whole form and meaning frittered away.

(Matt. xi. 12.) "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." Some speak of this, as "a commanded violence," "a holy violence," "the violence of faith and prayer," as if heaven were to be taken much in the same way as a citadel by storm, the ardour of military force, and the enthusiasm of the besiegers. In this view I agreed so long as I went on trust, and took all for granted that others interpreted; whereas, if you consult the context, that which goes before, and that which follows, you will see plainly, it was only a carnal, sinful disorderly rabble, press-

ing on the Son of God with their bodies, not believing on him in their souls; it was the violence arising out of novelty or idle curiosity, which the Baptist exposes elsewhere, (Matt. iii. 7.) of which Christ complained, and from which he withdrew himself. (Mark iii. 9.)

And (Heb. iii. 18.) how often is the "rest" there spoken of mistaken for heaven; and if so, as you have well observed on many occasions, both Moses and Aaron are excluded from it, whereas it meant only the rest of Canaan, upon which both they, and all that died in the wilderness, never entered.

Nor would it be difficult to mention many other conflicting and erroneous interpretations of God's word, all of which increase unbelief, and excite suspicion.

Timotheus.—If a man will give his own exposition of Scripture, or cite his authorities, let him do so; but if he is a mere textuary, and trying to discover new meanings, instead of praying for more saving grace, it is only a piece of egregious ostentation and vain glory.

Philemon.—Perhaps it may be difficult to form an exact idea of the full extent of many passages of Scripture; few humble-minded Christians will venture to define the precise boundary line, which the Holy Spirit intended should be put upon many texts, but nothing is more dangerous than to suffer the mind to roam at large, in the wide field of a man's own discursive imagination.

Jehudi.—And thus, I suppose, an end is to be put to honest enquiry, and freedom of thought; these men hate to be pressed to consequences

by incontrovertible arguments ; they carry the reputation of being great lovers and makers of peace ; but they can see the storm gathering around them in the distance ; they anticipate its effects, and very wisely use all possible means to avoid it ; but the discrepancy of one part of Scripture from another, and the arbitrary constructions put upon it, are stubborn facts.

Epaphras.—Mere assertions are no proofs, and all you can advance, passes by as the idle wind ; it is apart from the subject, and has no bearing on the general question. You read the Scriptures, but it is with the eye of prejudice, not with the Saviour as a teacher, and the Holy Spirit as a guide. (Psalm lxxiii. 24.) You resemble a man digging into the bowels of the earth for precious metal, say, silver or gold ; but if he miss the rich vein, what does it profit ? In like manner, if you take up Scripture, and pervert its meaning ; you miss the mind of the Spirit, you stumble on difficulties of your own making, and you are from that moment quite out of the scope and real interpretation of the whole passage.

Timotheus.—Unless we look well to what goes before and comes after, and tie the ends of the spiritual threads of Scripture, we shall never follow the straight line of God's truth.

Philemon.—Most assuredly, without taking proper heed, there is nothing which we may not make of Scripture, and no discrepancy we may not find in it ; in the present day, how often do we find ungodly men, bring together a few detached passages, and try to make the most of them ; they endeavour to twist and turn them to

their purpose—the same evil was rife in ancient times; the Scribes and Pharisees perverted the true meaning of Scripture to the worst of purposes; much of what they did, might arise from jealousy and pure malevolence; but suppose you they had condemned Christ, if, instead of saying, “*we have a law, and by our law he ought to die,*” they had spoken of or appealed to the *Law of God.*

For my part, I speak from long life and much experience; I have learned to take Scripture as I find it; the more I understand its sacred contents, the more I discover of consistency throughout. All the patriarchs, and prophets, and apostles, though they lived at different periods, and under widely different circumstances, spake as with one mouth, and there is a harmony and concordance, an unity and agreement in the Bible, which we find in no other composition whatever.

SECTION XLI.

ON THE SANCTITY OF THE SABBATH.

THOMAS.—EPAPHRAS.—PHILEMON.

Thomas.—There are professing Christians who consider the Sabbath in the light of a mere earthly institution, without any divine sanction whatever. They adduce innumerable arguments and sophisms in support of their opinions, but not one of them I have ever heard or read goes beyond the merest probability. And who would rest their faith in this matter on so insufficient a basis?

Epaphras.—In the almost worn out state of the world, let not that excite your surprise which is so plainly foretold. “In the last days perilous times shall come,” and there shall spring up in divers places men of perverse minds, who shall hold the truth in ungodliness. Not only will they speak against the institution of the Sabbath, but against all that is either sacred or mysterious in religion. Nothing shall be submitted to in humble faith; all things will be searched into with profane hands, and with most unhallowed boldness.

Philemon.—This is the sin of the age in which we live. Ungodly men are fast filling up the measure of their iniquity: an inundation of wrath, I fear, is at hand. Surely, if the present

race of men had any humbleness of mind in them, they would be afraid to set up their finite judgments against the judgments of the ancient fathers of the church. Such men as Cranmer, Ridley, Latimer, and others, would have enforced the sanctity of the Sabbath both by their precepts and examples.

Epaphras.—Many of the opposers of the christian Sabbath are so ignorant of the real nature of the question, and they are so profoundly ignorant of the sacred Scriptures, that many of them have not, to my knowledge, read the Bible once through, and yet they have the effrontery to oppose themselves to men who have not only read every page of Scripture, but every line in every page.

Thomas.—The question, in my mind, is not what good men have believed, or held, or written; but, what has the Lord revealed or sanctioned? Many, I know, undervalue that institution, and take umbrage against it, because they can discover no positive injunction respecting it in the New Testament. They contend, that the Lord is silent on the subject; and they reason, with some appearance of truth, that if it had been his will, it should be kept apart from other days, it had been established with all due authority, and come under express Gospel enactments.

Philemon.—But such an expectation proceeds from a mistaken view of the whole matter. It implies great ignorance in the very nature of our laws, both human and divine, even in mere human institutions; every enactment holds good as long

as it remains in the statute book unrepealed. It continues in force, and may be put in force, though for a time it may become somewhat obsolete and lose its vigorous application. Now where have we any repeal of the sacred institution of the Sabbath? We read of its original enactment, but where is there any trace of its abrogation, seeing the same authority is needful to annul it which first invested it with its awful sanctities?

Epaphras.—The line of argument which you adopt is incontrovertible, and the inference to be drawn from it most conclusive. Instead of seeking for any fresh sanction in the New Testament, it would be a work of supererogation to find any. The Sabbath stands precisely on the same footing as any other part of the Decalogue, of which it forms a part.

If you choose to press the matter further, and say that it is not found in the sermon upon the mount, where the law is so fully recognized, expounded, and applied, I say such omission is no warrant for you to go against it, but it rather makes for the original institution itself; and the reason why our Lord does not there allude to it distinctly, probably was, that an ordinance so obviously due to God, so beneficial to man, ought never to be brought into question.

Philemon.—It should ever be remembered that all days belong to God; they are all of his own making; and he may allot what work soever he pleases to be done in them. But while other days are spoken of without qualification, there is always an emphasis put on the Sabbath. Its

name bears the stamp of divine authority. Though all seasons are the Lord's, yet the fact of its being styled the *Lord's Day* shows you that this is *his* specially and emphatically.

And why, I would ask, should it be thought hard upon the creature that his great Creator should be thus careful of him? Can you suppose that the prohibition respecting the Sabbath should be viewed in any other light than as a privilege, or that divine legislation respecting the keeping of it proceeds from any other consideration than an eye to our spiritual and temporal good? When the Lord permitted our first parents the participation of all fruits, saving of that of the tree of life, was not that a most merciful injunction? And the consequence of their transgression, was it not their fearful overthrow?

Besides, if men did but attach to the ordinance of the Sabbath the importance it deserves, the solemnizing and sanctifying of that day would be no less a matter of *necessity* to keep it holy than free choice; for what is the tenour of the divine command respecting it? "Six days shalt thou labour, *and do all that thou hast to do*;" and if professing Christians, and men that fear God, did all in the week, and left nothing to be done of a worldly nature on the Sabbath, did they perform the works of their calling in the six preceding days? Could they say, as their heavenly Father did, "In six days the Lord created the heavens and the earth, and rested the seventh day," they would cease from their works inevi-

tably; and when there was no higher motive for the keeping of it sacred, necessity would supply that motive.

I am aware that some scoffers, and sceptics, and rationalists, have attempted to raise objections against the institution of the Sabbath, on the ground that the day is changed; but this is a sorry subterfuge. Were it not for the circumstance, that a change having been made in the day has rather unsettled some minds, I should not have noticed it; but if the Lord did make a change in the day, I would ask, had he not power to do so? Cannot he make whatever changes he thinks best? Has he not just reason for doing so? Is not creation-work equal to that of redemption? the making of all things out of nothing equal to making all things more like himself? Is not redemption the master-piece of all his work? Besides, is not the alteration in question for the better, as all successive works of God undoubtedly are? He changed the ceremonies of the law into the substance of the gospel; water into wine; nature into grace and grace into glory; happy changes! wherein we go from worse to better! may we go thus onward from imperfection to perfection for ever!

As one, then, my friend, who has received mercy, let me entreat you never to permit the thought, that the Sabbath is without a divine sanction; it is no mere ordinance of man, as some would tell you; it does not arise, as others think, from no higher motive than an eye to our vile being; much less does it take its rise from human policy and priestcraft: on the contrary, this ap-

pointed loan of sacred worship is from the Lord, the manner of it is from revelation, and the strength for its sacred performance is from the grace of our God.

I might here refer you to the primitive church of Christ, for the purpose of showing how this day of sacred rest ought to be kept, but we may go farther back still, and learn a lesson from God's ancient people. The Jews had several solemn preparations for the Sabbath, and such heed was given to these preparations, that they amounted to a law; they would not take a longer than a Sabbath-day's journey, lest, coming home too late, they might want leisure, and not be in a fit state for its due celebration. Does not their conduct put many Christians to open shame, who never prepare themselves for this solemn ordinance at all? Some, when the Sabbath morn dawns, enter into the sanctuary late, others so irreverently and heedlessly, that their very appearance is an insult to God, and a great annoyance to the more faithful worshippers.

There are some who keep the Sabbath, but then it is formally and hypocritically; they appear to hold the notion, that a certain space of time, spent in outward rites of the church, has a certain inherent holiness in it, whereas time is but the medium of duration, and has neither good nor evil in it; it is then only a holy season to us when the Sabbath is the means of producing holy feelings and affections in us; its sanctity is only then maintained, and the Lord only then sanctifies it to us when he sanctifies our heart.

But however the ungodly may profane it, or

nominal Christians try to lower it; it was an institute so good in itself, that it existed in Paradise: it was instituted before the fall, and was sanctioned by many Scriptures afterwards; the Lord himself had special regard to it on earth, (Matt. ix. 35.) and in heaven there will be a whole eternity of Sabbaths.

Ye, therefore, who are opposed to the spirit and the letter of this sacred day of rest, ye who make it a day of pleasure and pastime, of travelling and pandering to the vices of our age; how could ye endure heaven, which is laid under the everlasting continuance of one unbroken Sabbath? Surely if ye so complain, and so much abuse one day in seven now, ye can never wish to enter into that perpetual rest that remaineth for the people of God!

PART V.

OLD AGE OF PHILEMON.

SECTION XLII.

MATURITY OF EXPERIENCE.

TIMOTHEUS.—EPAPHRAS.

Timotheus.—A steadfast and progressive piety is the offspring of sound christian principles, and Christianity itself, you know, dear Sir, is like unto a grain of mustard seed, which groweth into a great tree. (Matt. xiii. 31.)

Epaphras.—Your observation is good: yet there be few that follow it out. Many professed followers of the Lord Jesus seem to care very little, whether they are increasing or decreasing in vital godliness: there are some I know, who have many years sat under a full and searching ministry, and yet the number of their mercies, and the frequency of their recurrence, has only produced an unfeeling frame of mind and growing insensibility: they do not lay it to heart; neither do they reflect within themselves whether they are going forward or backward: I stand in doubt of them. The candle of the Lord must often be trimmed, in order that it may burn pure and bright to the end; but in many instances, it is to be feared, it suffers almost total extinction, and nearly quite goes out.

Timotheus.—Of all outward and nominal professors of religion, what you say will be found but too true; (Matt. xxv. 11.) this is a common fault which applies to them all; they cast up their accounts with the world every night, but they suffer all the days and nights of their whole life to pass over their heads, and yet never cast up their account with God at all!

Epaphras.—When we speak of others we must speak charitably and truly,—something is due to one's self as well as to them; and the *manner* in which we view the state, or talk of the spiritual condition of others, whether in youth, manhood, or old age, is an evidence of *our own*: the guage we take of them is the exact *measure* of our own spirituality.

Timotheus.—How much then do we need spiritual discernment and a right judgment in all things, when we have to decide upon the growth and attainments of any one of God's people; and yet all that are God's must and do pass through successive stages of experience.

Epaphras.—It is the duty of all to do so; but *duty* is one thing, *facts* another. How many, even in old age, resemble stunted shrubs in the crevices of rocks, struggling to the last with a bare existence; yet, when the Lord's people do make progress spiritually, as others naturally, the sight is most cheering: it delights the hearts of their faithful pastors; it animates them to greater exertion; it is an encouragement to us all.

St. Paul was never satisfied but with the growing state of the churches; he would not

have his converts always children; (1 Cor. xiv. 20.) he prayed and longed to see them go on to perfection. It is *maturity* in divine things that gives joy to the saints, that gladdens angels, and surrounds with fresh lustre the throne of God.

Timotheus.—We have, thanks be to God, a goodly number of aged saints among us. God has greatly prospered the ministry of his word to them, and he now exercises his paternal care over them, manifests his interest in them, and fulfils his promises towards them. For it may be said of many, that “length of days is in their right hand, and in their left hand riches and honour.” (Prov. iii. 16.)

Epaphras.—Truly so; and Solomon has well said, that “the hoary head is a crown of glory if it be found in the way of righteousness.” (Prov. xvi. 31.) Yet there are many old professors who are every thing but what they should be, for they are not found in *the way of righteousness*.

