



Bodleian Libraries

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

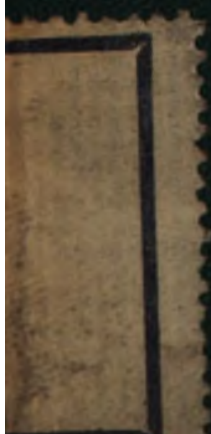
This book is part of the collection held by the Bodleian Libraries and scanned by Google, Inc. for the Google Books Library Project.

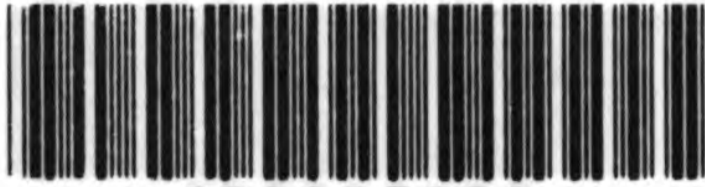
For more information see:

<http://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/dbooks>

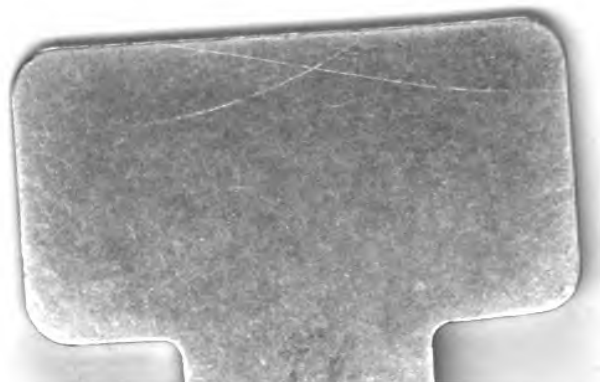


This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 2.0 UK: England & Wales (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) licence.





600095098.



JOY AND PEACE

IN BELIEVING.

4

JOY AND PEACE

IN BELIEVING;

OR,

HINTS FOR OBTAINING THIS
BLESSING.

LONDON :
JAMES NISBET AND CO. BERNERS STREET.

MDCCCXXXVII.

1268. f. 9

JOY AND PEACE

IN BELIEVING

JOY AND PEACE

IN BELIEVING:

OR.

WAYS FOR OBTAINING THIS
BLESSING.

LONDON

WHITNEY AND SONS, 15, NASSAU STREET.

M

12

9



JOY AND PEACE.



MY DEAR FRIEND,

You still write in depression of spirit. Alas, how I wish that I could comfort you! Most tenderly and deeply do I feel for you, and it is my constant prayer that your mourning sighs may soon be exchanged for songs of praise. It is however, delightful to reflect that you *have* a friend who can both sympathize with you, and richly comfort you, whose blessed office it is, to “bind up the broken hearted,” “to comfort all that mourn,” and to give “the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.”

What, then, is the only effectual way of obtaining comfort? It is, be assured, to acquire by the teaching of God’s Holy Spirit, an ever-increasing, experimental

knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. For what does St. Peter say? “Grace and *peace* be multiplied to you, *through* the *knowledge* of God, and of Jesus our Lord.” Nay I am almost certain, that all our sorrow, our doubts, and fears, arise from defective, cloudy views of our Lord Jesus Christ. Could we see him as he is, so able, so willing to save to the uttermost, so full of love to the most wretched, the most unworthy,—so long-suffering to the most provoking,—every other feeling would be swallowed up in admiration of his goodness, and we should be constrained to trust in him, to love him, and devotedly to obey him. It appears to me, that the whole of religion consists in obtaining a *true* knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. John xvii. 3. A true knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ would make sin appear unutterably odious, and most loathsome; consequently it would effectually humble the sinner;

while, at the same time, it would so convince him of the yearning compassion,—the melting pity—the overflowing love of the Saviour,—that instead of feeling paralyzed by guilt, and sinking into despondency, he would be compelled to arise, and devote himself to that adorable Being who so loved him. Let us then, my beloved friend, be more simple in our prayers, more simple in our object. Let our supplications,—our reading,—our meditations,—all have this one end in view—a clearer, deeper knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. Let us fix the eye of our mind so steadily upon him, that we may see but little else; and while our souls are thus waiting, watching, longing for the revelation of his glory, we shall assuredly see the cloud that now conceals him from our view begin to break away,—till at length it shall be wholly dissipated, and the Light of the world, the “Sun of Righteousness,” shall fully shine into our

souls, and fill them with joy and unutterable peace.

When the spirit is gloomy we are apt to fix our gaze intently on the dark cavern within, and perpetually to pore over its darkness, and misery; but light comes from above, not from within, and, consequently, this only increases the soul's distress. "The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord," and a short fervent prayer in this hour of darkness, that the expiring candle might again be lighted, that the dying lamp might be again trimmed, would be the most effectual way of making David's experience ours; "Thou wilt light my candle; the Lord my God will enlighten my darkness:" and we should feel with Micah, "When I sit in darkness the Lord shall be a light unto me; he will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold his righteousness."

"The entrance of thy words giveth

light ;” and if instead of despondingly poring over the dark recesses of sin, we were prayerfully to meditate on some passage of our blessed Saviour’s history, we should soon have reason to exclaim, “God is the Lord who hath shewed *me* light,” and we should then most ardently desire to be bound as a “living sacrifice” to the “horns of his altar,” with the holy “cords” of gratitude and love. *

I know, my dear friend, the absolute need of self-examination : but the interrogating of conscience as in the presence of God, previous to confession and prayer, is altogether a distinct exercise of the soul from the one I am now considering.

I am persuaded that our views of the Lord Jesus Christ are *indistinct* ; and that this will in a great measure account for the dulness of our minds, and the coldness of our spirits. We hear of his history as of a tale that is told ; and we feel that there is a

kind of mysterious grandeur about all that Jesus did and said; but we dwell not on each scene presented to us, till we fancy that we were present; and consequently, the effect made upon our minds is more that of a fine picture, than of a living reality. We do not seem to have seen him,—to have heard him, to have walked with him ourselves; and yet, a deeper meditation on every incident recorded, would doubtless in some degree produce this feeling.

It is a remarkable fact, that *every* application for help to our Lord when on earth, succeeded; while every thing he did, and said, was intended to encourage us to come to him, with the sure and certain hope of being graciously received; and yet, how slow are we to avail ourselves of this encouragement, and to cherish this hope! The truth is, we listen to our guilty suspicious hearts, instead of hearing the voice of Christ speaking to us in his

word and in his actions. “ Evil communications corrupt ;” and by thus holding communion with our unbelieving hearts, we are estranged from Christ our Saviour, instead of being drawn to him, and conversing *with him*. Oh, if we were but determined to break through every opposing barrier, and casting ourselves at his feet, to pour out our hearts before him, we should oftener hear him speak to us the words of mercy, forgiveness, and love ; while we should be constrained to reply, in the language of gratitude, adoring dependence, and praise.

What could the Lord do more to inspire our confidence and excite our praise ? When he walked upon the earth as God manifest in man, he heard, and accepted every prayer,—he relieved every want,—he soothed every sorrow,—he pitied every distress ; and yet, we will not trust in him ; we will not believe in his love to *us* ; we will

not believe that he hears *our* prayers—that he feels for *our* sorrows—and that he pities our distress, though we are told, he is “the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever:” we doubt, and we reason, instead of trusting and loving; and because we have not sensible comfort in our souls, we hastily conclude that we are shut out from his presence, and excluded from his love. We find, indeed, but too much cause for this exclusion in ourselves, and therefore we sit down in comfortless, helpless, despondency; whereas, if we simply depended upon the word of that “God who cannot lie,” if we meditated on his glorious character as it was manifested upon the earth in the Man Christ Jesus, we should feel compelled to “hope,” though it might seem to our unbelieving hearts, “against hope;” and the mists of doubt, and the dark vapours of sin, would melt away before the light of his mercy, and the warmth of his love.

Nothing gives such activity to the soul as a spirit of praise. If we wish to realize the truth of that beautiful promise, "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary—they shall walk and not faint;" we must obtain a spirit of praise and thanksgiving. It is this, and this alone, which causes the soul to mount up with wings as eagles. When a fervent spirit of praise has been excited in the soul, it can no longer stay on earth; the Divine Spirit takes it as it were on his holy wings, bears it up to the throne of God, and lays it at the feet, and sometimes even in the bosom of Christ. It is not wonderful then, my beloved friend, that our great enemy should endeavour, in every possible way, to prevent our obtaining this blessed spirit of praise. "We are not ignorant of his devices." Hence, he is ever seeking to cloud our

minds with doubts of the love of God our Saviour; though it would almost seem impossible for any to doubt that love, after the stupendous, unanswerable proof of it to which our Saviour himself refers us, John xv. 13. And when we take a review of the past, of our own individual history, it seems equally impossible to doubt that love, which has patiently borne with such ingratitude—which has so tenderly watched over such forgetfulness—which has healed the sickness, and assuaged the sorrow of the being who cannot trust him,—which has checked in sin, and strengthened in temptation,—which has allured by promises, and stimulated by example, till the same doubting, distrusting being has been led earnestly to “enquire the way to Zion.” Oh! we wrong, we basely injure our Saviour, by doubting his love, his yearning tenderness to us. Why are we still on mercy’s ground? why does the Spirit

still strive in our hearts? why is the gate of heaven still set open before us, if the Lord be not willing and desirous that we should enter there? Oh! my beloved friend, as we love our souls, and as we wish for heaven, let us guard against despondency: it unnerves the the soul—it chills the affections—it clouds the mind—it dishonours God. We shall never be active, zealous, devoted Christians, till we are happy in God; we shall never be happy in God while we give way to despondency. God our Saviour might well address us in these words, “What could have been done more to my vineyard that I have not done in it? wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth” the fruits of praise, and thanksgiving, and joy, brought it forth the poisonous weeds of doubt, and distrust, and unbelief? Oh! my friend, despondency, if indulged, will prove as night-shade to the soul—then root it out;

and more thickly sow instead, the seed of the blessed promises.

I am convinced, that if we were to meditate deeply upon what is related of our Saviour's human life, we should find matter of encouragement from even those words and actions, that on a cursory view seem calculated to have a contrary effect. I have been much struck with the truth of this remark as respects the story of the woman of Canaan. I never felt satisfied with the explanation usually given of our Lord's conduct to her. There always appeared to me something so harsh, so severe in our Lord's answers, something so inconsistent with his usual condescending and gracious words, that my mind was not relieved, and my heart was not comforted by the assurance, that he thus tried the poor suppliant's faith, in order that he might prove it and reward it; and that he thus painfully exercised her feelings to encourage his

people to persevere in prayer. Doubtless, this is the grand lesson to be learnt from the story, but this does not soothe our Lord's rebuke, or soften his expressions. Hence, this beautiful little narrative never came home to me with that healing power which it has afforded to many. I was meditating on it one day, when it struck me, that the whole story exquisitely described the state of a Christian during his days of trial. This thought was the key which unlocked to *me* the rich treasure of comfort contained in this short, but deeply interesting passage of the word of God. It explained fully our Lord's answers: love and the most tender mercy again breathed in every word; and the Saviour again appeared in all his touching sympathy and goodness. As man, he saw only the poor suffering woman of Canaan; but as God, he beheld the tears, the bursting sighs of all his afflicted ones to the end of the world, and he wished to prove that he "knew

their sorrows," by anticipating and delineating the exercises of their minds when bowed down by depression and trial.

