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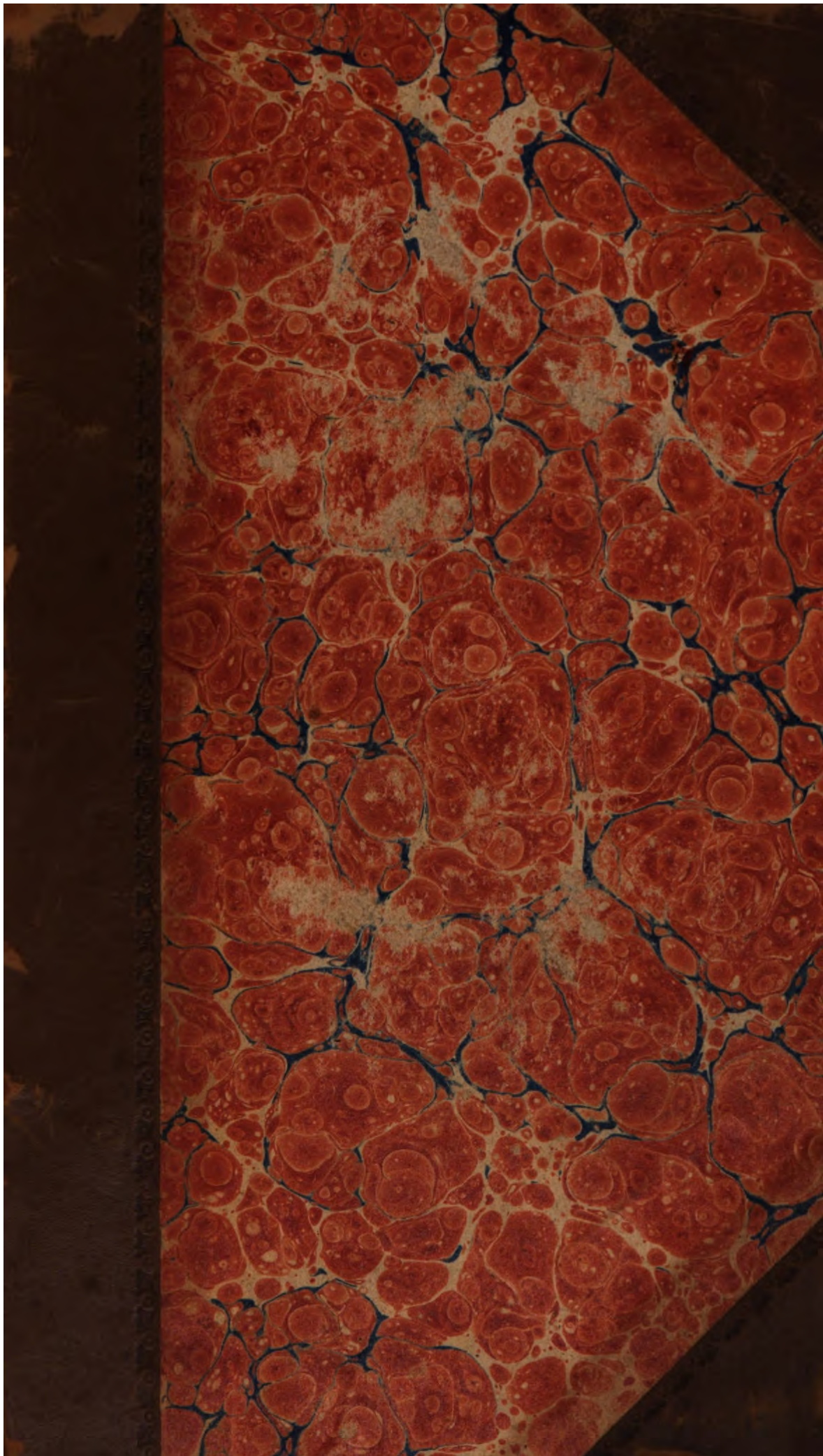
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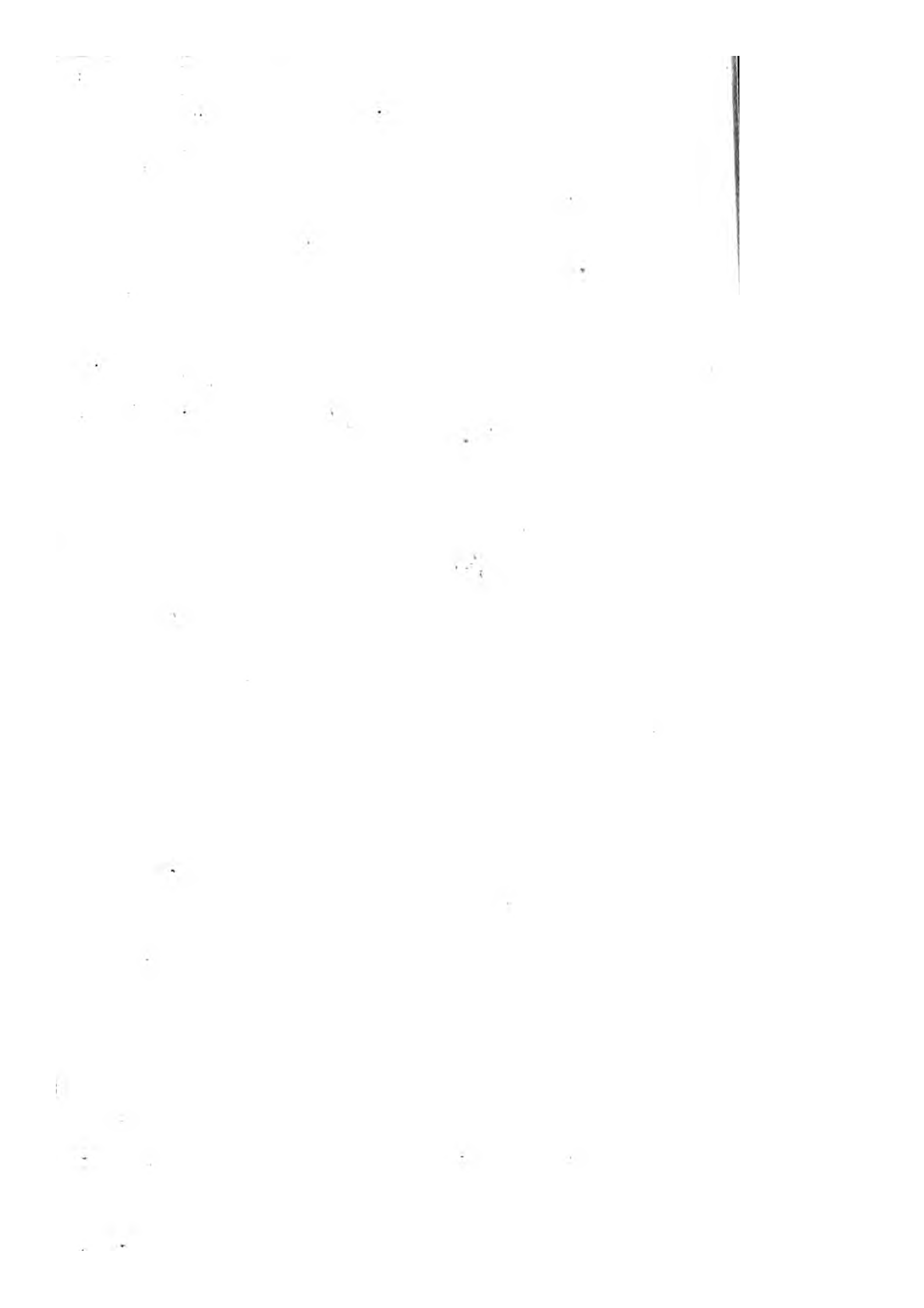




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DAILY READINGS.

PASSAGES OF SCRIPTURE,

SELECTED FOR SOCIAL READING,

WITH APPLICATIONS.

BY THE

AUTHOR OF "THE LISTENER," AND "CHRIST OUR
EXAMPLE," &c. &c.



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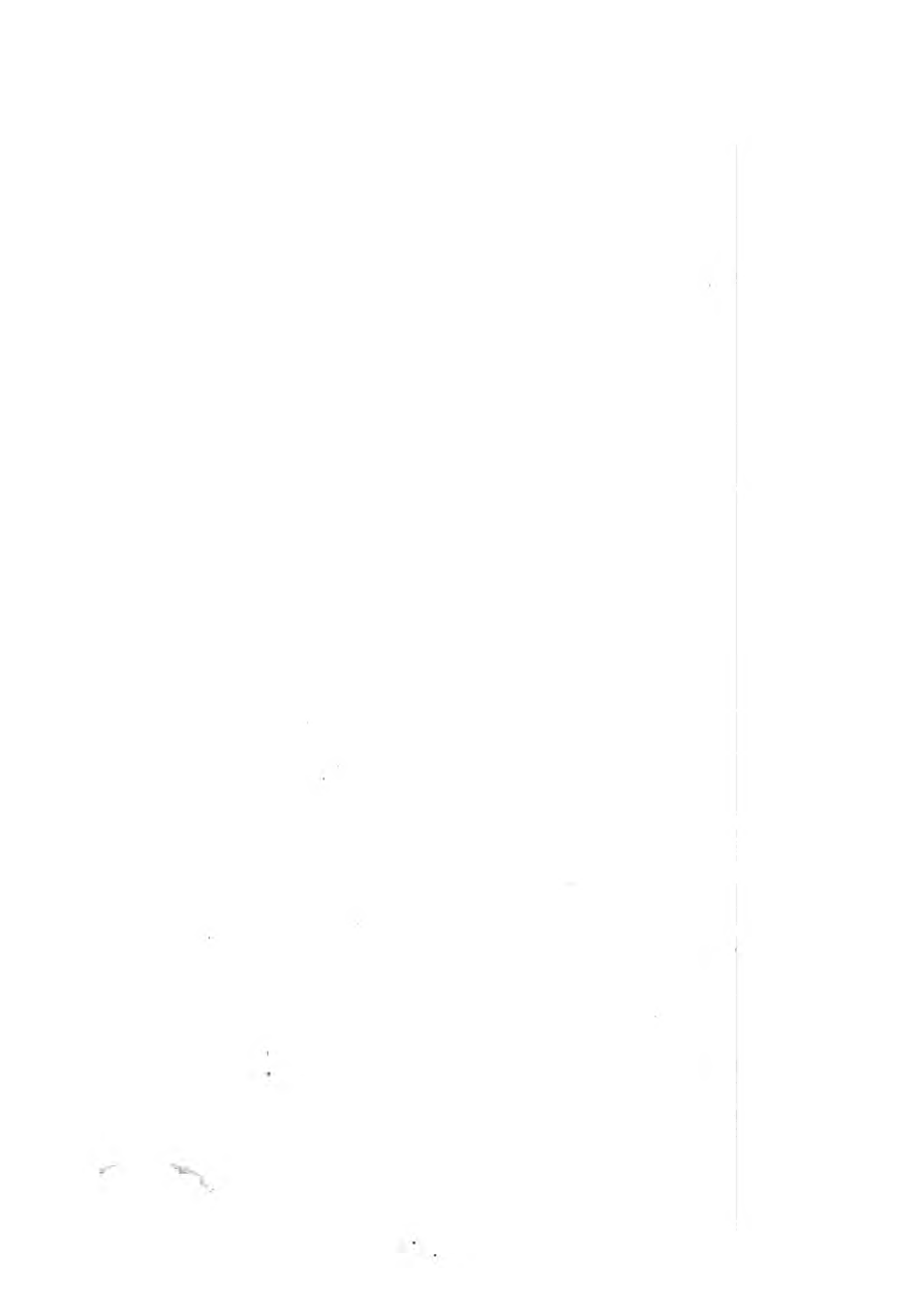
PREFACE.

THE following reflections are not intended for a Commentary upon the passages of Holy Scripture to which they are attached ; as such, they would be found insufficient, and sometimes inaccurate. They are, strictly speaking, reflections—thoughtful considerations of the text, such as might be supposed to be made extempore, or to arise in the mind of the reader, attentively perusing it for himself ; not so much to explain the meaning, as to derive instruction from it. Brevity is in such cases the greatest difficulty. I cannot be satisfied, that in the daily reading of the Bible, the word of God should be so far superseded by the words of men, that a single verse, or two, is as much as the protracted comment will admit of at one time. This must be

the case, if the whole meaning of the text is to be developed; and it is to avoid this, that in the following selections, I have considered each passage in a single bearing: I have chosen a single application out of the many that every passage would supply, and confined my remarks to one general impression from the whole, instead of dwelling upon every separate verse. My own feeling has also determined me as to the length of the passages. I have never thought it good to read much of the Scriptures at once; to efface the impression of one striking passage, by going on to another. In private perusal, I have found it more profitable to meditate on a short portion, going over it again and again, than to read throughout even a single chapter, if it contains many things. In social reading, if more time is to be occupied than will suffice for one perusal, I should rather recommend that the same passage be read again, after the comment, than that the text be proceeded with; unless the preceding or following parts of the chapter bear on the same point. Such is the case with many of the passages here selected, wherein I should have preferred to take the whole, had I not limited myself to a certain length; without meaning unprofitably to

limit the reader, when more can be advantageously perused; it will be seen, that my remarks frequently allude to the preceding or remaining verses of the chapter from which the passage is taken. In the selection, I have tried to be as general as possible; to give to no part of Holy Writ the preference, nor any particular bearing to the subjects. There are no portions of equal length throughout the Bible, that might not be dwelt upon as profitably; to select was not to choose, where one seemed no more desirable than another, and my only aim was to vary them. It is my intention to publish another volume, should the first be found acceptable, and seem likely to be useful to any class of persons. I have not designed it for any class in particular; I have simply committed to writing what I thought, and as I thought it, assured, that what the word of inspiration suggests to one mind, will seldom fail of adaptation to the minds of others.

THE AUTHOR.



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DAILY READINGS.

ISAIAH xl. 1—11.

1 COMFORT ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.

2 Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the LORD'S hand double for all her sins.

3 The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

4 Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain:

5 And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.

6 The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field:

7 The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass.

8 The grass withereth, the flower fadeth; but the word of the LORD shall stand for ever.

9 O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength: lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God!

10 Behold, the Lord God will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him: behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him.

11 He shall feed his flock like a shepherd; he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry *them* in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.

It would have been small comfort to his people had the prophet delivered but half his message—had the

voice uttered but half its "cry." It will be small comfort to us if we hear but a part, or if we receive but a part of the truth that it contains. When was the broken spirit healed, or the stubborn heart broken, by dwelling exclusively on man's infirmities? by drawing affecting pictures of the uncertainty of life, and the instability of all earthly things, apart from the promises that shall stand for ever? There is a religious sentiment which seems to live exclusively on the first mournful accent of this "cry"—that talks much of death, without being prepared for it; bewails the vanity of the world, without renouncing it; and dwells for ever on the emptiness and instability of all sublunary good, without having a taste for any thing beside: a morbid state of mind but too much administered to by the "cry" of some, who with much pious sentiment, and pathos, and fine feeling, do yet forget the main part of their message. I think also there are some, who without forgetting or excluding any thing, do yet give the prominence where God has not given it; and whether in the proclamation or the reception of the gospel, show a mournful preference to the darker phases of its varied aspect; liking rather to dwell on their own misery, than on the glorious triumphs of redeeming love. And hence it is, perhaps, that to so many Christians the straight path remains still crooked: the rough places are not made plain, and all is sadness where it should be joy. This is not the Lord's way; He alludes to our misery only to enhance the good tidings that He sends: He exposes our weakness only to contrast it with his own immutability and power. It is not on these that He would have us dwell to prepare our hearts for him. It is upon Himself; "Behold your God"—Jesus—in power a king, strong to save and omni-

potent to rule; his hand filled with his own reward to distribute to his people; his eye fixed on his own works to impute them to his beloved: in kindness a shepherd, to feed, to shelter, to lead; or if needful, to carry, even in his own gentle bosom, all that are committed to his keeping. These are the truths on which He would have us live—the preparation of heart that He has chosen. Let the grass wither; let the flower fade; let all that is ours be emptiness and nothing;—it is not on ourselves our eyes are fixed, it is on Christ—and the word of our God shall stand for ever. The gospel “cry” begins with pardon, and terminates in strength. “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.”

2 PETER iii. 8—18.

8 But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

9 The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

10 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night: in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burned up.

11 *Seeing* then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness;

12 Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens, being on fire, shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?

13 Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.

14 Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.

15 And account *that* the long-suffering of our Lord *is* salvation ; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you ;

16 As also in all *his* epistles, speaking in them of these things ; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as *they do* also the other

Scriptures, unto their own destruction.

17 Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know *these things* before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own stedfastness.

18 But grow in grace, and *in* the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him *be* glory both now and for ever. Amen.

“ He that believeth in the Lord shall not make haste.” It is the effect of faith to expand the thought beyond the stretch of sight, and, measuring all things with eternity, to reduce them to the proportion in which God beholds them. By the small measurement of man’s fourscore years, a day is much, for it is one of few ; an hour is loss, for even hours are numbered. Hope limited by earthly ken, grows sick upon delay, and expectation dies upon the unseen promises. Even fear cannot dwell upon unmeasured distance, but will betake itself to nearer objects. To-day is not comforted by thought of to-morrow’s joy, for to-morrow is no greater than itself ; and sorrow has nothing by which to measure its own brevity, that is not brief as well. It is faith, when it enlarges the vision, by realizing things unseen ; giving to the future life and the future world as much reality as belongs to things tangible and present ; it is this, that, like a beautiful back-ground to a picture, imparts to every intervening object its due colouring and proportion ; and, because it is always visible, allows nothing to be contemplated distorted and alone. To the eye of nature, God’s workings appear slow ; the wicked presume upon the delays of his justice, and the righteous faint in waiting for

his promise ; the former because he has no faith to expand his view, the latter because he wants a stronger light upon it. The prayer seems long unanswered ; the sorrow seems long unmitigated ; the peace too long in finding, and sin too long subduing. The soul becomes impatient of itself ; restless, and really impatient with its God. And with the ungodly world around us, how impatient are we of things that God can bear with ; in what a hurry to root up the tares that He permits to grow ; how irritable and angry about sins that God has not yet punished in his enemies, or perhaps only not yet subdued in those that love him. All this results from the limitedness of our views, and the indistinctness of eternal space ; which makes the extent of time's brief course seem something. The day will come when we shall see it nothing ; too short for a sigh, too transient for a wish—too rapid for thought to measure its duration. There is but one thing that gives time importance ; we have something to do in it ; and because we have, its very brevity adds to its importance. We have to get ready for our Lord's return ; we have to be diligent in our day's work, that when He shall appear there shall be no bustle and disorder in our houses, as if we were taken by surprise, but that we may be found of him in peace. We have so to grow in his grace that we may be meet for his company, and so to increase in his knowledge that we may enjoy the blessed companionship. Let us give Him now the glory we shall render Him for ever, for the patient love that grants us time for this.

GENESIS xix. 12—22.

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

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

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

15 And when the morning arose, then the angels hastened Lot, saying, Arise, take thy wife, and thy two daughters, which are here; lest thou be consumed in the iniquity of the city.

16 And while he lingered, the men laid hold upon his hand, and upon the hand of his wife, and upon the hand of his two daughters; the LORD being merciful unto him: and they brought him forth, and set him without the city.

17 And it came to pass, when they had brought them forth abroad, that he said, Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed.

18 And Lot said unto them, Oh, not so, my lord :

19 Behold now, thy servant hath found grace in thy sight, and thou hast magnified thy mercy, which thou hast shewed unto me in saving my life; and I cannot escape to the mountain, lest some evil take me, and I die.

20 Behold now, this city is near to flee unto, and it is a little one: oh, let me escape thither, (*is it not a little one?*) and my soul shall live.

21 And he said unto him, See, I have accepted thee concerning this thing also, that I will not overthrow this city, for the which thou hast spoken.

22 Haste thee, escape thither; for I cannot do any thing till thou be come thither: therefore the name of the city was called Zoar.

The Scripture never magnifies one attribute of God at the expense of another, as men are apt to do; for God seldom exhibits his justice without his mercy, or his mercy without his justice. Lot had greatly sinned in separating himself from the people of God, and taking up his residence among the unrighteous, for the sake of the

“well-watered plains,” foregoing the benefits of religious communion, and the blessing of God that attends it, for the sake of this world’s good. It followed to Lot, as it does to all who do the same; his life was embittered by the contact of sin, and his soul grieved, from day to day, with the ungodly deeds committed round him; and this grief, painful as it was, was that emotion of God’s Spirit which alone preserved him from the influences of such society. If we have made a choice, like his, either shall we suffer as he did, or abide the worse alternative of losing our sensibility to sin, and becoming reconciled to ungodliness. How often has a Christian been made to feel that he has wilfully pitched his tent in the wrong place, making that the last consideration which ought to have been the first—his own spiritual welfare. But this was not all. This man of God, by choosing his portion among the wicked, had exposed himself to the Divine wrath, and without a special interposition must have shared in their destruction. Had God been only just, Lot would have perished in Sodom. How many of us would have perished, will still perish, with that world for which we forsake him, if He does not interpose his power to force us out of it! But here was his mercy magnified; God would not let his servant ruin himself for ever. He let him take his miserable choice for a season, till he had proved its utmost consequences; but Lot was his servant still. He had not forsaken his worship, although he had so greatly provoked his judgments, and God had not forsaken him; at the last moment He sent his angels to bring him out. A beautiful figure of that redeeming grace which pursues the backsliding sinner, when he seems determined to place himself beyond its influence. Lot was saved, as many are saved, by divine mercy, in

spite of their own folly ; but not without a striking manifestation of Divine justice. He escaped with his life, but he took nothing with him of that for which he had forsaken the dwellings of the righteous ; there was nothing left to him of the flocks and the herds, for which he had wanted more room when he parted from Abraham. He had brought a curse upon the temporal good with which a bountiful Providence had blessed him, and compelled the Giver to take it all away. He never returned to the happy society of God's people ; but found in the solitude of the mountain a melancholy safety. Was there not a deeper anguish still ? Of that family whom he had wilfully exposed to contamination, some stayed behind and perished ; one looked fatally back upon the things he had led her so much to value ; the two that followed him took with them the most dreadful impress of the example to which he had exposed them. Are God's people not to fear his retributive justice ?

PSALM xxv. 10—22.

10 All the paths of the LORD *are* mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies.

11 For thy name's sake, O LORD, pardon mine iniquity ; for it *is* great.

12 What man *is* he that feareth the LORD ? him shall he teach in the way *that* he shall choose .

13 His soul shall dwell at ease ; and his seed shall inherit the earth.

14 The secret of the LORD *is* with them that fear him ; and he will shew them his covenant.

15 Mine eyes *are* ever toward the LORD ; for he shall pluck my feet out of the net.

16 Turn thee unto me, and have mercy upon me ; for I *am* desolate and afflicted.

17 The troubles of my heart are enlarged : O bring thou me out of my distresses.

18 Look upon mine affliction,

and my pain : and forgive all my sins.

19 Consider mine enemies ; for they are many ; and they hate me with cruel hatred.

20 O keep my soul, and deliver me : let me not be ashamed ;

for I put my trust in thee.

21 Let integrity and uprightness preserve me ; for I wait on thee.

22 Redeem Israel, O God, out of all his troubles.

“ All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth.” Neither mercy alone nor truth alone, but both inseparably. Happy indeed are we when both are on our side ; when, like the Psalmist, we can appeal to both. That appeal to divine mercy so often heard from those who have not kept the covenant of God in Christ is vain indeed, since the whole truth of God’s word and testimony is against them. Not so here. The confidence of the believer is founded on the very plea that might seem to be against it : his claim to mercy is exactly that which might seem to make it void—the greatness of his iniquity, the depth of his distresses, the overwhelming agonies of conscious sin, in union with that fear of God which knows all sin to be obnoxious to his judgments. Is this fear, this sense of sin, this trouble of heart, the thing that casts us down, and makes faint our cries for mercy to the Almighty ? It should not be so : for these are the only things that make his truth to be one with his mercy on our behalf. To him that feareth lest he should miss the way of the Lord, He is pledged by his truth to teach it. To him that feareth lest he should mistake the covenant of the Lord, He is pledged by his truth to show it. While they, and they only, whose iniquities are too great for every other hope, have the honour of his own name to plead for pardon ; because it is to such that he has promised it. Thus the number of our spiritual enemies, and their persevering opposition—the snares and temptations that have encom-

passed, perhaps entangled us, and the sins and sorrows that have overwhelmed our souls, are only so many occasions of confidence in the divine mercy, since they are all arguments with God on our behalf. And there is no argument so powerful as our own trust in him. While we have anything else to trust in, we may be made ashamed, and God's glory be not concerned in it; we may be disappointed, even destroyed, and his truth be not questioned in it. But to fail those that put their trust in him would be to compromise both, and transfer our shame to him. Let there be but integrity in our trust, and uprightness in our profession, and it is neither the greatness of our sins, nor the multitude of our enemies, that need discourage us. We have only to wait, and our troubles shall gather themselves up and remove out of our way, like the waters of Jordan before the ark of Israel, that we may pass dry-shod into the land of peace;—“His soul shall dwell at ease, and his seed shall inherit the earth.”

JOB vii. 6—21.

6 My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, and are spent without hope.

7 O remember that my life is wind: mine eye shall no more see good.

8 The eye of him that hath seen me shall see me no more: thine eyes are upon me, and I am not.

9 As the cloud is consumed and vanisheth away; so he that goeth down to the grave shall come up no more.

10 He shall return no more to his house, neither shall his place know him any more.

11 Therefore I will not refrain my mouth; I will speak in the anguish of my spirit; I will complain in the bitterness of my soul.

12 Am I a sea, or a whale, that thou settest a watch over me?

13 When I say, My bed shall comfort me, my couch shall ease my complaint;

14 Then thou scarest me with dreams, and terrifiest me through visions :

15 So that my soul chooseth strangling, *and* death rather than my life.

16 I loathe *it* ; I would not live alway : let me alone ; for my days *are* vanity.

17 What *is* man that thou shouldest magnify him ? and that thou shouldest set thine heart upon him ?

18 And that thou shouldst visit him every morning, *and* try him every moment ?

19 How long wilt thou not depart from me, nor let me alone till I swallow down my spittle ?

20 I have sinned ; what shall I do unto thee, O thou Preserver of men ? why hast thou set me as a mark against thee, so that I am a burden to myself ?

21 And why dost thou not pardon my transgression, and take away mine iniquity ? for now shall I sleep in the dust ; and thou shalt seek me in the morning, but I *shall* not *be*.

This portrait of suffering humanity, heart-rending as it is, has had its counterparts. The amazement that seized upon the soul of Job, when he contemplated his own condition—death without hope, a grave without return, about to end an existence more loathsome than that grave, and more agonizing than that death—an existence, empty as the vapour, and impermanent as the fitting cloud, yet capable of unutterable anguish ; a hireling, a worm, a thing of dust, made the mark of vengeance to the Infinite, magnified into an object of hatred to the Omnipotent ; a creature so abject, and not forgiven, so worthless, and neither abandoned nor amended—the amazement with which Job contemplated such a state, without the only beam that could have thrown light upon it ; the beam of divine truth, clear flowing from the lamp of revelation, was neither unreasonable, nor unparalleled. The friends that wondered at him, and reproached him, would have felt the same, had their souls been in his soul's stead, so little had they of the light he wanted. And how many, uncomfited in the hour of sorrow by belief in the word of God, have poured

out their souls in bitterness like this; or have owed it only to their insensibility that they did not! Offspring of sin and misery! without the Gospel, this is the picture of your condition, whether the mirror in which to see yourselves has ever been held up to you or not; if you do not believe the gospel, this is what you will see, what you must see, whenever your eyes are opened upon yourself. It has been often first seen, with the full light of the eternal world upon it, a sight that mortal imagination cannot picture. It has been sometimes seen at the heart-breaking of the sceptic, unable to understand, but capable to feel it. It is seen as Job saw it, when bodily suffering, and mental care, wearisome nights and months of vanity, which God does not, and man can not cheer, awaken the soul to a sense of its misery, and force from it that first cry of deprecation to an unreconciled God—“How long wilt thou not depart from me?” Why am I afflicted thus? Am I a whale, a monster, that thou thus dealest with me? If I have transgressed, why not pardon me? If I am mortal, why not let me die in peace? Happy indeed if the cry end as Job’s was ended, by a sight of the Almighty as He is; if the light of revelation breaks in upon the soul at such an hour, and shows us man here, a probationer for heaven, God afflicting him in mercy, and waiting to be gracious; time an education for eternity, and death the beginning, not the end of life.

JEREMIAH xxxi. 27—37.

27 Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will sow the house of Israel, and the house of Judah, with the seed of man, and with the seed of beast.

28 And it shall come to pass, *that* like as I have watched over them, to pluck up, and to break down, and to throw down, and to destroy, and to afflict; so will I watch over them, to build, and to plant, saith the LORD.

29 In those days they shall say no more, The fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children's teeth are set on edge.

30 But every one shall die for his own iniquity; every man that eateth the sour grape, his teeth shall be set on edge.

31 Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah:

32 Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers, in the day *that* I took them by the hand, to bring them out of the land of Egypt; (which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD;)

33 But this *shall be* the covenant that I will make with

the house of Israel; after those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.

34 And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

35 Thus saith the LORD, which giveth the sun for a light by day, *and* the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, which divideth the sea when the waves thereof roar; The LORD of hosts *is* his name:

36 If those ordinances depart from before me, saith the LORD, *then* the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me for ever.

37 Thus saith the LORD, If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel, for all that they have done, saith the Lord.

Nothing is wanting in divine revelation, to assure the believer of his final safety in Jesus Christ. In the New Testament, the most positive declarations of the unchange-

ableness of God's purpose of grace and love, are supported by arguments the most conclusive; that if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled by Christ, much more, being reconciled, shall we be saved by him. The end is no more contingent, than the beginning of the work of grace; if the dead in sin do not bring themselves to life in Christ, neither does it depend on them to keep themselves alive unto the end. The beginning and the ending, are one workmanship. In the Old Testament, we have the same truth exhibited, in a manner to allay every anxious and mistrustful doubt in them that have entered into the covenant of grace. The history of God's chosen people, at once the pattern and the pledge of all that concerns his spiritual Israel, illustrates no truth more fully than this, that the choice was unalterable; the separation irrevocable; the adoption without repentance, and for ever. It began in the sovereign love of the Most High, and could not be determined by any act of man's, not even by his own wilfulness and perversity. Contingencies there were indeed, most fearful ones; dispersion and desolation, and temporary abandonment; judgments severe and prolonged beyond example, were the alternatives of every blessing made dependent upon their obedience. They could do all, and did do all but separate themselves for ever from his loving mercy; withdraw themselves from that eye, that as it watched over them to pluck up, and to break down, and to throw down, and to destroy and to afflict, so would it watch over them to build and to plant, until they should be no more plucked up, nor thrown down any more for ever. Every believer is at last, what he is at first, a miserable sinner, kept from destruction by the power of God—what Israel as a nation was, every member of the spiritual

Israel individually is—a rebellious child; but still a child, prone to depart continually, and incur a judgment where he might have had a blessing; so prone, that if the covenant of grace were not more sure than his observance of it, he would depart for ever. But this is no where threatened of the one Israel, or of the other. I will not cast off the seed of Israel, for all that they have done, saith the Lord. If his people sin, sorrow pursues them; if they turn their steps from God, He turns away his face from them, and leaves them desolate indeed; but his ordinance stands fast; grace follows them; sorrow works repentance; the law is graven deeper and deeper in their hearts; they are still his people, and He still their God; neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor their own sinfulness, the most formidable enemy of all, shall be able to separate them from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

ST. JAMES iv. 5—17.