Timotheus.—In that I fully agree. Some of them, I know well, are propping up their tottering frame with animating views of their supposed goodness and moral worth, and others live in an inward consciousness (as they term it) of their own rectitude, and cheer their declining years with the thoughts thereof; others are so full of self-praise and adulation, that they have learned the happy art of hiding from themselves their own image, and of divesting themselves of all serious consideration; they satisfy their conscience by the approbation they still receive from their aged associates, as ignorant as themselves. And on all occasions, when you try to point

them to the only refuge and way of salvation, (Isaiah xxxii. 2 ; John xiv. 6.) they take shelter in the approval of their fellow-men, or run under the fostering wings of the world.

Epaphras.—It is a fearful mark of final reprobation, when any class of mankind, either old or young, have their life spun out to the latest span, and their age prolonged to the last period and power of nature, only that they may fill up the measure of their wickedness ; and yet, I quite agree with you, painful and distressing as is the admission, that there are multitudes who, by old age, have learned little else than old habits of sinning ; others there are who, though prodigals and spendthrifts in youth, have learned not only not to become reformed, but only worse and more depraved in their old age ; many that were once known to have been liberal and bountiful, growth of years has so hardened, that they are now full of policy and contrivance, and very misers. How many are there in every place, in every city, town, village, hamlet, through the land, from whom there is nothing good to be learned, and no wisdom to be gathered ; they have come into the world and go out of it, but they have not profited either in religion or in self-knowledge—either in the ways of grace, or in their manner of life ; they die without hope and perish in their sins, and therefore are lost without remedy !

Timotheus.—It is, however, dear Sir, a great mercy that there are many and great exceptions ; old men, who are at once full of years and full of

grace. But, for my better information, and the settling of my own mind, as regards this stage or growth in grace, it will delight and profit me much to have your thoughts on the subject.

Epaphras.—Ever remember, the oldest and most experienced saint was once but a mere babe in Christ; at that period, to ascertain growth admits of no difficulty; for as babes, (if healthy and well, grow in strength naturally,) increase in vigour and in stature; so the little ones of Christ's fold advance as they proceed, in wisdom from above, in saving knowledge and experience; in all which respects, they resemble, to a certain extent, the Lord Christ; of whom we read, that he "increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man." (Luke ii. 52.)

Afterwards, as you well know, succeeds to infancy the season of childhood; and this stage is marked with the greatest weakness, versatility of disposition and temper; a word will make a child your enemy, another will make it your friend; it is the little creature of passing circumstances, and the confluence of every kind of passion and feeling; and such is a little one of Christ's flock; in the first stage of its growth it is very weak, and yet it feels strong; it aims well, and yet it continually falls short of its aim; when it first sets out in divine life, it resembles a child shooting at a mark; it tries to hit it, but, because its arm is weak, and strength but little, the arrow wriggles and struggles along most unequally; this is the experience of childhood in the things of God, and it is easy to decide when it is en-

tered upon and where it ends; for when the powerful hand of faith pulls the bow of eternal truth, the arrow of conviction flies full and even, and goes direct to the mark.

In the hey-day of youth and manly courage, who can be at a loss either to discern or describe it? Can you fail to observe the blush of health on the cheeks, the activity of the limbs, the sprightliness of the countenance, and the vigour of the whole constitution? and when there is spiritual activity and energy for God, when there is the gracious determination of serving the Lord faithfully, and promptly, and decisively likewise; when there is the power of thinking and acting on his behalf, another stage in divine life begins to develop itself; the strength of manhood appears, and, in its train, unsuspectedness and temerity; the flower opens in all its freshness and loveliness, and throws out all its fragrance; it is its meat and its drink to do the will of God; it is full of boldness and zeal, even approaching to impetuosity for God; it is not fearful, nor faint-hearted, like unto a part of Gideon's army; but it is strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might, and the same characteristic features are observable in the parental state. And, as there are plainly successive stages in the life of God, even as there are in the life of nature, and all of them have their exact lineaments and features, why should you be at fault to fix the aspect and general features that belong to a good old age? for here, as in every other point of view, the analogy is complete

Timotheus.—This stage of experience then, I

suppose, I may discover in this way : in old men there is always a growing feeling of bodily weakness and infirmity ; these are often so sensibly felt, that they have not unfrequently proved the occasion of unholy complaining ; (Psalm xc. 10.) he, therefore, who has been the longest in the beaten path of grace and salvation, and who has had the greatest knowledge of his own heart, has the greatest readiness to confess his sins and to lament his unworthiness and growing weakness ; the more he sees of himself, the farther he advances in divine life, the more is he convinced that he has no spiritual life in himself.

Epaphras.—And hence, the oldest saint always writes the bitterest things against himself ; in surveying his past life, conscience speaks out, and accusations spring up in his breast, like succeeding waves on the bosom of the sea ; but, when he speaks of his Saviour, his unchanging love, his providential care, his unerring promises, his eye glistens with delight, his heart swells with gratitude, and his tongue with praise ; but when he looks off from the Saviour, and looks at himself, how vile he appears ! how great his demerit ! how deep his convictions of sin ! how sensible of his short-comings and infirmities ! how disposed to condemn self ! and to ascribe all the good of gone-by days to the Lord, and all the evil to himself ! to his omissions of duty, the grieving of God's Spirit, and to living below his privileges !

Timotheus.—But when an old man has thus attained to a practical and experimental knowledge of his own misery, is he not then in a posi-

tion to instruct others, and to magnify God's free mercy?

Epaphras.—Decidedly so; and no one can look upon such an aged saint but with the greatest reverence; for he is no dead and withered branch, but a living tree in the garden of the Lord: his great age has brought with it great grace, manifold experience, and much influence likewise.

Timotheus.—Is it not then our duty, no less than our privilege, to defer much to those who rise superior to us in wisdom, by reason of their gifts? to listen to them with attention, when they give us such a shining example by the meekness of their spirit, and try to lead us onward by the ornament of every christian grace? Is not that precept of Moses to that effect? (Lev. xix. 32.)

Epaphras.—Whatever is commanded of God, we know that command is to be honoured; and if we have grace to respect God's precepts, we are sure always to regard our own profit.

Timotheus.—May we profit much from converse with old men in Christ. God enjoins great reverence to them: there is no fear of God, where there is no reverence for old men.

Epaphras.—An old man, full of grace and full of days, bears the moral image of Jehovah. God has set his mark on his forehead, and his signet on his breast: in each successive stage of his life he has, after a sort, been made to wear his sacred impress: if he is in the majesty, he is the image of God's power; if he is a parent in the bosom of his family, he is the image of his providential care; if skilled in science, or practical knowledge,

he is the representative of God's wisdom ; and if he has come to length of days, he is the picture of God's eternity ; therefore, in every aged saint, you may trace out much of heavenly resemblance, and, hence, you require no further sanction to listen to them ; for you anticipate what I advise ; wherever the least and lowest trace of the divine image appears, that image is to be revered, and loved, and held in all due reverence ; old men, therefore, are to be listened to, not for their own sake merely, but for the good of others ; it is their privilege no less than their duty to rehearse the noble acts of the Lord, and to tell what things He has done for their soul !

SECTION XLIII.

ENUMERATION OF PAST MERCIES.

TIMOTHEUS.—PHILEMON, &c.

Timotheus.—What a treasure is the sacred Scriptures! how full of comfort and instruction! What a staff to lean upon through life! It seems to me that all God's dealings with his people in times past, are intended to be but so many exercises for the unseen future; and so far as I can judge and read my own heart, numbers make no difference; the divine government of a whole nation is that of one individual: and, on the other hand, one gracious man's experience is a kind of epitome of that of a whole believing world!

Philemon.—Truly so; and in this view I would have you read in a prayerful spirit all the pages of revealed truth; every part contains a rich vein of inexhaustible wealth; you may dig again and again into its deep and fathomless resources, and instead of having exhausted, or even explored the whole, new spiritual strata will open up more and more to your astonished view: this has been my happiness for many a long year; and though the well-springs of life are now fast ebbing out, and "I am bringing my years to an end, as a tale that is told," still the words of salvation are as fresh and new, as consolating and instructive as ever.

As it regards the history of God's ancient

people, in days gone by, unquestionably we may read our own in theirs, spiritually; for more than threescore years I have travelled with them; their desert of sin has been the desert of my soul; their journeyings in the wilderness, toward Canaan, my soul's progress towards heaven. I have had to encounter *spiritually*, the same painful experiences and the same signal mercies too, that befel them *naturally*. I have passed through their encouragements and discouragements, their trials and perplexities—their unbelieving hearts and rebellious spirits, their backslidings and short-comings I have felt within me; yea, the enemies also I have encountered, which hung upon them front and rear, and on both sides of them all their journey through.

Timotheus.—Now, as you are a man so full of years, and experience likewise, we should all so much like to hear your account of the gracious dealings of God with *your* soul; and more especially in immediate connection with the biography, the travels, and history of that most remarkable people to which you have alluded.

Philemon.—Nothing will afford me more pleasure; for whoever received more unexpected and more undeserved mercies? and who can be so base and so guilty of black ingratitude, as to be unwilling to record them? Surely, were I to try to sum up all, they would be more in number than I am able to express! a whole eternity will hardly be long enough for such an object and for such an enumeration!

Timotheus.—And yet our past mercies should not obliterate the feeling of present ones.

Philemon.—Far from it; for as our present mercies should renew the remembrance of all the past, so every fresh act of unworthiness, or sin, should recall to our minds the memory of all former guilt: the recollection of the past will strengthen for the future, and thus every present act of grace and mercy towards the soul will be like so many streams, whereby we are led step by step, till we get to the fountain-head of all mercy.

Timotheus.—But there are many good Christians who appear to me to fail much in this duty. How rarely do we hear the expressive language of David, “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life;” and then comes the sweet inference—it will do so—“I *will* dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.”

Philemon.—Shameful ingratitude! And yet, such is the blindness of the human heart, the perversion of the will, and the besotted state of many of the children of men, after the greatest possible mercies received, that after the greatest deliverances granted to them, after bitter and most sore experiences passed through; yet they will still continue to practice this sin of ingratitude, and to live in utter forgetfulness of God!

The Lord grant that this may not be the case with any of you: if God has already bestowed blessings on you, or freed you from burdens—if he has providentially brought you into trouble, and, with unexpected Providences, brought you out—if he has lightened your spirit, and taken off the weight of soul-oppression, see that you never forget, much less be unwilling, to make mention

of them. Say to all around, "Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul." (Ps. lxvi. 16.)

Timotheus.—This puts me in mind of a sweet anecdote told by another dear old saint of God, and when I was young in grace, and but little read, or skilled in the words of righteousness, it reached my conscience; it made upon my tender heart a deep impression, and were I to live as long as yourself, I could never forget it.

Speaking of gratitude to God, the remembrance of mercies received, and the recording of his gracious dealings, "Look," said the old saint, "at yonder doves, and by their example learn a lesson of thankfulness. Do you not observe, that after every grain of corn they pick up they immediately cast their eyes upward? That attitude," added he, "is the natural expression of thanksgiving." I felt the reproof, and if I have not done the same in expression always, in feeling, at least, I have never forgotten it.

What you have just suggested, appears to throw light upon that remarkable passage in the book of Canticles: Solomon there (Cant. v. 12.) compares the church of the living God to doves' eyes; and, I suppose, because every member of the spiritual church desires to express his gratitude to God for every grain of mercy he receives.

Philemon.—It is even so; and this is all the recompense the Lord looks for: it is all the spiritual rent he asks at the door of *our* dwellings; it is all the revenue he has, or seeks at our hands; and it is all the returns he ever expects; and if we do but make him all the returns of praise and

thanksgiving we are able, he makes the most of our intentions and feelings. Our God takes cognizance of both to the uttermost, and though it is his own free grace and help that enables us to make any sort of returns whatever, yet such is the bounty and liberality of our God, that he puts it all down to our account as a memorial of us.

Timotheus.—But I think that those blessings, whether present or past, that have been the most sought, are the greatest blessings: the more we seek for any thing, the more we prize it when we have obtained it. (Psalm xxviii. 6, 7.)

Philemon.—Yet, when you shall have travelled a long time in the way “to the land that is afar off,” as I have done, the grace of God will lead you to see, that but few, either mercies or blessings, would be yours, if none were to be received but such as had been *sincerely* sought; seeking mercies, and recording them faithfully, are great duties; it is at the peril of your soul to neglect or forego either; still God acts as a sovereign: he does many things and bestows more, to show us what, out of royal bounty and mere sovereignty, he can do; God would have you believe, that he does whatsoever he pleases, and always far more exceedingly abundantly than we can either ask or think. God is not tied down to prescribed means, or to our instrumentality; all things created are so many engines at work for God; winds and storms, no less than angels and archangels fulfil his word, and do his pleasure; oftentimes he steps out of the beaten path of providence altogether, sometimes he acts irrespective of, and above his promises; at other times, he fetches such a com-

pass, that his almighty arm is causing all to turn to our good: nay, such a good and gracious Father have we to deal with, that he is daily and hourly showering his benefits upon us, not for our sake, but for Christ's sake; not for our seeking or asking, but for Christ's praying!

Timotheus.—I do believe we get innumerable benefits from unseen and unthought of causes; mercies are often poured into our lap from quarters we never expected; we receive plentifully of good things we never dreamt of, and never sought for.

Philemon.—And what think you is the hidden source? It is none other than the fruit of the Saviour's intercession; Christ prays always for his people, though many of them seldom pray to any purpose for themselves. The Lord is our perpetual intercessor, and what he asks for his own mystical body, he receives; for it is a petition in behalf of himself; *Christ prays always, and God hears him always.*

Timotheus.—Delightful reflection! how ought we to acknowledge Christ as the sum and substance, as the great author and bestower of every blessing.

Philemon.—In this consists no small part of the believer's life; till we have learned to see Christ in every thing, we have seen God in *nothing*; it is the comfort of the believer, and the securing of the blessing itself, that our happiness is not the result of our industry and pains-taking, but the fruit of Christ's agony and bloody sweat; and herein lies the distinction between the believer and the unbeliever, and you may see it strongly

marked in the history of Esau and Jacob. (Gen. xxvii. 28.) When Isaac blessed *Jacob*, his words are “*God* give thee of the dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine;” but when he turns to *Esau*, his form of benediction runs thus, “Behold, thy dwelling shall be the fatness of the *earth*, and of the dew of heaven from above; and by thy sword shalt thou live, and shalt serve thy brother; and it shall come to pass, when thou shalt have the dominion, that thou shalt break his yoke from off thy neck.” (Gen. xxvii. 39, 40.) In the latter case, you perceive, there is no mention of GOD; his name is not even so much as once named! and this is to show you the character of the unregenerate and wicked. God is not in all *their* thoughts, their carnal mind is enmity against God; they forget God, their maker and preserver, continually; neither do they regard the operations of his hands: whereas a good and gracious soul eyes *God* in the bestowment of every blessing, it rejoices more in the donor than in the donation; more in the giver than in the gift: it takes more delight in the *hand* that opens with the treasure, than in the *enjoyment* of the treasure itself; it is more taken with the *gracious Author* of the good that cometh, than in any *good thing* that does come!