And when do we most earnestly "cry for mercy?" When we are most "grievously vexed" by the devil,—when the fiery darts of the wicked one are cast in quick succession at our souls, and we seem to have no "shield" interposed to protect them,—when the "prince of the power of the air" stirs up a mighty tempest around and within, and we feel just ready to sink in the waters of sin, and to be swallowed up in the billows of despair. The mind has been awakened to see the danger and the guilt of sin; it is anxious to flee to Him who alone can save; it breaks many of the chains which bound it to the world; it hastens to embark with the people of God, and to sail to the haven of eternal rest! But Satan has closely watched the captive; and scarcely has

the shore been left, when clouds and mists obscure the heavenly ray which had lured it on. The stormy wind of temptation arises; the billows of corruption begin to roll; and the earnest cry for mercy arises from the tempest-tossed spirit. The cry is earnest,—is fervent;—yet Jesus answers not a word: the tempest is unabated, the storm unhushed. What then is the language of the soul? “Ah, I am not a child of God! and Jesus is not sent to me. He hears the cry of his children; but I belong not to that blessed number, and a “cloud” of sin “covers my prayer,” that it cannot rise to heaven. He is merciful to the house of Israel, to his own dear people: he relieves their wants, strengthens their weakness, comforts their sorrows, subdues their sin, and hears their prayers; but I cannot expect him to do all this for an outcast like myself. Alas! what would I not give to possess an interest in such a Saviour! but he is not sent to me.” Yet

while the soul is thus depressed, if God have touched it with his grace, if he have breathed into it the breath of spiritual life, that life must find action in prayer. The Spirit purchased by the blood of Jesus hath been given to it ; and that Spirit is a Spirit of grace and supplication. Zech. xii. 10. It is never silent ; it is the voice of God speaking to and in the soul ; and that voice must be heard on high. Hence, whatever may be the temporary discouragement in prayer, the soul can only find relief in renewed applications to the throne of grace. The very contemplation of what Jesus is to *his people*, excites a more fervent desire for an interest in those rich blessings ; and again falling before the mercy seat, it sends forth the earnest heart-felt cry of “ Lord help ME : ” — though not one of the children of God, — though not belonging to the “ house of Israel.” Is the soul then answered with an answer of peace ? Generally speaking, not ; for faith

and humility, patience, and hope, have not yet been sufficiently strengthened, and therefore they must be further exercised. Instead of the blessed revelation of the Lord Jesus in all his power and willingness to save, the Spirit frequently casts a stronger light on the dark recesses of sin. More of the innate depravity of the soul is manifested;—more vivid remembrances of past guilt are given;—more of the awful nature of sin is revealed; and the soul is made to feel itself so unworthy, so unholy, so grovelling, so vile, that it is compelled to confess, that “it is not meet” to ask God to love so polluted a thing;—“it is not meet” to ask him to feed so depraved a being with the “Living Bread” which came down from heaven; and yet,—it cannot keep from the throne. Again, falling at the feet of Jesus, it ingenuously owns its past and present guilt. It meekly says “Truth,” to all the accusations of Satan,—to the

reproofs of the Spirit, and to the censures of the word of God: but still, its mouth is filled with arguments,—with pleas for mercy, to that God, who “makes his sun to shine upon the evil and the good,” and who “sendeth rain upon the just and the unjust;” above all, to that God, who when we were *enemies*, reconciled us to himself, by the death of his only and dearly beloved Son! It has been observed by a holy man, that wherever God gives his love, he also gives a spirit of persevering prayer; and that to such a soul the promise shall surely be fulfilled, “They shall follow on, they shall know the Lord.” Oh! who would not patiently endure days of darkness; who would not bear the tempest’s rage; who would not be tossed on the billows of sorrow and of trial, to hear at last Jesus speaking from the throne of God; nay, to hear him saying in his inmost soul, “Be it unto thee even as thou wilt?” Then Satan

is rebuked,—then the kiss of peace is given,—then, rejoicing in the light of his countenance, and embraced in the arms of his mercy, the soul has a foretaste of heaven, and the haven of eternal rest already seems in view. And thus it will ever be to the humble, praying Christian ; and with such blessed encouragement “ to pray, and not to faint,” can we suffer our hands to hang down, and our hearts to despond? No ; let the idea that Christ’s eye is fixed upon us, animate us to imitate the woman of Canaan,—to trust in his mercy,—to believe in his love, and to look for a smile from that gracious countenance, though now it seem to be turned away from us.

It may tend to enlarge our conceptions of that bliss, which is in store for the children of God, when we reflect, that the greatest comfort, the sweetest peace, and the brightest hope enjoyed by them on

earth, are but as *crumbs* of mercy and of love, falling from that rich banquet, which the Saviour has spread above, to feast his own throughout eternity. "They shall eat, and drink at my table, in my kingdom." Then shall every soul be more than satisfied; for every faculty shall be enlarged by Almighty power, and every affection shall be filled by Almighty love! God shall not only be around, but within us; and each shall then learn by blessed experience, what it is to be "filled with the fulness of God:" while all united together with the closest bonds of sympathy and love, the rejoicing company shall form one vast temple, an eternal "habitation of God, through the Spirit." We shall then in a peculiar manner, "enter into the joy of our Lord;" not from sympathy alone, or congeniality of tastes, but being made one with him, and completely filled by his Spirit, his own joy will be communicated to us and in

the perpetual enlargement of the soul to receive more and more of his influences, more bliss continually will be poured in; ever renewing the songs of rapturous praise.

If solitude should ever be sought in the bowers above, a temporary absence from that rejoicing multitude, surely it will be to muse the more intensely on the past; that even the brightness of the present glory may be heightened, by contrasting it with the dark shadows of time; that the rest of heaven may even seem still more sweet, by comparing it with the toils and labours of the weary pilgrimage on earth:—and how will such a review cause the soul to swell with gratitude, as it dwells with amazement and wonder on that surpassing love, which taught its wandering feet to reach that blest abode! —But no,—not even on such occasions will there be solitude in heaven; at such a

time the Saviour will be peculiarly present to receive the bursting thanksgiving, and to listen to the soul-felt praise. But *we* have not yet attained that blissful shore: the dark waters of Jordan still roll between us. We are still in this wilderness world, surrounded by danger, temptation, and trial, and we want encouragement to trust in the love of that gracious Being, who hath declared, "he that *putteth his trust* in me, SHALL possess the land, and SHALL inherit my holy mountain." That encouragement we may find in every page of his divine word, if we read it with an unprejudiced mind, and prayerful spirit. Let us then, dearest, turn to that word, and see what comfort you and I may derive from it. But let us read it with faith, and deep reverence, receiving every promise and every invitation, as a message sent to *us* by the Most High God without suffering our unbelieving hearts or desponding minds, to suggest any comment.

We are perfectly convinced, that when the Lord Jesus Christ died upon the cross, and thus offered himself up, as a victim to the justice of Almighty God, he made a full, perfect, and sufficient atonement for the sins of the whole world. We are equally convinced, that by his perfect fulfilment of the holy law of God, the Lord Jesus has wrought out so spotless a righteousness, that it gives to the believer a title to the kingdom of glory, God graciously enabling him to "lay hold" of it by faith, and condescending to impute it to him as his own. We also believe, that, purchased by the blood of the Son of God, the Holy Spirit descends into the hearts of those, who earnestly pray for his divine influence, in the name of the Lord Jesus, that by his mighty energy, he new creates the soul, communicating to it a principle of spiritual life, causing holy affections to spring up in the moral desert, and uprooting by degrees, those poisonous weeds which

had overspread it. Thus it is made, "to bud and blossom as the rose;" the lovely flowers of grace appear, and the fragrance of a thankful, grateful heart ascends to heaven. The seeds thus sown by his hand, are incessantly watered* by his care, till fully prepared for the garden above, they are transplanted to the paradise of God, to bloom with increased beauty and fragrance under the *unclouded* shining of the "Sun of Righteousness."

Of all these blessed truths we are deeply convinced, and therefore we need not at present turn to the Scriptures to have them confirmed. What we want especially to know is, whether *we* have an interest in all these things? whether *our* sins are washed away in the blood of the Lord Jesus? We wish to know if *we* may look up to God as a reconciled Father? if

* I will water it every moment. Isaiah li. 3.
lviii. 11.

we may lay hold of the Saviour's righteousness, and depend upon the Spirit as *our* sanctifier? To solve these doubts, and to answer these important questions, let us turn to the messages which the Most High God hath sent us; but let us *simply* receive them, without adding any of our own reasonings to them. And O! may the divine Comforter, bring them home with great power to our hearts!—Dearest, this is written after *earnest* prayer. Oh! read it with prayer! As we are searching for encouragement to trust in the mercy and love of God, we will first turn to the broadest invitations, and the most unlimited assurances of welcome from the Lord our Saviour.

“Look unto me, and be ye saved *all* the ends of the earth; for I am God.” “I will seek that which was *lost*, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and

will strengthen that which was sick.”
 “Come unto me, all ye that labour and
 are *heavy laden* ; and I will give you rest.”
 “For the son of man is come to seek, and
 to save that which was *lost*.” “*Whosoever*
 shall call on the name of the Lord *shall*
 be saved.” “Ho, *every one* that thirsteth,
 come ye to the waters, and he that hath
 no money ; come ye, buy, and eat ; *yea,*
come, buy wine and milk without money
 and without price.” “Incline your ear,
 and *come* unto me : hear, and your soul shall
 live.” “And the *Spirit* and the Bride say,
Come. And let him that heareth, say,
Come. And let him that is athirst *Come.*
 And *whosoever will,* let him take the water
 of life *freely.*” “This is a faithful saying,
 and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ
 Jesus came into the world to save *sinners.*”
 “Who will have *all* men to be saved, and
 come to the knowledge of the truth.”
 “Who gave himself a ransom for all.”
 “And he died for all.” “As I live, saith

the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked ; but that the wicked turn from his way, and live ; turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways : for why will ye die.” “ Peace, peace to him that is far off, and to him that is near, saith the Lord ; and I will heal him.”

Is it not impossible to read these messages, sent to us by God, without feeling that *we* are invited to participate in all the rich blessings of the gospel. The *last* charge of our Lord to his apostles, before he ascended to his glorious heaven, was, to “preach the gospel to *every creature*,” and therefore you, and I, are permitted to receive it, as addressed to ourselves ; and surely, if we had been privileged to word the invitations, so as to afford us the greatest encouragement, we could not have made them more free, more full, more unlimited. They are unrestricted by any condition ; and addressed to *all*, without any reference

to the past history of any individual : while all must feel, that in one or other of these gracious messages, their case is described, and consequently that they are included. Such mercy, such love from a holy Lord God, is indeed most wonderful, most astonishing ! But shall the greatness of his kindness make us doubt it ? shall we add to all our other sins, that of insulting our gracious God by disbelieving his word ? God forbid. Rather let us with deep humility of soul “lay hold” on that gracious hand which is now stretched out to us in forgiveness and peace ; and believing that “he calleth *us*,” to his kingdom and glory, let us with deep self-abasement, but with lively faith, commit our souls into his watchful care, with the comforting assurance, that He loveth us, and that He will give us both grace and glory.

But our most gracious God is not contented with sending us these blessed mes-

sages of mercy and forgiveness. He knows the suspicious, doubting nature of the guilty heart; and how difficult it is for a sinner awakened to feel his danger, enlightened to see his sin, and made sensible of the claims of his holy Lord God,—how difficult it is for such an one to *lay hold* of his mercy, and believe in his love; and, therefore, with his own gracious condescension, he draws a picture of what sin is in his sight; from which degraded as we are, we yet turn away with loathing. But the Lord describes the sinner at his worst state, and adds, “*Thou refusedst to be ashamed.*” And how does he endeavour to melt the hardness of such a heart? By sending the most endearing message of mercy! It would have been much indeed had he simply given such a being permission to fall at his footstool and to sue for mercy with all the shame and agony of a condemned criminal:—but what is the message of God? “Wilt thou

not from this time cry unto me, “ My *Father*, thou art the guide of my youth !” Could there be a more exquisite manner of inspiring hope in the most desponding, than to own that endearing relationship which the trembling sinner dares not claim, even in the name of Jesus, and to offer to be the all-wise, the all-gracious and almighty guide, who will conduct the lost one safely in the path of life ? “ Good and gracious is the Lord : therefore will he teach sinners in the way.” Yet, to make these gracious words available to the comfort of all, he again describes the character of the sinner he has found, and with the usual word demanding deep attention, adds, “ Behold, thou hast *spoken* and *done evil* things as thou couldst ;”—and then follows another message of mercy ; —“ and I said, *after* she had done all these things, Turn thou unto me.”

But even this is not enough : there is a

case of deeper guilt, and of greater hopelessness,—the case of those who have been instructed in the love of God, and have been blest with the example of Christian friends, who for a while seemed walking in the same blessed path, but who from unwatchfulness, and unprayerfulness, have declined in their souls, and have not acted up to the light they have received ; and a message of tender mercy is sent even to them ; “ Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord.” Such may well be depressed with the feeling, that they have in a peculiar manner done despite to the Spirit of grace, that they have especially grieved the Lord who bought them from death with his blood. In a peculiarly painful manner they have dishonoured his service ; for they have proved by their conduct, that they do not consider it sufficient to make them happy ! And must not such a Master, so “ rich ” in blessings to “ all that call upon him,” feel particularly slighted, and

injured, by so ungrateful and so ungracious a return for all his goodness? Undoubtedly he must: yet still he yearns with compassion over the perishing soul; he knows the advantage which Satan will take in this hour of darkness; how he will draw such a character of God, as suits his own despairing spirit; how he will direct the sinner's eye to the holiness of the Most High, while he seeks to shroud the light of his love, and forgiving mercy; and therefore, he not only prepares the way for the sorrowing one to return, but he increases in tenderness, and owns a still more touching relationship even than before, "Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord; for I am *married* unto you: and I will bring you to Zion." But the omniscient God who searcheth the "dark heart" of man, knows the subtle, and tenacious character of unbelief; how it reasons, and fears; but will not honour God by simply receiving his divine, and gracious words. The soul

looks within, instead of to heaven; and retraces the past, instead of dwelling in humility and faith upon the future. It argues, and doubts in a manner in which our gracious God has anticipated, “But I said *how* shall I put *thee* among the *children*, and give *thee* a pleasant land, a goodly heritage of the hosts of nations?” Is not this just the language of a desponding sinner? “Oh! it would be presumption for so ungrateful, so depraved a being as myself to hope to be put among the beloved and dutiful children of the most holy God! And how does the Lord meet this objection? By removing the difficulty and promising *freely* to bestow the loving, dutiful spirit of adoption; “Thou shalt call me, *My Father*; and shalt not turn away from me.” And then he repeats his gracious invitation, “Return ye backsliding children, and *I* will *heal* your backslidings.” Even the desponding, sin-convinced, and doubting sinner is at length overcome by such graciousness,

and replies, “ Behold, we come unto thee, for thou art the Lord *our* God.” And shall we not suffer this Scripture so expressly written for our instruction,* to produce the same happy effect upon us, and bring us to the mercy seat, with the same language on our lips, and the same feeling of holy confidence in our hearts?