5 Do ye think that the Scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?

6 But he giveth more grace: wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.

7 Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

8 Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse *your* hands, *ye* sin-

ners: and purify *your* hearts, *ye* double-minded.

9 Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and *your* joy to heaviness.

10 Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.

11 Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of *his* brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the

law : but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge.

12 There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy : who art thou that judgest another ?

13 Go to now, ye that say, To-day or to-morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain :

14 Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow :

For what is your life ? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.

15 For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.

16 But now ye rejoice in your boastings : all such rejoicing is evil.

17 Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.

That faith is the gift of God, that no man can come to Christ, except the Father draw him, or without his special grace can believe unto salvation, presents a difficulty to some minds, and an excuse to others ; as if, since we can neither produce divine grace, nor increase it in ourselves, we had only to wait inactively till it is given. St. James admits this truth, it is God that gives grace, and increases it ; but while this we cannot, there is much that we can do. Whether we be yet in the bond of iniquity, aliens from God, and uncircumcised in heart, needing to be regenerated, and born anew of the Spirit ; or whether we be weak, unstable, undecided Christians, longing to be more stedfast and consistent in the faith ; though in either case, the required grace must come from God, there is very much that we can do towards procuring it. Proceeding on God's own word, that He resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble, the rescript is very simple. " Submit yourselves to God," cease to murmur at his ways, to dispute against his word, and to resist his laws. " Draw nigh" unto him ; avoid the things that keep him out of mind, or make his presence fearful ; seek him in thought, in

prayer, and reading of his word. This we can do, assuredly. "Resist the devil," "Cleanse your hands," "Purify your hearts." This too, we can do, by avoiding whatever leads to sin, whatever encourages a guilty thought, or excites an unholy desire, or leads to the commission of an ungodly deed. "Let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness." Instead of drowning in this world's gaiety and mirth, the stirrings of conscience, and the strivings of the Spirit, withdraw from all ungodly pleasures and excitements, and mourn and weep before God, as better becomes an unpardoned sinner, or a soul unsanctified. "Humble yourselves." Give up that pride of heart, and pride of circumstance, and pride of self-righteousness, which is for ever struggling to exalt the creature, whose only road to honour is abasement. And as a proof of this, for there can be no stronger, cease to judge hardly, and search out tenaciously, the faults and inconsistencies of others, especially of the brethren in Christ; whether to exalt yourself by the comparison, or excuse yourself by the example, or find a pretext against religion in the faults of its professors: the humble see nothing on earth so evil as themselves. And give up your independence. Look upon all that you possess, as not your own; upon all that you want, as God's alone to give; upon all you design or undertake, as simply and wholly dependent upon His will. All these things we certainly can do, and these are the things that interfere with the divine life in the soul; with its reception first, and with its growth when there.

1 KINGS xxii. 10—23.

10 And the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah sat each on his throne, having put on their robes, in a void place in the entrance of the gate of Samaria: and all the prophets prophesied before them.

11 And Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah made him horns of iron: and he said, Thus saith the LORD, With these shalt thou push the Syrians, until thou have consumed them.

12 And all the prophets prophesied so, saying, Go up to Ramoth-gilead, and prosper: for the LORD shall deliver it into the king's hand.

13 And the messenger that was gone to call Micaiah spake unto him, saying, Behold now, the words of the prophets *declare* good unto the king with one mouth: let thy word, I pray thee, be like the word of one of them, and speak *that which is* good.

14 And Micaiah said, As the LORD liveth, what the LORD saith unto me, that will I speak.

15 So he came to the king. And the king said unto him, Micaiah, shall we go against Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall we forbear? And he answered him, Go, and prosper: for the LORD shall deliver *it* into the hand of the king.

16 And the king said unto him, How many times shall I adjure thee that thou tell me

nothing but *that which is* true in the name of the LORD?

17 And he said, I saw all Israel scattered upon the hills, as sheep that have not a shepherd: and the LORD said, These have no master; let them return every man to his house in peace.

18 And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, Did I not tell thee that he would prophesy no good concerning me, but evil?

19 And he said, Hear thou, therefore, the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing by him, on his right hand and on his left.

20 And the LORD said, Who shall persuade Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead? And one said on this manner, and another said on that manner.

21 And there came forth a spirit, and stood before the LORD, and said, I will persuade him.

22 And the LORD said unto him, Wherewith? And he said, I will go forth, and I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And he said, Thou shalt persuade *him*, and prevail also: go forth, and do so.

23 Now therefore, behold, the LORD hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these thy prophets, and the LORD hath spoken evil concerning thee.

Many passages in the Bible seem expressly intended

to betray the secrets of the invisible world ; to tell us once, that we may remember always, how things are transacted which influence human destiny, without being submitted to human sense ; and the fate of men, and the fate of nations settled, beyond their hearing and beyond their ken. Such passages claim our most exact attention ; they are not extraordinary and supernatural incidents that never occur again ; they are extraordinary and supernatural disclosures of things that are occurring daily. Such I have no doubt is the passage before us. Micaiah saw a vision ; but that vision represented a reality. The agency of evil spirits is a reality ; that God controls them, and makes use of them, is a reality. To lead men into sin ? No, but to punish them when their cup of iniquity is full. God has no agency for moral evil ; but He makes use of it, and of its instruments, to try the minds of men, and work both his mercies and his vengeance ; making often the wilfulness of moral evil to produce the temporal evils which are to be its punishment. It was so in this case. God did employ a lying spirit to mislead the king ; but not without Ahab's knowledge, nor against his will. The Almighty did not deceive Ahab ; the lying spirit needed not to have deceived him, unless he had chosen to be misled. God sent his own inspired prophet with the truth ; the king knew him to be the Lord's prophet, and therefore might have known he spake the truth. God further disclosed to Ahab, by his mouth, the purpose of the deceiver, and his own design in sending him. Was the king really deceived when he was misled ? Or did he not rather, being persuaded on either hand, by truth on the one side and by falsehood on the other, wilfully and perversely determine wrong ? Such is the perpetual colli-

sion in the heart of every man, between the Spirit of God and the spirits of darkness. The one gives testimony sufficient of God's will to lead us aright; but we do not like his counsels. The others ply us with falsehoods and evil persuasions, which would have no power to mislead us, if our hearts were single, and our will unbiassed. God has warned us of them; but they prevail, and He allows them to prevail, because we are not honest in inquiring for the right way. Ahab did not mean to believe Micaiah when he sent for him, unless his answer should be agreeable. God saw this, and sent two messengers, that he might take his choice; He had indeed determined the king's destruction, but He used no compulsion; He left his will free, with ample information of the truth, and Ahab chose the false counsel, because he liked it best. Whenever Satan misleads us, this is the method of it. God's will is sufficiently revealed; but we follow the tempter's suggestions because we like them—whatever ensues is no more than has been foretold to us.

MATT. xxvi. 17—29.

17 Now the first *day* of the *feast of unleavened bread* the disciples came to Jesus, saying unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare for thee to eat the passover?

18 And he said, Go into the city to such a man, and say unto him, The Master saith, My time is at hand; I will keep the passover at thy house with my disciples.

19 And the disciples did as

Jesus had appointed them; and they made ready the passover.

20 Now when the even was come, he sat down with the twelve.

21 And as they did eat, he said, Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me.

22 And they were exceeding sorrowful, and began every one of them to say unto him, Lord, is it I?

23 And he answered and

said, He that dippeth *his* hand with me in the dish, the same shall betray me.

24 The Son of man goeth, as it is written of him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! it had been good for that man if he had not been born.

25 Then Judas, which betrayed him, answered and said, Master, is it I? He said unto him, Thou hast said.

26 And, as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to

the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body.

27 And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it:

28 For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.

29 But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.

By this act of our Lord, the passover of the Jewish ritual was merged in the Christian sacrament of the Lord's supper. As the former commemorated the release of Israel from Egyptian bondage, and the passing by of the destroying angel when he saw the blood of sprinkling on the door, the latter commemorates the real event which those things typified and prefigured—the death of the Lamb of God, the freeing of his people from the yoke of sin, and their security under covert of his blood. As was observed with reference to the Sabbath, the celebration of the antitype took place of the celebration of the type. No one could be admitted to the passover unless he had been circumcised; the outward sign by which he made profession of the Jewish faith. No one can be admitted to the Lord's supper without making profession, by outward acknowledgments, of the faith of Christ. All who did the former were not circumcised in heart, and all who do the latter are not sincere in heart. But it is worthy of remark that Jesus, who knew what was in the mind of Judas, did not refuse him the sacrament on that account. The traitor had not openly

forsaken him—he still professed to be, and still appeared to be, one of his disciples—inasmuch as he came with them to the supper. Christ, though he previously declared that he was not deceived, knowing whom He had chosen, took him on his profession, and allowed him to receive the bread and wine to his own condemnation. I think this might satisfy the scruples of some who do not like to receive the sacrament in company with any but true believers. If that first communion was not pure, administered by Christ's own hand, how can we expect that any other should be so? If Christ admitted a communicant on the outward profession, when He knew it false, how is man, who cannot know, to insist on better evidence? But it offers no encouragement to the unbeliever to approach, or to expect benefit in the communion. Judas was the first who received it unworthily. He did indeed eat and drink his own condemnation—the very body and blood he had determined to betray. So far from benefiting or being amended by the administration, it was the very opportunity of Satan, who immediately after entered into him, as is stated by St. John. Having before put it into his mind to betray his Master, he now took full possession of him to effect his evil purpose. It is a forcible warning to those who receive the same unworthily; with purposes of sin, or thoughts of unbelief covertly lurking in an unexamined heart, promising, but not intending to lead a new life, and walk henceforth in God's holy ways. If there is any doctrine of the Gospel we purpose to resist, any of its precepts we intend not to observe, or any of its requirements we are not resolved to acquiesce in, there is in us a fearful resemblance to the mind of Judas when he sate down to supper with his Master, determined to betray him; and

there is the same enemy in waiting to take advantage of the opportunity to confirm us in our worst purposes.

REVELATION xx. 4—15.

4 And I saw thrones, and they that sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and *I saw* the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received *his* mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.

5 But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection.

6 Blessed and holy *is* he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.

7 And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison.

8 And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom *is* as the sand of the sea.

9 And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God

out of heaven, and devoured them.

10 And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet *are*, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

11 And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them.

12 And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God: and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is *the book* of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.

13 And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.

14 And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.

15 And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.

There are then two deaths, and two resurrections, distinct in time, and distinct in the subjects of them, with a definite interval between. The narration is so succinct, so explicit, as to the order in which the events are to succeed each other, it seems extraordinary, there should be so much difference of opinion about it; and the persons who are to be the subjects of these events, are so distinctly separated, there scarcely seems a possibility of applying to one, what belongs to another. Here is a first death. "It is appointed to all men once to die;" but this death is followed by a resurrection from the dead, and therefore is not eternal. There is a second death, which is eternal, for it is subsequent to the latest resurrection, and is followed by no other; of this all men are not partakers, which makes distinctly two parties in the narrative. Also there is a first resurrection, of which, some only are participants: "for the rest of the dead lived not yet"—making still two parties, the risen from the dead, who are of course alive; and the not yet risen, who are of course dead. It appears to me impossible, that these two parties should be afterwards so confounded, as to be all called, "the dead," in the latter verses. I must believe, therefore, that those who are the blessed partakers of the first resurrection, whatever be our construction of the time or nature of it, are not comprehended in the judgment of the dead, and are no more included in the second resurrection, than in the second death. They are alive already, their names are written in the book of life, the record of the living; and they are present to answer to the roll-call of their Redeemer, when that book is opened, perhaps to be rewarded by him in the arrangement of his kingdom, by some reckoning kept of their

fitness or their service. But in that other book, the record of the dead, neither their names, nor their works have any place; it was thence their sins were blotted out, that there should be no more remembrance of them—it was there the hand-writing was obliterated, that was against them. In the dark foldings of that book, there will be no discoveries made of sins that the sacrifice has borne away into the wilderness, to a land unknown, that they should no more be found. The living Dove, when, dipped in the blood of the slain one, he bore away the leper's sin, did not deposit it there. The justified in Christ will not come into judgment: the only memory of his sins is in his own grateful bosom, where it will remain for ever, to enhance his Saviour's love. Happy indeed are they, who have part in the first resurrection: we may be mistaken in the time of its occurrence, and the mistake be harmless; not so, if we mistake as to our share in it.

DANIEL vi. 10—23.

10 Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and, his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a-day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime.

11 Then these men assembled, and found Daniel praying and making supplication before his God.

12 Then they came near, and spake before the king concerning the king's decree; Hast

thou not signed a decree, that every man that shall ask a *petition* of any god or man within thirty days, save of thee, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions? The king answered and said, The thing *is* true, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not.

13 Then answered they, and said before the king, That Daniel, which *is* of the children of the captivity of Judah, regardeth not thee, O king, nor the decree that thou hast sign-

ed, but maketh his petition three times a-day.

14 Then the king, when he heard *these* words, was sore displeased with himself, and set *his* heart on Daniel to deliver him; and he laboured till the going down of the sun to deliver him.

15 Then these men assembled unto the king, and said unto the king, Know, O king, that the law of the Medes and Persians *is*, That no decree nor statute which the king establisheth may be changed.

16 Then the king commanded, and they brought Daniel, and cast *him* into the den of lions. *Now* the king spake and said unto Daniel, Thy God, whom thou servest continually, he will deliver thee.

17 And a stone was brought, and laid upon the mouth of the den; and the king sealed it with his own signet, and with the signet of his lords, that the purpose might not be changed concerning Daniel.

18 Then the king went to his palace, and passed the night fasting: neither were instru-

ments of music brought before him; and his sleep went from him.

19 Then the king arose very early in the morning, and went in haste unto the den of lions.

20 And when he came to the den, he cried with a lamentable voice unto Daniel; *and* the king spake and said to Daniel, O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?

21 Then said Daniel unto the king, O king, live for ever.

22 My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt.

23 Then was the king exceeding glad for him, and commanded that they should take Daniel up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no manner of hurt was found upon him, because he believed in his God.

We might suppose, in reading the narrative parts of the Old Testament, that the Spirit of God, foreseeing the difficulties which the abstract doctrines of the Gospel would present to the clouded intellects of men, had dictated these narratives in a manner expressly fitted to remove whatever is practical in such difficulties; so that whatever mistakes may be made as to the designs of God, there need be none as to His requirements. If it was foreseen that men, instead of joyfully embracing the

offer of salvation, would dispute against its terms ; would cite one apostle to disprove another, and make God's own words to be at variance with themselves ; if it was to be provided for, that the promise of every thing to faith would seem to give a licence to our practice ; or the mention of works to invalidate the grant to faith alone ;—nothing could be better suited than the terms of these narratives, to satisfy the practical inquirer, while they leave the theoretical disputant to his cavils. On examination of the stories of the Old Testament saints, we shall find, that although some act of obedience gave the immediate occasion, every peculiar manifestation of God's favour is said by himself to be granted to their *faith* ; as if on purpose to show, that it was granted to the principle from which the work proceeded, not to the work itself. Abraham, for instance, is signalized for faith, although the obedience and submission it produced are unparalleled. But this is nowhere more powerfully exemplified than in the case of Daniel. We cannot read it without being arrested, almost startled, by those last words : “ Because he believed in his God.” It was not his courageous devotion then, beautiful as it was, that closed the lions' mouths ; it was not the innocency of his life nor the injustice of his sentence, his fearlessness of man and open acknowledgment of the God of Israel, that kept Daniel alive in that ferocious grave. If man had written the comment, he would have said it was, and thence perhaps inferred, it was his works that saved him. He would have said, “ Because he obeyed God.”—“ Because he served him.” Daniel did obey Him, did serve Him, under no common circumstances ; but the Holy Spirit passes over these manifestations of principle, as if purposely to fix our

attention on that from which they sprung, from which alone they derived their value in the sight of God—his *faith*. Daniel believed the promises made by God, whether personally to himself or to his people generally, and he acted accordingly—the simplest exhibition of true Gospel faith; but here as in the Gospel, the acceptance is ascribed to the belief, not to the acting.

ST. LUKE xii. 22—32.

22 And he said unto his disciples, Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat; neither for the body, what ye shall put on.

23 The life is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment.

24 Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn; and God feedeth them. How much more are ye better than the fowls?

25 And which of you with taking thought can add to his stature one cubit?

26 If ye then be not able to do that thing which is least, why take ye thought for the rest?

27 Consider the lilies how they grow; they toil not, they spin not: and yet I say unto

you, That Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

28 If then God so clothed the grass, which is to-day in the field, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O ye of little faith?

29 And seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind.

30 For all these things do the nations of the world seek after: and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things.

31 But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you.

32 Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

There are not many of the requirements of the Gospel, from which human nature is so much disposed to excuse itself as this. We must all be conscious how loitering a compliance, and to the last how imperfect a

one, we have yielded to an injunction so full of blessedness to ourselves, and so reasonable on the part of Him who makes it. It is not spoken of those to whom this world is all: men must have a treasure somewhere, and their hearts must be upon it; and he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God, must needs take care of it for himself, for God has not promised to do so. The rich man of this chapter, is rather blamed for his security, than for his care. It is the disciple of Jesus Christ who is forbidden all anxiety about the things of this life; first, because it is unnecessary; and then, because it is unavailing; and lastly, because it is unreasonable. For things indispensable to us, how unnecessary; when the body that is to be clothed, is of God's making; and the life to be fed, is of God's giving; as if its preservation could be left to man. In things superfluous, how unnecessary still; while all nature revels in the prodigality of his bounty, as if it were likely our heavenly Father would restrict us to less than it is desirable we should have. In all things, how unavailing; not a cubit to be added, nor a hair to be changed! With all our interference, nothing can be done but by the hand of Him, who proposes to take the charge from us. With all our mistrust, our dependence remains the same; what He gives, we have—what he gives not, we cannot have, with all our cares. But chiefly, how unreasonable are these anxieties! It is our Father's good pleasure, to give us the kingdom; his own kingdom, which comprehends all things in time, and in eternity. "All things are yours, for ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's." Are we indeed afraid, lest this should be too little, or come short of what we require; or see we a power somewhere, that may traverse

his designs, and so bereave us of some portion of it? When we have satisfied ourselves that at no less a price than the sacrifice of Christ, our lives have been redeemed to everlasting happiness, it becomes a certainty, that the power which is to preserve us in it, must preserve us to it; and having provided for the issue, must have provided for the way. To feel a doubt of this, is so much opposed to every sound conclusion of the understanding, it seems impossible that believers should be so little tranquil about the things of this life, unless there were some small mixture of rebellion in their mistrust; unless they wanted something more than their Father knows that they have need of—something more than his goodness thinks it desirable for them to have.

2 COR. v. 11, to the end.

11 Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God, and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences.

12 For we commend not ourselves again unto you, but give you occasion to glory on our behalf, that ye may have somewhat to answer them which glory in appearance, and not in heart.

13 For whether we be beside ourselves, *it is* to God: or whether we be sober, *it is* for your cause.

14 For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead:

15 And *that* he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.

16 Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we *him* no more.

17 Therefore if any man *be* in Christ, *he is* a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

18 And all things *are* of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation;

19 To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them ; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.

20 Now then we are ambassadors for Christ ; as though

God did beseech *you* by us, we pray *you* in Christ's stead, Be ye reconciled to God.

21 For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin ; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

It appears, then, that the word of reconciliation committed to the apostles was distinctly this—the imputation of our sins to Christ, who had himself no sin, and the imputation of his righteousness to us who have no righteousness of our own. If there seems to be any difficulty in the latter position, it is elucidated by its strict analogy with the former, in which we are not accustomed to find any. Christ being not a sinner, was considered as such, was treated as such—suffered everything denounced against the sinner, as if he had been so ; but he did not become so—he was perfect still. Man, when reconciled to God in Christ, is considered righteous, is treated as righteous—is called so in the language of Scripture, and becomes entitled to everything that is promised to the righteous ; but he does not become so—he is a sinner still. There is, indeed, an after-process, by sanctification of the Spirit, through which the soul progresses towards an ultimate state of holiness, to be attained hereafter ; but this makes no part of the word of reconciliation—has no share in the justification of the sinner : it is subsequent to it, and consequent upon it—sanctification is, in fact, a part of the boon which we receive on being reconciled, and therefore can be no part of the procuring cause. Whatever holiness may become inherent in us, is a part of our salvation, and therefore can be neither its condition nor

its price ; in no case can a thing be at once the purchase and the payment. Christ is the only purchaser, and has paid for all. In him we are justified, accounted just, treated as just, and for ever made free from any charge that can be laid against us in our own character of sinners, by the imputation to us of Christ's character of the righteous one. God sees in us this substitution while yet sinful in ourselves, as much as ever He saw in him the sinner's substitute while holy in himself. If we believe the consequence of the one imputation, the death and passion of the holy Jesus, we may feel perfect security of the other—the salvation of those who are justified in him. Do we ask who they are ? Are we among them ? The apostle describes them briefly in this chapter : “ If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature ;” the nature of the change is abundantly drawn out in other parts of Scripture. There are some of whom St. Paul says, “ God *hath reconciled* us to himself by Jesus Christ ;” these are the justified, who have no more to fear. There are others to whom he says, “ As though God did beseech you by us, we pray you in Christ's stead, *be ye reconciled* to God.” If we are not among the former, we are among the latter ; and surely it is a gracious message.

PROVERBS xii. 2—14.

2 A good *man* obtaineth favour of the Lord : but a man of wicked devices will he condemn.

3 A man shall not be established by wickedness : but the

root of the righteous shall not be moved.

4 A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband : but she that maketh ashamed is as rottenness in his bones. .



5 The thoughts of the righteous *are* right; *but* the counsels of the wicked *are* deceit.

6 The words of the wicked *are* to lie in wait for blood: but the mouth of the upright shall deliver them.

7 The wicked are overthrown, and *are* not, but the house of the righteous shall stand.

8 A man shall be commended according to his wisdom; but he that is of a perverse heart shall be despised.

9 *He that is* despised, and hath a servant, *is* better than he that honoureth himself, and lacketh bread.

10 A righteous *man* regardeth

the life of his beast: but the tender mercies of the wicked *are* cruel.

11 He that tilleth his land shall be satisfied with bread: but he that followeth vain *persons* is void of understanding.

12 The wicked desireth the net of evil *men*: but the root of the righteous yieldeth *fruit*

13 The wicked is snared by the transgression of *his* lips: but the just shall come out of trouble.

14 A man shall be satisfied with good by the fruit of *his* mouth; and the recompence of a man's hands shall be rendered unto him.

The eternal destinies of the righteous and the wicked, widely contrasted as they are, are not more surely different than their position in the present life. The overwhelming importance of that last great separation withdraws our attention from the fact that they are already separated in the favour of the Almighty; that an anterior judgment is already going on, in which the recompence of a man's hands is really rendered to him. Nay, it is not necessary that judgment should interfere. The connexion between sin and misery is indissoluble; suspension, a brief and sometimes merciful suspension, is all that can come between the cause and its consequence. Unless the ill-blossoms be timely torn away, the bitter fruit is sure. In the turmoil of existence, the retribution that is going on is not always perceived; to the eye of the careless it is not even perceptible. Chance, and fortune, and accident, even Providence, is made to stand between a man's character and his circumstances—to his own vision cutting off the link that is between

them. But let a man read, where only he can fully read it, within himself, and by the light of truth, the secret history of his own motives, passions, and desires, as they have acted upon his past life, and he will be at no loss to detect the connexion between these and the sufferings and enjoyments of that life, its successes and its disappointments. Has it not been our own counsels that deceived us, our own desires that led us into the net, our own lips that betrayed us to the snare? Was it not the company we chose that warped our understanding, the vanity of our pursuits that brought us into difficulty, the perverseness of our disposition that caused us to be despised? It may be said, "The wicked prosper." It may be so, but do they enjoy their prosperity? "The proud are exalted." But are they satisfied in their exaltation? "The despisers of God are the admired of men." But does the world's favour keep their hearts at rest? Solomon had tried all this; and he could have told us, without an inspiration, how wide the distance between outward prosperity and inward peace. But we need not his testimony, "The good man obtaineth favour of the Lord;" and as long as the Lord is God, his favour must be the source of every blessing. If we obtain anything from other sources, it does not prove a blessing when we have it; if we fail of anything that we have sought from Him, we are still blessed without it. Right thoughts bring no uneasiness; upright words are followed by no remorse; wisdom forfeits no respect; mercifulness makes no enemies; industry lacketh not bread; and the trouble that a man comes in, without his fault, he shall be safely brought out of by the favour of the Almighty.

PSALM li. 1—17.

1 Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness; according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.

2 Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.

3 For I acknowledge my transgressions; and my sin is ever before me.

4 Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done *this* evil in thy sight; that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, *and* be clear when thou judgest.

5 Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.

6 Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts; and in the hidden *part* thou shalt make me to know wisdom.

7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

8 Make me to hear joy and gladness; *that* the bones *which* thou hast broken may rejoice.

9 Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities.

10 Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.

11 Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy Spirit from me.

12 Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me *with thy* free Spirit:

13 *Then* will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee.

14 Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation; *and* my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness.

15 O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall show forth thy praise.

16 For thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give *it*: thou delightest not in burnt-offering.

17 The sacrifices of God *are* a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.

David's sense of sin is the deepest that can be expressed; but let us observe its characters, for they are written for our learning. Christian penitence is not always understood where it is felt, nor felt where it is assumed. Nowhere can we better contemplate it than in this Psalm, to learn its genuine characters. David had fallen very low; as low, perhaps, as a man of God could fall in actual transgression. But whatever was his

horror of that sin which was immediately before him, he recognizes it as the offspring of his own nature ; he does not charge it on the circumstances that called it forth, nor express surprise that he should commit it. He finds its ample source within him, and passes by the manifestation of evil to dwell upon the principle. It is an important distinction ; man would rather own that he sins, than that he is a sinner ; would rather believe sin an accident, than inherent in himself. Pride is surprised, and self-love is irritated by failures that seem to set him rather at variance with himself than with his Maker. David saw nothing in his sin but the offence to God ; so much did this overbear all other considerations, whether of disgrace to himself or injury to mankind. The deadliest character of sin is its offensiveness to the Deity ; but men do not always think so. Repentance is measured by the consequences of actions, rather than by God's opinion of them, causing a very undue apportionment of our sorrow. Then, here are no promises, no resolutions ; contrition is not at its lowest while it can promise. The mourning sinner does not know, he cannot know, but that he shall do to-morrow what he has done to-day ; and he dares not tell the Almighty that he will not. His sense of sin is a sense of helplessness. Even a resolution implies some consciousness of power which the penitent at such a moment has not : he can but throw himself simply upon God, " Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean." It is self-love, but not self-knowledge, that can heal our wounds with resolutions. Further, we observe the character of the Psalmist's suffering, what it is he feels and apprehends. It is the sin, and not its punishment ; it is God's displeasure, not his vengeance : the loss of his presence, the withdrawing of his Spirit,

the withholding of that joy and gladness, which the sense of his salvation brings;—thoughts that seldom mingle in the world's remorse. It is these that break his bones, that break his heart; and not the fear of judgment. Lastly, there is no despondency in David's penitence, no mistrust—I may almost say, no fear. The deepest anguish of contrition is compatible with the most unshaken trust in God for pardon and recovery. Neither the entireness of his corruption, nor the perfectness of God's law, led David to doubt that he should be made to know wisdom; that his sins could be blotted out, and he should be whiter than snow.

ST MARK xiv. 1—9.

1 After two days was *the feast of the passover*, and of unleavened bread: and the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might take him by craft, and put *him* to death.

2 But they said, Not on the *feast-day*, lest there be an uproar of the people.

3 And being in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at meat, there came a woman having an alabaster-box of ointment of spikenard, very precious; and she brake the box, and poured *it* on his head.

4 And there were some that had indignation within themselves, and said, Why was this waste of the ointment made?

5 For it might have been sold for more than three hun-

dred pence, and have been given to the poor. And they murmured against her.

6 And Jesus said, Let her alone, why trouble ye her? she hath wrought a good work on me.

7 For ye have the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good: but me ye have not always.

8 She hath done what she could: she is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying.

9 Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, *this* also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her.

These disciples are not the only persons who think

every demonstration of love to Jesus Christ is a wasteful expenditure that had better be devoted to the temporal benefit of mankind. It is the mind of those, who, while they countenance every charitable enterprise for improving the temporal condition of the poor, discountenance and deprecate all undertakings of a more spiritual kind ; it is the mind of those who neglect the service of God and the ordinances of religion, under pretext that to do good is better than sacrifice, and to love mercy than the fat of rams ; it is the mind, in short, of all those who think that philanthropy and good will towards mankind, alms-deeds, and general benevolence of heart, are the better part, if not the whole of religion. It is not the mind of God. He is the only Being who must seek his own glory first, set his own honour above every other consideration, and postpone to his own worship every duty of his creatures towards each other ; and when the manifestation of this supremacy devolved on the person of the Son, Jesus Christ became the object of all love, and honour, and devotion. It is not true that the sweet incense of faith and love, poured out at the Redeemer's feet, is less acceptable to him than deeds of charity : it is not true that believing prayers and tears of penitence, are less valued by him than kindly words and beneficence of feeling. So much do his requirements centre in himself, that what is done for man is only held good as done for love of him. To make works of benevolence acceptable to God, Christ must be a party in them ; they must be done for his sake, and accepted as to himself. " Inasmuch as ye did it unto the least of these my brethren, ye did it unto me." Herein is all their value. What is expended upon Jesus in faith, in love, in self-negation and devotedness of heart, needs no

participant to give it value. "She has done what she could." It was little indeed, and useless enough, to Him who is not profited by anything that man can do. But it was all she had, it cost her much; she gave it him in love. Jesus was satisfied, and the memory of the gift immortal. Many have felt uneasiness, because they find so little means to show their love to Christ, so little to do, so little to give. Let them do what they can. We have feelings to sacrifice; we have sins to give up; we have desires to forego and passions to subdue, for Jesus' sake; we have all, at least, a heart to give him. These are the spikenard very precious that he accepts, and accounts sufficient if we can do no more.