While then, my dear children in the Lord, I do undertake, God willing and helping, to fulfil your reasonable desire, I must postpone it for the present; it is well thus to open the general question, and enough has been said at one time for after-reflection.

Meanwhile, as the strongest need the aid of the

weakest, let me have your prayers, that while I endeavour to consider the days of old and the years that are past, I may be kept from pride of heart; spiritual pride is a subtle evil at all times, and never more so than when we speak of self; there is great danger in surveying God's mercies towards us, lest in speaking of God, we are only speaking of ourselves! Self-adulation, self-seeking, and self-praise is the besetting sin of every age and every step in divine life; little indeed can either young or old record of God's goodness, without tainting and spoiling the memorial by spiritual self-righteousness: there is an open acknowledgment, perhaps, of his mercy; a gracious disposition, in the main, to ascribe all to the right cause; still in every such narration, without much watchfulness and prayer, there is always no little wool-gathering; always a hedging you in unconsciously, always a contracting your circle of general observation, always a tendency to turn all eyes from God till it comes to one's self; I say then, pray, that in remembering or putting down God's mercies for your comfort and instruction, and many, and great, and divers they have been, I may be preserved from pride and unmortified self.

SECTION XLIV.

TRAVELS.

PHILEMON.—APOLLOS.—JESIAH. *A sincere Enquirer.*
2 Kings xxii. 2.

Philemon.—I have been the subject of many good and gracious providences; and mine eye has not, I trust, been wholly unobservant of them, nor mine heart insensible to them, nor would my memory refuse either to recall or my tongue to record them; but time would fail me to tell out all God's manifold goodness in years that are past.

Apollos.—And yet what we are not equal to do at one time, we may at successive periods; the dealings of God with his people, and his providences likewise, appear to me to develop themselves in succession; our instruction, perhaps, ought to be given in the same way; such I think is the meaning of the prophet; "precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, and there a little." (Isaiah xxviii. 10.)

Philemon.—Without further prefatory remark, then, I proceed to give you the information sought.

The travels of God's people are wonderful, whether they are regarded naturally or spiritually; in the calling of them out of Egypt, (the iron furnace) I seem to see the deliverance of my soul from sin and death, and the beginning of my heavenly journey; that act was a lively emblem

of such deliverance ; it was to show, in a natural figure, what every soul must experience in a spiritual sense, before it can take one step towards the land of promise.

And when the children of Israel were brought out of Egypt by the hands of Moses and Aaron, it was after a long season of servitude and hard bondage; they had a sad experience of slavery, which they could never afterwards forget; the iron yoke went into their very souls, and they sighed under it; and truly this was my case, before the day-spring from on high visited me. And is not such the bondage and captive state of all men by nature? are not all bond-slaves to sin, Satan, and the world? can any of the sons of Adam plead exemption? can any lay claim to an escape from a deluge of iniquity, which has overspread the whole race of mankind? are not all born in sin, and the children of wrath, and, till the light of grace breaks in upon the soul, are not all walking in Egyptian darkness? are not all naturally under the law, as a severe taskmaster, and under its curse as the penalty due to transgression? and under the power and prevalence of sin till grace delivers them? and who but the election of grace can ever be brought out of bondage? and what instrument is equal to so great a work, save the inward and influential call of the Spirit of God?

Apollos.—But may not all be called; or did I hear of the election of grace only?

Philemon.—The call of God *then* is just what it is *now*; it is discriminating, for God acts from himself. He has no other reason to assign for

any thing he does than that which arises out of his own nature, hence all his purposes of grace and mercy are uninfluenced by any considerations save those which are to be found in his own mind, and it is also sovereign. All are not called as yet nationally, nor even many effectually; in the Old Testament you read, "The Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth." (Deut. vii. 6.) And what do we find in the New, "Unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ, the power of God, and the wisdom of God." (1 Cor. i. 24.) Men quarrel with God's sovereignty and the freedom of divine grace; they can submit themselves to his decrees of providence, whereby the Lord makes one man poor and another rich; one low and another exalted, and yet, strange to say, in spiritual things, the same sovereignty cannot be endured.

Apollos.—How I long to know whether I am one of the called, or a member of the election of grace!

Philemon.—*What are your views of yourself?* It is a sure sign of your inward change of principles if you feel in your conscience, and can say from the heart, that works done before the grace of God were not done but from self-love, self-interest, and self-seeking; and not from love to Christ, or any disposition to walk in his ways. *And what are your views of others?* It is a sure proof that you are a child of God yourself when you can truly testify of others that they are

inwardly and effectually called by the Spirit. You could not discern the condition of others, or bear your testimony to their change, unless you had experienced the same yourself; for “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God.” (1 Cor. ii. 14.)

Apollos.—Many thanks for this instruction and information also. But, to return to the subject; who can fail to notice the prompt obedience of the children of Israel when they received a call from God? Many were the obstacles that lay in their way; great were the privations they were subject to, and terrible the threatenings; yet they went out with haste; they longed to be gone. Readiness and even precipitance marked their proceedings; they appeared to forget for the moment all the past, and to delight themselves in their future prospects. No sooner do they reach Jericho, on their march, than, at the sound of ram’s horns, “the walls fell down flat,” and, “though they got not possession of it through their own strength, neither was it their own arm that helped them,” yet, after such beginnings, they seemed to have contemplated nothing but joy and the most signal triumphs.

And such, I remember, was the state of my feelings when grace first wrought a change in my heart, and God, in rich mercy, brought me out of the prison of sin and death. Oh, how ardent was my first love! How glowing my zeal! How fervent my prayers! How voluntary my many acts of self-denial! I delighted to know the ways of grace, and how willing to walk in them!

Truly, I could then say, “ Oh, satisfy us early with thy mercy, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.” (Ps. xc. 14.)

Apollos.—But may we not hope this spiritual joy will continue, and even increase more and more; have we not been told that the ways of religion are ways of pleasantness? &c.

Philemon.—Experience is the best teacher, “ what thou knowest not now thou shalt know hereafter;” meanwhile, learn lessons of heavenly wisdom for yourself in the enterprizes of this great people.

In the very first battle the children of Israel fought for the possession of Canaan, they were put to the rout; they were entirely worsted and wholly discomfited; their great leader and captain fell on his face to the ground; (Joshua vii. 10.) the heads of the tribes and subordinate captains and officers disperse themselves; the people flee in all directions; the whole army is in dismay, and almost in despair; every face gathers blackness,—every heart faints,—courage fails,—all is well nigh given up for lost. Oh, what a living representation! What an exact picture of the experience of my own soul! How often, in meeting with some enemy or obstacle unexpectedly,—how often, in the midst of some soul conflicts or bitter experience,—how often, under the influence of unbelief, have I exclaimed,—“ Surely one day I shall perish by the hand of Saul!” How frequently has my soul been prostrate! Often has my heart and flesh failed me! And, notwithstanding that the *Lord* has said, “ I will never leave thee nor *forsake* thee, notwith-

standing all the promises and assurances of divine favour; notwithstanding the power and presence of Jehovah going with me, and working in me, and by me, graciously and mercifully, and almost miraculously; still, such has been the weakness of my faith at times, the depravity of my heart, and the prevalence of unbelief in my soul, that I was ready to turn back upon my enemies, and, like the Israelites of old, to give up all hope of ever reaching the land of promise.

Josiah.—How sweetly is God's gracious dealings with, and forbearance of his people, expressed in Exod. xv. 13. "Thou in thy *mercy* hast led forth the people which thou hast redeemed; thou hast guided them in thy strength unto thy holy habitation."

Philemon.—True, my child! and that one verse embodies all I mean; it presupposes danger on the way to heaven, great difficulties in getting there, and so many enemies from within and from without, that it requires the *strength of God to guide*, to carry us along, and bring us safe to his holy habitation.

Apollos.—But were not the children of Israel often affrighted without cause? were not their minds frequently full of imaginary fears that never existed? were they not always ready to meet evil half-way? and how seldom did they wait till they did come?

Philemon.—Truly, distrust of God's goodness was their besetting sin; I need only refer you to Numbers xiii. 18. as a specimen of imaginary foes they had to cope with.

Yet such doubts and fears, whether imaginary

or otherwise, are such as every true child of God is subject to; they spring from various causes, sometimes they originate in those who are the appointed leaders and captains of the Lord's host; they do not give a good report of the land; they dwell so much upon difficulties and obstacles in the passage thither; they go so much on conditions and exact fulfilments of the law; they are so unacquainted with their own infirmities and the human heart; they so shut out the Saviour and the freedom of grace, that it should almost seem that heaven was any thing but a free and absolute gift; they make it appear as if it depended partly on *works* and partly on faith, and that it was not settled on Abraham and his *seed* for ever; sometimes doubts and fears arise from clouds and corruptions within, darkening our evidences, interrupting our spiritual views of Christ, and so weakening our faith; sometimes from other causes, viz. pride of heart, secret sin, going against light and conviction, &c.

But if any of you, my young friends, are discomforted, through needless doubts and fears of your own or others' making, (sin only excepted, our sin is *just cause of fear*,) remember, I pray you, that the whole land is before you, in all the plenitude of its mercies, and in all the fulness of its blessings—as the *free gift of God in Christ*; as a *heritage* already *given*, and not *conditionally* bestowed; as a free gift for *Christ's sake*, and not for our *deserts*; “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Romans vi. 23.)

Now be satisfied, my children, with this rapid

sketch of the Israelites' travels; enough has been said for your memory to retain,—more would be too much for my strength at this time to give.

Apollos.—Certainly; the good of hearing is the measure of our profiting. I now feel, more and more, how little I know in divine things.

Josiah.—Oh, for more enlarged views of gospel truth! I seem hitherto to have attached too much importance to particular passages and verses. I have not been mindful enough of the general bearing, and the great and comprehensive whole, which is to glorify God in the salvation of his people on a broad scale; in the manifestation of his wisdom, in the fulfilment of his promises, and in gradual discoveries of his grace.

Thomas.—I also see my failings in a very different point of view, when I thus hear of the triumphs of grace. My shameful unbelief distresses me exceedingly; in the travels of the children of Israel, what wonders of wickedness, and yet, what miracles of mercy; though they were a rebellious nation, a stiff-necked people, a seed of evil-doers, yet God, ever true to his word, and faithful to his promise, guided them at last to their promised rest. “O, may he guide me by his counsel, and afterwards, receive me to glory.”

Philemon.—Yes, if you will but trust God, and lean not to your own understanding, “though he may lead you by a way you know not,” though oftentimes he may cause you to walk in darkness, and to see no light: though “neither sun nor stars for many days may appear,” still if you cleave to the God of your salvation, He will in his own good time do for you in a spiritual sense,

as Joshua did to the tribes of Israel: he divided to them their inheritance by lot; and so Christ, the great Captain of our salvation, will never leave you, till he has not only brought you into the kingdom of grace beneath, but into the "new heavens and new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness."

SECTION XLV.

BIOGRAPHY.

JOSIAH.—PHILEMON.—BARNABAS—APOLLOS.—SILAS.

Josiah.—The outline you gave us of the travels of God's ancient people, has interested us not a little : it has, I trust, profited us all in many points of view ; chiefly as it throws light upon God's gracious dealings with our souls, by leading us to apply their earthly pilgrimage to ourselves, after a spiritual manner.

Philemon.—It is in this way we make the experience of others our own ; and derive benefit from what we read ; it is in this way also, the history of past ages becomes the narrative of the present ; the spiritual interpretation of the Bible forms a running comment for ourselves : its examples are our lessons ; and its details respecting the lives and manners of others, are but so many faithful records of our own daily mercies and sins.

Josiah.—We would now desire, dear Sir, if convenient, to have your thoughts on another, and very different subject. The biography of some of the Old Testament saints, and the recording of their sins, has surprised us ; they have proved a stumbling-block to many amongst us.

Philemon.—The Bible is an authentic document ; it describes things as they are ; it neither exaggerates sin by magnifying it, nor flatters saints by making them think better of themselves than

they really ought: the disorders, and abuses, and flagrant transgressions to which you allude, were both permitted and recorded for our instruction; they are intended to humble us, and to make us watch over ourselves with a godly jealousy.

Barnabas.—Scandals among those who profess godliness, prove stumbling-blocks to the weak: they are a great grief to the more established, and often lie very hard and heavy upon all that truly fear God.

Apollos.—I have not as yet learned the ways of God perfectly: but it strikes me there is great difficulty in reconciling the lives of some of the ancient worthies, as they are called, with a state of grace and salvation; some of them were hard-hearted and cruel; others were deceitful and inconsistent; many of them fell into most grievous and scandalous sins; where can you find an exception?

Philemon.—Young Christians see themselves in a true light by degrees; they are put into possession of themselves as they can bear the sight; but hypocrites deny, if not the existence of sin, at least they think of it and speak of it as though they had but little of it: they pare down every evil that is in the sepulchre of their hearts, unto some mere shreds and remainders of evil: whereas the sacred Scriptures make out sin to have not only its being, but its abode and indwelling in us, even after conversion to God. (Rom. vii. 24.)

Josiah.—And my conscience tells me, that sin is still *sin*, under whatever form it appears; an ulcer is an ulcer still, though it be covered with a silken bandage: it was, as you know, under

the law but a bright rising spot in the surface, yet it was pronounced the dreadful leprosy. (Lev. xiii. 2.)

Philemon.—A tender conscience is a great blessing: but an ill-informed conscience is a great evil: every child of God, (if he is a true man and no spy in the land,) feels from in-dwelling sin and natural corruption, that he is *really*, though not specifically, a sinner, as any drunkard, or swearer, or sabbath-breaker whatever; and though such be his views of himself, and such oftentimes his feelings, yet, through grace, he does not live in any known sin whatever; grace reigns, and sin is mortified and kept under.