But the Lord has not been contented even with all this. He knows the power of *hope*—the blessed effect of trusting in his love,—and therefore, for the encouragement of ALL, he has caused two cases to be recorded in his word, which are calculated to inspire hope in the most desponding; the case of a most awfully hardened sinner, and the case of a grievous backslider, who both obtained mercy, and rejoiced in the full and free forgiveness of our holy Lord God, our Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier.

* Romans xvi. 4.

The first case is that of Manasseh ; and it is one of most aggravated wickedness. Few persons have been born under happier auspices, or in circumstances more favorable to early piety than Manasseh. His excellent father had restored, in all their holy and imposing solemnity, the long neglected services of the temple. A peculiar blessing from heaven had attended his first celebration of the Passover. We are told that numbers even in Israel, “ humbled themselves,” and returned to seek the God of their fathers ; and that, “ In Judah the hand of God, was to give them one heart ;” so that Hezekiah rejoiced, when he saw how the Lord “ had prepared the people.” “ A great number of priests also, sanctified themselves,” and the “ Levites were even more upright in heart to sanctify themselves than the priests ;” “ and they arose, and blessed the people, and their voice was *heard*, and their prayer came up to his holy place,

even unto heaven." The effect of this earnest seeking after their long-forgotten, but all gracious God, was great "gladness of heart." He accepted their services, owned them as his people, and caused "great joy" to be felt in Jerusalem. They returned from the holy solemnities with hearts full of devotedness to their forgiving God; and without delay, destroyed every vestige of idolatry in the land.

But it was even in a still more favoured hour than this, that Manasseh was born: it was when the faith of his father and his people had been proved and strengthened by trial, when their gratitude and love had been warmly called forth by the visible interposition of the God of heaven on their behalf, and he had proved himself mighty to save those who put their trust in him, by sending an angel from his presence, to summon the Assyrian host to his own awful judgment seat! The nations around were for awhile ashamed

of their idolatries, and were compelled to give glory to the King of Heaven; they “brought gifts unto the Lord to Jerusalem,” and “presents” to his highly favoured servant Hezekiah. The astonishing story must have been often related to Manasseh in childhood, and thus his young mind would early be impressed with the greatness and power of the Lord God of his father; while, doubtless, Hezekiah often took his loved one on his knee, and told him of his sickness unto death, and of his miraculous recovery; and thus the little child would learn that the God of Israel is a merciful and gracious Lord God. The intimation Hezekiah had received of future events, must have made him doubly anxious about his child’s spiritual welfare; and, indeed, to judge of the *tenderness* with which he fulfilled this duty, we have only to refer to his touching appeal to the Levites, when trying to awaken them to turn to their God;

while we may judge of the *zeal*, with which he performed it, by considering his beautiful address to those who had departed from their allegiance to his family, and who were apparently given up to idolatry. But Manasseh had more than his father to instruct him in the things of God. He had the heaven-inspired Isaiah, whose lips had been touched with a "live coal from off the altar," and whose eye had "seen the King, the Lord of hosts!"

With these great advantages, it would have been a sad proof of ingratitude, and hardness of heart, had the young prince been only lukewarm in the service of that God, who had so blest his father; and yet, when called upon to govern the people of the Lord, whose hearts had been so happily turned to their Creator, what was his conduct? With the whole weight of his influence and authority, he led them back to the service of devils! "He built

again the high places, which Hezekiah his father had broken down, and he reared up altars for Baalam and made groves." And as if that were not enough, he set up idolatrous altars even in the two courts of the house of the Lord. He then proceeded to murder his own children in the most cruel manner, and publicly sacrificed them to devils. Indeed he proved to all his people, that he gloried in his alliance with the demons of darkness, by seeking to hold communion with them in every possible way ; " He used enchantments, and used witchcraft, and dealt with a familiar spirit, and with wizards." We can scarcely fancy any wickedness, any impiety going beyond this. But Manasseh was in close league with the hateful enemy of the most high God, and that evil spirit readily suggested a more daring deed, a more awful insult to the King of heaven !

The Lord of hosts had condescended to

take possession of the house that had been built to his name, and had filled it with his glory: in this house, therefore, an especial insult might be offered to his Divine Majesty: accordingly, an idol was made, and brought into the *house of the Lord*; and where his people, his highly-favoured and much loved people, had so lately offered him the incense of penitent prayer and heartfelt praise, even there, did Manasseh cause them to bow down to the carved image which he had made. Oh! the wonderful patience, the astonishing forbearance of the Lord our God! We wonder that (as in the case of Uzziah) the leprosy does not rise up in his forehead, or that the thunderbolt does not summon the awful transgressor to the bar of his insulted Judge! But no,—a message of warning, of gracious expostulation, is sent him instead by his long-suffering God, “and the Lord spake to Manasseh and to his people: but they would not hearken.” Nay, more than this, he then even added to all his other sins, that of slaying the Lord’s messengers; and

doubtless, many others also, who continued faithful to their God, for it is said, "He shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another." The Lord then brought upon him the enemies he had threatened, and the host of the king of Assyria, carried him bound as a captive to Babylon. What must then have been the reflections of the fettered king of Judah ! In loneliness and in darkness, he was compelled to reflect. The awful fulfilment of the last message sent him by his justly offended God, must have proved to him the mighty power of Jehovah, that he was truly the God of the whole earth, and that his threatenings are not to be despised. Then must all the awful past have arisen in dreadful array before him ; " he had seduced the Lord's people to sin more than the heathen !" The demon of darkness, that he had so fearfully sought, was with him in this dreadful hour, to lash him into madness

with remorse, and goad him to despair! Yet, one little ray of light darted across this soul, darker in guilt and misery than even the dungeon in which it was confined: it was a ray from heaven, and it was a ray of *hope*. Why had he not been cut off? Why was his life prolonged? The same mighty arm that had hurled him from his throne, might have cast him into the pit of eternal destruction. And, doubtless, the days of childhood returned to memory and he recalled all that he had heard of the graciousness, and mercy, and love of that mighty God to all who put their trust in him. *Then* Manasseh was encouraged to pray: *then* the blessed ray that had shewn him the mercy-seat, became brighter, and as his hope increased, his contrition and penitence deepened; “He *humbled* himself *greatly* before the God of his fathers.” And oh! the forgiving, gracious character of our holy Lord God! “He was entreated of him and heard his supplication, and brought

him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom." Then Manasseh knew that the Lord he was God." Now, dearest, why was this written? "That *we* through comfort of the Scriptures might have HOPE."

The other case is that of a grievous backslider. To enter in any degree into the peculiar ingratitude which stamped David's sad departure from his God, we must dwell on every page of his history ; we must meditate on the wondrous goodness which had followed him all the days of his life ; and the review of which so often caused his heart to swell with praise and rapturous thanksgiving.

In the hour of danger and difficulty his mighty God had ever been near to defend and direct him : in the hour of trial and sorrow his *gracious* God had ever drawn near to comfort and cheer him. When hunted as a partridge on the mountains, and apparently forsaken by man, the desolate

wilderness was made as the garden of Eden to his soul, and in the abundant revelations of heaven, he forgot all the distresses of earth; the desert was lighted up with the glory, and filled with the presence of his faithful God, whose footsteps of mercy he delighted to trace, and whose tender care for his creatures was manifested in all around him. Who can read Psalms, civ. and lxxxiv. without feeling, that even in exile and in solitude, David was the highly-favoured servant of the Most High? But more than this; who can tell the holy rapture that filled his soul when the spirit of prophecy unfolded to his view the glories of Messiah's kingdom, and *David's Lord* was revealed to him as *David's son*? We may in some little degree understand the feelings which overflowed in Psalms viii. and ciii.

But David was “delivered from all his enemies,” and “brought to honour on every side;” when overwhelmed with a sense

of the goodness of his God, he called upon all his people “to give thanks unto the Lord, and call upon his name, to *remember* the marvellous works that he had done,” to “give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name, and to worship him in the *beauty of holiness.*” It was after this that the Lord his God sent him so gracious a message, that David was overpowered by his undeserved goodness and kindness. He was constrained to arise and go to the house of his God, where with astonishment and praise, he reminded the Lord of his own promises, and with adoring gratitude dwelt upon the wondrous love that had been shewn him. Oh! who then can describe the manner in which David must have grieved the Holy Spirit by his sad and dreadful fall! Evidently he had previously greatly declined in his zeal and devotedness to his great Benefactor; for we find that, instead of leading the hosts of Israel against the enemies of the

Lord, he suffered them to be commanded by another, while he followed his own pleasures, and “tarried behind in Jerusalem.” How quickly does indolence lead to sin! and how fearfully does one sin lead on to another. Yet we hear of no penitence—of no sense of guilt. The spirit of darkness had so clouded his mind and benumbed his conscience, that all was awful apathy and spiritual stupor: the light of heaven had been withdrawn, and he was shrouded in the vapours of sin, and enveloped in the thick mists of unbelief. Oh! the tender mercy, the graciousness of God! he forsook not his guilty sin-stained servant; he left him not in the sleep of death; he sent his prophet to arouse and awaken his soul: and when the charge of guilt was brought home to him, light from heaven flashed conviction on his conscience, and shewed him the deep and awful abyss of iniquity within. Oh! who can tell the agonies of that moment, when, with all the powers of re-

turning spiritual life, David was fully awakened to see his guilt in all its fearful extent; when all the benefits,—the goodness,—the sweet and intimate communion he had been permitted to enjoy with his God, came bursting on his memory? And then, would the foul dishonour, the base ingratitude with which he had repaid that gracious God, come with the sickness of death over his soul! Doubtless he was overwhelmed with “a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation.”

We may gather from the words, so few and yet so full, that burst in anguish from his heart, that these were indeed his feelings; “I have sinned against the LORD.” And that Lord, who read the agony of his soul with a compassion only divine, immediately comforted him with an assurance of forgiveness,—and thus he was strengthened to hear the sad consequences that would result from his sin.

Now, why was this related? The fall of a man so highly favoured by the God of heaven, has furnished many a scoff to the infidel, and many a jest to the blasphemer. It was written, because the tears of the contrite, and the sighs of a spirit wounded with a sense of sin, are precious in the eyes of the Lord of Hosts, and because he graciously wishes to inspire such with *hope*, that they may immediately return to the mercy seat.

But it is not only in these instances that the graciousness of our God appears; and this brings me to another strong ground we have for encouragement from the *character* of our God. We have seen the messages of mercy he has sent us,—so full, so free, that they include *all*; and if we study his divine character as it is manifested in the Scriptures, we shall find that his words of mercy and of love are but as so many reflections

of his own most gracious image ; and thus we shall be sweetly drawn to trust in his mercy and *believe* in his love. We know so very little of God, because we do not thus study him that we might really become acquainted with him. We suffer our own evil and unbelieving hearts to draw a picture of Him, on which we look, instead of fixing our eye intently on the one portrayed by his own divine Spirit. The argument of encouragement drawn from the gracious character of God, we should feel to be irresistible every day of our life. If we were plunged into circumstances of great difficulty and distress, and there were a person in our neighbourhood of great influence and authority who could effectually assist us, but with whom we were utterly unacquainted, how industriously would we seek to inform ourselves of his character ; and if it were one of great generosity and liberal

kindness, how unhesitatingly would we cast ourselves on his benevolence. But oh! what is the kindness of man, compared with that wondrous goodness and long suffering which the Lord has shewn our wretched race from the first moment of the fall. Though a holy and sin-hating God, yet does his astonishing forbearance and tender pity for the sinner break forth in gleams of light in every page of man's dark history. Do we not see the graciousness of his divine character appear, in his immediately calming the terror of our first parents, when he so unexpectedly, changed the dark and awful anticipations of guilt into praise and thanksgiving, for so wonderful and undeserved a deliverance? We see again the same long suffering manifested in his gentle expostulation with the rebellious and unbelieving Cain, who had refused to worship the Lord in the way which he had appointed,—the *only* way

by which a sinner can draw near to the mercy-seat,—by the blood of atonement. Was there not also tender compassion shewn in suffering that awful, unknown, dreadful evil, death, to take its first victim from the family of God, that thus our first parents might be comforted while viewing their own fearful deed, with the thought that their lost one was taken to the bosom of Christ, and rejoicing in the paradise of God? And “when *all* flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth” and “God saw that the wickedness of man was great, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was *only evil* ;” when the whole world was one awful scene of abomination and bloodshed, and the Lord resolved to take such sinners from the “earth which they defiled,”—oh ! how did his divine compassion shine forth, in causing his Spirit* to strive with, to

* 1 Pet. lii. 18, 19.

warn, and to instruct the wretched beings for 120 years more, “while the ark was preparing,” in which he saved the few who loved him and called upon his name. Nor can we read the account of the care which he took of this little family, without feeling how tenderly gracious is our God.