NEHEMIAH ix. 5—17.

5 Then the Levites, Jeshua, and Kadmiel, Bani, Hashab-niah, Sherebiah, Hodijah, Shebaniah, and Pethahiah, said, Stand up, and bless the Lord your God for ever and ever; and blessed be thy glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise.

6 Thou, *even* thou, art Lord alone: thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all things that are therein, the seas, and all that is therein, and thou preservest them all; and the host of heaven worshippeth thee.

7 Thou art the Lord the God, who didst choose Abram, and broughtest him forth out of Ur of the Chaldees, and gavest him the name of Abraham.

8 And foundest his heart faithful before thee, and madest a covenant with him, to give the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Jebusites, and the Girgashites, to give it, *I say*, to his seed, and hast performed thy words; for thou art righteous:

9 And didst see the affliction of our fathers in Egypt, and heardest their cry by the Red sea;

10 And shewedst signs and wonders upon Pharaoh, and on all his servants, and on all the people of his land; for thou knewest that they dealt proudly against them: so didst thou get thee a name, as it is this day.

11 And thou didst divide the sea before them, so that they

went through the midst of the sea on the dry land; and their persecutors thou threwest into the deeps, as a stone into the mighty waters.

12 Moreover, thou leddest them in the day by a cloudy pillar, and in the night by a pillar of fire, to give them light in the way wherein they should go.

13 Thou camest down also upon mount Sinai, and spakest with them from heaven, and gavest them right judgments and true laws, good statutes and commandments:

14 And madest known unto them thy holy sabbath, and commandedst them precepts, statutes, and laws, by the hand of Moses thy servant:

15 And gavest them bread

from heaven for their hunger, and broughtest forth water for them out of the rock for their thirst, and promisedst them that they should go in to possess the land which thou hadst sworn to give them.

16 But they and our fathers dealt proudly, and hardened their necks, and hearkened not to thy commandments,

17 And refused to obey, neither were mindful of thy wonders that thou didst among them; but hardened their necks, and in their rebellion appointed a captain to return to their bondage: but thou *art* a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and forsookest them not.

Confession, retrospection, self-impeachment ever characterise the soul's return to God. Israel, determined to renew the broken covenant, and return to the obedience of the law, does not attempt, does not wish to expunge every record of the disgraceful past, and find peace in forgetting the sin that might disturb it. With a holy courage he puts God in mind of all his base returns to former mercies, at the very moment that he asks for new ones, and makes the history of his iniquities the argument of reconciliation. This is not nature's argument; the pained conscience of the natural man is stilled with sedatives. "It is too late to think of it; it cannot now be undone; there was this and that excuse; I would not do it now, and it is vain to dwell upon painful recollections." Thus the bankrupt debtor burns his account book, and hopes that his creditor has not kept one; and God is

argued with upon extenuations, ignorance, inexperience, unguardedness, example—any thing that may have a chance of lessening the balance. The believer knows there is no peace for him in this way. Bold in the strength of divine grace, he dares to cast up continually the account that is against him, and present it anew to his forgiving Lord. The retrospect of the past must become the source, not the disturbance of our confidence, before we can ever be at peace. What we have been, and what He has been, must be the very argument of our expectation, before we shall come to an abiding confidence in God. Why did Nehemiah and the elders call up this melancholy story of former provocations? Not to discourage themselves; not to turn into sadness the day of joy, and shake their confidence in the future: “Because of all this we make a sure covenant, and write it;”—little sure on their part, as their own argument had shown but sure, because God had kept his covenant when they had broken it, and “forsook them not;” “and many times didst deliver them according to thy mercies.” The Christian should review his former life with the design to strengthen, not to weaken his faith; to enhance and not to cloud his grateful joy. If he has retained any confidence in himself, that review will destroy it; and the sooner it is destroyed, the sooner will he arrive at peace: but if his confidence be wholly in Christ, he will find nothing in the past that should enfeeble it. He will find the same two characters filling up all the scene—the basest sinner and the most gracious Saviour—a faithless servant and a faithful Lord—the one always false, the other always true.

ROMANS i. 16—25.

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

17 For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.

18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness:

19 Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath showed it unto them.

20 For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* his eternal power and Godhead: so that they are without excuse.

21 Because that, when they knew God, they glorified *him* not as God, neither were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened:

22 Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools,

23 And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things.

24 Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves:

25 Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

The apostle's argument in this chapter, preparatory to the introduction of the Gospel, is to prove all men responsible for their situation as sinners, condemned not for their father's fall, but for their own—not in what they did not know, but in what they did—for that actual transgression against the light of nature, for which God would be just did He leave them to their condemnation. In the passage above, there is a point that is unanswerable; it is equally applicable to us all, and must ultimately condemn all who are not saved by grace. It is contained in the last verse, "Worshipped and served the

creature more than the Creator." The heathen did so, when the invisible things of God, even his power and Godhead, though not made known by revelation, were sufficiently manifest in the works of creation. That there is a God, and that He is omnipotent, there is in nature evidence enough ; but they neither glorified his power, nor were thankful for his gifts, choosing other objects of worship and affection. So doing, God left them, with nothing but themselves to blame for his abandonment, and the increasing corruption consequent upon it : " Given over to a reprobate mind." They who have the words of revelation, whether in the law or the Gospel, do still the same thing, and stand alike condemned by it. What God has showed of himself, be it more or less, does not suffice to bind men to His service ; they still love the creature more than the Creator, and He is only just if He leaves them to their choice, and to all the sin that it will lead to. Putting out of sight the original sin, which some esteem it hard to be condemned for, and putting out of sight the special grace, which some have not received, is there one of us, is there one anywhere who has not been guilty of this wrong, and, having proof enough of God's existence, has not preferred to Him the works of his own hands ? worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator ? Which of us has not loved something that He gave us, more than we have loved Him ? Which of us has not pursued something in the world more assiduously than we have followed Him ? We must be quite ignorant of our own and others' hearts, if we do not perceive that nothing more is wanting to bring all men in guilty before God, whether with the law or without it, whether in default of divine grace or in despite of it : because if there is a God at all, which

all men know, or might know that there is, He must have a right to the first place in our regard. If the same darkness has not fallen on ourselves that befell the heathen on this evil preference, it is by the interposition of God's restraining grace, which He owes not to us, as He owed it not to them; and if any escape their final condemnation, it is by the gratuitous influence of redeeming love.

GENESIS xxvii. 1—13.

1 And it came to pass, that when Isaac was old, and his eyes were dim, so that he could not see, he called Esau his eldest son, and said unto him, My son. And he said unto him, Behold, *here am I*.

2 And he said, Behold now, I am old, I know not the day of my death :

3 Now therefore take, I pray thee, thy weapons, thy quiver and thy bow, and go out to the field, and take me *some venison* ;

4 And make me savoury meat, such as I love, and bring *it* to me, that I may eat; that my soul may bless thee before I die.

5 And Rebekah heard when Isaac spake to Esau his son. And Esau went to the field to hunt *for venison, and to bring it*.

6 And Rebekah spake unto Jacob her son, saying, Behold, I heard thy father speak unto Esau thy brother, saying,

7 Bring me venison, and make me savoury meat, that I may eat, and bless thee before the LORD before my death.

8 Now therefore, my son, obey my voice, according to that which I command thee :

9 Go now to the flock, and fetch me from thence two good kids of the goats; and I will make them savoury meat for thy father, such as he loveth :

10 And thou shalt bring *it* to thy father, that he may eat, and that he may bless thee before his death.

11 And Jacob said to Rebekah his mother, Behold Esau my brother *is a hairy man, and I am a smooth man* :

12 My father peradventure will feel me, and I shall seem to him as a deceiver; and I shall bring a curse upon me, and not a blessing.

13 And his mother said unto him, Upon me *be* thy curse, my son; only obey my voice, and go fetch me *them*.

Inconsiderate readers are apt to forget, that these are true stories; and it has been made a charge against the Book of God, that the persons whose actions are related in it did so much that was wrong, and so frequently present us with a bad example. Two things are herein forgotten; first, that an example teaches as much what to shun, as what to follow: the wrong with its punishment, conveys as useful a lesson, as the right with its reward. And secondly, that the Bible is a true history; it is the history of sinners, and therefore must be the record of their sins. Had the Spirit invented, as human writers sometimes do, fictitious characters, to show what men ought to be; or as is the case in the parables, brought imaginary characters to illustrate moral truths, the case might have been different. But the characters of the Old Testament are real persons, who lived and acted as they are said to have done; men of like passions with ourselves—corrupt in their own nature, as we are—partially and progressively renewed by divine grace as we are. None were to be found, who had not faults, who did not sin; and had the word of God suppressed their faults, and passed over their sins in silence, it would be no longer a true history. The Spirit itself cannot indite the true history of a sinner, without making it, to some extent, an example of sin. But there is little in the example of Rebekah, that can induce any one to follow it. It is, on the contrary, an impressive warning of the manner in which God may turn a wicked action to his own good purpose, without leaving unpunished the bad intention of the perpetrator. The mother's falsehood and partiality, while it concurred in bringing on the head of the younger son, the blessing that God had destined for him, and which no one could

have diverted, consigned both him and her to a long period of suffering and separation. She perhaps never saw her favourite son again, and he, with all the stolen blessing on his head, says of his life when nearly at its close, "Few and evil have been the days of thy servant." Jacob was not as prosperous as his fathers had been. In the loss of Joseph, he must have remembered his father Isaac's sorrow, when, by his own means, he too was bereaved of a son in his old age. In the conduct of his other children, he must have seen the retribution of his own misconduct, when he wronged his brother, and deceived his father. The effects of truth are never to be feared. A partial statement of facts may be dangerous ; but that is because, so stated, it is not the truth. Thus with the word of God itself, mischief may be done, if one part is separated from the rest ; but never, if presented entire, as God has written it.

1 PETER v. 1—12.

1 The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed :

2 Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight *thereof*, not by constraint, but willingly ; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind ;

3 Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being examples to the flock.

4 And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall re-

ceive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.

5 Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder : yea, all *of you* be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility : for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.

6 Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time :

7 Casting all your care upon him ; for he careth for you.

8 Be sober, be vigilant ; because your adversary the devil,

as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour :

9 Whom resist, stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.

10 But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a-

while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle *you*.

11 To him *be* glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

12 By Silvanus, a faithful brother unto you, as I suppose, I have written briefly, exhorting, and testifying that this is the true grace of God wherein ye stand.

Next to the testimony of God, there is nothing so convincing, as the testimony of a saint, who has run his course, has kept the faith, and is about to depart out of this life. We feel that he must have tried the value of his faith ; that if there were any mistake in it, he would now at least discover it ; if his trust were misplaced, it would surely fail him now. Peter seems to have this in mind, when he says, " I have written briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God wherein ye stand." Setting to his seal, as it is elsewhere expressed, " that God is true." This passage is the testimony of such a one, while it is the word of God himself ; and the tone is most impressively characteristic. Those who are beginning what Peter was about to finish, to whom that is new which to him wore the sober colouring of experience, cannot do better than dwell upon his words, to imbibe, if it may be, some measure of his humble, holy, watchful quietude of soul. How unlike to the restless, turbulent exhibitions of religion we sometimes witness. I could almost say, how unlike to the predominant tone of religion in the present day, all hurry, restlessness, and disorder. The clothing of humility is not in fashion. An insobriety of mind, perpetually craving for some fresh excitement ; an unstead-

fastness of faith, that is for ever changing its ground ; contentious, insubmissive, independent ; every one struggling to exalt himself, or a party identified with himself, to the despising and depreciating of all others—what a contrast is such a religion, to that contemplated by the aged saint : the experienced consenting, not desiring, to take the lead ; the inexperienced following, mistrustful of themselves ; yea, all subject one to another, because no one feels himself worthy to be any thing, nor able to be any thing, and therefore cedes willingly to whomsoever it may please God to put before him ; and all casting their care upon God ; their care spiritual, as well as temporal. There is even in religion, a restless, anxious, fretful tone of mind, which God himself cannot satisfy, because the soul will not trust itself to him, but must have every day some fresh stay to rest upon. But they who are witnesses by faith of Christ's sufferings, as the apostle was by sight ; perhaps partakers of them, as he was, although he does not mention it ; and are by the testimony of his Spirit assured partakers of his glory to be revealed, have no need of care : God has taken the care upon himself, that we may have our minds calm, possessed and vigilant, to resist an enemy insidious, and ever watchful to betray us into sin. And surely nothing gives him so much opportunity, as a state of anxious and perturbed excitement ; whether it be in the community by reason of insubjection and disunion, or in our own hearts, the joint produce of mistrust and pride.

JEREMIAH iii. 12—22.

12 Go, and proclaim these words toward the north, and say, Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the LORD; *and* I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you; for I *am* merciful, saith the LORD, *and* I will not keep anger for ever.

13 Only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the LORD thy God, and hast scattered thy ways to the strangers under every green tree, and ye have not obeyed my voice, saith the LORD.

14 Turn, O backsliding children, saith the LORD; for I am married unto you: and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion:

15 And I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding.

16 And it shall come to pass, when ye be multiplied and increased in the land, in those days, saith the LORD, they shall say no more, The ark of the covenant of the LORD; neither shall it come to mind, neither shall they remember it, neither shall they visit it, neither shall *that* be done any more.

17 At that time they shall

call Jerusalem the throne of the LORD; and all the nations shall be gathered unto it, to the name of the LORD, to Jerusalem: neither shall they walk any more after the imagination of their evil heart.

18 In those days the house of Judah shall walk with the house of Israel, and they shall come together out of the land of the north to the land that I have given for an inheritance unto your Fathers.

19 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? And I said, Thou shalt call me, My father; and shalt not turn away from me.

20 Surely *as* a wife treacherously departeth from her husband, so have ye dealt treacherously with me, O house of Israel, saith the LORD.

21 A voice was heard upon the high places, weeping *and* supplications of the children of Israel: for they have perverted their way, *and* they have forgotten the LORD their God.

22 Return, ye backsliding children, *and* I will heal your backslidings. Behold, we come unto thee; for thou *art* the LORD our God.

There are times when the invitations of the Gospel seem inappropriate to our condition. We have heard them, and understood them, and accepted them long since; but we have failed in the conditions attached

to our acceptance of them—we have sinned against the Lord, since he became our God, and the shame lies heavy at our heart. We have been espoused to one husband, even to Jesus Christ, in bonds of faith and love; but we have broken them, and treacherously dealt with him, and our confusion covereth us. The prodigal once recovered, seems no example for us; for we, with the robe of Christ's righteousness upon us, and the chain of adoption round our neck, have turned away from our Father since he received us, and forgotten the Lord our God. The sick once healed, and blind once made to see, cannot encourage us now; for the sickness of corrupted nature has returned upon us, and our spiritual sight grown dim a second time. In this backsliding, yet repentant state, when the voice of weeping and supplication has taken place of confidence and love in some bosom in God's own Israel, the language literally applied to them of old, under the law, that it might be spiritually applicable to ourselves under the Gospel, becomes a mine of consolation, a well of deep water to the conscience-stricken spirit. The frequency of their rebellion, in the midst of mercies—the pardon that ever waited their return—their falseness to him, who had espoused them—his faithfulness to them, because He was married to them—the baseness with which every engagement, and every pledge of theirs was broken—the exactness with which every promise of his was kept;—these are all written for our encouragement: not in sin, we must be in love with misery indeed, if we find any thing in Israel's history, to embolden us to sin; but, to encourage us under a troubled conscience to return, not once, nor twice, and then despair, because we have

sinned again, as if there were a limit to forgiveness this there cannot be, until there is a limit to repentance, and the day of grace is ended; and that will not be to them whom He has redeemed out of the hands of Satan, and united to himself. When Israel sinned, every threatening was fulfilled upon her with most appalling judgments, that the family of God might fear for ever to offend him. But that which never had been threatened to her, never did befall, through all her provocations; she did not cease to be his people, or fall beyond repentance, and beyond recovery; that men might know for ever his mercy is unchangeable, and his love without recall. Can that word not reach us, that reached Jonah in the deep, and David in waters deeper still? "I am merciful, saith the Lord, and I will not keep anger for ever: only acknowledge thine iniquity that thou hast transgressed against the Lord thy God."

1 KINGS, x. 1—10.

1 And when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon, concerning the name of the LORD, she came to prove him with hard questions.

2 And she came to Jerusalem with a very great train, with camels that bare spices, and very much gold, and precious stones: and when she was come to Solomon, she communed with him of all that was in her heart.

3 And Solomon told her all her questions: there was not *any* thing hid from the king, which he told her not.

4 And when the queen of

Sheba had seen all Solomon's wisdom, and the house that he had built,

5 And the meat of his table, and the sitting of his servants, and the attendance of his ministers, and their apparel, and his cup-bearers, and his ascent by which he went up unto the house of the LORD; there was no more spirit in her.

6 And she said to the king, It was a true report that I heard in mine own land of thy acts and of thy wisdom.

7 Howbeit I believed not the words, until I came, and mine eyes had seen *it*; and,

behold, the half was not told me: thy wisdom and prosperity exceedeth the fame which I heard.

8 Happy *are* thy men, happy *are* these thy servants, which stand continually before thee, *and* that hear thy wisdom.

9 Blessed be the LORD thy God, which delighted in thee, to set thee on the throne of Israel: because the LORD loved

Israel for ever, therefore made he thee king, to do judgment and justice.

10 And she gave the king an hundred and twenty talents of gold, and of spices very great store, and precious stones: there came no more such abundance of spices as these which the queen of Sheba gave to king Solomon.

Solomon, endowed with all earthly wisdom, and eminently gifted with divine knowledge, was an example at once of human greatness, and of human weakness. In the former, he was a type of Christ; in the latter, a representative of all mankind—strong, only while upheld by grace—wise, only while under the guidance of God's Spirit—good, only while walking in close communion with Him. It seems as if God, having done for him the utmost that could be done for human nature, to make it great and good, had then withdrawn, and left him to himself, to show how soon, and how entirely it would fail. In his greatness, wisdom and knowledge, his offices as king over God's heritage, judge of His people, and builder of his temple, Solomon prefigured that greater than Solomon who was to come, and I think this is the spiritual meaning of the passage we have read. It does not signify who the queen of Sheba was: she was the prefiguration of every one who, being a stranger hitherto to Christ, and separate from his people, hears the report of his excellence, and draws near to inquire if it be true. He hears perhaps, that there is more in religion than he ever thought of; more mysteries in the Gospel of salvation, than he has ever examined; more purity in its precepts, more comfort in

its promises, more happiness in its peace, than he has ever found; in short, that Christ is precious to them that believe, far above any value he has ever set on him. Happy if he resolves to do what the queen of Sheba did! Our Lord himself employs the figure when He says: "The queen of the South shall rise up in judgment against this generation, and shall condemn it, for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here." How many hear of Christ, and believe not the report; but never draw near to see if He is all that He is said to be to them that love Him! Let such be persuaded, that the half has not been told them. It has not, because it cannot be. They must come into his courts, and commune with Christ himself—tell Him all that is in their hearts—their secret cares and unbelieving doubts—their sorrows, their sins, their fears. Christ knows all things, and there is nothing that, so sought, He will not tell us. His love, his peace, the knowledge that He imparts, and the happiness that is found in Him; all do exceed by far the fame that we have heard. None have drawn near to Him in faith, and earnestly inquired into the secrets of redeeming love, but they have ended, as the queen of Sheba did, in acknowledging the happiness of those that serve him, abide ever in communion with him, and gather eternal wisdom from his voice. Her very words are often on the lips of the believer, the fittest he can find to express his grateful admiration; while at Christ's feet he lays whatever he has, or is, and counts it no more his own.

1 JOHN ii. 1—12.

1 My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous :

2 And he is the propitiation for our sins : and not for ours only, but also for *the sins of* the whole world.

3 And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.

4 He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

5 But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected : hereby know we that we are in him.

6 He that saith he abideth in him, ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.

7 Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which ye

had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which ye have heard from the beginning.

8 Again, a new commandment I write unto you ; which thing is true in him and in you : because the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth.

9 He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now.

10 He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him.

11 But he that hateth his brother, is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes.

12 I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake.

The apostle did well to preface this address with the appellation, "Little children," for it needed the docility of childhood to receive it, and the simplicity of childhood to understand it. It is as if he said, "I do not address myself to the reasoning pride of manhood, which will answer me with cavils against the inconsistency of my statements. I do not speak to your intellectual wisdom, which may ask me, how an exhortation not to sin should be strengthened by the assurance, that if we do sin, the consequences are averted from us:—why the life so often declared to be of faith,

seems here made dependent upon conduct :—and above all, why the argument for obedience is not in order that our sins may be, but because they are, forgiven.” These words are for those who have become as little children, that they may be made wise in the wisdom of God ; a wisdom which their understanding cannot always compass, but of which their simplicity can apprehend the plain statements, and their docility acquiesce in them. To such the exhortation is full of light and truth. The disciple of Jesus must not sin ; it is elsewhere said, that he cannot sin. It is impossible his will and choice can be to do so, and he must be exhorted to make the utmost efforts to resist it. But if he sin, or rather when he sins, for sin he will assuredly, the weight of that sin is not upon him—the sin which the believer now commits unwillingly, as well as all that he aforesaid both did and loved to do, has been atoned for, and is forgiven. Is this a reason for disobedience ? The apostle does not think so ; since he gives it as the very reason why he writes an exhortation to obedience and moral duties. Had he been writing to the unbelieving world, he would have exhorted them to seek forgiveness, to renounce their own works, to trust wholly in Christ, and look for light from above to walk by. But because he speaks to those whose sins are forgiven, on whom the true light shineth, and the darkness of nature is past ; who have no more to do but to manifest to others, and confirm to themselves, this blest transition ; he has an argument the most powerful, an argument *ad necessitatem*, that so it must be, that they keep the word of Him in whose love they live, and love each other as He has loved them. If this does not follow on the profession of Christ, here called “ abiding in him,” it is not that the principle has failed to produce its fruit,

—it is that the principle is not there—the profession is a false one.

ST. MATT. xviii. 1—11.

1 At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven ?

2 And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them,

3 And said, Verily I say unto you, except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.

4 Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

5 And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name, receiveth me.

6 But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and *that* he were drowned in the depth of the sea.

7 Woe unto the world be-

cause of offences! for it must needs be that offences come ; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh !

8 Wherefore, if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast *them* from thee : it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands, or two feet, to be cast into everlasting fire.

9 And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee : it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire.

10 Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones ; for I say unto you, that in heaven, their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.

11 For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost.

Ambition is so natural to man, and in this world so generally successful, it has needed a revelation from heaven to make known its sinfulness ; and still how few believe it ? Few of us enter fully into our Lord's position, so many times repeated, that greatness in the creature consists in humility and lowliness of heart ; that they are the exalted who choose to be the least ; and

they sit highest who take the lowest place ; all figurative expressions of that desire to be nothing, and consciousness of being nothing, which characterise the converted spirit, and mark its progression in the way of peace. The first lesson a believer has to learn, and the last too, for it is the hardest and the longest in learning, is not only perception of his nothingness, but contentedness with it—satisfaction in it: ignorant, without affecting wisdom ; weak, without aspiring to be strong ; helpless, without a wish to help himself ; dependent, without desiring to be his own ; a child, without ambition to be a man. Such are the great in heaven, and ever must be ; for the first movement of ambition in an angel's bosom cast him from it ; the first aspiring thought was his sentence of expulsion. Such are the great on earth, if there be any. It is a slow attainment, but every believer is in progress towards it, and knows that he is ; because it is only he who recognizes the fitness of the position he is required to take : how fit a one, he knows in the knowledge of himself. For, alas ! he is a child in more things than are required of him. While endeavouring to be so in simplicity, in docility, in dependence, he finds that in forwardness and folly he is a child already. In proportion as he becomes impressed with a sense of his high-calling in Jesus Christ, he perceives the puerility and inconsequence of all his ideas and feelings ; the uselessness of his pursuits ; the silliness of his pleasures ; the toys with which he pleases himself, and the trifles he frets about : above all, the child-like unreasonableness with which he crosses his heavenly Father's care ; so restless, fretful, and impatient ; so heedless, trifling, and unstable : disturbed about trifles, and engrossed with baubles, and prone to harm himself with every thing. Thus much a child

in nature, the Christian's consolation is to be considered one; to be treated as one; to be borne with as a child; to be forgiven as a child; to be restrained, directed, and over-ruled, as one who is not to be trusted with himself, or relied upon for any thing. Blessed, indeed, to such a one, is the assurance that it is not the will of our Father, which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.

JOB ix. 13 33.

13 *If* God will not withdraw his anger, the proud helpers do stoop under him.

14 How much less shall I answer him, *and* choose out my words *to reason* with him?

15 Whom, though I were righteous, *yet* would I not answer, *but* I would make supplication to my Judge.

16 *If* I had called, and he had answered me: *yet* would I not believe that he had hearkened unto my voice.

17 For he breaketh me with a tempest, and multiplieth my wounds without cause.

18 He will not suffer me to take my breath, but filleth me with bitterness.

19 *If I speak* of strength, lo, he is strong: and if of judgment, who shall set me a time *to plead*?

20 *If* I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me: *if I say*, I am perfect, it shall also prove me perverse.

21 *Though* I were perfect,

yet would I not know my soul: I would despise my life.

22 This is one *thing*, therefore I said *it*, He destroyeth the perfect and the wicked.

23 *If* the scourge slay suddenly, he will laugh at the trial of the innocent.

24 The earth is given into the hand of the wicked: he covereth the faces of the judges thereof; if not, where, *and* who is he?

25 Now my days are swifter than a post: they flee away, they see no good.

26 They are passed away as the swift ships; as the eagle *that* hasteth to the prey.

27 *If* I say, I will forget my complaint, I will leave off my heaviness, and comfort *myself*;

28 I am afraid of all my sorrows, I know that thou wilt not hold me innocent.

29 *If* I be wicked, why then labour I in vain?

30 *If* I wash myself with

snow water, and make my hands never so clean ;

31 Yet shalt thou plunge me in the ditch, and mine own clothes shall abhor me.

32 For *he is* not a man, as I

am, that I should answer him, and we should come together in judgment.

33 Neither is there any days-man betwixt us, that might lay his hand upon us both.

The view which Job takes of God, fine and impressive as it is, is not a just one ; and gives, I think, a clear intimation of what was the nature of that ignorance respecting both God and himself, which was so quickly dissipated when his eye saw Him—saw Him as He is, in relationship to the repentant sinner. Job contemplates God in this chapter apart from Jesus Christ ; apart from any revelation of himself as a God of grace and mercy. He describes Him as every man beholds Him who rejects the testimony of his word ; but this is not what He is. A God too great to give an explanation of anything he does ; too hidden for his movements or approaches to be perceived ; too high to be addressed, and too remote to hearken—a God without forbearance or indulgence towards his creatures, and indifferent to their innocence or guilt—one who cannot be pleaded with, and will not be intreated ; and has given his own world into the hands of the wicked to deal alike with the just and with the unjust :—this is what He might have been without the intervention of redeeming love ; it is what He seems to be when the divine revelation is not believed ; it is what they see Him who behold Him only with the natural eye, without the illumination of the gospel. But how unlike to what He is in Jesus Christ ! Yes, He is a man ; He became a man like us, on purpose that we should answer Him, and that we should come together in judgment. He took eyes of flesh that we might know He sees, and ears of flesh that we might

be sure He hears, all that is doing among the sons of men. There is a daysman; the only begotten Son fills up the awful space between deity and humanity; lays the hand of reconciliation upon both; and renders to each whatever is required of the other. Contrast Job's picture of the unheard, unseen, with that of one who had both seen and known Him. "If a man love me, he will keep my words; and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you." "Ask, and receive, that your joy may be full." "I say not unto you that I will pray the Father for you; for the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me." "In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." "Henceforth I call you not servants, for the servant knoweth not what his Lord doeth: ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you." Had Job thus contemplated the Omnipotent, he would not have despised his life, nor refused to plead before his Maker. It is an important question to ourselves, which character best describes our own idea of God. Job found in his no consolation till he changed it.

ST. LUKE xxiii. 32 to 43.

32 And there were also two other, malefactors, led with him to be put to death.

33 And when they were come to the place which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors;

one on the right hand, and the other on the left.

34 Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots.

35 And the people stood beholding. And the rulers also with them derided *him*, saying, He saved others; let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God.

36 And the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him, and offering him vinegar,

37 And saying, If thou be the King of the Jews, save thyself.

38 And a superscription also was written over him, in letters of Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew, THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

39 And one of the malefac-

tors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us.

40 But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation?

41 And we indeed justly: for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss.

42 And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.

43 And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise.

A dangerous, and I think mistaken, use has been sometimes made of this wonderful instance of late repentance and a dying faith; to dress with fictitious promise the scaffold of the criminal, or deepen the slumbers of the procrastinator. For the last of these I am sure it was not intended; I do not know that it was intended for either. As an evidence that faith may be manifested for the first time at the moment of departure hence; that dying we may recognize the Saviour whom living we disowned, and by a late repentance cancel all, I think the incident is of very little value. The case of the thief upon the cross can never be ours. We never shall have an opportunity to manifest a faith like his, or show a trust so pure. It avails nothing to know that at such a moment a sinner can be saved. There never has been, there never will be, such another moment. When that thief called Jesus, "Lord," every evidence of his being so had been withdrawn—his enemies had prevailed, his friends had fled, and God, whose Son he had made

himself, even God, his Father, had forsaken him. At such a moment, when it seemed as if He could indeed not save himself, this criminal perceived and owned his Saviour. The spiritual history of man contains not another instance of faith so strong, so bold, so single. Perhaps of the thousands who had heard, and the hundreds who had believed the words of Christ, this malefactor was the only one who at that moment did not doubt. It will be poor comfort on our death-beds, if we come to them impenitent, to remember him. A written word, a preached gospel, a risen and glorified Saviour—these are the objects of our reluctant faith and postponed affections: his had nothing to lay hold of but a dying Master. I think the value of the incident is of a quite different kind; encouragement to the living, not the dying. The method of salvation, its freeness and fulness, and the security of the believer, is nowhere so simply and forcibly exhibited. We may tell it to the papist, who dreams of expiatory pains; to the pharisee, who proposes to pay a part price of his salvation; to the trembling sinner, who fears to come to Christ till he is fitter to be received. Forgiveness granted on believing, without a condition, without a contingency, and without delay—this was the thief's salvation. "To day:" it would have been essentially true had he lived as when he died; he would have entered that day into the peace of God. At the moment he confessed his Saviour, his name would have been graven on that Saviour's bosom, borne by him before the Father's throne, and transferred into the book of life; and though he had stayed behind his Master threescore years, the gates of Paradise would have been left open till he came. A little alteration of the words would make it true of every sinner, who, with

a penitent heart and lively faith, calls Jesus, Lord. He would say to us, He does say to us, at the moment we so believe, "This day is my paradise thine."