Apollos.—Still many of our friends, seeing the falls of the godly, and reading the wickedness of the saints in old time, have gotten great hurt to their souls: some have taken occasion to transgress by their example; others of them have emboldened themselves in sin: some have been greatly cast down; while others have been so alarmed lest religion should not prove true, that they have well nigh been cheated out of their birthright.

Philemon.—Every saint has a city of refuge to flee to.

Apollos.—And so has every sinner: will not the shipwrecked sailor put into any harbour in stress of weather?

Philemon.—But does he take up his abode there? Does he find that harbour his rest?—a city to dwell in? We must not expect of man, in his best estate, beyond what Scripture ascribes to him (Psalm xxxix. 5.) the *best* have sometimes the *worst* faults to lament in secret and weep

over; and corruption, you know, can never bewail corruption.

Silas.—We must not, I believe, expect perfection in this world.

Philemon.—So far from it, my son, that a truly gracious soul, and one that is taught of God, feels assuredly, it cannot use aright its own grace received, how much less that it never possessed.

Apollos.—We need farther instruction in this matter; without, therefore, entering upon particular characters, or making mention of particular names, neither of which may seem desirable just now, will you be good enough to take a general survey of the failings of the Old Testament saints, waving details, and foregoing explanations.

Josiah.—We only wish to have a right apprehension of real religion.

Philemon.—With pleasure I accede to your request: I have no greater joy than that your souls may prosper.

You have well said, we are not to expect perfection here; this is a great truth, and it is ever to be borne in mind.

The best Christian is a sort of anomaly; he is a great mixture of grace and sin; he has good and evil in all the faculties of his renewed soul, as well as the being of every evil, and the seeds of every sin in all the propensities of his body.

And though this be true in regard to all the vessels of mercy, yet there is this essential difference between them and the unregenerate; in the godly man there is no faculty into which the Lord has not put some grace less or more, and a

child of God always takes his designation and denomination from the best part of him.

Apollos.—In your view then, I suppose, one grain of real grace is to outweigh a whole mountain of corruption.

Philemon.—I did not use such words; still I would say, the *body* of sin and death (which is the sad heritage of all believers in this world) is one thing, *actual* transgression is another; besides, your own proposition is not untrue; though there be a mountain of corruption, ultimately the grace of God can reduce it and level it into a plain; and albeit, though there be even in the saints more of sin by nature, than of grace by implantation, yet *it is grace the Lord looks to*; it is not nature's deformity he contemplates with delight; yet, know it for your comfort and instruction too, that it is that one good quality that determines your whole character; hence you see, a man may be a saint of God, though he have to struggle with corruption, and even have fallen into gross sin.

Moreover, though you may not have been able to distinguish Old Testament saints from Old Testament sinners, yet the distinction is great, and strongly marked; the child of God, and the children of the wicked one, have been known to act, at times, not unlike each other; but in their leading features, they are always wholly dissimilar: they have been known to travel along the same road together; both have had temptations presented to them; both have taken the bait; but mark the difference, they consented to evil, but

not equally: at the first stage of transgression, *they part in feeling at least*; the one continues in his wicked course, he revels and delights in sin; his conscience and whole soul is in it; it goes with his taste, with the full tide and current of his corrupt passions and affections; if you could read the other's heart, you would find no soul-consent, but sacred misgivings, inward sorrow, dreadful relentings, and the most poignant regrets!

Josiah.—It has been said of all men, that “by nature they are the seed of the serpent;” this is carrying matters too far; but certainly all have felt its venomous bite.

Philemon.—All mankind have not the same power to do evil, either to hurt themselves or others; in the unregenerate there is the power to sting, and they do *sting*; in the regenerate, the poison of asps is kept under their lips, and it remains *within* them, but the *sting* is drawn and they are not permitted to wound.

But, without entering further into particulars, in forming a right judgment upon the Old Testament saints and their lives, I would have you carry with you these few remaining thoughts.

Study variety of character; some men, with little grace, appear *most gracious*, while others, who are far before them in both gifts and graces, are always *seen to great disadvantage*; the reason is, that nature and education has done for the one much, whereas the other has an untoward nature to deal with.

Study dispositions. The best men have their peculiarities, and through their physical constitution, act sometimes most inconsistently. Peter

was a man of this sort: he had a forward and headlong disposition to deal with: it was ever ready to push him into all manner of indiscretions. You have a signal instance *in his conduct* towards our Saviour; at one time he refused to let him wash his *feet*; the moment afterwards he falls into the opposite extreme, and nothing would do for him but a thorough washing all over, even to his hands and his head. Some of God's dear children have no equilibrium; hence their danger of great inconsistency, and also great sins.

Make all due allowance always for the age in which men live, and for the few privileges the ancient saints possessed in comparison of ourselves, as well as for the tempers of some of them, and the temptations to which they were exposed; and then I doubt not you will throw over their failings and sins the mantle of love, and agree with me, that certain enormities are registered against them, to show that we can never come to hope in Christ, till we have quite lost all hope of goodness in ourselves.

SECTION XLVI.

HISTORY.

PHILEMON.—JOSIAH.—APOLLOS.—TIMOTHEUS.

Philemon.—A faithful retrospect of the past is always considered a ground of future promise. The Israelites were, in the earliest ages, under God, the temporal saviours of the world. The sojourning of Joseph and his brethren in the land of Egypt was the preservation of the whole country: (Gen. xlvii.) had it not been for that providential circumstance, probably, not the Egyptians alone, but all the surrounding country had perished; they had been consumed by the disease, or died for want.

Josiah.—And notwithstanding they had conferred such signal benefit upon them, they afterwards became bond-slaves to that very people! they wore, indeed, the iron yoke of oppression, were subjected to an arbitrary government, and left to the caprice and tyranny of a cruel despot. (Ezekiel xxiii. 30.)

Philemon.—And it is even so at the present time: the Jews have been abhorred of those nations who are everlastingly indebted to them; the temporary rejection of the Jews has been the enriching of the Gentiles; (Rom. xi. 12.) and yet these ancient benefactors of other nations are now in the same painful condition in which

their progenitors were formerly; they may have lived under milder forms of government, and suffered less severely in some countries than in others, but surely no one who reads the annals of their melancholy history, but must confess that they have been little better than so many "bond-slaves in all."

Apollos.—Do let me hear from you the rising prospects of that most unhappy people.

Philemon.—The family of Abraham, as you well know, formed the element out of which all our spiritual privileges arose, and have been handed down to us; "to Abraham and his seed were the promises made;" and not one promise made to that ancient patriarch hath failed, the holy seed is the substance thereof; (Isaiah vi. 13.) there is still a remnant of believers among them, and they are destined to preserve the continuation of a glorious church, and the blessed truths of the gospel by their instrumentality, directly and indirectly, from generation to generation; that is, to perpetuate them in the world, as families are continued in continuous succession, one after another; and whatever becomes of *other grain*, rest assured their heavenly Husbandman will be careful of the *good old seed* which is to form the substance of the future crop, and to lead on to the harvest of the world!

Apollos.—What a misfortune that so great a nation should have subjected itself to such a series of dreadful catastrophes.

Philemon.—God's dealings towards his children are always various, often most mysterious and past finding out; yet at the last, when we

come to know his gracious purposes, and to understand the causes and effects of his actions fully, we shall be led to understand this great truth, that none, whether naturally or individually considered, have ever been found losers by godliness, none gainers by ungodliness; sin is the only evil; piety and duty the greatest practical good.

Josiah.—But am I right in supposing the miseries entailed upon that people were owing, not to some secret purpose of God, but purely to themselves, to their own sin and misconduct?

Philemon.—It is enough for us to know that nations do not subsist as such hereafter, therefore they are punished in a national way now; those that suffer for their sins most, suffer less than they deserve—“in judgment God remembers mercy.”

Apollos.—They are certainly left without excuse, for they had good laws and salutary statutes, by which to shape their conduct; “they had Moses and the prophets,” and I look upon Moses’ law as a rough draught of nature’s rules and restraints in paradise, in the time of man’s innocency; but be this as it may, it ought to have been a sufficient motive to them to abstain from sin, because sin is the “transgression of the law.”

Philemon.—God looks at it as a more violent and boisterous act in man, and in nations, to break his laws, than for the sea to burst its bounds. (Jer. v. 22, 23.) God commends the Rechabites for keeping the commandments of their Father, but ought the sons of mortal man,

to make a greater conscience of obeying the precepts of their *dead* father than the children of God, the *laws* of the *living* God ?

*Apollo*s.—God, we also read in 1 Sam. xv. 22, delights *in the obedience* of his people, “more than in the cattle upon a thousand hills.”

Philemon.—And God also is of purer eyes than to behold the least sin ; the least sin is an infinite evil ; it inflicts a mortal wound, and if the wound be mortal, it matters not, in point of effect, whether you have stabbed yourself with a penknife, or fallen upon the point of a sword !

Josiah.—The sins of the Jewish nations have been multiplied greatly ; they have been a backsliding people ; they would revolt more and more ; (Isaiah i. 5.) their transgressions and backsliding increased continually, (Jer. v. 6.) and God tells us they were “bent” upon doing so, (Hosea xi. 7.) and such an evil spirit manifested in the soul of a nation, may well be compared to an inward consumption in the body, or to a wasting ague ; it tends to the destruction of the whole system : they were also a schismatic people——

Philemon.—And schism is always visited with sorest punishments by God, and though the evil of it is seldom duly considered by men, the sin of it was viewed in a just light in the two tribes of Gad and Manasseh ; and how terrible was the punishment meditated till it was fully explained, though there was at that time no separation contemplated either in church fellowship or form of worship, but it was only a local separation arising out of circumstances. (Joshua xxii.)

Josiah.—The Jews have indeed been a rebel-

lions people; they have a revolting and a rebellious heart, (Jer. v. 23.) their princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves, (Isaiah i. 23.) the whole house of Israel has been so ever since God knew them; (Ez. xx. 13.) and no wonder, when the heads of the nation have no fear of God before their eyes, subjects become riotous and turbulent; no wonder they cease to respect constitutional order and authority, and that rule and obedience without which no government can stand.

Philemon.—But the sin that sealed their misery, was their rejection of the Messiah; for this, their Mount Zion was laid waste, their beautiful house turned into heaps, their temple service destroyed, sacrifices ceased, and now there remains among them no more sacrifices to expiate sin, and no way to seek for mercy, though they much need it; every avenue to return to God, of their own making, is shut up; they are judicially hardened, and “blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.”

Timotheus.—But are there not great mercies in store for them? and has not God reserved high privileges for them? is not his heart still much set upon them, though they must for a long time bear their iniquity?

Philemon.—True; and it is the divine purpose to gather together again the children of God that are scattered abroad; (Jer. xxxi. 10.) and though that people may seem to be scattered like dust to the four winds of heaven, and though they may be dispersed among all the families of the earth, and in all countries, among the idolatrous

heathen no less than professing Gentiles, yet you will observe, they are styled children still; even in their dispersion they are not looked upon as the seed of the serpent, but the children of God; just in the same way as your children are yours, though as yet they know you not, nor obey your voice, or walk in your ways.

Apollos.—But surely this is a powerful motive why they should be brought to know their God, and to do their duty to him; what a sad pity for children not to know their parents!

Philemon.—Blessed be God! the time is at hand, when all his gracious promises respecting them shall be literally fulfilled; indeed, year after year they are fulfilling to his true and spiritual Israel now, but they shall be *sensibly* and *naturally* accomplished in the great day of Jezreel, when the Jews shall again be restored, the church be again the spouse of Christ, be married to him in a visible manner, and the Lord for ever become their Saviour and God.

At the calling of the Jews, the Lord Christ will gloriously appear in power and great majesty; his second Advent will be attended with most glorious effects to that ever highly favoured nation; it will be “life from the dead,” (Rom. xi. 15.) “the riches of the world;” (Rom. xi. 12.) “the times of refreshing coming from the presence of the Lord; (Acts iii. 19.) “and the restitution of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.”

Apollos.—But do not those expressions refer to the great day of judgment?

Philemon.—The restitution of all things cannot refer to the last day, as it is usually called, for then there will not be a *restitution* of all things, but the *annihilation* of many things: nor, indeed, did the *holy prophets* ever speak much either of the *day* of judgment, or the *life* to come; that announcement is peculiar to the gospel; “the gospel has brought life and immortality to light.” Immortality was but partially known previously: little is said of it in the prophets; but the gathering together of Israel and Judah was their universal theme. And so great is to be the glory and lustre of that day, that former things are to be forgotten, and not even to come into mind; (Isa. lxxv. 17.) and though we know not what may be the precise nature of Christ’s presence, or the kind of his real manifestation with the saints, yet this we may safely assert, that there will be a more signal display of his presence and grace than has ever hitherto been, since the world began; for we read, there will be then a pure theocracy: “the Lord God omnipotent reigneth!” the whole earth will be one temple, and the Lamb the glorious light of it; and the saints will serve him day and night, and see his face, and the locality of his peculiar dwelling-place will be styled Jehovah Shammah, or “the Lord is there.” (Ezek. xlviii. 35.)

Apollos.—How wonderful are the ways of God! Are not his “judgments a great deep?” How truly may we exclaim, in the language of the great Apostle, (Rom. xi. 33.) “Who hath ever dreamed of such a national restoration after such a scattering?”

Philemon.—And yet there is a deal of difference between the scattering of the saints and the scattering of the wicked. Where God scatters his own people, it is only in the way of dispersion; but when he scatters the wicked, it is after the manner of a destruction. (Psalm cxliv. 6.) “ Let his enemies be scattered as smoke is driven away ;” and it is so driven away as never to return ; but the scattering of God’s ancient people is not that of the wicked—it is the sowing of the good seed, and the *wider their dispersion throughout all countries, the more extensive the promise of a future crop !*

Josiah.—Oh, then, how ought we to pray for and hail the restoration of God’s ancient people ! Methinks the great doctrine of salvation by grace and of justification by faith, will never *till then be fully understood ;* it will never appear in all its length and breadth—never be seen what it is to be, *so freely justified and saved, till they are all by one act of sovereign grace and mercy brought safely home.*

SECTION XLVII.

THE FORM OF GODLINESS WITHOUT THE POWER.

JOSIAH.—PHILEMON.—JAEEL.—JEZEBEL.—ZIBRA.—ZIMRI.—
NIRAM, &c.