Even those things which appear to us to be rather hard requirements, on meditation will be found proofs of love,—such as the calling of Abraham from his country, and kindred, and father’s house. Such a separation from his idolatrous relations might be absolutely necessary for the preservation of Abraham’s faith, and doubtless saved him from far more acute trials and temptations than those to which he was exposed on leaving them. And the being made to feel so entirely dependent upon his God for every thing, must have greatly increased his spiritual-mindedness ;

by which no doubt he was prepared for those richer blessings which were in store for him. And when the faith of his servant was weak, and he could not trust the God that had been his guide, and guardian, and "Friend," yet how did that gracious God watch over his happiness, and restore him the wife that he loved. We shrink from the trial imposed on Abraham, in the command to sacrifice his only child; yet, surely, it was not only to try his faith, and test his obedience, that the Lord gave that command; infinite love to Abraham's soul may be discovered even here.

We must not forget, that the God who appointed the trial, communicated grace proportionate to it. The apostle tells us that Abraham was comforted with the full assurance that God would restore him his Isaac; and this will account for his words to the young men at parting. But could Abraham ever forget the feelings with which

he ascended that mountain? Could he ever forget the anguish with which he “stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son?” The angel of heaven forbad the deed in the moment of agony, and the tears of sorrow were quickly exchanged for songs of praise. But when the awful hour of this world’s atonement came,—when the Lord of Hosts took the sword of retributive justice into his own almighty hand—though he beheld his son, his only son—“his elect, in whom his soul delighted,” bleeding, from agony, at his feet, yet he withdrew it not till he had plunged it into the SOUL* of his “beloved one.” To Abraham was unfolded by the Lord the glorious plan of man’s redemption: and could Abraham ever forget his Saviour’s love? could he ever think of Mount Moriah without having his whole soul drawn out in gratitude to his God? That such were the impressions made on

* Isaiah liii. 5, 7, 10, 11.

his mind by the scene, we may gather from his words, "The Lord will provide." Doubtless he looked beyond the "ram caught in the thicket," even to the spotless Son of God, who was to be offered upon that same mountain, as an atoning sacrifice "for the sins of the whole world."

In every incident of Abraham's history, the graciousness of the divine character beautifully appears, and especially in all the circumstances connected with Isaac's domestic happiness; and, after the interesting relation has been given, how touching is the conclusion; "And Isaac was comforted after his mother's death."

But, probably, in no instance is the condescending compassion and kindness of God more strongly exemplified than in the history of Jacob. It is difficult to conceive more melancholy circumstances than those in

which Jacob was placed when he was compelled to leave his home, and become a lonely traveller to a distant country, where he was to dwell with strangers : and how deeply he felt this separation from all he loved, is affectingly shewn in his strong emotion at meeting one, in some degree connected with his family. But a deeper grief must have weighed on Jacob's heart than that of parting from his kindred,—he had offended his God ; he had yielded to unbelief, and presumptuously taken into his own hands, the fulfilment of God's promises. As he lay down at Haran with the earth for his bed, and a stone for his pillow, the darkness and desolation of the desert around, must have been a true picture of his mind : thoughts of his long loved home, of his aged father, and of his devoted mother, must have swelled his heart ; but still more, must the remembrance of his sin have clouded his spirit, and oppressed his soul, he must

have felt himself an exile from home, and from heaven !

It was an hour of deep suffering, and sorrow,—but it was the hour in which his gracious God drew near. How condescending the revelation,—how comforting the promises,—and how changed the scene by the presence of God ! The gloomy wilderness became the house of God, the solitary desert the gate of heaven !

And when did the Lord again especially manifest himself to Jacob ?—Upon his return to his native land, in a season of sore anxiety, and great distress. He had sent his beloved family over the brook, while he himself remained in darkness and in solitude, to make earnest supplication to the Lord God of his father. His present danger reminded him of his past transgression, and he was constrained to acknow-

ledge, that he was “not worthy of the least of all the mercies, that had been shewn him:” and yet with the holy confidence of faith, he reminded his gracious God of all his promises. And how quickly did that gracious God draw near to fulfil them ! and how abundant were the consolations he poured into the soul of his penitent, and believing servant ! It is emphatically added, that as “he passed over Penuel, the sun rose upon him ;” but a brighter sun had shed his beams upon his spirit.

And when in the decline of life, it was necessary to purify Israel’s soul with affliction ; to wean him from his too strong attachment for the image of his beloved Rachel in her son, how gently was it done ; and how tenderly during the days of separation, did the Lord watch over his loved one. The need for this trial we see in the despairing grief of Jacob, when

he “refused to be comforted,” and when he bitterly exclaimed, “all these things are against me ;” yet, in fact, all those trying dispensations were *for* him ; and as soon as Israel’s soul was bowed in submission to the will of God ;—as soon as he was made meet to enjoy the blessing without endangering his eternal interests, it was restored to him, enriched a hundred fold. The touching manner in which the re-union of Jacob and Joseph is dwelt on, must prove to every heart the tender interest which the Lord took, even in the temporal happiness of the aged Patriarch.

The peculiar manner in which Moses was prepared to be the deliverer, and leader of his people, conveys the same lesson. How does the graciousness of our God appear in so exactly qualifying him for the high office to which he was destined. His instruction in all the wisdom

and learning of the times, — his long season for meditation and prayer, as he kept the flocks on Horeb,—the wonderful patience with which the Lord answered, and removed his objections,—and even the very anger which he manifested, at his continued unbelief, and which finally overcame his unwillingness to undertake the glorious service to which he was called, all prove the gracious condescension, and tender regard of the Lord of Hosts for his people. And how strikingly does this appear in the first incident that is recorded, upon the Israelites leaving Egypt. They were brought into circumstances of great peril, and apparently hopeless distress : and why was this, but to teach them in the most impressive manner, to *rely* on the *power*, and *believe* in the *love* of their ever-present God : for on this their safety depended. And was it not merciful and gracious in the Lord to teach them this important lesson, at the beginning

of their pilgrimage? Had they duly learnt it, they would soon have reached the happy land in prosperity and peace. But they *limited* the Holy One of Israel; they would not rely on his power; they would not believe in his love! *Many*, many times turned he his anger away: but they grieved his Spirit; they insulted his Majesty: they even thought scorn of the pleasant land to which he was leading them; till at length he was constrained by their dark unbelief, to “swear in his wrath, that they should not enter into his rest.” Who can read the 106th Psalm and not feel that our God is gracious, and long-suffering and merciful?

And though for infinitely wise reasons, the Lord did not grant the prayer of his faithful Moses, and suffer him to lead the hosts of Israel into the promised land; yet how does his condescending kindness appear in the last scene that is recorded

of his servant's earthly pilgrimage. The Lord knew the brightness, and the glory of that heaven, to which he was about to remove the leader of Israel, and of which Canaan was only a type, a faint shadow. Yet his servant had earnestly wished to see this type of his glorious rest, and he must be indulged. And how was his desire accomplished? The Lord himself descended from heaven to shew it him. Alone, on the mountain which commanded the glorious view, Moses was soon made sensible of the presence of another, even of his gracious God, who drew near, and strengthened the eye of his beloved servant, to discern the glorious heritage he had prepared for his people. How does the graciousness of God appear in thus granting the last earthly wish, of his highly-favoured child: and, doubtless, as he condescendingly pointed out to him the beauties of Canaan, he revealed to the eye of his soul, that brighter, and more

blessed land in which was his own portion. How sweetly was Moses thus prepared on the heights of Pisgah, for the hill of Zion.

But probably not even Moses himself had been placed in circumstances so painfully anxious, as Joshua, when he was called upon to command the thousands of Israel ; and how the graciousness of God appears, in affording him such immediate, and abundant support and encouragement. For though he had been “magnified” by the Lord, “in the sight of all Israel,” by the miraculous passage of Jordan ; still as he viewed the massive walls of Jericho, and thought upon the “mighty men of valour,” by whom they were defended, and also upon the armed myriads who so thickly peopled Canaan, and then recalled his own undisciplined host, unused to the terrors of war, and always ready to despond, he must have felt himself almost overcome

with the responsibility of having so many thousands committed to his care, "with their wives and their little ones." We have every reason to believe, that, unable to rest from these anxious feelings, he left the slumbering host, and "drew near" to inspect the city. The Lord knew the thoughts that oppressed his faithful Joshua, and how does his tender compassion, and gracious kindness appear in the manner in which he made himself known to him. Perceiving a man standing near him, with a drawn sword in his hand, Joshua boldly "went unto him," inquiring if he were a friend, or an adversary? To which the Lord most graciously replied, "As Captain of the host of the Lord, am I now come." Thus at once relieving the mind of his faithful servant, by taking upon himself that awful responsibility which had so distressed him.

And when the Lord had safely brought

them, to take possession of the long desired country, when he had destroyed their enemies, and given them rest on every side, how graciously did he warn, and instruct them, alluring them by promises, and alarming them by threatenings, to keep the path of safety and of peace.

Moreover, when they soon so far forgot their Benefactor, as to insult his divine majesty, by worshipping devils, and were necessarily brought into great distress; how does the graciousness of his character repeatedly appear, in again and again raising them up deliverers. Though abusing his goodness, and constantly forgetting his benefits, yet do they pay this homage to the wonderful patience of their gracious God, that they seek him in the hour of distress, and cry to him in the time of trouble "Arise and help us, for vain is the help of man," till at length, being wearied with their continued ingratitude, he refuses to assist

them any more. But, they humble themselves, and confess their sin, and again, the Lord's graciousness appears, "His soul is grieved for the misery of Israel," and he delivers them!

But who can follow the footsteps of his mercy? "who can recount his gracious acts to his people?" They appear in every page, and shine in every history. Oh! what a character is the character of our God! So holy that even "the heavens are not clean in his sight;" yet, so merciful, so ready to forgive, so easy to be entreated, and so patient to bear with his rebellious creatures, whom he could destroy in a moment! How rich he is to all that honour him, his gifts to Solomon abundantly proclaim. How gracious to mark any abasement of soul, His forbearance towards Rehoboam, and even the impious and idolatrous Ahab, plainly testifies. Though the king of Israel had "dugged

down his altars, and slain his prophets," and in every way insulted his Majesty ; yet when startled by the awful message of his justly offended God, Ahab humbled himself, how immediately did the Lord vouchsafe to notice it, and to mitigate the sentence he had passed ! and, doubtless, had it not been a transient humiliation, but a sincere repentance, even Ahab would have found full and free forgiveness.

And when Judah was wholly given up to abomination, and idolatry, when they " would none of his counsel," and would not attend to his reproof, yet how patiently did the Lord bear with their provocations, and continue to send them warning after warning, and prophet after prophet!—How touchingly did he entreat them, " Be instructed, oh ! Jerusalem, lest my soul depart from thee." " Wash thy heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved!" Moreover, when all, all was in

vain, and they had signed, and sealed their their own condemnation by the unequivocal declaration, "As for the word that thou hast spoken unto us in the name of the Lord we will not hearken unto thee. But we will certainly do whatsoever thing goeth forth out of our own mouth, to burn incense to the queen of heaven:" and even then, when lingering mercy was in a manner compelled to give way to judgment, how did the Lord express himself of his long loved, though rebellious, and ungrateful people? "I have given the dearly beloved of my soul, into the hands of her enemies!"

Now is it not impossible to *meditate* on these manifestations of the graciousness of God, without feeling the heart drawn towards him? And why is all this written? Surely, that *we* might trust in his mercy, and *believe* in his *love*.

And if we look around us, we shall be able to trace the same gracious God also in

his providence. Have we never seen him expostulating with hardened sinners? When death has entered a family, have we never seen that member called, who was best prepared for heaven? And have we never seen the glorious Gospel continued in a place which little valued it, while Sabbath after Sabbath, the preacher, the ambassador of heaven, has in vain entreated the inhabitants to turn to their long suffering God, and be saved? Have we never seen the penitent christian graciously delivered from those distresses which were the consequences even of past transgression! while the afflicted christian has been richly comforted, and the darkness of the cloud of trial has only made the rainbow of covenant mercy and love to appear the more conspicuous? And so, for all the footsteps of mercy which we have been tracing, we may still find corresponding mercies in his present daily dispensations.

But these manifestations of the graciousness of the character of the "great God our Saviour," became brighter, and more frequent when he visibly appeared amongst his guilty creatures, and abode with them.

In the Lord Jesus Christ we recognize that great and wonderful Being, on whose longsuffering and kindness we have now been dwelling, though the majesty of holiness, was softened by that more than human sympathy, and compassion, and love, which breathed in every word, was expressed in every recorded look, and displayed in every action of the Lord, our Saviour, when on earth.

The scattered rays of mercy and of love, which light up the old dispensation, are almost forgotten, in the bright rising of the "Sun of Righteousness" on this dark and ruined world. Clouds, and darkness had in a degree, encompassed the throne of the

Most High before; but those clouds were dissipated, and that darkness was dispelled, by the glorious manifestation of the God of love, in the person of his beloved Son : the “ brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person.”

The very coming of the Son of God to this sin-stained earth ; the very purpose for which he came, in deep humiliation to work out for us a justifying righteousness : and to offer himself up, as a sin-offering “ for the sins of the whole world,”—ought so powerfully to speak to the heart of every fallen child of Adam, as to convince the chief of sinners of the Saviour’s willingness to “ save to the very uttermost.”