1 COR. i. 17—31.

17 For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect.

18 For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.

19 For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.

20 Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?

21 For after that, in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.

22 For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom:

23 But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness;

24 But unto them which are

called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.

25 Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

26 For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called:

27 But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world, to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world, to confound the things which are mighty;

28 And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are;

29 That no flesh should glory in his presence.

30 But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption:

31 That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.

Every defect in religion is an insufficient knowledge of

Christ, an insufficient appreciation of his atonement; therefore the remedy for all is the exhibition of Christ. Men ask of each other enticing words of wisdom; some, like the Jews, will have evidences, proofs; some, like the Greeks, will have arguments, reasonings; and we have all, perhaps, in this day, too much of human teaching. We fancy we must hear a great many things, and understand a great many things, before we can enter into rest; but, indeed, we need to know but one thing, that is, Christ crucified. If we think we are not religious enough, we should study the death and passion of Jesus Christ, and let our mind dwell continually on Him; we shall not grow pious by thinking of God without Christ. If we know any one else who is not religious enough, we should talk to them about the sacrifice of Christ; we shall never advance them by exhortations to serve God apart from Christ. But must we not be right in the doctrine? There is but one doctrine necessary to salvation—"Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." And must we not be right in practice? There is but one practice required in order to salvation—"Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." But there is the Holy Spirit's work? His work is only to take of the things of Christ, and show them unto you. Thus be the matter what it will, be our deficiencies in knowledge, in practice, or in faith, it is more of Christ that should be told us, more of Him that should be inquired for—we need only more thought, more love, more value for a crucified Saviour, and all will be well with us. As our minds dwell upon Him, we shall love him; as we love him, we shall grow like him; as we grow like him, we shall enjoy him. Men try a great many other ways, and teach a great many other ways,

of making progress in religion : some dwell on death, and some on heaven, and some on hell ; some on the love of God, and some upon his wrath : all foolishness, in respect of their influence upon our minds, if they be not contemplated in Christ. Where, but in the study of His atonement, can we find out what is meant by death ? Where but in his holiness catch a glimpse of heaven ? Where, but in his agony, get an idea of hell ? By whom is God's love, on whom was his wrath, in whom are any of his attributes exhibited to mortal sense, and made subject to human understanding, save in Jesus Christ and him crucified ?

PSALM XLVI.

1 God *is* our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

2 Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea ;

3 *Though* the waters thereof roar *and* be troubled, *though* the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. Selah.

4 *There is* a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy *place* of the tabernacles of the Most High

5 God *is* in the midst of her ; she shall not be moved : God shall help her, *and that* right early.

6 The heathen raged, the

kingdoms were moved : he uttered his voice, the earth melted.

7 The LORD of hosts *is* with us ; the God of Jacob *is* our refuge. Selah.

8 Come, behold the works of the LORD, what desolations he hath made in the earth.

9 He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth ; he breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder : he burneth the chariot in the fire.

10 Be still, and know that I *am* God ; I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth.

11 The LORD of hosts *is* with us ; the God of Jacob *is* our refuge. Selah.

There is a seeming anomaly in the language of this

Psalm, which the light of the Gospel, and the expectation of the Christian church can alone explain. The images are those of terror and destruction; the promise is of peace; the tone is that of confidence and triumph, the scene to be looked upon is desolation. It is the language of the church of God, encouraging herself against that great day of his vengeance, of which it gives the prophetic intimation. This earth must be removed; its high places must be made low; its waters must be worked into unnatural tumult, and its mountains shaken to their very base. Morally, politically, and physically, the course of this world must be broken up, while the impotent rage of men who honour not God, and the demented terrors of them that do not trust in Him, will add horror and confusion to the scene. In the midst of it, the Lord will speak—his voice will be heard in wrath, and the earth will melt before it—the rage of the wicked will be silenced—the cry of rebellion will be stilled—his enemies will be extinct before him; and his people are called to look upon the desolation. Meantime the Psalmist's language is not that of fear, of anxious apprehension. Why, but because however this world's waters shall be troubled, there is a stream of heavenly consolation which will flow on in its own peaceful course to make glad the church of Christ, the tabernacles of the Most High, his people wherever they may be found. Because God will be in the midst of her, and she will be firm and unmoved, though the world be crumbled into dust. God will help her, not in the end, but early; in the beginning of those troubles and throughout them. What language then becomes the children of God in contemplation of those awful days, so nearly perhaps approaching? "God is our refuge and

strength, therefore will we not fear." And what does it become them to do? The text says, to "be still." Not to put themselves forward in the political conflict—not to be busy in the convulsions of the dissolving kingdoms, as if it was theirs to help forward the destruction or to stay it—not to be running to and fro in wonder and confusion, as if they knew no more of what was doing than the ungodly world. Whenever the signs of those times appear, believers are to know, that He who is doing all is God; they are to be quiet—to stand still—to take no part in the commotions that will shake the nations of the earth—to raise no arm of flesh; to lift up no voice, except the voice of prayer, and of exhortation to the people to come out of the foredoomed world, whose day of destruction is at hand. So doing, they may wait with calm and holy expectation the peace that is to follow, when He maketh wars to cease, and will be exalted in all the earth.

ST. JOHN ix. 1—12.

1 And as *Jesus* passed by, he saw a man which was blind from *his* birth.

2 And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?

3 *Jesus* answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents; but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.

4 I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work.

5 As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.

6 When he had thus spoken, he spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and he anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay.

7 And said unto him, Go, wash in the pool of Siloam, (which is, by interpretation, Sent.) He went his way therefore, and washed, and came seeing.

8 The neighbours therefore, and they which before had seen

him that he was blind, said, Is not this he that sat and begged?

9 Some said, This is he: others said, He is like him: but he said, I am *he*.

10 Therefore said they unto him, How were thine eyes opened?

11 He answered and said, A

man that is called Jesus made clay, and anointed mine eyes, and said unto me, Go to the pool of Siloam, and wash: and I went and washed, and I received sight.

12 Then said they unto him, Where is he? He said, I know not.

The process by which the grace of God performs its work upon the sinner's heart, is not always the same, although it issues in the same end. We are too hasty perhaps sometimes in concluding, that a work is not his, when we see it proceeding in an unusual order. Faith usually takes precedence of obedience, and we are justly taught, that obedience is of no value in the sight of God, unless it be the offspring of faith in Jesus Christ. Indisputably as this is true, when we see a person who knows very little of Christ, assiduously and honestly endeavouring to obey the law of God, although we may certainly say, he is not yet born anew of divine grace, of which faith in Christ is the only test; I think we cannot conclude, that his efforts at obedience are not the Spirit's work, the first step in the regenerating process, more commonly effected contrariwise. Considering our Lord's miracles as always emblematic of his works of grace, the one before us illustrates what I speak of. Usually the first demand upon those who came to Him to be healed, was faith, accompanied sometimes, but not always, by an act of obedience. "As thou believest, so be it done unto thee," was not accompanied by a command to do any thing before the cure should be completed. "Take up thy bed and walk," is a simultaneous exercise of faith and obedience; because the thing commanded was

to nature impossible. In the instance before us, the obedience is required first : not before the miracle—the divine work was, as it ever must be, first—Christ had already annointed his eyes : but before the blind man knows who it is that undertakes his cure—before he is called upon to believe in the Son of God, or has made any confession of his name : for it does not appear that this man made application to Jesus to be healed. In this instance, therefore, obedience was the first step towards a cure, as regards the subject of it, though second to the divine unction ; followed by faith in Him who wrought it, immediately that He declared himself : belief seeming to be rather the result of recovery, than the condition of it. Then if any of us are doubtful of our faith, if we cannot satisfy ourselves that we know Christ, or think of Him as we ought ; if we know little more for certain, but that we are born blind, without clearly perceiving how we can be made to see ; let us do meantime the things that He has said : light may follow on our obedience, and faith will surely accompany the light. It is not uncommon to excuse ourselves upon the plea, that until faith be given us, we can do nothing. You can do nothing, with faith or without it, towards your own recovery ; it was not washing in Siloam, cured this man, nor was it believing made the leper whole ; it is Christ who does it all. If you do not yet know Him, do what He bids you, till He reveals himself.

GENESIS xviii. 20—33.

20 And the LORD said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous ;

21 I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me ; and if not, I will know.

22 And the men turned their faces from thence, and went toward Sodom : but Abraham stood yet before the LORD.

23 And Abraham drew near, and said, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked ?

24 Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city : wilt thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that *are* therein ?

25 That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked ; and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee. Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right ?

26 And the LORD said, If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes.

27 And Abraham answered and said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto

the LORD, which *am but* dust and ashes :

28 Peradventure there shall lack five of the fifty righteous : wilt thou destroy all the city for *lack of* five ? And he said, If I find there forty and five, I will not destroy *it*.

29 And he spake unto him yet again, and said, Peradventure there shall be forty found there. And he said, I will not do *it* for forty's sake.

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

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

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

33 And the LORD went his way, as soon as he had left communing with Abraham : and Abraham returned unto his place.

To all who take the evidence of sight, without the eye of faith, the events of this life present a most delusive picture. It seems as if the children of God took their chance with other men ; as if one event happened

to the just and to the unjust, all preference and distinction being reserved for the life to come. To prove to us that it is not so, that it is impossible it should be so, God has here and there drawn aside the veil that hides his providence ; not to reveal some rare and singular event, but to disclose by an example, the constant and equal workings of his will. This tale of Sodom, is not something which happened once ; it happens daily, it happens always : destructions overtake the wicked, and the Lord delivers the righteous out of them all. “ Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked ? ” Abraham was mistaken to suppose that God would do so ; we are mistaken if ever we think he does so. Whatever may appear, the event that involves them both, is not the same to the just and to the unjust. God has many ways to save his people, as appears in this narrative. To a certain extent, He will spare the wicked for their sakes ; He will suspend his judgments, rather than they shall suffer, as He would have spared Sodom for ten righteous' sake. How small a proportion to stay the doom of so corrupt a mass ; and yet not less, perhaps, than has kept the whole world in existence since the day that men began to corrupt their ways upon the earth. So much does God's love overbear his most just retribution—so much does He love mercy more than judgment. And when He can no longer stay his hand, He can exempt his people from the stroke, as He did Lot when Sodom fell. “ Thousands shall fall beside thee, and ten thousand at thy right hand, but it shall not come nigh thee.” God does so spare much oftener than we know, because we do not always know by what remarkable interpositions we may have escaped a calamity that has fallen on those around us.

Lot suffered nothing in the ruin of Sodom, but what his own sin required; he lost a home that was unfit for him, and property for the sake of which he unfitly dwelt there, and connexions that he never should have formed. Every child of God suffers the chastisement of his own sin; but this is no common fate indiscriminately borne, whatever connexion it may have with public calamity. Or suppose him to bear the full extent of it: suppose the just man to have died in Sodom; is the event one to the just, and to the unjust? Far from it. God does not mean it so, and the righteous do not think so. The sword or the pestilence that cuts off the ungodly, when his day of grace is ended, withdraws him from all that he desires or delights in, and fixes him in death for ever: but if it reach the righteous, it is because, prepared for glory and made meet for bliss, it is no longer necessary to delay the consummation of his joy. What sights of woe had the righteous Lot escaped, if his soul had been perfected when the cities of the plain were overthrown—it had been but another mode of rescue.

ISAIAH xxx. 8—21.

8 Now go, write it before them in a table, and note it in a book, that it may be for the time to come for ever and ever:

9 That this is a rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the law of the LORD:

10 Which say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right

things; speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits:

11 Get you out of the way, turn aside out of the path, cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us.

12 Wherefore thus saith the Holy One of Israel, Because ye despise this word, and trust in oppression and perverseness, and stay thereon:

13 Therefore this iniquity shall be to you as a breach ready to fall, swelling out in a high wall, whose breaking cometh suddenly at an instant.

14 And he shall break it as the breaking of the potter's vessel that is broken in pieces; he shall not spare: so that there shall not be found in the bursting of it a sherd to take fire from the hearth, or to take water *withal* out of the pit.

15 For thus saith the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength; and ye would not.

16 But ye said, No; for we will flee upon horses; therefore shall ye flee: and, We will ride upon the swift; therefore shall they that pursue you be swift.

17 One thousand *shall flee* at the rebuke of one; at the rebuke of five shall ye flee; till ye be left as a beacon upon the top of a mountain, and as an ensign on a hill.

18 And therefore will the Lord wait, that he may be gracious unto you; and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you; for the Lord is a God of judgment: blessed *are* all they that wait for him.

19 For the people shall dwell in Zion at Jerusalem; thou shalt weep no more: he will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry; when he shall hear it, he will answer thee.

20 And *though* the Lord give you the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction, yet shall not thy teachers be removed into a corner any more, but thine eyes shall see thy teachers:

21 And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left.

This summary of Israel's fate, contains the spiritual history of many a Christian, perhaps our own. When the natural heart is disturbed in its transgressions by the law of God, the first movement is to put the voice of truth to silence; to keep the Holy One of Israel out of sight, that we may not be disquieted. That Holy One lets it be so; but if He has a purpose of mercy toward us, some great calamity, some overwhelming sorrow comes in upon our forgetfulness, till our hearts are broken like a potter's vessel. Then are heard the first whispers of divine mercy, the first Gospel call: "In returning and rest shall ye be saved." Repent

and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. "In quietness, in confidence, shall your strength be." Think not to do any thing, or to be any thing; but throw yourself helpless into the arms of redeeming mercy. But no, we will not consent to this; we can yet do something for ourselves—we will amend our lives—we will get the better of our sins—we will deserve better at the hands of God, before we accept his mercy. Again, He lets it be so: we may try; but, alas! how soon are we left as an ensign on a hill, with its defences taken, and its defenders fled! Meantime, the Lord is waiting to be gracious. How long have some of us thus made Him wait! He can do nothing for us, while we are in such a mind. His justice must be exalted, his judgments must be felt, before He can have mercy on such a one. But blessed are ye when this position is reversed, when it is you that wait for Him, not He for you. This often is so, and have we reason to complain? Is it a great thing, after he has waited years upon years for our repentance, that our first cry of contrition seems awhile unheard? Is it any wonder, if, when He has so often invited us in vain, His peace should not be granted to our first prayers? Blessed are ye, notwithstanding. Be not discouraged. It is but meet you wait a little for Him, who has waited so long for you. He will surely come; He will not tarry long: "He will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry." Outward adversity, and inward contrition; adverse fortune, and an aching heart, may be the bitter retribution of your folly; "but thou shalt weep no more." You will not now bid away the voice of truth, and He will not withdraw the teaching of his Spirit any more. Soon you will hear the sweet voice of the Comforter behind you, saying, "This

is the way, walk ye in it," and you will find it then a way of peace indeed. At whatever point in this spiritual progress any one of us may be, we are deeply interested in the detail. What we do not recognize as past, may be to come. Shall we learn no wisdom by the gracious warning? Shall we choose to make Him wait, who is so gracious in his purposes? Shall we venture to make Him wait, who is so powerful in his judgments? Why loiter so painfully on the way to joy?

ACTS i. 1—11.

1 The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach,

2 Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen :

3 To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God :

4 And, being assembled together with *them*, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, *saith he*, Ye have heard of me :

5 For John truly baptized with water ; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.

6 When they therefore were

come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel ?

7 And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons which the Father hath put in his own power.

8 But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you : and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

9 And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up ; and a cloud received him out of their sight.

10 And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven, as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel ;

11 Which also said, Ye men

of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.

There are in this passage many important intimations, which we may with advantage dwell upon. The fact of our Saviour's resurrection is not, I suppose, a subject of doubt even to nominal Christians; to the believer it cannot be, because it is that on which all his hope depends: if Christ be not risen, then is his hope vain, he is yet in his sins. Neither is the ascension, I conceive, any more a matter of uncertainty than the resurrection. But respecting two other events here referred to, namely, the return of our Lord, and the restoration of the kingdom to Israel, there is in the minds of many Christians considerable agitation, and even uneasiness; both as to the facts, and as to the time and manner of their occurrence. On these subjects, as well as on their relative importance, the passage throws considerable light. We are sure, that by the restoration of the kingdom to Israel, the apostles understood, what they had always expected, a temporal restoration. That our Lord did not undeceive them, is considerable evidence that they were not deceived. He even does more; for the assertion that they might not know the time, was adequate to an admission, that such a time would be. With respect to his own return, the assurance is as positive as its importance required. Jesus, the same Jesus, should come again; and he should come in like manner, as he went, visible to mortal eyes upon the clouds of heaven. Nothing but such an assurance could have comforted them; nothing is so well calculated to comfort us: we cannot think of his return too often; we cannot desire it with too full a heart; we cannot expect it with too

assured a certainty. But while the apostles were to be satisfied with ignorance on the one hand, and with knowledge on the other, they were to go their way and occupy themselves with other things ; they were neither to stand gazing after that of which they were made sure, nor sit down and calculate that which it was not given them to know : they were to occupy themselves in the interval with the works of the Spirit, and the confession of Christ crucified. It is a valuable guide for us. We are to expect the one event, and rest in delightful certainty upon the other ; but it is the redemption of our souls by the death of Christ, and the sanctification of our souls by his Holy Spirit, that is chiefly to occupy our minds in this life. And if such was the direction given to the apostles, it may justly be applied to those who have succeeded to their ministry ; and if to the preacher, of necessary consequence to the hearer, that our desire should be for such instruction as is of the most immediate and personal importance.

LUKE xi. 1—13.

1 And it came to pass, that as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.

2 And he said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name : Thy kingdom come : Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth.

3 Give us day by day our daily bread :

4 And forgive us our sins ; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us : And lead us not into temptation ; but deliver us from evil.

5 And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves ;

6 For a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him ?

7 And he from within shall

answer and say, Trouble me not ; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed ; I cannot rise and give thee.

8 I say unto you, though he will not rise and give him because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth.

9 And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you ; seek, and ye shall find ; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.

10 For every one that asketh

receiveth ; and he that seeketh findeth ; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

11 If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone ? or if *he ask* a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent ?

12 Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion ?

13 If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall *your* heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him ?

In this parable, as well as in the parallel one, of the unjust judge, chap. xviii. it is essential to bear in mind the point they were intended to illustrate. That there may be no mistake in the application, it is expressly marked in the context ; in the latter case, by the declaration that it was to show, that men ought always to pray and not to faint ; in the former, by its immediate connexion with the Lord's prayer, and his own interpretation of it : as if to prevent the possibility of supposing either parable to be a representation of the character of God ; or any farther applicable than to the point it is intended to illustrate, viz. the efficacy of perseverance in prayer. Even in this sense, the parables are most extraordinary, the strength of the statement astounding to human reason ; but extraordinary only in their beneficence ; strong only in the power to encourage. Reason would conclude, and must conclude, that in this particular, there could be no comparison between God and man ; that He could not be induced to grant to-morrow, what he refuses to-day, or by any importunity of ours, be moved to that which He resists. But, to put in the

strongest possible light the falseness of this conclusion, God has placed himself in comparison with the selfish and unjust of this world, to show that the effect of importunity is, and by his appointment is to be, the same upon Himself, as upon our fellow creatures. When once our foolish reasoning is silenced, as it surely may be by Christ's own words, the comfort and encouragement of these passages is unlimited; the pledge they give is so strong, as sometimes to have been the Christian's last hold, when every hope has seemed about to yield, the long protracted prayer to be given up, and the soul's desire to be relinquished in despair. Many a tried saint has read it, and taken heart, and begun his prayer again. The concluding verses are of a less extraordinary, but not less persuasive character, appealing to our experience of the operation of parental love, to judge of its action in the bosom of our heavenly Father. I think also, the two last verses imply, that whatever we ask of God in the spirit of a child, will not be granted in anger, but in love. If when we ask an egg, He knows it would prove a scorpion in the issue, He will not give it us, but a wholesome blessing in its stead. In confidence of this, I do not think a child of God need hesitate to ask, with the submission of acknowledged ignorance, such earthly things as are in his heart to wish for; though it is evident the passage points more directly to that spiritual good, which every one that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth, beyond the possibility of failure.

JEREMIAH xvii. 5—14.

5 Thus saith the LORD, Cursed *be* the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the LORD :

6 For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh ; but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land and not inhabited.

7 Blessed *is* the man that trusteth in the LORD, and whose hope the LORD is :

8 For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and *that* spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green ; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit.

9 The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*, and desperately wicked : who can know it ?

10 I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, *and* according to the fruit of his doings.

11 *As* the partridge sitteth on eggs, and hatcheth *them* not ; so he that getteth riches, and not by right, shall leave them in the midst of his days, and at his end shall be a fool.

12 A glorious high throne from the beginning *is* the place of our sanctuary.

13 O LORD, the Hope of Israel, all that forsake thee shall be ashamed, *and* they that depart from me shall be written in the earth, because they have forsaken the LORD, the fountain of living waters.

14 Heal me, O LORD, and I shall be healed ; save me, and I shall be saved : for *thou art* my praise.

With respect to the things of this life, the Old Testament saints walked more by sight than we do ; but it does not therefore follow, that their trust had a firmer foundation, or their reliance upon Providence a more assured certainty. The personal communications by which God's promises were given, may seem to make confidence more easy ; and the specific character of his promises, to make dependence upon them more entire. But this is not really so. Why should the evidence of the senses be stronger than the witness of the Spirit ? Why should the word spoken, seem more sure than the word written ? When God said, He would give manna

in the wilderness, and water in the desert, and victory over untried enemies, and milk and honey in an unknown land, we are apt to wonder that Israel ever wanted faith, or feared; especially when they saw the promise continually verified by facts. Yet what had they to rely on more than we, when it is said to us, "All these things shall be added unto you." "He that believeth, shall want no manner of thing that is good." "The very hairs of your head are numbered." "Thou shalt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed upon thee." It is not true that they of old had more promises for this world than we have. Then why are we not surprised at ourselves rather, that ever we feel mistrust or fear about the present life? It is not because we want more ground of assurance, and a distincter promise, or because we have no evidence of its fulfilment; but because the heart is what it always was, deceitful above all things, and we incur the curse, while we make pretensions to the blessing. We refuse to trust God for the things we desire of him; we do not expect what we pretend to ask, and cannot be at rest without better security than his word. This world's good in store, however come by, seems a more sure dependence, than daily supplies from Him; the help and countenance of men, however procured, a more sure assistance than his unseen arm. With those we can lie down in peace, and walk in cheerfulness; with only these, we must consume our lives with anxiety and waste our days in care. In this sense our hearts are continually departing from the Lord. Then comes what must come. Instead of calm in the midst of danger, and confidence in the midst of uncertainty, and holy composure amid surrounding or impending ills: like the

tree that feels not the heat, nor is careful in the drought, which cannot wither it, because its root is in the waters ; there comes anxiety in the midst of blessings, fearfulness and carefulness dry up every source of pleasure, and wither every fresh bud of joy. Like the heath on the desert, when good cometh the heart sees it not, because its care lies deeper ; the supplies and blessings of each succeeding day, good and many as they are, are like the soft shower to the arid wilderness, that cannot make it blossom, for mistrust is still beneath.

ROMANS xii. 1—11.

1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, *which is your reasonable service.*

2 And be not conformed to this world ; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God.

3 For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think *of himself* more highly than he ought to think ; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.

4 For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office ;

5 So we, *being many*, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.

6 Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, *let us prophesy* according to the proportion of faith ;

7 Or ministry, *let us wait on our ministering* ; or he that teacheth, on teaching ;

8 Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation : he that giveth, *let him do it with simplicity* ; he that ruleth, with diligence ; he that showeth mercy, with cheerfulness.

9 *Let love be without dissimulation.* Abhor that which is evil ; cleave to that which is good.

10 *Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love ; in honour preferring one another ;*

11 Not slothful in business ; fervent in spirit ; serving the Lord.

Nothing can be more reasonable than this demand. The redeemed of the Lord are his by many titles peculiar to themselves. What a man buys is his; what he expends his labour on is his; what he conquers in legitimate warfare becomes his. Christ has bought his people, has conquered them from Satan, has made them anew by his Spirit. Whose should they be but his, in body, soul, and spirit? "Transformed by the renewing of your minds." This is the manner of the believer's separation from the world. It does not consist, as may be thought, of a few peculiarities of conduct; as if these made up all the difference between the believer and the world. They are among the outward manifestations of the change; but they do not constitute it. The transformation is of the heart. If one, engaged to a new master, assumes his livery, it is not the livery that makes him to be the servant; but he wears it because he is so. It is because the Christian has changed his service that he can be no longer conformed to the world. His conduct is changed, because his character is changed; his desires, his prospects, his fortunes, his hopes, and fears, and affections, all are changed: it is impossible he should appear the same. If he does so, then is he not transformed; and if not transformed, then is his mind not renewed. He gives no evidence of having changed his service; and what evidence has he of it to himself? But there is yet another sense in which Christ has a claim to our service, and which may also be our guide in the manner of rendering it. We are the members of his body; and as such, must act with him and for him continually, in the position assigned to us. We must not choose our place; we must no more insist on doing another's work than do negligently our own. The young, and inex-

perienced in the faith, must not insist on becoming its pillars and supporters; the weak and disabled must not fret to be in active service; the unlearned must not repine that he has no talent to serve with, nor the learned that he could do more, if he had wealth. If one has greater gifts than another, he must not be exalted to the despising of his brother who has less, as if the head had no need of the feet; and as little must he who is lowest covet despondingly another's gifts, as if because he is not the head, he were therefore not of the body. In the warmth of a newly-kindled zeal, Christians are very liable to overlook this order, and to appoint themselves to places in their Master's house, for which they are not fitted, in over eagerness to do all that they see others do. An earthly household would soon be thrown into disorder by such misguided zeal; it is for the master to assign to each the place and occupation for which he believes him fitted. Our Master must do more than this; for in ourselves we are unfit for any service, and He must make us capable before He can employ us. Surely it is his to choose; our's to wait humbly and submissively to see what He would have us do, then to do it simply, diligently, and cheerfully.

PSALM cxii.

1 Praise ye the Lord. Blessed is the man *that* feareth the Lord, *that* delighteth greatly in his commandments.

2 His seed shall be mighty upon earth: the generation of the upright shall be blessed.

3 Wealth and riches *shall be* in his house; and his righteousness endureth for ever.

4 Unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness: *he is* gracious, and full of compassion, and righteous.

5 A good man showeth favour, and lendeth : he will guide his affairs with discretion.

6 Surely he shall not be moved for ever : the righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance.

7 He shall not be afraid of evil tidings : his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord.

8 His heart is established, he shall not be afraid, until

he see *his desire* upon his enemies.

9 He hath dispersed : he hath given to the poor ; his righteousness endureth for ever : his horn shall be exalted with honour.

10 The wicked shall see *it*, and be grieved ; he shall gnash with his teeth, and melt away ; the desire of the wicked shall perish.

God does not separate time from eternity. Viewing all things at a glance, and issuing at once his promise and his fiat, He is not untrue, because all is not immediately realized, as if there were no time to lose. The upright have all eternity to be blessed in, to be made rich in ; their honours need not to be crowded into four-score years, lest they fall short of what is promised. But neither does God separate eternity from time, that his blessings should have no reference to the latter, and be waited for, till man has left the earth on which it is said he shall enjoy them. His promises to the righteous will be wholly, and are already partially, fulfilled. The wealth that is assigned him is the wealth of God ; the riches are the riches of heaven ; but he does not wait for them till he arrives there. He is in the condition of the minor, " who, while he is under age, differeth nothing from a servant though he be lord of all ;" but no one therefore determines that he is not rich, or that his seed will not be mighty. In fact, the upright man is rich above all that earth can make so. For who so rich as he who has all that he desires ? Or who so great as one that desires not to be greater ? In the darkness of sorrow, if such should overtake him, the brightest light of hope arises to him ; and goes not out, when all beside him have

none. His graces, his feelings, his principles, all are wealth to him, and enable him to scatter richest blessings round him, "to show favour and to lend" to them that need. His judgment is wealth; acting under the guidance of Heaven, referring all his affairs to God, asking counsel in every thing, and sure to be led aright, who can be so rich in his discretion? And there is one character in the prosperity of the godly which pertains to none beside—it cannot be moved for ever. He is not the rich man, who wins a fortune at hazard to-day, and loses it again to-morrow. Yet such is the world's game. Win as much as they will, they must lose it to-morrow; but the godly man's wealth goes on increasing through all eternity. And is he not endowed—is he not exalted in dignity above all other men, by the very circumstance that "he is not afraid of evil tidings?" How many a velvet couch does fear make sleepless? How many a costly banquet does it poison? That vague, that indefinite apprehensiveness to which none are strangers who have any thing to lose, how does it abase the spirit of the lofty, and mock the boastings of the proud, proving none truly great but he who is above it, because "his heart is established, trusting in the Lord?" These are the small beginnings of the righteous man's wealth and honours—a secret now between himself and God; for the world perceives them not, or thinks but meanly of them. In the end, if we may apply the term to that which endures for ever, his horn will be exalted before all men. The ungodly shall behold his greatness, and be grieved; while the objects of their desires, the sordid interests of this world, perish, they will see the righteous take possession of everlasting wealth.

JUDE 14—25.

14 And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousand of his saints.

15 To execute judgment upon all; and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard *speeches* which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.

16 These are murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts; and their mouth speaketh great swelling *words*, having men's persons in admiration because of advantage.

17 But, beloved, remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ;

18 How that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts.

19 These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit.

20 But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost,

21 Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.