Josiah.—Really, Sir, the aspect of the times is extraordinary : in the world at large, strifes and contentions one with the other are to be expected ; but in the church of God, how sad a thing it is to see so much of heartburnings and bickerings, jealousies and party spirit.

Yesterday, in a small party of what are called real Christians, would you believe it ? that though the whole time was spent in talk about the sacred Scriptures, and ministers of the gospel, the conversation was most unprofitable, anti-christian very often, and throughout unedifying ; every one had a different view of the word of God ; on every point nearly there was a difference of opinion, and as to the ministers of the gospel, it was what you would call a thorough taking of them to pieces.

Philemon.—You must not be surprised at this : many professors interpret Scripture after their own fashion, and in their own way ; whereas, we are told, no Scripture is of any private interpretation : it was first penned by the Spirit of God, and it must also be interpreted by the same Spirit ; if the professed followers of the Lord Jesus, to whom you allude, had kept this steadily

in view, they had not differed on that occasion as much and as widely as you describe; they had not clung so pertinaciously to their own private judgments, nor indeed to the opinions of man; they had not been the blind followers of a party spirit, nor have been so led away from Christ as that they should have studied only their own interest and credit. But who were the sort of people with whom you spent the evening?

Josiah.—There were present a great number of religious professors, several of whom I knew personally, viz. Jael and Jezebel, Ziba, Zimri, Hiram, &c., and one or two more, whose names my memory does not serve me to recollect.

Philemon.—From such a quarter, I should suppose, there would be a dealing out of strictures and censures on ministers most unmercifully; but as it is possible to derive instruction, even from those who are in opposition, will you be good enough to give me, as near as you can, an abstract of their remarks.

Josiah.—Nothing will give me greater pleasure than to turn that, which was evil in itself, to some good account.

“Did you hear,” said Jael, “the Rev. Mr. — the last Lord’s Day? *I* could not sit under him for this plain reason: he certainly says many good things, but he has no discrimination, and little or no application of his subject; he seems to have no idea of the sort of good which is suitable for several ages, classes, and conditions of his hearers. He is generally harping on one and the same doctrine; he clearly does not understand the several characters he has to deal with.”

Jezebel.—I quite agree with you; that is just my view of him: it is a great fault and should be remedied. John the Baptist adapted his appeals to several characters, (John iii. 14.) and so did the beloved disciple of our Lord, (Matt. iii. 5.) and such discriminating preaching is the duty of all who profess to teach.

Ziba.—Ministers, we all know, are but stewards; and the office of stewards is to deal out to every one their portion in due season. Good ministers are spiritual physicians, but to prescribe the same medicine for every kind of sickness, and every sort of disease, every body knows is the ready way to kill rather than cure.

Zimri.—If report speak true, there is no man in this metropolis that comes up to the Rev. Mr. ———; he lays down the law clearly; he opens the gospel doctrinally, and he presses home duties in a spiritual way. No wonder all the world is gone after him, as we say.

Hiram.—It is true he is very popular, but your view of his style is more charitable than true. His preaching is high flown, and very uncommon; it is more fitted for the gentleman than for the humble-minded and seeking Christian; and, if I must tell you what I really think, his congregation, and many of them I know well, hear his discourses with more love to the man than understanding of his matter. They are more lovers of what are called great men than of God's truth; they deify the creature, and make a divinity of man's puny intellect: hence the true secret of all his popularity.

But I quite love Mr. ———, whom I heard some weeks ago; you cannot help being pleased with his native simplicity of manner, his holy earnestness, and fervour of spirit.

Ziba.—True, he is beautiful for simplicity and sincerity; and, though I admit that his matter is always better than his manner, still he is so nervous and so rapid, that, at times, there is no following him; it makes a whirl in one's head, and a confusion in one's thoughts. His aim may be good, but that manner, and that rapidity of delivery, though it shows great precipitance of thought, is very unpleasant; besides, when he suffers himself to run out so often into extremes, it is very unlikely he can always get back again and make things meet in a common centre.

Zimri.—But what think you of Mr. ———, his style, his manner, his voice, his gesticulations, his attitudes; in all respects does he not present to his audience a master-mind and a finished pattern of eloquence?

Ziba.—Low be it spoken; but, if you will believe me, I cannot hear him; it is all science, and done with a manifest view to effect. The secret object of such preachers, depend upon it, is not to serve the Lord Jesus, but their own interests. It is not the *word* of God they want to live upon, it is *bread only*, and, however strikingly they may appear to preach, it is only to draw out the popular breath, and to catch the air of popular applause. Their sole aim is to attract the multitude; the whole strain of their ministrations is after the enticing words of man's wisdom; it is to captivate

and ensnare the affections of the people without their cognizance, and there is palpably wanting the demonstration of God's spirit and God's power. This sort of preaching is all animal excitement; nay, it is spiritual dram-drinking,—it is dry drunkenness!

And as to Mr. ———, he is a useful man in the church to all *outward* appearance, but he is a desperate egotist. In most that he says or does, cannot you discern the work of the ingenious artificer? He is at best an evangelical workman, melting down a graven image in the hearts and affections of the people, that they may all, in thought and feeling, ere long, fall down and worship himself!

“How I was amused,” said Jezebel, “I must say, in listening to Mr. ——— at St. ———. It was a charity sermon; all the people were on the tip-toe of expectation, all excitement, and all wonder and surprise. The preacher began in a low, simpering voice; by and by, he assumed a loud tone; soon he rose to thunderings and lightnings; at last he ended in mere nature's crash and carnal controversy.

Jael.—This is just the truth. I heard him also, and he pressed and pressed, till he quite oppressed the whole truth as it is in Jesus.

Ziba.—Such a man, in my esteem, deals with souls as some ruffians deal with cattle; if you do not understand him he seems out of humour with you. He instantly steps down from the promises of Mount Zion, gets up as fast as he can to the top of Mount Ebal, and then pours out, in the voice of Boanerges, all the curses of the law, and

all the threatenings of the gospel too, on the heads of his people.

Hiram.—But have you seen the writings of Mr. ———, they will prove to you that he is a man of some calibre?

Ziba.—But are they his own? He is a pirate on all seas; herein is no mistake. The labour of others is in print as his own. The child of another is abroad in the world, but it is affiliated as his own offspring.

The description which others gave of Mr. ——— was much of a piece with similar observations thrown out respecting several other pastors of churches.

“ I grant you,” said Zimri, “ that Mr. ——— is well disposed, and a good man in a worldly sense; he is amiable in his disposition; he is unblameable in his conduct; he is mild in his temper; he is exemplary in the different relationships of life; he is a lover of hospitality, I believe, and of good men; he is, as we say, a moral and a tolerable well-living man. But he little thinks that he is a slayer of all the people committed to his care and self-keeping, for he never preaches the gospel, and, in fact, he is alike ignorant of the Saviour and of himself!

Josiah.—The truth is, Sir, that in every character brought forward there was not one without a flaw; some of God’s faithful servants were too high in doctrine, some too low, some too slow, some too fast, some too sleepy, and some too violent: none were what they could wish.

Philemon.—Dear Sir, how easy it is to find fault, and yet who are without faults? Imperfec-

tions are the lot not only of the best of Christians, but of the greatest and best of ministers that have ever lived. They are one and all encompassed with infirmities. All of them may be compared to an old fashioned lanthorn which has but one side light, whereas two sides are in darkness ; or, perhaps, to give you a more elevated illustration, the best of them may be compared to the moon, which, as you know, even at its full, has some dark spots in it ; and therefore, instead of people sitting in judgment upon them, and censuring them and their unworthy ministrations with severity, they should feel for them, and pray for them, seeing that a feeling sense of our own inward and outward imperfections is, in this world, the very perfection of us all.

But, I have long seen, that the ministers of God are viewed as a kind of public property, and therefore they are more subjected to animadversion than other men are. How greatly does it behove them to be on their guard, to abstain from the very appearance of evil, since, while they desire to be faithful, they should endeavour not to give needless offence ; for such is human nature, that where there is no love to the minister's person, there will be no profit from his preaching ; there must be an appreciation of his character, before there will be an edification from his matter ; one reason, among others, why Ahab did not profit by Elijah's preaching, and why he could not bear Micaiah's faithful dealing with his soul, was his hatred of their persons ; he viewed the one as his enemy ; (1 Kings xxi. 20.) he hated the other, and whenever this is the case, no man

is likely to be made the instrument of much good. How much of heavenly wisdom, therefore, is necessary in such a gainsaying world as this! how great is the difficulty always to go wisely about the work of the Lord! How often in admonishing and reproof, in preaching and praying, for want of more grace, and a little more common sense, do we make bad worse!

Much as the spirit you saw evinced is to be reproofed, yet how often, on looking back, do I feel myself condemned. Oh! for more of the mind of Christ, to bear with meekness the sneers and censures of the most uncharitable. When shall there be an utter forgetfulness of the creature, and a mind swallowed up in the single approbation of its God? then, and then only, will there be, on the behalf even of our enemies, service without slothfulness, prayer without ceasing, patience without anger, humility without spiritual pride, and blessing without cursing!

SECTION XLVIII.

A RATIONALIST IN RELIGION.

SIMON—*A Rationalist.* Acts viii. 9.—PHILEMON.

Simon.—What a wonderful change has the world in which we live, undergone! In the book of Genesis we read, when God had finished all his works that he had created, he pronounced them “very good;” (Gen. i. 31.) but in after time, when Solomon surveyed the same world with the eye of inspiration, he pronounced all below the sun to be vanity and vexation of spirit; (Eccl. i. 14.) and when St. John viewed it in the light of the Spirit also, the spectacle presented to him was still more astonishing; “we know,” said he, “that we are of God, and the world lieth in wickedness.” (1 John v. 19.) Now it is apparent, and the matter admits of no contradiction, that a moral deluge has broken in upon this earth of ours, sweeping away almost every vestige of good in its course; but I do believe all this change, of which we hear so much, admits a full explanation on natural and rational principles.

Philemon.—We cannot keep too close to Scripture; no explanations are admissible, but such as the word of inspiration gives; men that leave the sacred Scriptures are plunged into the wide sea of uncertainty.

Simon.—But why call in helps superior to the

occasion? why introduce the intervention of superior causes, which many conscientiously disbelieve? when nature herself is sufficient for the various workings, what do we want more? For my part, I like much the good old Roman adage, "Deus vindice nodus."

Besides, who cares for the honour of antiquity? We live in the age of modern inventions and improvements, the schoolmaster is abroad, and as well may we resist the fury of the tempest, as attempt to stop the irresistible march of intellect: what sect can prosper that fights against the discoveries of reason, and what hope of proselytism if we set our faces against the light of clear induction and experimental philosophy?

Philemon.—I have lived long, and have observed the rise and fall of many experiments, and most wicked attempts to extinguish the light of Scripture, but hitherto, they have all proved useless and vain; and what reason can we assign for this? It is because the church keeps to the word of God, therefore the word keeps her; and depend upon it, we can never fall into error, so long as we fall not from the plain declaration of God's word; we shall be found sound indeed, so long as we stand fast in the faith.

But why, let me ask you, undervalue antiquity, or try to silence the voice of the Spirit? as if the language of truth was not the same in all ages. For my part, I love antiquity, because I seem to see in it the very image of Deity; and hence our blessed Saviour, in Daniel, uses it as an emblem of himself, Ancient of days, (Dan. vii. 9.) moreover, in Jer. vi. 16.; we are commanded

not to seek or yield our minds to novelties, but to require the old paths both of believing and doing : and why in the New Testament is the word of God styled the *everlasting* gospel? is it not because its authority is to be relied on, and its sanction is to be received with implicit credence in all dispensations? does not the Old Testament differ from the New, only as a second edition differs from the first? the latter comes forth with enlargement, and certain necessary emendations.

But, Sir, to bring our interview to some useful and practical purpose, what is it you intend?

Simon.—I wish to make you see, that no events recorded in Scripture demand divine or supernatural agency to account for their existence.

Philemon.—To what events do you refer?

Simon.—I need only specify a few, and from them you may infer my view of them all.

You look upon the deluge, for example, as a phenomenon above nature; I, on the contrary, explain it on *natural* principles; the fountains of the great deep being broken up, in my judgment, means nothing more than the heads and springs of water already within the earth, and these being expanded and widened by excessive rains, they would of course overflow the surface to a great extent; and the windows of heaven being opened, surely had nothing miraculous in it, inasmuch as that was merely the parting and opening of the clouds by which the rain falls in torrents; and as for the wind that God made to pass over the surface of the earth, and to assuage the waters, what was there in that extraordinary? In the story of Lot's wife also, who can believe her trans-

formation into a pillar of salt? Wise men reject the interpretation, all rational and intelligent men can easily account for the appearance in different ways, and all profane persons take umbrage, and scoff at it, as if it were the same as Ovid's *Metamorphoses* or Æsop's fables.

Philemon.—But here I must interrupt you; there is a mighty difference between the actions of God and a poet's fictions; surely he who believes that Jehovah made all things out of nothing; he who sees, with his own eyes, birds break forth from eggs, and living creatures starting from dead seed; or a chrysalis burst into a butterfly, can he doubt a woman's body for the sin of the soul turned into a pillar of salt? With God are not all things possible?

Simon.—Surely, Sir, there is such a thing as credulity and blind superstition.

Philemon.—But avowed infidelity is more blind still; it is worse, and far more dangerous than both.

Simon.—The principle of credulity is deeply rooted in the human heart; if the God of heaven does but multiply means to ends, or *extend any natural or physical power in any way*, it must needs be set down as *something miraculous*—is not this childish and irrational in the highest degree?

Philemon.—But what do you mean by confounding a miracle of God with the extension of a natural power?

Simon.—One illustration must suffice; when Stephen the protomartyr exclaimed, “Behold I SEE heaven opened, and the Son of man stand-

ing at the right hand of God. (Acts vii. 56.) I argue *that* was no miracle: his natural sight was only *extended*, it was only the *increase* of a faculty which admits, for aught we know, of *any extension*, but a miracle is something more than the multiplication of natural faculties.

Philemon.—And in this manner, I suppose, you explain away all miracles that are recorded, both in the Old and New Testaments?

Simon.—I confess the very same events which you look upon as miraculous, to me appear only as so many providential acts which reason can account for: if I see a child growing up gradually and insensibly to manhood, I admit at once a work of mere nature; but were such an one to become a man at once, that would be pronounced, I suppose, instantly, a miracle; but can you bring before me any such tangible evidence?

