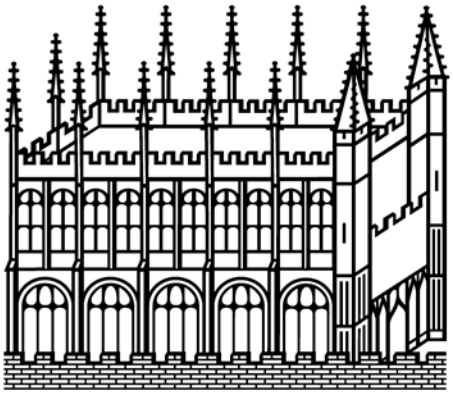

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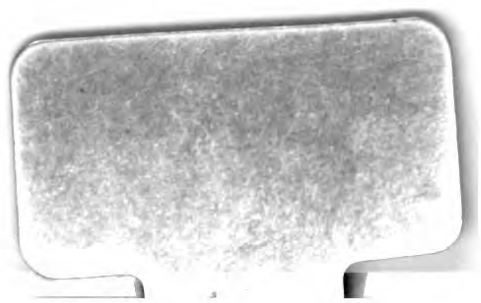

THE

Scripture Expositor;

OR,

DISTRICT VISITORS' SCRIPTURE ASSISTANT.

Edited by the Rev. Charles Holland, M. A.,

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THE CREATION.

"*In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.*

"*And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day.*" GEN. I. 1 and 31.

WE are told in the Second Epistle to Timothy, that "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works." We learn from this, that the Old Testament is not to be put aside by any child of God, who wishes to be taught by God. For as the "holy men of old," who wrote the books of the Old Testament, "spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost," therefore it is God's voice to us, and to be as much heeded as any other part of God's word. Some persons are apt to think that because the New Testament speaks plainly concerning Jesus Christ, and salvation by Him, that therefore we need not look back to the Old Testament, which does not speak

so openly about Jesus Christ and His redemption. But this is a sad mistake. St. Paul said to Timothy, "From a child thou hast known the Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus;" and our Lord said to the Jews, "Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of me." Now in both these cases, the Scriptures mean the Old Testament writings; therefore they do—if we have ears to hear them—they do teach us much concerning Jesus Christ, and we can never learn Christ as we ought to know Him, unless we see how Moses, and the Prophets, and the Psalms, all set forth Jesus Christ, His sufferings and His glory, and the way of salvation by Him. We shall find the New explains the Old Testament, and the Old helps us to understand the New. Only let our desire and our prayer be, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law, O Lord," and then it will be our happiness to find with David also, "the entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple."

The first five books in the Bible are called "the five books of Moses," because Moses was the "holy man of old," inspired to write them. The first of these is called Genesis,

the meaning of which word may be understood by remembering that it comes from a Greek word, which means "to be born," and that it is the same word as "generation," used in the first chapter of St. Matthew,—"The book of the generation of Jesus Christ." And as in this place it means the account of the way Jesus was descended from David and from Abraham; so as the name of the first book of the Old Testament, it means an account of the first beginning of this earth and the things on it, especially man.

The first thing we are told in it, is that God is the Creator of every thing. And one reason this is the first thing which man is required to believe of God is, no doubt, that we may have right views concerning His power and Godhead. God well knew that man, from his natural ignorance and sinfulness, would be tempted to worship and serve the creature,—that is, the things which He has made,—more than the Creator,—that is, He who made them. And indeed many nations have been found to be worshippers of the sun and the moon and all the host of heaven. But God says to us, "Hath not my hand made all these things?" God says, "I have made the earth, and created man upon it; I, even my hands have stretched out the heavens, and all their hosts

have I commanded;" and again, "There is no God else beside me; a just God and a Saviour; there is none beside me, look unto me, and be ye saved all the ends of the earth, for I am God and there is none else." (Isa. xlv. 12, and 21, 22.)

But we learn yet more from the creation of the world, concerning the God whom we serve. We learn His wonderful character of Three in One. We find that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost were joint actors in this work. And it is generally understood that this is why it is said in the 26th verse, "And God said, let us make man in our image."

That God the Father is the Creator, we learn from this chapter. That God the Son is not less the Creator, is plain from many parts of the New Testament: thus in John i. 3, "All things were made by Him; and without Him was not any thing made that was made." Again, Epistle to Coloss. i. 16, "For by Him were all things created, that are in heaven and that are in earth." So also, see Heb. i. 10. And of the Holy Ghost we read, verse 2, "The Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." As the Spirit of God moves over the heart of man, and new-creates him, so the Spirit moved on the earth, which became

changed from a state "without form and void" and in "darkness," to a state in which it was said to be "very good." Now all this we are called upon to believe, because God states it. So Heb. xi. 3, "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear." "He spake, and it was done, He commanded, and it stood fast."

And very blessed is the reward of such faith. Very happy are the thoughts which come into that child's heart, who believes that his Father made all the heavens, and all the stars, and the earth, and the sea, and all things in them. As David says to them, "Ye are blessed of the Lord, that made heaven and earth." (Psalm cxv. 15.) Blessed indeed, if we can look abroad upon the sparkling sky by night, or think of the sun and moon,—glorious, wonderful orbs, and the vast globe on which we move, and say, "My Father made them all." He who by the breath of His mouth made all these things, and by His infinite power and wisdom and mercy, upholds and directs them, is MY Father, and that same power, wisdom, and love, are employed in directing the things of my life, and bringing about my everlasting happiness. And on the

other hand, what an awful thought it is to have any doubts whether or not this God is our God. Surely we must say, "Woe to him that striveth with his Maker." What shall they do who must feel all this mighty power is not on their side, but against them.

A mighty question this,—and oh! how important to answer, can I certainly call this God my Father, and feel sure that His mighty power is working and ever will work for my good?

But this is a question which may at once be answered, and that from this very chapter compared with other Scripture. We must ask simply this other question, have we ever felt this same mighty power of God working a change in our heart, a change like that which took place in the earth when the Spirit of God moved upon the face of it? The state of us all by nature is like that of the earth "without form and void and darkness upon the face of it." It was not so a fit residence for man—neither is the heart for God. But where the Spirit of God and of Christ moves upon the face of it, and a man is born again, he is a new creature in Christ Jesus. And this power we must know, for "except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." But when born again, the Spirit of God's Son

being sent into his heart, even the Spirit of adoption, he calls God his Father, and this is the God who made the world and all things in it. Or again, the world was in darkness, "and God said, let there be light, and there was light." Here then is another question with regard to our state. St. Paul was thinking of this, when he wrote thus, 2 Cor. iv. 6, "But God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." It is true of all of us by nature, "Ye were sometimes darkness." We can see nothing spiritual. We have no true ideas of God. We think of Him as altogether such an one as ourselves. We have no correct ideas of sin; or of the wickedness of our own hearts. We see not the value of our souls. We cannot perceive the danger they are in. Darkness is upon the face of the heart. It can only be removed by God showing Himself to us as He is to be seen in Christ Jesus. The glory of God is seen in the face or person and character of Jesus Christ. When we read of His work of redemption for sinners, when we read of His life of love and holiness—active love, spotless holiness—then we see the "express image of God." And seeing God we see ourselves,—

the same light shows us our own hearts,—how unlike Christ,—how worthy of eternal wrath. And seeing our danger, and feeling our sinfulness, we flee unto Christ for pardon and deliverance, and believing in His name we have power, that is, right or privilege, to become the children of God. "Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus." (Gal. iii. 26.) And this is the Lord that made heaven and earth. Is this our case? Is this your case, O reader? Hath God so shined in your heart? Are you now light in the Lord? It is a great and wonderful change, we cannot but know it. Think of the difference between night and day. Has the sun of righteousness risen in your heart? Do you "show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light?"

The last words of the chapter demand your attention. "God saw every thing that He had made, and behold it was very good." All that was in the heavens, and all in the earth and sea; the trees, and plants, and herbs; the fowl of the air, the whales and fish of the sea, the cattle, and every thing that creepeth upon the earth; and, above all, man made in the image of God, was all fair, perfect, and beautiful. Every thing answering the end for which it was created. No blem-

ishes, no flaws, no fading was to be seen in any thing that was made,—behold all was very good. Even man was perfect and upright. How long all continued so, we know not. Were it good for us to know, we should have been told. That all is changed we do know. Our eyes and our experience tell us. All is no longer very good, without blemish, or unfading. The earth brings forth thorns, and thistles, weeds, and briars, and no good plant without care and cultivation. Animals devour one another, the grass withereth, the flower fadeth. All things wax old and die. And as for man, "The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, that did seek God." And no longer does He say, "All was very good," but, "There is none that doeth good, no not one." (Psalm liii. and Psalm xiv.) "They know not, neither will they understand; they walk on in darkness: all the foundations of the earth are out of course;" yea, saith the same word of God, "we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now." (Rom. viii. 22.) Behold how changed then is all. "There is none good, save one, that is God."

The cause of this change is told us further on in this book:—sin,—sin, and the curse sin

brings with it, is what marred and spoiled and polluted God's work. Of this we shall speak further when we come to it. Let us only now add a word of the remedy for all this evil. Of man's remedy we have already spoken. It is this, "If any man be in Christ he is a new creature; old things are passed away, behold, all things are become new." (2 Cor. v. 17.)

And of the earth,—its change, its new creation, its restoration, we also read, (Isaiah lxv. 17,) "Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind." And in Rev. xxi. 1, "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; and the first heaven and the first earth were passed away."

The old world, before the flood, was destroyed by water. "The heavens and earth which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men." (2 Peter iii. 7—14.) The earth has been baptized with water, and it is still polluted. The earth shall be baptized with fire and the Holy Ghost, and then it shall be "a new heaven and a new earth, according to His promise, wherein dwelleth righteousness." This is the time of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all

His holy prophets since the world began." (Acts iii. 21.)

Reader, what know you of a "good hope" of that glorious time,—when the time of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; and He shall send Jesus Christ?" Are you prepared for the Lord's coming? Will the Lord's presence be refreshing to you? Is it so now, as you seek Him in prayer, in the word, in all worship? Do you, with St. Paul, ever feel it is far better to be with Christ? Can you comfort yourself with such thoughts? Remember, only those who now, though they see not Jesus, yet, believing on Him, love Him and rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of Glory, will feel glad when He comes again. Those who know Him not now, will not be known by Him in that day. "Be diligent then, that ye may be found of Him in peace, without spot and blameless." (2 Peter iii. 14.) "And now, little children, abide in Him; that when He shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before Him at His coming." (1 John ii. 28.)

PRAYER.

O God, who commanded light to shine out of darkness, shine, I beseech thee, in my heart, and give me more and more knowledge of thyself in Jesus Christ.

Create a new heart, and renew a right spirit within me. Look upon me in thy dear Son's merits, and thou shalt see me "very good." Let thy Spirit move on the face of my dark heart. Let Him teach me. Let Him comfort me. Let Him shed abroad thy love within me. Keep me from grieving Him.

O God of hope, fill me with such joy and peace in believing, that I may abound in hope through the power of the same Holy Ghost. And, Lord, what a hope is that, thou hast set before me! May I delight myself in the thoughts of seeing Christ as He is, of being ever with Him, of dwelling in righteousness, and righteousness dwelling in me. May these hopes cause me to purify myself, even as thou, O Holy Saviour, art pure. Amen. Amen.

THE SABBATH DAY.

"*Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.*

"*And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made.*

"*And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made.*" GEN. II. 1—3.

IN the first chapter of Genesis we are permitted to see Almighty God at work. We are told of the wondrous creation of all things; and though we find that creation was but the effect of *the word of God*—that He had but to say, "Let there be," and it was; yet, it is impossible for us, with our present mode of thinking and speaking, not to connect the idea of labour, with that of creation. Accordingly, the second chapter opens with telling us of God's rest, when He had finished His work. It tells us that God ended the work, and that He rested from His work. Thus God is graciously pleased to condescend unto man, and to speak of Himself "after the manner

of man," in order that we may learn what would otherwise be quite beyond our reach. But in the verses before us, God speaks thus, not only to tell us of Himself, but to make known to us a portion of His holy will, as regards ourselves. When God had finished the work of creation, He declared the day on which He thus ended, to be a holy day—He blessed it and sanctified it. It was man who was to be placed in this new world, governed by time; and it was to man that every seventh day, as it came round, was to be a blessed and holy day. Behold then, from the beginning of time, this seventh day pronounced holy by God; sanctified and set apart for holy purposes, in distinction from other days. Six days it pleased God (who could have done all by one word,) to employ in building this world, and in forming its inhabitants: on the seventh He rested. Six days men were to feel might be employed in such labour as this world required at their hands: the seventh, such work was to cease, for God had pronounced it a holy day. The Sabbath day, then, is a day made holy by God's word concerning it: IT IS A HOLY DAY. It is not our keeping it which makes it holy; but, being a holy day, all those who do not keep it as such, prove themselves unholy, and pollute the day.

From the time when God made the first Sabbath, by blessing the seventh day, we hear of no change in His purpose concerning it. With God are no changes. If God has once spoken His will, we know it for ever. The next mention we find made of the observance of this day, is Exodus xvi, where the children of Israel are ordererd to gather a double rate of manna on the *sixth day*, "to-morrow is the rest of the holy Sabbath unto the Lord." (*Exodus* xvi. 23.) Then we come to the mention made of this day in the ten commandments. The language of the fourth commandment is remarkable: "REMEMBER the Sabbath day to keep it holy." The people of God had, doubtless, much forgotten His will in this matter: His day had often been lost sight of, and been given to worldly and unhallowed purposes. But this is not the language of one giving "a new commandment," it is the reviving of an old one. This fourth commandment does not make the Sabbath day, but reminds men of the duty they owe to it. And now, all through the writings of Moses and the Prophets, we find this holy day repeatedly spoken of. Many passages concerning it, must be familiar to all who read their Bibles. We have an awful instance of the "severity of God" against him who violated

it, in Numbers, chapter sixteen. By the mouth of the Prophet Ezekiel, God tells His people, that He gave His Sabbaths to be a sign between Himself and themselves. (chap. xx. 12.) Blessings are pronounced on those who keep the day without polluting it—that is, without perverting any part of it to unholy purposes. (Isaiah lvi. 2.) And for the profaning it, heavy judgments are pronounced against the sinners in Israel.

Directions are fully given, as to how the Lord would have it observed, and glorious are the promises made to those who shall thus keep it holy, according to God's will. "If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words. Then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord, and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." (Isaiah lviii. 13, 14.)

Thus far the Old Testament conducts us; and now, do we find the Sabbath abolished in the New? It was a subject of frequent discussion between our Lord and the Jews.

Why? Because He would have them cease from observing it?—No; but because He would correct their false views on this, as on so many other occasions, when they "made the word of God of none effect through their traditions." Adding to the letter of the law, by their own foolish inventions; breaking the spirit of it continually, by their unconverted hearts. Our Lord maintained the lawfulness of doing good on the Sabbath days. And, moreover, when His disciples were accused of profaning it, by an innocent action, which satisfied their hunger, He gave it as a proof of His own greatness, that the Son of Man is Lord, even of the Sabbath day. (Matt. xii. 8.) Jesus Christ honoured the Sabbath day, and remembered it, to keep it holy.

Instead of feeling that the Sabbath day was to cease under the Christian dispensation, we may rather see in it, an institution which all along looked forward to Gospel times, in order to be seen in all its glory. Here, as in all other ways in which God has revealed His mind and will to man, Jesus Christ is the object to which He would direct us: it is Jesus Christ who is to be glorified. "All things were created by Him, and for Him. And He is before all things, and by Him all things consist." (Col. i. 16, 17.) Him "hath

God appointed heir of all things," and by Him, "He made the worlds." (Heb. i.) By Jesus Christ hath a work been accomplished and finished in the world greater than even the work of creation; that work is, the work of redemption. This He came into the world to do, and truly when His work was done, "behold it was very good." In His life and death it was accomplished, and when God raised Him from the dead, and thus powerfully declared Him to be His Son, and that His work was accepted for His people—*then* did Jesus rest from His work, and His resurrection did indeed sanctify and bless the day on which it took place. If then the day be changed from what we call the last day of the week, to the first—this makes no change, either in God's will, or in the duty which that will puts upon us. Still have we a day—a seventh day—the Lord's day—a day of God's rest, (for Jesus is God over all blessed for ever,)—a day therefore which all God's people will see to be a holy day; not, (as we have said,) because they make it so, but because God hath made it so.

How then will God's people keep this day holy? Let us consider the words before us, which tell of its first institution. God blessed the day, and pronounced it holy, because that

in it He rested from all His work, which God created and made. For what had God made all things?—For His own glory. And what was man, the noblest part of the creation, (man, so different from all things else, because made in the image of God,) what was he to be? Even the priest of the world, he who in the midst of creation was to know and honour the Creator. Had man continued innocent, surely his life would have been one of holy activity through the week, (for without activity we cannot conceive of happiness,) whilst each returning seventh day would be employed in sounding forth "the high praises of God," from hearts overflowing with love, delighting in the service—which would be darkened by no iniquities in holy things, and hindered by no infirmity, whether of body or soul. But man becomes a sinful, defiled being, far off from God in affections and in will, till as one of the redeemed he is brought near by the blood of Christ, by His finished work. What will the Lord's day be to such an one? Will it not be a day of rejoicing in that work of "the Lord our righteousness," and especially in that which marked its glorious accomplishment and acceptance on his behalf—even the resurrection of Him who "died for our sins, and rose again for our justification?"

Yes,—the Christian's Sabbath is the day for entering into Christ's rest; rejoicing in Him, the risen Saviour. Christ is the first object in the heart of every one who is "taught of God," to keep holy the Sabbath day. On this day, Christ is sought in the house of prayer, and is found fulfilling His sure word of promise, that where two or three are gathered together in His name, there is He in the midst of them. On this day Christ is preached. His name is sounded out by every faithful minister, and His people do indeed find that name to be as "ointment poured forth," in its preciousness to their souls. In secret Christ is sought, both in His word, and by prayer. And, in short, we may truly say, that the believer prizes this holy day, just so much as it is made the means of revealing more of Christ, and of his interest in Him—just so much as he feels Christ is honoured by being "believed on in the world." The Sabbath is no day of bondage to the Christian: it is not that he puts himself under the law, and thus "observe days." Nay, but God hath revealed His mind in His word; it is the first expression of God's will found in the Bible, and it is the believer's choicest privilege to hold communion with his God, when thus permitted to do so.

Moreover, the Lord's day is still "a sign" between Him and His people. It is a sign that "there remaineth a rest for the people of God;" and "His rest shall be glorious." It is a sign that God who made man the inhabitant of this lower world, made him for Himself, and that one day His people shall be with Him where He is, and behold His glory. It is a sign that though by sin man hath died, there is by man a resurrection from the dead, and that Christ is become the first-fruits of them that sleep. It is a sign that yet this world shall enter upon the enjoyment of an eternal Sabbath; when "there shall be no more curse," but when Christ shall take to Him His great power, and reign over "a new heaven, and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." When there shall indeed be "the days of heaven upon earth."

Surely then we cannot err in saying, how great a test of our spirituality is afforded us by the Lord's day. Surely, all who love the Lord, will love the Lord's day. For what is the state of the Christian on earth? Compelled to live amongst earthly things, having his calling and his duty in the very midst of them; surrounded by things of sight, and in perpetual danger of forgetting the things which are unseen and eternal. Finding in himself a

corrupt nature, ever ready to take part with the world, ever likely to be led astray from God and heavenly things. How will such an one prize the day, when, by God's will, he is bid to cease from earthly things—he is permitted to rest from earthly duties, and to turn all his attention to things spiritual. How will he prize the means of grace, in which he seeks the face of the Lord, and find Him: the Day on which, through the preached word, he receives the special message from God that his soul needs: the Day which he finds, again and again, through the power of the quickening Spirit, a resurrection day to his soul. Oh! where is the soul that loves the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, that cannot testify that his Sabbaths have been the stepping-stones that have pointed out to him the way to the Celestial City; and that as he has passed from one to the other, he has found them indeed tokens to his soul, that the Lord was with him of a truth; his mighty Saviour and faithful Shepherd, leading him by the way?

We fear not to say to you, judge yourselves by your Sabbaths. We mean not that the mere delight of the moment in hearing the preacher, that a mere passing excitement is sufficient proof that all is well. But ask yourself honestly—What think you of the Lord's

Day? What do you desire as each Sabbath draws upon you? What do you seek after through the Sabbath Day? What effect has your Sabbath on the week that follows it? Do you lay by in store on the first day of the week, that food in which you delight day after day? Oh! prize your Sabbaths more and more, "redeeming the time because the days are evil." Watch and pray lest there be the beginnings of spiritual decay here, for surely such a decay in the Lord's Day, shall eat as doth a canker through the week.

One short word of warning to those who do not honour the Lord's Day. It is but to beseech you to remember what has been said. It is the Lord's word which makes the day holy, and holy it is. You cannot make it any thing but what it is. Week by week does it come round as the Lord's Day which He has hallowed: the portion of your time which He claims for heavenly service. "Will a man rob God?" Will you venture to go on, suffering it at each return to be a record on high, against your soul: a token that you are saying, I am not the Lord's—saying to the Highest, depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways?

PRAYER.

O Almighty and most merciful God, who didst create all things by thy word. Thou hast been pleased to make known to us thy will from the beginning, and to bid us remember to keep holy thy Sabbath Day. I thank Thee, O Lord, for this day: this token of thy love to our souls. Thou, O God, who knowest us all altogether, knowest how greatly we need it both for soul and body. But, O Lord, I lament that I have so little profited by this great privilege. Forgive me, I beseech Thee, for Jesus' sake, all my Sabbath sins! And since, O Lord, thou hast blessed this day, give me grace to profit by the blessing. Grant that each Sabbath may make me richer in the knowledge of Christ. Grant me grace to love thy holy day, and never to be ashamed to esteem it honourable and a delight. And bring me O Lord at last to inherit the blessing prepared for those who shall dwell with Christ in a Sabbath of eternal peace and joy. Hear me, O Father, for the sake of this same Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN.

THE
FIRST MAN'S DISOBEDIENCE.

"Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?

"And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden:

"But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.

"And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die:

"For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.

"And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat." GEN. III. 1.—6.

THIS is God's account of how sin first entered into this world of ours. Many curious questions will often arise in men's minds concerning

this great matter of sin being in the world; but all that is good for us to know, is what God reveals to us in this chapter. He tells us these facts about it—that it came from the devil, and that man's disobedience to God's word was the cause of his fall, and by his sin all his posterity are corrupted. So writes the Apostle of Adam's sin, in Rom. v. 12, "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned."....."By one man's disobedience many were made sinners." And this account of sin first coming into the world is very instructive, and teaches us many things concerning the way in which sin attacks men now, and how we may profit by the warning before us. Things we may learn concerning our enemy the tempter, and the temptations with which he tries men. For of this we may be sure—Satan grows wiser by success. What he found to be of avail so many thousand years ago, he will still make use of against the sons of men. The weapons he used then, he will use now. Another thing we must remember—he finds men's hearts more prepared to receive him than was Eve's. She was innocent before he tempted her, but now men's hearts are already inclined to evil—too ready to listen, yea, to yield to his voice.

Let us see then how he managed this first great plot.

Observe then that he used subtilty and deceit. He came in the form of a serpent—and why? "Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field." Satan came not openly, in his own form; he knew that would not do. He came as a serpent. He is often in other parts of Scripture called "the serpent." See 2 Cor. xi. 3; so also in Rev. xii. 9, "That Old Serpent, called the Devil and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world." We read of his serpent-like qualities in John viii. 44, "He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him; when he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own; for he is a liar, and the father of it." We read also of his power to change himself still into deceiving forms, "Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light." 2 Cor. xi. 14. Satan knows how to deceive. If he came in his natural form, men would beware of him. He comes in some attractive way. He tempted our Lord once by the fair-sounding words of a friendly disciple, and the Lord knew him and said, "Get thee behind me, Satan." Oh! think not Satan will show himself in a black form, with cloven feet, and fiery mouth and eyes, as you see sad pictures of him sometimes—he

knows better than that; he is a spirit, and will come in a subtile, a serpent-like manner.

Next, you see his wisdom, in coming to the woman first. "The woman, being deceived, was in the transgression." She is the "weaker vessel." Satan knew it. He knows our weakness, and is still wise to direct his force accordingly. He tempts men with those temptations which he thinks are most likely, from their condition or circumstances, to be successful. Some are tempted with sins which are no temptations to others; and what are powerless with some men, are full of attraction to others. Satan still knows all this, and acts accordingly.

But let us chiefly note the nature of this present temptation. What was his aim? To make man disobey God. This is his one object, for then all the rest follows. How then shall he do this? His wisdom told him in two ways. First, throw doubts on God's word. Secondly, make them see some benefit to be gotten by disobedience.

See how he began by casting doubts on God's word. He said, "Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" Implying that God had said a hard matter, or something He did not mean. And then, having prepared the way, he flatly denies the truth of what

God had said, and puts his own words along side of it, yea, over and above it, "Ye shall not surely die." And he adds a reason for believing this, rather than God's word; tells them what gainers, instead of losers, they will be, if they will do as he said, "Your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." This sounded a great gain. To be more than what they were, "as gods:" to know more than what they did, "knowing good and evil." And this it was succeeded. Eve could not resist this. It was not the taste of the fruit only that she desired, but what Satan said it would do for her. "And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat."

It would seem that her husband was not far from her all the time; he sinned with her—for not to resist sin is to partake of it.

Now you have here the simple history of every temptation by which Satan prevails, or seeks to prevail, over men, and women, and children now. God's word has gone forth against all sin and unrighteousness. God has spoken a word against every possible sin which man can commit by word, deed, or thought. To

keep this from bearing on man's conscience, is the Devil's first aim; and many are his ways of doing it. First, he tries to make men blind to see and deaf to hear God's plain words. "The god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of God should shine unto them." And, "When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the Wicked One, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart," and as in St. Luke, "lest they should believe and be saved." His object is to keep God's words against sin from dwelling in men's hearts. For this cause he will make them neglect reading their Bibles, turn away from the house of God, or sleep whilst there, or take no pains to understand the sermon. For this cause he will make them make excuses about the meaning and force of God's word, saying it does not mean what it says, or making them see it in a perverted, twisted sense, and not in God's plain sense. In all these ways he will try to make men not hear God's plain words, "Ye shall surely die," and will cast doubt on all He has said, whispering, "Hath God said?" where it is plainly written, "Thus saith the Lord." And then sometimes when any particular temptation presses upon a man, and

yet that man cannot but remember that God has plainly written the sentence of death against those who do so sin, then he will whisper again, "Well—but you will not die at once, God doth know that you will have time to repent and turn from sin before you die," and so he says, "Ye shall NOT surely die." Thus he "deceiveth the whole world."

But this is only one side of every temptation. The chief strength lies in what the Devil offers for yielding. If he had said to Eve, "Eat of the fruit, for ye will not die," God's word would, at any rate, have been as good to Eve as Satan's; so he told her the gain she would get by eating. And so in every temptation—there is a profit to be had, a pleasure to be enjoyed, otherwise sin were no temptation. It is the pleasures of sin that make it so. If Esau will give up his future blessings of birthright, he shall have the present pleasure of a mess of pottage. And so, if men will act against God's word now, there is ever the promise to every such act, "You shall be as gods," you shall have this or that, that you have not got—this gain, this pleasure, or that freedom from evil which is before you. Now it is to be observed, as from the case of Eve, that it is the seeing God's word when we are thus acted on by our desires

and wishes, that makes God's word despised, and Satan's whispers believed. We are then like men with dark glasses before our eyes. Things do not look as they are, but as our desires would wish them to be. Eve looked up at the tree, and saw how good the fruit looked. She thought how pleasant it would be to be wiser than she was, and while she thus felt, God's words looked quite different from what they were before, for she did not wish them true; and the Serpent's words seemed very good and proper, for she heartily wished they might be true: and at last she believes altogether that they are true. She casts God's words, the words of a Gracious and Holy and Loving and Kind Being, behind her back, and takes the Devil's words for her guide, and to be the guide of her husband.

Such is the sin of unbelief. And that is the real root of every act of sin. God's word is plain enough, but men get blinded and deafened in their spiritual understandings, so that Satan's words come with more power to them, telling them they shall not die, than God's words which say that "the soul that sinneth it shall die." It is this that keeps many persons altogether in the path-way of sin, in the broad road of destruction. They acknowledge they are wrong, but some how or

other they think they shall not die, they will turn in time, or God will not be so strict as His word, the door of hell will be shut before they get to it. Thus they go on in a state, the wages of which is death, yet some how they believe the Devil before God, they will not die, but may go on enjoying the "pleasures of sin for a season." And thus, as it was with Eve, so with the many now, Satan succeeds. And as surely as all the evil, that has been in the world ever since that time, was brought about because Eve believed the Serpent rather than God, so certainly will all that evil which is laid up for sinners in the next world be brought to pass on them, unless by God's grace they be turned from the power of Satan unto God, and through faith in the second Adam get pardon and strength against sin, and so live here by faith in every word of God.

Carry away this then from this sad history. That the way to resist sin is to resist it in its first on-set: even the first whisper of temptation. Dally not with it. Once like Eve listen to it—think of the pleasures of it—and all is over with you. The eyes and the ears are the inlets of sin. You must close these at once against it. David fell into sin for want of this when on his house-top. Joseph fell not, because he hearkened not *to be* with the object

of sin. "Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away." (*Prov.* iv. 15.) Yours is the promise then, "Resist the Devil and he will flee from you."

Remember also, the only safe-guard is the Word of God hid in the heart. As saith the Holy Ghost by David, "Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee," As our Lord over-came the Serpent, so in His strength can His disciples, "It is written," my God hath said, and His word is before all. Read the Bible for this end—to know what sin is, and to have strength against it. Yours then is the promise, "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you."

Moreover, ask much for the good Spirit. Satan shall not blind you then. You shall not be ignorant of his devices, if God's Spirit anoint your eyes. Satan is a spirit, and a subtile one, but God's Spirit knows more, and can glide into the heart, even more quickly than Satan. He can get before him in all his devices. We wrestle against spiritual wickedness, but we have spiritual powers on our side in Christ, who is the stronger man, and "if God be for us, who can be against us."

Lastly, see here how this Scripture sets forth strikingly your privileges as a believer in Christ the second Adam, "the Lord from heaven." If

you have a living faith in Him, you stand on very different ground from what Adam and Eve did, and therefore are more secure from falling. Theirs was a covenant of works. Yours is of grace. Life with them depended on obedience given by them. Life with us in Christ depends on what Christ has done, the obedience He has given, the curse He has endured. As it is written, "by the obedience of one many shall be made righteous." "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth."

Moreover, we have greater strength than they had. The Captain of our salvation fights for us. The battle is now the Lord's. Through Christ in us we are very strong, far stronger than Satan and all his angels. O believer, rejoice in this strength. Triumph in it. "Sin shall not have dominion over you, you are not under law, but under grace." Seek to be more imbued with the Spirit of Christ's commandments; read, study, and pray over the Word of God for this end; and yours is the gracious encouragement, (*Rev.* xxii. 14.) "Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city."