But indeed we see this willingness most plainly expressed in every incident of our Lord’s history, though Satan uses every endeavour to cloud our minds, that

the beams of our Saviour's love may not reach and warm our hearts. How strikingly his gracious kindness was shewn, in his manner of teaching the people. Accessible to all, he instructed them in places of public resort ; and though in him were "hid all the treasures of wisdom, and knowledge," he yet condescended to teach his ignorant creatures in the most simple manner, illustrating divine truths by those natural images with which they were most familiar. How strongly too did he manifest his gracious desire to lead them on in the knowledge of God, in tenderly speaking the word to them "as they were *able to bear it.*" And knowing how dead and indifferent the natural heart is to spiritual things, how does the graciousness of our Lord's character appear, in his way of alluring the people to himself, by healing all their bodily diseases : thus, in the most impressive manner, directing their attention

to himself, as the Physician of the soul, and recalling to their remembrance the glorious descriptions given by their favourite prophet of the Messiah, by fulfilling them before their eyes.

A picture is drawn of the divine Saviour, when thus engaged, which beautifully represents his mission to this world of disease and death, and which ought to encourage every human being to come to him. “ And he came down with them, and stood in the plain, and the company of his disciples, and a great multitude of people out of all Judea, and Jerusalem, and from the sea coast of Tyre, and Sidon, which came to hear him, and to be healed of their diseases; and they that were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed. And the whole multitude sought to touch him, for there went virtue out of him, and healed them all. And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples and said, Blessed are ye poor,

for your's is the kingdom of God." What a contrast must this mass of human misery which surrounded the Saviour, have formed, with his own beautiful creation spread around !

How deeply he felt such scenes, his tears at the grave of Lazarus testify. His loved friend was about to be restored to his weeping family ; but the Saviour could not witness the ravages of sin and death in this once happy and still beautiful world, without emotion.

If we had formed part of that immense multitude, and had beheld the wretched objects as they pressed, or were carried through the crowd to meet the Saviour's eye, and had seen them all returning with thanksgiving and praise, and all the newborn joy of great and sudden deliverance, whilst we ourselves were suffering,—oh ! think you, dearest, we should have lin-

gered, despondingly considering our case? should we not rather with all the strength which *hope* imparts, have forced our way to the Saviour's feet, sweetly assured, that we also should return rejoicing? But, had we been mourning the diseases of the soul; had we been faint with the sickness of sin; oh! what a gleam of heavenly joy would have passed over that divine, yet suffering countenance, as the prayer burst from our lips, and he graciously said to us, as to others so oppressed, "Be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven."

But there is another picture drawn of our Lord, which may even prove more encouraging than this: "And Jesus departed from thence, and came nigh unto the sea of Galilee; and went up into a mountain, and sat down there. And great multitudes came unto him, having with them those that were lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, and cast them down at the

feet of Jesus; and he healed them : inso-
much that the multitude wondered, when
they saw the dumb to speak, the maimed to
be whole, the lame to walk, and the blind to
see ; and they glorified the God of Israel.”
Could any thing give us a more beautiful
idea of the Saviour’s gracious and kind
deportment than this ? They felt it was
enough to lay the afflicted ones at his feet ;
and bring them beneath his compassionate
eye, for them to obtain immediate relief.
Nor did they hope in vain ; all were in-
stantly healed.

The many busy feet that then pressed
that mountain, have long been mouldered
in the grave ; the hum of human voices
has long since passed away ; and the blue
waters of Galilee roll on in silence and
solitude. The Saviour no longer sits as
a man of sorrows, in deep humiliation, on
that desolate mount ; but he is seated in
glorious majesty on Mount Zion, and
around him are his loved apostles, and a

multitude that no man can number, redeemed to God by his blood. But, though now in glory, his heart is unchanged; “He is the same yesterday, to-day and for ever;” numbers are daily—hourly—coming to his footstool, diseased and wretched, and are sent rejoicing away: and if *we* have but faith to remain there, though we may be speechless from distress, or ‘the dryness* of the soul, yet the prayerful look of want will bring down his blessing, and ensure his help.

And after these days of incessant fatigue, in which he was so unweariedly engaged in doing good, in relieving those oppressed by the Devil, and in “healing every sickness,” how does the graciousness of our Lord appear in his nights of prayer. Cold are our hearts, and little do we feel the sufferings of others; yet, have we never visited the sick, the dying, and the sor-

* Isaiah xli. 17, and xliv. 3.

rowful, and been constrained to seek the mercy-seat on their behalf? These feelings may enable us, in some little degree, to understand why it was, that after being surrounded the whole day by sights of woe, which feebly shadowed forth the ruined state of soul of those around, the Saviour “rose up a great while before day, and departed to a mountain to pray.” Who does not love to follow this wonderful, mysterious, but all-gracious Being, as he leaves the humble dwelling-place, in which he had allowed his wearied human nature a short season of repose, and seeks the solitary mount, to hold communion with the God he so intensely loved. As he looked back upon the sleeping city, now hushed to silence, and thought of the myriads there, who were sleeping the sleep of sin and death, we may well believe, “He sighed deeply in his Spirit,” and hastened with increased pity and love, to the place of intercession.

Withdrawn awhile from the oppressive atmosphere of sin in which he daily breathed and lighted with the pure light of his own glorious lamps which he had hung on high, how must the stillness of "earth, air, sea, and sky," of glassy lake and vine-clad hill, have harmonized with the Saviour's spirit, as he enjoyed an earthly communion with the blest above! And, after one of these seasons of fervent intercourse with heaven, when he was again sought by the people he had so miraculously fed, how does our Lord's tender compassion and love for the soul appear in the gentle, but impressive manner, in which he endeavoured to raise their thoughts and desires above the miracle to the spiritual instruction it was intended to convey. And, when they were offended at his sublime address, and departed from him, oh, how does his graciousness break forth in that sorrowful and touching appeal to the disciples, "Will ye also go away!" We know not how much

this appeal, and the prompt and fervent reply it drew forth from St. Peter, tended to establish the faith and strengthen the hopes of the rest; consequently, we cannot fully understand the love which prompted it.

How gracious and how encouraging was the style of our Lord's preaching, we may affectingly learn from the manner in which it subdued and melted the heart of the "woman that was a sinner." She had, doubtless, been mingled in the crowd that witnessed the miracles, and listened to the words of the Saviour, after he had received the messengers of John the Baptist. The light, and beauty of holiness, as it irradiated the Redeemer, shewed her, painfully and powerfully, her own dark polluted state. Yet his words were mingled with such looks, and expressions of compassion and love, that a hope of forgiveness stole across her soul, and she felt drawn towards that gracious Being

who had so deeply convinced her of her sin. She could not keep away from that Holy One, who seemed to feel such pity for her lost soul; and taking her little offering, she sought again to enter his presence, though in a Pharisee's house! Oh! who can tell the sorrow that swelled her heart, as the remembrance of past guilt came darkly over her spirit, and almost clouded the hope of pardon that had led her on. Overpowered by the sense and feeling of her sins, she remained behind the Saviour at his feet, not venturing to attract his notice, or present her offering—tremblingly she lingered; probably expecting a mandate to depart, as soon as her polluting presence should be known. The contempt expressed in the countenance of the Pharisee and others, must have increased this apprehension: yet, when the Saviour fixed his eye upon her, it was so full of holy compassion and tender pity, that it melted her very soul. The tears fell fast of contrition

and penitence ; they fell upon the Saviour's feet ! and, trembling that any thing from one so polluted should touch so Holy a being, she instantly wiped them away : but instead of meeting the reproof that she dreaded, she saw in the Saviour's gracious countenance a gleam of that joy, which is felt in heaven over one sinner that repenteth ; and, overwhelmed by his goodness, she could no longer resist the strong emotions of gratitude and love which filled her soul, but “kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment she had brought.” Oh ! how does the touching graciousness of our Lord appear in every word of this exquisite story ! in his gentle expostulation with the self-righteous and unbelieving Pharisee, whose thoughts he had divinely read,—in his enumeration of all those silent marks of gratitude and love which the weeping penitent had given,—in his reiterated assurances of full and free forgiveness, and in her gracious dismissal, accom-

panied as it was with his own peculiar blessing, “peace” in her soul, and “peace” with heaven. Do we not see the Lord God of Manasseh here!

We have another instance given us of the graciousness of our Lord’s preaching, in the discourse he delivered in the synagogue at Nazareth. He knew the contemptuous unbelief,—the malignant hatred which filled every heart in that assembly, and which burst forth, when, with brutal violence, “They rose up and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong.” Yet, when the Lord “stood up for to read,” and, looking round, read all their thoughts, what was the text he selected for his address?—“the Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor: he hath sent me to heal the broken hearted,—to

preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind,—to set at liberty them that are bound,—to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.” And when they all intently looked at him, “he began to say unto them, This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears.” And “all wondered at the gracious words that proceeded out of his mouth.” If to such a congregation the Lord freely and fully offered himself as a teacher, a deliverer, a physician, and a Saviour, may we not be encouraged to believe, that he will be graciously all these to the soul that endeavours to seek him? This gracious willingness to save all who come to him, we see most beautifully exemplified in his taking the long and weary journey to the coasts of Tyre, to soothe the sorrow and relieve the distress of a poor Gentile woman, whose heart was prepared to welcome, and whose soul was humbled to seek him. We see the same graciousness displayed in his visit to the

Gadarenes, that he might rescue from the powers of darkness, the wretched being whom they kept in madness and misery among the tombs. The Saviour knew the reception he should meet with from the people; he knew they would immediately desire him to depart from them; yet, to save one soul, and to restore one human being to comfort and happiness, was a sufficient object for the Redeemer to undertake the voyage.

And even those actions and those words that seem not at first so gracious, on meditation, we shall find have a gracious end, or proceed from a gracious feeling; such as the destruction of the swine in the lake. Our Lord, whose comprehensive eyes scanned eternity, and who knew how these worldly minded people were bartering their souls for a little earthly gain, was graciously anxious to convince them in a most impressive manner, of the power and fearful

malignity of those demons of darkness whom they suffered to rule over them; and therefore he permitted the devils to set before their eyes an appalling picture of their own dreadful state; that the enemies of God were urging them on to headlong destruction, that they might eternally perish in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone. If any thing could rouse them from their sinful apathy, surely it was this; contrasted as it was with the blessed picture of peace, the lost one sitting at the feet of the Saviour, in heavenly tranquillity and thankful joy. Surely then it was for a gracious end that our Lord permitted the destruction of the swine.

In the same manner we may trace the severe language of the Saviour to the Scribes and Pharisees, to a gracious and compassionate feeling. Our Lord himself tells us the cause which excited so powerfully his indignation : “ They shut

up the kingdom of heaven against men: they neither went in themselves, neither suffered they them that were entering to go in." Surely we must see in this holy indignation a gracious desire for the salvation of the lost.

Amidst such repeated, and awful manifestations of the power of the Godhead, how encouraging it is to observe the feelings of the manhood continually appearing in our Lord's history. We have a touching instance of this in his conduct after the death of John the Baptist. When peculiarly wounded in feeling, and sad in heart, have we never felt constrained to seek refuge in prayer and in solitude? these feelings may help us to understand why the Saviour, after being told of his beloved servant's violent death, "departed" immediately "by ship unto a desert place apart." Doubtless, as God, he had been with John in the lonely prison, warming

his heart with the beams of his love, more fully revealing himself to his soul, as the "Lamb of God" that should take away *his* sin, and irradiating his dark and solitary cell with gleams of light from his opening heaven. And as the hour drew near for his entrance there, doubtless his faithful and unchanging God more fully revealed the glorious crown that was awaiting his martyrdom ; but, as *man*, the Saviour could not hear of his beloved servant's death without emotion. He had been his chosen messenger to "prepare his way" into this world of sin, and misery : and the bloody death awarded him, must have struck upon the Redeemer's heart, as another proof of the black ingratitude of those he came to seek and save. The Saviour was without all human sympathy, how touching then, how natural it was, that he should seek comfort in communion with his God and Father, yet how does his astonishing kindness, and graciousness appear when

the people followed, and crowded around him! even at such a time of wounded feeling, and painful emotion, “he went forth to them, was moved with compassion” towards them, and “healed their sick.”

How does the graciousness of our divine master again appear in his treatment of the beloved family at Bethany. Persecuted, derided, scorned, and blasphemed, how must the Saviour’s heart have expanded towards the family that received, and welcomed, and honoured him. We are not left to imagine this: it is beautifully said, “Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus.” How deeply, then, he must have felt the touching message sent him, “Lord, behold he whom thou lovest is sick.” They felt it was enough to mention their distress to one who relieved every sickness that was brought before him: and this confidence in his love, and in

his power, must have peculiarly touched the Saviour's heart. He knew the agonizing suspense, the hope, the fear, which agitated their breasts; he knew the sickening feeling of despair which came over their souls, as they seemed to be deserted in their hour of utmost need.

How deeply the Saviour felt this trial of their faith, his strong emotion at again meeting his afflicted, and loved friends proclaims. Yet he appeared to forsake them; he delayed his departure, till the awful scene was over, till the last dying sigh had escaped from the lips of his beloved Lazarus, and the sob of agony had burst from the bosom of Mary over the grave of her brother. And why was this? None felt so exquisitely as the Saviour, for his feelings had never been benumbed by sin, and were only strengthened by suffering. Oh! it was from the most gracious kindness to all his people. The

faith of Martha certainly needed to be confirmed; much also might have been wanting in the souls of the others; but, our Lord's eye embraced the case of all his afflicted children, to the end of time; he knew in how many of his loved ones, the trial must be sharp, protracted and apparently hopeless, that faith and patience might have their perfect work; he knew what would be the workings of unbelief, the temptations of Satan, during such an hour of darkness and distress, and therefore, from the grave of his beloved friend, he was willing to call upon them in the most impressive manner, to *trust* him when they could not see him; to "hope, even against hope," that they "might obtain a better resurrection." Oh! is there not gracious kindness and compassion here? The same tender consideration for the feelings of his people, we see in the incident of the widow's mite. Why did our Lord take his place that day, over against the treasury?