Philemon.—I now see the drift and bearing of your observations quite well, and it is no manner of use in prosecuting this line of argument further.

Simon.—Whether we do so or not, I cannot subscribe to any doctrines that are miraculous and preternatural. My *reason* tells me, I can get no good from any agency which comes not within the range of my own observations, and which I can neither see, feel, nor understand.

Philemon.—Is that of any consequence? Do not many things work a change, though their presence is far from us? Is not the sun in the heavens, and yet does not its light reach us? Is not the fire we sit by away from us, and yet does not its influence warm us? Would that you could

be prevailed upon to believe in an agency which is not apprehended by your senses!

Simon.—I had rather dispense with such a blessing, than be at any pains to seek it; my reason is sufficient for me; I cannot listen to the childish notions of miracles.

Philemon.—Then you cannot listen to the *voice of God*; for the evidence of Christianity rests on undeniable miracles.

Simon.—The darkest ages have always been most celebrated for superstition and ignorance, and the most wicked men likewise. If you will but turn over the pages of Scripture, you will find that the foulest apostates have always been the greatest sticklers for supernatural agency. Did not the devil desire stones might be made bread? (Mark iv. 3.) did not the epicurean in hell wish to be freed from the regions of the damned by a miracle? (Luke xvi. 24.) Did not the crucifiers of Christ seek a sign from heaven? (Matt. xii. 39.) and did not Herod do the same? Hence I infer, there is always the greatest cry for miracles where there is most wickedness.

I wish, Sir, you would make use of your own wisdom, and rid yourself of these superstitious snares.

Philemon.—If we would really come out of the snares of Satan, we must first know what a *dangerous snare* we are in.

Simon.—Heaven is in the eye of my reason, and there are no insuperable barriers in my way.

Philemon.—You may toil hard to reach the heavenly land, but a sea of difficulty is before and against you.

SECTION XLIX.

A VISIONARY IN EXPERIENCE.

IDD0—*A Visionary.* 2 Chron. ix. 29.—PHILEMON.

Iddo.—There are great and glorious things wrapped up and folded together in the mysteries of religion, and when once they are sensibly felt, and experimentally known, the soul needs to know no more; the carnal mind cannot apprehend them, nor yet the eye of reason; they lie as far beyond the region of nature as they surpass even the bounds of thought; we come at them by special revelation and glorious manifestations of the Spirit; for “the Spirit,” you know, “searcheth all things, even the deep things of God.” (1 Cor. ii. 10.)

Philemon.—“Be sober,” is a word of warning in Scripture, and it is good to cleave to the sacred Scriptures. “To the law and to the testimony, if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.” (Isaiah viii. 20.)

Iddo.—If we go no further than the outside of religion, we fail of its marrow and substance; our eyes are still blinded by the god of this world, and we cannot see afar off—at most we are learned literally, and know the Scriptures outwardly and externally.

Philemon.—And yet it is dangerous to set aside the word of God in its obvious meaning and sense; I mean in its plan, doctrines, and

plain and practical duties ; it is not the reception of a part, but the whole word of God that is the soul's directory ; its precepts and promises, its threatenings and warnings, must all be received in humble faith ; its spiritual influence, it is true, must be felt, but actual practice is also to be exhibited ; we are not to be choosers of what portion we shall receive, and what we may reject ; the word of God must be received as a whole, and then it may be compared to bread for its nourishing qualities ; to live only upon one portion, argues an unhealthy state of soul ; such was Herod's practice—he heard a part of the divine word preached by John the Baptist gladly, and he would abide by it, but he would not listen to it all.

Iddo.—Though some men arrive at an advanced stage of Christian life, yet they still appear but babes in divinity ; he who has to argue with them on the sublime things of God, is mistaken for one that deals in parables and paradoxes, in dark sayings and speeches.

Philemon.—Much observation leads me to maintain, that whether a man be counted a babe or no, a wise man or a fool, he must hold no new opinion in religion ; I would as soon attempt to create a new world as to broach a new doctrine ; moreover, I believe the word of God to be saving, must be both received as a whole, and be abiding also ; it must not be a flash of light beaming into the understanding, but the word of truth, and the good word of life, which being rooted and grounded in love, abideth for ever.

Iddo.—I honour the Spirit above the letter,

and revelations above all written communications; tell me what use it would be to me, and where would be the profit to my soul, were I merely to know only what the letter teaches? Think you that you know Christ, when you tell me a long story about his life and death, about his baptism and temptation, his agony of mind and torments of body, and great drops of blood? What! is this your creed? this all you apprehend of Christ? is this all you believe? this your saviour? Then, be assured, it is all nothing! the devils believe and know a thousand times more, and yet they are eternally and hopelessly damned.

You may know the history of Christ, and understand the outward sense: you may bring the whole gospel into little compass, and by labour and study, make a good digest of its contents, but all such outward knowing of Christ is nothing—it is as sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal. Old things must pass away, such things, I mean, as old creeds and statutes of the church, old articles and summaries of faith, &c.: these must pass away from the renewed mind, and give place to the sublimer views, made immediately to the soul by the Eternal Spirit.

Philemon.—The Spirit's sacred influence may be mistaken, and its saving properties misunderstood; there are many who lay claim to his blessing, on whom it was never bestowed; some have confounded his operations with the working of animal feeling; others, with an over-heated imagination, and not a few, the divine, with satanic influence. Did not a lying spirit take possession of the minds of prophets? (Jer. xiv. 14.) did not

the spirit of prophecy come upon Balaam? (Numb. xxiii. xxiv.) of wisdom for the commonwealth upon Saul? (1 Sam. x. 9.) of zeal upon Jehu? (2 Kings x. 16.) of humility upon Ahab? (2 Kings xxi. 29.) of joy upon Herod? (Mark vi. 20.) of fear upon Felix? (Acts xxiv. 25.) of power, so as to perform miracles and wonders on multitudes of others, and yet did not some of them live in darkness, and others of them die in despair? Hence, I give my opinion as one that hath obtained mercy, that if we wander out of the precincts of the written word of God, we wander out of the safe keeping and daily protection of the Holy Ghost.

Iddo.—As to the conduct or failures of others, I know not; all I feel sure of is, that if you are one of the favourites of heaven, you can rightly divide, not the literal word merely, but the waters of life; you can bottom the deep things of God, and go over the Jordan of spiritual life dry-shod; you can break the shell of truth, and feed upon its substance; you can delight yourself in marrow and fatness, and live with your soul in heaven, while your body is on earth.

This is the experience that brings you into close communion and heavenly nearness to God, and all besides is carnality and nature's leanness. No man can relish these spiritual dainties but those who have ceased all consultings with flesh and blood! Never did I understand them till my whole body of sin was killed and slain; yes, and my own wisdom too, and will, and all my grovelling ways!

Say what you please, but, unless you know Christ mystically, and feelingly, and inwardly,

—I mean, unless all he did outwardly and literally, is done in you really,—unless Christ lives in your soul, as truly as ever he did in his own body, in the days of his flesh,—unless he is *formed* in you spiritually in regeneration, *conceived* in you by spiritual conception, *born* in you in fulness of time, and brought up in your soul, and grows in wisdom and stature within,—unless these high mysteries be your experience, yours is no Christianity! I would not give a rush for all your divinity; for, mind you, it was not the Saviour Mary carried about in her bosom in the world, it was the Christ she bore in the heart that saved her soul; (Col. i. 27.) and if the Lord is not after this fashion in you, you have no hope of glory. Yours, I fear, is a saviour all may have, and all the world may look to; but it is a saviour of your own making, and such a Christ was never of the Father's sending.

Philemon.—What I know from experience is this, viz. that what is in us is *ourselves*, and the description the word of God gives of ourselves is not calculated to puff us up with spiritual pride, but to humble us in the dust, to sink us in our own esteem, and to make us esteem others better than ourselves.

When any man makes himself the centre and circumference likewise of his little orbit, of course every other object is either excluded, or seen in the distance, and far below it; as, when the sun appears in yonder system, it shines on all below itself, but darkens every object above itself; though there are many shining orbs and luminous stars above it, yet not one of them

is seen—all above itself are buried in darkness and obscurity. And so it is with those who fancy all spiritual light must needs centre in themselves, and be reflected from them also; and hence it is, if they appear to shine at all with heavenly lustre, it is only to make all others, if possible, see how far in gifts and attainments they are below themselves.

Iddo.—It is not the first time I have had full proof and evidence that men that are wedded to old notions and opinions, hold them fast and prove immoveable; but know, as the “ne plus ultra” in spiritual things, that the Saviour, as it respects his essence, is as near one as another; he is as near the most wicked man alive as the highest seraph, as near the lowest as the highest intelligence. But here lies the difference: the one has the feeling of it, and is sensible of his nearness; the other is without such knowledge. It is my joy and privilege to enjoy his sensible manifestations to my soul, and therefore, because Christ is exalted in me, antichrist is pulled down and destroyed in me; and we, who sit with him in high and heavenly places, are no longer the dead withered stocks of formality,—we live on the green and flourishing tree of life.

Philemon.—Dear Sir, in taking my leave of you, allow me to give you a word or two of caution, which you will do well to ponder over; let me tell you, the surest way to be exalted towards heaven is, through mercy, to be very humble on earth. David was not exalted to sit on a throne before he was familiarized in his earthly condition to the sheepfold, and till he could say in his

heart, "My soul is as a weaned child." Oh, for more of his spirit! Pray for more true love to Christ, and for more scriptural zeal in doing the Lord's revealed will, pray for active service in doing it, for patience in suffering it, and for humility in both.

And, in the next place, be on your guard against self. Oh, that pronoun I, a little word, but an index of great evil! It can hear of no experience but its own, and of no praise but its own; it is to be met with, more or less, in every tongue; and, such is its pretension, that if unheeded, it would clothe itself with a kind of ubiquity, and be present every where, and excluded no where.

SECTION L.

AN ENTHUSIAST IN FEELING.

ELIPHAZ—*An Enthusiast* Job iv. 15, 16.

PHILEMON. --TIMOTHEUS.

Eliphaz.—All mankind are by nature in a moral deluge; and though there are many merciful deliverances, yet by far the greater proportion of our unhappy race are still drowning themselves, some in one way, some in another.

Philemon.—'Tis true; and among the number there will be found not a few who have been wrecked on the wide sea of spiritual pride and self-conceit.

Eliphaz.—Yet, if the souls of men did but rise to that pitch of elevation to which the spirit can bear them—if they would but cast away the cords of human invention and contrivance, which fasten them to earth—if they would put themselves under the overruling, and all-pervading, and all-commanding influence of heaven-born principles, nothing terrestrial could hurt them; their eye would be wholly celestial, and the objects of their pursuit would be wholly spiritual and eternal.

Philemon.—But so long as we are in the flesh, the motions of sin will work in us, and the sense of our universal demerit, and the sore burden of our sins will press heavily upon, and clog the wheels of our christian course. “The flesh also lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh, and we cannot do the things that we would.” How

often are we compelled to exclaim, "Oh, wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" And even after being born again, the true believer finds indwelling sin and natural corruption as really in him, though not as specifically acting, as in the days of his former ignorance and unregeneracy.

Eliphaz.—How can this be? The moment we are born from above, we are emptied of ourselves, and filled with the fulness of God! Is there not in the very act of conversion, a clearing out of all mischief? Is there not—

1st. Condemnation of ourselves as worthy to be destroyed?

2d. Annihilation of ourselves, a reducing of ourselves to nothing? for whereas our sin and nature had made us think ourselves something, the light of the Spirit and grace makes us nothing again.

3d. Abdication of ourselves, or a resigning all to God that we have had or ever may possess.

4th. Indifference, or the being equally indisposed to all sublunary things; hence, whether it be riches or poverty, health or sickness, good, bad, or indifferent, the heir of glory knows that nothing can be better than it is.

Here is the mystery of our holy religion, that whatever we see in God's children, is not themselves; for it is God himself, that by his preternatural influence ever lives, moves, and obeys in them; and, therefore, when God is the life of our life, and the soul of our soul, where can there be any ground for outward or inward sorrow?

Philemon.—The sacred Scriptures tell us what man is, even in his best estate; (Ps. xxxix. 5.) and the information which God gives of ourselves, claims precedence to every other.

Eliphaz.—I charge you, in the name of the great God, as ever you hope for felicity in heaven, or to see God's face in the kingdom of his glory, I charge you, (though I know you have no power to do it, but to show what you should be, and what you must be, as ever you expect to enter into glory) live above EXTERNALS in religion; for if you do not, your light and knowledge will do you no more lasting service than the water of Jacob's well did the woman of Samaria, who spent all her natural strength to draw it; you will for ever be liable to thirst again, and never be satisfied.

Philemon.—But what is meant by *externals* in religion?

Eliphaz.—The shell and outside of things. Oh! if your soul did but once come to the very mercy-seat of the Most High, to the true visions of God, and to the hidden life of Christ, you would soar for ever above the dull atmosphere of sight and sense; all base, and low, and carnal things would be as dust under your feet: you would be privileged with the Apostle, never to know men in the world, or any creature after the flesh again; you would not set your heart on perishing earth, or seek to place in it any of your delight and esteem.

Timotheus.—Much that we deem pure and spiritual, is often spotted and defiled with sin. Those who have felt in a spiritual sense the

most strongly, and soared the highest in rapturous feeling, have sunk the lowest afterwards; it has been good for many so to fall: yea, far better that God should let them fall, than that they should be enabled thus to stand; for in many cases, self-knowledge is only gained by painful experience, that brings down what is high and elevated, and shows us what vile and sinful creatures we are. Many have had occasion to exclaim, it has been good for me that I have *not* been permitted to stand always, but that I was allowed to fall; for, before I sinned, I went astray, always going and getting nearer to hell, by trusting to my good deeds and my outward performances.

Philemon.—It certainly argues no religion to rest in the letter and in outward forms, but it is monstrous to *slight* them, and to *deny their use altogether*; this is none other than Satan's policy, when he cannot lead us astray in one way, he tries to ruin us in another, for there is no end to his resources in mischief; if he cannot hold us to himself by ignorance of Scripture, he will chain you to him by supposed knowledge and light above the sacred Scripture; many poor souls have in this manner been launched forth into the wide ocean of feeling, and, like mariners at sea without a compass, when they have once got fairly *in*, they have never been able, by any oars of their own, to work themselves *out*.