PRAYER.

O Lord God! Thy word tells me of a great enemy who is against my soul, I desire to pray against him. Thou, Lord, has made thyself manifest in the flesh, that thou mightest destroy his works, I pray for thy help. Lord, I beseech thee, destroy his power and his works both in my soul and in my path. Open my eyes that I may see his devices. Strengthen my hands that I may resist them. Let thy word be ever uppermost in my heart. May I shrink from every thing contrary to it, as from a viper that bites. May I test every thing by it. May I see the hook in every bait of Satan. Put all thine armour upon me. Let thy good Spirit lead me. Give me righteousness on the right-hand, and on the left. Lord, make me more than conqueror over all that Satan does to me. Bruise him under my feet. Give me victory now and in every step I take, until I am beyond the reach of the Wicked One and in glory eternal, through Jesus Christ my Lord and my God. AMEN.

THE CURSE OF THE SERPENT.

"*And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden.*

"*And the Lord God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou?*

"*And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.*

"*And he said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?*

"*And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat.*

"*And the Lord God said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat.*

"*And the Lord God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life:*

"*And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.*" GENESIS III. 8—15.

THE promise Satan had held out to Adam and Eve as the reward of disobedience, was, that they should "know good and evil." The real fruit of their disobedience was, however, something more than this; they not only knew evil, but *felt* it. They felt evil inclinations, and they felt most bitterly the punishment which God inflicted on sin. In hiding this from them was Satan's subtilty. He told them only part of what they should receive, naming it as if it were a good and desirable end, and keeping from them all the other evil consequences. It is so in every temptation he puts before men now. He so blinds them that they see only the seeming good which sin is to bring them. But as in the case of Eve, as in the case of Gehazi, (2 *Kings* v,) as in the case of Judas, when they have received all he promised them, they are bitterly disappointed. The disappointment of Adam and Eve, as it may be seen in their knowledge of evil, their wish to hide from God both their persons and their sins, and the sentence pronounced by God upon the Serpent, together with the merciful promise it implied to mankind, these are the subjects which we have before us in this passage of Scripture.

Satan's words in a sense were fulfilled. Adam and Eve from this time knew evil which

they did not know before. As you read in 7th verse, "the eyes of them both were opened."..... A sense of shame was a feeling they had not had before.

But far worse than this, was a nakedness of soul of which they now became partakers, as also of a sense of shame before God. These were shown by their actions.

So then, while Satan's promise was in a measure and very painfully made good to them on their obedience to him, God's word was altogether fulfilled on their disobedience to Him. They did "surely die." Present spiritual death, i. e. estrangement of the soul from God was theirs. The seeds of temporal death were from that day in them, and they became liable to disease and sorrows, and all those infirmities of life, which only end in the return of the body to dust. Eternal death, destruction of body and soul in hell, became also their lot, unless by the rich mercy of God, through faith in His promises of a Saviour, they were pardoned and again accepted.

One of the most remarkable signs of their changed state was the great difference of feelings which they now had towards God. How striking is this if you compare their conduct with their state before they sinned. Who can doubt it was their chief joy and

satisfaction to hold communion with God; to hear Him speak, to speak unto Him, and to be in His presence? But now how different their case! They heard the voice of God and hid themselves. Adam said, "I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid." That voice once a pleasure, now a terror. That presence once sought, now shunned. And the reason, a guilty conscience within their breasts. And also, we may suppose, an actual dislike to the presence of God. This we see followed by vain attempts to hide themselves from God's sight. They "hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden." Their eagerness to escape God's presence, made them forget the utter uselessness of such hiding places before His all-seeing eye. A blindness of soul had come over them, notwithstanding Satan's promise of more knowledge. This was a proof of spiritual death.

Now it is remarkable how you will find that this dislike to the presence of God, together with attempts to avoid it, is one of the chief proofs now of a soul being "dead in trespasses and sins." And when you remember that there is nothing in God but what is good, and kind, and merciful, and lovely, it more strongly marks the exceeding sinfulness of those hearts

we inherit from our first parents. In all persons who will honestly search their hearts, and say what they find there, there can be no doubt of the existence of this feeling of dislike towards God. Nothing but grace delivers us from it. "The carnal mind is enmity towards God." Every man in his natural state has a feeling towards God which many persons feel towards another person to whom they owe that which they cannot pay. They would rather not be reminded of this debt by meeting that person. So it is a guilty conscience, a sense of not being what is right in God's sight, and yet not being quite inclined to give up all that is necessary to become so, this makes many afraid of meeting God at the throne of His grace, in the place of worship, at the Lord's Supper, and other ways. It is this that makes them afraid to hear His voice in the Scriptures, and causes them to turn away from His gracious words therein declared. This makes them ready to speak of any subject whatever rather than of the truths of God's holy word. Our Lord told the Jews who liked not His teaching, "He that is of God (born of God) heareth God's words, ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God." (*John* viii. 47.) Man by nature cannot find pleasure in the presence of God. To be

alone with God is a dreadful thought to him. He would rather be alone with any human being. And there cannot be a stronger proof of how great and decided a change we all need, even that of being new created in Christ Jesus, before we are fit to dwell in the presence of the Lord in glory, and before we can really feel that to be for ever with the Lord would be to us real happiness. Surely this thought would convince many a one of a wrong and dangerous state, if it were not that men sought to smother their conviction, and like Adam and Eve, vainly hope to hide from God.

But, ah! how awful will be the sound of that voice to those who go to their graves unreconciled to God, which shall at the last day, meet their ears, even the voice of the Son of God, saying to them, "where art thou!"

Hear God's voice now, asking us to be reconciled unto Him through the death of His Son. Know the blessed presence of His Spirit in the heart drawing us unto Himself. Learn His will by searching the Scriptures daily, and then shall we not fear that mighty voice at the last day, nor wish to hide ourselves from Him, with whom it will be perfect pleasure to dwell through all eternity.

We find that God first addressed Himself to Adam, doubtless because to him He had

given the command which had been broken. Adam put the guilt upon the woman; the woman upon the serpent; as we read in the twelfth and thirteenth verses. This guided the order in which they each received their punishment. But it did not alter their guilt in God's sight. Men can always find excuses for their guilt. They can plead the peculiarity of the circumstances under which they were tempted, that it was not their own fault, but another's; that temptation was strong and their nature weak, that had they been differently situated they would have acted differently, but all these are cobwebs which a Holy God who cannot look upon iniquity does not regard as just excuses for sin. Perhaps Adam had not sinned if Eve had not given him the fruit: perhaps Eve had not sinned if the serpent had not tempted: yet both suffer punishment, and hear the sentence against their guilt spoken by God in the order in which they had sinned.

First, "the Lord God said unto the serpent, because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life: and I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel."

You will observe, there is enmity on both sides,—"thee and the woman." "Her seed and thy seed." The Devil is opposed to Christ, and Christ to him. The Devil has enmity against those who are God's children through faith in Christ: and they that are truly such are opposed to him. Moreover the Devil's seed is spoken of; and there is enmity between them and the woman's seed. We have said, the woman's seed means Christ, and they that are Christ's. Who then are the Devil's seed? undoubtedly the ungodly. The Lord said to the unbelieving Jews, "Ye are of your Father, the Devil." So also in (1 *John* iii. 10), "The children of the Devil:" and v. 8, "He that committeth sin is of the Devil." As long as the world shall last there shall be enmity between God's children and Satan's seed. It cannot be otherwise. We must expect it, it is part of our curse. And it comes from the nature of the case. "Every one that doeth evil hateth the light." Where it shines most fully, there most enmity will be directed. Christ was "the sun of righteousness." He shined for a time when in our flesh upon earth, and men rose up against Him, and sought to put out that great light. They crucified the Lord of glory. This was Satan and his seed showing enmity against

the woman and her seed, which is Christ. Just then in the same way, as the children of God reflect the light of Christ, they are hated by the world. Many like their master have been cast out of the world, that they might not shed light on men's wicked actions. Thousands have been persecuted, and are to this day troubled on the same account. Abel suffered for this cause, and all the prophets suffered on the same account. A wicked king said of one, "I hate him, for he doth not prophecy good concerning me, but evil." (1 *Kings* xxii. 8.) This is the real cause of men's hatred against Christ's disciples. Their examples, their abstinence from evil, their words against sin, these things offend. Thus did John the Baptist bear witness unto death of the truth of this Scripture. Thus did all the Apostles and early Christians suffer. Thus did our Reformers in our land prove the fact of this hatred against light, when they were burned, as we may say, for their love to God's truth. And none of God's children now escape altogether some of the evil effects of this enmity. Always to confess Christ before men, ever to act upon God's word, at all times fearlessly to speak for Christ, and plead his cause against sinners, must bring upon us some of that enmity which sought to crush the prince of glory.

But after all, this is but a bruising of the heel, and that is not to the real injury of the Church. It may make us go halt all our life-time; it may make us sorrowful, and often with fears within and without, even as it made Christ, "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;" yea, even as it caused Him to be crucified, but all this works together for good. We are more than conquerors, for we overcome, and get very rich spoils. Satan and his seed think evil against us, but God means it for our good, to save alive much people, to humble them, and prove them, to "make them perfect through sufferings," to bring them to glory.

For Christ, it is promised, shall bruise the head of the serpent. This is final destruction foretold. Christ was "born of a woman" for this very end. For this purpose was He manifested in the flesh. When He obeyed the law for man, when He died for sin, when He rose again from the dead, and was received into glory, He did then "spoil principalities and powers." He robbed Satan of his "lawful captives," and began that work of which it is written in *Heb.* ii. 14. "That through death, He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the Devil."

And the time is coming when Christ will complete this work, and "the God of peace

shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly." Of this final bruising we read chiefly in the book of Revelation. Satan will yet make greater attempts against Christ and His people than he has yet made. The "man of sin" will be revealed. He will bring all the ungodly of the world to battle against the saints. He will have greater wrath than he yet has had against the woman and her seed, when he has been cast out of heavenly places, and knows that his time is short. (*Rev.* xii. 9, 12—17.) But "the Lord will consume him with the spirit of His mouth, and with the brightness of His coming!" and Satan will be bound for a thousand years, and though loosed for "a little season" after that, yet it will be but to hasten on his final overthrow, for at the last "fire will come down from God out of heaven and devour them," and the Devil be cast into the lake of fire, and that for ever and ever. (*Rev.* xx. 9, 10.) Thus shall this Scripture be fulfilled, and the serpent's head be bruised eternally.

PRAYER.

O Almighty God, may I never wish to hide myself from Thee. Give me a clear conscience by the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus, and the purifying of thy Spirit. Grant me to know my state, and to come to Thee to confess it. I am by nature wretched and miserable, and poor, and naked, as to all spiritual things. Have mercy on me, and make me happy in Thyself, peaceful in the righteousness of Christ, rich in Thy grace and every good gift, and clothed in righteousness and true holiness.

Lord, give me abundant evidence that I am not of the Devil, but that I am Thine. Make me faithful to confess Christ Jesus, my Lord, at all costs. Give me grace to suffer for His sake.

O God, bruise Satan under my feet; and give me such victory over him now, as shall secure to me hereafter a share in that kingdom which thou wilt set up when the god of this world is bruised for ever. Grant these things, O Lord, for Jesus' sake. AMEN.

THE

JUDGMENT OF ADAM AND EVE.

"*Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.*

"*And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life;*

"*Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat of the herb of the field.*

"*In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.*

"*And Adam called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living.*

"*Unto Adam also and to his wife did the Lord God make coats of skins, and clothed them.*" GENESIS iii. 16—21.

IN judgment God remembers mercy. We see this remarkably in each of the righteous sentences which God passed severally on the

Serpent, on the woman, and on the man. In each of them you will see mercy towards man is mingled with judgment. We have seen this in what God said to the Serpent. A promise was given of that Saviour who should destroy Satan, and deliver the seed of the woman. We have now to observe it in the punishments inflicted on the woman and on man. The curse passed on Adam did indeed affect Eve. The ground was cursed to each, and is so still to both man and woman. But the woman received greater punishment than the man, something besides what she had in common with man. This was because she sinned first. Her punishment is expressed in the 16th verse. It is two-fold. Sorrow in conception of children, and subjection of her desires to her husband, or to the man.

To both parts of this sentence, we find St. Paul makes allusion in the 1st Epistle to Timothy, where he is exhorting the woman to submit to man in the matter of learning, i.e. of being taught. "Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence." This probably refers to conduct in the public assemblies and places of worship; and does it not refer us to this very sentence which God passed on the

woman, by which it was decreed that she should as the "weaker vessel," henceforth be subject to and dependent on the man: for the apostle goes on to give the reasons for this in the next verses, "for Adam was first formed, then Eve: and Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression." (1 *Tim.* ii. 11—14.)

In many heathen countries, and among uncivilized nations, we find that the woman is considered and treated as being, in every respect, far below the man, even her own husband. And often they are in the most degraded state of slavery to their husbands. This is doubtless the fulfilment in part of this curse. It is only as the Gospel of Christ removes the curse from us, that woman is restored to an equality with man in such respects.

With regard to the other part of the sentence, which refers to sorrow in time of conception and of bringing forth children, we may remark that so surely is this always fulfilled, that in many parts of the scripture, the subject is used as a figure expressive of great, overwhelming, and unavoidable pain and distress. Thus in the 1st of Thess. v. 3, "when they shall say peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape."

This is spoken of the day of the Lord overtaking the wicked and unprepared, "as a thief in the night." Our Lord uses the image to inform his disciples, both of the sorrow and the joy they should have after He had left them. (*John* xvi. 20—22.) The same applies to us. If God be giving us His blessing on all the sorrow, and trial, and trouble we suffer in this life, then may we regard our short time here as merely the travail of our souls, by which we are brought forth into the glorious liberty that remains for the children of God. When we enter that new world, our sorrow will be turned into joy, and we shall remember no more the anguish, for joy that we are born into that world; the Lord will see us again, and our hearts will rejoice.

Next observe how St. Paul also speaks of the woman's travail in 1 *Timothy* ii. 15. After saying that the woman was first deceived, he adds, "notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety." Now I think it is here, you will see, how God has remembered mercy in judgment. For what is the meaning of this promise? Note first what it does not mean. It cannot mean that all women, who have faith, charity, holiness and sobriety, shall be safely brought through

the labours of childbirth: we do sometimes see the most holy women are taken away at such times. We must remind you that the word translated "in," "in childbearing," is sometimes also translated through, or, by. So it is rendered in 1 *Cor.* iii. 15, "he himself shall be saved yet so as by fire." Now if we so render the word here, we come, I think, to this conclusion about the promise contained in the passage. Although the woman was more guilty than the man in "being deceived and in the transgression," yet God mercifully means that she should be saved as well as man, and by the same means, which are, continuing in faith, and love, and holiness with sobriety, although she have this danger beyond what man has, viz., travail in childbirth.

Here then is mercy in the promise, that childbearing, though a season of sorrow and pain, shall not be to her destruction, although her sin deserves it.

Special mercies are often experienced by mothers at such seasons of special trial. The fears before-hand, the pains at the time, and the joys afterwards, have oftentimes been sanctified, so as to have brought forth the peaceable fruits of righteousness to those who were exercised by such afflictions.

But let us next notice the sentence passed

upon Adam of which the woman also is a partaker.

There are very few cases, if any, in which one person's sin does not bring evil upon others. Sin is like an infectious disease. And when others take it from us they have all the sufferings which follow necessarily with the disease. Eve's offer of the stolen fruit to her husband, made him a partaker of all the misery of the punishment which ensued.

Now the punishment of man may be said to be this. A curse has been passed upon the ground, the effect of which is, that man must labour for food to sustain life. "In sorrow" is he thus to eat all the days of his life; and then to return to that dust out of which he was formed.

Before man sinned, the earth brought forth nothing but what was good. Now we know it bears weeds, thorns and thistles, and that of itself, whereas the good seed degenerates or does not grow at all, unless great toil, and care, and cultivation be bestowed. Perhaps more than three-fourths of the inhabitants of the world are labourers, earning bread by the sweat of the brow. Some in the field, some at the loom, and others in all the various trades by which men seek a livelihood. Nothing, worth having, is to be had without labour.

The simplest food is bread. But look at the long and varied process of making bread. It takes a year before you can obtain a loaf of wheaten bread. The land must be tilled, the seed sown, the crop reaped, the ear threshed, the grain ground, the flour prepared, the bread baked, to obtain the staff of life.

Nor must we forget that part of this curse is felt in the labour of mind, which most of those have to go through, who have not to labour with their hands. More persons suffer in health from over exertion in mind, than by excess of labour of body. Nor are those exempt from the curse, who are so gifted with this world's goods, that they need not labour for a livelihood. They are partakers of sorrow, of afflictions in the body, of anxiety and vexation of spirit. As it is written, "man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward." See also an account of man's state here in *Psalm* xc. ver. 10. "The days of our years are threescore and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow: for it is soon cut off and we are gone."

It is because of this curse that there is nothing earthly that can give perfect satisfaction.

One man there has been on this earth, who

was more rich, more wise and clever and learned, more honoured and sought after, than any that were before him, or that will come after him. We may learn from the 2nd chap. of *Ecclesiastes*, that there was no pleasure or profit, no source of joy and satisfaction from earthly things that he left untried. But was Solomon freed from the curse of Adam? Hear his own testimony of how he found the curse affecting every thing, as you read in the 11th verse of that chapter. "Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit, (no real and perfect satisfaction) under the sun." And if you are in any way a labourer, forget not this. Many a one who labours hard perhaps for his livelihood, envies the lot of those who have riches at their command, and need not labour. But let such ever bear in mind, how the curse of Adam affects all alike. Riches bring cares with them. And what is worse when they are heaped upon us, it makes it harder for us to enter in at that narrow gate that leadeth to life. The honest and pious labourer who gains but sufficient for the daily maintenance of himself and family, is far happier than the richest and greatest monarch on the earth who knows not Christ and his peace.

And after all, out of this bitter lot of labour comes forth the sweet portion of happy rest. True, "the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain." "True, the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly," but why? "by reason of Him that hath subjected the same in hope, because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God." (*Rom.* viii. 21.) God then hath cursed this earth to us, not only as a punishment, but as a pathway to the blessings of heaven. In judgment He has remembered mercy. The very curse of labour, and sorrow, and bondage, and weariness of the flesh, through mercy and grace, becomes a blessing. Thus, who so happy, as he that has his time fully occupied? What more miserable in itself and what it leads to, than idleness, "the mother of mischief," the opportunity of Satan? And above all, who, may we not ask, so happy, as he to whom the sorrows of this world are sanctified? It is so to the children of God. By these things their affections are weaned from earth. They learn to feel this is not their rest, and to say "I would not live always." They learn to live by hope. And though they groan within themselves, they are filled with joy and peace, "waiting for the adoption, to

wit, the redemption of their bodies," through the merits of that same Saviour who hath redeemed their souls from death spiritual.

Hence it follows necessarily that the remaining part of the curse becomes also a blessing to those that are of the seed of the second Adam. To remain here in sorrow, were unhappiness. To remain here in health and peace were impossible. To return to dust, becomes a blessing to those who, like the grain of wheat, are cast into the ground to die and rise with another body which God giveth. For "except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit."

God would not let Adam and Eve remain in the garden of Eden, lest they should "take also of the tree of life, and eat and live for ever: therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden." Had man lived for ever under his present state, he had lived for ever under a curse. Blessed then be God who hath subjected His creatures to vanity, that they might be partakers of a glorious hope, and hath "devised means that His banished be not expelled from Him."

Reader, are you certainly one whom God will thus fetch home again? Have you through grace, a "good hope" that the Spirit of Christ

dwelleth in you, and by it God will quicken your mortal body at the last day? God graciously clothed Adam and Eve with skins of animals, slain perhaps as types of the One great Sacrifice for sin. To this day our very clothing reminds us of the naked state and the spiritual wants of our souls. Hath God clothed you with the righteousness of Christ, the Lamb? Are you protected from His wrath at the last day, and "accepted in the Beloved" now, because of God Christ is made unto you "wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption?"

PRAYER.

O Lord God! In just anger thou didst pass sentence on the first man and woman. And we in Thy wisdom are made to inherit their curse. Lord, I confess, I am as guilty as they were. I have done evil; yea; I have loved it. I deserve eternal death. Every day's sins and infirmities prove it. Yet Lord with Thee there is mercy and plenteous redemption. Thou hast given Thy Son to be the Father of a new and godly seed. O God, make me one

of that seed. Give me as truly of the nature of Christ, as I inherit the nature of Adam. Grant me as strong desires after righteousness by Christ dwelling in me, as I have had after sin by being like Adam. And as I have been a sinner by Adam's disobedience, so now for the sake of the obedience of thy dear Son, count me righteous. Put not my sins to my account. In vain have I tried to clothe myself and cover my nakedness of sin, now Lord do thou clothe me with thine own hand, and cause me to put on the Lord Jesus Christ. In Him let me live. In Him let me die. In Him let me be found at the last day to the praise and the glory of Thy grace, through the same Jesus Christ. AMEN.

MAN ACCEPTED BY FAITH.

"*And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord.*

"*And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering:*

"*But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell.*" GENESIS iv. 3—5.

ADAM and his wife are driven out from the garden of Eden: sentence hath been passed upon them by the Lord God, against whom they have sinned. Henceforth man is known to us only as a fallen creature. From this time forth, every man or woman that is born into the world, is born a sinner in God's sight. The questions then immediately arise, how are men to serve God? In what way shall God and His sinful creatures go on together? "Can two walk together except they be agreed?" These questions are answered by the history now before us.

We here find that Eve has become the mother of two sons. Her first-born son she

had called Cain, a word which in the Hebrew signifies gotten or acquired: and we read that when he was born, her exclamation was, "I have gotten a man from the Lord." It is very probable that she supposed she was now receiving the promised seed which was to bruise the serpent's head, for she had simply been told that such a seed should be given to her, and where there is faith in a promise, there will be the expectation of its fulfilment. And surely hath that promise to Eve been fulfilled. When the fulness of time "was come" *then* "God sent forth his son made of a woman," (*Gal.* iv. 4,) but many hundreds of years were first to pass, and alas! for Eve, this her first-born son was one of the seed of the serpent. "And she again bare his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground."

Both the brothers are partakers of the corrupt nature of their parents: of both we know it must be said that they were "shapen in iniquity and in sin did their mother conceive them." (*Psalm* li. 5.) We find, however, that both acknowledge God, both show by their conduct that they esteem themselves the creatures of God, and such as owe Him a service. Furthermore we find that they both approach Him by sacrifice: both bring an offering to God. Abel

brings of the firstlings of his flock, and of the fat thereof. "Cain brings of the fruit of the ground an offering to the Lord." Now the idea contained in an offering is clearly this: I am a creature dependent on Him who made me, desiring His favour, and owing Him my service; to Him therefore do I bring an offering as a representation of myself and of my service to Him: I desire Him to accept this sacrifice in token that He accepts me and my service.

It is evident that in some way or other, God had revealed to man His will thus to be approached by him. How much light He had vouchsafed to him on the subject of sacrifice we have no means of knowing. A *living victim* slain, and offered in sacrifice, would have this meaning; "I confess that as a transgressor against thee my God, I deserve only death: look upon this victim slain in my stead, and accept my services as the services of one whose life Thou hast spared in mercy and free grace."

It may be that Abel having learnt that through a "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world," the way of access was made, and that looking to the promised seed, as to Him who was in some way or other to ensure his acceptance, he brought of the firstlings of his

flock to God. Whilst Cain, heedless alike of his need of an atonement, and of the promise which had been given, offered, without any question as to acceptance having ever been stirred in his mind, of that fruit, which by the labour of his hands he had succeeded in bringing forth from the earth.

But without exactly understanding how much of light was given to, or withheld from the first brothers, we find this passage in the Old Testament, is in a remarkable manner made plain and instructive to us by the New. In Genesis we are simply told, "And the Lord had respect unto Abel and his offering: but unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect." In the 11th chap. of the epistle to the Hebrews we read, "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead, yet speaketh." Here then we have at once the reason given, why the offering of one brother was pleasing to God, whilst the offering of the other met with no acceptance in His sight. Abel offered IN FAITH: FAITH made his sacrifice more excellent than that of Cain. FAITH obtained for him a witness or testimony that he was accounted righteous by God: and the testi-

mony was this; God made it manifest that He accepted his gifts or offering.

Abel therefore was justified by faith; his faith was counted to him for righteousness, and being accounted righteous by God, he was in a position to offer Him an excellent or in other words, an acceptable offering.

Cain was without faith, he remained therefore a condemned, unrighteous man, and as such he could offer nothing to God but that which would be looked upon as partaking of the pollution of him who brought it in sacrifice. God as a holy God can accept no service from the hands of an unholy being, the offerer must first be made righteous, then can he offer a sacrifice acceptable to Him who thus accounts him righteous. Abel had been brought to the true knowledge of God; he *believed* in Him. He believed that "God is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." *(Heb.* xi. 6.) He believed that God would accept him, would put away his sins, and was willing to be gracious unto him; therefore he came to God in faith. Not in servile fear, not in proud self-righteousness, but with the love which must be produced in the heart by a belief in God as the God whose name is love.

We know not the precise way in which God

was pleased to declare His acceptance of Abel's offering: whether by causing fire to come down from heaven to consume it, or in some other manner equally decisive. This is plain, that in some way or other, it was made clear to the two brothers, whether their offerings were accepted or not: and Cain finding that to him and to his offering God had not respect, "was very wroth, and his countenance fell." Here is not the feeling of a son affectionately grieving that he has displeased a loving Father; it is the bitter enmity of one whose pride is offended, and anger stirred at finding himself an object of the displeasure of the Being he dreaded but could not love. Here are envy, hatred, and malice stirred up against him, whose deeds were pronounced to be righteous, whilst his own deeds were evil. We cannot conceive a more fearful, or miserable state of mind than that of the unhappy Cain, thus full of wroth against God Himself! The Lord condescends to remonstrate with Cain, and to ask him why it is that he is wrath, and why his countenance is fallen?

The words which God further speaks to Cain, are difficult to understand, and their meaning has been variously given.

Without pretending to decide concerning these different meanings, we may take this as a

probable one. The Lord shows to Cain, that his anger was unreasonable; that he by doing well as Abel did, might have been accepted. The way of acceptance was open to each, and if Cain would not thus "do well," "sin lieth at the door." The word here translated "sin," in the Hebrew sometimes means a sin-offering. This was "at the door," that is, near at hand, if Cain would use it. If he would do so, "unto thee shall be his desire and thou shalt rule over him." This probably refers to Abel, who it is promised should then be in subjection as the younger brother to Cain. The same expression is used with reference to the woman and her husband in the 3rd chap. and ver. 16. Cain's anger was excited because Abel was before him in God's sight: if Cain did as Abel did, he would be accepted of God, and moreover be looked upon as the elder brother, and thus the cause of anger would be removed.

But now let us turn to gather by God's help, the important lesson placed before us in this portion of the history of Cain and Abel. They are, we may say, the representatives of the two classes into which the world is yet divided. There are still amongst the children of men, those who are accepted of God, and those who remain under the sentence of condemnation, by which both they and their services are alike rejected of Him.

Now the number of those is very few in a Christian land, who do not in some way or other acknowledge God, and feel their obligation to render Him some service. Thousands may be living in a way which their conscience testifies is displeasing to Him, they may be continually "leaving undone those things which they ought to do, and doing those which they ought not to do:" but still they make confession that they sin in so doing, and the inward feeling of their heart is, that God is looking for a service at their hands, which they are but very imperfectly rendering to Him. Thus they think, whilst all the time they are ignorant of this one all-important truth,—that till our *persons* are accepted by God, we can render Him no manner of acceptable *service*. The service of the justified soul is alone that which can be pleasing in the eyes of a holy God. The great question which it concerns each one of us to ask, and to seek an answer to, is this: Am I myself accepted before God? that is, am I justified by Him, is He accounting me righteous or not?

Now in order to our obtaining this acceptance or righteousness before God, no work of ours can in the slightest degree help us. Till God accepts our person, we can offer Him no service that He can accept, how impossible is

it then that our duties should help forward our acceptance! How then are we to obtain that favour of God to our persons, which can enable us to serve Him with acceptance? God hath Himself plainly told us. It is His own Son Jesus Christ who hath given Himself an offering, and a sacrifice to God, for a sweet smelling savour. (*Ephes.* v. 2.) This is the sacrifice through which alone we can approach unto God. He gave Himself for us, "the just for the unjust that he might bring us to God." Jesus Christ the promised seed of the woman is "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." It is sin which withholds from us the favour of our God, but His sure word of promise is that "through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins." (*Acts* x. 43.)

This then is the scripture method, "Let us have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably." Let us seek His grace or free favour to us for the sake of His dear Son: let us draw near through the appointed sacrifice, let us look unto Jesus: so shall we be justified by faith, God will account us righteous, and will fulfil to us that great word of promise, "their sins and iniquities will I remember no more." (*Heb.* x. 17.) Thus accounted righteous before God, shall we like Abel obtain witness that we are righteous:

the Spirit of God shall bear witness with our spirit that we are the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. Then shall we be able to understand how Christ hath made us to be an holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Him: (1 *Peter* ii. 6,) then shall we understand how "God is indeed no respecter of persons," but looking upon all with favour who come to Him through Christ, He saith unto them for Christ's sake, "See I have hearkened to thy voice and have accepted thy person."

A word of solemn warning surely is spoken by the subject before us. Are there not many to whom it says, "Bring no more vain oblations." Cease from those offerings which are but as that of Cain in the sight of God. Cease from the vain, the fatal error of thinking that it is by his services, by his religious or moral duties, that man can make God to have respect to him. God hath opened one door, through which man may pass to His favour: it is the "door of faith." (*Acts* xiv. 27.) And Jesus Christ hath said of Himself, "I am the door, by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out and shall find pasture." (*John* x. 9.) Come then to this door: seek pardon in the blood of cleansing; seek clothing in the spotless robe of righteous-

ness which shall be "unto and upon all them that believe." We read that by his faith Abel is still speaking; be warned and hearken to the voice.

How truly awful an example is Cain of the danger of remaining in a state of "enmity against God;" and this is the state of every soul that has not heeded the voice which cries in the Gospel, "be ye reconciled to God. For he hath made him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." (2 *Cor.* v. 20, 21.) In such a state sin hath dominion over the soul, for it is under the law and not under grace, (*Rom.* vi. 14,) and whither may it not lead—even as in the case of the miserable Cain!

And to the people of God, Abel surely yet speaks in words full of encouragement. Let them still keep fast hold of the precious truth that "there is no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." They are safe, for they "are come to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaketh better things than that of Abel." It is a blood that secures to them God's unchanging favour,—the fulfilment of all His precious promises,—a supply of all grace, and of His Holy Spirit. It is a blood that gives a clean conscience now, and makes us safe from

the sword of the destroying angel of death at the last. What we want is more faith to apply to it, to learn and to feel its blessedness, ever remembering it is as "faith grows exceedingly," that the soul shall be more and more "thoroughly furnished" to every good word and work. It is as we are taught of the Spirit to see that the Lord accepts us in Christ, that we shall find our peace to be as a river, and our righteousness as the waves of the sea.