To see that little offering cast in. And why was it recorded? Because he knew, that the greater number of his people are poor in the things of this world, though rich in faith; and he was graciously willing to cheer, and encourage them with the thought, that the smallest offering of grateful love would be noticed and accepted by him,—would, even be more esteemed than the larger donations of the rich. And thus, in all that our Saviour did, and said, we may find encouragement to trust in him, to love him, and to devote ourselves to his most blessed service.

But perhaps, in no recorded scene does the amazing love he bears to sinners, so strikingly, so exquisitely appear, as in his last descent to Jerusalem. In Jerusalem the Redeemer had suffered the glories of his Godhead especially to break forth, and there he had uttered his most sublime discourses. There, with the most aston-

ishing goodness, and untiring patience, he had daily entreated the people, “ while they had the light, to believe in the light, that they might be the children of the light,” and had affectingly complained that “ they would not come to him, that they might have life.” There, also,—he had been blasphemed, and insulted, tempted, and derided — there his life had been assailed, and they had impiously accused him of “ having a devil” and of being “ mad !” Yet all this was but a faint picture of those out-breakings of malignant hatred that were about to take place. All the Saviour’s sufferings were fully known to him, all—all were continually before his eyes when he descended into this guilty city, as a lamb going to the slaughter-house. The bitter scorn, —the hardened unbelief,—the thundering cry of “ crucify him, crucify him” from those whose distresses he had so often relieved ; the cruel mockings, and the agonizing

scourgings, were all present to his view; and more than this,—the blasphemous insults, when he hung in his dying agonies on the cross, were before his mind. We are apt to wonder, that, as the Lord God of Mount Sinai, he does not again descend in fire to take vengeance upon these hardened rebels and consume them as in a moment! But,—he draws nigh to the city, and takes his last, earnest, farewell look; and that, not a look of vengeance, but, of lingering, sorrowful, and rejected love! “And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it! saying, if thou hadst known even thou at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace. Oh! Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the Prophets and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings; and ye would not.” Can we read this, can we *meditate* upon it, without

feeling *encouraged* to ask in the confidence of faith, for a part in that great salvation, which the Redeemer was going to Jerusalem to purchase with his blood?

But even this affecting scene yields in tenderness, to the last interview of the Saviour with his disciples. Who can fully enter into the love which prompted the Lord to humble himself, even to the washing his disciples feet; thus giving them the most important instruction, in a manner which they never could forget: oh! if his people, did but remember this lesson; if they only sought to be washed in his blood, and sanctified by his Spirit: if “each esteemed others, better than himself,” and endeavoured to be the highest in the favour of Christ, by being the lowliest in spirit, where would be the ambition, the heart burnings, the divisions, that now furnish a jest to the infidel, and a subject of just reproach to the scoffer? They would all

pass away, like the melting of a dark cloud, before the bright beams of the sun ! Have we ever been oppressed with grief, yet surrounded by those who were dear to us, have felt constrained to check the tear, and stop the bursting sigh; lest those we loved should suffer even more; and have we in some degree, forgotten our own sadness, in the endeavour to cheer, and lessen theirs ? This feeling may faintly enable us to perceive the exquisite tenderness of our Lord's last address, to those whom " he loved unto the end." If ever there was a time for the Saviour to be absorbed in his own reflections, by his own sufferings, surely, it was this; the night before his awful death, the night on which the wrath of his God and Father was to be poured out without measure on his soul; the night on which he was to drink the cup of agony, never tasted by man, and which nothing less than his Godhead could support: yet when he looked around the table at his sad

disciples, and saw that their hearts were filled with sorrow ; when he saw his beloved John, after (we may well suppose) wistfully gazing in the Saviour's face, as he spoke of his departure from them, in speechless love and grief, resting his head on his Redeemer's breast ; the Saviour thought not of himself, but in the most touching manner tried to comfort them ; supporting them with those glorious hopes which strengthened his own soul, in this hour of need ; gently reminding them of his life of suffering, and sweetly adding that they ought to rejoice, that those sufferings were soon to be ended, and that he was about to return to that God whom he so inconceivably loved, and from whom he had been in a manner so long separated. Oh ! can we dwell on all this, without feeling encouraged to look to him for comfort in every hour of sorrow, and to trust in his love in every time of trial ?

We see the same wonderful graciousness

in his increasing efforts to guard them against temptation in the garden of Gethsemane,—the same unutterable love, in the look given to Peter in the hall of the palace, which pierced to his very soul, and at once extricated him from the grasp of the prince of darkness. And oh! how do we see again the same exquisite tenderness appear, in the especial message sent to the sorrowing Peter, after the resurrection; our Lord knowing that the abased and self-accusing apostle would not venture to include himself in the joyful greeting sent to the other disciples. How we recognize the God of David here: but, it is vain to attempt to follow all the footsteps of our Lord's mercy and love, they may be traced in every line of the sacred record of his earthly life: in the selection of each narrated miracles, and in every incident of his history, all calculated to convey some important instruction, and rich consolation, in the most impressive and interesting

manner. And why was all this written? To inspire our confidence, and to brighten and strengthen our *hope*.

And may we not also derive encouragement from the Lord's dealings with *ourselves*?—Have we not seen numbers cut down on the right hand and on the left, and called away to give in their great account, while we are still continued in the land of forgiveness, and with all the means of grace? But, has the Lord only permitted us to live? has he given no light to the soul? has he communicated no life to the spirit? has he brought home no instruction to the heart? Have we never felt his most gracious Spirit striving with us? When we have heard of the love of Jesus, have we never felt a desire, that that love might penetrate and melt *our* hearts? and has no prayer been suggested, for the out-pouring of the divine Spirit to effect this in us? When we have seen the grace of God

shining in the life and conversation of a consistent Christian, have we never felt the power and beauty of holiness, and has not the earnest wish filled the heart, and left the lips in prayer, that we might also thus adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour? Have we never felt willing to give up the world, and take our portion and lot with the people of God? and have we never been convinced, that the peace which the Saviour gives, is of more value, than all the riches of this world; and that to feel his love, and to love him in return, would be perfect happiness? And when we have not acted up to the light of conscience, have we not felt grieved, and sad? and have we not found that under such circumstances it was our greatest relief to pour out our hearts before our forgotten God, and own to him all our offences with their aggravations? Have we never been led to exert ourselves for the sake of his people? and after ministering to their wants, have

we never felt pained, and sorrowful, that it had not been done from a pure, warm love to the Saviour; but that sin, in some manner or other, had marred the offering, and tarnished the service? Can we fix our eyes intently on the worst season of our past history, recall the entire alienation of the heart, the blindness of the mind, the worldliness of the thoughts, the unchecked, perfectly uncontrolled reign of selfishness in the soul, the unholy state of the affections; and comparing this period with the present, after duly inspecting our views, our feelings, our whole condition, can we truly say, that God has done nothing in us, or for us? Oh! my friend, I think not. I think we must be constrained to confess, that he has never, never left us, that he has been teaching, been striving with, and daily warning us. May I not add, been *helping* us? For, have we never resisted any temptation? Have we never overcome one besetting sin? Have we never gained the

victory over one evil temper? Have we never been able in *any* degree to bring our wills into subjection to the will of God? Have we never been able patiently to bear any trial, or to give praise for any mercy? Surely, the Lord *hath* helped us, and would ere this, have richly comforted us, had we not obstructed our own comfort: we may then well 'account the long-suffering of our God salvation.' We may well take the consolation of that blessed text 'God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for *us*.'

And now, dearest, with all this great encouragement, what is it which so discourages us? Is it the remembrance of the past, of our sad transgressions? This may well humble, but should not discourage us; on the contrary, it should give us a greater idea of the Lord's wonderful love in bearing so long with those so unworthy. I think the review we have taken of the

past, must convince us that God our Saviour has been leading us to himself; we have seen the free messages of invitation which he has sent us; and that upon coming to him, the black record against us, is blotted out of his book of remembrance; yes,—even those sins which press most heavily upon the conscience, and peculiarly weigh upon the heart, are all freely, fully forgiven. When the soul is enlightened to see in some degree the hatefulness of sin; when the light thus received in the conscience, is reflected upon the past, and makes the darkness, and deformity of our transgressions visible, when they all start up, in fearful array against us, it is difficult to believe, that they are all forgiven, that they are no longer as a dark cloud to intercept the rays of God's love from shining on our souls. And the Lord of hosts has anticipated this difficulty; and therefore, he tries to elevate our minds with high conceptions of his glory, and ma-

jesty, when he makes his wonderful declarations of mercy. He points to the heavens, the grandest display of His Almighty power, and then emphatically adds, that "if heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath," then, only will he "cast off" his people "for all that they have done." Could any thing give us a more impressive idea of the "height and depth" of the Lord's work of grace? Again, when he exhorts the "*wicked* to forsake his way," and his evil "thoughts," and to return to him, and promises freely to have mercy, and "*abundantly to pardon,*" he adds, "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so, are my ways, higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." And when he graciously wishes to give us some idea of the removal of our sins from us, he directs us to "look how far the east is from the west," and promises in like manner, to separate us from our

iniquities. And after some of his most cheering promises of renewing his divine image on the soul, by writing his laws upon the heart, and freely “forgiving all iniquity,” and remembering our sins no more, knowing how hard it is for a soul struggling with sin, to believe this, he adds, “Thus saith the Lord,” “which *divideth the sea, when the waves thereof roar, the Lord of hosts is his name:*” thus intimating to us, in the most forcible, and beautiful manner, that he could as easily quell, and still the depths of corruption within. Oh! it is a glorious, and blessed truth, that the blood of Jesus “cleanseth us from *all sin* ;” that, “In him, we have redemption, through his blood, the *forgiveness of sins* ;” that “by him, all that believe are justified from *all things* ;” that he that cometh to Christ is so fully, so entirely forgiven, “that none of his sins that he hath committed, shall be mentioned unto him ;” but that they shall all be

“cast into the depths of the sea.” Therefore, dearest, our transgressions ought indeed to humble, but not to discourage us.

But are you depressed because of the hardness, and coldness of your heart? We may well take shame to ourselves that we so *little* love One, who hath so wonderfully loved us, and nothing can be a more convincing proof of our ruined state; but while we ought to deplore it, we need not be discouraged even by this; as the Lord knows our wretched condition, and hath provided a certain remedy. “Hath he said,” and shall he not do it?” He hath promised of his own free goodness, and by his own almighty power, to “take away the heart of stone” from us; to give us a “heart to *know* him, that he is the Lord;” and that he will cause us, “to return to him with our *whole heart* :” and we should depend on the gracious words in simple faith. The Lord not only knows

our state, but hath told us, that our "bruise is *incurable*, and our wound is grievous;" that our soul is utterly diseased; that "from the sole of the foot even unto the head, there is no soundness in us: but wounds and bruises, and putrifying sores." But, what is his free promises, "Behold, I will bring it health, and cure, and I *will* cure them, and reveal unto them the abundance of peace, and truth;" "and I will cleanse them from all their iniquity, whereby they have sinned against me." "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you an expected end." The cure promised is certain. We may use all the means of grace in the *full assurance* of faith, that eventually they will be made effectual by his Spirit to the purification of the soul; for "he that hath begun the good work" will complete it. But, if we were in the hands of an able Physician, should we allow our-

selves to be discouraged, if we were not restored to health immediately? should we yield to despondency, because the symptoms of a disease, which had grown with our growth, and strengthened with our strength, occasionally shewed themselves? or, because we suffered from that languor, and weakness, which usually attend deep seated complaints? Surely not; then why should we act thus with respect to the soul?

But are we distressed at the power which Satan seems to bring against us? do we tremble at his fierce assaults? The Lord has anticipated these fears, and has given most gracious promises to encourage us: "they shall fight against thee, but shall *not prevail* against thee, for I am with thee, saith the Lord, to deliver thee." "Even the *captives* of the mighty shall be taken away, and *the prey* of the terrible shall be delivered, for *I* will contend with

him, that contendeth with thee." And I will deliver thee out of the hand of the wicked, and I will redeem thee out of the hand of the terrible." And he hath especially declared himself to be the God that "strengtheneth the *spoiled*, against the strong," and that "will bruise Satan under our feet shortly." The victory is thus *assured*, if we keep close to the Captain of our salvation, and firmly grasp the "sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; but, we must put on *all* that armour, which God hath provided for the warfare.