22 And of some have compassion, making a difference;

23 And others save with fear, pulling *them* out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.

24 Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present *you* faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy,

25 To the only wise God our Saviour, *be* glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.

A day when Christ will come in judgment, we all recognize as a part of our religious creed; and yet there is an extraordinary reluctance in the mind to believe in its approach. One might almost suppose that some think it never can approach; that it is an event which will be for ever future and for ever far; which always is to be, but never will be;—so absurd to them appears any suggestion that this great day may possibly be drawing near. Indeed, there are so many writers and talkers, whose language is irrelevant to a world that is to terminate within any conceivable period, we might be led to

doubt if men generally believe it. The heart is very deceitful, and unbelief is an insidious thing; if we think others can have no reason to suppose our Lord's coming near, have we any reason to suppose it is not? While we feel revolted by the supposition that the day of vengeance is at hand, are we quite sure we believe that it will ever be at all? If we do, there is much in this passage to fix our attention; for while the company of the avengers is simply named, "the Lord, and ten thousand of his saints," the party to be judged are minutely described; and we cannot fail to perceive, particularly if we revert to the preceding verses, that they are persons at present included in the external church; spots in a feast of which they fear not to partake; trees in a garden where they bear no fruit; stars of a firmament in which they have no abiding place. And we shall further perceive that the terms are not descriptive of gross vices, of avowed infidelity, or open defiance of the Deity. Ungodly deeds, hard speeches spoken against Christ, murmurers against his providence, complainers against his government, walkers after their own way in opposition to his, proud exalters of themselves, and vain admirers of this world's distinction—in short, creatures of sense, because they have not the Spirit—these are they upon whom Jesus comes to execute judgment; not in arbitrary vengeance, but with such a disclosure of himself as shall strike conviction to their souls, that He is not what they thought him, when they mocked him by the assumption of his name, and did not the things that he said. Well might the apostle exhort us to keep ourselves, and with compassionate, discriminating earnestness, to labour to bring others within the shelter of Divine love and mercy in Jesus Christ, and end with committing us to Him who

alone can keep us from falling, and so present us to Himself upon that day, that it shall be indeed to us a day of exceeding joy. From the very bottom of our hearts we have need to say, "Amen."

1 SAMUEL ii. 27, to the end.

27 And there came a man of God unto Eli, and said unto him, Thus saith the Lord, Did I plainly appear unto the house of thy father, when they were in Egypt in Pharaoh's house?

28 And did I choose him out of all the tribes of Israel to be my priest, to offer upon mine altar, to burn incense, to wear an ephod before me? and did I give unto the house of thy father all the offerings made by fire of the children of Israel?

29 Wherefore kick ye at my sacrifice and at mine offering, which I have commanded in my habitation, and honourest thy sons above me, to make yourselves fat with the chiefest of all the offerings of Israel my people?

30 Wherefore the Lord God of Israel saith, I said indeed that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before me for ever: but now the Lord saith, Be it far from me; for them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.

31 Behold, the days come that I will cut off thine arm, and the arm of thy father's house, that there shall not be

an old man in thine house.

32 And thou shalt see an enemy in my habitation, in all the wealth which God shall give Israel: and there shall not be an old man in thine house for ever.

33 And the man of thine, whom I shall not cut off from mine altar, shall be to consume thine eyes, and to grieve thine heart, and all the increase of thine house shall die in the flower of their age.

34 And this shall be a sign unto thee, that shall come upon thy two sons, on Hophni and Phinehas: in one day they shall die both of them.

35 And I will raise me up a faithful priest, that shall do according to that which is in mine heart, and in my mind: and I will build him a sure house; and he shall walk before mine Anointed for ever.

36 And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left in thine house shall come and crouch to him for a piece of silver and a morsel of bread, and shall say, Put me, I pray thee, into one of the priests' offices, that I may eat a piece of bread.

The severity of Eli's punishment fixes our attention on the nature of his sin. It was no conduct of his own that brought this judgment on him, for he was apparently a devoted and a godly man. We are not told that he personally profaned the holy things, or by himself dishonoured the priestly office; and his melancholy and affecting death gives reason to believe that then, at least, the ark of God, the glory of the Lord, was that which lay nearest to his heart. The sin of Eli was too indulgent an allowance of the sin of others. "His sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not," or as it is in the margin, "Frowned not upon them." He did remonstrate with them, as we have read; but it was in terms much too lenient for the nature of their offences—too little indignant for God's insulted worship, and careless to prevent it. The word of God leaves us in no doubt about the nature of the sin: "Thou honourest thy sons above me." Sooner than condemn his children, sooner than degrade them as he should have done from the holy office, and before God and man have protested against their wickedness, he could bear to see the law of God insulted, his service made light of and profaned. Are we in no danger of committing Eli's sin? To parents, it is a most awful and impressive lesson. Remonstrance is not enough; persuasion and example are not enough; else had not Eli been condemned. Reproof, restraint, displeasure, prevention, as far as possible, are a parent's duty towards the sinful propensities of his children. How nearly we venture upon Eli's sin, whenever we make light of transgression in those we love; whenever, though but in the secrecy of our own hearts, we would rather shut our eyes to the purity of the divine law, than open them to the sinfulness of those we value and esteem. What do we, whenever we defend or extenuate sin in

practice, or error in principle, for the sake of those in whom they are detected, but that which Eli did—honour man above God, and cause his law to be lightly esteemed? And we risk no small measure of his punishment. If we were faithful to protest against the errors of our beloved, they might be made aware of them; if we fully appreciated their sin, we should be the more earnest with God on their behalf: we should do for them what we do for ourselves, confess the transgression, and cry for grace and mercy; perhaps we should obtain it. But, no! we will not blame them; we will not believe them in the wrong, or suppose them in danger; and, as far as we are concerned, they may perish in their sins: for be it remembered, that God hears no prayer but in the publican's language, whether it refer to others or ourselves. The punishment of Eli was severe, but it was just, because of his peculiar situation. "I did choose him out of all the tribes of Israel to be my priest," &c. In the house, in the family of such a one, can God's name be dishonoured and his laws be broken, without incurring twofold guilt and condemnation? Every believer stands in this position. In a sense, God's own honour is committed to him: shall earthly affections make him careless of it?

MATT. iv. 1—11.

1 Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness, to be tempted of the devil.

2 And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred.

3 And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.

4 But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not

live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

5 Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple,

6 And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in *their* hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.

7 Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.

8 Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and showeth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them;

9 And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.

10 Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.

11 Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him.

Some have thought that if Jesus had no sinful dispositions, he could be subject to no temptations. Any desire or inclination to sin He certainly could not feel, which is the sense in which we are said to be tempted of our own lusts, and enticed. But He was tempted in the sense of being tried, whether He had such inclination or not, as God is sometimes said to tempt men. In this sense it was a real, not a fictitious trial. For it was to the natural, but not guilty feelings of humanity, Satan addressed himself. Christ, as man, felt the bitterest pangs of hunger, and it was no sin to desire food. To this innocent desire Satan addressed himself, in hope to induce Him to satisfy it contrary to the will of God. The kingdoms of this world were to be the purchase of his own blood; He was going to his Father to receive them; but the tempter thought to induce him to accept them unlawfully at his hands, who had the rule over them for a season. The word of God did really contain the promise with which he tried to seduce the Holy One, by working upon his confidence and trust. Thus we

perceive that Satan did not try him with things evil, and therefore not desirable to his holy nature : but through his natural and innocent feelings, as man, endeavoured to lead Him into the commission of sin, which constituted a real temptation. Nothing is more remarkable than the manner in which our Lord repelled it. He gave no reason for his refusal but the word of God. Tempted as a man, He answered as a man ; as if he had no law but his Father's will, and no knowledge of his will, but by the written word. He knew the kingdoms of the world were to be his ; He knew that he should indeed not hurt his foot against a stone, and He knew the purpose for which He had endured his voluntary fast. But He urged nothing that He knew as God, or as God detected in the tempter's guile. He left us a perfect example, how to meet and to resist temptation, by taking the Scriptures for his only guide, judging of right and wrong as we must judge of it, and defending himself by the arms that we are provided with against the deceitfulness of Satan. The manner of the tempter's guile is ever the same ; to make our natural feelings an excuse for sin ; to offer us great temporal advantages in doing wrong ; to pervert the Scripture in order to mislead us ;—these are ever his devices. Our defence against them is that which Jesus used. “ It is written.” We do not know what He did know, the secret will of the Father ; and we have not, as He had, an inclination always in conformity with it ; but we have the same rule by which He formed his conduct, to be the rule of ours, and guard us from deception.

2 KINGS v. 1—14.

1 Now Naaman, captain of the host of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master, and honourable; because by him the Lord had given deliverance unto Syria: he was also a mighty man in valour; *but he was a leper.*

2 And the Syrians had gone out by companies, and had brought away captive out of the land of Israel a little maid; and she waited on Naaman's wife.

3 And she said unto her mistress, Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy.

4 And *one* went in and told his lord, saying, Thus and thus said the maid that is of the land of Israel.

5 And the king of Syria said, Go to, go, and I will send a letter unto the king of Israel. And he departed, and took with him ten talents of silver, and six thousand *pieces* of gold, and ten changes of raiment.

6 And he brought the letter to the king of Israel, saying, Now, when this letter is come unto thee, behold, I have *therewith* sent Naaman my servant to thee, that thou mayest recover him of his leprosy.

7 And it came to pass, when the king of Israel had read the letter, that he rent his clothes, and said, *Am* I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man doth send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy? Wherefore consider, I pray you, and see how he seeketh a quarrel against me.

8 And it was *so*, when Elisha the man of God had heard that the king of Israel had rent his clothes, that he sent to the king, saying, Wherefore hast thou rent thy clothes? let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel.

9 So Naaman came with his horses and with his chariot, and stood at the door of the house of Elisha.

10 And Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean.

11 But Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said, Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper.

12 *Are* not Abana and Parpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean? So he turned, and went away in a rage.

13 And his servants came near, and spake unto him, and said, My father, *if* the prophet had bid thee *do some* great thing, wouldest thou not have done *it*? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean?

14 Then went he down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God: and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.

Every story in the Old Testament, while it is a real history of God's providence, is a typical history of his grace, and has its realization in our own spiritual experience. None, therefore, can be read without the deepest personal interest. The leprosy, whatever was the natural character of that disease, was the ordained type of man's original corruption; that principle of our fallen nature of which we are sick from head to foot, no whole part remaining in us. By natural means it was incurable; as far as we are informed none such were ever made use of. In the Mosaic law no remedy or regimen is prescribed, even as intermediate in the cure; the cleansing being entirely a supernatural process, by sacrifice and prayer. In the present instance, the washing in Jordan, to whose waters no such natural efficacy is ascribed, was merely an exercise of faith and obedience, or perhaps of obedience only; for Naaman scarcely seems to have believed he should be cured. Do we sometimes think we have not faith enough in Christ to be cleansed from our corruption by his blood? Let us obey then; with all our doubts about us, let us do what we are bidden to do, in drawing near to Him, and try if it is not more efficacious than we think. We cannot believe that Christ will heal us for our mere asking; but can we not try? We cannot believe an offer of recovery so unconditional; but can we not accept it and see? Naaman believed at least one thing; he believed he was a leper, and knew he had no other means of cure. It is well if we believe so much as this, for then our way is plain: we may come with all our doubts, and try the remedy. But we are like Naaman: it is too easy, too simple, too absolute; there must be at least a process, a preparation, a contingency—if we need not have merit, we must have

faith, repentance, love How do we know if we are thus qualified to be made whole in Christ? Miserable sinner! do you know that you are a leper, white as snow? If you do, you have all the qualification Naaman had. Wash in the spiritual Jordan, and be clean. The Syrian's spirit stays with us often to the very last: when we have washed, we scarcely can believe that we are healed, and are for doing great things still. The simplicity and entireness of the cure still baffles our confidence; a sort of spiritual ambition keeps possession of us, that cannot be satisfied. We must have greater evidence, greater faith, greater devotion, and when do we know we have enough? Thus does the ease, and not the difficulty, disturb our faith. Nothing is so hard to nature as to believe that nothing is required before the cure, but to use the remedy; and nothing after it, but "henceforth to offer neither burnt-offering nor sacrifice unto other gods but unto the Lord."

JONAH i. 1— 15.

1 Now the word of the Lord came unto Jonah, the son of Amittai, saying,

2 Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me.

3 But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.

4 But the Lord sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken.

5 Then the mariners were afraid, and cried every man unto his god, and cast forth the wares that *were* in the ship into the sea, to lighten it of them: but Jonah was gone down into the sides of the ship; and he lay, and was fast asleep.

6 So the shipmaster came to him, and said unto him, What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise,

call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not.

7 And they said every one to his fellow, Come, and let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this evil *is* upon us. So they cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah.

8 Then said they unto him, Tell us, we pray thee, for whose cause this evil *is* upon us. What *is* thine occupation? and whence comest thou? what *is* thy country? and of what people *art* thou?

9 And he said unto them, I *am* an Hebrew; and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, which

hath made the sea and the dry *land*.

10 Then were the men exceedingly afraid, and said unto him, Why hast thou done this? (for the men knew that he fled from the presence of the Lord, because he had told them.)

11 Then said they unto him, What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us? (for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous.)

12 And he said unto them, Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you: for I know that for my sake this great tempest *is* upon you.

Every typical story of the Old Testament is full of moral and spiritual truth, distinct from its figurative sense. In the committal of Jonah to the deep, to save the vessel and the crew with whom he had embarked, the three days burial and apparent death in which he lay, the faith which he maintained in the deep darkness of his soul, his safety from corruption and resurrection to life, to be the means of bringing the condemned city to repentance—in all these things we know that Jonah was a figure of Him that was to come. His disobedience was no type, but a sad image of man's perversity and folly, hoping to evade the will of the Almighty, and escape his observation. How impotent the attempt, might well have been foreseen; yet so besotted was this man of God in his rebelliousness, that he lay sleeping in the very storm he had provoked, and never bestirred himself to call upon his God. Is Jonah's case without a parallel? Or is it not rather the common effect of sin indulged, so to stupify our sense of it that conscience

falls to sleep in the commission, and leaves the soul really unconscious of the Lord's displeasure, until some awful intimation of it wakes us. Happy, indeed, that we should be so awakened by whatever calamity may overtake us. Whence we are led to remark the conduct of these mariners, containing, as I think it does, an important truth. They too, from feelings of humanity, were unwilling to yield to the manifest will of God, and give up his servant to his displeasure. Their resistance was unavailing; if persevered in, it would not have saved Jonah, safest always in his Master's hands, but would have involved themselves in his destruction. I think it is an instructive lesson to Christians, and Christian communities, that no tenderness of feeling should induce us to countenance a brother living in opposition to the word of God. The command is express in the gospel, that if any brother walk disorderly, he is to be disowned—not to his injury, but in order that he may be reclaimed. Charity suggests that if he be thrown off he will perish: if his Christian brethren disown him, who will bring him back to God? The world and Satan will ingulph him to perdition. So thought the mariners: but their humanity would have been far more fatal to the prophet than his Master's wrath. The child of God is safe under his Father's rod; but most unsafe in a course of disobedience, in which they who see him slumber forbear to waken him, and with a mistaken charity assume that he may be safe.

PSALM lxxvii. 1—13.

1 I cried unto God with my voice, *even* unto God with my voice; and he gave ear unto me.

2 In the day of my trouble I sought the LORD: my sore ran in the night, and ceased not: my soul refused to be comforted.

3 I remembered God, and was troubled: I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed. Selah.

4 Thou holdest mine eyes waking: I am so troubled that I cannot speak.

5 I have considered the days of old, the years of ancient times.

6 I call to remembrance my song in the night: I commune with my own heart, and my spirit made diligent search.

7 Will the LORD cast off for

ever? and will he be favourable no more?

8 Is his mercy clean gone for ever? doth *his* promise fail for evermore?

9 Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies? Selah.

10 And I said, This is my infirmity, but I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High.

11 I will remember the works of the Lord; surely I will remember thy wonders of old.

12 I will meditate also of all thy work, and talk of thy doings.

13 Thy way, O God, is in the sanctuary: who is so great a God as our God?

Whether from outward trials, or from inward conflicts, there are moments when words so sorrowful as these, become the language of the believer's heart. It may be, when some temptation yielded to, or doubtful course pursued, has separated between him and God, and the sense of sin takes such hold of him, that he cannot look up. Or it may be, when Satan takes advantage of adverse circumstances, or physical depression, or hope delayed, to shake his confidence, and obscure his faith. He calls to mind in his anguish, those days of bygone peace, when God seemed his friend, and the fresh beams of love and joy shed tints of heavenly blessedness around him; when he walked in the light of God's

countenance, and feared not. He calls to mind those nights when his waking was for song, and not for tears; when he was bestirred with gratitude, but not with grief. The remembrance of what he once enjoyed, adds agony to his woe. Is it God that has changed? This is the bitterest thought of all; and Satan takes care to tell him so. Is He who was once his friend, become his enemy? Is the tender father changed into the angry judge? That mercy in which he trusted once, and of old so sweetly tasted, but now perceives not, is it gone for ever? Those promises on which his hopes were once so firmly built, now seemingly no longer kept, no longer made to him, have they failed eternally? Was he deceived in God, or deceived in himself, or why is he thus forsaken? The enemy of our souls has answers for all such questions, is present at all such communings. While we are searching for evidences of God's love to us, he presents us with our own defections: when we are looking for the promises, he reminds us of our unanswered prayers; when we try to trace back the workings of providence, he lets us see nothing but our own mistakes; and buries every mark of grace received, under the memory of sins committed. In such sad hours we must do as David did: we must remember our "infirmity." It is ours to change, not God's; it is with us to depart, not Him; our faith has failed, but not his promises: we may forsake, He cannot. The very suspicion of it is our infirmity; the very thought is sin. Let us contemplate his character—let us meditate upon his works—let us read and think of all that He has done in ages past, for his people in every age; if possible, let us inquire of his doings from them that have made trial of his

faithfulness. We shall find it impossible his love can fail, his pardon be refused, or his mercy wearied. So shall we recover our confidence; or while the gloom remains, be satisfied that it arises from some infirmity of our own, wait submissively for better days, or penitentially retrace the steps we have gone from Him.

ROMANS v. 1—11.

1 Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ.

2 By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

3 And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience;

4 And patience, experience; and experience, hope;

5 And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto us.

6 For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.

7 For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die.

8 But God commendeth his love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

9 Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.

10 For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.

11 And not only so, but we also joy in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.

It is a ground of much regret, and I think humiliation, that believers in this life so seldom attain, or at least so seldom own they have attained, this joy and confidence in God. It cannot be that God is reluctant to fulfil his promises to their full extent, and purposely keeps back his children from the utmost enjoyment of

them. Unlikely as this would seem, if duly considered, men are not unapt to say He does so, by inference at least; for they say that they must wait for their assurance till it please God to give it them; and hitherto it has not pleased Him to admit them to the full enjoyment of that hope which maketh not ashamed. True, we must wait for every thing till God gives it; of Him we must ask it, and from Him alone expect it. But it may be doubted, whether it is ever his pleasure to withhold what He has both promised and commanded; whether He would not be always pleased, much better pleased, that his people on their part made not so many difficulties, but took simply and wholly his offers and assurances, and all the blessedness attached to them. I apprehend, most frequently, if not always, the delay is with ourselves; it is we who will not take, not He that will not give, the peaceful security of faith; and whether unwittingly, or whether wilfully, place something between ourselves and Christ, that makes the full vision of our bliss impossible. Oftener than any thing, perhaps, it is our contentedness to be without it; we are satisfied to be in doubt; we are satisfied with a vague uncertain hope, and will not use the means to attain to more. Yet surely it is a base contentedness, to wait without, as servants who know not what their Lord doeth, when we are invited to enter in as children, and partake of his counsels; and surely it is to be meanly in love with penury, not to long to enter into our rich inheritance. It seems humility, and were it a question of merit, it might be so; but where the tender is a gift, it is oftener pride than humility that hesitates. If it be said, that our sins prevent us, two doubts suggest themselves: it cannot be pardoned sin

forbids our joy, that is the very ground of it; it must be, either that some trust in ourselves still hangs about us, which vacillates of course under the sense of sin; or we are wilfully allowing ourselves in some questionable course, and therefore doubtful if sin has not still dominion over us. In either case, it is not good to be contented with our condition, and it rests with ourselves to amend it; we can give up our self-righteousness, or leave our doubtful practices; or if we think we cannot, we should give God no rest by day or night, till He send us strength to do so. There is no reluctance with Him—He only waits to be inquired of by us. If, when we were enemies, we were reconciled, and being reconciled, are saved; how much more, it may well be added, shall we be made glad by the knowledge of our salvation!

JOHN i. 35—49.

35 Again, the next day after, John stood, and two of his disciples;

36 And looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God!

37 And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus.

38 Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye? They said unto him, Rabbi, (which is to say, being interpreted, Master,) where dwellest thou?

39 He saith unto them, Come and see. They came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with

him that day: for it was about the tenth hour.

40 One of the two which heard John *speak*, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother.

41 He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messiah, which is, being interpreted, the Christ.

42 And he brought him to Jesus. And when Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art Simon the son of Jona; thou shalt be called Cephas, which is, by interpretation, A stone.

43 The day following Jesus would go forth into Galilee, and

findeth Philip, and saith unto him, Follow me.

44 Now Philip was of Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter.

45 Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.

46 And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see.

47 Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!

48 Nathanael saith unto him, Whence knowest thou me? Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig-tree, I saw thee.

49 Nathanael answered and saith unto him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel.

Jesus made on earth a perfect exhibition of the works and attributes of Deity as they concern humanity. In his own character He showed us what God is towards us; in his life and conversation what God would have us be towards Him, and in his works on earth, the manner of his secret working now in heaven. By signs and wonders, by miracles and parabolic figures, he subjected to mortal sense, the spiritual workings of his grace; and there is no part of his acting as man, that is not a revelation of his will as God. As such, we may contemplate the choice of his disciples. He had not one rule for choosing them, and another now; nor another method of calling them, nor another argument to bring them; the separation was made as it is now, and ever has been, with this difference; that what Jesus did then by his own voice, he does now by the voice of the Spirit. Let us examine the process, it may throw light upon a subject sometimes thought obscure. In the election of these first disciples, there is something totally beyond our reach: its originating cause is not so much as hinted at; their previous lives are not alluded to; they are not shown to have been distinguished by

any thing from the people round them ; nor to be any more fitted or prepared than others for the high destiny to which they were preferred. Here all is mysterious, super-human, inscrutable ; it would seem we must not ask, since all clue to an answer is withheld. But in the calling of these chosen twelve, how plain and simple is the process. There is no ostensible constraint upon their will, no apparent exercise of power to find them, or to bring them ; they seem to come to Christ of their own mind, though afterwards informed they could not, unless the Father draw them ; as if they chose Him, though He assures them afterwards the choice was his. The first two hear of Christ through the ministry of John, and on his testimony, Jesus observes them seeking Him before he addresses himself to them. A third is informed by his brother of what he himself believes, and is induced to go before he has received any invitation. Philip does not appear to have been seeking or inquiring at all when Jesus found him ; but the moment he heard the command to follow, he obeyed it. Nathanael when informed of Philip's discovery, did not believe it, thought it very improbable ; but with a guileless simplicity of heart, which won the commendation of our Lord, willing to be convinced, he consents to go and see. Such was, and such is the simple process by which our Lord's disciples are chosen from an unbelieving world, that hearing the same ministers, does not receive their testimony ; informed where Christ has been found, will not go after him ; commanded by himself to follow Him, will not obey ; persuaded by those who have obeyed his call, want the candour to listen, and the honesty of heart to be convinced. So simple practically, is a doctrine that seems in theory so difficult.

2 CHRONICLES vi. 12—21.

12 And he stood before the altar of the LORD, in the presence of all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands.

13 (For Solomon had made a brazen scaffold of five cubits long, and five cubits broad, and three cubits high, and had set it in the midst of the court; and upon it he stood, and kneeled down upon his knees before all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands toward heaven.

14 And said, O LORD God of Israel, *there is no god like thee in the heaven, nor in the earth; which keepest covenant, and shewest mercy unto thy servants that walk before thee with all their hearts:*

15 Thou which hast kept with thy servant David my father that which thou hast promised him; and spakest with thy mouth, and hast fulfilled it with thine hand, as *it is this day.*

16 Now therefore, O LORD God of Israel, keep with thy servant David my father that which thou hast promised him, saying, There shall not fail thee a man in my sight to sit upon the throne of Israel; yet so

that thy children take heed to their way to walk in my law, as thou hast walked before me.

17 Now then, O LORD God of Israel, let thy word be verified, which thou hast spoken unto thy servant David.

18 (But will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house which I have built!)

19 Have respect, therefore, to the prayer of thy servant, and to his supplication, O LORD my God, to hearken unto the cry and the prayer which thy servant prayeth before thee:

20 That thine eyes may be open upon this house day and night, upon the place whereof thou hast said that thou wouldst put thy name there; to hearken unto the prayer which thy servant prayeth toward this place.

21 Hearken, therefore, unto the supplications of thy servant, and of thy people Israel, which they shall make toward this place: hear thou from thy dwelling-place, *even from heaven;* and when thou hearest, forgive.

Solomon, as the builder of the temple, was a type or prefiguration of Christ, appointed by the Father to raise up a spiritual house, in which His gracious presence might abide for ever, and his name be eternally exalted. The temple was a type of the church of God, the Gospel

church, of which Christ himself is the chief corner-stone, as well as the builder. Every word, therefore, of this beautiful prayer, offered at its dedication, has a direct application to ourselves, and may become our prayer. Nay, more, it is the prayer of Christ for us. How deeply interesting, how suitable to our necessities is its language! Christ, presenting to the Father his accomplished work, done by his appointment, done according to his will, pleads the promise, and claims the blessing that had been annexed to it. He owns the house which he has builded, is in itself not worthy; is not meet for Him whom "heaven, and the heaven of heavens cannot contain." It may well be asked, if God will in very deed dwell with men upon the earth. But his word shall be verified. In the person of the Son, God has dwelt once with men in human form; in the person of the Holy Spirit, He dwells continually in the hearts of his people: in presence invisible, but not unperceived, He abides with his church on earth, until it be removed into his presence in heaven. Unworthy as we are, the church of Christ is that to which the promises are made, the house which God has builded for himself by the Redeemer's hand; and it is He who in this passage, claims their fulfilment on our behalf. And what is the purport of his prayer? That our prayers, the prayers of his people, should be accepted when offered toward the place where He has set his name. In the day of distress, in the day of suffering, in whatsoever sore, in whatsoever sickness, in war, in famine, and in oppression; above all, in sin, and under those judgments sin may bring upon us, if we turn our hearts, and turn our eyes towards the place of the mercy-seat, toward Christ the corner-stone of his own temple, the ark of the covenant,

and the great antitype of all its mysteries, the Father's eyes are open, and his ears attent unto the prayer : He will hear from heaven and forgive. Such is our Saviour's supplication ; and He that prays, and He that grants are one ; it cannot be refused. And if we are not of his people ; if we are strangers hitherto to the covenant of his grace, and the influences of his Spirit, there is a provision for the stranger too : when smitten by his outstretched arm, and impressed by the greatness of his name, we come into the gospel sanctuary, and seek the mediation of the Saviour's prayer.

ISAIAH i. 1—12.

1 The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.

2 Hear, O heavens ; and give ear, O earth ; for the Lord hath spoken : I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me :

3 The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib : *but* Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider.

4 Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evil-doers, children that are corrupters ! they have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward.

5 Why should ye be stricken any more ? ye will revolt more and more. The whole head

is sick, and the whole heart faint.

6 From the sole of the foot even unto the head *there is* no soundness in it ; *but* wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores : they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment.

7 Your country *is* desolate, your cities *are* burned with fire : your land, strangers devour it in your presence, and *it is* desolate, as overthrown by strangers.

8 And the daughter of Zion is left as a cottage in a vineyard, as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city.

9 Except the Lord of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah.

10 Hear the word of the

Lord, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah:

11 To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord: I am full of the burnt-offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts;

and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats.

12 When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand to tread my courts?

It is well for us to consider against whom is this solemn judgment given, containing, as it does, the most impressive evidence of man's entire corruption. And upon whom pronounced? Not upon the heathen worshippers of other gods, upon the corrupt descendants of Esau or of Ham, the heaven-abandoned heritors of Adam's sin. This people, so corrupt from head to foot, so sick, so incurable, was man in his most favourable circumstances; man, when all had been done that could be done to improve his fallen nature. Chastisements and mercies, revelations, miracles, and divine communications; laws the most explicit, and providences the most extraordinary: all that Deity itself could devise, if we may so speak, had been exhausted upon this people, to try if there were any circumstances under which the nature of Adam's seed could be amended. How does the result of the experiment confound the pride of those who think the fall but partial, and the natural heart still capable of recovery under favourable culture! What could be done more for his vineyard, that He had not done? What earthly culture can be like that bestowed upon Israel? Will man succeed in perfecting, what God himself did not succeed to mend? This trial of a people severed from the corrupted mass of humanity, and placed in the most advantageous circumstances, was intended by one great experiment to testify, and will testify eternally, that

nothing can make good the seed of the first Adam ; unless born again, created anew in Jesus Christ. These services which God abhors, these offerings which He calls an abomination ; they were the services and the offerings He had himself appointed : the festivals and sacrifices were of his own choosing ; yet he declares, that his soul hateth them. They were offered with unclean hands, and unbelieving hearts ; Christ was not seen in them, and sin was not repented in them : and God denies that He required any such. Can we think there is acceptance for any services of ours, for our prayers, our ordinances, our alms-deeds, and our moralities ? Compliances with the letter of his law as theirs were ; but no more required of us, than theirs of them, without the spirit, and without the faith, and without the sanctification of heart, in which they are to be presented. Man has been ever the same, and his wisdom is to know it. Judaism failed, and Christianity has failed to reach the natural heart, unless softened and changed by divine grace ; and “ Except the Lord of hosts had left us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah.”

ST. LUKE x. 3—16.

3 Go your ways : behold, I send you forth as lambs among wolves.

4 Carry neither purse nor scrip, nor shoes : and salute no man by the way.

5 And into whatsoever house ye enter, first say, Peace be to this house.

6 And if the Son of peace be there, your peace shall rest upon it : if not, it shall turn to you again.

7 And in the same house remain, eating and drinking such things as they give : for the labourer is worthy of his hire. Go not from house to house.

8 And into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you, eat such things as are set before you :

9 And heal the sick that are therein, and say unto them, The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you.

10 But into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you not, go your ways out into the streets of the same, and say,

11 Even the very dust of your city, which cleaveth on us, we do wipe off against you : notwithstanding, be ye sure of this, that the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you.

12 But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable in that

day for Sodom than for that city.

13 Woe unto thee, Chorazin ! woe unto thee, Bethsaida ! for if the mighty works ha been done in Tyre and Sidon which have been done in you, they had a great while ago repented, sitting in sackcloth and ashes.

14 But it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment than for you.

15 And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted to heaven, shalt be thrust down to hell.

16 He that heareth you heareth me ; and he that despiseth you despiseth me ; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me.