I would have you, therefore, read the Scriptures, and pray over them for a more healthy piety, and for more earnestness in *plain duties*; the body of scriptural truth should be well digested for the exercise of faith; it is self-deception to

hope to sustain spiritual and heavenly life on earth, if we neglect or supersede what is intended by God as our spiritual subsistence and future nourishment.

Eliphaz.—But where lies the life, and power, and spirit of religion, I ask? You tell us, it is good to pray and read the Scriptures, and I deny it not, to babes and infants, and it is all right and good in its place; but what spiritual good comes into the soul of those who are tied down to the outward means? What manner of persons are those among you, who break the mere husk of truth with their carnal teeth? What sort of livers are they in their lives? What profit they in the school of Christ? Are they transformed, or reformed, or wholly new creatures? Do they live the inward and spiritual life after a heavenly manner? Are they dead to the world, and is the world dead to them? Are they wholly emptied of themselves, and do they rest on Christ alone? Is it not the truth that they are feeding on ashes, alive in themselves, and that Christ is dead in them?

For my part, I prefer infinitely the Spirit's inward revelation to the outward letter, and never will I, while I have my being, prefer the mere handmaid of truth, to the mother and mistress of all God's truth. It is with the mysteries of religion as with the hidden treasures of nature, all spiritual truth, like the oyster in the shell, is fast shut up; it is mainly to be forced open by raptures in feeling, and ecstasies from the Almighty.

Why, I should like to know, is St. John styled the *divine*? Why wears he the eagle for his crest?

It was doubtless because, like that bird, he flew higher in the regions of the spirits of just men made perfect, and soared higher in the contemplation of eternal truth, than all the other evangelists put together: and why should not I imitate the divine evangelist? Oh, Sir, if the Spirit of the Lord would but bid you come up higher, (Rev. iv. 1.) you would hear, and see, and taste things unutterable and unspeakable; the hidden manna, and the living waters would nourish you to everlasting life, you would then catch a glimpse of the glory of the Lord, who is the light of his temple, whose brightness you can only see now, as through a glass darkly, and so far as you can receive it.

Philemon.—In, vain dear Sir, will it be for me to reason with one who will listen to no reason; before we part, however, a word of advice from an elder brother.

There are those who begin in religion where they ought to end; they contrive to set their foot on the top of the ladder of life in the first instance, without first going the varied rounds of inward experience; such persons have often been seen to come down after another fashion than that in which they appeared to go up.

If you would know the truth of your present state, you will rather trust to soundness of christian principles than to extent of feelings; that mind is, for the most part, the most tumultuous which possesses the least stability. There is nothing like a good foundation to rest upon. Ask yourself then this question,—Is my anchor of hope fixed where my rock is? Do my gifts,

and graces, and sublimated frame render me more humble in the sight of God? Am I sensible of my own unworthiness in my own eyes! Oh, take heed! and beware how you make a Christ of your graces! To conceive in your heart that you are wholly spiritual, is only an opinion; to boast of it by the tongue, is only profession; but to take well what I mean, argues a teachable spirit.

I believe then that the Lord has done great things for you; but it is my judgment that there is much painful experience in store for you. He who has, in rich mercy, imparted to you many right views, can alone preserve you from wrong ones. It is not enough to set an instrument in tune, it must be kept in tune; and it is not enough for you to have experienced a great change, or to have your feelings in a good frame; they have need, daily and hourly, to be kept by grace in a good and gracious state.

SECTION LI.

A BELIEVER IN DREAMS.

TIMOTHEUS.—EPAPHRAS.—PHILEMON.
SHEMAIAH—*A Dreamer.* Jer. xxix. 24.

Timotheus.—How unsearchable and most mysterious are the Lord's dealings with his people ! Ordinarily the appointed means of grace, a preached gospel, searching the Scriptures, &c. are the instruments of conversion. But, sometimes, men are effectually worked upon by means they themselves never contemplated, or ever looked for.

Epaphras.—Our God is undoubtedly a God of means ; he works not immediately by himself, but by instruments of his own appointment ; but, though this be the usual method of the divine proceedings, there are many and great exceptions. It often pleases the Lord to show his sovereignty, and that he is the self-existent, acting irrespectively of all appointed rules and created intelligences, and working not only above means, but without them, and sometimes contrary to them.

Timotheus.—The conversion of my friend, here present, is an instance in point ; he owes what he knows of a Saviour to a providence the most extraordinary ; at the same time that which has been made use of in his conversion, has proved, in his after experience, no ordinary source of distress.

It seems to me to have given a complexion to the whole of his spiritual life.

Philemon.—Very precious are all means that tend to lead a soul to the Saviour, but none is so precious in itself, or so commanding in its influence, as that particular means which the eye of the enlightened conscience can clearly discern in its spiritual birth.

Timotheus.—Fearing lest I should err in judgment in the present case, I deemed it advisable that my friend should hear for himself, and after stating his own case, reap the benefit of your judgment and long experience; his mental distress seems to me to arise from a superstitious feeling, which the circumstances of his conversion, no less than his natural temperament, tend to increase; but to be brief, and cut short farther remarks, it will be best for him to be the medium of communication himself.

Shemaiah.—Most gladly, dear Sir, do I open my mind to you, and give you a summary of my experience, which, when I disclose, you will also deem most extraordinary.

I owe my first abiding impression to a dream in the dead of night; it seemed to me, on one occasion, (and the impression is even now vivid and strong,) that there were but a few more fetches of my breath, and a few more groanings in my spirit, before I should leave this my earthly tabernacle, and appear in judgment before the great white throne of my God. I saw in my dream, that my days were all numbered, but not quite ended; there was a little space afforded me for the exercise of faith and repentance unto life:

my first impression was, to snatch the earliest opportunity of tendered mercy, and to escape ; but such hideous forms and ghastly spectres as I shall soon have to mention, presented themselves to me in my dream, that I felt affrighted, and I appeared to myself to possess no power at all, no, not so much as even to move ; I tried in my dream, long and sore, to overcome them, and to the best of my strength and ability, and with sensations of actual conflicts ; I attempted to scare them away, with frowns on my countenance, and with angry looks, and bitter speeches ; I also bridled up myself with haughtiness of manner, but it was all to no purpose ; they cared not for these things, they stood as with eyes immovably fixed on their prey, and ready to devour me whole.

At that awful hour, which I well remember, and never can forget, I was filled with amazement ; and lo, in my dream, not only did I see a legion of devils without, but I had the bitter experience and full persuasion that they were all within me likewise ; but I wrestled with my spirit much, and reasoned with myself more, that these things could not be ; said I, how can my soul be the dwelling-place of Satan ? How can I be the seat and citadel of all sorts of monstrous things, such as red dragons in the wilderness, and fiery flying scorpions in the desert ? &c. How can I be possessed of these monsters ? I, who can bless God, and say, that I am not as other men are, a drunkard, a liar, a Sabbath-breaker, or a thief ? I, who have lived respectably with my acquaintances, and irreproachably among my

neighbours, so that not one of the living, nor any that are dead, could ever see a beam or a mote, or a black, in my eye!

But while I was thus struggling with my feelings in my dream, and partially at times triumphing, there was one spectre that stepped forward, different from all the others, and he seemed to come forth to me as the son of consolation; and though I viewed him, by his appearance, as a stranger, yet he proved my familiar; and though I looked on him as a friend, yet he is my greatest enemy; for the moment his face stood full to my face, his very image was reflected to my inmost soul; it was none other than the old serpent himself, under a beautiful disguise, the devil as an angel of light!

By this appearance a flood of light was poured upon my soul, and lo, the suspicion was stirred up, and the flash of conviction pierced into the deepest recesses of my heart, that all that I had seen was but the modification of one and the same wicked being, who assumes many shapes, and has manifold names, because of his manifold nature and power of iniquity, and because no one name is sufficiently comprehensive to include all his vile wickedness; and hence I concluded that all these names and representations of him were intended by God, to set out the multifarious wickedness of *my* nature and my inward capacity of evil.

The impression also was made upon me deeply, that all these manifestations of the powers of darkness to my soul were in rich mercy; the numbers of them did but enhance the divine com-

passion ; they were permitted of God, I believe, that some, at least, might reach my case, and if my nature could not be discovered, and laid bare by one name of Satan, at least it might by another.

And Oh, dear Sir, of all miseries, the very height and precipice, and greatest of aggravations, is the discovery of the utter worthlessness and hollowness of all our own goodness and moral excellency. I can conceive a Cain going down to the very pit of hell with his murderous weapon in his hand ; a Lamech overcome eternally by his lusts ; an Absalom by his rebellion ; an Achan by his theft, and a Judas by his covetousness. But Oh, to see myself thrust out into outer darkness for my reliance upon my supposed light and piety ! for my prayers and alms-deeds ! This is, indeed, a manifestation to the soul most fearful and appalling.

And in this way my dream became the law to me for condemnation ; the angel of light, which I fancied I beheld, carried to my conscience irresistible convictions ; he differed from all the rest in his outward shape, but inwardly he was the same ; I seemed to be a transcript of him both in my soul and in my body, both in my outward and inward man ; his image, I now perceived, was my full-length portraiture ; it included my nonage and full age ; the winter and summer, the morning and meridian of my days.

I now indeed beheld, for the first time, Lucifer dwelling in our vile nature ! Tell me, is it not his spirit ? When any one can pride himself on his

own excellence, and appear somewhat to others ; and when we begin to look upon what we are, and to pride ourselves, like certain birds, on their borrowed plumage, ought not the language of a child of God to be, down, not merely with our sins, but down with our graces, and all wherein we may excel ? Therefore, when there is pride in the head, and we follow our own reason and will, we may be sure we may espy Lucifer's image in ourselves.

Satan also, the great deceiver, I discovered in us all by nature. He who accused God unto man, and man unto God, but who never accuses himself. Rather than throw a suspicion upon himself, he will venture an accusation against universal nature ; he will accuse all men and all creatures, and even God himself, and such is naturally our very image ! How often can we espy evils in others, and trace out their sins to their secret causes ; but the thought, in the meanwhile, never enters our heads to exclaim, “ Lord, is it I ? ”

The great red dragon also, I felt had found a place in me ; and Oh, Sir, how many has he swept away with his long tail, as with the besom of destruction. Yes, many that once shone like fixed stars, but were but blazing comets in the firmament of religious professors. (Rev. xii. 4.)

And old Adam, and antichrist, and the man of sin, all—all had a being and subsistence in me ; for though I had thought that, by the general vote and voice of our nation, the Pope was the man of perdition, yet now I see I have carried

him hitherto, and cherished him in my own bosom; there now seems to me as many anti-christs in the world as there are men; he is working with all his subtlety in every person, and in every place.

Thus, dear Sir, I have narrated my dream, and how I was brought, by means of it, to a Saviour. It led me to see that, by nature, we are all children of wrath, and that, to overcome our vile nature, we must experience a new creation, for to resist sin, merely by outward restraints, and in its effects, is no manner of use; it is only the topping of weeds while we leave their root in the ground; they only gain vigour and wax stronger by the process.

But while my dream proved useful to me in the first instance, by exciting suspicions in my mind, and rousing me from the false security in which I then was, I have been greatly troubled in my mind by reason of dreams ever since. To neglect these monitions altogether would seem as if I were quenching the Spirit of God; and, on the other hand, to give way to them, with a full and implicit credence, is to become a prey to superstition and vanity. May I, therefore, solicit your opinion, and the honest expression of your unbiassed judgment.

Philemon.—Wonderful things are recorded in Scripture respecting dreams; and, in the world, some of them have been so well authenticated, that there is hardly any room for wholly disbelieving them. At the same time, to give heed to those common and ordinary dreams of the night,

which, for the most part, are senseless and most trifling, would argue the greatest possible weakness, as they have no warrant in Scripture. They are an offence to sober reason and common sense; they have not a particle of divine authority to stand upon; and of course, in such cases, human authority can have no weight.

SECTION LII.

DYING TO THE WORLD.

PHILEMON.—BARNABAS.—DEMAS.—THOMAS.

Philemon.—In the plentiful use of God's creatures, I have learned by experience, how easy a matter it is to forget God. "Jeshurun" we read, "waxed fat and kicked," (Deut. xxxii. 15.) and God, we are told, gave his people their desire, but he sent leanness withal into their souls. (Psalm cvi. 15.)

Indeed, where there is much outward substance, there needs much grace along with it; I have known persons who had rather part with Christ, than with their wealth, rather lose their immortal souls than their perishing substance.

But if those who are rich were likewise spiritually wise, and knew how to put out their riches to the greatest possible interest and advantage, they would not prove less a blessing to the community at large, than do service to themselves.

Barnabas.—I look upon great wealth as upon a great talent entrusted to my charge, and for the use of which I must one day give an account; every man possessed of much of this world's wealth, should resemble a vessel out at sea; the deeper and wider the ocean, the less there is of danger, and if any of God's people are blessed with great plenty, if they have a little ocean of abundance on which to swim, it is that they may steer a more liberal course, and open out to them-

selves a more free passage than others: having plenty of sea-room, and no impediments arising from the sharp rocks of temporal difficulty, they should, under God, aim at a most prosperous course of practical Christianity.

Philemon.—No doubt, men of wealth would be sure so to do, if only they had love to Christ, and the love of his suffering members in their hearts; but, alas! many that profess godliness, the love of the world possesses.

Demas.—But what do you mean by the world? do you mean the outward fabric and frame-work of the universe, and all earthly motives, secular benefits, riches, and honours?

Philemon.—All these things are intended, and most of them prove great snares; indeed there is hardly a temptation which is not headed by the world in some shape or other; what is it that makes some deny their master, others to betray him, and many to sell themselves for gain? what is it that draws us all more or less aside from the path of duty, but some worldly lust; thus, if a man is aiming to support a tottering credit, that is the pride of life; if his desire is to make great profit, that is the lust of the eye; and if he be seeking the gratification of his carnal mind, that is the lust of the flesh.

Demas.—But really, if this be the case, a man may just as well shut himself up in a cloister, and go out of the world at once, if he is thus to have all joys within his grasp, and enjoy nothing; to possess all nominally, and be afraid of every thing really; then, of all estates, the state of such an one must be most miserable.