PRAYER.

O Holy and Almighty God, I pray Thee enter not into judgment with thy servant, for in Thy sight shall no man living be justified. Give me Thy Holy Spirit to teach me, to make me know what I am in Thy sight. Make me to feel my own sinfulness. Teach me how to behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. Let me find grace in Thy sight by drawing near to Thee in faith. Grant that I may draw all my hope of Thy favour from the blood and righteousness of Jesus. Give me Thy Holy Spirit, to bear witness with my Spirit, that I am Thy child. And give me grace, O my God, to think and speak and live as becomes a child of God, and a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ.

For His sake, accept me now and evermore. AMEN.

THE MURDER OF ABEL.

"*And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him.*

"*And the Lord said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: Am I my brother's keeper?*

"*And he said, What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground.*

"*And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand;*

"*When thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth.*"
GENESIS IV. 8—12.

CAIN has rejected the way of acceptance with God, and remains at enmity with Him. The open door was set before him, but he would not enter in. And now we have to mark the evil heart of unbelief bringing forth its own fruits. Had Cain drawn nigh to God, God would have drawn nigh to him; and being reconciled to God by faith, he would have

found a new heart and a right spirit put within him, and his works would have been accepted, as well as his person. Instead of this, his heart remains hard, dark, and full of every evil. It remains without love; hatred to God is there, and hatred to his brother whom God alone could have taught him to love, "for love is of God." This hatred in the heart of Cain, at first only a root of bitterness, showing itself in displeasure at the acceptance of his brother's offering and the rejection of his own, grows and brings forth at last its full ripe fruit, even that of murder. Cain rises up against Abel his brother and slays him.

One verse in the Bible tells us this awful history of the first murder; but oh! how much is said in those few words! Who can rightly conceive all that had passed in the mind of Cain, before he was led thus to act? By whom must he have indeed been possessed before he could thus do, what no example before him had ever taught him to do: who but the evil one himself could thus have guided him to take away the life of his brother?

The deed is done, and the short and simple narrative of Scripture tells us not of Cain's state of mind, or of the horror which must have been his, when he thus found himself

guilty of his brother's blood. But the voice of the Lord God is heard. He was present as they talked in the field; He had "known long before" the thought of Cain, and He saw the first shedding of man's blood by man. "Where is Abel thy brother?" saith he to the murderer, who doubtless had fled from the scene of his own dreadful deed, or perhaps had hastened to cover over in the earth, the remains of the first dead. We may observe in Cain's answer the voice of the Devil speaking by him. He answers with a lie, "I know not:" and then in the reckless state of his heart goes on to speak insolently and profanely to the mighty God, "Am I my brother's keeper?" How awful is the answer of God! "What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground?" How are we to understand this expression that the blood cried unto God? It cried for vengeance; it required vengeance, we may say, from God. The attributes of God, that is, His character as God, required that He should avenge the blood which had been shed. His sovereignty required it, for He had given life, and who should dare to destroy it? His justice required it, for He was Abel's God, in whom Abel trusted, and Abel had been unjustly slain. His holiness required it, for He

is of "purer eyes than to behold iniquity," and can "by no means clear the guilty." He proceeds therefore to pass sentence upon the murderer, and Cain goes forth doubly cursed of God. The earth had already been cursed, and man condemned to eat bread in the sweat of his brow: but now to Cain it was doubly cursed, even when he tilled it, it should not bring forth fruit. Man had already been driven forth from Eden into the wide world; but now upon that world Cain was to be a wanderer and a fugitive, deprived of every feeling of home and of its comforts: and deprived of the knowledge of any place concerning which he might feel that there the Lord had recorded His name, and there He would come to him and bless him.

Well might the unhappy one exclaim, "My punishment is greater than I can bear." When the first curse was pronounced, even then redeeming mercy had stepped in, and the full weight of the curse had been reserved for One who from all eternity was able and willing to be made a curse for man. But Cain has cut himself off from all that was left of good for man on earth—and cursed from the earth must he spend the remainder of his wretched days upon it. His words show a full understanding of his sentence: "from thy face shall

I be hid." He had never known what it was to love and delight in the face or manifested presence of God: but he had felt its protection, and to that he now saw he had completely lost all claim.

There is some little difficulty in understanding his fear of being murdered: we know not how long a time had passed since his own and his brother's birth, and whether other children had been born to Adam and Eve: or whether Cain was looking forward to the increase of the human race as what would endanger him. Neither have we any thing to tell us what was that mark which God set upon him, whereby his life was to be given to him for a prey in all places where he went. But these particulars are of little importance: the Bible is never intended to gratify curiosity, whilst in all matters where we need instruction, it gives it to the very utmost extent that we can desire. And much and deep is indeed the instruction which is to be gathered from the history now before us. May God by His Spirit open our hearts that we may attend to it.

If we turn to the 3rd chapter of 1 *John*, we find the history of Cain and Abel brought forward for our learning, and here is the truth which the Apostle by that history would put

before us. "In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, *neither he that loveth not his brother.*" He then that loveth not his brother is not *of God*; how plainly speaks the word in this matter! "For this is the message (or commandment) that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. Not as Cain who was of that wicked one and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous." Here then we are told what we find also expressed in the next chapter of this Epistle, that "love is of God: and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love." (1 *John* iv. 7, 8.) In Cain we see an example of what is the state of every unconverted heart—that is of every heart that has not yet been born again. Cain was led on by the devil to whom he had yielded himself up, and the hatred which was in his heart working unrestrained to the uttermost, made him at last guilty of his brother's blood. But the same *root of evil* which produced murder in the case of Cain, lies in the heart of every fallen creature; and in the eyes of Him who "searcheth the hearts and trieth the reins"

that root is seen to be what it really is. "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer." You may be tempted to say; Yes, but surely it is only a few persons who are really guilty of *hating* their brother. Hear then the same truth put in these words, "He that *loveth not* his brother abideth in death." (chap. iii. 14, 15.) Do we not hereby learn that in God's sight the absence of love is that which marks the presence of hatred in man's heart? By nature, and until the grace of God change the heart, man does in fact love only himself. There may be much of what we call good nature, and good temper in the heart; qualities which attract the love of our fellow-creatures, and which are indeed valuable as promoting happiness in those about us. Still if we try things by the light of God's word, and God's Spirit, we shall find that all these natural pleasing qualifications may be there, and yet the root which alone can bear the real genuine fruit of love, have never been planted within us. If you feel unable to understand this, yet believe it on the testimony of God's word. That (as we have seen) plainly asserts, that "love is of God."

By this try yourself and your love. Say that you have kindly feelings in your heart, and that you find it hard to condemn your-

self for a want of love: yet, try your love of what nature it is. As we find in nature, the wild and uncultivated fruit or flower bearing some faint resemblance to the more perfected species, so as sometimes to gain for it the same name as that, whilst yet for beauty or usefulness, we see the wide difference between the two; even so is there in the uncultivated or natural heart continually found that, which because men know of nothing better, they imagine to be the real "fruit of the Spirit." Is your love from God, or springs it of itself in your heart? Has it been produced there by your knowledge of God, or is it something which as we may say, has nothing to do with God, but springs from yourself, and goes out to others because of what they are to you?

A further trial of your love may be thus proposed to you. What are your feelings towards God's people, towards those whom you are conscious are more truly lovers of God than yourself? If the love which we profess to find in our hearts come from God, then will it be especially drawn out towards those who have most of God in them. If we love because the Spirit of the Father is in us, then we shall love His children. "Every one that loveth him that begat, loveth him also that is

begotten of him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments." (1 *John* v. 1, 2.) This is a point on which men do so much deceive themselves, that it cannot be too earnestly pressed upon your attention. How often do we hear men drawing comfort from the circumstance (as regards either themselves or others) that there is a *good heart*, by which is meant a kindly nature; and that no harm has ever been done to others. And what a vain, miserable "refuge of lies" is this, if it be found that the very virtue which is imagined to be there, is something utterly without existence in the sight of "God the judge of all men:" and that He, knowing the truth, will say of such "good hearts" as these, "Wherefore when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?" (*Isaiah* v. 4.)

Let us return again to the case of Cain, and remember how it was with him. His heart remained unreconciled to God, and therefore filled with enmity against his brother. He hated his brother because of his superior righteousness, and of the favour with which God regarded him. Had Cain known the love of God to himself he would have loved God, and have loved his brother also.

If this be true with regard to Cain, how much more may the same truth be declared of men now. "God is love:" and "in this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." And then it is added, "Beloved, if God so love us, we ought also to love one another." (1 *John* iv. 9—11.) It is the knowledge of, and belief in, the free, wondrous, unmerited love of God to us so utterly unworthy, which alone can produce love in these hard, cold, and selfish hearts of ours. It is "the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us," (*Rom* v. 5,) which can alone soften and melt them, and warm them towards God in Christ first, and then towards our brethren for Christ's sake. It is at the cross of Christ that lies the fountain head, from which alone every streamlet of real love derives its being.

Abel's blood is graciously spoken of in Scripture, by way of setting before us the value of the blood which has been shed for us, nor must we leave the subject without turning to so blessed a lesson which God Himself would teach us. We have heard that He

said, "the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground:" and we have seen how that blood called for vengeance from every attribute of God. In setting forth the wondrous advantages of those who are called to the gospel, and not to the law,—the Epistle to the Hebrews says, "Ye are come to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaketh better things than that of Abel." (ch. xii. 24.) Oh! let us wonder at the riches of grace in this, that, whilst on the one hand we are told to see what the blood of man requires of God's justice, we are bid to mark on the other how the blood of God's own Son, as shed by "wicked hands," pleads *for us*, and speaketh unto God in behalf of sinful man! Come then by faith to that blood of sprinkling, there seek to be cleansed from all sin: then shall you truly learn what love is,—and you shall be able to rejoice in the witness of the Spirit that you are born of God, for you shall love much. Is it a little matter to be able to say, "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren?" (1 *John* iii. 14.)

PRAYER.

O merciful God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, look upon me who come to Thee in His Name. Forgive the hardness of my heart: forgive my coldness and want of love. O God, Thou art love, teach me to love! Make me to know Thy love, open mine eyes to see it. Grant that I may know and believe the love which God has to me: and that Jesus Christ loved me and gave Himself for me. Holy Jesus, let me be sprinkled with Thy precious blood, and do Thou give me that most excellent gift of love. Grant, O God, that I may ever remember my need of thy mercy and thy love, and may show to others the love I receive from Thee. May faith and love be put into my heart by the Holy Spirit, and there may they grow exceedingly to the glory of Thy Name, through Jesus Christ. AMEN.

ENOCH WALKING WITH GOD.

"*And Enoch lived sixty and five years, and begat Methuselah:*

"*And Enoch walked with God after he begat Methuselah three hundred years, and begat sons and daughters:*

"*And all the days of Enoch were three hundred sixty and five years:*

"*And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him.*" GEN. v. 21—24.

How fitly is man's life described by the Holy Ghost, in the Epistle of St. James! "What is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away." This is true of longer lives than we live now. It is true of those who lived many hundred years, as men did before the flood. For what is the longest life,—even the life of Methuselah,—compared with eternity? The fifth of Genesis is a striking chapter, if you look at it in this light. How long must the life of Seth have appeared to him, as he lived on past nine hundred years! and yet it came to an end, and all that we read of him,—his

long life, and his many deeds and sayings, is just this:—"Seth begat sons and daughters; and all the days of Seth were nine hundred and twelve years, and he died."

Among the names recorded in this chapter, Enoch's occurs, and his history differs from the others. First, his days were fewer upon earth, he lived three hundred and sixty-five years. His end was different,—it is not said he died; but, "he was not, for God took him." His life was different,—for it was a life spent with God, he "walked with God."

His days were fewer here, perhaps, from the very fact that he walked with God: for "the righteous is taken away from the evil to come." (*Isaiah* lvii. 1.)

Concerning his end, we read further in the eleventh chap. of the Epistle to the Hebrews, "Enoch was translated that he should not see death: and was not found, because God had translated him." Only of one other do we read, who had such a blessed end as this. Elijah was taken up into heaven without tasting of death.

What was Enoch's character is plain from this description of his life, he "walked with God." If other things were not told us of him, how full of meaning is this account. He knew God. He loved God. He talked

with God. He listened to God. He leaned upon God. He was employed in the service of God.

But we have somewhat more told us of him. We learn from the Epistle of Jude, v. 14, that he was a prophet. "And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these (that is, of the wicked men of the last days,) saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon all." He was a prophet then. And he prophesied of the Lord's second coming. He looked beyond the great event of the flood, and spoke of this greater one,—the second coming of the Son of Man.

It is remarkable that the two who have gone from here without tasting death, have been prophets. The one before the flood, the other after. The one (Elijah) for the Jews especially, the other to the world at large. The one was a witness against sinners, when the wickedness of the old world was reaching to its greatest height; the other was a witness against the Jews, when their wickedness had arrived at that pitch, that Elijah could hardly see one righteous man left.

Who can say whether these may not be the two witnesses spoken of in the eleventh chap. of the book of Revelations, who are yet again

to prophesy (clothed like prophets in sackcloth) on this earth, and who shall then taste of death, "when they shall have finished their testimony!"

We are told also of Enoch, what was the secret of his life of holiness. In the eleventh chap. of Hebrews we are told that it was "by faith," that he walked, and that "before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God." It is also there added concerning this principle of "faith," "But without faith it is impossible to please God, for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him."

Now this will help us in understanding how it is we can, like Enoch, "walk with God." How we can have testimony that we do please Him: and how we can enjoy a blessed end of our walk, even that of not seeing death.

None of us may be content without walking with God. We cannot be true Christians without it, for a Christian is one that follows Christ, and Christ is "God with us." It is the great end of the Gospel to be answered in every one who believes it, to bring us near by the blood of Christ unto God; that we may have access by Him through the Spirit unto the Father; that we may have fellowship with

the Father and the Son,—in a word, that we may walk with God.

We see at once the first step in such a walk must needs be that "faith, without which it is impossible to please Him."

We may well say, (*Amos* iii. 3.) "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" How can sin-loving man walk with God, "who cannot look upon iniquity?" How can a just and Holy God hold intercourse with righteously condemned criminals? Two things must first be done. God's justice must be satisfied by man's guilt being taken away. Instead of a condemned criminal, he must stand before Him as an innocent man, "in no condemnation."

Also, the enmity of man's mind against God, which is manifest in every unconverted person, must be done away. He must regard God as an object not of fear which hath torment, but of love.

These things are done by Christ for those who believe in Christ. Christ "died the just for the unjust to bring us to God." Christ pleased God by His sacrifice and His obedience, and satisfied God's justice in behalf of man, that is, of those who believe in Him, for it is by faith we lay hold of this righteousness and become "accepted in the beloved." We (like Abraham, like Enoch,) believe God, and

it is imputed unto us for righteousness, and we are called the friends of God. (*James* ii. 23.)

These are in no condemnation, because they are in Christ; they are objects of God's love and everlasting friendship.

But also, "they walk after the Spirit, and not after the flesh." "You that were enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath He reconciled." The "carnal mind," which is at enmity with God, becomes by the Spirit of Christ "spiritually minded,"—that is, minds the things after the Spirit. The renewed mind delights in the law of God; loves to hear the voice of the good Shepherd in the written word; turns not away from the throne of grace; commits its ways and thoughts to God; leans upon the promises of grace and strength; pants after the image of God in perfect righteousness; finds the nearer God the greater the peace that enters and abides within, and thus walks with God.

Faith overcomes the world. There are two walks in this world. One, known as narrow and strait, and little frequented. It is the "walk by faith," the "walk after the Spirit," the walk with God. The other, known as being a broad and much frequented way. It is the walk of sight, the "walk after the course of this world."

The difference of these walks is faith. Faith makes spiritual things as real to us as worldly things. And as the sight of worldly pleasure, worldly gain, worldly interests, worldly friendship, makes a man diligently seek these things, because he thinks they will reward him,—so faith opens a man's eyes to see spiritual gifts, spiritual riches, pardon of sins, communion with God, friendship of Christ, promises of peace, prospects of glory,—so strongly, so clearly,—that he "diligently seeks" God, knowing He is the "rewarder of all such," and knowing that one of God's rewards is better than a thousand worlds.

Moreover, Faith brings testimony to the soul that the soul pleases God. The more faith we have in Christ's complete work, as Redeemer, the more will doubts and fears and misgivings be cast to the winds. The promises of God are full, but our hearts are narrow. The promises of God are free, but our expectations are confined by earthly ideas of bargaining, and buying, and deserving. God's promises are unchanging, "immutable," stedfast, but our minds are fickle and changing in their frames, and we are apt to judge of God's word accordingly.

The more the Spirit works faith in us, the more "joy and peace," and "hope" in the

Holy Ghost will be ours, and these are some of the things that cause us to believe God is pleased with us, and that we are His children.

But we want another witness. This is our own,—like Enoch, we want one fromGod. And if our own spirit does bear witness that we are the children of God, does not the Spirit of God bear witness also,—thus with our spirit making two witnesses, by whose mouth the thing is established. Does not the Holy Ghost testify, that if you have the Spirit of adoption, whereby you are led to yearn after God as your Father, and to breathe forth your earnest desires to Him, that then this cometh of God, who hath adopted you and sealed you with His Holy Spirit? And if, casting away all other hopes, you have learnt to call Jesus your Lord and your God, and to say, in Him have I righteousness and strength, does not the Holy Ghost testify that "no man can say that Jesus is the Lord but by the Holy Ghost," and thereby you have testimony that you are "accepted in the beloved," and are pleasing God? And if in any degree you are bringing forth the fruit of the Spirit, — and above all, that one so contrary to nature, "Love," is not this God's witness? And is not each promise of Scripture, spoken by the Holy Ghost for the comfort of poor sinners, who have fled for

refuge to lay hold of Christ,—also a distinct testimony from God that such sinners are objects of His love, His care, His tenderness; which love, which care, and which tenderness are those of an "everlasting Father?" This testimony then have those who are like Enoch, walking with God.

Now such, like Enoch, shall have a blessed end. They shall not altogether escape that part of death which is implied in giving up the spirit. But "surely the bitterness of death is past." One has tasted it for them. One who gained the victory over "him who had the power of death," hath said and will not go back from His word, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, if a man keep my saying, he shall never see death." There is no such thing as death to the believer. When he comes to the time of his departure, and that shadow comes over him so like death, he finds he doth not die but sleep. So Stephen "fell asleep." So other saints are "them that sleep in Jesus." If a man walks with God in this life, is it likely God would leave him when he comes to that strange and dark part of the road he has never gone before, and which from its name and former power is fearful? No: God holds fast the hand of those who walk with Him in the time when their spirit is departing

from the flesh, as much as when they are together. When saints are seen walking with God here, then when they have finished their course, "they are not, because God takes them." They "are not," to their friends here, but they are with Christ, which is far better. "O death! where is thy sting? O grave! where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law; but thanks be unto God that giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 *Cor.* xv. 55—57.)

O Reader, is this your end of which we are speaking? Shall you not see death? Is it to you among those things of which the Apostle speaks and says, "All things are your's..... life or death, things present or things to come; all are your's, and ye are Christ's and Christ is God's?" (1 *Cor.* iii. 22.)

To know your end you must know your course. "To die is gain," if "to live is Christ." Are you walking with God? First, do you see Him who is invisible? We may have to do with godly things, and yet not walk with God. Judas followed closely in Christ's footsteps, but knew not God. Do you get through ordinances unto God, and not stop short at the outward means of grace?

Next, do you lean on His arm as you pass through this wilderness? Do you trust Him to guide you? To give you a sufficiency of things temporal? To keep you from things hurtful?

Do you hold close communion with Him? Do you shut your door, and pray to Him that seeth in secret? Do you listen to His teaching, reading, marking, and dwelling upon what He says in His word?

And for all these things do you seek, and depend on, and rejoice in the righteousness, the wisdom, and the strength of Him who is "the way, the truth, and the life?"

PRAYER.

O God! how great is the privilege of walking with thee! A sinful worm of the earth, with an Almighty, All-Holy God! And yet how slow am I to seek this privilege! God! forgive me. Draw me, and I will run after thee. Make me to thirst after the living God. Teach me to enjoy thy presence here. Raise my desires to thee, and fix my affections on thee.

Reveal thyself in such a way to me that all my desires may be after thee. Lord, I beseech thee, show me thy glory. Let me see thee in the person of Jesus Christ. Cause me to choose thee as my portion. I am tempted to walk after my own desires, but do thou, by thy Spirit, make thy will mine. I am tempted to walk after the course of this world, but do thou make the things of faith more to me than the things of sight.

Lord, when I cease to walk with thee in this world, may I walk in thy house of glory above. Translate me, that I may be with thee where thou art and behold thy glory, through Jesus Christ. AMEN.

THE WORLD BEFORE THE FLOOD.

"*And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.*

"*And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart.*

"*And the Lord said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them.*" GENESIS vi. 5—7.

WHAT a difference between the world as it came first from the hands of God, in the day when the Lord created it, and the world after it had been ruled by Satan awhile!

We read in the 1st chapter of *Genesis*, "And God saw every thing that He had made, and, behold, it was very good." And now what do we read? "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth." And again, "The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence, and God looked upon the earth,

and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth." (verses 11, 12.) "God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions." (*Eccles.* vii. 29.)

Thus had men abused the long lives which God granted them on earth. Doubtless the world before the flood was far advanced in civilization. This would be a likely result of long lives. Men's minds and bodies must have been strong and vigorous to bear proportion to their long lives. Great and mighty must have been their projects, and their deeds of those days. Men had time to follow out the greatest schemes, and to bring to perfection the greatest works. Perhaps in arts and sciences, in inventions and contrivances, they were not far behind what the world has arrived at now. But their sin increased with their knowledge, their power and their numbers. And the earth groaned with the weight of iniquity upon it. And the ill savour of its pollution went up into heaven, and brought down the vengeance of God upon it.

God has shortened mens lives since then, perhaps for this very cause, that their wickedness should not grow to such a height. But even with such short lives as we have, men are capable of great wickedness, and flesh is

again corrupting his way upon the earth. And we are assured that the days when Christ comes will be like the days when the flood came. It is important for us to enquire into the source and the nature of the wickedness that then was and again shall be.

Now the first thing we learn about the wickedness of the Old World at this time, is what is related in this 6th chapter in the first two verses. There we read that one of the principal causes of the great sin of the world, was that, those who by profession were the children of God, made marriages with those who were the ungodly in the world. "It came to pass when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them, that the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose." We read directly after this, God began to say His "Spirit" should not always "strive with men." The expression "sons of God," does not mean angels, for angels do not marry nor are given in marriage. Nor can it mean sons of God in any thing like the sense in which Jesus is the Son of God; but that the world was then divided into two classes, even as it is now, the men of this world, and the children of God; the sons of Belial, and the sons of

God. For a time these were kept distinct, but at the last they mingled together. Professors, but not real "sons of God," soon appeared. Young men and young women there were, who, as they grew up, threw off the restraints of religious education, and mixed with those who were altogether worldly. The men made evil marriages. They "took them wives, of all which they chose," they were guided in their choice only by outward appearances. They saw fair women and they chose them, not regarding their impiety, or thinking about whether they were children of God or not.

This, of course, led to great evil. The good that was in them soon vanished away. Evil communications corrupted them. It can never be otherwise. Where such unions take place, the stronger principle of evil in one party soon gets the better of the weak intentions of good in the other. And yet, how often are such unions made now. How mixed together is the professing Church and the world. Surely this is one of the proofs that "as it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be in the days of the Son of man." The distinction between the sons of God, and the men of this world, which ought to be very marked, is too much lost sight of. Many a young person, the

child of holy parents, distresses those parents, hurts his or her own soul, and sins against God by marrying a person simply because of fair outward circumstances. A good worldly match is all that is thought of, and that too often by the parents themselves.

Hear what the Scripture says on this subject, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers; for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial?" (*2 Cor.* vi. 14, 15.) Remember all professing believers are not real believers, and therefore having not necessarily "communion with Christ." You must look for proofs of real grace in the heart of one you would be united with, or else, though no man may, God forbids the banns.

Another thing said about the evil of the Old World is this,—men resisted the Spirit of God. "And the Lord said, My Spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh." The question is, how did God's Spirit strive with man? And the answer is plain. Much as He strives with men now. He strove with men in the word preached; a word of warning, and a word of promise, if they would repent. For Noah, we are told, was "a

preacher of righteousness." And Noah preached by the Spirit of Christ.

Ever since the promise of Christ to restore the world, Christ has striven with sinners by His Spirit. Enoch, as we have seen, prophecied of His coming. Noah is called "a preacher of righteousness." (2 *Peter* ii. 5.) And it is also said, that by the Spirit, Christ went and preached unto them (whose spirits are now in prison, reserved unto judgment) who were disobedient, when once the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah. (See 1 *Peter* iii. 18—20.)

Unto the unbelieving Jews, Stephen said, "Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost, as your fathers did, so do ye; which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted?" (*Acts* vii. 51, 52.) God's Spirit strove with the Old World in the preachers of righteousness. He strove with the Jews in the law and writings of Moses, in His Prophets, and in His own Son. God's Spirit strives with men now. The Holy Ghost speaks God's mind in the word written and preached. And as this word falls upon men's ears, strikes upon their conscience, the Spirit strives. And alas! with how many does He strive in vain! They hear, and heed not; or they refuse to hear, turn away from the preacher, shut up and look not at their Bibles!

Again, God's Spirit strove with men in the still small voice of a reproving conscience. "Their thoughts the mean while accused or else excused one another." They knew they sinned, but they heeded not their consciences. Conscience instructed by God's word is a monitor which will rise up in judgment and condemn us at the last day, if he is slighted now.

Once more,—God's Spirit strove with men before the flood, by the good example of Noah. This was a light continually before them. Here was one righteous man, who stood out against all the world. They knew he was a man of God, but they shunned his company, and followed not his example. God speaks to men now in the same way. He tells them of grace to make men good in His word, and He shows them the power of that grace in the lives of the righteous. These are epistles known and read of all. All men have some such light before them; some pious relative, or some friend or acquaintance, who goes on walking piously, praying, reading, and seeking to avoid evil, and to cleave to that which is good. This is God's voice. This is the striving of His Spirit. What shall be the end of those who refuse Him that speaketh? Surely, it shall be with them as it was with those of old! "My Spirit shall not always strive with

man." God's voice will soon not be heard. And they that have not obeyed it, will not hear it again until it passes eternal judgment on the sinner.

We may notice next, how it is said that the fountain head from which flowed all this great wickedness was men's hearts. Their hands were engaged in it. Their minds were occupied with it. But the seat of the evil was the heart. "Every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." So again we read, "The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth." Every heart born into the world is here described. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh." And again, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked."

And this accounts for men's resisting God's voice, and God's Spirit. In vain does He strive with men's consciences, and in vain does He teach men's minds, and in vain do His words strike upon the outward ears, until the heart be opened to admit Him, and men's wills be turned towards Him. Men have, by nature, no heart for God, no taste for spiritual things now, any more than they had before the flood. Their imaginations are only of this world. They "mind earthly things." Would we lay the right foundation of true repentance,

it must be repentance of the heart. Would we have saving faith, it must be faith that affects the heart,—faith that "worketh by love." In this way to be "spiritually minded is life and peace." To continue as we are by nature, which is "to be carnally minded, is death." And so men found it in the days of Noah.

"It repented the Lord that He had made man on the earth, and it grieved Him at His heart. And the Lord said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth." This, of course, does not imply any change in God's mind, or any feelings of sorrow, as we change, or as we feel sorrow;—but it is language used for our infirmities. It is speaking after the manner of men. "Known unto God are all His works from the beginning." He foresaw that man would corrupt his way on the earth, even when He made him. At the same time such language tells of God's hatred of sin, and His purpose of bringing judgment on sinners. What an awful thought is that, that any man should so live in this world, that God repents that He has made that man;—just as a man repents having planted a fruit tree in his garden, and having taken pains with it, and it remains unfruitful, so at the last he says, "Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?"

But in judgment God remembered mercy. The earth was laden with iniquity; offensive with its ill-savour. Yet the Lord spared it awhile, and He said, "Yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years." The time of its continuance was thus limited. And why was it granted at all? We learn from other Scripture (1 *Peter* iii. 20,) it was then "the long-suffering of God waited." God waited to be gracious. To see if there were any that would seek after Him;—lest any should say they had not time, nor warning enough,—and that God should be proved to be the righteous Judge in condemning those who "despised the riches of His goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leads to repentance."

The same is going on now. The period of the world's continuance in its present state is limited. We know not how many years. But the Father knoweth the very day of its end. Of one thing we are sure, it is now a time of long-suffering. God's Spirit is yet striving. Yet, a little while, and He will withdraw it. The appointed years will have ended. God's people will have been called out of the wicked world. God's enemies will have been proved. The measure of their iniquity being filled up, God will appear to their confusion, and to the eternal salvation of His own people.

On which side are we? Among the thoughtless multitude, with imaginations only evil,—conformed to this world,—making alliance with the ungodly,—resisting and grieving His Spirit,—earthly-minded? Or, like Noah walking with God, our hearts changed by His Spirit, whose blessed influence we court and ask for,—accepted through faith in the Redeemer,—heirs of righteousness by faith,—and heirs of the "new heaven and new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.?"

PRAYER.

O God, thou most worthy Judge eternal! thou hast declared thy hatred to evil!—thou hast punished the guilty! Make me to learn righteousness by these thy judgments.

My heart is evil continually. I have sinned from my youth up. Enter not into judgment with me. Wash out every stain of past guilt in the blood of Jesus. Renew my heart and mind by thy Holy Spirit.

Cause me to separate from the evil of the

world. May I never follow the multitude to do evil. Give me the will and the power to obey thy call, to come out of it and be separate. Repent not that thou hast made me, though I deserve this. But look upon me as I stand in the merits of Christ whom thou lovest. And when thou destroyest the earth, as thou wilt do by fire, may I be among those whom thou wilt spare. Let me be found of thee in Christ, in peace, without spot and blameless, to the praise of the glory of thy grace, through Jesus Christ. AMEN.

NOAH FINDING GRACE.

"*But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.*

"*These are the generations of Noah: Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God.*

"*And Noah begat three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth.*" GEN. vi. 8, 9, 10.

NOAH's character should be to us both interesting and instructive. They were wonderful days in which he lived, when there was not one other righteous man upon earth. He therefore must have been a remarkable character. He is mentioned by the Lord as one of those three men, who were especially righteous in His sight. (*Ezekiel* xiv. 14.)

And when we consider what the world was in his days, and what a wonderful exception he was to the rest of the world, we ought not surely to pass lightly over his character, but to try and learn from it what is the secret of being righteous in the midst of the greatest temptation.