Or are we discouraged by the continually recurring conflicts with inbred sin, with unholy tempers, earthly affections, and those temptations to which we must be daily exposed from a world entirely alienated from its Maker? We cannot but *feel* these most painfully; yet, we need not be *discouraged* by them. In every struggle

with sin we are fighting upon the Lord's side. The very conflict proves that we are come over from the ranks of His great enemy, who keeps his soldiers in strict alliance with sin. The faith, and *hope* of Abijah ought to be ours, and we should seek to follow his example. Against him were set, in battle array, 800,000 chosen men, being mighty men of valour: with him were only half that number: yet, was he dismayed at the sight? No, he encouraged himself by thinking of the Lord his God, and in all the confidence of faith, exclaimed to his foes, "Behold, God himself is *with us*, for our captain, fight ye not against the Lord God of your fathers; for ye shall not prosper." And when the awful conflict was begun, "and Judah looked back and behold, the battle was before, and behind:" did their hearts then faint? No; "they cried unto the Lord," and "gave a shout," in the anticipation of victory, and in the full assurance of *hope*; and as they

shouted, as they thus honoured their ever-present defender: "God smote" their enemies before them, and gave them "into their hand." To confirm the impression that this narration is calculated to make upon our minds, the Divine Spirit has caused another of the same kind to be soon after recorded.

Just as Asa was rejoicing in the rest that had been given him, an immense host, even 1,000,000, with 300 chariots came up, against him: all human aid was utterly vain; but did he therefore give way to desponding fears? He "cried unto the Lord his God, and said, Lord, it is nothing with thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have *no power*; help us, O Lord our God; for we rest on thee, and in thy name we go against this multitude. O Lord, thou art our God; let not man prevail against thee." And did the Lord reply to this confidence in his power, this

trust in his love? “And the Lord smote the Ethiopians before Asa, and before Judah, and the Ethiopians fled. And the Ethiopians were overthrown, that they could not recover themselves; for they were destroyed before the Lord, and before his host.” We should never forget that *all* that is written in the word of God, was expressly written for our instruction and comfort; and I think that these incidents are peculiarly calculated to promote this gracious end, if we read them in a prayerful spirit. But if we are depressed with a feeling of our weakness; if we are faint with the continual warfare in which we are engaged, we are just the persons to whom the Lord makes one of the most comforting of his gracious promises, which he introduces as usual in the sublimest manner. He bids us lift up our eyes above the earth, the scene of our sorrows, and survey His glorious heavens, spangled all over with the orbs of light, each one walking in its

brightness, and asks the impressive question "who created all these?" The inference alone were comforting; for the God who lighted those lamps of glory, can surely fill our souls with the light of His grace; the mighty God who upholdeth those shining worlds "with the word of His power," can surely, surely uphold the fainting Christian in the path of life: but it is beautifully added, "He giveth *power* to the *faint*; and to them that have *no might* he increaseth strengt h ."

But are we cast down because we have *brought ourselves* into circumstances of great trial and distress? Alas! this ought to abase us; but there is the greater need immediately to seek the help and comfort which the Lord is so ready to impart; and therefore we should feel encouraged instantly to seek his gracious assistance in the humble but strong confidence of faith and hope. And to encourage us to this,

He has mercifully caused His tender kindness to his servant Jehoshaphat to be recorded.

The king of Judah had been blessed by God in every way, and on every side ; yet, in an evil hour this favoured servant of God courted the society, and sought the friendship of the man that had most insulted his Divine benefactor. One evil step rapidly leads to another. He united himself with Ahab and his people, and went up with them to war against Syria ; the consequence of this ungrateful conduct began then to be felt. He was brought into the most imminent danger of losing his life ; and doubtless his sin in “ helping the ungodly and loving them that hated the Lord,” then flashed upon his conscience : but when he “ cried,” “ the Lord helped him, and God moved” his enemies “ to depart from him.” Surely this incident ought to encourage us under any painful

circumstances to apply to the Lord with *hope* ; “ for “ the Lord upholdeth all that fall, and raiseth up all those that be bowed down.” “ The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth ; He also will hear their cry, and will save them.”

Hitherto, dearest, we have been meditating upon the *encouragement* afforded us, to *hope* in the Lord, and to believe in his love to *us* ; but have we ever considered *hope*, even a *strong* and a *bright* hope, in the light of a positive duty, a clear command, of as much force, and coming with the same authority as all those precepts to which we bow with implicit submission and obedience? And why is this? Because the Lord who created the soul, knows the *power* of *hope* ; how it braces and animates every power and every affection ; how it nerves the soul for conflict, and strengthens it in the hour of battle, how it overleaps mountains of diffi-

culty, and forgets the present in its animated and joyful anticipation of the future. There is no feeling in the human soul more powerful in its actings, more supporting in its influence, than HOPE. It gives confidence and strength to the warrior rushing to the fiery engagement; it gives patience to the man of deep research, who under its influence toils contentedly through apparently inextricable mazes; it braves all the terrors of the ocean; it cheers the gloomy dungeon; and,—but it were vain to attempt to follow its effects; it pervades all classes; prompts to every enterprise; is essential to every success. And can it then be supposed, that in the most deadly and continued conflict,—in the most astonishing enterprise,—in the most difficult research—and across the most tempestuous and dangerous ocean, its presence can be dispensed with? The Lord who knows the soul has judged otherwise, and has therefore made it his positive command, that we

“*rejoice in hope.*” He has made it one of the most important parts of that armour in which we are to fight and conquer. He has made it the anchor, which is to keep the soul surely and steadfastly fixed to the throne of God, on which the Lord our Saviour is sitting, having all power in heaven and earth, to give strength and grace to his people, according to their respective wants and necessities. But is this our idea of *hope*? Is it not usually considered a blessed privilege, which some favoured believers alone enjoy? When they hear of the bright and the strong *hope*, which by anticipation enters heaven; which lays hold of the glorious crown of life; which rejoices in the love of God the Father, and in the perfect work of God the Son; do not many sincere and excellent Christians feel that this state of mind must be indeed most happy and blessed; but that it would be presumption in them to make so sure of such glorious blessings, while there remains

so much evil in their hearts; not considering, that a strong and bright, a *scriptural* hope, is the most effectual means of overcoming that evil; and not considering, that it is far greater presumption to pretend to be wiser than the Most High, and to rush into the battle with our head *uncovered*, when he has graciously provided for our helmet, “the hope of salvation?” And the very figures used, imply that the hope is both strong and bright. A trembling hope does not correspond with the idea of an ancient helmet, or with the stability and strength of an anchor; neither would a trembling hope fill the whole soul with that rejoicing, with which hope is associated in the command to possess it. Such dear Christians do not consider, that “hope” brings us “nigh to God;” and the nearer we are brought to Him, the more we must love Him; while the more we love God; the more beautiful will holiness appear, and consequently the more earnest

and heartfelt will be our endeavours to obtain it. We see the effects of hope in worldly enterprises and plans; the stronger the hope, the greater the exertion; whereas if you diminish the hope you immediately diminish the ardour of pursuit, and all is comparatively languid and nerveless. And it is precisely the same in spiritual things. The stronger the hope of a personal interest in all the great things which the Saviour has purchased, the more ardent will be the pursuit of them. The stronger the hope of heaven, the weaker will be the love of earth; till having obtained the "full assurance of hope," we shall long "to depart, and be with Christ;" and the soul by anticipation having long entered heaven, the dark waters of Jordan will be scarcely seen from the glory of the shore beyond; and when called to pass them, having already experienced that the Saviour has indeed "saved to the uttermost," from earthly

foes, the soul will rejoicingly trust in Him, to save to the uttermost also in the valley of the shadow of death.

A strong scriptural hope melts the soul far more effectually, into godly sorrow for sin, than any doubts or fears. "Is God my reconciled *Father* in Christ? Has he freely, fully forgiven me all the past, and washed my soul from every stain in the blood of His Son? Does the Saviour love me? and has he been interceding for me every day, and every hour, and drawing me to Himself by the gentle, but powerful leadings of His divine Spirit? Will he finally subdue *all* sin in my soul, and present me "without spot," before the throne of God? and have *I* a place already prepared for me in the bowers of bliss above? and when *I* am prepared for *it*, will the Saviour take me to himself? Oh! wondrous, most wondrous love! Let a person after such reflections, think of that period

of his life most stamped with dark ingratitude and sin; and what will be the result? the greatest astonishment will possess him at the surpassing goodness of God, and the most earnest desires will be felt in the soul to dedicate the remainder of his life, his thoughts, his words, and actions to that Saviour, whose compassionate eye followed him in all his wanderings, and whose gracious and all-powerful hand extricated him from so many snares. Would this be the effect of an hour passed in communion with doubts and fears? Oh! no; they weaken, they chill the soul, but they do not fill it with the love of God. The Lord exactly knows how the disease of sin must be cured, and we should implicitly follow His remedies. If we were suffering from a disorder which required the knife, and also cordials to be administered, and were attended by men of acknowledged skill, we should not obediently submit to the

suffering of the one, and yet reject the strength of the other! No! we should unreservedly follow their directions; and therefore why should these dear Christians be afraid of presumption, when the Lord has graciously commanded us to hope, with a strong, and bright, and rejoicing hope? They would willingly submit to the sharpest and most painful probings, but they tremble to take the blessed cordial held to their lips. Yet without this *bright* hope, how can we be filled with that spirit of praise and thanksgiving, which is enjoined us? How can we “come to Zion with songs and everlasting joys.” Can a trembling fitful, hope give us such joy as this? And yet, this is the manner in which the ransomed of the Lord are told to accomplish their pilgrimage to the holy city? Even the very “heavens” are called upon to “sing” with joy, and the “earth” is exhorted to take up, and echo back the glad thanksgiving, because the

“ Lord hath comforted His people, and will have mercy upon His afflicted.” And should we, the objects of all this goodness, be afraid to rejoice with them? No! may the description given by the divine Spirit of those who accept the great salvation offered them, apply to us: “ for ye shall *go out* with *joy*, and be led forth with peace; the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.” And thus, we shall be brought to take our places in the “ house ” of Christ, “ if we hold fast the confidence and the *rejoicing* of the *hope* firm unto the end.”

But many other dear Christians think, that this bright and comforting hope is most desirable, and should be attained, and they sigh when they look at those who are enjoying it, while they are themselves destitute of it; but they consider it an

especial blessing from God, that he has imparted such sensible comfort to the soul, that all doubts and fears are constrained to take flight. Doubtless in many instances it is so, and we must all humbly acknowledge that every blessing and every holy feeling comes from God; but, I think the cause (generally speaking) rests with ourselves, when we do not obtain this blessing. We look upon it as a privilege to be bestowed upon us, instead of a blessing to be most diligently sought, and a *duty* to which we must most carefully attend. It is a great mistake to suppose that it depends on *sensible* comfort. David thought otherwise, when in the absence of that comfort he exclaimed, "In God's *word* will I rejoice, in the Lord's *word* will I *comfort* me." And if we followed his example, and oftener recalled the day, when God our Saviour delivered us from the hand of our great enemy in Gethsemane, and on Calvary, we should frequently be con-

strained to praise and rejoice, though in the absence of what many persons call sensible comfort. It is also a mistake to suppose that hope is a spiritual gift which is communicated to the soul in a peculiar manner; it must be sought as other graces of the Spirit, and it will be received as other blessings, through the diligent use of the appointed means of grace. Have we sought it in this manner? Of three very important duties it is placed first, because its influence would materially assist in the fulfilment of the others.* “Rejoice in hope; be patient in tribulation; continue instant in prayer.” Now, we all acknowledge the imperative necessity of the two latter duties. We watch, and strive against murmuring, repining, discontented thoughts; and against everything that would lead to them. And when our great tempter suggests them we will not listen to him, knowing that the admission of such thoughts would entirely

* Romans xii, 12.

prevent our obeying the command of the Spirit to be "patient in tribulation." But more than this, we feel it necessary also to dwell on all those things which are calculated to strengthen patience; all those meditations which confirm us in the belief that trials are good for us; that they are directed by a hand of infinite love, and will surely have a blessed end, if we do not by our own resistance frustrate this intended effect. And thus the soul is disciplined to be submissive to the will of God, and grace is received to be "patient in tribulation." In the same manner with respect to the duty of prayer, we feel it to be absolutely needful to be on our guard against all those things which would destroy the spirit of prayer. We feel that we must not give way to vain and worldly imaginations, to over-anxiety of mind, or to anything in short, which might cloud the mind, chill the feelings, and indispose the soul for devotion. And not contented with this, we try

to stir up the spirit of supplication within us, by those considerations which are best calculated to lead us with earnestness to the mercy seat. Now do we act thus with regard to the first duty, with regard to hope? Do we watch with the same anxiety and diligence against every desponding, doubting thought? do we with the same quickness repel every dark view that Satan may present to us? And these pictures will be powerful and frequent, for the fallen spirit has nothing to do with the rich blessing of hope, and, consequently, his attacks upon it will be peculiarly bitter. Do we also industriously try to cherish and strengthen hope by all those meditations which are likely to increase it and give it brightness?—or, do we suffer our unbelieving, ungrateful, desponding hearts, and our great adversary, to suggest what they like to us, on this subject? Do we listen without interruption to all their arguments, follow out all their reasonings, and even think it a duty, to hold

parley with doubts and fears, till the last benign, and cheering ray of hope is almost obscured? And after such an exercise of mind as this, do we find ourselves brought nearer to God? do we find ourselves stronger in resisting sin? do we find the love of earth diminished, and the love of heaven increased? I think not. A friend of mine almost considered it right and safe, to be in a doubting, trembling, fearing, frame; yet, after reading the Scriptures attentively, a far different one seemed there inculcated. At length a conviction of the absolute *duty* of hope took place in the mind. There was however no alteration of feeling—there was no addition of sensible comfort communicated—the same dark views were held up as before, by the Prince of Darkness,—the same doubts and fears,—the same arguments and reasonings returned: but, they were no longer listened to,—there was no *conversation* carried on with them: the pictures were

not looked at: the soul intently gazed on brighter scenes. Early in the morning the thought was *grasped* on waking,—God is *my* Father, Christ is *my* Saviour,—and the Holy Spirit will be with me this day to instruct and sanctify my soul. To all the many thoughts that arose to check and darken this feeling, the same answer was returned, “*I will* not listen to you for a moment.” Throughout the whole day the same comforting views were industriously sought: every little word of admonition that came seasonably to the mind, whether by book or conversation, was received as a confirmation of the blessed truth, that God loved the soul, and would constantly watch over and instruct it, until it should be brought to glory. Every trial was viewed in the same light, and even when sin, for awhile unhappily triumphed, in causing any ebullition of unholy tempers, the soul tried firmly to secure the same comforting truths; though then, Satan renewed with

increased energy, his endeavours to wrench them away ; and it felt consequently, humbled and softened, while owning to its heavenly Father, that it had walked unworthy of the spirit of adoption, unworthy of "its high calling," and earnestly supplicated for more grace. By degrees, what was so difficult, became more easy : bright and happy views became habitual,—and the Prince of Darkness diminished the struggle when he found it to be vain. My friend's experience, I think, would be the experience of all who made the same attempt.