It is worthy of remark, that the first message to be delivered by those who propagate the gospel is a message of peace ; the denunciations of a broken law and a despised faith may follow, but they do not precede, the message. First say, "Peace be to this house." Before you inquire who is within, before you know if it will be welcomed, announce the blessing you have been sent to offer—to offer to all, without inquiry and without discrimination. The Son of peace knows whether his Spirit is there to give effect to the message, and prepare for it a welcome in the house ; we cannot know, nor need we, for our commission is the same in any case. Wherever we enter we are to make known, in the first place, the offer of peace through the gospel—the proposals of pardon and reconciliation through Jesus Christ. This is so plainly the direction, it seems extraordinary that any one should doubt the order in which divine truths are to be set forth ; esteeming it necessary to

alarm the conscience by the terrors of the broken law, before the balm of the gospel can be administered ; to withhold the promises till the penalties of sin have been effectually appreciated ; in short, to give the precepts of the gospel first, and the doctrines afterwards. This is not God's way. In paradise He gave the doctrine of peace even before he pronounced the curse. Our Saviour began his sermon with the blessings, proceeded to the doctrines, and gave the moral precepts last. Wherever we have a scripture example how to teach, this is the observed order. And if it is the way to teach, it is the way to learn ; we must make peace with God in Christ ; we must have the kingdom of God brought nigh unto us, even set up in our hearts, before any effort at obedience can be successful. The passage would seem to contain an answer too to those who think that believers only are to be addressed in the preaching of the truth. The apostles had but one thing given them to say to all. They were to enter everywhere ; if they were received, they were to say, " The kingdom of heaven is come nigh unto you ;" thus imparting to the believer all the blessings it implies. If they were not received, they were still to say the same—" Notwithstanding be ye sure the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you"—leaving to the unbeliever all the consequences of having rejected it. Unbelief can make no difference to the fact ; Jesus Christ has been crucified for us ; his salvation is made known to us ; his kingdom, in all its blessings, is ours, if we will receive him ; but whether we will or not, it must equally be established, and we must be comprehended in it : if not in its blessings, in its judgments. Christ has not died in vain to any man ; since they who do not enter into his rest, by reason of unbelief, will have to abide the con-

sequences of their rejection of Him: and "it shall be more tolerable in that day for Sodom than for that city."

JOB xvii. 1—16.

1 My breath is corrupt, my days are extinct, the graves *are ready* for me.

2 *Are there* not mockers with me? and doth not mine eye continue in their provocation?

3 Lay down now, put me in a surety with thee; who is he *that* will strike hands with me?

4 For thou hast hid their heart from understanding: therefore shalt thou not exalt *them*.

5 He that speaketh flattery to *his* friends, even the eyes of his children shall fail.

6 He hath made me also a by-word of the people, and aforetime I was as a tabret.

7 Mine eye also is dim by reason of sorrow, and all my members *are* as a shadow.

8 Upright *men* shall be astonished at this; and the innocent shall stir up himself against the hypocrite.

9 The righteous also shall

hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall be stronger and stronger.

10 But as for you all, do ye return, and come now: for I cannot find *one* wise man among you.

11 My days are past, my purposes are broken off, *even* the thoughts of my heart.

12 They change the night into day: the light is short because of darkness.

13 If I wait, the grave is mine house: I have made my bed in the darkness.

14 I have said to corruption, Thou *art* my father: to the worm, Thou *art* my mother and my sister.

15 And where is now my hope? as for my hope, who shall see it?

16 They shall go down to the bars of the pit, when *our* rest together is in the dust.

It is a nice point to administer godly consolation. The friends of Job spoke many excellent truths. There is a high tone of moral beauty in their discourses, an elevated view of God's power and greatness, and a manifest intention to do Him honour. As Creator, as moral governor of the universe and sovereign disposer of all things, we cannot find anywhere more striking exhi-

bitions of the Deity than in some of these chapters. Yet we have the declaration of God himself, that they did not speak of Him the thing that was right. To the sufferer they intended kindness, else had they not come to him in his affliction; but from want of sympathy in his character, and understanding of his condition before God, they bitterly aggravated his mental anguish. The occasion of their failure seems to have been that their arguments were not what we should now call gospel consolations: they were drawn wholly from God's moral, not his spiritual rule; they looked not at all beyond the present life, nor beyond the actions of man to his principles of action. Their words exhibited the doctrine of human merit as the ground and measure of divine favour; and this world as the scene of its distribution, in earthly rewards and punishments. Job repelled this with indignation; because if moral character were the claim to God's favour, and this world's prosperity the measure of it, he knew his own integrity. We have the testimony of God, that there was no man like him; and, no doubt, the touching picture he drew of his own uprightness and benevolence was a just one. Such arguments tended to exalt rather than to humble him, and they did exalt him; but, alas! such exaltation brought no comfort to his soul. It was not till, putting out of sight the comparative excellence of man with man, Job measured himself by the holiness of God, that he became vile in his own eyes; and, thus abased, was brought within the reach of divine comfort. It is in vain to tell the chastened spirit of the justness and power of the Almighty: it is still more in vain to turn his memory back upon himself, or forward upon time, or around him upon the destinies of men. He must be taught that he is nothing, and has nothing,

and can deserve nothing—that good in this life, or the life to come, is not of merit, but of gift; and this world not the believer's heritage—that sorrow here is no token of God's wrath, but very often of His saving love. He must find peace in believing, not that he is the best of men, but that he is the "chief of sinners;" not in holding fast his integrity, but in repenting in dust and ashes.

ST. LUKE xxii. 24—34.

24 And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest.

25 And he said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors.

26 But ye *shall* not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve.

27 For whether *is* greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? *is* not he that sitteth at meat? but I am among you as he that serveth.

28 Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations:

29 And I appoint unto you a

kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me;

30 That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

31 And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired *to have* you, that he may sift *you* as wheat:

32 But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.

33 And he said unto him, Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison and to death.

34 And he said, I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me.

We cannot fail to be impressed, on the reading of this passage, with the contrast that is between the confidence of Peter now, and that which he exhibited on another oc-

casation. The same ardent affection and honest purpose animated him on both occasions ; he as much meant to follow his Master to prison and to death at the time he said it, as before to walk with Him on the waters of Gennesareth. But how differently grounded was his confidence, and how different the tone of his expressions ! a bold affirmation instead of a petition—instead of a holy confidence that the power would be given with the command, a proud assertion that he had it in himself. His fearlessness, before so beautiful, was now ill-timed. He had been warned of the designs of Satan against him, with a gracious intimation that by his Master's intercession only he would be recovered from the snare. It became Peter now to fear—not the prison and the death he boasts about, but the temptation and the sin of which his Master warned him. These the disciples of Christ are bidden to “ fear always ;” to dread, to fly from, and tremble to encounter. And as his courage was ill-timed, his confidence was misplaced. Had God required him to follow to prison and to death, he would have made him ready by his grace, and Peter might justly have trusted that he should be made able. But, in himself, he could not be ready, and he was not able, however he might be willing. The believer has a will to do all things for the love of Christ ; but he has the power to do nothing. He is honest in his purpose, as certainly Peter was, but how to perform he finds not : he will fail always, he will fail in everything, if he trusts to his resolutions and good will. When Peter's love suggested the desire, he should have said, in like manner as before, “ Bid me to follow thee to prison and to death ;” thus confessing that the decision and the power were with the Lord, his the desire only. As on God's word we cannot trust too much, on

our own resolves we cannot trust too little. While the greatest degree of confidence in God brings the most glory to Him, and the most security to ourselves, the least measure of confidence rested upon ourselves, brings inevitable failure and confusion. The watchful Master, who, in the one instance, reproached his servant with a doubt, while walking triumphant over nature's laws, had now to pray that just faith enough might be left him in his gross transgression, to receive the look of pardon when it was turned upon him. So different are the results of confidence equally honest, but differently placed—of love equally sincere, but manifested in a different spirit. We need only compare the two instances to see all the distinction between a holy and an unholy confidence.

HEBREWS xiii. 5—16.

5 *Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.*

6 So that we may boldly say, The Lord *is* my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.

7 Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of *their* conversation:

8 Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.

9 Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines:

for *it is* a good thing that the heart be established with grace; not with meats, which have not profited them that have been occupied therein.

10 We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle.

11 For the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned without the camp.

12 Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate.

13 Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach.

14 For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come.

15 By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the

fruit of *our* lips, giving thanks to his name.

16 But to do good, and to communicate, forget not : for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.

Man is so prone to err, and so capricious in his errors, that no sooner has Almighty wisdom set a hedge about him on the one side than he loses his way on the other ; no sooner is he cautioned against one extreme, than he needs a remonstrance against the very opposite. What but omniscient foresight could have provided way-marks, so exact as the holy Scriptures afford, to make sure the Christian's course ? In the church men have at all times been prone either to despise the ministers of God, or to be blindly led by them ; to set no value on their opinions and example, as if God could not teach us by them, or credulously to accept their testimony, as if they could not lead us from the truth. Neither is the case. God does teach us by them, and has ordained them to that very end : to set no value on preaching or other pastoral instruction, is to contravene his purpose, and say we can do without what He has provided for us. But ministers can only benefit us as they speak to us the word of God : if they have one word after their own fancy to subjoin, it is not safe to listen. They can only guide us aright, as the end of all their conversation is Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. If they take one erratic step in search of something else, it is not safe to go with them. Stability in religion is of immense importance. The doctrines are not divers, and they are not strange ; they are not one thing to-day, another to-morrow, and off to an opposite extreme the next day : they are not something to startle and surprise us, which

no one before has ever heard or thought of! The first appearance of such characters in a preacher, should put us on our guard. Above all, it must be Jesus, and him only, whom they teach; there must be no adding to his sacrifice, for justification, for sanctification, for peace here, or security hereafter. They who serve the altar must not meddle with the hallowed thing; if they lay so much as a finger on it we must distrust them. Our steadiness, and our permanent peace, to whatever temporary excitements that name may be unduly given, will mainly depend on our keeping the same uniform and beaten track, by which the saints before us have attained their rest—advancing, indeed, but not altering our course. If any will teach us new songs of praise, new fruits of the lips to the glory of Jesus' name, some fresh good to be done, or bliss to be communicated, let us listen to them, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased. But whoever it be that brings us new discoveries in the doctrines of the gospel, notions strange and diverse upon the way of salvation, we cannot be too cautious of being "occupied therewith."

ISAIAH lv. 1—13.

1 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.

2 Wherefore do ye spend money for *that which is* not bread, and your labour for *that which* satisfieth not? Hearken

diligently unto me, and eat ye *that which is* good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.

3 Incline your ear, and come unto me, hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, *even* the sure mercies of David.

4 Behold, I have given him *for* a witness to the people, a

leader and commander to the people.

5 Behold, thou shalt call a nation *that* thou knowest not; and nations *that* knew not thee shall run unto thee, because of the Lord thy God, and for the Holy One of Israel; for he hath glorified thee.

6 Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near.

7 Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

8 For my thoughts *are* not your thoughts, neither *are* your ways my ways, saith the Lord.

9 For *as* the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

10 For as the rain cometh

down, and the snow, from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater;

11 So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void; but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper *in the thing* whereto I sent it.

12 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.

13 Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir-tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle-tree: and it shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign, *that* shall not be cut off.

Throughout the Scripture we shall not find, in any single passage, so full, so beautiful, so entire an exhibition of the religion of Jesus: its doctrines, promises, consolations, and conditions, all in one. We may almost say it contains the entire gospel. An attempt to explain it would tend only to obscure the sense, but we may dwell upon the passage with benefit and delight. If the enemies of divine truth could deprive us of every word but this, it would surely be enough to lead us forward in the way of salvation, and support us in it. How can we, reading it, believe the religion of the Old Testament differed from that of the New? First, the persons to whom the gospel is sent, for whom its blessings are prepared.

Where are they more distinctly specified? They that want and have not, and have not means to purchase; who have spent their all in vanities, and find themselves unsatisfied; longing for the wine of gladness and the milk of consolation; but having nothing to present in return to Him who can alone impart it. Then, the blessings offered—life, the soul's life, which is eternal; delight, the soul's delight, which is divine; good, present and eternal good, in never-ending fulness; above all, security—a covenant of mercy that is sure to everlasting. Next, the source and origin of these blessings, "The Lord thy God," "The Holy One of Israel," and his beloved, Jesus, whom he has given—given even unto death—to be our Saviour, leader, and our guide to glory. Then the time: the invitation is limited—to-day, while it is called to-day. A time will be when God cannot be found. And the conditions: repentance, the forsaking of sin, the change of our unrighteous thoughts; turning to the Lord, to God in prayer, to Christ in faith, for mercy and for pardon, promised abundantly and freely. Then there is the office of the Holy Spirit, accompanying the word, and giving it effect according to the pleasure of the Lord. And lastly, there is the triumph and the bliss of the redeemed. A mourning people breaking forth with songs of joy; a troubled people restored to perfect peace: a world that sin has blighted and planted with thorns and briers, bearing again the fruits of righteousness and the flowers of bliss;—all terminating, as all must terminate, in the glory of God; in the exaltation of Christ; in that sign and name which shall be everlastingly exalted in his people. Such is the prophetic picture of the Gospel; all promise, holiness,

security, and bliss, without one discouraging or saddening word.

ST. LUKE xvii. 1—10.

1 Then said he unto the disciples, It is impossible but that offences will come: but woe unto him through whom they come!

2 It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones.

3 Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him.

4 And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him.

5 And the Apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith.

6 And the Lord said, If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou plucked

up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you.

7 But which of you, having a servant plowing, or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat?

8 And will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink?

9 Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not.

10 So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.

The excellency of the divine legislation in a world whose final judgment is suspended till the redemption of God's people shall be complete, is worthy of the closest observation. It is necessary for them that the wicked should remain, lest, if the tares be rooted up, the wheat perish with it—be removed before it ripens. It is necessary that they should suffer in the offences that must result from such a state of things; because their own

hearts require the discipline of affliction. Such offences are in the order of God's providence; He directs, makes use of, and in that sense orders them. But not in any sense that affects the responsibility of the offender. God does not originate the evil; every offence against his people, abundantly beneficial as it is to them, being judged by the intention, not the issue, is considered a transgression against himself, and as such requited. And what are his people to consider of these trespasses, so seeming evil, and so really good to them? To rebuke them as sins, most certainly, for God so holds them; but to forgive them, and leave to Him the retribution. As touching ourselves, all wrongs are to be accepted as a good from God, as much in the order of his providence, as if the trial came direct from Him. As touching the perpetrator, they are to be contemplated as sins, without excuse, committed against the Lord. His enemies it is for Him to deal with; they are not ours, although they mean to be. To nature this is hard. The apostles thought so, and asked the only power by which the difficulties of practice in religion are to be met—the strengthening of the principle. That every moral difficulty would yield to this, our Saviour testifies by declaring its sufficiency for what to man seems even a physical impossibility. There is no need for us to calculate the difficulties of a godly course; if the mountain, or the sycamore tree were in the way, they must transplant themselves at the bidding of a faith that goes forward in reliance on the truth of God, walking in the way of his commands. Our care should be of a quite different kind; namely, that when we have done these duties so difficult to nature, obeyed these requirements so seeming hard, and perceive within us the supernatural results of

the implanted principle, we take no credit to ourselves; make no mention of merit on our own behalf; count not our attainments what they should be, or, at their best, other than unprofitable to Him who has given us what He had a right to demand from us—the will to serve Him, and such measure of the power as we may have.

JOB xxxiii. 14—30.

14 For God speaketh once, yea twice, yet *man* perceiveth it not.

15 In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed;

16 Then he openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction,

17 That he may withdraw man *from his* purpose, and hide pride from man.

18 He keepeth back his soul from the pit, and his life from perishing by the sword.

19 He is chastened also with pain upon his bed, and the multitude of his bones with strong *pain* :

20 So that his life abhorreth bread, and his soul dainty meat.

21 His flesh is consumed away, that it cannot be seen; and his bones *that* were not seen stick out.

22 Yea, his soul draweth near unto the grave, and his life to the destroyers.

23 If there be a messenger with him, an interpreter, one among a thousand, to shew unto man his uprightness;

24 Then he is gracious unto him, and saith, Deliver him from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom.

25 His flesh shall be fresher than a child's: he shall return to the days of his youth:

26 He shall pray unto God, and he will be favourable unto him: and he shall see his face with joy: for he will render unto man his righteousness.

27 He looketh upon men, and *if any* say, I have sinned, and perverted *that which was* right, and it profited me not;

28 He will deliver his soul from going into the pit, and his life shall see the light.

29 Lo, all these *things* worketh God oftentimes with man,

30 To bring back his soul from the pit, to be enlightened with the light of the living.

We observed on a former passage in this book, that

amid many fine sayings, and abstract truths contained in the speeches of Job's incompetent friends, there was nothing applicable to his condition, and therefore nothing calculated to humble or to console him. A very striking contrast is the address of Elihu. Instead of exhibiting the Almighty as a moral governor, rendering to every man, with rigid equity, rewards and punishments in this life according to his merits, Elihu presents at once the gospel exhibition of the case. He presents man fallen, suffering, perishing: the sentence of death already in him, and the torturing hand of death already on him, to consume his life with pain, and his soul with care, and deliver up both to the grave and the destroyer; but insensible to his condition—bent on his own purposes—proud in his supposed integrity—warned once, warned twice, spoken to by God continually of his danger, and yet perceiving it not. And he presents God, as He is in Jesus Christ, breaking in upon this fatal slumber by supernatural influences, but calling often before the dulled spirit hears; nay, constrained to give him hearing that he may hear, before his instruction can be sealed; delaying the hour, keeping him back from the pit, that he may have time to seek mercy; pursuing him with chastisements, to bring him to contrition. And then if the messenger of truth draws nigh, if he convinces the sinner that God is holy when He judges, and just when He condemns; and calls forth the prayer for grace and mercy, and the confession, "I have sinned, and perverted the right, and it profited me not;" then is the word of peace pronounced: "Deliver him from going down into the pit: I have found a ransom for him." And then is the deliverance begun; the furrowed brow of anguish beams anew with joy; the worn spirit re-

sumes the fresh activity of youth, and the healthful tone of childhood; suffering having done its work, gives place to a most blessed prosperity, as in the case of Job; or it remains to perfect it, a curse no longer, but an accepted medicine administered by love, and with such bright light around, such sense within of renewed existence and inextinguishable life, that sorrow and pain, and death, have changed their colouring, and become but the ministrators of eternal joy. How soon was Job comforted, after Elihu had spoken!

PSALM xxxii.

1 Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

2 Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.

3 When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long.

4 For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. Selah.

5 I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah.

6 For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found: surely in the floods of

great waters they shall not come nigh unto him.

7 Thou art my hiding place; thou shalt preserve me from trouble; thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance. Selah.

8 I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye.

9 Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee.

10 Many sorrows shall be to the wicked: but he that trusteth in the LORD, mercy shall compass him about.

11 Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, ye righteous: and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart.

The terms righteous and upright in heart, by which

the joyous expression of this last verse is limited, might seem to say, such gladness is not for us, did we detach it from the previous verses. They are terms of frequent occurrence in the Psalms ; and while to the proud, they have served as a pretext for the claims of human merit, a contradiction to the Gospel's most humiliating truth ; to the humble, they may seem an exclusion from the joys in which the righteous only are called to participate. In the psalm we have read, the foreseer of all things has provided for both these misconstructions ; and with one such explanation, so clear, so explicit, it is without reason that we anywhere mistake the meaning of these terms. The joy that ends the psalm, and the blessing that begins it, are indissolubly united ; the recipients are one, the characters inseparably one. The glad at last, are the blessed at first ; the righteous are they, whose sin is covered ; the upright are they, to whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity. If we would trace the process by which this condition, with all its joyousness, is come to, not a link is wanting in the chain, we have it all before us. First, the subject of the blessing. He who is holy ? No ; but the sinful, whose transgression is not pardoned only, but so covered, that there shall seem to be none. He who is innocent ? No ; but the guilty, whose iniquity is considered not his, in such a manner, that he shall appear guiltless. Next, the reception of the blessing. In the silence of self-abasement, in the anguish of contrition ; with a heart broken under the chastisements of the Almighty, and without guile in the acknowledgment of its sins ; by penitence, by confession, and by prayer. Lastly, the effects of the blessing—confidence, security, guidance, submissiveness, and gratitude. Thus have we the entire Gospel in this short

psalm ; it wants but the name of Him, who had not yet been named on earth, Jesus Christ, through whom all this is done. It is thus the sinful become the righteous in the language of God, and the fallen become the upright in his sight. And it is thus, the sorrowful may become the glad ; the broken heart may burst anew with joy, and the saddest and the sinfullest among us, may be entitled to the language of exultation, that closes this, and pervades the following psalm. If we be indeed participants in the blessing, let not God be wanting of the shout of praise.

EPHESIANS vi. 10—24.

10 Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.

11 Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

12 For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

13 Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

14 Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness ;

15 And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace ;

16 Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.

17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God :

18 Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints ;

19 And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel,

20 For which I am an ambassador in bonds : that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

21 But that ye also may know my affairs, *and* how I do, Tychicus, a beloved brother and faithful minister in the

Lord, shall make known to you all things :

22 Whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose, that ye might know our affairs, and that he might comfort your hearts.

23 Peace *be* to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

24 Grace *be* with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Amen.

We cannot but be struck with the graphic force of the apostle's language; but we may not be so immediately impressed with the most important intimation given in it. The Christian, as here spoken of, is no longer the timid sheep among the wolves, the unresisting object of the world's hatred—the meek, the patient, the unrecriminating—bearing all things, forgiving all things; turning the left cheek to him that smiteth the right; and of him that bereaves him, not asking it again. He is now the warrior armed in his own defence from head to foot, and bearing offensive weapons against his foes. He is described in the attitude of one who has an arduous struggle to maintain; who must not walk unprepared, nor lie down unguarded, nor afford his enemies a moment of advantage, by being off his guard. This is no picture of careless, self-indulgent ease; there must be much work to do to warrant such terms as these. But the essential point of the passage, is in the nature of our enemies. It is not against the authorities of this world, the Christian is to arm himself; with these he has been told rather to suffer wrong, than to enter into conflict against flesh and blood: “the servant of the Lord must not strive.” These are far other enemies, and it is with the reality of their existence, this passage should impress us. Do we believe it? Do we realize to ourselves the fact, that we have day by day to defend ourselves against an invisible force, actively engaged in our destruction? It is

a tremendous thought; it is not a thing that can be believed in lightly. How, if we could behold at some moment, these powers of darkness in battle array against us? We should not think lightly of them then. And is an enemy less formidable for being unseen? The word of God has disclosed to us the awful secret. If we do not believe it with a realizing faith, we shall make sport of the danger, and take no measures to resist it: we shall not fear an ambush in the paths of pleasure, or a surprise in our moments of insobriety; we shall not suspect a bribe in the flatteries of earth, or treason in the movements of our bosoms. And we shall not discover the strength of our enemies, only because we make no resistance to their power: they will lead us captive at their will. If we believe it, we shall do what the apostle bids us do; be always watchful, always guarded, attentive to every sign of enticement, or whisper of temptation, as well as prepared for every more palpable assault: we shall live as in the garrisoned fortress of an enemy's country, with every inlet of evil closely shut. And because mortal defences are inefficient against supernatural foes, hopeless to contend in our own strength against powers so subtle, so invisible, we shall make haste to put on us the armour of God: his truth to secure us against their deceptions—his righteousness to defend us from their temptations—the gospel of his peace, to enable us to walk calmly and fearlessly in the midst of them; above all, the shield of faith, which, believing all that God has said, and trusting in all that He has promised, will make harmless their assaults; praying always that the Spirit will do his part in our defence, and watching always, that we may do our own.

ST. MATTHEW xii. 22—32.

22 Then was brought unto him one possessed with a devil, blind, and dumb: and he healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw.

23 And all the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the Son of David?

24 But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This *fellow* doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils.

25 And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand:

26 And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand?

27 And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast *them* out? therefore they shall be your judges.

28 But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you.

29 Or else how can one enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? and then he will spoil his house.

30 He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad.

31 Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy *against* the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men.

32 And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the *world* to come.

This passage, and similar ones, indicative of a sin for which there is no pardon, have been an occasion of uneasiness to some minds, lest they might ignorantly have committed it; while others, finding it inexplicable, have rather rashly concluded, it is sin which cannot be now committed. Taking the whole testimony of Scripture to solve the passage, I cannot perceive the fitness of either supposition. There always was, and always will be, one sin for which there remaineth no more satisfaction, and of course no pardon; the rejection of Christ's atonement.

St. Paul says of the unpardonable sin, that he does not say, we are to pray for it. Do we ever pray, dare we pray, that one who *finally* rejects the blood of Jesus, shall be forgiven? We know it is impossible; we dare not ask it, we may not wish it, for then were He indeed dishonoured in his death. And we as certainly know from the whole testimony of Scripture, that all other transgression, however aggravated, however accumulated, can be expiated and forgiven, through the accepted blood of Christ. That it is called sin against the Holy Ghost, is apparent, because it is the Holy Ghost that testifies of Christ—the Spirit never testifies of himself—but his testimony is resisted when Christ is denied. Such perhaps was the sin of Esau, who, knowing by revelation of the Spirit, that Christ and his kingdom were the promised inheritance, contemptuously sold it for a mess of pottage; whence it is said of him, that he found no place for repentance, though he sought it with tears. Such, doubtless, was the sin of Balaam, who, knowing by his own prophetic inspiration, the blessing intended for God's chosen people, endeavoured to defeat it, and taught Amalek to compass their destruction. And such was the sin of some, no doubt, to whom our Saviour is speaking in the text. By works that none but God could perform, and holiness none could gainsay, the Spirit testified that Christ was God; and they rejected him, not in ignorance, but because they hated holiness, and hated God. "Now have ye hated both me and my Father." Such was not the sin of all. "Father, forgive them." There was pardon for them that shed his blood—there is none for them that despise it. There was pardon for Saul who persecuted Jesus, before he knew him—there was none for those, who,

after having known Him, fell away. Sin against the Son may be forgiven. Alas! how much must be forgiven to all of us, before we can be saved! What offence, what neglect, what secret unbelief and open denial of his name! All this there is pardon for in his own precious blood. But if there be any that knowingly resist the Spirit's testimony; convinced in judgment, but unchanged in heart; satisfied of the truth of the Gospel, but unsatisfied with its conditions; and for the love of earth, and for the love of sin, do finally and wilfully refuse it: where is it possible that they can find a pardon?

EXODUS xxxii. 7—14.

7 And the LORD said unto Moses, Go, get thee down; for thy people, which thou broughtest out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves:

8 They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them: they have made them a molten calf, and have worshipped it, and have sacrificed thereunto, and said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which have brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.

9 And the LORD said unto Moses, I have seen this people, and, behold, it is a stiffnecked people:

10 Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation.

11 And Moses besought the LORD his God, and said, LORD, why doth thy wrath wax hot against thy people, which thou hast brought forth out of the land of Egypt with great power, and with a mighty hand?

12 Wherefore should the Egyptians speak, and say, For mischief did he bring them out, to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth? Turn from thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against thy people.

13 Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, thy servants, to whom thou swarest by thine own self, and saidst unto them, I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have spoken of will I give unto your seed,

and they shall inherit it for ever. of the evil which he thought to do unto his people.

14 And the LORD repented

It is in vain for us to reason against the efficacy of prayer; that it is consistent with the wisdom and immutability of God, who foresees all things, and foreknows all arguments, to change his mind upon the solicitation of a creature such as man. If we believe the Scripture, nothing is more indisputable, nothing more plainly asserted, or more frequently exemplified. Not that God changes his mind; his mind is all and always good towards us: but in a manner not submitted to our apprehension, because perhaps beyond its compass, He does suspend his purposes upon our prayers; He makes his gifts contingent upon our asking, and averts his wrath upon our supplications. We were better occupied with the immense importance of this fact, than with its improbability: God has not only said it, but He has proved it continually. If we could read the secret workings of providence, we should perceive, that He is continually proving it anew; we should see, day by day, what we gain by praying, what we lose by not praying; what blessings we might have had, or might have had sooner, had we asked them trustingly; what sufferings we might have been spared, had we prayed repentingly. You may say, this is very unlikely; nothing has befallen without the will of God; and what He wills must come to pass, whether we pray or not. This is good reasoning, good philosophy; but God says otherwise; He proves it otherwise. I am persuaded we have no warrant in Scripture for saying of any blessing we have missed, or any sorrow we have suffered, that our prayers could have made no

difference. It is one of the most important of the many things about which we must not reason, but believe. We have been reading an instance in which God speaks as if He were even unwilling to be prayed to, lest it should impede his vengeance. Not that he was really unwilling, but He said it purposely to exhibit the power of the prayer, which if offered, He could not resist; He makes as if He would rather not be asked, because if He is asked, He will not refuse. Moses understood it as an encouragement. We, if we want any thing, if we fear any thing, may we not find in it an encouragement too? But nothing in the passage is more remarkable, than the argument Moses makes use of. He offers no excuses, he pleads no temptation; he makes no promises for the future, and appeals not even to the divine mercy for his people. God's own promise, his own glory—these are the potent spell which omnipotence itself could not resist. Who shall say how often, since the time of Moses, a like prayer has proved alike irresistible, when poured from the penitent bosom of the believer; in some moment, perhaps, when he has had nothing else to say? Unable to extenuate, afraid to promise, doubtful of the mercy he has abused, and the love he has outraged, nothing has been left to him to say but this, "Thou hast promised to save me: how will the enemy triumph if I am lost!" In the beautiful language of our church, "O Lord, arise, help us and deliver us for thine honour." Never has prayer so offered in sincerity been unheard. The passage contains yet more encouragement; for Moses was a type of Christ, and it is thus that the Son pleads with the Father for his people, and prevails.

JEREMIAH xviii. 1—11.

1 The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying,

2 Arise, and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause thee to hear my words.

3 Then I went down to the potter's house, and, behold, he wrought a work on the wheels.

4 And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter : so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it.

5 Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying,

6 O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the Lord. Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel.

7 *At what* instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck

up, and to pull down, and to destroy it ;

8 If that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them.

9 And *at what* instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it ;

10 If it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good, wherewith I said I would benefit them.

11 Now therefore go to, speak to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I frame evil against you, and devise a device against you : return ye now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good.