The first thing we read about him, is a circumstance connected with his birth. We read in the 5th chap. of *Genesis*, verses 28 and 29, "Lamech lived an hundred eighty and two years, and begat a son; and he called his name Noah, saying, this same shall comfort us concerning our work and toil of our hands, because of the ground which the Lord hath cursed." Lamech seems to have been a good man. He was the grandson of Enoch. He called his son Noah, which means "rest," or "comfort." And this he may have done from one of two causes. It may be, he thought he would be perhaps that promised seed, which was to bruise the serpent's head, and who would take away the curse from the earth. Or, as is more probable, he had the Spirit of prophecy, and foretold that his son should be, as he was, a righteous man, to whom the Lord would give the promise He afterwards did, "I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake." Certainly, being a man of faith, he was a man of prayer, and he prayed for Noah, and his prayers were heard. Such was the beginning of Noah. He was a child of many prayers. No parent prays in vain for a child.

The next thing we read about Noah is this, "But Noah found grace in the eyes of the

Lord." The "but" refers us to the verses before, which speak of all the world as worthy of death. Grace is free favour or mercy, and this did Noah find at the Lord's hands. It was this made him to differ from others, in being spared destruction, and also in being righteous while the others were sinners exceedingly.

If we could have asked Noah about this, surely he would have answered us with Paul, "I am what I am by the grace of God." In sin did Noah's mother conceive him. But God's grace, his father's prayers, and his own faith in God, changed his character, so that "Noah was a just man and perfect."

To find grace or favour in any one's sight signifies the acceptance of our person by them; the permission to draw near and speak, and even ask any thing at their hands. It always must imply being without such privileges until they are granted us. In this way Joseph found grace in the sight of Potiphar, and from being a mere bought slave, he became ruler of his household. In this way Jacob found grace in the eyes of Esau, whom he had offended, and from being great enemies they became friends, and embraced one another. So Esther obtained favour and grace in the sight of king Ahasuerus. And in this sense must every

sinner "find grace" in God's eyes, before he can be different from the rest of the world in point of guilt, and in character.

God is of purer eyes than to look upon iniquity. No man finds favour with Him, save by his iniquity being purged away. This iniquity is done away in Christ. The believer finds grace only for Christ's sake. "No man cometh unto the Father but by me." In Christ there is something God can look upon, and be well pleased with. For His sake therefore Noah (in whom, as we have read, was the Spirit of Christ,) was pardoned, accepted, and made righteous: Noah by faith became an heir of the righteousness which is by faith. *(Heb.* xi. 7.) This is the grace in which every sinner must stand to be accepted, as the apostle writes in *Romans* v. 2: "We have access (that is, can and do approach,) by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God."

It is this makes us to differ. Do we indeed know that this difference has been made in us? Is this true of us, as of Noah, "But he, or she found grace in the eyes of the Lord." The last day will decide indeed, but how awful to leave it till then. Noah found grace many hundred years before the flood came and proved that he had found it. In-

deed if he had not, how could he have been saved, with his family? The ark took a long time to build and prepare. If we have not found grace before we go down to the grave, we shall not find it at all. We want to find grace, not only to die well, but to live well. We want grace, not only to deliver us from wrath to come, but also from the present anger of God, and from the power of "this present evil world." As says the apostle, we want grace to serve God with. "Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear, for our God is a consuming fire." (*Heb.* xii. 28, 29.) Every thing combustible brought near a raging fire is consumed, as the men that bound Shadrach and his brethren found to their cost. So the sinner finds that ever falls into God's hand, without having first found grace.

But the door of grace is open in Christ Jesus to every believing sinner. "The grace of God, that bringeth salvation, hath appeared to all men," teaching us and giving us power to "deny ungodliness," to "live righteously," and to look for a blessed hope of glory. "Grace and truth" have come by Jesus Christ. Of His fulness have

thousands and thousands received, and grace for grace. Yet His fulness remains the same, like the sun in its inexhaustible heat and light. Jesus stands a faithful High Priest at God's right hand;—His heart full of love; His lap full of gifts; His mouth full of promises; His hands laden with blessings. He has gone up "having received gifts for men, even for the rebellious." And having such an High Priest —one that has offered His own body; one that is all-righteous in God's sight; one that "ever liveth to make intercession" for His people; one that is "touched" with the "feeling of our infirmities,"—the invitation comes to us, "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." *(Heb.* iv. 16.)

"Millions of sinners, vile as you,
Have here found life and peace:
Come, thirsty souls, and prove it true,
And drink, adore, and bless."

But Noah not only found grace and was spared, but grace made him a righteous person, a partaker of that "holiness without which no man shall see the Lord." He "was a just man and perfect." Perfect means here, as when used with regard to Job and elsewhere, —sincere, having a heart really set upon God.

For Noah was not sinless. We read afterwards of his falling; but this was an exception in his life. He abhorred that which was evil. He loved God. Being born of God he could not sin, as a habit, as a thing of pleasure. This is plain, for it is said, "Noah walked with God."

This was Enoch's character. It is most expressive of the true Christian's life, when once he has ceased to walk after his own lusts, and according to the course of this world. It is choosing God as our portion; Christ as our companion. It is having the habit of pouring out our thoughts before God, listening with eagerness to His words, catching at every intimation of His will, and leaning on His strength, as we walk on in our course. It is running with patience the race set before us, looking unto Jesus. It is living through the Spirit, and walking in the Spirit, and being led by the Spirit.

But what is remarkable of this holy walk, as seen in Noah, is that he did it when he had to walk alone, and when all the world were going in an opposite direction. Think what it must have been, to have been the only man that really feared God, save the members of his own family! What, to have been the only family that met together to worship God! Or

the only man that thought it wrong to do those things done by all the rest of the world! How many of us find it hard to walk with God, even when we may have many companions on the same road. What then must it have been to have stood alone, and to have been the laughing-stock of a whole world? Doubtless men wrote against Noah; men spoke against him; men published bitter things against him, who set himself up in opposition to all mankind! But "his bow abode in strength." He walked on quietly, evenly, devotedly, notwithstanding all that was said and done against him. None of these things moved him. He remained upright, and just. He still "walked with God," and was "perfect in his generations."

And it is no secret how he did this. Like Him, in whose righteousness and strength he walked, when he was alone, he was not alone. Not only he walked with God, but God walked with him. Not only he found grace, but grace found, and grace kept him. He was "kept by the power of God through faith." Here was the hidden hand that poured oil from behind the wall into the fire, which the world sought to extinguish. Millions of men were against him, yet there were many more, and many stronger on his side.

By this strength do believers walk and prevail now. Many know it not, because they have not dared to separate themselves from the world, and take their walk alone. Yet it is then God's presence is most precious, and His promised strength is found sufficient. God comes not to our succour wholly, when we cast not ourselves altogether on it. Too many want to walk with God and the world too. But how can this be? "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." Let us once be separated in heart from the world, and let our affections be once really knit to God and God's people, and God will give us strength to act a right part, to walk in a right way, although it be different from all the world.

We shall find we walk most securely, when we are in the habit of being much alone with God. It is when pouring out our hearts in secret before our Father, when searching His truths for ourselves, when going out into the fields to meditate on heavenly things, that God especially draws near to us, communes with us by the way, and manifests Himself unto us. And then, when all the world forsakes us, we are not alone. When friends die or fail us, Jesus lives, and abides faithful. When our father and mother forsake us, the

Lord taketh us up; and when we walk in the valley of the shadow of death, (and die alone we must) the Lord is still with us.

How happy this character,—how blessed the end it leads to! Shall we not choose this good part for ourselves, and be found "walking with God?" Shall we not pray and watch and strive accordingly?

"O for a closer walk with God,
A calm and heavenly frame;
A light to shine upon the road,
That leads me to the Lamb."

We have one more point in Noah's character to notice. He lived for others as well as himself. He sought to save others as well as himself. He was "a preacher of righteousness." He reasoned with the world of "righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come." He disputed daily, to convince them of sin. He sought to persuade by the "terrors of the Lord." He set forth those truths which the Spirit of Christ which was in him did signify. Now this must have been a hard matter in such ungodly times. Men would oftener leave the righteous alone, if they would leave them alone. But who can see souls perish and not cry out? Who can believe in eternal fire, and not therefore speak?

Who can have tasted that the Lord is gracious, and not ask others to "come and see?" Surely this is as certain a result of walking with God, as it is a duty belonging to the righteous. They are lights, and they are to let their light shine. Every child of God should be, in one sense, a "preacher of righteousness." All are not called to the ministry of the Gospel, but all are called to be "ensamples" of Christians. And love for others, if nothing else, should make us speak of righteousness to those who are lacking it, as we have opportunity. This is hard sometimes. It is far more pleasant to praise men, than to hint to them of faults. It is easier to pray for our friends, than to use means to bring them to God. Yet, it is a kindly office, expected of us. Faithfulness in this respect will save many a tear of regret by and by. We shall never repent having spoken a word in season to a thoughtless soul. It may be a cross now, but it will be part of a crown of rejoicing hereafter. It may make us frowned upon now, but men will bless us hereafter: it may bring us shame now, but what is that, if it saves souls from eternal shame hereafter?

Let this be our character. Let us ask for grace that we may find grace,—more grace. "He giveth grace to the humble." And while

we walk with God ourselves, let us seek to win others to the same walk,—the walk of faith, the walk of love, and the walk that leadeth unto life eternal.

PRAYER.

O Gracious God, Holy Jesus, and life-giving Spirit! I bow my knee before thee, Eternal One, and ask for grace. Let me find grace in thy sight. Thy Spirit strove in vain with sinners of old. But it strove not in vain in thy servant Noah. Let it not strive in vain with me. Give me largely of that Spirit. Let Him not depart from me, till He has made me willing by His power. I fear lest I have often grieved Him. Yet, Lord, withdraw not His presence from me.

Make me as thy servant Noah, just and perfect. Sanctify the thoughts and desires of my heart. Conform my actions to thy blessed rules. Guide my words with discretion; and so make me walk with thee in love, as thy child. Let my righteousness speak to others, and tell of thy grace. Give me wisdom and power to let my light shine before others, that they may see my good works, and glorify thy name, both now and in the day of visitation. I plead the merits of thy dear Son, Jesus Christ. AMEN.

NOAH SAVED IN THE ARK.

"*In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, the seventeenth day of the month, the same day were all the fountains of the great deep broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened.*

"*And the rain was upon the earth forty days and forty nights.*

"*In the selfsame day entered Noah, and Shem, and Ham, and Japheth, the sons of Noah, and Noah's wife, and the three wives of his sons with them, into the ark ;*

"*They, and every beast after his kind, and all the cattle after their kind, and every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth after his kind, and every fowl after his kind, every bird of every sort.*

"*And they went in unto Noah into the ark, two and two of all flesh, wherein is the breath of life.*

"*And they that went in, went in male and female of all flesh, as God had commanded him : and the Lord shut him in.*" GEN. VII. 11—16.

THE gracious invitation is now given to Noah, "Come thou, and all thy house, into the ark." That ark Noah had himself built. Most likely many of the ungodly in the world had

assisted Noah in the work;—not as he had done, acting in obedience to God's word, and with the expectation of being saved in it,—but being paid for their labour. Even as it is now, it is possible we may, from unworthy motives, help to save others, and perish ourselves. Many will come in the last day, and say, they have done many things in the name of Christ, and yet, being "workers of iniquity," they will be cast out.

A larger number of clean beasts than of others (v. 2) was to be taken into the ark, because there would be a greater necessity of them for the use of man. "But why seven? Surely that God, that created seven days in the week, and made one for Himself, did here preserve of divers clean beasts, one for Himself, for sacrifice. He gives us six for one in earthly things, that in spiritual we should be all for Him." *

And when Noah had done in these and other respects, all that God had commanded him, we read, "the Lord shut him in."

"Now the day is come, all the guests are entered, the ark is shut, and the windows of heaven are open. I doubt not but many of those scoffers, when they saw the violence of the waves descending and ascending, according

*Bishop Hall's Contemplations.

to Noah's prediction, came wading middle deep unto the ark, and importunately craved that admittance they once despised; but now, as they formerly rejected God, so are they justly rejected of God. For ere vengeance begins, repentance is seasonable,—but if judgment be once gone out we cry too late..... Others, more bold than they, hope to over-run the judgment, and climbing up to the high mountains, look down upon the waters with more hope than fear: and now, when they see their hills become islands, they climb up into the tallest trees; there with paleness and horror at once look for death, and study to avoid it; whom the waves overtake at last half dead with famine, and half with fear. Lo! now from the tops of the mountains they descry the ark floating upon the waters, and behold with envy that which before they beheld with scorn. In vain doth he fly whom God pursues. There is no way to fly from His judgments, but to fly to His mercy by repenting. How securely does Noah ride out this uproar of heaven, earth, and waters! He hears the pouring down of rain above his head,—the shrieking of men, and roaring and bellowing of beasts, on both sides of him; the raging and threats of waves under him; he saw the miserable shifts of the distressed

unbelievers,—and in the meantime sits quietly in his dry cabin, neither feeling nor fearing evil. He knew that He which owned the waters would steer him,—that He who shut him in would preserve him. How happy a thing is faith! What a quiet safety; what a heavenly peace, doth it work in the soul, in the midst of all the inundations of evil."*

This wonderful event is to us a figure of what is to be. As the world was, so will it be in the latter days. As the destruction of the ungodly by water, so will be their destruction by fire. And as Noah was saved, so the Lord will again show that He "knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished." (2 *Peter* ii. 9.)

Thus, there will be scoffers among the ungodly, who will be "walking after their own lusts, and saying, where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. For this they are willingly ignorant of, that by the word of God, the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water; whereby the world that then was being overflowed with water, perished. But the heavens

*Bishop Hall's Contemplations.

and the earth which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men." (2 *Peter* iii. 4—7.)

Now, you will observe a remarkable expression in this passage from St. Peter's Epistle. "Of this they are willingly ignorant." There is such a thing as willing ignorance. It is ignorance willed and chosen by persons. As it is said, "None so blind as they that will not see." Men easily doubt that which they do not wish. Many know not what sinners they are, because they willingly shut their eyes and ears to the plain words of God, which they would rather not know. Many believe not in the terrors of the Lord,—the curse of the ungodly, — the judgments awaiting the wicked; they prove their unbelief by their inactivity to escape these things: and the reason is they do not wish them to be true,—they do not want to find that they are so. But ignorance is no safe plea for disobedience.

And from this we learn wherein lies the safety of the righteous. Only mark first, how few they are in number. In Noah's day's, only eight were saved. In the ark,—"few, that is, eight souls were saved by water." The Lord says of these days, "Many are called, but few are chosen." This is an

awful thought, and may well drive the question home, Am I among the few? Have I any points of Noah's character? Have I any sure signs of being among the "few chosen,"—the "little flock" of Christ? Alas! alas! the very fact of there being many walking down the broad road of destruction, is what comforts some. "If I perish," say they, "many perish with me." But ah! what madness is this! What scales for the eyes of the ungodly put on, —kept on,—by the devil! What comfort was it to the mother perishing with her children in the rising waves of the flood, that thousands around her had died, and were now shrieking with dismay? What comfort to the ungodly rich man waking in hell, to remember he had five brethren coming quickly after him? What comfort to have a million travelling with you now,—a million suffering with you hereafter?

And then on the other hand, the very fact of there being few in the right road, keeps many from walking in it. They like not to be marked characters. They like not the scoffs and the "hard speeches" of unconverted neighbours. And yet, what a mercy,—what an honour is that, to be distinguished by God, —to be of Christ's little flock,—to be one of those chosen to dwell with the Lord for ever.

And what is it distinguishes such? It is

BELIEF IN GOD'S WORDS, AND CONDUCT CORRESPONDING TO IT.

So is it said of Noah:—"By faith Noah being warned of God, of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is by faith." *(Heb.* xi. 7.)

Now here were two things in which Noah differed from others. There was faith, and there was action. There was something within, and something outward. And that which was outward, came from, and agreed with that which he had within him. God spoke of destruction, and faith made him wish to avoid it. God pointed to a refuge, and faith made him flee to it. We can best know what faith is, by seeing what it does. Faith in wrath to come, must make a man eager, anxious, diligent to escape it. Faith in his house being on fire, will make a man run from it. Faith in the truth of our being certainly condemned to eternal fire, will put a man in fear,—great in proportion to the danger. He will be moved with fear. Faith in the appointed means of pardon, will make a man seek to it. He will wait for nothing,—he will tarry for no one,—he will say, let every thing in the world be uncertain,—every thing doubtful,—of this one

thing, I want to be assured, that I am pardoned and delivered from the wrath to come. Faith that stops short of such fear and such acting, is dead faith, vain faith, and not saving faith at all.

To make us like Noah, heirs of "righteousness which is by faith," is what our faith must do for us. It is this righteousness, and not faith itself, which is the meritorious cause of salvation. This is the obedience of the second Adam, the Lord from heaven, which is imputed to those who believe on Him that raised up Jesus from the dead. Now it is expressly said, such faith in the heart, must be shown by confession with the mouth, which is the first act of obedience to God. "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." It is not always easy to confess Christ's name before men. It is never easy to act up to that confession and profession in the world. But real faith gains this victory, as it did in Noah's case.

This is why it is said, baptism was prefigured by the waters of the flood. After mention has been made of the ark wherein "eight souls were saved by water," it is added, "the like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the

flesh, but the answer of a good conscience towards God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ." (1 *Peter* iii. 21.) "He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved." To be baptized, is the great proof of a man's faith in God's word which requires it. It is a seal of the righteousness which is by faith,—it is a confession of Christ's faith before man, and it is the time of making an open profession of what we believe. This last is called the answer of a good conscience. This the eunuch had when Philip baptized him, and his answer was, "I believe that Jesus is the Son of God." (*Acts* viii. 37.) It is this that saves,—the washing away the filth of a conscience defiled with sin by the blood of Jesus, "and not the putting away the filth of the flesh" by water only.

Yet the outward sign,—the outward act of obedience—is necessary,—for the Lord hath appointed it. We are not saved in our own way, but God's way. Noah might have built the greatest ship ever seen in the world, without God's direction, but it would not have saved him. The ark did, because God had appointed it. Many may think baptism needless, but if God has appointed it, "who art thou, O man, that repliest against God?" The answer of a good conscience in one sense

saves, but in another it is written, "baptism doth now also save us" by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The resurrection of Christ is the procuring cause of our salvation,—but he that believeth and is baptized, is the way of applying the resurrection to our souls. Noah was baptized into Christ, when the waters swelled around him in the ark,—and at the last he came forth like a new creature, to the enjoyment of a new creation. So it is written, "We are buried with Christ by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so, we also should walk in newness of life." (*Rom.* vi. 4.)

And mark the security of Noah once in the ark. God Himself shut him in. Even our position in Christ, is not safe, except God place us there. The work of faith in the soul, is God's work. "No man can come unto me, except the Father which sent me draw him." Christ must be made "of God unto us,—wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption." But, blessed be God, He is as ready to shut us into Christ, as He is unwilling we should remain without Him. There is no poor sinner really desires to be safe in Christ, but what God's hand is at work already in his heart, and that hand will

lead on till it place him on the Rock that is higher than he. And how safe is that sinner! Not more safe was Noah from the raging elements around him, than is he from the swellings of ungodliness. Danger may threaten, but it shall not come nigh him. Past sins may look black, but none shall condemn him whom the Lord justifieth,—for whom Christ died,—for whom He intercedeth. Lusts may rage horribly, but the Lord is mightier. Satan will plan and plot to get the soul from trusting to what he will tell him is the unsafe raft of the work of Jesus of Nazareth,—but the soul taught of God, will feel secure in the merits of the Son of God, and will know that He is able to save to the uttermost, all that come unto God by Him.

Oh! shall I not ask, hath God thus shut me in His ark of grace? Am I really delivered from the wrath to come? By faith in Jesus am I an heir of the righteousness of faith? The highest mountain of good works, —the mightiest fabric of our own working,— will not secure us from the wrath to come, nor make us safe in the day when God appears to punish the ungodly,—for all are ungodly but those who have their righteousness of Him,— whose hearts are renewed by His Spirit, and whose hopes unto the end are that God "hath

made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him."

PRAYER.

Almighty and everlasting God, who, of thy great mercy didst save Noah and his family in the ark from perishing by water, I pray thee, at this time, to hear and accept my prayers, and let me find grace in thine eyes, even unto my salvation.

What am I, O Lord, that I should be spared from that everlasting destruction, with which thou wilt visit the ungodly in the world! My only hope is, that thou regardest me in Christ Jesus, to whom I have fled for refuge. For His sake spare me, and cover my iniquity. Lord, let thine own hand shut me up in His precious merits. Let that hand work faith in me. By that hand keep me close unto Christ. Oh! keep me from wandering from Him! Make me steadfast in faith, joyful through hope, and rooted in love, that I may so pass the waves of this troublesome world, that finally I may come to the land of everlasting life,—there to reign with thee, in glory everlasting; through Jesus Christ my Saviour. AMEN.

THE RAINBOW.

"And God said, This is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations:

"I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth.

"And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud:

"And I will remember my covenant, which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh.

"And the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth.

"And God said unto Noah, This is the token of the covenant, which I have established between me and all flesh that is upon the earth." GENESIS IX. 12—17.

THE first thing Noah did, when he came out of the ark, was to build an altar unto the Lord. He "took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt offerings on the altar." (c. viii. 20.) This outward

act, so well pleasing unto the Lord, tells much of what was passing within him. By this he seemed to acknowledge God's mercy in having spared him and other of his creatures; and as he laid his offering on the altar, he seemed to say, I and my family deserve to die as these animals now do by my hand. By thus dedicating these offerings unto thee, I desire to acknowledge our deserts, and to confess it is only by thy mercy we are spared.

These offerings were shadows of the One Offering of the body of Christ, by which "He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified." Noah knew that without shedding of blood there is no remission. He owed his life to God's mercy; and he showed this by a sacrifice of life.

All the substance he had saved in the ark he owed to God's mercy, therefore he would give of them unsparingly to God. "And the Lord smelled a sweet savour; and the Lord said in His heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake." (*Genesis* viii. 21, 22.) The ill-savour of man's sin had before gone up unto the Lord, and He had smitten the earth with a curse; but now He smells a sweet savour in Noah's sacrifice, and promises He will not so curse it any more.

We must not pass over an important law

laid down at this time, when God was afresh covenanting with man. It is one that is to make a man's life precious in his brother's eyes,—so precious that when taken by man, it shall be at the cost of his own. "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed : for in the image of God made He man." *(v.* 7.) It is probable that the crime of murder had been a common sin among the ungodly before the flood. It is likely that Cain had many followers. God in mercy established this law. He did not wait until He should give the ten commandments from Mount Sinai, in which He said again, "Thou shalt do no murder," but gave it to all the world at large. In every land where the Bible is ackowledged, this is the law of the land. When it ceases to be law in a land, the Bible ceases to be acknowledged as a guide in the government of a nation.

The next interesting event after the flood, is the covenant God established with Noah and all his seed after him,—of which the rainbow is the token. There was no rainbow before the flood, for indeed, it would appear there was no rain. "For the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth.....But there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground." *(Chap.* ii. 5, 6.)

It is probable then, that the first rain that came on the earth, was that which lasting forty days and forty nights, swept away all living upon it. From this time it has pleased God to water the earth and make it fruitful, by the clouds dropping rain. Now, we can well imagine that when the sons of Noah, and their sons, should behold the first gathering of clouds, and the first threatening of a storm,—after that one fearful storm which had been so mightily fraught with destruction; they would be filled with alarm, and would fear, lest indeed God was again about to punish the inhabitants of the earth. To prevent and to quiet such fears did God graciously "speak to Noah and to his sons with him, saying, I, behold I, establish my covenant with you, and with your seed after you.....from all that go out of the ark, —to every beast of the earth.....Neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth." God's word might have been enough. But He knew how slow to believe His creatures would be, and therefore He gives a sign or token of this His promise. "This is the token of the covenant,—I do set my bow in the cloud.....And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud: and I will remember my covenant." And again, "And I will

look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth." With what interest would the first eyes gaze upon this bow! With what awe and wonder would it first meet the eyes of Noah and his sons, reflected in its bright and vivid colours, upon the dark back-ground of black and tempestuous clouds. But, with what comfort, gratitude, and pleasure, would they also watch it, as the bright shining of the sun's rays which produced it, told of God's mercy, love, and faithfulness to His creatures.

And should it be otherwise with us? Is not the covenant made with us as much as with them? Yes:—"with every living creature that is with you, FOR PERPETUAL GENERATIONS;" so runs the covenant. Does not God speak to us in that bow that so often cheers the passing shower? It tells of that which should humble us. We are as worthy of destruction, as were the sinners of old. It is not our virtues that cause the windows of heaven to be stopped, and the rain from heaven to be restrained now. It is simply that mercy which bears long with even the wickedness of the unconverted. This should we remember as oft as we look upon the bow. The black clouds and the howling wind, and the pouring

rain, and the rolling thunder, proclaim loudly our deserts ;—but the bright and beauteous bow in a still small voice,—listened to by the believer,—declares God's love. It tells also of that which should make us grateful. Whatever we do, it is said by God, "I will look upon it, and will remember." Surely we should look upon it, and remember. If God's eyes are there to remember mercy, our's should be there to whom that mercy comes.

Every thing in nature should speak to us ; but this in particular. The rain falling reminds of God's goodness, which "sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." But the rain ceasing, with the bow in the cloud, is a standing miracle, which should remind us of the covenant of which we still are partakers.

Moreover, it should remind us of other mercies. It should bring to our minds other covenants which God has made with His people.

Thus, first, in Isaiah liv., the Jewish church is comforted with a promise, which God says is like the promise concerning the flood. Though Israel is there represented as forsaken, yet the promise of recovery is given. "For a small moment have I forsaken thee ; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a

moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord, thy Redeemer. For this is as the waters of Noah unto me; for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth; so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee. For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee."

Here then mark the force of the simile. When the dark clouds covering the heavens, seem to threaten destruction, and speak nothing but wrath, then God's covenant, of which the rainbow is the token, reminds man that it is but for a small moment the sky assumes this angry look;—the sun shall soon shine in its force again. So, looking at the Jews now, we are led to think of them as forsaken, and God's face as hidden from them in wrath. But lo! the covenant He has made with them secures the promise, "For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee, but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer." The promise is, that though blindness has happened unto them

now, it is but blindness *in part*, and "until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in, and so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Zion a Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob." (*Rom.* xi. 26.) The clouds will one day hang yet more darkly over Israel than even now,—but then it will be that they may be dispersed for ever. "When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him, and the Redeemer shall come to Zion: this is my covenant with them, saith the Lord. (*Isaiah* lix. 20, 21.) And then their light shall burst out afresh, as itis written, "Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee." Oh! happy and glorious time, when the Lord shall turn again the captivity of Judah! For then shall be the time of the world's conversion to God; as it is added, "The Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising."—"Then thou shalt see and flow together, and thine heart shall fear, and be enlarged; because the abundance of the sea shall be converted unto thee, the forces of the Gentiles shall come unto thee." (*Isaiah* lx. 1—5.)

But are we not also reminded of that part of this same New Covenant, which promises

grace and glory, not to the Jews only, but to all that believe in Jesus, whether Jew or Gentile? This covenant is made with Christ. It can never fail, for Christ has fulfilled its conditions. It is sure to those that are in Christ; and it tells them "their sins and iniquities I will remember no more,"—"Sin shall not have dominion over you, for ye are not under the law, but under grace,"—"He that believeth on me, hath everlasting life." Pardon, peace, grace, and glory, are the promises of the New Covenant.

And what is the token of this covenant? Every covenant has its token or outward sign, even as the rainbow was Noah's token,—As circumcision Abraham's and his seed's,—As the blood of the lamb sprinkled on the door posts was looked upon by the destroying angel who passed over the house when he saw it, and as it was looked upon by the Israelite, and assurance gained; just so it is with regard now to our covenant in Christ. The blood of Christ is the token of the covenant between God and every believing creature. And it comes to pass when God looks upon this token, the blood of sprinkling, He remembers the everlasting covenant He hath made with His Son, and with every believer in Him.

Dark and cloudy days do arise even to

them, to whom God has given assurance that they shall not be destroyed, and they need the comfort of such a token as this. Sometimes to them a storm seems to be gathering in their horizon ; temptations rise with threatening aspect ; dark clouds of trouble and sorrow, and sometimes of unbelieving doubts, seem to hang heavily over their heads; and then where is their comfort? It should be in this token, —the blood shed on the cross. God looks upon it. They should also look upon it. God remembers mercy promised. They should rejoice in mercy received. God's face may seem to be hid, but the Sun of righteousness shall soon shine again in full force upon their path. The crimson colour of this token reflects the love of Him who shed His blood for them. It tells of righteousness covering all defects. It tells of a curse endured in their stead. It tells of victory gained over death and the dark grave. It tells of a glorious promise of resurrection unto life. God looks upon the token, that He may remember the everlasting covenant. Believers in Christ should look upon it and rejoice in their safety. The rain may last a few hours, or a day, but it shall not overwhelm them. The very clouds that threaten are big with mercy. By these the soul is made more fruitful, and though not

joyous but grievous now, "they yield afterwards the peaceable fruit of righteousness to them that are exercised thereby."

"What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him freely give us all things?" Are we then interested in this covenant? All receive the benefit of that covenant of which the rainbow is the token; but all do not receive the benefit of the New Covenant in Christ. This is made with the believers in Christ,—with him who fears the wrath of God, flees to the cross, cries for mercy, and receives the atonement.

Reader, have you thus fled from the wrath to come? Has a sense of sin really awakened you to your need of a covenant of mercy? Are you eager for a sure token that the covenant includes you? Have you the three-fold witness testifying to your safety,—the Spirit, the water, and the blood. Is your conscience clean through faith in the blood?—your heart clean through the water of the "word spoken" by Christ? Does the Spirit bear witness with your spirit that you are a child of God? Yet a little while, and you will want these witnesses; but they must "bear witness" for us "in earth," or their witness will not be for us, but against us in heaven.

PRAYER.

Blessed God, who hast caused all Holy Scripture to be written for our learning and admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come; I pray for light and grace to understand, and apply this portion I have read.

Teach me, O Lord, more and more, to feel my need of a Covenant being established with me, to take away my sin. Make me deeply sensible of my sin. Cause me to see with faith, the fearfulness of the wrath to come. And so lead me to value, and to love thy promises of pardon and peace, to believers in thy dear Son. Lord, look upon the blood of my Saviour, and remember not my offences. Take away every cloud of doubt and unbelief between thee and me. In every trial may I see thy love. Cause the Sun of righteousness to break through every cloud of infirmity and sin. Lift up the light of thy countenance upon me. Make mine the path of the righteous, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day, through Jesus Christ, my Redeemer. AMEN.

THE BUILDING OF BABEL.