There is something very striking in the repetition of the miracle of feeding the multitude : it is related by the Evangelists, with much attention. Was it not intended to strengthen our belief in our Lord's gracious declaration, "He that cometh to me shall never hunger?" And the soul is increasingly fed when it strongly hopes ; it experiences, more and more, the truth of the promise, "He that putteth

his trust in the Lord shall be made fat." Every thing does it good, every thing seems to nourish it; and seeking cause to hope yet more, it enters into the meaning of those gracious words, "they that have gathered it, shall eat it, and praise the Lord."

Our Lord Jesus Christ is set before us as a perfect pattern, which we are carefully to seek to imitate. And what made our Lord despise the shame of the cross, and so patiently endure its anguish?" A strong, and bright hope of the joy that was set before him. We must earnestly, prayerfully, perseveringly, seek the same hope, and we shall taste the joy of the prophet, when he exclaimed, "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall be joyful in my God, for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness. For, as the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as

the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to spring forth, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring " up in our souls. This last figure, so beautifully representing the sureness of the work of grace, though it may to us appear to be slowly carried on, should abundantly encourage us to hope, even against hope. And perhaps, one great cause why we have so much to deplore is, because we have too little attended to the *duty of hope*, and thus, have prevented the "good news" respecting the Lord Jesus, from producing its due effect upon us.

But, if we desire to be strong in hope, we must be steadfast in faith and *warm in love*. The more this heavenly grace pervades the soul, the more it breathes in our thoughts and words, and actions, the more we shall realise the presence of God, for "God is love," and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him. It is not enough that there are no bitter words, or

even thoughts, there must be love, warm, sympathising, and considerate love. Oh ! when we have complained of the dryness of our souls, it has often been because this channel for God's grace and especial comforts to descend into, the soul has been choked by selfishness, or unkind feelings, and we have not endeavoured to remove this impediment. How often, when we have sighed, and felt depressed, after long seasons of retirement, because the spirit has remained as dull as ever, should we have "mounted up on the eagle wings" of hope and joy, had we denied ourselves some little pleasure, or some arrangement of time, in order (for our Saviour's sake), to increase the comfort or satisfaction of those around, and thus to increase in ourselves, and others the spirit of love. It is these little things which bind hearts together ; and it is in obeying the spirit of our Lord's commands in these little things, that we meet frequently with that grace

and comfort we so much desire, and which has been denied to a more selfish way of seeking it. When we consider the impressive hour, and the impressive manner, in which our Lord delivered his *last* command, “to love;” and reflect upon the example He set us of self-denial, never seeking His own comfort, or support, when others needed His assistance; but even immediately coming forth to them when they intruded upon his devotional retirement, we must feel,—that in no way are we so likely to obtain the blessing we desire; as by seeking to promote the good of others; and in no way can we so well attain this end, as by increasing in them, and in ourselves, the spirit of Christian love.

Another reason why we frequently have to complain of dulness of mind is, that we overstrain the powers of the mind by a too long season of meditation and prayer. We have found it difficult to raise our

thoughts to things above; we cannot endure the idea of leaving our apartment without obtaining some quick spiritual feelings; they are obtained;—and then, they must be improved: and after such an exhausting exercise, in what state of vigour is the soul for the active self-denying duties of the day? We need not cease from prayer when we leave the closet; for, prayer

Is the burden of a sigh,
The falling of a tear,
The upward glancing of the eye,
When none but God is near!

Can we wonder, after so weakening a process, that we should be again painfully dull when the next season of devotion comes? Oh! the secret of an elevated happy mind, is to be ever holding communion with God in the heart:—but,—not on the knees.

It has appeared to me, also, that we do not make that edifying and comforting

use of the word of God which we might. There is something there for every circumstance, and every feeling, and if we read it in simple faith, according to our need, I think we should be much oftener strengthened in trial, and comforted in sorrow. For instance, are we in circumstances of painful anxiety? Let us meditate on those texts which exhort us to a calm, and entire *trust* in God, with the blessed promises annexed to such a believing trust and I think we shall soon enter into the full meaning of those beautiful words, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee."

Are we tempted to despond? Let us prayerfully dwell on all the texts calculated to excite and strengthen hope. Are we disquieted with a remembrance of past sin? Let us meditate on all the promises of free, and full forgiveness, through the blood of atonement. Are we op-

pressed and disheartened by the struggles of indwelling sin? Let us seek those assurances of final victory, and of present help, so abundantly made to us through Christ. This way of reading the Scriptures would greatly support our faith, and we should find, that a "word" read "in season how good is it."

We have the most abundant encouragement to pray for hope. "This is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask any thing according to His will, he heareth us, and if we know that he hear us, we know that he have the petitions that we desired of Him." Now, "this is the WILL OF GOD, even your sanctification," and as a Scriptural hope has a very sanctifying influence, in praying for it, you are praying according to the *will of God*, and are therefore *sure* to be heard. "Ask, that ye *may receive*, that your joy may be full," are our Lord's own words.

There is not any reason for discouragement, whatever may be our trials, our conflicts, or our temptations, and we should honour God by encountering all our enemies in the spirit of Jehoshaphat, and his people, when they heard that a "great multitude were come up against them from beyond the sea." And Judah gathered themselves together, to ask help of the Lord: even out of all the cities of Judah they came to seek the Lord." In the midst of this immense congregation, Jehoshaphat stood forth, and solemnly and affectingly commended himself and his people to the protection of his God; reminding the Lord of all his gracious promises, and concluding his beautiful prayer with these words, "Oh! our God we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but, our eyes are upon thee." And all Judah stood before the Lord with their little ones, their wives, and their

children !” What a picture of danger, distress, and earnest supplication ! A prophet encourages them in the name of the Lord. “ Thus saith the Lord unto you, Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude ; for the battle is not yours but God’s.” They implicitly believed the gracious message ; they confidently expected the promised help and deliverance, and, in the full assurance of *hope*, they immediately began praising and extolling their God, though the mighty host which caused their fear, was stretched in all its strength, and power in the valley. Early the next morning, they sallied forth to the battle field, when the king addressed his people in a few emphatic words ; “ Hear O Judah ; *believe* in the Lord your God, *so* shall ye be *established* ; believe His prophets, so shall ye prosper.” And how did they go down to meet this fearful array of powerful enemies ? They “ praised the beauty of

holiness," and said, "praise the Lord, for his mercy endureth for ever." "And when they began to sing and to praise," the Lord began to destroy their enemies; and when "they looked into the multitude, behold, they were dead bodies falling to the earth, and none escaped." Oh! did *we* but meet, and engage our foes in this simple joyful confidence of hope, founded on the unerring word of the living God, we should often return from the conflict as the host of Judah, with great rejoicing, and with much spoil.

Oh! how does a bright scriptural hope strengthen in the hour of distress, and light up the chamber of death! Many such instances must occur to us, but one is now peculiarly present to my memory. It was a case of complicated distress, of especial sorrow. Beautiful, and interesting, the person I am alluding to, married early in life. Unhappily she connected herself

with one, who, by his dissipated conduct, and senseless extravagance, soon brought her to poverty. The trial of seeing his beloved child so distressed brought on a temporary aberration of mind in her father, whom she devotedly loved; and the constant and intense grief she felt on his account, and for her destitute children, sowed the seeds of a cancer, which soon began to manifest itself. These various afflictions had been blessed to her soul; for many years she had been humbly seeking her God, and he comforted her with a strong and bright hope. She felt it to be her duty to submit to the painful operation of having the part affected cut off: but when they offered to hold her during the trying period, she gently refused, and calmly added, "*the Lord* will support me." After a short time the cancer again showed itself, causing, as usual, intense suffering. She had in the former part of her sickness, attended the ministry of one,

on whose remembrance I love to dwell ! One, who made the sorrows of his flock his own ; whose tearful eye, and voice of love, as he sat by the bed of suffering, sweetly told, that his was not the cold sympathy of the world, but flowed from a heart filled with the love of Christ, and anxious like his blessed Master to heal every wounded spirit with the balm of a Saviour's love. Oh with what persevering zeal has he visited the lonely cottage of the sick and dying sinner ! With what simplicity, and fervour, has he directed the afflicted man to Him, who only could support and cheer him on his bed of languishing, and light up the gloomy chamber with a ray from heaven. How has his soul been pained, as the cold look, and almost averted face too plainly told, that his words had not reached the sick man's heart ;—but, that all was sorrow and darkness there. With what patient kindness has he repeated the oft-told blessed truths :

and when at last the warm, welcome, upraised eye, spoke of better feeling, with what redoubled earnestness and care did he guide the afflicted one, till he „clasped the cross, and was supported there.” And when his hope grew “bright and brighter still, as nearer death approached,” when the sick man grasped his hand, and said, “the peace of God was in his heart,” oh! with what tears of gratitude and love, with what humble and heartfelt joy did he pour forth his soul in thanksgiving and praise. To this dear minister of God she sent—she had been greatly comforted by his ministrations; and as her sufferings increased, she had still more need of comfort. He gladly obeyed the summons, and as his visit gave her consolation, in the overflowings of his loving heart, he promised her that comfort weekly, till comfort should be no longer necessary, till faith should be exchanged for sight. This promise was faithfully kept, though as she

had returned to her desolate home, many a dreary moor, and bleak hill, had to be passed, ere he could reach her dwelling. For a year he thus attended her, and I was privileged to be present at some of those visits of love; never can they be forgotten! My first I remember well;—all within the house was gloomy, and sad; all spoke of ruined fortunes. With a heart oppressed with melancholy, I passed to the sick chamber: carefully stealing round the bed, I intently gazed on the sufferer there! Traces of beauty were still visible in her countenance, though the features were sharpened by pain and sorrow. Before her, supported on a pillow, lay the swollen, unsightly, and diseased arm of suffering. There was an expression of perfect peace,—which was soon exchanged for joy as she welcomed her faithful and comforting friend. He inquired kindly if she had suffered less? She shook her head, and said, “the pain had been intense.” “But how has it been

with the soul? there has been no suffering there I trust." A gleam of heavenly light passed across her face, as she replied, "All peace, all comfort; no cloud overshadows that." Soon after a paroxysm of extreme pain came on, which for the instant disturbed her intellect, and the flush of anguish suffused her face. I shall never forget the countenance of that dear minister of God, during this trying interval: with tearful eyes he gazed upon the sufferer as if she had been his child, then clasped his hands, and raised the tearful eye to heaven, as he fervently implored help for the afflicted one. The pain subsided—the mind returned—and peace again overspread her face. She turned to those around, and gently said, "Thank God; I can *again* praise Him!"—On leaving this chamber of heavenly peace, lighted up as it was with a bright and glorious *hope* "full of immortality," how different were the feelings, from those experienced on entering it. How

insignificant seemed the world,—how fleeting every trial and sorrow! Her mind continued in the same elevated, happy, *blissful* state, till she sweetly fell asleep in Jesus! “She set, as sets the morning star, which goes not down behind the darkened west, nor hides obscured amidst the tempests of the sky :—but melts away into the light of heaven.”

And now beloved friend, farewell.—Remember Him who hath said, “My grace *is sufficient* for thee,—for my strength is made perfect in weakness.” And “God is able to make all grace *abound* toward you,” and “to supply *all your need*.” Remember that if you expect to conquer, you must obey the direction of the Spirit, and “put on the *whole* armour of God, that you may be *able* to stand against the wiles of the devil. And *again*, the Spirit says, by the apostle, “Wherefore take unto you the WHOLE armour of God.”

“ Now the God of HOPE, fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may *abound* in HOPE through the power of the Holy Ghost.”

Your most truly attached.

T. C. JOHNS, Red-lion-court, Fleet-street.