In all God's dealings there is something that confounds the intellectual pride of man. Man chooses to be great, to be wise, to be spiritual, and would be treated as if he were so. God deals with him as a child, as a creature of sense, to whose incapacity all high things must be levelled by comparison with the meanest. The actions enjoined upon the ancient prophets, to exhibit in sensible signs the messages they were inspired with, would seem to us in beholding them, perhaps do seem to us sometimes in the reading, almost ridiculous ; or, at the least, unnecessary to illustrate their words. But God knows our nature better than we know ourselves ; and if we feel

disposed to look with contempt, as now the disposition is, on all external signs, and forms, and ordinances of devotion, we shall do well to observe how adverse to our opinion has always been the mind of Him who made us, and should know us best. In Eden, God appointed sensible signs of spiritual things ; as, no doubt, the trees of life and knowledge were. Throughout all time afterwards he did the same—an action, calculated to arrest the attention, generally accompanied the miracles of Moses ; even when the blessing and the curse of the Almighty were suspended on the obedience of the people, he was commanded to put the one upon Mount Jerizim, and the other upon Mount Ebal ; as if external memorials were necessary to the full effect of all moral impressions. So in the present instance, and others throughout the prophetic scriptures, the seer is to do something, or to behold something, figurative of that which he is to learn or to teach. Surely it is a vain imagination that externals are indifferent to our spiritual condition. The truth exhibited to the prophet in this simple emblem is of the deepest moment ; it exhibits two opposite facts. Not only is man passive and resistless as the clay in the potter's hand, but He, in whose hand he is, can change his design, and new make his work, if he sees fit to do so ; He can break his best workmanship, and cast it from him ; or if it be marred in his hand, He can make it anew to perfectness. But while His power is exhibited as thus absolute, His will is shown to be contingent. It is no impeachment of His sovereignty that it should be so ; but only an exercise of his sovereignty that He makes it so to be. Thus unlike is the Christian's providence to the sceptic's fatality. There is no evil however pronounced, however decided

upon in this life, from which God may not be moved to pity and to spare; there is no good He may not be provoked by sin to withhold or to withdraw. Are men so indifferent to suffering that they could live carelessly if they believed these facts?

ST. JOHN x. 24—38.

24 Then came the Jews round about him, and said unto him, How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly.

25 Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye believed not: the works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me.

26 But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you.

27 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me:

28 And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any *man* pluck them out of my hand.

29 My Father, which gave *them* me, is greater than all; and no *man* is able to pluck *them* out of my Father's hand.

30 I and *my* Father are one.

31 Then the Jews took up stones again to stone him.

32 Jesus answered them,

Many good works have I showed you from my Father; for which of those works do ye stone me?

33 The Jews answered him, saying, For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God.

34 Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods?

35 If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the Scripture cannot be broken;

36 Say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God?

37 If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not.

38 But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him.

It is not one of the least trials of a man of God in an unbelieving world, that he is open to the charge of presumption whenever he asserts his real character. To be one with Christ seems as proud a claim on his lips as

did that of Jesus to be one with the Father ; while the sense in which he calls himself a child of God, though not the same in which the Son asserted it, is equally distinct from the sense in which all men are so, and equally offensive. This passage, therefore, whilst it contains the strongest evidence that Christ was God, by proving that the Jews so understood his words, contains also much encouragement and much admonition to those who, following after Him in all lowliness of heart and secret self-abasement, are yet reproached with making themselves to be better than others, the peculiar favourites of Heaven. It is encouraging to view Jesus under a similar imputation, and instructive to observe how he received it. They saw a man, and heard him assert that He was God ; we see the sinner, and hear him assume to be a saint. The unbelief of the Jew was not excusable, because his own scriptures, which he was bound to study and believe, had so clearly described the Messiah, the Son of God, who was to come, that Christ might have been recognized as the predicted person. We, in that Word which we profess to believe, might find descriptions too—of persons who were once children of wrath even as others, but who are washed, who are cleansed, who are justified—the very character the saint pretends to. It must be true of somebody. Should we be surprised that some lay claim to it, and scoff at their pretensions without examining them ? But how did Jesus deal with the unbelievers ? “ If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not.” If he had not done that which no mere man could do, Jesus did not require them to believe that he was God. If men do not see in us something that nature does not produce, we have no right to expect them to believe us the subjects of divine grace.

That conformity to the will of God, that renunciation of ourselves, that separation from the world, which are the fruits of faith; the holiness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost which nature's wild olive tree was never known to bear, are the only evidence we can offer that we are one with Christ, children of God by adoption of his Spirit. It is true the world will not admit this evidence—they did not so with Christ. It ill becomes the servant to be impatient of what the Master bore, or more anxious than He was to vindicate himself from charges of assumption. Christ asserted his deity, and pleaded the works of deity to prove it. The believer asserts that he is one with Christ, but can only plead the effects of grace upon his heart. It becomes him there to leave it, without being too tenacious of his own honour.

JOEL ii. 18—27.

18 Then will the LORD be jealous for his land, and pity his people.

19 Yea, the LORD will answer and say unto his people, Behold, I will send you corn, and wine, and oil, and ye shall be satisfied therewith: and I will no more make you a reproach among the heathen:

20 But I will remove far off from you the northern *army*, and will drive him into a land barren and desolate, with his face toward the east sea, and his hinder part toward the utmost sea, and his stink shall come up, and his ill savour shall come up, because he hath done great things.

21 Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice: for the Lord will do great things.

22 Be not afraid, ye beasts of the field: for the pastures of the wilderness do spring, for the tree beareth her fruit, the figtree and the vine do yield their strength.

23 Be glad then, ye children of Zion, and rejoice in the LORD your God; for he hath given you the former rain moderately, and he will cause to come down for you the rain, the former rain, and the latter rain in the first *month*.

24 And the floors shall be full of wheat, and the fats shall overflow with wine and oil.

25 And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpillar, and the palmerworm, my great army which I sent among you.

26 And ye shall eat in plenty, and be satisfied, and praise the name of the LORD your God,

that hath dealt wondrously with you: and my people shall never be ashamed.

27 And ye shall know that I *am* in the midst of Israel, and *that I am* the LORD your God, and none else: and my people shall never be ashamed.

The whole of the Bible history is a true, and not an allegorical history; it is an account of things that really happened as they are told. If this is the case with what is past, we must suppose it to be the case with what is future; that the prophecies when fulfilled will be a real history. But the Bible narrative, whether past or to come, is a typical as well as a real history; it has always a spiritual sense, in which it relates to the church of Christ, as well as a literal one in which it relates to the Jews, the standing type of the church. While, in the latter sense, it is a subject of holy admiration and curiosity respecting the providence of God, it is, in the former sense, most properly our own; its consolations are ours; its promises to us; and, without depreciating the literal interpretations of prophecy, as such, it is certainly not too much to say, that what concerns ourselves is of more importance to us than what concerns another. Thus, while we read with deepest interest the narrative of Israel's release from bondage, and arrival in the promised land, its vital importance to ourselves depends on its being a figure and a pledge of our own redemption from the bondage of sin and death, and ultimate possession of the heavenly Canaan. The passage we have read, will, I make no doubt, be some time literally fulfilled to the Hebrew nation on their restoration to their native land. In the meantime it contains promises and blessings for

ourselves, which wait not the lapse of time to be fulfilled. They wait only the occasion to which they are promised. "God waiteth to be gracious." What is that occasion? A day of deep calamity; a "day of darkness and of gloominess, of clouds and thick darkness; with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning." Do we know days like these? "Then turn unto the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil." These are the very moments to which is made the most brilliant promise of felicity contained in the whole Bible. We have just read it. Do you think there is no truth in it? If you are in sorrow now, do you think He cannot make you glad? Can He who has made your heart desolate, not make it to bloom afresh? And He who has sent the cankerworm, and the caterpillar, and the palmerworm, his great army of trials, and losses, and afflictions, on purpose to bring you to this point, that you may rend your heart and turn to Him, do you think that He cannot, or will not, do the rest, and give you again the years of blessedness? When was He known to fulfil his threatening, and stop short of his promise? There is no instance of it in the scripture story, which is a continued series of the same reverses; sorrow to the sinful, gladness to the penitent. The stopping short is with us: it is we that cut the thread. When God has done the first part of his work, we lose time in doing ours: we are not humbled, we are not turned, we do not cry to Him to do the rest. If many a tale of human misery has ended there—if many a bosom's wilderness has never bloomed afresh—if the sad have not been comforted, and the broken-hearted not been healed, the failure has not been with God.

I COR. xi. 23—34.

23 For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the *same* night in which he was betrayed took bread :

24 And when he had given thanks, he brake *it*, and said, Take, eat : this is my body, which is broken for you : this do in remembrance of me.

25 After the same manner also *he took* the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood : this do ye, as oft as ye drink *it*, in remembrance of me.

26 For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.

27 Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink *this* cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.

28 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of *that* bread, and drink of *that* cup.

29 For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.

30 For this cause many *are* weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.

31 For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged.

32 But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.

33 Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another.

34 And if any man hunger, let him eat at home ; that ye come not together unto condemnation. And the rest will I set in order when I come.

A close examination of this passage would tend to check at once the apprehension and the carelessness of those who approach the Lord's table. The sacrament is not, as some think of it, an awful ceremony, to be modestly shrunk from, or fearfully performed. Solemn, indeed, it is ; but solemn from its deep and heart-touching interest, not from any mysterious terrors that are in it. It is essentially a feast ; a feast of love and peace. Observe the time of its institution. " The same night in which He was betrayed." That was no time of anger ; no moment for other recollections of his people's sins,

than by the expiation of them He was about to consummate: love, pity, fellowship, forgiveness, no thought but these were in the Saviour's bosom, when he appointed this memorial of himself. The institution came not like those of other times, in characters of greatness; in thunders from Zion, or voices from heaven, or awful, supernatural appearances of the Deity. It came from Jesus; Jesus, a man—a dying man—to his followers and companions, whom He was about to leave; as if on purpose to divest it of all terror, and give it no character but of gratitude and love. "In remembrance of me." What had they to remember of Him? Not one act of vengeance; not one exercise of wrath. They had nothing to recall of their beloved Lord, but his gentleness and love. It was not the Lion of Judah, the Son of God upon his judgment-seat, they were to think of as oft as they drank it—it was the dying Lamb, the willing sacrifice, and Saviour of the sinful:—"His blood shed," "his body broken;" emblems of intensest love. Should we take of them with gloomy and mistrustful hearts, with trembling and reluctant hands? Think you He let fall into that cup one drop of gall, or breathed a thought of reproach over that bread? No; He mixed it and He left it all of mercy, that we might partake of it with glad and grateful hearts. Who, then, are they that take it unworthily? The apostle says who they are, and surely some who hesitate, on account of the awful sentence annexed to it, have not fully examined what is said. It is those who do not discern the Lord's body; who take it without reverence, without love; without belief in the efficacy, or value of the benefits of Jesus' blood. It is those who take it as a ceremony, a religious ordinance, a duty, without any realizing perception, any heart-felt remem-

brance of Him whom it represents, or feeling of interest, or sense of blessedness in Him. It is the want of spiritual perception in the using of the ordinance, carelessness, impenitence, and unbelief, the apostle is here reproofing, as may be seen by the context; not any want of moral fitness or preparedness in themselves. To our unworthiness it presents a remedy, not a prohibition. It is not said that because many are weak, and sickly, and asleep, therefore they may not take it; but because in taking it they discern not the Lord's body, partake not spiritually of its blessings—"for this cause many are weak and sickly among you and many sleep."

GENESIS xlii. 25—36.

25 Then Joseph commanded to fill their sacks with corn, and to restore every man's money into his sack, and to give them provision for the way; and thus did he unto them.

26 And they laded their asses with the corn, and departed thence.

27 And as one of them opened his sack, to give his ass provender in the inn, he espied his money; for, behold, it was in his sack's mouth.

28 And he said unto his brethren, My money is restored; and, lo, it is even in my sack: and their heart failed them, and they were afraid, saying one to another, What is this that God hath done unto us?

29 And they came unto Jacob their father unto the land of

Canaan, and told him all that befell unto them, saying,

30 The man, *who is* the lord of the land, spake roughly to us, and took us for spies of the country.

31 And we said unto him, We are true men; we are no spies:

32 We be twelve brethren, sons of our father: one is not, and the youngest is this day with our father in the land of Canaan.

33 And the man, the lord of the country, said unto us, Hereby shall I know that ye are true men: leave one of your brethren here with me, and take food for the famine of your households, and be gone;

34 And bring your youngest brother unto me; then shall I

know that ye *are* no spies, but *that ye are true men* : so will I deliver you your brother, and ye shall traffic in the land.

35 And it came to pass, as they emptied their sacks, that, behold, every man's bundle of money *was* in his sack : and when *both* they and their father

saw the bundles of money, they were afraid.

36 And Jacob their father said unto them, Me have ye bereaved *of my children* : Joseph *is* not, and Simeon *is* not, and ye will take Benjamin *away* : all these things are against me.

To Jacob, for a long time past, every thing had seemed "against him:" depressed by sorrow, and, no doubt, convinced of sin, he was disposed to interpret every thing darkly, and look for evil rather than for good. "Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away." Not one of these things were so. How blind is man to read the ways of Providence! Neither the future, nor the present, nor the past, were as Jacob supposed them. The pain of his first bereavement he had indeed endured, with all the length and bitterness of reality. There is no promise of God that his people shall not suffer; it is necessary for their purification, and necessary for the accomplishment of greater good; but, as with the patriarch, so is it with all: the dispensations of God are full of life and light, the darkness is in the cloud that veils them from us. Jacob saw through it in part, when himself and his family were preserved from famine by the exaltation of his lost son in Egypt; and doubtless he gratefully acknowledged that his sufferings were repaid, and his sins most leniently dealt with, while spending his last years in peace, under the protection of his beloved Joseph. So, for the most part, the servant of God finds even in this life the explanation of his trials, and not seldom a full compensation for them in the event. But this is the least part of God's purpose. If Jacob had died before he heard of

Joseph, would he, in eternity, have seen less goodness and less beauty in the dispensation? Joseph himself read no further than the present, when he said, "God hath sent me hither to preserve life;" but what an immense deal more than this was involved in Joseph's removal into Egypt! The whole destiny of God's elected people, and, in them, the spiritual history of all mankind. It was a link in the great work of man's redemption, which could not have been dispensed with without an alteration in the whole chain of events that followed it. Wide as it seemed of the mark, the removal of the seed of Abraham into Egypt, was the first step towards their possession of the promised land. It is so always: whatever be God's dealings with us, they have always a purpose beyond the present life, for ourselves or for others. The world subsists only till He shall have accomplished the number of his elect, and every thing in it is directed to that end. This is that mystery which we cannot read; but we are bound to believe it always. Adverse circumstances, of which we feel the pressure while we see not the benefit to ourselves, may affect the spiritual interests of many—it may be of our children, of our best beloved. Should we say they are "against us?" It is more than we know, or can know, with respect to our own immediate benefit: in the great results of all sublunary things, we know the contrary. When tempted to anticipate evil, as Jacob did, we may remember that the moment in which his adversity seemed to have reached its height, was the eve of its termination; it was when all seemed gone, that all was given back to him.

MATTHEW xiv. 22—33.

22 And straightway Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship, and to go before him unto the other side, while he sent the multitudes away.

23 And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone.

24 But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary.

25 And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea.

26 And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear.

27 But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of

good cheer; it is I; be not afraid.

28 And Peter answered him, and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water.

29 And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus.

30 But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me!

31 And immediately Jesus stretched forth *his* hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?

32 And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased.

33 Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God.

There are in this narrative truths of the deepest importance. Most deep of any, and most important to ourselves, is the conclusion to be drawn from our Saviour's words to Peter, by comparison of the state of mind which he encouraged with that which he reprov'd in his disciple. When Peter, anxious to rejoin his Master, and wishing to do what he saw his Master doing, felt that nothing was necessary to it but his Master's word, he met with no repulse. It was impossible that he should; for never was there a state of mind more in unison with the spirit of the gospel than his words imply. "If it be thou." He needed but to know it was Jesus whom he saw, and all beside was easy; the sea was no obstacle—

the difficulties did not signify—the impossibility was nothing—his Lord was God! Let Him but bid him come, let Him but bid him do it, and wherever that Lord was, whatever that Lord was doing, Peter believed that he could follow Him, and do it too. Was it a presumptuous confidence? It was all that God requires of any one: to behold in Christ, the Saviour; to recognize his Godhead; to wish to go to Him; to desire to imitate Him; to believe that we want only his command for doing any thing. For such a mind the Saviour has but one reply at any time, “Come.” The grant was as single as the faith that asked it; as full and free as the confidence that bespoke it; and had Peter’s faith not failed him, the boisterous wind had stirred itself in vain—the disciple would have walked the water as securely as his Lord. He wants nothing else at any time to walk securely where his Saviour bids him “Come.” But faith in man is vacillating ever; and if no hand were put forth to hold him, the failure of it would very shortly sink him in the deep; did it serve him to set out, it would fail him by the way. But, observe our Lord’s rebuke. He does not say, Why didst thou venture? Why didst thou presume? Why so impatient and so confident? Such would have been the words of men; but the words of Jesus were, “Wherefore didst thou doubt?” It is his language ever; it is the gentle remonstrance that He makes with every one who falters in their trust, after accepting his invitation to come to Him. If we will not honour Him by a firm and abiding confidence, he will let danger so approach us as to get himself honour by our rescue; but it is still the doubt, and not the confidence, that He reproaches; it is the doubt, and not the confidence, that brings the danger.

MICAHA vii. 7—20.

7 Therefore I will look unto the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me.

8 Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord *shall be* a light unto me.

9 I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him, until he plead my cause, and execute judgment for me: he will bring me forth to the light, *and* I shall behold his righteousness.

10 Then *she that is* mine enemy shall see *it*, and shame shall cover her which said unto me, Where is the Lord thy God? mine eyes shall behold her: now shall she be trodden down as the mire of the streets.

11 *In* the day that thy walls are to be built, *in* that day shall the decree be far removed.

12 *In* that day *also* he shall come even to thee from Assyria, and *from* the fortified cities, and *from* the fortress even to the river, and *from* sea to sea, and *from* mountain to mountain.

13 Notwithstanding, the land shall be desolate, because of them that dwell therein, for the fruit of their doings.

14 Feed thy people with thy

rod, the flock of thine heritage, which dwell solitarily *in* the wood, in the midst of Carmel: let them feed *in* Bashan and Gilead, as in the days of old.

15 According to the days of thy coming out of the land of Egypt will I show unto him marvellous *things*.

16 The nations shall see, and be confounded at all their might: they shall lay *their* hand upon *their* mouth, their ears shall be deaf.

17 They shall lick the dust like a serpent, they shall move out of their holes like worms of the earth: they shall be afraid of the Lord our God, and shall fear because of thee.

18 Who *is* a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth *in* mercy.

19 He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities: and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.

20 Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob, *and* the mercy to Abraham, which thou hast sworn unto our fathers from the days of old.

Under the image of Jerusalem, fallen before her enemies, and laid desolate for her sins, there is presented to us the most painful position of a believer in an ungodly world. When cast down by the rebuke of the Most

High, writhing under the displeasure of the Almighty, he mournfully recognizes the chastisement of some committed sin. How changed the language now from what we have sometimes read it. "Lord, thou knowest mine uprightness? Try me, O Lord, if there be any way of iniquity in me?" No, such is not the tone of supplication now. The believer, conscious of having provoked the anger of his Father, sensible that he lies under his just displeasure, has changed his language; but it is still the language of faith. To the unrighteous world, glad at his falling, he says nothing in defence of himself, in extenuation of his sin. "I have sinned, I have fallen, I sit in darkness; but mercy has not left me, God has not forsaken me, I shall arise again." To himself he says, and it is the most important feature of the case, "I will bear the indignation, because I have deserved it." While the heart rebels against the punishment, the sense of having provoked it only embitters the suffering: but that is a beautiful state of feeling, pleasing in the sight of God himself, in which the believer welcomes the punishment, because it is deserved; gives his consent, as it were, to the infliction, because he knows what has occasioned it, assured that as soon as it is over he shall be received again into his Father's arms with undiminished love. There is a steadfastness, and fearless, though mournful, confidence in this position, which makes sorrow scarcely painful, and gilds the dark hour of penitence with hope and peace, and thoughts of joy to come. Thus is the language of this passage a triumphant language in the midst of defeat and shame. Towards God the believer's tone is still all confidence; the brief dishonour which his sins have brought upon himself shall terminate in the greater glory of the Lord, when He

puts forth his hand to recover and to save, his grace to heal, his pity to forgive. His judgments upon his people shall fill his enemies with fear; his loving mercy, with confusion and abasement. God will punish—He has always said he will—his children in love, his enemies in wrath; but the end how different! While the enemies of Israel, the Canaanites and the Amalekites, perished out of the land, and were no more—Israel, his typical people, are kept for pardon still: deep as their sin has been, prolonged as their punishment has been, favour is laid up for them, and the promise to Abraham is remembered. So with the spiritual seed, which they prefigured. Whatever our sin has been, whatever is our punishment, while we own the one and accept the other, be sure that He will turn again—He will have compassion upon us—He will subdue our iniquities by this very chastisement, and cast the sin that provoked it into the depths of the sea.

PSALM lxxiii. 3—17.

3 For I was envious at the foolish, *when* I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

4 For *there are* no bands in their death; but their strength *is* firm.

5 They *are* not in trouble as *other* men; neither are they plagued like *other* men.

6 Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment.

7 Their eyes stand out with

fatness: they have more than heart could wish.

8 They are corrupt, and speak wickedly *concerning* oppression: they speak loftily.

9 They set their mouth against the heavens; and their tongue walketh through the earth.

10 Therefore his people return hither; and waters of a full *cup* are wrung out to them:

11 And they say, How doth

God know ? and is there knowledge in the Most High ?

12 Behold, these *are* the ungodly who prosper in the world ; they increase in riches.

13 Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency.

14 For all the day long have

I been plagued, and chastened every morning.

15 If I say, I will speak thus ; behold, I should offend *against* the generation of thy children.

16 When I thought to know this, it *was* too painful for me,

17 Until I went into the sanctuary of God ; *then* understood I their end.

How mournful a spectacle to the believing mind is the prosperity of the ungodly ; so fearless, so high-minded, so insensible to their condition ! It seems as if heaven, earth and hell, had conspired to keep up their delusion. The prince of darkness adds something to his wages every day, lest satiety should waken a doubt of their sufficiency : some new luxury, some new pleasure, some accumulation of property, or increase of name. The world throws its good opinion, its love and flattery into the treasury of delusion ; and it seems as if God himself concurred in it, for He draws nothing out—exact no token of dependence—sends no message of providence to demand a possession from them, and remind them of the tenure by which they hold the rest. “ They are not in trouble as other men.” They live undisturbed, and die unawakened, for death’s approach cannot dissolve the charm ; the fascination is continued in their children. “ They die and leave the rest of their substance to their babes,” and often die in peace. “ The wicked have no bands in their death.” God has done with them, and Satan will give them no disturbance. Have we, like the Psalmist, ever looked with doubtful mind upon a sight like this, contrasting it perhaps with the condition of the righteous, poor, afflicted, chastened

day by day ; their blessings taken from them, their substance wasting, their children sickening, or they about to leave them unprovided ? And have we at some such moment been tempted to exclaim, “ Verily, I have washed my hands in vain :” if the Lord our God be God indeed, why are his people in affliction, and the ungodly in prosperity ? It is because the heirs of heaven must be purified from the dross of earth, and affliction is the fire that must do it. It is because prosperity is the very aliment of pride, and pride is the disease of which man will die eternally. They who are to die eternally, may feed on : God has no motive, but His mercy, to interrupt the feast, of which the poisoned viands are but the slow executors of his justice. Unsanctified prosperity—it is the most awful position in which a sinner can be placed—that slippery place, whence they will glide insensibly into destruction. If we have been ever there, let us tremble to look back on it, and be grateful for any misfortune that has removed us from it. It is a messenger from God, it is a token of his remembrance of us, that at least He has not put us out of mind, as them that are already dead. It may be a messenger of grace and mercy ; let us give it entertainment ; let us hear its errand, lest there never come another.

1 JOHN v. 9—21.

9 If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater : for this is the witness of God, which he hath testified of his Son.

10 He that believeth on the

Son of God hath the witness in himself : he that believeth not God, hath made him a liar ; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son.

11 And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.

12 He that hath the Son, hath life: *and* he that hath not the Son of God, hath not life.

13 These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.

14 And this is the confidence that we have in him, That, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us:

15 And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.

16 If any man see his brother sin a sin *which is not*

unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it.

17 All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death.

18 We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not: but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not.

19 *And* we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.

20 And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true: and we are in him that is true, *even* in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.

21 Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.

The vague uncertainty about their eternal destiny, in which men choose to live, has no warrant in the word or will of God; it has no justification, even in reason and common sense. That the one great concern of life should be at the same time the one great uncertainty, is irreconcilable equally with all. Groundless hopes, and groundless fears do not constitute the separation God intends between his people and the world: characters indefinite and illegible, are not the way-marks he has set upon the paths of life and death; this is man's doing. But is it reasonable? Is it rational? Is the only thing that is of real importance, exactly that to which certainty is not necessary? Is the one thing needful, the very thing to which a doubt may with safety be attached? It

would be senseless to say this ; but we say, that we have not the means of knowing, it does not admit of demonstration. It admits of more clear demonstration, and we have more certain means of knowing it, than the most part of the things we say we know. For of all that we accept for certainty in this life, the greater part is received upon the testimony of men ; is a matter of credence, not of experiment. Society could not exist, if men dealt with each other's witness, as they do with God's, refusing to be assured of any thing they have not realized. No persons taking God's word with as full a reliance, as they continually place upon each other's, need remain in any doubt whether they are at this time walking in the way of life or death. And if it is the future to which we attach the ideas of uncertainty, because of our propensity to sin, the same reliance on the same word, would make us certain still. There is but one sin of which man need die ; because for every other he will be forgiven, if he asks it : this sin, it is expressly said, the believer born of God cannot commit ; and how can he, since it can be no other than the rejection of the Spirit's testimony of Jesus Christ, the reception of which constitutes the new birth unto righteousness. On the other hand, is not there as fixed a certainty of death, as here of life ? that he who ultimately rejects Christ, as testified of by the Spirit, and witnessed to by the Father, makes of God in Trinity a liar, and cannot be forgiven, and must die eternally. " We know, that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness." The apostle had no means of knowing either of these things that are not equally accessible to ourselves.

1 CHRONICLES xvii. 16—27.

16 And David the king came and sat before the Lord, and said, Who *am* I, O Lord God, and what *is* mine house, that thou hast brought me hitherto?

17 And *yet* this was a small thing in thine eyes, O God; for thou hast *also* spoken of thy servant's house for a great while to come, and hast regarded me according to the estate of a man of high degree, O Lord God.

18 What can David *speak* more to thee for the honour of thy servant? for thou knowest thy servant.

19 O Lord, for thy servant's sake, and according to thine own heart, hast thou done all this greatness, in making known all *these* great things.

20 O Lord, *there is* none like thee, neither *is there any* God beside thee, according to all that we have heard with our ears.

21 And what one nation in the earth *is* like thy people Israel, whom God went to redeem *to be* his own people, to make thee a name of greatness and terribleness, by driving out nations from before thy people,

whom thou hast redeemed out of Egypt?

22 For thy people Israel didst thou make thine own people for ever; and thou, Lord, becamest their God.

23 Therefore now, Lord, let the thing that thou hast spoken concerning thy servant, and concerning his house, be established for ever, and do as thou hast said.

24 Let it even be established, that thy name may be magnified for ever, saying, The Lord of hosts *is* the God of Israel, *even* a God to Israel: and *let* the house of David thy servant *be* established before thee.

25 For thou, O my God, hast told thy servant that thou wilt build him an house; therefore thy servant hath found *in his heart* to pray before thee.

26 And now, Lord, thou art God, and hast promised this goodness unto thy servant;

27 Now, therefore, let it please thee to bless the house of thy servant, that it may be before thee for ever: for thou blessest, O Lord, and *it shall be* blessed for ever.

Such is the language of the believer in every age. As David knew no reason why he should be taken from the sheepfold to sit on the throne of Israel; why he had been selected from among many brethren, and many families of the same tribe, to be established in prophetic greatness for ages yet to come; a house distinguished

above all that dwell upon the earth ; so the believer, looking back upon what he has been—upon what he might have been—upon what others are, who were once no other than himself—amazed at the power of God, and confounded at his own unworthiness, can only sit before the Lord and say, “ Who am I, and what is my house ? ” “ According to thine own heart, hast thou done all this greatness.” Whether like David, we look back through the way that God has brought us hitherto—through a succession of follies borne with, mistakes counteracted, and sins forgiven long ; visits of providential interferences, to bring us where we are, and make us what we are, in spite of Satan and the world—in spite very often of ourselves : whether we look back through all these, to the rock whence we were hewn, and the hole of the pit whence we were digged—that state of insensibility and spiritual degradation, in which we all were born, bond-slaves of sin and death ; or whether with David, we look forward to the great things that are promised and prepared for us hereafter, we can have nothing to say of the past, but what David said : “ Who am I ? ” “ O Lord, there is none like thee, nor any God beside thee.” And we can have nothing to ask for the future, but that which David asked : “ Now, O Lord, let the thing that thou hast spoken concerning thy servant, and concerning his house, be established for ever.” The believer wants no more. “ Do as thou hast said.” Often this is the only prayer that suits him ; he sees in God’s word such amazing goodness, such astonishing wisdom, such overwhelming blessedness, he can find nothing in his heart to wish or to say, but simply this : “ Do as thou hast said.” And as from first to last, we shall find nothing in ourselves to distinguish us from other sinners, that

God should have put this great blessedness upon us, to be made of his own people for ever ; “ The Israel whom he went to redeem, to be his own people ;” and “ became their God ;” so have we no reason to give, why the blessing should be continued to us, and the promised goodness fulfilled, but his own glory—his own name’s sake, that it may be magnified for ever, in the salvation of his people—in the house of David, the true David, the Christ, the real Beloved of the Father.

ST. LUKE ii. 8—18.