"*And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech.*

* * * * * *

"*Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the Lord did there confound the language of all the earth; and from thence did the Lord scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth.*" GEN. XI. 1—9.

"A LITTLE leaven leaveneth the whole lump." The earth has been cleansed by the waters of the flood, and one would have thought it would have been a lesson long remembered by man, and that sin would have made slow progress after such awful proofs of God's wrath and indignation against it. But not so. Evil had, alas! been shut up in the ark, —in the breast of at least one individual. And the same chapter relates God's covenant with the remnant saved in the ark, and sins committed by some of those that came out of it. Noah sinned, and his sin was the occasion of his sons sinning. Ham the father of Canaan sinned, and a curse was pronounced upon his posterity.

The leaven of evil soon spread. The chapter before us records sinful conduct in which numbers were engaged, and God's judgment of that sin which remains in a measure to this present day.

It is wonderful to remark, through what lengthened ages the effects of sin may be traced. The punishment remains long after the sin itself in its first commission has ceased. We may see,—nay, feel among ourselves in the present day, the effect and consequences of sin committed thousands of years ago. Thus it is we feel the effects of that one transgression of Eve's, when she ate of the forbidden tree. Sorrow in conception experienced by every mother,—the toils and troubles of man earning his daily bread,—sickness,—old age,—death,—are some, but not the worst of the consequences of that one weak moment in which Eve listened to the whisper of the great deceiver.

The rain and the rainbow remind us to this day of God's judgment of sinners before the flood, as well as of His mercy and longsuffering.

The sad, wretched, and miserably degraded condition in which the descendants of Ham, the father of Canaan, are to this day found in the coasts of Africa, is the fulfilment of a curse pronounced thousands of years ago. "And

He said, cursed be Canaan ; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren." (*Gen.* ix. 25.) "A servant of servants" seems to express the utmost possible degree of servitude and slavery, too fully realized by the blacks of Africa,—too well known by many, still to this day, engaged in the sinful traffic of human flesh and blood, and too often heard of, and lamented by every one engaged in any missionary work, to need any further dwelling upon.

The sin committed on the plains of Shinar has likewise reached unto us in its effects, and has its monument among the nations of the earth to this day. Before that time, "the earth was of one language and of one speech." But now, the languages are as numerous as the nations upon earth.

Let us look a little at this great design of these men, and enquire into their purposes, and see what was the evil of them.

The plains of Shinar were situated between the two great rivers, the Euphrates and the Tigris, in that part of the country, afterwards called Mesopatamia. Here having found a convenient place, men planned to build a great city. And in this city a great and lofty tower, whose top might touch the very clouds of heaven. Their object, they said, was, to make

them a great name, and to prevent their being scattered all over the earth.

It was then a union for evil purposes. Some suppose that the tower was to be for the purpose of worship. But of course idolatrous worship, for God did not approve of their design. And for this cause it is evident, their design was evil. It was not to obtain a great name as the people of God, but to have a great name of their own, to be counted the greatest people upon earth, to have a kingdom, a city, a people, and a name which should be greatly admired and wondered at by all the earth. Their's was the sin of pride, haughty independance of God, sensual ambition.

Any greatness which men aim at independant of God must be sinful. God alone is great, and God alone may be exalted on earth. To be great without God, is to raise up arms against God. "He that glorieth let him glory in the Lord."

Moreover, it was a union of evil men. What evil will not evil minds brought together concoct? In every irreligious company, the devil is amongst them, and often the chief speaker. He knows that "union is strength," and will not fail to make use of such means for his ends. These encouraged one another in the work. "They said one to

another, go to, let us make brick; and they said, go to, let us build us a city and a tower, and let us make us a name." The thought began in one man's breast, he told his fellow, another planned it, and soon thousands of hands join in it. The foundations are laid. The mighty walls begin to rise. They commend one another for the progress of the work, and begin to cheer themselves with the prospect of the day when they shall dwell together in this mighty city, and bid defiance to all opposing powers, whether of heaven or earth, of time and age, of tempest or of flood. But "except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it." Working without God, they worked against God, "And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the children of men builded." God saw it, indeed from the beginning, and might have prevented the laying of the first brick in the building. But now, He comes to take notice in a way that men shall know that He sees it. Perhaps He sent an angel to the city, as He did to the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. God is pleased to justify His actions, even before sinful man. He will see what they do, before He punishes them for their doings. And God put a stop to their proceedings, and disappointed their wishes. But how!

Not by destroying their work,—not by cutting off the lives of the labourers,—not by causing to cease the activity of the hands and feet that laboured in the work; but, by affecting the smallest member of the body, by simply altering the language they spoke. This was effectual, they could no more work together, for they could no longer speak together. This was merciful, for they were let off easy, and might yet go and live profitably. This was an exercise of God's wisdom, for it would hinder such evil unions in future. The having one language before the flood must have greatly helped onwards the wickedness of men. Therefore "the Lord said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do; and now nothing will be restrained from them which they have imagined to do. Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech. So the Lord scattered them abroad, from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city. Therefore is the name of it called Babel, that is, confusion, because the Lord did thus confound the language of all the earth."

We are taught that the devil is the chief promoter of all such evil projects. For indeed he moves men's minds to meditate evil, and

as through his devices evil first entered the world, so it is by him—finding more willing instruments than when first trying Eve—evil is kept and furthered in the world. As he moves the minds of individuals, so he moves the minds of masses. And do we think he has ceased to aim at such mighty combinations of evil, since the days of Babel? Assuredly not: for though all his plans are brought to nought by God, he is not weary of attempting them. Scripture leads us to believe he will again attempt a mighty union of wicked men for wicked purposes, before his final overthrow in this world. Before his kingdom is utterly ruined, it will be first made more manifest in the earth; and before his power is cast down and destroyed, it will be exerted in a more definite and awful manner than hitherto. He will concentrate it, and bring it to a focus. By this he will get more men to worship him, and will bring about his object of their ruin.

We read of another "Babylon," a "City of confusion," yet to be destroyed in the earth. Most good men suppose that the Babylon spoken of in the book of Revelation is the Romish Church. It is represented in chapter xvii. under the figure of a woman. "And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS,

AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH." The true Church of Christ is represented as a virgin,—a false and idolatrous Church as a harlot. Idolatry is spiritual adultery. But it is added, "the woman which thou sawest is that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth." And the next chapter (Rev. xviii.) speaks of the overthrow of this mighty city of Babylon. Her sins reach unto heaven. And it is said, she shall be "utterly burned with fire; for strong is the Lord that judgeth her." Before the final destruction of this "Mother of abominations," it would appear she is to assume still more the form and power of a material "city that reigneth over the kings of the earth," and as such she shall be destroyed. (Rev. xviii.)

This will be the time of the revelation of that Wicked One, "whom the Lord shall consume with the Spirit of His mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming. Even Him, whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power and signs and lying wonders." (2 Thess. ii.)

"Evil men and seducers will wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived" in the latter days. They will grow wise and clever in wickedness, and overcoming every obstacle caused by the difference of

languages, will again unite to do evil, and to bring about that consummation of iniquity, which will draw down the just vengeance of heaven, and bring on God's final judgment of the wicked.

We may or may not be alive when these things come to pass. But one thing is certain, we now belong either to those who would join such an ungodly union, under the power of the Wicked One, or, we are on God's side. And this is our present question, Am I translated out of the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom of God's dear Son?

There is a Name, greater than all the names of earthly greatness, to which we should belong, by which we should be called. It is the name of Jesus. Are we called by that name? Are we saved by it, hoping in it, trusting to it, so that in the Lord we have our righteousness and our strength?

There is a great city that truly reacheth unto heaven, for it is a "city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." "For here we have no continuing city." Do we then "seek one to come?" Do we belong to this heavenly city? Have our names been enrolled among its citizens? Are our "names written in the Lamb's book of life?" Is our title to this inheritance made good, being made

heirs through the blood of the Lamb, and the "unction of the Holy One?"

There is one blessed and united family to be found in part even among the sons of men, having one Father, even God; one elder brother, through whom they inherit, even Jesus; one source of union, even the fellowship of the Holy Ghost. These may glory in their pedigree, for they are sons of the Most High and Mighty God. These may glory in their greatness, for their strength, their wisdom, their riches, and honour, are of the Lord; Christ the Lord is their greatness, for in Him they have their "wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption." Are we members of this family? Have we been adopted into it? Have we received "the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba Father?"

These speak all one tongue, even the spiritual language which God the Spirit teaches. The world cannot understand it. It is foolishness, it is weakness, to the men of this world. But the children of God can understand the words which the Holy Ghost teacheth, the voice of the good Shepherd, and are understood one of another when they "speak of the glory of His kingdom, and talk of His power, to make known to the sons of men His mighty acts, and the glorious majesty

of His kingdom." (*Psalm* cxlv. 11, 12.)

These then can help one another in the work, for which God thus unites them, and makes them His people. They can glorify His name together. They can act both as "builders" and as "living stones" in the spiritual building raised to the glory of God. And so should they help one another, "considering one another to provoke unto love and to good works; not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another; and so much the more as ye see the day approaching,"—the day when "the holy city, New Jerusalem, shall come down from God out of heaven,"—the day when "there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and His servants shall serve Him; and they shall see His face; and His name shall be in their foreheads,"—the day when the saints shall live and reign with Christ.

PRAYER.

O Almighty God, unto whom belongeth all might, majesty, dominion, and power, regard me, I beseech thee, at this time, as I come

into thy holy presence. Lord make me sensible of my real state in thy sight. Take away from me all pride and self-sufficiency. Root out from my heart every high thing that exalteth itself against thee. Have I sought great things for myself? O teach me to seek them no more. Let me only want that greatness, honour, and glory, which thou givest when thou bestowest thyself. Cause me to delight myself in the name of thy dear Son, by which I am pardoned and accepted. May I be exalted only in thy strength, thy righteousness, and thy wisdom, O blessed Jesus!

Give me grace more earnestly to desire a part in that city and that kingdom which is to come. Make me and keep me meet to be a partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light. Hear me and answer me, O God, for Jesus Christ's sake, for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. AMEN.

THE CALL OF ABRAHAM.

"*Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee:*

"*And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing:*

"*And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.*

"*So Abram departed, as the Lord had spoken unto him.*" GEN. XII. *v.* 1, 2, 3, & PART OF 4.

DEEPLY interesting, deeply instructive, and very striking, is the history of Abraham. From no individual's life are we to gather so much as from this great Patriarch. His life was a life of faith, and we must walk,—and shall find we are called to walk,—in the steps of faithful Abraham, if we would with him enjoy Gospel blessings.

The reason why faith was so remarkably seen in him, is that faith was so remarkably tried in him. His whole life was a constant

exercise of that "faith which is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

Thus, in God's first appearance to him, he was called upon to leave what he saw, and to go to a place, and hope for things he had not seen.

His promise of a child, through whom his seed should be multiplied, and nations blessed, was a continual demand upon his faith till he was a hundred years old. And then what faith was not necessary, when called on seemingly to blast all these hopes, and cut the tie of his fondest earthly affection, by the slaughter of his son with his own hand!

Then too, his living as a stranger in the land of which he had the promise, yea, his dying in it without having "so much as to set his foot on," whereas God "promised He would give it to him for a possession," (Acts vii. 5.)—did not all this require strong and vigorous faith?

He is the "father of all them that believe," and "they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham." Let us see then how we are called upon to act faith as he did, that with him we may receive the end of faith, even the salvation of our souls.

His first step of faith is recorded in the

passage of Scripture before us. We might have passed lightly over it, but our attention is drawn to it, as a special instance of faith's obedience, in Hebrews xi. 8.

First then, from whence was Abraham called? We read fully in Acts vii. 2, 3, 4, "The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopatamia, before he dwelt in Charran, and said unto him, get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall shew thee; then came he out of the land of the Chaldeans, and dwelt in Charran; and from thence when his father was dead, he removed him into this land."

It is important to remember that Abram was in a land of idolatry, when thus called by God. There is no doubt of this, as you will see by referring to Joshua xxiv. 2: "Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time, even Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nachor, AND THEY SERVED OTHER GODS." It is thus that we see that Abram's calling was "according to the election of grace." "And I took your father Abraham, and led him." "The whole world lieth in the wicked one." Satan wraps the world in dark idolatry. It pleases God to keep the pure worship of His name upon

earth. For this cause He selects an individual even Abram, and chooses a family, and a nation, even of Israel, with whom He deposits "the oracles," to whom He gives "the promises and the covenant," and "of whom concerning the flesh Christ came." And to what other source can any trace their saving knowledge of the true God and Jesus Christ, than to this election of grace? Naturally we all serve other gods,—the world,—or riches,—or self,—but when it has pleased God to reveal His Son in any soul, who must have the praise of its separation from the world, but He that showeth mercy,—He that made us willing to obey His call,—"that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of Him that calleth." (*Rom.* ix. 11.) It is this thought that calls forth the deepest gratitude, and the highest strains of praise, from the heart and lips of every unworthy sinner thus taught to love God, because He first loved him.

But, next, what was Abram called upon to leave behind him? His "country," his "kindred," his "father's house." Things most dear to him, property, persons, places, and associations, known and loved from his boyhood. His kindred were idolatrous, therefore they must be left by him that is to serve

the true God. The place was unholy, therefore did God say, "Come out of it my people, that ye be not partakers of its sins, and that ye receive not of its plagues." This was no slight trial of the Patriarch's faith in Him who called him. There would be many earthly friends ready enough to persuade him to refuse obedience to the heavenly voice. There would be strong temptations enough from within his own breast, prompting him to stay, or at least to delay his departure. The flesh lusted against the Spirit, no doubt. But faith gained the victory. Faith saw Him that was invisible, heard His voice, and obeyed His word.

But, mark next, unto what was Abraham called? His faith had to look behind, and to leave the things of sense, but to what had he to look forward? This was the greatest test of his faith, he was "called to go out to a place he should *after* receive as an inheritance," he went out, "not knowing whither he went." He saw nothing before him. And when he turned his back upon all that had hitherto administered to his earthly comfort and pleasure, sight and sense failed him, there was of this earth nothing before him.

But, was there therefore nothing before him? Did he see nought? Did he set forward on his travels with no prospect?

True, his friends could see nothing,—true, his bodily eyes could see nothing,—true, his mind had no help to conceive any prospect, but then his faith, the vision of his soul, saw something, and that so plainly, that it had more effect on him, than all that he saw with his senses.

Here was the principle, that wonder-working principle of faith, for which he through grace was famous. This was the secret spring of his action. Faith was the ear that made God's word sound louder and more important than the entreaties of his neighbours. Faith was the eye that saw a land that was far off, and made him count it better than the one that was near. Faith gave him spiritual affections which are stronger than those that are merely natural. Faith caused him to see a friend in Him who called him, whose friendship outweighed all that he could leave behind him, "a friend that sticketh closer than a brother," therefore "he obeyed, not knowing whither he went," but well knowing God would keep His word, and "shew" him "a land." The word of God was more to him than all the substance of his house, the friendship of friends, and the comforts of life. That word had said, "get thee out," "so Abram departed as the Lord had said unto him." And as he went, his faith upheld

him. He lost his name in the place where he dwelt, but faith recovered it in the word of promise, "I will make thy name great." Many a hard word may have followed the soft but vain words of entreaty, but faith heard a sweet word and took comfort, "I will bless thee," and "thou shalt be a blessing." He lost opportunities of usefulness in the land of the Chaldees, but faith looked for the fulfilment of the promise, "In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed."

Others besides Abraham have had such calls, and others have obeyed it. The Lord Jesus called Matthew the Levite, to leave all and follow Him, and he went out, not knowing whither he went, taking the Lord for his portion. The Lord called the Apostles, and "they left all, and followed Him." Paul had a like call, and by faith was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, and for His sake who had called him;—he went out taking nothing, but suffered the loss of all things.

The question rather is, Are there any who are not called to some such acting of faith as Abraham? Are not all to whom the faith of Christ is preached, called to leave something seen, and to look by faith to something not seen? Most undoubtedly. All are called to "walk by faith, and not by sight." All are

called so far to leave the "things seen which are temporal," as is necessary for obtaining the "things not seen which are eternal."

Thus, in the first place, all are called, at all costs, to leave sins behind them. There is no doubt of this, and every man acknowledges it. But, we must remember, that it implies of necessity that we leave behind us, the occasions of sinning. And it is the office of faith, to make us leave those occasions. Reason, plain sense, fear of wrath, natural conscience, will often make a man leave off certain evil habits; but, faith only will make him give up those things, which are occasions of sinning, when those things can only be forsaken at a loss. Take one instance only, where such demands are made of us by Christ in the gospel, it is said, "If thy hand offend—or if thy foot offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two feet to be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched." (*Mark* ix. 43—45.) You see the demand here made. Here is a voice from on high, calling on us to leave occasions of sinning. The hand and the foot are precious members. But, if one of them through disease have begun to mortify, it is better to part with it, and pass our days without it, than keeping it to let the whole body

die in a little time. Some men's sins are so closely joined to their earthly callings and occupation, that to leave one, they must cease from the other. Some men's sins are so closely bound up with the friends they have, the company they keep, or the pleasures they take, that to leave off the sin, it is necessary they should cease to keep the same company, have the same friends, and pursue the same pleasures. Whosoever feels this, and reads these words of God, does hear a voice calling him, even as Abraham heard also his call. Are you obeying this call? Does your faith in God's command, make you see it is for your real good, thus to leave the causes of offence, and to follow holiness?

Again, see the call in another point of view. Think of where our affections have to be placed, and for this cause how they often have to be cut off from some beloved objects. On this point also, hear the direct call of God. "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple." (*Luke* xiv. 26.)

This says plainly, Christ is to have our hearts, if we would have part or lot with Him, and His inheritance. Such love must we have to Him, that all other loves are sacri-

ficed, when He requires it. We may displease other friends, but we may never run counter to His wishes. When friends call us one way and Christ another, then must our utmost affections for one, be as hatred compared with our love for the first object. When duty to Christ is crossed by friends, however dear to us, then is the call of God most plain, and faith will make us, both hear and obey it, "Get thee out from thy kindred."

Once more, God calls on us to leave much, when we are taught to count ourselves as "strangers and pilgrims" here, and to look forward to "a city which hath foundations:" "as strangers and pilgrims abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul." This implies a sitting loose in our affections from earthly things,—a not taking them as our portion,—not finding our *chief* delight in them,—not loving pleasure so much as God,—not wishing to take up our abode here, even if all things could be continued to us, and their enjoyment made good to us. It implies having heaven as our home, and that a departure hence would lead to something "far better."

Now what can do all this for us but faith, such as Abraham's faith that sees God, hears His word, loves His favour, desires His promises. This is why it is said, "this is the

victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." Oh! for that faith in us which shall cause it to be said of us as of Abraham, "so he departed as the Lord had spoken unto him." But before faith can walk, faith must hear. Some do not hear God's call plainly. They think they can have Christ and leave nothing for Him,—have the "city to come," and yet not be "strangers" here. Let this be our first object, to know what the Lord would have us do. Pray that you shut not your ears to His demands, nay, pray that you may know them to the fullest extent. And then seek for grace to be obedient, for faith that shrinks not to follow wheresoever God calls.

Faith can do wonders for you, even as it did for Abraham. When it is divine in its origin, then it is wonderful in its working. As nothing is impossible with God, so nothing shall be impossible with him who resolves, leans, struggles, and acts in God's strength. With this faith, you may boldly bid farewell to the sin that most easily besets you. By this you will be ready to part with everything which is giving you most pleasure, or bringing you most profit, but which stands between you and your God. For faith not only "endures as seeing Him who is invisible," but "esteems the reproach of Christ" great

riches, and has "respect unto the recompence of the reward."

PRAYER.

O Almighty God, who didst call thy servant Abraham, that thou mightest bless him, and do him good in his latter end, and who dost now call thy people to leave that which is hurtful to their souls, that they may delight themselves in thee, I pray for grace to be obedient to thy heavenly calling. Give me the hearing ear, and the understanding heart, that I may know thy will. Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth; what wilt thou have me to do?

Draw me, O my God, and I will run after thee. Let me not be kept back by any things of this world, from following close after thee. If there is any thing keeping me from close communion with thee, any fleshly lust, or friendship of this world, I only ask that I may know it, and have strength to crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts. Forgive me, for Jesus' sake, all my past backwardness and frowardness, and give me also, for His sake, a heart to love thee more truly, and more zealously to press forward toward the mark for the prize of thy high calling in Christ Jesus. AMEN.

ABRAHAM A STRANGER IN THE LAND OF PROMISE.

"*And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh. And the Canaanite was then in the land.*

"*And the Lord appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the Lord, who appeared unto him.*

"*And he removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Beth-el, and pitched his tent, having Beth-el on the west, and Hai on the east: and there he builded an altar unto the Lord, and called upon the name of the Lord.*" GEN. XII. 6—8.

WE must not pass hastily over Abraham's history. God has given us full accounts, and many particulars of it; we must give much thought and consideration to it.

One striking point in God's dealings with Abraham is, the number of times He was pleased to repeat the promises He had made to him. No less than six times did the Lord appear to Abraham, and make some precious promise to him. This is instructive in itself.

So shall we ever find; when there is required of us the greatest exercise of faith, then does God give us the greatest number of promises. His word will abound in such promises as shall tend to keep alive faith in that particular point in which our faith is tried.

Moreover, it is to be observed that each of God's promises were made to Abraham at most seasonable times. We have seen this in one instance, when Abram was called to leave his father-land. As he had to withdraw his eyes from his own home, so he needed some ground on which to fix the eye of faith. This he had in the promise of future greatness which God gave him.

The next time of promise (recorded in this same xii. chapter) was when he reached the land of Canaan, and it is said "the Canaanite was then in the land." Here then was a reason for the promise being repeated, "Unto thy seed will I give this land." Still was the country covered with the cities and houses of many and powerful nations. Abraham might well wonder how these could be dispossessed, and that by his own descendants, when as yet he had no son. But faith in the power and faithfulness of Him who promised was to satisfy his mind. When he saw the land, and saw the enemies in it, his mind might waver,

he might suppose he had mistaken God. Therefore when he stands on the very land, and sees the difficulties of the case, then God repeats His word, and says again, it shall be so.

The next occurrence recorded is, that Abraham built an altar to the Lord there. Then he went on to a mountain between Beth-el and Hai, there he pitched his tent, and there also made an altar to the Lord. The altars showed his habit of worship, and also proved how he bore witness to the inhabitants around him, as to Who he worshipped. His sacrifices on the altar, showed how he hoped for acceptance, and that like Noah when he slew the offering on the altar, he thereby confessed his worthiness to die, and shewed that he believed in God's mercy to accept another's death instead of his, even that of Him, the Lamb of God, of whom all other sacrifices were but figures.

Abraham's dwelling in a tent was also expressive of his character. His building altars to God, showed faith in the appointed sacrifice for sin; he "saw the day of Christ." His pitching tents for himself and family, showed faith and hope in God's promises of something lasting and not moveable as a tent. So we are taught in

Heb. xi. 9, where it is said, "By faith Abraham sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." Abraham's conduct in this respect was exactly opposite to that of the unbelieving builders of Babel. They looked for no other city than what themselves might build here. So they sought to build one which had foundations, whose builder and maker they would be themselves. Abraham looked beyond here for a certain dwelling place, not even building a house, he simply pitched his tent. This would every day remind him and his family of what their hopes should be. And this would testify to the then possessors of the land on what his hopes were fixed. Thus he confessed he was a "stranger and a pilgrim on the earth, for they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country....They desire a better country, that is, an heavenly; wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, (the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, still living unto God. Matt. xxii. 32) for he hath prepared for them a city." This city is here called "the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem." It is further spoken of

in the book of Revelation, (*Rev.* xxi. 2,) as seen by John coming down from God out of heaven,—"a tabernacle of God with men." And we do well to read and think of it. For it is promised us as well as Abraham, if we through faith in God's promises are walking in his steps. Abraham "died in faith, not having received the promises;" for, as it is said in the same place, (*Heb.* xi.) "these all having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise; God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect."

There is room then for others in that blessed city. God is waiting till others both of Jews and Gentiles should be prepared to dwell in it. And then when the fulness of the Gentiles is come in, and when all Israel shall be saved, this holy city shall come down, and Christ will then appear, a Redeemer coming out of Sion to receive His people to Himself, that where He is there they may be also.

And who of us will have a place in that glorious city? We read, "there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie; but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life." (*Rev.* xxi. 27.) And again, in verse seven, "He that over-

cometh shall inherit all things." And this is the very victory Abraham gained,—the very same that we must gain,—it is the victory of faith over things of sense and sight. Abraham overcame this world, when by faith he sojourned here, and looked for the next.

Have we gained this victory? Do we by our lives, our words, our hopes "declare plainly" that we seek a country, really wishing for, "desiring a better, that is an heavenly?" Not wishing for a better in the sense of more unmixed enjoyment of this world's things, but "better" because there shall be no more sin, therein "dwelleth righteousness." Christ is there, and "the spirits of just men made perfect," and we feel that to be a door-keeper in such a place is indeed "far better" than to abide here and enjoy the "pleasures of sin," not for a season only, but for ever, if it could be so. Who is he that overcometh the world?—the answer is, "he that believeth that Jesus is the Christ." That is then, he who, as Abraham, sees the day of Christ, rejoices in Christ Jesus, and has no confidence in the flesh, worships God in spirit and in truth, lives from day to day upon the promises of God, and holds fast this confidence unto the end. To do this we must have other strength than our own, so it is also

said, " Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world."

A third occasion of God's appearing and speaking to Abraham occurred a little later in his life. It was after his visit into Egypt, whither he had gone on account of the famine in the land. When he came back he dwelt at Beth-el, where he had first built his altar to the Lord, and " Where his tent had been at the beginning."

It was also after having separated from Lot. The substance of each was so great, the land was not able to bear them, that they might dwell together. When therefore there was strife between Lot's herdsmen and Abraham's, then Abraham, full of love, of meekness, and of gentleness, at once yielded to his nephew : " Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between thee and me, and between my herdsmen and thy herdsmen ; for we be brethren."

True faith will ever work by love. Abraham would rather give up all his earthly goods, than fall out with a brother. His faith, too, in God's power to provide made him make the generous offer to Lot (xiii. 9.) by which Lot might make his choice, and go to the right or to the left, and he would act accordingly.

Here then, I think, we see some reasons for a repetition of God's promises at this season.

First, this faith, which made him ready to give up all for peace, needed encouragement, and obtained reward by a fresh promise from the Lord. So that "the Lord said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes and look.....for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever ..... arise, walk through the land in the length of it and the breadth of it: for I will give it unto thee." Another circumstance which made this promise seasonable, and certainly demands our notice, is, that by this time Abraham had grown exceedingly rich, (v. 2.) "Abraham was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold." The promise then of future blessings was needed to remind him that still he had "a better and enduring substance" in heaven, that still this earth was not his rest nor his inheritance, and he must still be as a stranger and a pilgrim, and must not even build a house. Nor did he fail to learn this lesson, and to keep this glorious hope in view. The next verses tell us, that as he journeyed on, he "called on the name of the Lord," and still again it is said, "Abraham removed his tent."

And this is not the least instructive point in Abraham's character. He is one of those few instances which show how it is possible to

be very rich in this world's goods, and yet be very rich in grace. Truly, it is written, "How hardly shall they that have riches, enter into the kingdom of heaven." Observation shows how seldom these things go together. The "mammon of unrighteousness," or this world's good things in plenty, and the "true riches" of faith, and love, and hope, and joy in God. Nor can we wonder, when we search our hearts, and they testify, how but a little of this world's things, nay, even the desire for what we have not got, seals up the heart, chokes the word, shuts out things of faith, and fastens the affections to the things below. It is the "love of money," and not only its possession which thus becomes the "root of evil," and it is "they that will be rich," and not only they that are rich, who "fall into temptation, and a snare, and many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition."(1 *Tim.* vi. 9, 10.) How much more then, must their possession, and all the cares, and interests, and pleasures of the spending them, be hurtful to the soul, and become thick dust, whereby the wicked one can seal up men's hearts and understandings. But all things are possible to God. And as in Abraham's case, the heart may still be God's, and it may be, that the very gifts and trea-

sures which the Lord has poured in His mercy on His people, are instruments whereby they glorify God. They remember whose they are, and that they are stewards only for a time, and while they esteem God's favor, word, and promise, more than thousands of gold and silver, they prove they do so, by the way they dedicate themselves, and then their substance to the Lord. That it was so with Abraham, is plain, because with all those things of sense and sight, his eye and his heart were still fixed on things of faith. His after life proved this, when called on to make sacrifice to God, of things he loved most dearly. Moreover, we may learn it, from another simple fact: his care, lest it should go forth, that what he did possess, he had from any other source than God. Thus, when the king of Sodom, in gratitude for Abraham's help in battle, would have given him much booty; then Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I have lift up my hand unto the Lord, the Most High God, the possessor of heaven and earth, that I will not take from a thread, even to a shoe-latchet, and that I will not take anything that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich." Thus, was he anxious all should know, that he was not careful after this world's things, and that all he had, was given him by God, who according to promise, would sustain him.

Again then, let us ask, if we have Abram's faith, and love, and hope. His journey is ended,—his contest over,—his victory secure, —and God is not ashamed to be called his God, — for he glorified God, and God will glorify him, in that city which is yet to come. But, here are we, still travellers in this land. As many, nay, more promises are ours, than even Abraham had. Where then are our affections fixed?—where is our treasure?— where our hopes? Are we willing, seeking, striving to be rich, or are we even willing to be poor, so that we may but be rich in grace and heirs of glory? The prince of darkness offers to make us rich, but it is at the cost of our souls, and all the precious things of faith; —do we therefore resist his offers, lest he should say, "I made you rich," and so should at the last day, have too strong evidence that we have bartered our souls, and yielding to temptation, lost the things of faith and eternity. Oh! let us lift our hands to God, and pray that we may never be seduced by lying vanities, and by this world's vain, short, and passing joys to forsake our own mercy, and lose that rich portion God gives His heirs, made His through Christ.

PRAYER.

O God of Abraham! thou wast not ashamed to be called the God of those, who but for thy grace, would have been ashamed of thee! I come to ask thee now to be my God. Grant me that precious faith, which thou didst give thy servant, and make me thine. Lord, too long have I been my own, seeking only to please myself, and to live to my own glory,—my own ease and comfort. Now, Lord, I would henceforth live to thee. On the altar of thy Son's sacrifice, would I now offer up myself, and in His merits, call upon thy name. I ask for grace, to pass my time more as a stranger and pilgrim here, that my whole life, may declare plainly, that I seek, and I desire, a better and a heavenly home. Make thy promises more worth to me, than all the world. May I learn to feel, and say, whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none on earth I desire, in comparison of thee. Hear me, and accept and bless me now, for Jesus' sake. AMEN.

ABRAHAM JUSTIFIED BY FAITH.