For my part, I utterly differ with you, why may we not love the world, and the things which are in it? Did not God, when he made all things in the world, pronounce them all very good, (Gen. i. 31.) and if they are all thus described by God as good, why may we not use and love those good things? is not love an affection in the natural mind? is it not dreadful to be without it?

Philemon.—The world is not what it once was, neither is the principle of love; how often do we love earthly things more for their own sake, than for the sake of God, to gratify our natural selfishness or ambition, and not to do God service! how often are men in the keen pursuit of wealth, for its own sake, and for the sheer gain of it, and not from any desire to honour God, or to benefit others therewith; wealth is only then not sinful, either in the acquisition or possession, when we desire the glory of God by it, the furtherance of the gospel, and the alleviation of general distress; when neither the mind or affections go out inordinately after it, and our feelings and objects of pursuit are in no wise bounded by it.

Demas.—But is it not lawful for every man to do what he will with his own? Has he not the power to act as he pleases? does not mind possess the mastery over earthly substance?

Philemon.—I know by a long course of experience and observation, that our nature is impotency here; if the Lord vouchsafes his grace with the outward gifts of providence, we *can* rise *above* the world; if he withholds it, we are *sure* to fall *below* it, and instead of being the lords of creation, we become its vile slaves!

Barnabas.—Say what you please, you cannot lay too much stress on the danger of loving the world. “If any man love the world, or the things of the world,” says St. John, “the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John ii. 15.); and yet, can you look at many professing Christians, and not be ashamed of their selfishness, their sheer avarice, and their worldly conformity? In one, you see a sinful compliance, he is accommodating himself to the habits and customs of worldly men; in another, you discover the evil eye of covetousness; though he may not, like Achan, take that which is not his, yet he covets that which is another’s. What he gives with the hand, he pulls back with the heart: in others, you see worldly desires above their means, extravagances above their estate; and all this brings want, argues an antichristian spirit, and unfits for holy exercises.

Philemon.—Often does the Spirit of God warn men against trusting in uncertain riches;—“If riches increase,” says Solomon, “set not your hearts upon them.” If ever we yield to their commanding influence, instead of *possessing* wealth, that instant we are to all intents and purposes *possessed* by it.

Barnabas.—This world is but at best the outward shape and fashion of a world; it is even now fast passing away; the more we can look upon it as an act in the great drama, or stage of life, the better; it is continually changing its outward aspect and general character; those who love it most, will be most disappointed, for there is no condition in the world which can continue long together fixed and immoveable; change and fluc-

tuation are written out upon the face of every thing here below; the happy medium, of which some persons speak, and of which we have heard so much, never had any existence, but in their own distempered imagination.

Demas.—It appears to me that you speak against the love of the world much too strongly.

Philemon.—It is one of the fruits and properties of true love, that it seeks not its own good, (1 Cor. xiii. 5.) but rather seeks and desires the good of others: that love of the world which originates and animates, and ends in self, is nothing else than self-love; but where there is love to Christ, and love to other things, only as they lead to him, that is a holy principle; and it is always much occupied about the object of its desire: it is comparatively negligent of and forgetful of self, and so far from heaping up for its own private use and benefit, it delights in distribution.

Indeed, I hold it utterly inexpedient to possess any thing, but what manifestly proceeds from God; and whether it be a creature-good, or a domestic comfort, or temporal greatness, or riches, or honours, if our spirit is a gracious spirit, and the life we live is a life of faith, we should not even desire it, or reach after it, if God in his providence withholds it; our determination will be that of Jephthah, (Judges xi. 24.) what God gives us, says he, we will possess, and assuredly, so dead ought we to be to the world, that what God does not give us, we should not covet, much less usurp it, for ill-gotten wealth ends in a curse to its possessor, and not a blessing.

Thomas.—But how shall we know whether that prosperity, which comes to us fairly and honestly, is to terminate in good or evil? for it is the opinion of many, that prosperity destroys more than poverty and want.

Philemon.—Whom the Lord enriches, he blesses; the prosperity that flows from God is the alone sure and stable prosperity, all besides is deceitful, and is merely the outward show of it; that store which increases by the policy, the cunning, and the knavery of man, may seem wealth, and may have many advocates, but does it remain to its possessor? Haman raised himself to great power and wealth by foul means; he was the happiest man in the kingdom, in his own eyes, as well as in the eyes of many others; one day he is nearest to royalty, the next, he is farthest from it—to-day he is honoured, the next he is hanged.

Thomas.—I believe that God is the giver of every good and perfect gift; but how may we ascertain whether our good things come from God, or whether they are evil things gilded over with the appearance of good, and to prove trials to ourselves?

Philemon.—Nothing is more easy than to point out the difference; it is one thing for God to give good things in his providence, it is another to receive them in the way of ordinances; the former are intended as exercises of faith, and trials of graces, and it is always a mercy unspeakable, when they do not turn out to our ruin; the latter are blessings always, for whatever God in Christ gives us in the way of pro-

mises, he ordains it a blessing, and we find it so in enjoyment; but outward providential blessings, fall as plentifully on the barren rock, as in the teeming valley,—they are the privilege alike of the evil and the good?

Demas.—This certainly seems to put temporal things in a new light; but how may I know that my substance comes from the God of grace, and in the way of ordinances?

Philemon.—You may perhaps know how it came to you, or how you came by it. Did you obtain it by questionable means, by worldly shifts and subterfuges? or did it come to you when you were in the plain path of duty, following on to know the Lord, doing the will of God, living in a prayerful spirit, and maintaining a good conscience?

Demas.—These are difficult questions to answer, and few can solve them always satisfactorily.

Philemon.—And yet let me assure you, herein lies the grand distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between the trickery of the world and the good and gracious gifts of God; a man of faith and prayer may derive little profit comparatively in outward things, but he has great riches in respect of heavenly things, and therefore, he is the alone rich man who has Christ, though he may have nothing in the world besides; but let a man be rich as “Cræsus,” and yet if he is a stranger to Christ, and to the riches of his grace, he is a poor beggar notwithstanding.

SECTION LIII.

THE CONCLUDING SCENE OF PHILEMON.

The varied steps of Divine Providence are in no man's power to direct. God knows, but we know not, what is best for ourselves. Little indeed did I think, when the grace of God began with me, that the Lord in after life intended for me so much mercy. Oh! what a contrast between my feelings *then*, and the sweet sense of pardoning grace and love I enjoy *now*! No one can tell what I passed through, when first I felt the hand of the Lord strong upon me in convictions, and the power of corruption working equally strong in me at the same time.

Many obstacles stood in the way of my heart's conversion to God. Something seemed to say to me again and again, (for I could never bear the idea of hypocrisy) what is the use of repenting? Will you never fall into the same sin of which you repent afterwards? and then, what will become of your sincerity? Will not all your pretended piety amount to mere mockery in the sight of God? The inward struggle that ensued upon these misgivings, cost me not a little; indeed, it was well nigh insupportable. How much have I to thank God, that the sorrow I then felt was a godly sorrow, or *a sorrowing towards God*, and not the sorrow of the world, that worketh death; the former never wears out the frame, or

wastes the spirits, or destroys the energies of life, or suffers the soul to pine away in sickness; the latter breaks the natural spirits, destroys hope, undermines health, unfits for present duty, and often ends in despair!

A little subsequent to this period of my spiritual history, I was at times enlarged in prayer, but far more often straitened and shut up in that holy exercise: sometimes, also, I had longings after better things; but more often I had none whatever. The Bible was still, as a whole, a sealed book, and my spirit very frequently carnal and dead; yet I cannot think how it was at this distance of time, that I did not go to the Saviour at once, who is the supply of all our wants, and infinitely more than we need. And greatly do I wonder that I did not search the Scriptures for myself, and in that way find him, especially as he has been the theme of discourse ever since the world began. Adam heard of him; (Gen. iii. 15.) Noah prophesied of him; (Heb. xi. 17.) Abraham rejoiced in him; (John viii. 56.) Moses wrote of him; (John v. 46.) and David foretold him; (Ps. xvi. 10.) and most of the prophets likewise; indeed, some of them are so full of Christ, that it is difficult to say whether *they* may be styled, with more propriety, *Evangelical Prophets*, or the prophetic *Evangelists*.

This part of my experience, however, was, by God's blessing, made very profitable to my own soul, and to many, I trust, besides. Often have I urged it on others (whom I afterwards met in similar circumstances) not to stop short, or for one moment to deem it enough to feel sensibly

and keenly our spiritual wants. Many a person feels truly his spiritual necessities, and yet he has too much pride to stoop down at the footstool of mercy and ask for the supply of them : and how many had rather starve, and perish in sin, than seek Christ, or make their wants known. But it is very blessed, when the mind is not only filled with a deep and lively sense of its wants, but has a gracious and suitable frame also imparted to sue immediately for the relief of them.

Another source of discomfort to which I was subject about this time was, if my memory serves me aright, the mistaken view I entertained of spiritual life ; little did I think my first impressions of sin were to be my last impressions ; and that though the curse was taken away, still the evil, and burden, and sense of indwelling sin, would last so long as life itself lasts ; why not cease from the very sense of evil ? Why not drop the very being of it ? why not reach perfection at once ? Thoughts of this nature crossed my mind often, and troubled me much ; and such a summary method of dealing with sin had been pleasing to my feelings : but I now see it had neither so much promoted my happiness, nor the glory of my Saviour ; God leaves the seeds of every corruption within us, and the being of every evil likewise ; and this is for the exercise of our graces, and to make and keep us humble, and to show also the power of *his grace in our weakness*, and how it can rule in the midst of his enemies. Without such a continual memento of indwelling sin, who had ever fully understood its malignant nature ? who had ever fully experienced Christ's

healing virtue? the efficacy of his grace? the energy of his Spirit? or the depth and malignity of his own inbred corruptions? Had the Lord perfected me the day 'after he had converted me, would all boasting have been excluded? had salvation appeared of free grace?

The outward and visible church of God also, as established in these realms, now became no small cause of secret disquietude to me; almost every body had their eyes open to its faults, and to admit its defects; prejudices, I believe, blinded some to its excellencies, interested motives others, and an utter indifference most; while the few really godly were weeping over these things in secret, and this was all the relief they had against them; but it has pleased God since to convince me, that all my fears on this head originated in my ignorance of the real character of a true church on earth; her militant condition must never be lost sight of; and does not this idea of her state presuppose, that like the ark of Noah, she must be tossed to and fro, yet, blessed be God, she is destined to outride the mightiest swellings of the tempest? Her professedly Christian sons and daughters also, in many instances, excited my surprise, no less than my sorrow; they were not what they appeared to be; a free and unrestrained intercourse with them to do them good, had well nigh proved the shipwreck of my own soul. Oh! nothing is more dangerous than consorting much with the enemies of God; even when it is lawful in itself, how seldom is it expedient! What conceivable good can we derive from society, whose views of sin, and a Saviour, are

so unscriptural? and what improvement can we ever expect from those, whose principles are eternally at war with our own? Neither the religion we profess, nor the profession we make, sanction the practice: what did Joseph gain by his too frequent intercourse with the Egyptians? did he not learn thereby to swear by the life of Pharaoh? and shall we ever prize that earthly learning which Moses despised, above a holy and sanctifying, and scriptural education and example, which, under God, is calculated to save the soul?

Towards the close of this stage of my spiritual life, I would willingly draw a veil of oblivion, but why should we, in recounting our mercies, (and in *my past pilgrimage* they have been great and multiplied,) why should we refuse to recall to our recollection the remembrance of our most secret sins and backslidings? Though *God* remembers our sins no more, can *we* ever cease to *deplore*, or, ever cease to forget them? Alas! the wound is too deep and the sore too grievous, ever for time to efface them; feelingly, indeed, could I speak on this point; my teacher is distressing experience. Oh, how little do we understand the deep depravity of our hearts! how seldom do we know what spirit we are of! how blind to the first risings of spiritual pride! how insensible to the first downward movement of the soul from God! How often do we think we are confiding only in Christ, when we are presuming on ourselves! Think not, I beseech you, that you have for ever turned your backs on the world, or imagine for a moment that that you are ever free from contamination and danger. Can a nature so depraved as ours; can

sinful flesh so wrapped up in its own corruptions, ever be otherwise than exposed to evil from every quarter? Deem it not sufficient, I pray you, that you are grown more spiritually minded, that your inclination to sin is, through mercy, less perceptibly felt, or that it now amounts to an actual disrelish. Let not this put you off your guard; let not progress, past or present, lull you into the lap of a carnal security; present feelings afford you no security against the future, nor the circumstance of your thoughts being turned heavenwards, nor any advances in piety you may be supposed to have made. The current of evil is often diverted into other channels for awhile, but only in the returning tide, that its reflux may be the more vehement: the union of certain causes may force the stream of a river contrary to nature, but it is only that it may flow back with the greater impetuosity, and man, at his best estate, is not to be measured by his outward appearance, but by his capabilities; and his nature is always capable of all manner of sin. Oh! it is easier far to shut up the heavens against rain, like Elijah, than to shut up the heart against its natural outgoings of evil.

But God, who is rich in mercy, often leads us by a way that we know not, and a full acquiescence in the divine will, is the result only of long experience and sanctified affliction: if his people seek him in the hour of their distress, he will deliver them; they may be, in our eyes, like trees stripped of their leaves, and yet in his all-seeing eye be still infinitely precious; and though, in the winter of adversity, there may appear nei-

ther leaves nor moisture in the branches, still there may be life in the root, and thus was it in rich mercy with me; I sinned in the life, but there was faith in the heart, and my experience at that time was, I believe, similar to that of St. Peter, who knew not himself when he denied his Lord and Master, through fear of man; while with his *mouth* he denied him, I believe in his *heart* he confessed him, and hence one secret cause of his final recovery.

But now that my outward frame is enfeebled and my daily infirmities increasing, I long to leave a world which is so full of impurity, and where nothing is to be enjoyed but with much earthly alloy. I have a sort of presentiment of my approaching dissolution, and even now, while I am thus speaking, I feel as though my pilgrimage will soon be over, nor do I regret the circumstance; for I long to be at home! Death to me now is no longer what it once was—an object of terror! I regard it rather as the harbinger of mercy, and as the gate of heaven; and though it is but little of heaven we taste on earth, still I know in whom I have believed, and I enjoy the sweet persuasion, that if this earthly tabernacle were dissolved, I have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

FINIS.