"*After these things the word of the Lord came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.*

"*And Abram said, Lord God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus?*

"*And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir.*

"*And, behold, the word of the Lord came unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir.*

"*And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be.*

"*And he believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness.*" GEN. xv. 1—6.

THIS is the fourth time we read of God's appearing to Abraham, to encourage his faith. No doubt Abraham felt the need of such helps. It was no easy matter to keep his faith alive,

and this chapter tells us as much, for when the Lord said to him, "fear not," he replied, "What wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless?" As though he had said, How will this promise be fulfilled to me?—I cannot see where my descendents, and their enjoyment of blessings, are all to come from, since here I am getting old, without a child, and a stranger, Eliezer, my steward, is the only one I can see to whom my possessions will descend. This was Abraham's feeling at this time. The Lord read his thoughts, and knew that he needed encouragement. He gave it him by repeating the promise, and also as we read in this chapter, by the sign of a covenant He made with him.

There are several points of interesting instruction in God's intercourse with Abraham at this time, and there is the great blessedness which his faith obtained for him, which is called being justified, or accounted righteous, all which demand our fixed attention.

The first point we will notice is, the words of encouragement, "Fear not, I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward." There is no doubt implied in the expression "fear not," a command to put away doubts, for doubt brings fears, as to the fulfilment of the Lord's word. The cause for removing fears and

doubts is, "I am thy shield, and I am thy great reward," that is, I will ward off from thee all evils which seem to surround thee, and I will be such an object to thee as shall completely satisfy all thy wants. The promise of God being a shield to His people is by no means uncommon in His word. It is frequent in the Psalms, and is an idea full of comfort. "The Lord God is a sun and a shield: the Lord will give grace and glory: no good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly." (Psalm lxxxiv. 11.) The way to enjoy this promise is by a diligent use of the promises and precepts of His word. "His truth shall be thy shield and buckler." It is by faith in His word that every fiery dart of the enemies of our salvation may be warded off, and we may lay hold of "the shield of faith." This also is the way we may find God to be that satisfaction to our souls that is implied in the words, "I am thy exceeding great reward." As David said, so should we, "Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever; for they are the rejoicing of my heart." If we did but give ourselves up more to the searching and the dwelling upon some portions of Scripture, we should know more of this great joy in God, and the happy experience of saying, "thy testimonies are my delight and my counsellors."

We may remark next, that God here taught Abraham that true faith relies upon God's promise, in the entire absence of any thing of sight or sense. Abraham looked about, as it were, for something on which to prop up his faith in the promise of an heir. He could see nothing but his steward. "Lo, one born in my house is heir." But God replied, "This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir." And that there might be no mistake, and that Abraham might see the extent of the wonderful promise, God made him fix his eyes on the multitude of bright stars that filled the spangled heavens of an Eastern sky, and said, "So shall thy seed be." It is thus that God would ever have His people trust His word. We are too often tempted to look about for some more solid help to our faith than the bare promise of the Lord. We want to see how these things can be,—we would fain see something which makes it more easy to understand how God will bring about what we are desiring. But God is honoured by our trusting His bare word. Real faith is leaning only upon a promise, and believing that it will bear us up, and will not break underneath us. It is this faith which Abraham had, and which glorifies God. Let us

read the Apostle Paul's comment on this point. (Rom. iv. 18—22.) "Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, so shall thy seed be. And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb. He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that what He had promised he was able also to perform; and therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness."

This is the secret of persevering confidence in God's promises, whether of any special deliverance, or any gift, or blessing which we are wanting, namely, that we be FULLY PERSUADED that what God has PROMISED He is ABLE to perform. All things are possible to God. Nothing is too hard for Him. If therefore we can only say, such and such a thing is promised me in God's word,—God has said He would do this or that,—He would provide this,—or He would help in such a case,—then it matters not what difficulties are in the way of performance, that is not our business, but His who can move mountains,

"who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were." Our part is only to believe, only to go on waiting, and trusting, and expecting, and verily "there shall be a performance of those things which were told us from the Lord."

But see next how God further assisted the faith of the Patriarch, by the sign of an outward and visible covenant. When the Lord said, "To thee will I give this land," Abram said, "Lord God, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it." This he said, not doubtingly, but in an enquiring spirit. The Lord gave him a token. (9—12.) He took certain animals, of a certain age. He divided them, and laid each piece one against another. He watched them, that no birds of prey might devour them; they were sacred to the Lord, and the Lord had not yet answered him by them.

The only other reference to a covenant like this is in Jeremiah xxxiv. 18. The reason of dividing and leaving a space between the pieces seems to have been in order that the persons who made the covenant might pass through the pieces, and signify that so might they be cut asunder if they broke the covenant. As the sun set a deep sleep came upon Abraham;—in this state God revealed to him

some of the future events which were to happen to his seed after him, and also Abraham's own peaceful death. And when the light of day was altogether withdrawn, and it was dark, then light came down from above, and passed through the pieces, "behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces. In the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abraham." (v. 17, 18.) Thus was Abraham's faith confirmed. The Lord answered him by fire. The Lord gave him an outward sign of an invisible promise.

But now we have to observe here, how God's revelation to Abraham is called preaching the Gospel to him, and how Abraham's faith in that revelation obtained for him the Gospel blessing of justification, forgiveness of all sin. The apostle Paul again comments on this important history, in his Epistle to the Galatians. "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." (Gal. iii. 6.) Then in v. 8, he adds, "And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the Gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed." There has been then but one way of acceptance with the Father from the beginning, and that is the way of faith, and of

righteousness which is by faith. There is a righteousness which comes by keeping the law. And if any had ever whereof to boast in the way of obedience, it was Abraham, who gave up all that God required of him. But it is most clear he had "not whereof to glory before God, for what saith the Scripture?—Abraham believed (not obeyed) God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness."

The reward of pardon (as it is written, Rom. iv. 4.) and righteousness could not have been a free gift (of grace) if Abraham had earned it by his works of obedience, but would have been the payment of a debt, whereas "to him that worketh not but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness."

David knew this way of salvation, and "describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works." (Psalm xxxii. 1, 2.)

And all this is written that we might learn what is even more clearly set forth in the Gospel, as says the apostle of Abraham's justification, "Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him; but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on Him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; who was delivered for our

offences, and was raised again for our justification." (Rom. iv. 23—25.)

It may be necessary here to guard against a misunderstanding of this doctrine. It is possible to suppose that there was something meritorious in Abraham's faith. We may make the mistake of thinking that the act of believing is so good in God's sight, that this is why God promises pardon to him who does believe. But this is not so. This is a subtle and dangerous error. A fair speech, by which the enemy would place something between Christ and the sinner, lest he should be beholden altogether and entirely to Christ for pardon, and peace, and life.

If we were justified *on account* and *because* of the faith that is in us, instead of on account of what our faith lays hold of, then this would be being justified by works. Faith in the heart is as much a work as love, or purity, or any other right feeling, or act of obedience. The reward would then be of "debt" for "him that worketh." A man might say, I have purchased pardon by my act or acts of faith; it is the reward due to my faith. We should have whereof to glory before God. But the gospel is of grace. Righteousness is to him that worketh not, but believeth.

Secondly, the reason why faith justifies the

sinner, shows that a man is justified not on *account of*, but *through* believing. "It is of faith, that it might be by grace." That is to say, believing is simply receiving. If there is more than receiving—if there is doing anything for receiving—then grace is no longer grace. Faith is the simplest act of the soul, it is opening the hand to receive. That which justifies is the righteousness of Christ. Faith is the grasping that righteousness as a gift, the putting on those merits as a garment. That which justifies is what Christ has done when he suffered, when he obeyed, when he rose: that which makes what Christ has done the sinners property, is believing; thus the sinner's sins are imputed to Christ, and Christ's merits are imputed to the sinner. Not the righteousness of the act of believing justifies, for then the godly would be justified, but it is the righteousness which becomes ours only by believing which justifies, and then the ungodly is justified by believing on Him that "justifieth the ungodly."

This shows the freeness and the fulness of the Gospel of grace, and the blessedness of being in a justified and pardoned state. It is a free gift, our's not in proportion to the measure of our faith, but according as we have any faith or not. The Israelite who

only had faith enough to lift up the eyelid to look on the brazen serpent was healed, and the man who simply looks unto Christ though with faith not the size of a grain of mustard seed is pardoned.

Then how complete his state! Not depending on what his faith does, but on what Christ has done. "Ye are complete in him." True, faith if real, will produce works, and they will prove justification. But before a man has had time to work, let faith take hold of Christ's merits, and he is as much a justified and accepted child of God, as he will be after many months or years of obedience.

No wonder then, the Gospel should be good news to the sinner, since it thus saves people from their sins! Where is then the blessedness of which the Gospel speaks? Where is the joy and peace of believing in it? Where is the love and vehement desire to live to Christ, proportioned to such free, full, and most amazing love of Him who hath thus first loved us? Do you, O reader, know these things? Are you thus rejoicing in the Lord?

PRAYER.

I pray thee, O Almighty God, to be unto me a shield and my exceeding great reward. Defend me from all evils which may hurt my soul. Satisfy me with the enjoyment of thyself. Show me some token for good. Let the light of thy countenance cheer me in this my dark and dreary pilgrimage. Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation.

Lord God, give me increasing faith in the merits and work of thy dear Son. I plead no merits of my own. My best deeds are defiled with sin. Even my faith is mixed with unbelief. Lord justify me in thy sight for thy Son's sake. Impute righteousness to me. Make me strong in faith giving glory to thee. And let the love of Him who has done so much for me beget love in my soul to Him. Lord I love, but yet how feebly. Oh! help thou my want of love. Cause me from this time to live less unto myself, and more devotedly unto thee, through him who died and rose again for my justification, to whom with thee and the Holy Spirit I ascribe all glory and honour. Amen.

THE COVENANT OF CIRCUMCISION.

"*And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect.*

"*And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly.*

* * * * * *

"*And God said unto Abraham, Thou shalt keep my covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations.*

"*This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised.*" GENESIS XVII. 1, 2, & 9, 10.

THIS is the fifth time that God repeats His promise to Abraham. Between this and the former time of God's appearance, circumstances had happened which made this fifth assurance very seasonable. Abraham had shown some slight degree of weakness of faith, and had been tempted to turn aside from the upright path in which he generally walked.

Scripture history is too faithful to pass over men's faults, or to give a one-sided view of any person's character. The failings of the best of God's children are recorded for the double purpose, that we may learn not to think of them above what they were, or feel they are beyond our imitation; and also that we may remember that their righteousness and their strength were of the Lord. They were not justified by their good lives, for these were imperfect. They were not holy by any strength that they had of themselves, but were holy or unholy in word, thought, and deed, just as they abided in the Lord, or stood alone. So true is it, from the beginning to the end "without ME, ye can do nothing."

When Abraham was called to the greatest acts of faith, he looked beyond himself for strength, and stood the test. But in lesser trials he failed, doubtless, because he thought such efforts were not too much for his own strength. He who had not shrunk from leaving his father's house and land, his kindred and his property, to go to an invisible inheritance, because commanded by the Lord, yet, when driven into Egypt by famine, would not trust God to save his life and keep his wife from heathen hands, but sought to avoid thedanger, by departure from the truth. (*Gen.* xii. 10.)

Another error, perhaps also the result of weak faith, is related of the patriarch, in the 16th chapter. He hearkened to the voice of Sarah, who suggested that as he had had no children by her, he should take Hagar also to wife, who was his handmaid. She conceived, and brought forth a son, whom she named Ishmael. And it seems, that both Abraham and Sarah supposed that it might be by him, that God would fulfil His promise of a future inheritance and great blessings. Sarah said, "It may be that I shall obtain children by her," or be builded, established by her. Abraham in an interview with God, exclaims, "Shall a child be born unto him that is an hundred years old, and shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear? O that Ishmael might live before thee!"

Such conduct, however, was certainly blameable. It was wrong in Sarah to suggest it, in Abraham and Hagar to consent to it. And we may observe, that where such breaches of the sacred bond of wedlock were made, family discord and trials were sure to be among the consequences. So you read of discord and persecution in the family of Elkanah, because he had two wives, Hannah and Peninnah. (1 *Sam.* 1, 6.) And now also in Abraham's family, no sooner had he listened to Sarah's

advice, than each one in the family, had cause to regret their conduct. Abraham's household was disturbed, Sarah was despised by her maid, Hagar was dealt hardly with, until she fled from her mistress's face.

It had been better, then, if they had waited patiently for the accomplishment of God's word, in His own way. We must never think God needs our help to bring to pass His own promises. He does not promise what He cannot, or will not perform. There may be no way visible to us for the fulfilment of His word,—there may be a mighty mountain of difficulty in the way of it, and the time of fulfilment may seem to have almost passed away, without one particle of that mountain being removed, still it is for us to wait and believe. "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass. Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him: fret not thyself in anywise to do evil." (*Psalm* xxxvii. 5—8.)

At the age of ninety-nine Abraham receives this fifth assurance from the Most High, "I am the Almighty God, walk before me, and be thou perfect, and I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly."

He much needed it. For about twenty-

three years he had now dwelt a stranger in the land of promise, and all this while had waited for a son.

But acccording to the length of time he was kept waiting, God gave him strong and repeated tokens of His purposes. He had already received some outward signs of the covenant; he now received two more. The one was the change of names to be adopted by both Sarah and himself, the other was that chief sign of circumcision which was to be a sign not only to himself, but to all his seed after him. "This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised."

The name of Abram was changed for Abraham, which means "father of a great multitude." The name of Sarai became Sarah, which means "princess," "kings of people shall be of her." These changes were pledges of future blessings. It taught Abraham and his wife to act on a promise, as they would on its fulfilment.

So also was the sign of circumcision. "It shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you, and he that is eight days old, shall be circumcised among you, every man child in your generations, he that is born in the house,

or bought with money of any stranger which is not of thy seed, must needs be circumcised: and my covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant." Accordingly we read, "In the self same day was Abraham circumcised, and Ishmael his son, and all the men of his house." (26, 27.)

Now we find frequent mention made *in* Scripture of the rite of circumcision, and many truths connected with its mention are instructive even to those who are not of the "circumcision made with hands."

In the fourth chapter of Romans, *it* is spoken of as a seal. "He (that is, Abraham) received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had, yet being uncircumcised; that he might be the father of all them that believe. (v. 11.)

Many Jews in the apostles' days, thought that none could be saved who were not circumcised, even of the Gentiles. It was even a question which called for the consideration of all the apostles and elders, in the early days of the Church of Christ. (*Acts* xv.)

Moreover, the Jew who was circumcised, was tempted to trust in the rite as part of his way of being justified. Hence, St. Paul's care to dwell on the subject, in so many of his writings.

He replies to these Jews, that as it was a seal of righteousness by faith, which Abraham had before he was circumcised, therefore it could have nothing to do with his obtaining that righteousness by faith. "Righteousness was reckoned to Abraham in uncircumcision." It was long before he received this outward token of the covenant, that he received the inward blessing of imputed righteousness. The Jew learnt by this, that righteousness belongs to him, not because he is circumcised, but when he walks in the steps of that faith which Abraham had, yet being uncircumcised. The Gentile learnt, "that he is the father of them that believe, though they be not circumcised, that righteousness might be imputed unto them also." (*Rom.* iv. 11.)

Then, in the Epistle to Galatians, he uses strong language and says, "If ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing."

Now these things instruct us. There are ordinances and outward rites with us, to which some are tempted to trust too much, or at the least, to put them in the wrong place. While some on the other hand, are tempted to despise and make slight of them. Thus it is that errors are made with regard to the rite of baptism, appointed by the Lord. It is written, "He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved."

Now there are two mistakes (as we conceive) made in connection with this saying. Some have held on the one hand, that, as it was appointed that they that believe should be baptized, that therefore infants who cannot believe, should not be baptized. Surely there is a reply to this objection against infant baptism, in the rite of circumcision. Every male child was to be circumcised at eight days old. Yet, it was a "seal of the righteousness which is by faith." It was then a seal to be stamped on those who had no faith as yet, not being old enough to believe. In accordance with this, it is that we think it right that children should be taken into covenant with God, and receive the outward sign of an inward washing, although they are not old enough to have that faith, to which the inward washing is promised. God received children into covenant under the Old Testament; shall we lessen or limit the blessings of the New Testament? If God Himself has not forbidden this blessing, who of us is bold enough to do so? Christ took little children in His arms to give them blessings, would He not rebuke those disciples among us, who forbid our seeking such blessings, when we dedicate infants to the Lord at baptism?

But, on the other hand, let us not attribute

too much to the mere performance of the outward rite.

The Church of Rome has erred concerning baptism, as the Galatian Church concerning circumcision. Some have taught that all baptized are therefore born again and justified. But Scripture tells us this is not the case, either in the baptism of infants, or of those who profess faith. The test of both must be spiritual life. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit." If a man bring forth the "fruit of the Spirit," we judge him to be born of the Spirit. If a man do the "works of the flesh which are manifest," we cannot say he is born again, or born of God, although baptized in infancy, or when of age, and after a profession of his faith. The tree must be known by its fruits. We may say of baptism as of circumcision, that "which availeth" is a "new creature," and "faith which worketh by love."

And now let us ask, can it be said of us, as the apostle wrote of certain Christians, "Ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power, in whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye

are risen with him, through the faith of the operation of God who hath raised him from the dead?" (Col. ii. 10—12.)

Or again, do we know our character, as thus described, "We are the circumcision, which worship God in the Spirit and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh?" (Phil. iii. 3.)

This is circumcision of heart, without which we shall never sit with Abraham in the kingdom of Christ. "Putting off the body of sins in the flesh," implies self-denial; a consciousness of the contest between flesh and spirit; a crucifying impure, discontented, covetous desires. And all this daily, "through faith in the operation of God who raised up Christ from the dead." God raised Christ from the dead, He also can raise us from death in sin unto life of righteousness. We cannot raise ourselves. We have not courage or strength to crucify this body of sin, but God will give His Spirit for this end; and, placing our faith in that mighty operation by which our Lord was made to come up again with life from the cold dark grave, we shall find we are raised to walk in newness of life by the same power.

Encouraging words are these given to us through Abraham, "I am the Almighty, walk before me, and be thou perfect" (or

sincere). He who commands this upright walking is Almighty. The authority of the command is undoubted; but so also, the strength for the performance is secure. He who enjoins this holy walking, and He who promises all needful strength, is One, the Almighty. He asks not for more than He undertakes to give. He says not "walk alone," but "before me," in my presence, so that though I require much I also give much. He says not "walk before me, for thou art Almighty," but "I am Almighty." Walk in my strength, lean on my arm, depend on my guidance, seek to my wisdom, listen to my counsel, for I that speak am mighty to save, I am the Almighty.

Are we not encouraged to draw closer to the Lord? Shall we not certainly hope to "perfect holiness in the fear of God?" Shall we doubt of complete victory over all difficulties now in our way of more entire devotion to God? Shall we not rather with triumphant voices say, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for thou art with me?" For says the Lord, "I am the ALMIGHTY, walk before me and be thou perfect."

PRAYER.

Almighty God, who madest thy servants of old, and even thy blessed Son, to be circumcised and obedient to the law, grant unto me the true circumcision of the Spirit. Give me that faith in my Saviour which worketh *by* love. Grant me to be in Him a new creature, renewed day by day by the Holy Spirit. Crucify in me all unrighteous desires, and give me the will and the strength to put off the body of the sins of the flesh, and through the Spirit, to mortify the deeds and the desires of the flesh.

Cause me to rejoice in Christ Jesus, and to have no confidence in the flesh. Give me grace to worship thee in spirit and in truth.

Lord, I am weak and powerless to do as thou dost command, but thou art Almighty. Into thy hands do I commit myself; lead me, —uphold me,—direct me,—that I may walk before thee in righteousness here, and behold thy face in righteousness hereafter, for Jesus Christ, His sake. AMEN.

ABRAHAM PLEADING FOR SODOM.

"*And he said unto him, Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak: Peradventure there shall thirty be found there. And he said, I will not do it, if I find thirty there.*

"*And he said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord: Peradventure there shall be twenty found there. And he said, I will not destroy it for twenty's sake.*

"*And he said, Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak yet but this once: Peradventure ten shall be found there. And he said, I will not destroy it for ten's sake.*

"*And the Lord went his way, as soon as he had left communing with Abraham: and Abraham returned unto his place.*" GEN. XVIII. 30—33.

"AND the Lord appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre, and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day: and he lift up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood by him: and when he saw them, he ran to meet them at the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground, and said, my Lord, if now I have found favour in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant: let a little water,

I pray you, be fetched and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree; and I will fetch a morsel of bread, and comfort ye your hearts; after that ye shall pass on; for therefore are ye come to your servant. And they said, So do, as thou hast said."

Such is the sacred account of the manner of God's appearing to Abraham, for the sixth time, before He fulfilled His promise of a *son*. Each promise becomes more distinct and more minute in its detail, as the time of fulfilment draws near. The Lord now declares Sarah shall have a son, and that at such and such a time.

Before we notice how Sarah and Abraham received this promise, let us observe some other incidents in this chapter.

The more we read of Abraham, and the more his history is brought before us, the more do the good points in his holy character present themselves. We should observe this, because it shows how the principle of real faith influences the whole character, and that faith is not, as many think, a mere act of the mind which may take place without affecting the heart, and whole bent of the mind.

Abraham was one who breathed a spirit of love towards his fellow creatures, which made him desire to do good, especially to those of the household of faith. It is often in our

conduct in the little things of life, that our true character is most discerned. Thus it was on one occasion, we may remember, that Abraham showed his meekness and amiable disposition, when there was strife between his herdsmen and Lot's herdsmen. He reminded Lot there should be no strife, for they were brethren; and although Abraham was, according to the flesh, Lot's uncle, yet he let his nephew have first choice of the land which was before them.

A little after that, we read of Abraham engaging himself and household in the perils and troubles of war, for the purpose of rescuing his relation from imprisonment by the heathen kings. We have now in this chapter two more proofs that love was as much a part of Abraham's character as faith.

Surely there was some proof of this in his kind entertainment of the strangers that appeared to him. He treated them courteously, liberally, and with all humility. He was anxious to show them hospitality. He pressed his attentions upon them. He and Sarah were active in serving them with the best things their house afforded. It may be with reference to this that we are urged in the Epistle to the Hebrews, (xiii. 1, 2.) "Let brotherly love continue, be not forgetful to

entertain strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." We are sure to be no losers by acts of kindness done from a right motive.

Abraham had washed the feet, not of saints merely, but of angels. Angels were these under the appearance of men. And now they speak unto him, as with the voice of the Lord. And his kindness is more than paid for, by the good news they bring him. The promise has reference to Sarah: so "they said unto him, Where is Sarah thy wife? And he said, behold, in the tent." Then the Lord speaks, "and he said, I will certainly return unto thee, according to the time of life, and lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son, and Sarah heard it."

This promise meets with more faith in Abraham than in Sarah. It was a great demand on their faith. "Abraham and Sarah were old and well stricken in age." But Abraham was "not weak in faith; he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb: he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God." (Rom. iv. 19, 20.)

But, what of Sarah? She was "weak in faith." "Therefore Sarah laughed within

herself." She said moreover, "Shall I of a surety bear a child, which am old?" But who did she say this to? Who heard her speak? No man. She was in the "tent door which was behind." Besides she only spoke it within herself, and "laughed within herself." But God heard her. "All things are naked and open to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." "The Lord said to Abraham, wherefore did Sarah laugh?" Sarah thought not at the time how that God reads the thoughts, and "Sarah denied, saying, I laughed not." But God counts the thought entertained and the thought expressed as one and the same thing. Therefore "he said, nay, but thou didst laugh."

But though Sarah begun with doubts, she ended this conference with faith. Her faith increased while under the influence of the conversation of these gracious visitors. The very proof she had of the Lord's presence in the fact of His reading her inward doubts, must have helped to remove those doubts. And there were some gracious words added besides these. It was added, "Is any thing too hard for the Lord? At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son." It was necessary that there should be faith in Sarah,

before there could be a performance of those things which were promised her of the Lord. And so there was, from this time forth, according as we read, (Heb. xi. 11.) "Through faith also Sarah herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised."

Thus then did Abraham show his love, *and* minister of his substance to the Lord, and the Lord left a blessing behind Him.

But we see now another mark of Abraham's brotherly love. The Lord had sorrowful news as well as good news to tell him of. The Lord's love to him gave him the promise of the birth of a son. And the same love and favour would not hide from him the death of many sinners. "The Lord said, shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I shall do?" (read v. 18—22.) The Lord could not hide from Abraham that He was about to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, for he was "the friend of God," and the example should be useful to his "children and his household after him." Moreover, Abraham was interested in Sodom. He had relations there. The news affected Abraham. He thought of the whole city perishing, and the good and the evil in it together.

Now Abraham's faith, as we have seen, had made him a man of prayer, and taught him where to cast his burden. The angels went to fulfil their commission. "The men turned their faces and went toward Sodom: but Abraham stood yet before the Lord. And Abraham drew near and said, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked, peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city: wilt thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein? That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" From what follows we learn, the Lord would have spared the city for fifty, but there were not fifty righteous persons in it. Abraham pleaded again, and the Lord would have heard him for forty and five, but there were not so many righteous ones in it. Abraham pleads again and again with the Lord, even unto the sixth time. But alas! while the Lord said, I will not destroy it for ten's sake, there were not ten found to be as salt to preserve it.

The patriarch did not however plead in vain. The Lord was not angry with his importunity. Abraham pleaded, for he knew that Lot and

his relations and friends were in the city. Doubtless he thought they would together have made up fifty. But they were not ten, nay, nor scarcely three. His prayers were heard for these, and righteous Lot was delivered, and his daughters.

Now Abraham should certainly be our pattern in this good habit of praying for others. When we hear, like him, of other's evils or dangers, and when we know of other's wants, we should learn to carry their cases to a throne of grace, just as readily as we do our own. We are selfish indeed if we only seek to enrich ourselves by the blessings promised to prayer and supplication. Can we expect others to remember us, if we forget them at such times?

How valuable are the prayers of others, even as the apostle James has told us, "Pray one for another."..... And the promise is, "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." (James v. 16.) We need not to be sinless for our prayers to be successful. "Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are:" so was Abraham: so was Paul: and so were many others, whose prayers yet availed much for others beside themselves. We are urged to do this also in another part of Scripture, "I exhort therefore that first of

all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, giving of thanks, be made for all men, for kings and for all that are in authority."……And it is added, "this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour." (1 Tim. ii. 1—3.)

Abraham prayed fervently on account of the evils in a neighbouring city,—surely we should remember in our prayers our own country and nation, our beloved Sovereign, and all in authority under her. If we know what it is to have access to a throne of grace, through the One Mediator, and to have obtained blessings for ourselves, surely this favour at least should we show our friends, relations, and all with whom we are in any way connected. We should seek for them some of the same blessings. "I will therefore (says the Holy Ghost by the apostle Paul) that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands without wrath and doubting."

How great an example of this duty and privilege is the Lord Jesus Himself. What would any of us be, had it not been,—were it not now at this moment for His intercessory prayers? He has taught us how He graciously thought of all His disciples before His Father, by the beautiful prayer in the seventeenth chapter of St. John's Gospel. A prayer which He offered to His Father when on earth for

them, and not for them only, but as we are told in it, "for them also which shall believe on me through their word." A prayer full of the most gracious words, telling of the love that Jesus bears to all His people, and His wishes for them in time and to eternity.

What, too, would Peter have done without such special intercession on his behalf? Satan desired to have him to sift as wheat, and *what* disappointed the malicious desires of the wicked one, but the all-prevailing prayers of the Righteous One, who said, "I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not?"

How blessed then for those that know this privilege of having the Lord engaged in intercession for them. If it were blessed for Lot to have Abraham, what is it for us to have Jesus, as an Advocate with the Father? And this is the privilege of all who have fled to the Lord Jesus, and through faith in His sacrifice are "accepted in the beloved." To whom He is a Priest to atone, to them He is a Priest to intercede. "Wherefore He is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them." (Heb. vii. 25.)

Christ, then, is not selfish, but mercifully mindful of all His people's wants and infirmities; we should also aim to be like-minded.

This shall ever be a test of real love to one another, of a readiness to forgive our enemies, and of a really enlarged and charitable heart. Are we ever as fervent in desires for others as for ourselves? Do we thus love our neighbour as our self? Let us remember, too, how often we may know the wants of others more than themselves, and therefore how needful to remember friends before God. A parent knows a child's wants, better than the child can. Friends may know, and therefore pray over each other's infirmities, better than they do for themselves. A people may know a minister's wants, and a minister those of the people better, in some points, than each do themselves, and therefore they should remember one another when they are "yet before the Lord," and as with Abraham for Lot, or when he prayed for Abimelech, their prayers shall not be in vain before the Lord.

PRAYER.

Lord God, Almighty, I desire to draw near to thee in prayer. I know that I am not worthy to lift up my eyes unto thee, but I would come in the merits of Him who is a faithful High Priest at thy right hand.

Forgive me, Lord, if hitherto I have been too like thy servant Sarah, and slow of heart to believe all thy great and precious promises. Increase my faith, as thou didst her's. May I believe nothing is too hard for thee. Make me to cease from doubting, and in all things to lean upon thy promises.

Give me more of that love which showed itself in thy servant Abraham. May I plead with thee for others as well as myself. Make me as earnest in my wishes for the spiritual and temporal good of my friends and neighbours, as I ever am for my own. Teach me to bring their wants as well as my own before thee. I know that I am but dust and ashes, yet behold now I would take upon me to speak for them, for I plead not my own righteousness, nor their's, I plead only the merits, and I trust to the intercession of my blessed Mediator and Advocate, Jesus Christ the righteous ; for His sake bless me and them, and teach us to pray for one another through the same Saviour. AMEN.

LOT'S SONS-IN-LAW.

"*And the men said unto Lot, Hast thou here any besides? son in law, and thy sons, and thy daughters, and whatsoever thou hast in the city, bring them out of this place:*

"*For we will destroy this place, because the cry of them is waxen great before the face of the Lord; and the Lord hath sent us to destroy it.*

"*And Lot went out, and spake unto his sons in law, which married his daughters, and said, Up, get you out of this place; for the Lord will destroy this city. But he seemed as one that mocked unto his sons in law.*" GENESIS XIX. 12—14.

THE events connected with the history of Sodom and Gomorrah are pointed to in many parts of Scripture, as sources of much instruction, and of solemn warning.

The two chief ways in which they instruct us are told us in the Second Epistle of Peter, where he says, "the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished." (chap. 2. v. 9.) The punishment of the unjust is referred to in the

same chapter, "turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly." The deliverance of the godly out of temptation is also referred to, "and delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked."

We are to look at this history as a great model of the history of the last days of this world. Our Lord has said, "As it was in the days of Lot, so shall it be in the days when the Son of Man shall be revealed."

And we seem in this history to have an example of three different classes of persons as that day shall come upon them.

First: There are those who shall be destroyed with the general destruction of the world, because they refused to hear the voice of warning—even as Lot's Sons-in-law.

Next, there is the case of those who seem to take warning, and seem to be escaping the condemnation of the rest of the world, but after all are destroyed—even as Lot's wife.

Thirdly, there is the case of those who shall be counted worthy to escape all these things, and to stand before the Lord—even as Lot was delivered.

The first of these is to occupy our attention in these present pages.

But, we cannot but remark first a little on Lot's position in these cities. Whence came he here? How comes it he stands alone amidst so much awful iniquity? Surely there was blame here, on his part? Now, if there was, we see the cause of his error in a point of his previous history. We remember, when he parted from Abraham, he chose his own situation. (Gen. xiii. 9. 10.) What guided him in his choice? Was it the hope of good company? There was none where he went. Was it that going where sinners were dwelling, he might act as a missionary among them? We read not of such a reason. Seemingly, it was not God's glory, or his own soul's safety, nor that of his family that he sought, but rather his own temporal prosperity, "Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan that it was well watered everywhere..... then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan .....and Lot dwelled in the cities of the plain, and pitched his tent toward Sodom." But, it is added, "the men of Sodom were wicked, and sinners before the Lord, exceedingly." To this one choice must all Lot's future family and personal troubles (and they are many) be traced.

Can we be too much impressed with the importance with which one such act of choosing

may be fraught? To one such act of choosing for self, irrespectively of God, can many trace a thousand troubles they have had. He who chooses for himself without God, must enjoy what he has chosen without God. He who chooses this world's things without regard to the spiritual advantages or spiritual losses such things occasion, must expect to find much cause for regret, and often wish to have his choice over again. God will never suffer His own children to find peace and happiness in any place where he Has not placed them, in any path to which He has not pointed, in any possession which He has not given them. Such choices must lead to sorrow. Such temporal gains must bring spiritual losses. A man will thus often lose his best friends, as Lot lost the society of Abraham. He will stand on slippery ground, and hardly escape slipping aside, as Lot did not. He will often have great pain and grief from his relations, as Lot had. He will have constant cause of sorrow and vexation of spirit, as was the case with Lot. He will only just escape with his life, as Lot did.

But God, we must next observe, overruled this for His own glory. He glorified His grace in Lot's preservation. He justified His righteousness in Lot's testimony to the men of Sodom.

Let us look now at the state of those to whom Lot gave the word of warning and advice. His own Sons-in-law were among the sinners of Sodom. As in the days of Noah, here were greatest evils from unholy, unequal alliances. How had Lot's daughters become united with such sinners? Either from evil communications they had learned to love sin, or else they had persuaded themselves into a belief that they were not doing wrong in making such alliances. And now the worst consequences ensue. The holy messengers that came to Lot were not acknowledged by these once members of his own family. When they left their father, they left his faith; when they took their husbands, they took their creed.

Two angels came to the city at even. They were messengers of God sent to execute vengeance against God's enemies. Righteous Lot was the only one who looked kindly on these strangers, and, like Abraham, entertained them. The men of the city not only despised them, but sought to evil intreat them. Sinners are not content with shunning the light that condemns them, they would fain show their contempt for it, if they do not extinguish it. But they that came against the Lord's messengers were struck blind by the Lord. None

shall injure God's little ones with impunity. They were not destroyed, for their time was not come. Their sight only was destroyed that they might feel God's hand, and not see to do evil.

When Lot had been delivered from his evil townsmen, by the hands of those to whom he had shown kindness, these holy messengers proclaim their message. It was to the effect, this place shall be destroyed, thou and all thine may escape. Lot at once spread the awful news, and told those that had married his daughters of this certain impending destruction. He said, "Up, get you out of this place, for the Lord will destroy this city." Who that knows all God's wrath as revealed against all unrighteousness, and will not seek to warn those who are living subjects of that wrath? Who that wishes well to their relations in things temporal, will not much more be anxious for them in things spiritual? But how is this kindness received? How is this warning responded to? "But he seemed as one that mocked to his sons-in-law." Strange indeed was his reception. There was nothing trifling in the fact he announced, "The Lord will destroy this city." There was nothing of levity in his words of warning, "up, get you out of this place." His manner surely must

have told the anxiety he felt, but yet it is said, "He seemed as one that mocked to his sons-in-law." Thus then did they harden their hearts, and close their ears, and God's word being despised, His heavy hand was felt. "He overthrew those cities and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities." Thus those that had warning, those that had pious friends, those of whom the Lord's messengers had said, "bring them out of this place," perished in their iniquity, and were destroyed with the rest of the ungodly.

We have not to wait long, and we shall see all this acted over again. Yea, even now, much that passed then is going on among us.

The world we live in is a condemned world. More than an angel from heaven has revealed this to us. The Son of God has born witness to this. The inspired word is still uttering His voice among us, and saying, "The Lord will destroy this place." The earth which now is, "is reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men." This fire is eternal, for "the wicked will be turned into hell and all the people that forget God."

But God's warnings are abroad also. The word which reveals His wrath against all ungodliness, has therein also revealed in it the

"righteousness of God," by which men can be saved, as it is written, "the just shall live by His faith."

The Gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation unto every one that believeth. (Rom. i. 16. 18.)

As the angels waited awhile, and urged Lot to save his friends as well as himself, so now this is the time of God's longsuffering. Many a one is now proclaiming to ungodly men, "Up get you out of this place, for the Lord will destroy this earth." Yet a little while and "the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven, with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God and obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." Such is one part of the message of Christ's ambassadors. The other part is to tell of mercy; mercy even for the chief of sinners. Mercy for all that flee to the one appointed door open for mercy, where men may go in at and be saved. Christ is that "door, the way, the truth, and the life." All are invited to come to the Father by Him and be "saved to the uttermost."

But how is this report received? To whom is this arm of the Lord revealed to their salvation? Alas! by far the greater number are like Lot's sons-in-law. We preach Christ

crucified, and He is to many a "stumbling-block," and to others "foolishness." We seem to many as though we were "mocking them."

We seem to mock by preaching improbabilities. The men of Sodom could not believe Lot's words would be verified; their fine city soon be enveloped in flames; brimstone fall from heaven; everything living be destroyed. There was nothing to make it likely; "all things remained as they were from the beginning." So many argue now. Our words seem like idle tales. Will God indeed destroy all the ungodly with everlasting fire? Is He not too merciful thus to deal with His own creatures? And thus we seem as they that mock when we preach that all the world is guilty, and all men are in condemnation. Again, we seem to mock, because we shut up salvation in one narrow, straight path. It was hard to believe that Lot was right, and all the men of Sodom wrong. Lot's family safe; the whole cities in danger. Lot's advice good, and all the great, and rich, and noble in the cities, wrong. So now men think us harsh for saying "few will be chosen." The way to life is "narrow and straight, and few there be that find it." Only faith, living faith in Christ saves; no other righteousness but His

will justify; and if any man have not His Spirit, he is none of His. All this is too exclusive. They that preach it are mocking us.

So too it is with another word which is written in God's book, and preached by the ministers. The world must be left, given up, despised, or men cannot be saved. How simple was that word of Lot, how foolish the thought to many! Must we indeed leave all these things behind us? Must we leave our names, our property, our fields, our houses, our pleasures, our profits? Surely thou art mocking us.

Thus, simple too, does that word sound to many, which tells them, "Be not conformed to this world," that Christ's disciple is not "of the world;" that he must use it, not abuse it, and this by passing through it as a stranger and a pilgrim. We seem to mock men, as we tell of the necessity that is upon them; if they would wear a crown, they must carry a cross; if Christ is to acknowledge them hereafter, they must walk closely with Him now, and not be afraid to deny themselves pleasure and gain in His service,—not be ashamed to confess Him before men. Surely they say this standard is too high, you are as those that mock us.

But all these things will soon be proved true. Fools only make a mock of sin, and

fools only despise the remedy. "A prudent man forseeth the evil and hideth himself, the simple pass on and are punished." (*Proverbs* xxii. 3.) Lot and his family stood alone in his strange and unlikely counsel, and Lot and his family stood alone on the hill, that saw the city in flames.

They only who believe our testimony now, shall be safe in that day, and be caught up, or raised up, to be ever with the Lord.

PRAYER.

O Lord God, who hast revealed thy wrath against all ungodliness, and yet declarest there is mercy with thee, that thou mayest be feared, look down upon me, a poor and helpless sinner, and guide my feet into the way of peace. Deliver me by thy mercy from the condemnation of the world; save me by thy grace from conformity to it. Let thy word of deliverance be heeded by me, and the way of salvation chosen and followed.

Hide me securely in Christ Jesus, and when thou comest forth to punish the inhabitants of the world, let me be safe in thy favour and in thy love.

Increase my faith in Christ, that Christ may increase in preciousness to me. Cause me so to walk in His strength, that I may triumph over the world, the flesh, and the devil. Teach me so to abide in Him, that at the last I may be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless. For His sake hear me in this my prayer. AMEN.

LOT'S WIFE.

"*The sun was risen upon the earth when Lot entered into Zoar.*

"*Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven;*

"*And he overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground.*

"*But his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt.*" GEN. XIX. 23—26.

LOT'S wife is one of the most awful examples in Scripture. "Remember Lot's wife," are the words of the Lord Jesus, which alone would give a sad solemnity to her example, if nothing else would do so. The Lord tells us to remember it. It must be important. We are bound to consider it, to weigh it deeply, and to seek to turn it to good account.

Lot's sons-in-law were impressive examples. They had warning, they scoffed at it, and they perished. Lot's wife was not only warned, but seemed to give heed to the warning, fled from the city, and yet perished. If the case of persons who, like the sons-in-law, turn their backs upon religion, and perish in their

folly, is common, the case of those who, like Lot's wife, pay some attention to it, and yet are lost for want of it, is still more common.

Let us look at what she seemed to be; then enquire what she was really; and so shall we learn what we are specially to remember about her.

First, then, Lot's wife seemed to listen in common with her husband to the voice of warning from God's messengers, to believe what they said, and to wish to follow their counsel.

That she had some faith in what they said there is no doubt, and that she wished to escape by fleeing what danger there was, is also certain. But that she had doubts and hopes contrary to God's word of threatening, seems also clear; otherwise she would not have acted as she did, and disobeyed, and looked back. This was unbelief.

In this she is a warning to those who believe with the head, and not with the heart; who believe a little, but not entirely; who have a dead faith, and not a living faith; whose faith is built on other grounds than on the power of God, and demonstration of the Spirit.

In the second place, she took some measures to avoid the danger. Like Herod with John

the Baptist, she not only "heard" the voice of warning, but she did "many things." An outward observer would have seen no difference, or but little, between her and Lot himself. With him she was preparing to go away. With him she followed the angels that led them. With him she actually left the walls of the city, and stood in the plains outside.

And herein she is a sample of that character so often spoken of in Scripture, which has the "form of godliness," but does not know its "power." Many there are, especially in these days of religious light and knowledge, who are in outward appearance doing as much as the truly righteous. Judging by outward looks and acts you would not know the difference. They are like the wise and foolish virgins. Professing the same object, holding the same creed, attending the same ordinances, having the same hope, and seemingly reposing on the same ground of security, as it is said, "they all slumbered and slept." All professors of religion are builders, but some are building on sand, and some on rock, a solid and deep foundation.

In the third place, Lot's wife seemed to be under the influence of God's grace and mercy. How remarkable is this. Not only the angels' words drew her out of the city, for they said,

"arise, take thy wife, and thy two daughters which are here, lest they be consumed in the iniquity of the city," but also, the angels' hands drew her out of the city, "and when he lingered, the men laid hold on his hand, and upon the hand of his wife," and thus she was with him "brought forth and set without the city." Thus the Lord's hand was felt by her. She was actually under the leading of His merciful guidance. And are there not those now, who go so far, and are led thus far, and even further, and yet whose end is that they perish? It was so with the Israelites, who "were baptized unto Moses in the cloud and the sea, and did all eat the same spiritual meat, and did all drink the same spiritual drink; for they drank of that spiritual rock which followed them, and that rock was Christ, but with many of them God was not well pleased; for they were overthrown in the wilderness." (1 Cor. x. 1—6.)

See too, how far people may go, and how much they may have to do with the word of God, and the Holy Ghost, and the world to come, and yet not be safe, by looking at what is written in the sixth chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews. See it also in what the Lord has said, "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophecied in

thy name? and in thy name cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? and then will I profess unto them, I never knew you." (Matt. vii. 22.) Now these persons, it is surely implied, must have been in some degree under the influence of the word of Christ,—must have been partakers of the Holy Ghost,—must have had faith to cast out devils; and yet, as Christ knows not them, they never knew Christ.

But let us now look into the real character of Lot's wife. Let us ask what she was, and not what she seemed to be.

First, in all her religion she was only acted on by outward circumstances, and was not drawn to God by any real faith or love. She had a righteous man for a husband, must often have heard the truth, and seen what was right. Perhaps this was her chief reason for making any profession. Then too, she doubtless had an affection for her husband and daughters, and could not but wish to be with them. Perhaps this also constrained her to follow them. Or perhaps she really was afraid of the threatened vengeance of heaven, and was moved by fear in proportion as she believed it. There are many such causes which move men to religious acts. There may be the constraining and driving fear of

an unquiet conscience, without the least affection of the heart for religion. There may be the outward causes of being brought up among religious people; mere force of custom leading us to do many things, the mere following the fashion of those around us, or the feeling obliged to act as a parent, a teacher, or a master, or mistress, may wish and expect. Or again, natural affection may be giving us a desire to please others. All this will account for the religion of some, whose religion would drop to the ground if you took away these outward causes. But such religion can never save. It is faith built on the wisdom of men, not on the power of God. It is religion from constraint, and not from choice. And though there may be in such persons a fear of wrath, leading them to do much, there is no real conviction of sin, leading them to adopt God's appointed method of salvation,—there is no giving themselves up to the Lord's will and His service.

Then again, if we could look into such persons' hearts, as well as at their outward acts, we should find that these acts were worth nothing in the sight of God, because of the unworthy motives from which they are done. It is not the outward deed, but the feeling which prompts us, which makes the act right

in the sight of God. Lot's wife may have done many things, which seemed to make her differ from the ungodly persons around her, and which gave her the character of a righteous person. But when these actions came to be weighed by Him that trieth the hearts they availed nothing, because they proceeded not of any real faith in His word, or love to Himself. Oh! what need have we to sift the motives of our hearts, since that is where God's eye is fixed, and from whence His judgment of us is formed.

We observe further, that what was chiefly wanting in Lot's wife was this, that she had never given her heart to God. And when she left the city, she left her heart in it, and when she had gone a little way, she looked back to the place where her treasure and her heart were still.

This is a safe test whereby we may judge of our state, when we seem to have gone far, and done much in the way of religion. If the Spirit of God has been at work in our hearts producing faith,—if the hand of God has been laid on our hearts leading us to Christ,—if there be any work in our hearts deeper than the mere outward strivings of the Spirit and the Word, which may be resisted,—then this will always be one of the signs to follow,

Love, the first-fruit of the Spirit, will be an inmate of the heart. You will see that this is not named among the qualities of those who go so far in the things of God, as is described in Heb. vi. There may be enlightenment of the mind,—there may be fear of the conscience,—there may be a "tasting of the good word and the powers of the world to come," and yet be no love, no yielding of the affections to Godward. There may be a casting out devils in the name of Christ, and doing many other things, as preaching and teaching, as in the case of Judas ; and yet, all the while, the heart may be never the least set on spiritual things, but, altogether going after covetousness, or some other worldly or fleshly lust. Thus, then must we search for love as the first-fruit of the Spirit in the heart. We must have chosen God as our portion. And though this love may be feeble and variable, and fickle at first, yet, it will be sincere, and as faith and knowledge grow, it will abound more and more.

Once more, as the faith of Lot's wife was faulty, so also did her outward acts prove this. She was disobedient to the heavenly word, when she looked back behind her. Her faith did not justify her in God's sight, so neither do her actions justify her in the sight of the

world. Where there is a fault in the heart, there will always be fault in the life. And if the word of God is not believed on in the heart unto righteousness, the outward acts of obedience and confession unto salvation will always be wanting in some point. It might seem a small act of sin to be punished for, to be lost for one look behind her. But the smallest act is sufficient to prove what the heart is. Had her heart been weaned from the cities and their iniquity, her face would not have been turned to them. Had her affections been on what was put before her in God's salvation, and His promises, she would not have looked behind her, but reached forth to the things set before her.

And so it ever is, a faulty heart will lead to a faulty life, and disobedience to God's word, is the result of unbelief in that word. It may seem a small sin to be the ruin of the soul, that it has not placed all hopes in the "righteousness of faith,"—in the merits of Christ,—especially when men have a zeal of God, and are earnest in establishing their own righteousness. But the truth is ever in such cases, there is something wrong in the heart that leads to this wrong way of seeking life. There is a pride which will not stoop to God's way of saving, or there is a self-righteous spirit that will not

submit, or a worldliness that will not be given up. And this too, accounts for those who seem to go a great way in religion, and then after all, look back to the world they seemed to leave, and are drawn again into its sins, and into its damnation. They never walked in God's appointed way of salvation, and never did really use those means which would have made them safe, because their heart was not yet where it should be, and God's word not believed on with the heart unto righteousness. Hence it is said, "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." (Luke ix. 62.)

Thus then, do we learn how great is our need to remember Lot's wife.

If our religion be a thing of name and not a matter of heart, we have need to remember her who went so great a way with the righteous, and yet after all, was destroyed with the ungodly. Take heed that your heart be affected with the things of God, and not your mind and understanding only. See that your faith be a real act of laying hold on Christ and His promises, and not a barren assent to the truth, or unfruitful knowledge of His grace. See that the Spirit of Christ acts as great a part as your own spirit in all your devotions and religious exercises; that your prayers be in

spirit and truth ; and that the Spirit help your infirmities also in your reading and hearing of God's word.

If any be undecided in the matter of giving up themselves to the Lord,—if any waver between the world and God,—if any be waiting for a more convenient season to live wholly for God, then let such remember Lot's wife, and take heed, lest while thus looking back with lustful heart to the world, they be cut off in their sins, and one lingering look shall be their ruin.

And if any are growing lukewarm or cold in God's ways,—if any seem to make no progress, but, if anything, to go back in things spiritual, let them also remember Lot's wife, and fear. They may not yet have turned back, but their next temptation will be to do so. The word is to them, and let them fear disobedience to it, "Escape for thy life, look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain, escape, lest thou be consumed."

PRAYER.

O Lord God, who hast graciously given me warning by the examples of thy word, I ask for grace to profit by thy warnings.

Lord, thou hast set before me a way to escape the wrath to come, thou hast commanded me to flee for my life. But, O Lord, how strong are the temptations to linger, to lust after the world, and to disobey thy word. Therefore do I come to thee for grace, that I may resist these temptations, and may not look behind me. Turn away mine eyes, O Lord, from beholding vanity, and quicken me in thy way. Keep my heart, and fix my faith on the Lord Jesus, that I may count all things but loss, for the excellency of His knowledge,—that I may be willing to lose all things for Him,—that I may win Him, and be found in Him.

Grant that I may never look back with longing eye, on anything thou dost command me to leave. Teach me more and more to forget those things that are behind, and to reach forth to those things that are before. Leave me not, O Lord, though I be tempted to leave thee. Draw me, and I will run after thee. Lead me by the right way, till I come to the heavenly Sion, through Jesus Christ my Saviour. AMEN.

JUST LOT DELIVERED.

"And Abraham gat up early in the morning to the place where he stood before the Lord:

"And he looked toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and toward all the land of the plain, and beheld, and, lo, the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace.

"And it came to pass, when God destroyed the cities of the plain, that God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when he overthrew the cities in the which Lot dwelt." GEN. XIX. 27—29.

A DISMAL sight was this for Abraham! Where lately had stood large numbers of massive buildings, long walls, lofty houses, mansions of the great, streets, and rows of dwelling-places for the people, there now was beheld nothing but the last embers of a mighty conflagration, beneath which were buried the ruins of these great cities, and above which was ascending up to heaven the last offensive savour of iniquity—the smoke of that furnace which had done such work of destruction. Where lately had been heard the din and

clamour of the busy multitude, the mingled sounds of merriment and strife, business and pleasure, the sounds of the many going to and fro, the buyer and the seller, engrossed in daily business; and the sounds of midnight revellings—of those who "continued unto night, till wine enflamed them, and the harp, and the viol, the tabret, and pipe, and wine being in their feasts,"—there now was the stillness of death; not a voice was heard, not a cry, nor a laugh, nor a whisper,—all was hushed in fearful silence, and "the mirth of tabrets was ceased, the noise of them that rejoiced ended." "The city of confusion was broken down, all joy was darkened, the mirth of the land was gone." Nought but the murky "smoke of the country" was in motion now, as in black and dismal rolling waves it rose on high, to tell of the accomplishment of the fierce anger of the Lord of hosts.

Yet was there peace and quiet in the breast of Abraham, as he pondered on all these things. And while the tear of pity, and the deep sigh of regret told of his painful feelings and real compassion, for the sinners that had perished, there was the peaceful thought within of acquiescence to the will of God, as his holy mind rested on the assurance, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

Peace, too, was his, as he remembered how he had laboured in prayer and intercession for his friends and relatives in the unholy cities; and as he felt assured the justice of God that had visited the ungodly, had remembered the godly, and that had been far from the righteous Judge of the earth "to slay the righteous with the wicked." Nor was he wrong in such thoughts. "It came to pass that God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when he overthrew the cities in the which Lot dwelt."

This then is the third character in this history, by which we are to search and see our own. The thoughtless and indifferent are destroyed in flaming fire, and are now in chains and darkness, awaiting the last judgment of the last day. The deceived and worldly professor that draws back, has perished also, and awaits the same judgment. The godly is delivered from temptation, and from condemnation,—in this do we resemble "just Lot?"

Yet a little while, and this earth will be one mighty furnace, and none but the righteous shall escape; caught up to meet the Lord in the air, and to inherit a new heaven and a new earth. Are we among the righteous?

In answering these questions, let us only

take such points in the character of the righteous, as we are here taught to have existed in Lot.

He is called in holy writ, "Just Lot," "that righteous man," "the godly." He is said to have had a "righteous soul." (2 Peter ii. 7, 8, 9.)

But whence did he first get these titles,—whence a good right to these titles, not in the sight of men only, but in "the sight of God?" Lot was in many things faulty, and even in the account we have of him, his character is not altogether blameless. But he was accounted righteous in God's sight, and dealt with accordingly,—his sins being forgiven him, because his was the righteousness of faith. Just as Abraham had believed in God, and it was imputed to him for righteousness, so it was with Lot. "The just shall live by his faith." Lot was accepted through the merits of the One Mediator, Jesus Christ the righteous.

But then, like Abraham and all really righteous men, his faith was proved by works. And while the faith of his heart justified him in the sight of God, the works of his life justify him in our sight; so that we can see he not only stood in the perfect righteousness of the Redeemer, imputed to him through

faith, but also in the imperfect righteousness of the creature, imparted to him by the Spirit of the Holy One.

The first proof we have of this holiness of character is, in the love that Lot bore to the righteous, and his consequently kind reception of the messengers of God. We have seen how Lot received these into his house, defended them from the evil of the city, entertained them, and gave heed to all their counsel.

Now this is a point of Christian character oft mentioned in Scripture. The receiving disciples in the name of Christ, is promised a reward. (Matt. x. 41.) The injuring any of those that believe in Christ, is threatened with sore punishment. (Matt. xviii. 6.) It is even said, "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." (1 John iii. 14.) And it is given as a sign of a righteous man, in the fifteenth Psalm, "He honoureth them that fear the Lord."

The love that any profess to God, can never be real, if it be not thus practically shown to them that are God's. And, like Lot, we must be found loving and respecting those of the Lord's people, who are sent to us from God, to declare His will and His knowledge. We must esteem them highly for their work's sake. Lot's messengers came with unpleasant news

in one sense; to tell him he must leave his home and many of his friends, yet this abates not Lot's love and obedience. Ministers will not always bear pleasing messages, but often such as run counter to flesh and blood. Hence many persons regard only those who can prophecy to them smooth things, and a faithful one becomes their enemy, because he has told them the truth. See that you regard your minister for his work's sake, because he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts, and not merely because his style or manner of preaching happens to be in accordance with earthly tastes.

A second point in righteous Lot's character is, his hatred of evil, and his being pained by the wickedness of the wicked. He was "vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked; for that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds." (2 Peter ii. 7, 8.)

So David, describing the righteous, "in whose eyes a vile person is contemned." And a mark of the ungodly is, "neither doth he abhor that which is evil." David himself had this sign of holiness, he said, "Woe is me that I sojourn in Mesech, that I dwell in the tents of Kedar." (Psalm cxx. 5.) He said,

moreover, "I beheld the transgressors and was grieved, because they kept not thy law." And again, "Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law." (Psalm cxix. 136, 158.) St. Paul wept for the enemies of the cross of Christ. (Phil. iii. 18.) In Ezekiel's vision (chap. ix.) those are marked for preservation who "sigh and cry for all the abominations" that were done in the wicked city.

How should it be otherwise? There must be in every heart taught of God to love good, a detestation of evil in proportion to our love of God. If Christ, and His ways, be loved, Satan, and his ways must be abhorred. If the voice of the good Shepherd in His holy word be well-pleasing to the ear, how hateful the evil words of wicked men, every one of whose ungodly speeches is as it were a stone thrown at Christ,—reproach hurled at the Almighty.

How much cause does the believer find to be thus vexed every day. We can scarce go abroad, or be long with others in the world, without hearing some filthy conversation, some angry words, some blasphemy, foolish jesting, ungodly levity. Our cities are too much like Sodom and Gomorrah. We cannot so fix our eyes on holy persons and things, or so

keep our ears only open to what is pleasing, but that unlawful deeds and ungodly words do meet us at every turn, and crowd upon our senses in almost every company, almost in every street. How do these evils, and others that we know of, affect us? Are we indifferent? or are we vexed in our souls? Do they ever make us pity and pray for the sinner? Do they make us pray for grace to be kept from such evil? Do they make us value the character of God, who is of spotless holiness? Do they make us value the promises of being with Him and with saints in that "new heaven and new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness?" Let us beware of growing indifferent to these things, because they are common and thought nothing of by most men. Although Lot saw and heard these things daily, yet they "vexed his righteous soul from day to day." The more we get of the mind of Christ, the more we shall hate and shrink from "the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience." It is a sad sign when sin has a hardening effect on us. We are in evil case if our love waxes cold, because iniquity aboundeth. We must live more in the atmosphere of heaven, and the stench of ungodliness will be more unbearable, and our souls will be "vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked."

The last proof we add of Lot's righteousness was, the obedience he gave to the Lord's word to flee from the city. True, it is said, "while he lingered, the men laid hold of his hand," but his lingering was not like his wife's, from leaving his heart behind him. True, also, that when he was out of the city, he prayed that he might have a resting place in the little city of Zoar, not a great way off. But in this there was no disobedience, for God accepted him, and spared that city: it was a safe refuge for him. He believed the word which told him to flee, and he fled. He believed it was needful to leave much that was naturally dear to him, and he left it. He believed that he must not even look back, and he looked not back at all. And thus, like Noah, he was, through faith, moved with fear, and prepared to obey, to the saving of his life, and the lives of his daughters.

Have we thus obeyed? Are we the godly, delivered out of temptation?

Are we already in Christ, and pardoned, and not only waiting to be so? The Lord said to Lot, "Haste thee, escape thither; for I cannot do any thing till thou be come thither." (v. 22.) Lot did not wait till the fire came down before he left the cities, he was safe in Zoar when it came down. So,

before the Lord appears to punish the world, or before we appear before Him through death, we must have been "delivered from this present evil world," be in "no condemnation, have passed from death unto life." Those who wait till He appears, will have no refuge to flee to. A fearful mistake it is, for those who have received the message to fly, yet to be putting off their flight, not being "in Christ," pardoned, sanctified, safe. Their danger is present, and they are acting as if it were future. They are in condemnation now; they are refusing to flee out of it, as if it were only hereafter. The mercy provided in the Gospel is present, not future,—now, not then to be enjoyed. The garment is to be on now, not put on when the King comes in. The world is to be left and Christ to be our's now, and not for the first time when the world ceases, and Christ only remains. Are we thus in Christ, and in no condemnation?

Moreover, is the world left in heart by us? Know we the double crucifixion by the cross of Christ, by which the world is crucified unto us, and we unto it? Is Christ before every thing in it in our esteem? Is even what is dear as our own flesh cut off, cast away, when and as we learn it is His will? Is Christ first, and every thing else secondary? Are we

aiming at this state, praying, striving, watching for it?

These things should press upon us from the example before us. What an answer is here, and in the destruction by the flood, to that solemn question, "Lord, are there few that be saved?" Noah and seven others only escape in the one case. Lot and two others only in this. As it was in their day, so will it be in our's; many called, few chosen. Well may we ask before God's judgment decides, are we among the few in the narrow road of life, or are we in the broad road of destruction? Are we through grace "righteous," "just," "godly." Are we in Christ, and shall we be found His, "without spot and blameless?"

PRAYER.

O Almighty God, thou most worthy Judge eternal! Blessed be thy name, my day of grace is not yet ended. Thou dost still speak unto me, warn me of danger, and call me to flee for safety. O Lord, make me to value

the message brought to me by thy servants. May I count them worthy of honour for Christ's sake, whom they serve. May I not linger, but obey promptly. Give me the hope of the righteous, a good hope through grace in Christ Jesus. Give me the marks of the righteous. Let me have the witness of the Spirit. Cause me to abhor that which is evil, and cleave to that which is good. Lead me, and teach me, that I may say with thy servant, "Behold now, thy servant hath found grace in thy sight, and thou hast magnified thy mercy, which thou hast shewed unto me in saving my life." Hear me, O God, for Jesus' sake. AMEN.

ABRAHAM REPROVED BY ABIMELECH.

"*Then Abimelech called Abraham, and said unto him, What hast thou done unto us? and what have I offended thee, that thou hast brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin? thou hast done deeds unto me that ought not to be done.*

"*And Abimelech said unto Abraham, What sawest thou, that thou hast done this thing?*

"*And Abraham said, Because I thought, Surely the fear of God is not in this place; and they will slay me for my wife's sake.*

"*And yet indeed she is my sister; she is the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife.*

"*And it came to pass, when God caused me to wander from my father's house, that I said unto her, This is thy kindness which thou shalt shew unto me: at every place whither we shall come, say of me, he is my brother.*" GEN. XX. 9—13.

SCRIPTURE history is very faithful. It tells us men's faults as plainly as their virtues. The saints of God are never made to appear more excellent than they really are. Sometimes their failings are put before us so faithfully,

that we should have doubted their being God's beloved children, if it were not for the same word telling us that they were so.

We can scarcely put our finger upon one holy character that is not soiled with such blemishes. And what is remarkable is that in many cases the very faults of which they are guilty, are failings in the very graces or virtues for which they are famous. "Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth," (Numbers xii. 3,) and yet "it went ill with him," because he was "provoked in spirit, so that he spake unadvisedly with his lips." (Psalm cvi. 33.) Lot escaped the prevailing sins in the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, but by the sinful influence of his daughters, in the city of Zoar, fell into the sins of drunkenness and incest,—the very same that had "vexed that righteous man," dwelling among the sinners of Sodom.

And what was Abraham famous for? Was it not for his faith? Yet, as we see in this history, a want of faith made him soil his garments with the sin of lying. He calls Sarah his sister.

But do we not see the wisdom of God in thus recording His own people's faults? The short-sighted wisdom of man often keeps quite out of sight the faults of his fellow creatures

whose lives he is recording. The consequence is we often have a mistaken view of their real character. We think of them above what they really were, and (what is more important,) above what is written in God's word they are, as judged by Him. We read their lives with an impression we cannot imitate them, they are above us: we gather false notions of human worth. Now God's word keeps us from such feelings, when pondering on its characters. It records men's failings and their falls, that we may "not think of them above what is written." Now it is written of all men, without exception, "there is none righteous, no not one." And again, "There is none good save one, that is God." And thus we are taught from whence it is any have had the goodness they had, and why they were not worse than they were. Thus do we learn to study examples profitably. They are not above us, for they were what they were by the grace of God. Without the grace of acceptance through the merits of "the Holy One," they would not have found favour with God; and without the grace of His Spirit "working in them to will and to do of His good pleasure," they would have remained in their first trespasses and sins; they never would have risen above any of their peculiar infirmities. Good men have

fallen that they might learn wherein their strength lay to stand upright. Their falls are written that we may learn the same truth, "Without ME ye can do nothing."

Moreover, because saints are seen to fail at times in the very virtues which by nature and by grace they shine in, it is that they may learn, first, that nature is not enough without grace. The "meekness," for example, which is the "fruit of the Spirit," will stand, where the meekness, which is our natural disposition, will fail and give way. Secondly, that God's children have no stock of grace independently of Him. Abraham had no such measure of faith given into his hands at the beginning of his course, which he could afterwards use or not, independently of God; but he had faith, or he had not faith, just as he was leaning upon God or not. So we are strong, or weak and powerless, in the exercise of any grace, just as we are drawing, or are not drawing, strength from Christ. The fruitful Christian is not a plant standing alone, but a branch growing upon and drawing sap from the stem. Hence, thirdly, we are hereby taught to prepare ourselves, and seek strength from the Lord as much for little trials and temptations as we would for great. The same God must bear us through either. Without Him we are

as helpless in the lesser as in the greater. Observe, Abraham had a great trial of faith, when called by God to leave his father-land, and go out not knowing whither he went. But for this he was prepared: doubtless he sought strength from above in proportion to the trial. A still greater trial than this, also found him faithful. "By faith when he was tried Abraham offered up his only son." For this also, who can doubt he prepared himself, by prayer and supplication, by strong cryings and tears unto Him that was able to save him. And he was heard, and endured.

But a lesser trial than this awaited him. He has to go and visit different heathen kingdoms, and to take Sarah with him. He knows that, according to the custom of those countries, Sarah being a beautiful woman, and a stranger among them, the people of the country, especially the kings, might be tempted to take Sarah and add her to their number of wives. This was his fear. And to endure this exposure of Sarah, and his own life, to heathen hands, was his trial. First, when he sojourned in Egypt; (chap. xii.) a second time when in Gerar. How did he prepare for these trials of his faith in God's power to protect his wife, although thus exposed to danger? Alas! he had recourse to a plan which showed

a want of faith,—even in the faithful Abraham. His plan was this, "And it came to pass when God caused me to wander from my father's house, that I said unto her, this is thy kindness that thou shalt show unto me; At every place whither we shall come, say of me, he is my brother." (v. 13.) His departure from truth showed his lack of faith. And thus he that did not shrink from giving up his dearest object, his only son, by an actual sacrifice demanded of the Lord, failed from want of faith to trust God for the preservation of his own life and Sarah's honour; showing us how we need God's grace to make us walk uprightly, in what appears to be a lesser trial as much as a greater, and in order to obey the most direct requirements of God as much as to hold fast our integrity in those things which come upon us not so directly, yet as certainly, by the appointment of God.

A second important lesson we learn from this history is this,—That we shall always find it better to trust God than to trust to the smallest departure from truth to deliver us from any difficulty we may be placed in.

Abraham's reply to Abimelech, king of Gerar, who asked him why he had thus deceived him, was this, "Because I thought surely the fear of God is not in this place;

and they will slay me for my wife's sake." Moreover, he added, "And yet indeed she is my sister; she is the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother, and she became my wife." (v. 12.) By the first part of his reply he showed how he distrusted God to preserve his life, and took the matter into his own hands by attempting to deceive others. By his next remark he showed how easy it is to deceive ourselves by what seems to be so small a departure from the truth that it is allowable. By calling Sarah his sister only, Abraham gave the idea that she was not his wife, and wherein did this really differ from saying outright, "She is not my wife?"

Now it is important to remark that in both cases where Abraham acted in this way, his departure from strict truth did not only not serve the purpose of delivering him out of his strait, but, was the very means of bringing his wife into greater danger than she would otherwise have been exposed to. It brought, also, upon himself the reproof of the heathen king, unto whom he ought to have been a pattern of truth and uprightness, as the prophet of the Most High God. "What hast thou done unto us, and what have I offended thee, that thou hast brought on me, and on my kingdom a great sin? Thou hast done

deeds unto me, that ought not to have been done." Thus was Abraham, the man of God reproved by Abimelech, a heathen king. Thus are we taught, that the way of truth is the way of safety, the way of lying, the way of danger and the way of shame.

We must remember, that when we fall into any difficulty, straits, or danger, God always knows our circumstances as well as, and better than we do. The very strait is intended to be for a trial of our faith and trust in Him. It is not chance that brings it us. He appoints it should be so, and knoweth what strength we have need of, as well as what weakness we have.

We must remember also, that God can keep His own. Was Sarah God's child, and shall not God be able and willing to keep her from heathen pollution, if she were committed into His hands? Was Abraham God's friend, the subject of many mercies, the heir of many promises, and shall not God preserve his life from every kind of danger? We dishonour God's power and God's love, when we have recourse to our own sinful plans, and tell even the smallest falsehood to get out of trouble.

Again, our own plans, especially if pursued at the cost of truth, can never deliver us, unless it please God to order it so; why not, there-

fore leave Him to save us by His own way, and that a righteous one, and one that will always glorify Him. "Call upon me," He says, "in the day of trouble, I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me." (Psalm i. 15.) Abraham's methods which he trusted to, did not succeed in delivering him. God's methods, which Abraham had not thought of, did deliver both him and his wife.

Herein lies, therefore, the security of faith and simple trust in God's power to deliver us. Unbelief sees mountains of difficulties which may never come to pass, or which faith causes to vanish as we draw near them. Faith will see those mountains as it were covered with armed troops on our side. Abraham saw great danger, because he thought, "surely the fear of God is not in this place." But Gerar seems to have known God,—to have called his people, a righteous nation," (v. 4.) and in this instance, at least, to have had integrity of heart. There is often the fear of God, where our unbelief made us suspect it. We should often not be disappointed, if we exercised that "charity which hopeth all things." Certainly, what Abraham feared most from, was what God used as the way of his deliverance.

In all such cases, too, God has more resources than we know of, by which to help us.

"God came to Abimelech by night in a dream, and said to him, Behold, thou art but a dead man, for the woman which thou hast taken, for she is a man's wife." (v. 3.) God thus stepped in, to stop the evil Abraham was nearly the cause of. Sarah, we may note, was as guilty as Abraham. And no wonder, since he, that should have known better, thus misguided her, that should have been led aright by him. We cannot err the least, without leading others astray. Those that are most dependent on us for good, are most open to the influence of our evil conduct. Yet are those thus led astray, not on that account free from blame. Sarah was also reproved by Abimelech. "Unto Sarah he said, behold, I have given thy brother a thousand pieces of silver: behold, he is to thee, a covering of the eyes, unto all that are with thee, and with all other; thus was she reproved." (v. 16.)

Abimelech heaped presents upon both Abraham and Sarah; and thus were they both reproved, by that best of all reproofs, "overcoming evil by good." They received great acts of kindness from him they had injured in expecting great acts of wrong and injury at his hands. Abimelech said, "thy brother," that she might remember what was his real relationship, and that she ought to regard

Abraham, as of himself,—being a husband and a man of God,—a sufficient veil to hide her face, and so protect her from all men who should desire her; whether those with her, or those they should fall in with.

Let us ever learn, thus to depend on God's own ways and means, although before-hand we see nothing of them. Let us see them with the eye of faith. This is why God keeps them in the back ground, till the time they are wanted,—that He may call our faith into exercise, on the promises of His word. If we could see how He would help us before-hand, there would be no room or call for trusting Him. Our being in want of help, and His word promising help to those who call upon Him; this is the only ground we ought to want for leaning confidently on His word,—expecting His help. Such faith would keep our minds in perfect peace,—give us confidence even in the most dreary parts of our journey here, and above all, it will keep us from that departure from truth, which dishonours God, —brings discredit on His cause,—brings shame, and often more trouble on ourselves, and seldom delivers us out of our difficulties, even for the time.

PRAYER.

O most merciful and most holy God, incline thine ears to a sinner's prayer. There is none holy as thou art. The very best of thy children, are before thee, found wanting. Deliver me, O Lord, from the power of all my sins, and wash me from their guilt. For thy dear Son's sake, forgive my past iniquity, and give me a spirit in which there is no guile. Give me real integrity of heart. May I hate vain words and all false speaking. Save me from all temptations to act or to speak that which is not strictly true. May I never seek to save myself, by doing evil in thy sight. Let me trust in thy power and thy love, to deliver me out of all my troubles. May thy promises be my support, and may I ever hope in thy word. May thy holy word be my shield and my buckler,—my refuge in the day of trouble, —my rock and house of defence. Lord, receive my prayer, and let my cry come unto thee, in the name of Jesus Christ. AMEN.

ABRAHAM OFFERING UP ISAAC.

"And it came to pass after these things that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am.

"And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of." GEN. XXII. 1, 2.

WE come now to the most wonderful part of all Abraham's history, the most remarkable event in his life, the most notable exercise of his, or any other person's faith.

No wonder mention is made of this event in other parts of Scripture. No wonder that in the instances of faith, recorded in the eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, this has a prominent place. Let us hear what the apostle writes concerning it in that chapter, v. 17—19. "By faith Abraham when he was tried, offered up Isaac; and he that had received the promises, offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, that in Isaac shall thy seed be called; accounting that

God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him *in a* figure."

This passage explains what is meant by "God did tempt Abraham." It means God did try, or put to the test, Abraham's faith. Not that He Himself might discover what faith, or what lack of faith, Abraham might have,—for He knew what was in him. But for Abraham's own sake, and for our's who hear and read and have the example of Abraham's obedience.

Hence we may refer to another mention of this event in Scripture. We read in St. James, chapter ii. verse 21—23, "Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the friend of God." We are not to understand this as teaching us that works must be joined with faith, before we can be accounted righteous, which is, being justified; nor are we to think that faith does not perfectly justify until it has been proved to be true by works. We can prove that St. James does not mean this,

by, first, referring to other Scriptures, (and the Scriptures do not contradict themselves,) in which we are told that faith, simple faith, justifies the soul of the sinner. In the fourth chapter of Romans, "If Abraham was justified by works he hath whereof to glory, but not before God,"—that is, he had not whereof to boast of works before God; "for what saith the Scripture, Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness." It is further added in the fifth verse, "to him that WORKETH NOT, BUT BELIEVETH on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." Faith justifies without works, because faith is the hand that lays hold of those promises of God's word which are in reality the causes of justification. But what then does St. James mean, when he says, "Abraham was justified by works?" He means, Abraham whose faith had already justified him before God, now by his works gave proof of his faith, and justified himself in the sight of men. For what clearly proves this to be the meaning of this Scripture, is this important fact, that Abraham was accounted righteous through faith very many years before he was called upon to show his faith by offering up his son. The first event is recorded in the fifteenth chapter of Genesis,—this

latter in the twenty-second. The first of these parts of Scripture was "fulfilled," (St. James writes) that is, proved to be true "when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar." His faith was thus proved to be real faith, COMPLETE, and not wanting when it thus "worked by love."

Now it is certain that some such proofs of our faith will also be required at our hands. Our faith which justifies us before God, must produce works which will justify us in the sight of men. True faith, like real gold, will stand the trial.

Let us consider somewhat more attentively, first, this trial of Abraham's faith, and secondly, the triumph of his faith.

It was indeed a fiery trial that now tried Abraham. We cannot conceive of a greater. What was he called upon to do? No less a thing than to put the knife with his own hand to the throat of his only son. Here then was one of the greatest difficulties of the trial. The command seemed so opposite to the very nature and character of God. God, that is very merciful and loving,—God that so severely judged the first murderer. Can it be the command of the same God, that I should put my own child to death?—thereby I shall not only destroy my own son's life, but break his

mother's heart, and wound myself sorely,—can this be the Lord's voice that speaks, can I be bound to obey such an order?

Then next, how opposed was this command to his own strong parental feelings, and to the keen affections of his wife and mother of the child. We must remember, how for this child they had watched and waited for years and years,—how he was the son of their old age, how he was the only child God had given to them. Yet now an order comes, "take now thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and offer him for a burnt offering." How would the patriarch's heart be weighed down with sorrow as he broke the tidings to his wife, and must seem to her the most unnatural of husbands. Surely, she would say, as Zipporah to Moses, "a bloody husband thou art." How would his bowels yearn after his beloved child, as he led him to the place of sacrifice,—a journey of three days, and then listened to the moving accents of his son's voice, saying, "My Father," and asking, "where is the lamb for a burnt offering." Nor would it lessen his grief, while it satisfied his own mind to say, the lamb was of God's providing, "My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering."

How great and sore the trial too, when he

came to all the preparations for the sacrifice,—the binding of his own child; the hand that had fed him, the hand that had clothed him, the hand that had taught him to walk,—must now be the very hand to bind and slay this same beloved child. Oh! wonderful command; that so it could be! and yet so it was.

Once more, the severity of the trial is seen in the fact of his being the child of many promises,—the son in whom were centred all the promises which had reference to the Messiah,—the seed in whom all the nations of the earth should become blessed. By the death of him all his hopes of posterity would be blasted,—by the destruction of this child all his hopes and expectations would at once be cut off. Well then might Abraham wonder at this most strange command. And well,—had he been inclined, as doubtless he was tempted,—might he have reasoned on the subject, and argued there was some mistake, it could not be God's meaning; surely it was only a figurative way of speaking, not the real intention of God, who had made a covenant with this very son. Yet so it was, and Abraham believed and obeyed.

Now let us pause awhile, and consider how this strange requirement of God instructs us as to what God may and does require of ourselves.

We learn this, that it is possible many of God's demands may appear to flesh and blood unreasonable, unnatural. Some things He asks us in His word to believe may appear opposite to our notions of His character as a merciful, loving God. Some truths there are revealed for our faith, which man in his natural state is opposed to, and thinks unreasonable, and even when enlightened cannot wholly understand; and yet they are as plainly the word of God, as was the order that came to Abraham to kill his son. We must, like Abraham, bow to God's sovereignty. We must think with him, "shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" We must not stand and reason upon things clearly revealed, or ask with hesitation, "how can these things be?" But ask only, is this the word of God? As was the case with Abraham, God is able to make all things plain afterwards. He says to us, "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter." We are poor judges of the Infinite Mind. It would indeed be strange if all were clear and plain, seeing that we have such narrow, limited, earthly minds. "Now we see through a glass darkly."

Observe again, many of God's requirements may be opposed to our natural affections. Not unfrequently does God's voice in the Gospel

demand of us that which costs us much to give up, just as it cost Abraham many a hard struggle to give up Isaac. Can we wonder it should be so, when we remember how our earthly affections are the cause of so much sin, and so often separate us from God? It is the voice of love, as it was to Abraham, though it sounds severe, and crosses our own love. God would have us holy, but holiness is separation from the love of this world. God would have our best affections,—for He only can satisfy them,—but if so, we must be weaned from this world's power over them.

We are to put the knife to our own sins. We are to part with the occasions and causes of sin. Old habits,—strong feelings,—peculiar circumstances,—may make it hard to do this. But the command is clear, obedience must be prompt. So the Lord tells us, "If thy hand offend thee, cut it off; it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched, where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched." (Mark ix. 43.) A right hand is a dear member. But the doctor is our friend who tells us it is mortifying, and unless cut off, will endanger the life of the whole body. It is better to part with any evil habit, than by it, being drawn into sin,

be drawn at last into hell. It is better to displease the dearest friend, than by pleasing him, disobey our Friend in heaven, and endanger our souls. It is better to give up a way of living, a trade, a profession, a business, a service, although our very livelihood depends on it, if by it we cannot avoid breaking the commands of God, going in opposition to His will, or leaving undone either the spirit or the letter of His plain requirements in the Gospel.

It is thus giving heed to the Gospel of Christ, that brings such commands before us, as will test our faith in God. The Lord has plainly said, that "He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me." Our dearest object of affection must not cross us in our path after Christ. These are our Isaacs that come between our souls and a close walk with Christ.

But once more we also learn, that often times what God enjoins us to do, will seem for the time, to clash with our strongest desires, to blast our best hopes, and overthrow our highest expectations. As in Abraham's case, His commands to us at such times, may seem to run counter to His own promises. We had hoped for something; even that which was good; to be obtained in a certain way; but God dashes the cup we are sipping from our

lips. Teaching us to believe in hope against hope,—to receive blessings in His way and His time, and not as we had marked out for ourselves.

But turn we now for a while to Abraham's faith, which gave such ready obedience to God's strange command.

We read of no delay. We are told of no hesitation. On the contrary: "Abraham rose up early in the morning, and took Isaac his son." This comes next in order to the command. He heard and understood God's word, and this was enough for him. It must be right to obey God, whatever my own desires may be. He was on this occasion as before, when greatly tried; "strong in faith, giving glory to God."

But, mark the special objects on which his faith relied. He believed God's power, God's faithfulness, God's love, and God's wisdom. As the apostle tells us, he "accounted that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from whence also he received him in a figure." His faith in God's power was so strong, that he believed if it were necessary for the performance of His promises, God would raise up his son from the dead,—and indeed already he received him back again in a figure, that is, not in reality, but in his own

mind, his faith saw him raised again. He knew God was Omnipotent. Nothing had hitherto been too hard for Him. The deadness of Sarah's womb had not staggered him before. Neither now should the deadness of his son stagger him, or prevent his believing that the same God could raise his son unto life again. It is faith in God's power, that makes His commandments easy. It is remembering and really believing, that all things on this earth are at His disposal. And by His might, He can bring about what He chooses for our good, that will make us run cheerfully in that way, that at first seems evil and painful. It is a God that "quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were,"—a God that is able out of evil to bring good, out of nothing to create all things; it is such a God demands obedience, and it is faith in such a God will give it.

And as to this, we can add He is a faithful God, so when He hath promised any thing, it is this gives us confidence even against hope, that there can be no let or hindrance to His will. He is faithful that has promised. And He is Almighty that has promised. Abraham knew this. God must keep His word; "In my seed the earth shall be blessed." Though I slay my seed, yet will I believe God will keep His word, for He is able to do so.

Oh ! the peace and comfort, and the strong assurance, when faith can thus see the power and the faithfulness of God, joined together as the foundation on which we are building our hopes. God hath said, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all other things shall be added unto you." What then, though in thus seeking God, I seem as though at first, I must leave all other things? God is able, for all things are His, and God is faithful, for He has promised to give me what I need, and I will therefore trust His word. God hath said, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." What then, though I may have to leave many earthly comforts; what though human friends forsake me, my God will take me up, He is able to make all things abound to me, I will therefore trust Him, and do as He requires.

So again, Abraham was obedient, because he believed in God's infinite love. This was a command that his friends would have loved him too well to enjoin him, had they been able, but was there less love in his God? That could not be. "God is love." His commandments cannot be against His love. All must be proofs of His love,—ways of showing His love. He would feel therefore, that as it was not a lack of love, that made him ever chasten his son Isaac, so neither was

it a lack of love, that made God appoint this trial for himself. Had God's love been seen in the gift of this son, God's love should also be seen in the withdrawal of that son. Did Sarah love her husband? Did Isaac love his father? God's love to His son Abraham, was stronger than either. Should he lose Sarah's love by this deed? Should he lose his son's affections with his life? God's love could make it up to him; he should be no real loser in the end, even as regarded his affections. It is thus we should believe in God's love to His children in Christ Jesus. They are told that all things work together for their good. They must believe that when they have to sacrifice so great or so many objects of love, that yet God's love demands the sacrifice, and His love will supply the place in their affections. He will Himself be more to them, than all they sacrifice for Him.

Finally, Abraham believed in God's infinite wisdom, and thereby was helped in his obedience. God's ways had often been too deep for him to fathom, but in the end they had proved to be wise,—infinitely wise. So now he could not see all God meant by this strange command, but as God's wisdom had planned it, there was some wise end to be gained by it. And it is thus that we as children, must bow

before the all wise counsels of our eternal Father. Does a child wait to understand the reason of everything, before it will obey its parent in anything? Shall it question why and how, before it will do as it is commanded? Why then should we expect to know all that God reveals of Himself, and of His will? We are children, we are "fools" and "babes." We cannot understand all earthly things,—how shall we understand all heavenly truth? One thing only let us ask, is this the will of God? Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? There are mysteries in God's providence, for the very trial of our faith. There are mysteries in His commands, for the very testing of our obedience. Like Abraham therefore, when the commandment is plain, let the obedience be prompt; and like Abraham we shall find, however mysterious the command,—however painful the trial,—yet as infinite wisdom has planned our path,—infinite power will uphold us in it, that infinite faithfulness may accomplish the purpose which infinite love has devised for us.

Lastly let us note, Abraham was a gainer by this act of obedience, and this trial of his faith. He received his son again; and with what increase of joy for the gift! With it, he received fresh assurances of God's love and

future purposes. With it, also, who can doubt, an increase of faith in that God that had tried, and thereby proved and strengthened his faith. And thus, "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation, for when he is tried (that is, when all his trials are ended), he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him." (James i. 12.)

Thus it was with Abraham, his faith was increased in that Redeemer in whom he was hoping, and whose sacrifice for sin he had now seen prefigured, in the sacrifice of his own son. "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day, he saw it and was glad." (John viii. 5, 6.)

And now, O reader, it is for you to ask, "Do I know what it is to walk in the steps of faithful Abraham, and to be blessed with his blessings?"

The blessings are inconceivably great and glorious, the road to them is very plain and simple. The blessings are righteousness and peace in Christ here, glory eternal hereafter. The way of obtaining them is by believing. "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth," this is justification by faith in the sight of God.

But let us ask if our faith is being proved

by works,—are we also with Abraham "justified by works?"

One thing we are sure of, if we have faith, that faith will be tried. We need trial to prove faith true, we need it to increase and strengthen it. Our trials of faith will differ according to our circumstances in life.

As we have said before, we all have something to give up for Christ's sake. God says to every returning sinner, "take now that evil habit, or that way of life which brings you into sin, or that indulged lust, and give it up at once." Have we proved our faith in such plain commands, by at once setting to work with prayer and watchfulness to give up what is thus required? Or are we like the young man in the Gospel, turning away sorrowful, because our heart is fixed on earthly treasure? Or like another, do we hesitate and say, "Lord suffer me first to enjoy this or that a little longer, and after that I will make the sacrifice?" (See Luke ix. 59.)

Our father Abraham did not do so, although it was not sin he was called on to give up. Our faith must be very unlike his, if we are hanging back from what conscience and God's word declare plainly He requires. Such faith is not real, is not living, is not saving. Real faith will make God's words concerning sin

more binding, and more able to persuade us, than our own love and inclination to sin. Living faith will make us more ready to please God by denying ourselves, than to please ourselves by fulfilling the lusts of the flesh. True faith will always say, "God's commandments are not grievous." This does not mean that obedience to them will always be without effort, without pain in crucifying the flesh, but it does mean that we should find a willingness of the spirit, making us earnestly desire to do as God says, because we are sure it is for our real interest so to do.

But there are other trials than these to which our faith will be brought. God not only tries it to make proof of its reality, but also to increase and strengthen it. "If need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations, that the trial of your faith being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ." (1 Peter i. 7.)

When there is a "NEED BE," God will try our faith. Our faith is so much mixed with unbelief; it is like gold, mixed with dross. The fire that tries it is affliction. It is a great mercy that our heavenly Father thus purifies our faith, so that when the Lord Jesus shall

appear, our faith shall appear real. We want a faith that will make Jesus precious now, and then we shall not be ashamed when He appears, but rejoice in His presence. We want a faith which while it glorifies God now, shall be found to glorify Jesus at that day, as the "Author and Finisher" of it. For this end there is a "need be" to have it tried. This is the reason of heaviness, sufferings, and bereavements which come upon the children of God. The Lord knows best if there is a "need be" in our cases. It is well that we are not left to choose for ourselves in this matter. We should not know what trial we needed. We should not appoint ourselves the right ones, any more than Abraham would have thought of his. But our "Father knoweth we have need of such things" as make for our eternal good. His wisdom plans what His love and tenderness appoints, and though the trial may be fiery, the blessing is only thus to be obtained, and is not to "be compared to the glory that shall be revealed in us."

Bless your God then, O reader, for all such trials. Put yourself willingly into His hands. Pray only to know His will. Ask for grace to follow it, that what He asks for, you may at once give up; where He leads, you may at once follow. Remember, He who tries gives

strength for the trial. "As thy days, so shall thy strength be." And if the trial is great, and the sorrow is much, the glory is greater, and the joy more abundant, when you shall "receive the end of your faith, even the salvation of your soul."

PRAYER.

O God of Abraham, and Father of the promised seed, even the Lord Jesus Christ, be pleased to incline thine ear to my petition. Teach me to profit by this example of faith which thou hast given me. Lead me and show me the way to walk in the steps of faithful Abraham. Thou hast said, they which be of faith shall be blessed with faithful Abraham. Give me his faith, that I may have his blessings. Cause me to rejoice in the blessedness of righteousness accounted to me. Give me a clean conscience by reason of the blood of sprinkling. Cause me to rejoice in a spirit without guile. Give me a clean conscience by

reason of the Spirit of holiness. Cause me to walk closely with thee, rejoicing in Christ Jesus, and having no confidence in the flesh. Give me grace to give obedience to all thy calls. May I shrink from no sacrifice which thy word enjoins. As Christ has given Himself for me, so may I give myself to Him, henceforth and for ever, through the same Jesus Christ my Saviour. AMEN.

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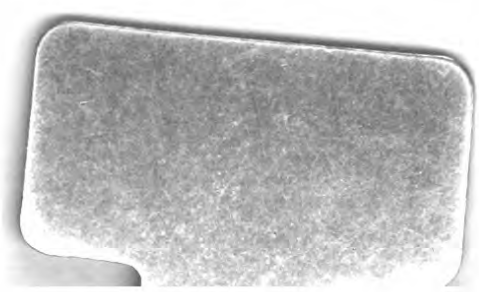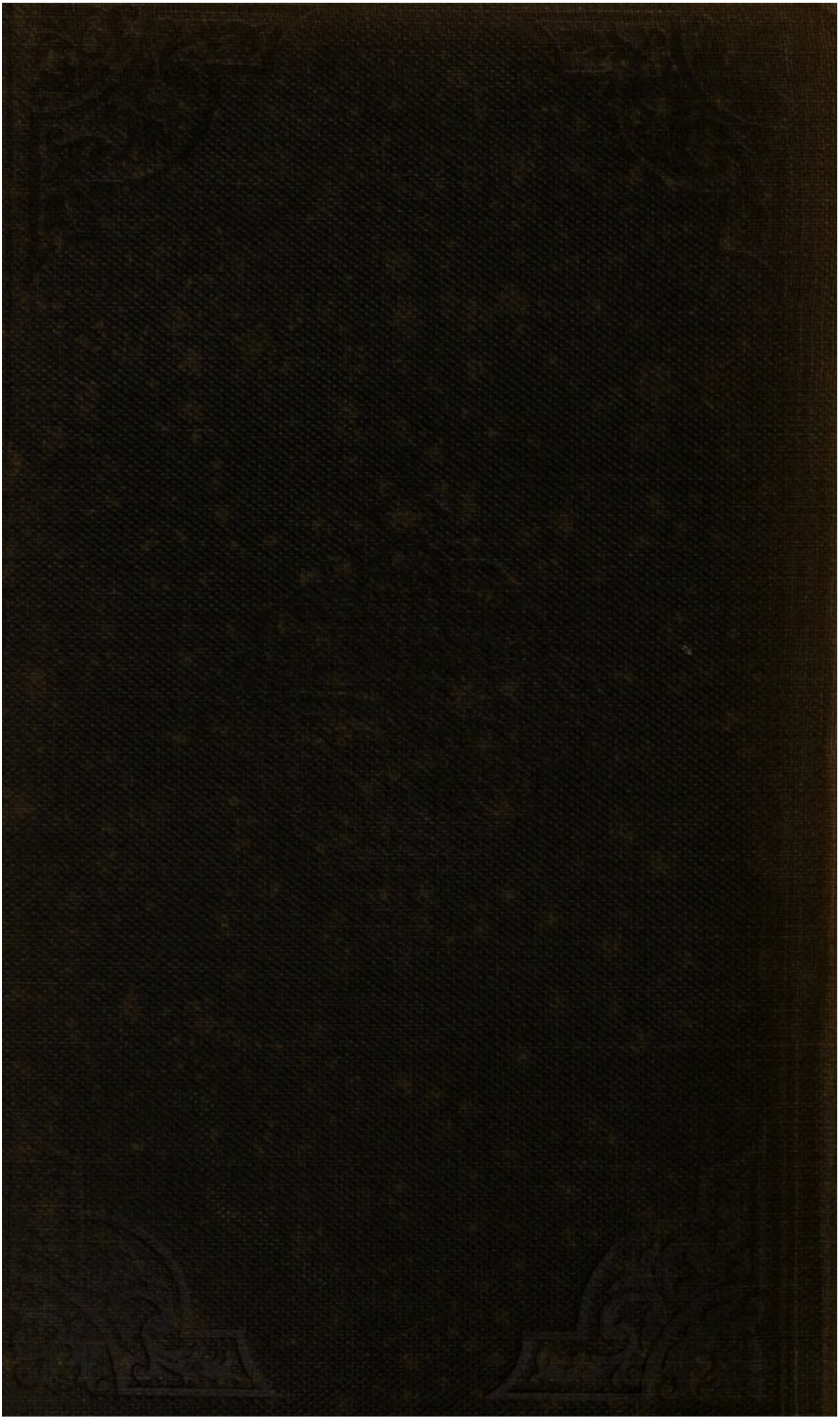
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