8 And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over the flock by night.

9 And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them ; and they were sore afraid.

10 And the angel said unto them, Fear not : for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

11 For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

12 And this *shall be* a sign unto you ; Ye shall find the babe wrapt in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of

the heavenly host, praising God, and saying,

14 Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

15 And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.

16 And they came with haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.

17 And when they had seen *it*, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child.

18 And all they that heard *it* wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds.

Has it ever occurred to us, to wonder what became of the peace on earth which those angels came from heaven

to proclaim ? Possibly it may, for in the aspect of the world at large, no change has taken place to verify the proclamation. Foreign wars, and civil tumults, have continued to desolate the nations ; slaughter and bloodshed are as familiar to modern, as to ancient story. And in the nearer fields of social and domestic life, the angelic mission seems little better verified. If something of the rudeness of other days has been softened by the civilization that accompanies Christianity, the result is so very much unlike to the prediction, it is almost proverbially established, that peace in this life is not to be expected. And nearer still, in the interior of our own bosoms, there are some present, perhaps, who, between the cares and the feelings that distract them, do not know what it is to feel at peace. What has become then of the blessing so solemnly, so gloriously announced ? Was it a mistake, since nobody enjoys it ? Be assured it was not. God has been glorified, and his good will towards men has been manifested in the birth and death of Christ : it cannot be, that the remainder of the annunciation took no effect—that man must wait for heaven, to enjoy what was promised on earth. Some hearts among us, no doubt, have already testified to what we say ; but if any have not, let them be assured, that the blessing which angels at the birth of Christ announced, and he at his departure hence bequeathed, is within mortal reach : amid the strife of nations, amid the jarings of society, and the cares and passions of humanity, peace may be, and is enjoyed. It is needless to say where. The world makes no claim to it ; it has its pleasures, its joys, its triumphs, but never pretends to peace ; and Satan, deceitful as he is, has made nobody believe that he can give it, though he can promise every

thing beside. Its dwelling is in the bosom of the believer ; the exclusive portion of God's children. " The peace of God which passeth understanding." The understanding of those who have it not, it does indeed surpass ; and those that have it, wonder at its sweetness. This peace was well annexed to the news of the Saviour's birth ; because it is derived exclusively from Him. It is the peace of a conscience which sin does not disturb, because it is already pardoned through his blood, and in progress to be subdued by his Spirit. It is the peace of a mind that sees every thing good which God has done, and knows that whatever He may hereafter do, will be the same. It is that peace of a contented spirit, which has nothing to desire, because it has the promise of all things, in the world that now is, and that which is to come ; and nothing to fear, because Almighty love has engaged for its security. Do we not at once feel, that if all restless desires, and all careful apprehensions could be removed, our hearts would be immediately at peace. Be assured that this can be. " Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee." Men wondered, as well they might, at the things which were told them by the shepherds ; but they who have believed them, have amply proved their truth ; if we have not, it is because we have not believed them.

JEREMIAH xxxv. 12—19.

12 Then came the word of the Lord unto Jeremiah, saying,

13 Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Go

and tell the men of Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, Will ye not receive instruction to hearken to my words ? saith the Lord.

14 The words of Jonadab the son of Rechab, that he commanded his sons not to drink wine, are performed; for unto this day they drink none, but obey their father's commandment: notwithstanding I have spoken unto you, rising early and speaking; but ye hearkened not unto me.

15 I have sent also unto you all my servants the prophets, rising up early and sending *them*, saying, Return ye now every man from his evil way, and amend your doings, and go not after other gods to serve them, and ye shall dwell in the land which I have given to you and to your fathers; but ye have not inclined your ear, nor hearkened unto me.

16 Because the sons of Jonadab the son of Rechab have performed the commandment of their father, which he commanded them; but this peo-

ple hath not hearkened unto me:

17 Therefore thus saith the Lord God of hosts, the God of Israel, Behold, I will bring upon Judah, and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, all the evil that I have pronounced against them: because I have spoken unto them, but they have not heard; and I have called unto them, but they have not answered.

18 And Jeremiah said unto the house of the Rechabites, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Because ye have obeyed the commandment of Jonadab your father, and kept all his precepts, and done according unto all that he hath commanded you;

19 Therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Jonadab the son of Rechab shall not want a man to stand before me for ever.

A message such as this might well be sent to us; every one of us who have not obeyed the word of the Lord, and hearkened to his instruction. Nature, fallen as it is, attests the obedience that is due to a parent's law, the compliance that is owing to a father's wishes; and nature's unassisted strength has often proved sufficient to enforce them. Early instruction, and remembered example, has often made duties and privations easy and inviolable in after life; while the maxims of our fathers have ever been esteemed a sacred thing. There is, perhaps, nothing more intuitively shocking to the moral sense, more painful even to our uninstructed feelings, than ingratitude. Nature too, with all its blindness, can bear witness to the justness of this ap-

peal from the Lord of Hosts to the rebellious house of Israel, that they had not rendered him the obedience, which even the children of this world render to their fathers. We can all wonder that, visited as they were, instructed as they were, experienced from day to day in the power and goodness of their God—intreated, persuaded, reminded, we can all wonder, that it was possible for Israelites to betake themselves to other gods, and despise the commandments of the Lord. It is only when the appeal is to ourselves, that nature makes no response; that the heart remains insensible to its hardness and ingratitude. God has done all for us, that ever he did for them. Beside his written word, his preached Gospel, his hand in the visible things of the creation, there is not one of us who has not received from him special and individual messages: some stirring of the conscience, some voice of warning, some gracious persuasions, some whisper of his Spirit, that we might have heard; nay, did hear, although we hearkened not. From the day we are born, till we lie down in death, we are the objects of his bounty, and the subjects of his instruction; the message comes every day, and it is still the same message: “Return ye now every one from his evil way, and amend your doings, and go not after other gods, to serve them. “How is it, that no conviction seizes upon us, that no shame overtakes us, that no sense of ingratitude awakens in our hearts? How is it, that our very nature is not revolted by the perception, that we love any thing, fear any thing, obey any thing, rather than the word of God? This insensibility is in itself so monstrous, it would in all other cases be so unnatural, there needs a revelation to explain it. And will man still dispute the entire corruption of his heart, and his desert of everlasting woe?

2 CHRON. xxxii. 25—33.

25 But Hezekiah rendered not again, according to the benefit *done* unto him; for his heart was lifted up: therefore there was wrath upon him, and upon Judah and Jerusalem.

26 Notwithstanding, Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart, (*both* he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem,) so that the wrath of the Lord came not upon them in the days of Hezekiah.

27 And Hezekiah had exceeding much riches and honour: and he made himself treasures for silver, and for gold, and for precious stones, and for spices, and for shields, and for all manner of pleasant jewels;

28 Storehouses also for the increase of corn, and wine, and oil; and stalls for all manner of beasts, and cotes for flocks.

29 Moreover he provided him cities, and possessions of flocks and herds in abundance; for God had given him substance very much.

30 This same Hezekiah also stopped the upper water-course of Gihon, and brought it straight down to the west side of the city of David. And Hezekiah prospered in all his works.

31 Howbeit, in *the business* of the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon, who sent unto him to inquire of the wonder that was *done* in the land, God left him to try him, that he might know all *that was* in his heart.

32 Now the rest of the acts of Hezekiah, and his goodness, behold, they *are* written in the vision of Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, and in the book of the Kings of Judah and Israel.

33 And Hezekiah slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the chiefest of the sepulchres of the sons of David: and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem did him honour at his death. And Manasseh his son reigned in his stead.

When men write biography, to exalt the creature, or as they think to save the honour of religion, the misdeeds of godly men are suppressed, and their sins extenuated. Not so when the Holy Spirit dictates; then the creature's share is weakness, inconsistency, and sin—God's is the glory, the excellence, and perfection. How impressive a lesson should we have lost, how striking an exhibition of God's dealings with his people would have been withheld from us, had Hezekiah's failure been sup-

pressed ; for his story is or may be the secret history of every one—the parallel of God’s dealings with every one it must be—for in Him is no caprice or variability. Hezekiah prayed, and was heard ; he trusted, and was saved ; he humbled himself, and was exalted. Herein all the goodness and the praise is God’s ; his arm got the victory, his hand poured in the abundance, his Spirit dictated the prayer that won it. Hezekiah thought it was his own, and took the honour to himself ; he exalted himself, and was abased. When strangers came, he showed them his treasures instead of showing them his God, the only thing he had to glory in. What was “in his house” was not his ; for while he was yet showing it, the divine purpose had transferred it to the king of Babylon—a lesson for the proud heart’s secret swell ! What do men see in our houses, and hear of in our conversation—God, or the things that God has given us ? Surely the best of us make our boast amiss—it is He that is ours—all these things are his. Hezekiah might have showed them a treasure that never was transferred to Babylon—the loving-kindness of his God. Therein he had indeed whereof to boast, with no unhallowed exaltation. But his heart was lifted up, and “God left him.” How much is in those words ! God did not first withdraw his grace that pride might take possession of Hezekiah’s heart. Pride had entered ; God saw it there, while the king was insensible of it : to show him his own sinfulness, it was necessary it should manifest itself in the outward act ; then was restraining grace withdrawn, that he might know what was equally in his heart, whether or not he had an opportunity to betray it. The distinction is important ; God does not first leave his people that they may fall into sin, in order to humble

them ; but when He perceives in them some secret sin, He leaves them to the temptation that will call it forth, that they may perceive it, and be abased. No sooner was Hezekiah humbled thus, than all that was personally painful in the sentence was recalled. God's purpose stood, as it ever must ; His word was without change or revocation, as affecting the ultimate design ; but it could be so changed, so modified by prayer and humiliation, that on him whose sin provoked its announcement the stroke fell harmless. The captivity of Jerusalem had been determined for her own sins, as she had many times been warned ; Hezekiah, by his ingratitude, brought on himself her judgments ; but by his penitence, and the example of his humiliation to the people, its execution was remitted, till they who so repented could no more suffer in its infliction—an example to nations—to the godly in a nation : divine vengeance on the unrighteous cannot be averted ; it may be delayed, for the sake of them that humble themselves.

ST. JAMES i. 13—27.

13 Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God : for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man :

14 But every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.

15 Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin : and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.

16 Do not err, my beloved brethren.

17 Every good gift, and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

18 Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures.

19 Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath :

20 For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.

21 Wherefore, lay apart all filthiness, and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.

22 But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.

23 For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass :

24 For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straight-

way forgetteth what manner of man he was.

25 But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth *therein*, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.

26 If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain.

27 Pure religion, and undefiled before God and the Father, is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.

There is, if I may so speak, a peculiar niceness and delicacy in the touching of St. James, when he portrays the Christian character ; it is like the last careful application of the sculptor's chisel to the already formed and well-proportioned statue. His holy exhortations are at once suited to and descriptive of a church still compassed with infirmities ; full of error, full of inconsistency ; surrounded with enemies, and betrayed to them by its own faithlessness—such a church, as while its worst components are false professors, and its best but miserable sinners, the church of Christ will ever continue to be on earth. In this state of imperfect renovation, where the old nature and the new are in perpetual conflict, two cautions are peculiarly needful ; namely, that we charge no part of the remaining evil upon God, as if sin could for any purpose originate in his will ; and that we ascribe no portion of the good to any one but Him, as if man, even in his renewed state, were capable of originating it in himself. And because this is the case to the last, as

much as it was at the first, when of his own will, and not of ours, He begat us anew in Christ Jesus, it becomes us to be very humble, very teachable, very little confident in word or deed about our own doings and opinions; attent to hear, slow to dispute, patient of others' infirmities, and watchful of our own. Above all, as unable to take a step alone, yielding ourselves wholly and simply to the dictates of the divine word. But there are two ways of accepting the word of God. There are those who neither deny its truth nor its fitness: who when their own character is presented to them by reflection from its pages, can neither deny the accuracy of the representation, nor its inconsistency with the law, by the side of which it is exhibited. But the impression stays no longer than the mirror is before them, than the law is in their sight; it is without, not within their hearts, and therefore not always present; and the moment it is withdrawn, their own deformities are forgotten. But the law, which, although it is in fact the same, St. James designates the perfect law of liberty, because it is that which the heart loves, and consents to, and would obey by choice without constraint, is written by God within the heart, and never is withdrawn, and never out of sight, and therefore cannot be forgotten. What a beautiful summary of religion is the last verse! 'The fulfilment of every duty, and the abstinence from every sin, attesting the principle by its results—"We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren"—and "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."

ISAIAH xxvi. 1—13.

1 In that day shall this song be sung in the land of Judah ; We have a strong city : salvation will *God* appoint *for* walls and bulwarks.

2 Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in.

3 Thou wilt keep *him* in perfect peace, *whose* mind *is* stayed *on thee* ; because he trusteth in thee.

4 Trust ye in the Lord for ever : for in the Lord JEHOVAH *is* everlasting strength.

5 For he bringeth down them that dwell on high ; the lofty city, he layeth it low : he layeth it low, *even* to the ground ; he bringeth it *even* to the dust.

6 The foot shall tread it down, *even* the feet of the poor, *and* the steps of the needy.

7 The way of the just *is* uprightness : thou, most upright, dost weigh the path of the just.

8 Yea, in the way of thy judgments, O Lord, have we waited for thee ; the desire of

our soul *is* to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee.

9 With my soul have I desired thee in the night ; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early ; for when thy judgments *are* in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.

10 Let favour be shewed to the wicked, *yet* will he not learn righteousness : in the land of uprightness will he deal unjustly, and will not behold the majesty of the Lord.

11 Lord, *when* thy hand *is* lifted up, they will not see : *but* they shall see, and be ashamed for *their* envy at the people ; yea, the fire of thine enemies shall devour them.

12 Lord, thou wilt ordain peace for us : for thou also hast wrought all our works in us.

13 O Lord our God, *other* lords beside thee have had dominion over us ; *but* by thee only will we make mention of thy name.

That city is Christ ; those walls and bulwarks are Christ ; and Him only has God appointed for salvation. Where, then, are we to find the perfect peace, that thing so strange to this uneasy world, men almost doubt if God can keep his promise ? It lies within the gates set open for them that keep the truth. Perhaps we have been looking for it somewhere else ; but I am sure we have not found it. On the heights of this world's prosperity, in the loftiness of this world's pride, uncertainty,

brevity, insecurity, at least were there to trouble us ; for He bringeth it to the dust. In the abundance of God's goodness, in the multitude of his mercies, and the promises of his gospel, that land of uprightness, there is no peace even there, without the city gates—God's majesty is not regarded in them, his righteousness is not learned in them, without the faith of Christ. And in afflictions, when his hand has been lifted up against us, we may have been ashamed, we may have been consumed, but we have not been comforted and at peace, unless in the love of Christ. If in joy, if in sorrow, if in religion itself, we have not found rest, till we begin to wonder what that extraordinary promise means, we shall do well to consider whether we have really entered the city of salvation, or whether other lords have not still dominion over us. God promises peace only to those whose minds are stayed on Him ; but there are many things men trust in beside God, which invalidates the promise. And if they think they can trust God without Christ, it is again invalid, because it is made only to them that are within the walls and bulwarks of salvation ; in other words, who are in Christ. This is the secret of our failure ; either we do not stay our minds wholly on God, or we do so on a wrong ground, and thus no peace ensues. If we look for salvation in any thing but Christ, there can be no spiritual peace ; if we love any thing better than Christ, there can be no temporal peace ; if we obey any one rather than Christ, there can be no conscious peace. While we do not know that He has borne our griefs, our griefs disturb us ; while we do not know that He has taken away our sins, our sins disturb us ; unless we are assured that He has merited heaven for us, the thought of eternity disturbs us ; and unless we believe that in Him we live,

and move, and have our being, the cares of time disturb us. There are truths to be learned before the gates are opened, we must believe in Christ: there are walls to pass, we must go to Christ; a city to enter, we must be found in Christ. When this is done, it is not with God if there is any failure. Our peace will be proportioned to our trust; if the one is not perfect, it is only because the other is not; if the promise is not performed to the very letter, it is only because the condition is not. It is not possible that God should give us peace, while we believe not that He can, or that He will. But has any mind, so stayed, not found it?

DEUT. v. 22 to the end.

22 These words the Lord spake unto all your assembly in the mount, out of the midst of the fire, of the cloud, and of the thick darkness, with a great voice; and he added no more: and he wrote them in two tables of stone, and delivered them unto me.

23 And it came to pass, when ye heard the voice out of the midst of the darkness, (for the mountain did burn with fire,) that ye came near unto me, *even* all the heads of your tribes, and your elders;

24 And ye said, Behold, the Lord our God hath shewed us his glory and his greatness, and we have heard his voice out of the midst of the fire: we have seen this day that God doth talk with man, and he liveth.

25 Now therefore why should

we die? for this great fire will consume us: if we hear the voice of the Lord our God any more, then we shall die.

26 For who *is there* of all flesh, that hath heard the voice of the living God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as we *have*, and lived?

27 Go thou near, and hear all that the Lord our God shall say; and speak thou unto us all that the Lord our God shall speak unto thee, and we will hear *it*, and do *it*.

28 And the Lord heard the voice of your words, when ye spake unto me; and the Lord said unto me, I have heard the voice of the words of this people, which they have spoken unto thee: they have well said all that they have spoken.

29 O that there were such

an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever!

30 Go say to them, Get you into your tents again.

31 But as for thee, stand thou here by me, and I will speak unto thee all the commandments, and the statutes, and the judgments which thou shalt teach them, that they may

do *them* in the land which I give them to possess it.

32 Ye shall observe to do therefore as the Lord your God hath commanded you: ye shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left.

33 Ye shall walk in all the ways which the Lord your God hath commanded you, that ye may live, and *that it may be well with you*, and *that ye may prolong your days in the land which ye shall possess*.

The most remarkable thing in this passage is the request of the people of Israel that they might not hear the voice of God any more; that they might no more receive the commandments directly from himself. His glory once seen, his greatness once manifest, they perceived that it was too much, and implored a mediator. Have we so beheld his glory, so contemplated his greatness, so listened to the thunders of his law, that without a mediator we can no more approach Him? For it is so, whether we have perceived it or not; and if we have not perceived it, it is because we have not so seen God, as to appreciate his greatness, and be impressed with his glory, and understand the holy requirements of His law. God, without Christ, cannot be approached. He is as a fire that consumeth; to deal with Him without a mediator is to die. Israel did not know this till He showed himself; and sinners do not know it, till He speaks to them by his Spirit, to make known what He is, and what He requires. The moment this is sufficiently felt, the sinner has no refuge but in Christ: he dares not look again, he dares not speak again—the glory confounds him, the greatness overwhelms him. “I have heard of thee with the hearing of the ear, but now my

eye seeth thee : behold, I am vile ; I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." This is the language of every heart as soon as God is truly known, and then there is no remedy but one. We call upon Christ, as they upon Moses, to stand ever between us and the Father ; to bring his commands to us ; to take back our petitions to Him ; to shadow his glory, so that human eyes may gaze on it ; to manifest his greatness, so that human hearts may love it ; to exhibit his holy law in such characters of graciousness and love, that it may seem no longer terrible, but full of peace and joy. Observe with what acceptance this desire of the Israelites is received by God : " They have well said all that they have spoken." We scarcely find elsewhere so strong a commendation. " O that there were such a heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep my commandments always." This godly fear, this sense of their unfitness for His presence, this humble desire to hide themselves under shelter of another more holy than themselves, the appointed type of Christ who was to come ;—this was the very posture of mind to which, had they continued in it, God would have granted them every desire of their hearts, every blessing in their land, all that would make it to be well with them, and with their children for ever. God has not changed ; to the same Spirit in Christ all things are promised, in time and in eternity.

1 COR. xiii. 1—13.

1 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

2 And though I have *the gift of* prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge ; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains,

and have not charity, I am nothing.

3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed *the poor*, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.

4 Charity suffereth long, *and* is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,

5 Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil;

6 Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;

7 Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

8 Charity never faileth: but whether *there be* prophecies,

they shall fail; whether *there be* tongues, they shall cease; whether *there be* knowledge, it shall vanish away.

9 For we know in part, and we prophesy in part;

10 But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.

11 When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

12 For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.

13 And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.

The apostle, in showing to us a more excellent way, or rather the most excellent state of a believer upon earth, does not mean to set at nought the things that by comparison he depreciates; on the contrary, he has previously declared that all these outward manifestations of the Spirit of God within us, these actings, as it were, of our devotion, are earnestly to be coveted, in the measure in which God has promised to impart them: in extraordinary gifts when such were in the churches, in ordinary ones when those have ceased. He does not mean that the strongest exercise of faith, the most unlimited benevolence, the most accurate knowledge of divine things, and courage to maintain them at any sacrifice, are no parts of the Christian character. But they are not, as men are apt to think they are, the tests by which our attainments in religion are to be estimated; by themselves they could not prove the existence of divine life in the soul, and still less can they be the measure of our

progress in it. These, the actings of religion, are all good ; but its essence lies within, and they are not the measures of it. We think much, far too much, of those men of God who are distinguished in such things, in the power of communicating divine truth, in pious exertions, or acts of martyrdom ; as if they were necessarily the most exalted saints, and more advanced in holiness than any other men. But this is not always so. There is a higher thing ; there is that life itself from which these things emanate ; which is eternal, while they are temporal ; which will go on increasing, while they pass away with the occasion for them. In this passage it is termed charity, a word not only inadequate, but having in our language no such sense ; and if we say love, we mean more than the word commonly signifies. We mean the love of God shed abroad in the heart ; not ours for Him, nor his for us distinctively—but that which He is—that which He exhibited in Jesus Christ—that which is of God, and which we dwell in when we dwell in Him—that, in short, which will hereafter be our heaven. St. Paul describes it by the characters it assumes in this life, so strongly contrasted in every feature with the likeness of the first Adam in the unrenewed spirit. We may call it spirituality, holiness, nearness to God, assimilation to Christ, all modes of the same being. It is that to the perfecting of which both faith and hope are subservient, and which having perfected they will be no more required. Originating in love, and going forth in love, it is that righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost, which constitute the divine life on earth, and will do so for ever. Many a lowly saint, by man unheeded, has more of it than the most eminent in the church of Christ.

ST. LUKE ix. 51—62.

51 And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem.

52 And sent messengers before his face; and they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him.

53 And they did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem.

54 And when his disciples, James and John, saw *this*, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?

55 But he turned and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of.

56 For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save *them*. And they went to another village.

57 And it came to pass, that as they went in the way, a certain *man* said unto him, Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest.

58 And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air *have* nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay *his* head.

59 And he said unto another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father.

60 Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead; but go thou and preach the kingdom of God.

61 And another also said, Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell which are at home at my house.

62 And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.

Two sorts of persons are reproved by our Lord in this passage; characters opposite to each other, but equally opposed to the spirit of the gospel. Those, on the one hand, who are warmed and animated by divine love, really and singly zealous for the truth, but of a spirit that truth does not sanction, nor love acknowledge as its own. It is a spirit impatient of what the Master bears with, intolerant of what He excuses, ignorant of his designs, and not willing to wait his time of grace; mistaking the commission with which sinners are sent to sinners; and, instead of ambassadors, making of themselves judges and avengers. Instead of simply proclaiming

the gospel, with its powerful threats and enticing promises, waiting to see how much and how far it will please God to accompany their teaching with his grace, these too eager disciples of a long-enduring Lord seem more intent on detecting error than recommending truth, and manifest great bitterness of spirit against all who either reject their testimony or dissent from their opinions. If they cannot immediately bring others to their own standard of truth, fallible creatures as they are, and slow themselves in the attainment of it, they are ready to reject and condemn them as the enemies of all truth ; and if their bitterness does not call down fire from heaven, it is at least in too much haste to call up the fire of hell, to consume all who differ from them. In accidental or designed contrast with these, are the persons spoken of in the concluding verses ; called upon to follow Christ, and professedly willing to do so, but with so much coldness, so much deliberation, our Lord pronounces them unfit to be his servants. Do we not recognize in these characters the counterpart of many—perhaps ourselves among the number—who after the call of the gospel to follow Christ has been heard, and by the will assented to, have found so many earthly ties, so many supposed domestic duties in the way of an open and decided adherence, that our Saviour has been made to wait till the world could be satisfied to let us go ? Unfit servants, indeed, for a Master who left his home in heaven for us ; and most unfit for a kingdom which cannot be enjoyed with a divided heart. There is not, and cannot be a tie, however natural, a duty, however positive, between us and the commands of God, the requirements of the gospel ; because the moment any such duty or tie comes into that position, it ceases to be

one. Excuses we may find many, but reasons there can be none, why any one of us should delay to become followers of Christ.

NUMBERS xxiii. 18—28.

18 And he took up his parable, and said, Rise up, Balak, and hear; hearken unto me, thou son of Zippor:

19 God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?

20 Behold, I have received *commandment* to bless; and he hath blessed; and I cannot reverse it.

21 He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel: the LORD his God is with him, and the shout of a king is among them.

22 God brought them out of Egypt: he hath as it were the strength of an unicorn.

23 Surely *there is* no enchantment against Jacob, neither is *there* any divination against

Israel: according to this time it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel, What hath God wrought!

24 Behold, the people shall rise up as a great lion, and lift up himself as a young lion: he shall not lie down until he eat of the prey, and drink the blood of the slain.

25 And Balak said unto Balaam, Neither curse them at all, nor bless them at all.

26 But Balaam answered and said unto Balak, told not I thee, saying, All that the LORD speaketh, that I must do?

27 And Balak said unto Balaam, Come, I pray thee, I will bring thee unto another place: peradventure it will please God that thou mayest curse me them from thence.

28 And Balak brought Balaam unto the top of Peor, that looketh toward Jeshimon.

This, like most other narratives of the Old Testament, is only the drawing aside of the veil that hangs between the providence of God, and those who are the subjects of it; between his loving kindness and the objects of His care. It is the disclosure, not the events disclosed, that is extraordinary. The same thing goes on elsewhere than on Mount Peor—an attempt to curse whom God

has not cursed, and to defy whom God has not defied. It is even possible that some one of ourselves may be the Balaam whom Satan urges forward to the adventure; and the only difference be that our eyes are not opened, as that false prophet's were, to see the futility of the attempt. Nothing is more common. God has a people, a spiritual Israel in the world, whom He has blessed, and no man can reverse it; for Christ's sake He has blotted out their iniquities, and shut his eyes upon their perverseness; by his Spirit He has brought them out of the bondage of sin, out of the Egypt of this world's vanities, to which they were enslaved. He has promised to bring this people to a heavenly Canaan, and He will not lie; He has undertaken to save them, and He will not repent; He has said that He is ever with them, and shall He not do it? But Satan is still trying to defeat this end, and interpose a curse between them and their blessing; and He finds ungodly men as willing to be his agents as Balaam was. We may be encouraged by the assurance that they are as little able. God has disclosed in this story the secret of what passes between Him and our enemies; his determination to save what they are determined to destroy; and their utter powerlessness to reverse the sentence. They may speak the words which Balaam, as a prophet, was not allowed to speak—words of high swelling vanity, which deride the separation, and deny the pretensions, and despise the faith and hope of God's devoted people—or words of argument and persuasion, designed to turn them aside from following the Lord—or words of reproach and harshness to distress them. But there is no enchantment against Jacob, no divination against Israel. Opposition and unkindness cannot harm or

hinder the redeemed. Let them not fear it, let their enemies not hope it. Every attempt, as it did here, but brings forth a new blessing. The assaults that are intended to shake the Christian's faith, and disturb his peace in God, are made to strengthen and establish them. What confidence, what exultation would have been in the tents of Israel, if they had overheard this colloquy! We are allowed to overhear it, for our encouragement, if we are in the ranks of the righteous; if we are against them, mark the impressive termination: "Blessed is he that blesseth thee, and cursed is he that curseth thee."

ECCLESIASTES ii. 12—23.

12 And I turned myself to behold wisdom, and madness, and folly: for what *can* the man do that cometh after the king? *even* that which hath been already done.

13 Then I saw that wisdom excelleth folly, as far as light excelleth darkness.

14 The wise man's eyes *are* in his head, but the fool walketh in darkness: and I myself perceived also that one event happeneth to them all.

15 Then said I in my heart, As it happeneth to the fool, so it happeneth even to me: and why was I then more wise? Then I said in my heart, that this also *is* vanity.

16 For *there is* no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool for ever; seeing that which now *is* in the days to come shall all be forgotten.

And how dieth the wise *man*? as the fool.

17 Therefore I hated life; because the work that is wrought under the sun *is* grievous unto me: for all *is* vanity and vexation of spirit.

18 Yea, I hated all my labour which I had taken under the sun; because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me.

19 And who knoweth whether he shall be a wise *man* or a fool? yet shall he have rule over all my labour wherein I have laboured, and wherein I have shewed myself wise under the sun. This *is* also vanity.

20 Therefore I went about to cause my heart to despair of all the labour which I took under the sun.

21 For there is a man whose

labour is in wisdom, and in knowledge, and in equity; yet to a man that hath not laboured therein shall he leave it *for* his portion. This also is vanity, and a great evil.

22 For what hath man of all his labour, and of the vexation

of his heart, wherein he hath laboured under the sun?

23 For all his days *are* sorrows, and his travail grief; yea, his heart taketh not rest in the night. This is also vanity.

Well might the prophet call the boast of this world, "A refuge of lies," where the deluded spirit takes refuge in one lie from the disappointment of another. Solomon, having forsaken God, made trial of the world without Him, and left in this book the record of his experience. The time will come, nay, does come to every man, that he can set to his seal, that what he says is true; yet how few of us believe it! There is so much apparent difference between one thing and another, between one man's character and destiny, and another's, we come not without difficulty to the conclusion, that all is vanity alike. Viewed from the level of this low world, there seems a division marked enough between the wise man and the fool; between the prosperous and the unfortunate; the despised poor, and the luxurious great. But raise the soul only so high above the earth, that all shall be beheld from the same elevated point, its compass measured, and its boundary seen, and the marks of distinction disappear: vanity in the end, and vanity by the way, is the common character of all things. Men untaught of God, look with restless ambition towards the places of others, because those they occupy have failed to satisfy them; and this is the secret of all human discontentment; as long as there is any thing we have not tried, we think that that would do. But it would not do, be it what it might. The excellent things of this

world, though their excellency should be as that of light above darkness, its learning, its greatness, its wisdom, separate from God, and from eternity, are but a day's-work of toil with vexation for their wages. Nay, it was only when he made trial of these, that the preacher reached the summit of despair—hated his life, by reason of his vexatious labour; and gave a decision in favour of his follies. He was right. The higher endowments of intellect, and that superior judgment which men call wisdom, are not blessings, held apart from God; they add oftener to the sufferings of the possessor, than to his enjoyments. The greater the capacity, the less possible it is for the things of earth to satisfy it; the more intellectual and refined our feelings, the more are we susceptible of being pained, the more restless in our desires, and exorbitant in our demands; and while there is nothing but a vain and passing world to answer them, the more certain and bitter are our disappointments. Few persons possessed of mental superiority, unsanctified by grace, but have at some time exclaimed with the king of Israel, "Why was I then more wise?" So miserable a thing is this world's ambition, though its aim should be what men call best and highest. Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: "Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole of man"—the whole of his wisdom and happiness, as well as of his duty.

ST. MATTHEW xx. 1—16.

1 For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man *that is* an housholder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard.

2 And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard.

3 And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the market-place,

4 And said unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, I will give you. And they went their way.

5 Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise.

6 And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle?

7 They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right *that* shall ye receive.

8 So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the la-

bourers, and give them *their* hire, beginning from the last unto the first.

9 And when they came that *were hired* about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny.

10 But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny.

11 And when they had received *it*, they murmured against the good man of the house.

12 Saying, These last have wrought *but* one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day.

13 But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny?

14 Take *that* thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last even as unto thee.

15 Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?

16 So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen.

This fine parable, so familiar to all of us, is a striking similitude of what passes in the world, in more senses than one; for it is a likeness of what God does, and a likeness of what man does; of God who shows mercy, and of man, who charges that mercy with injustice. Yet, why injustice? If one be brought early in life

into God's service, and devote himself to it through all his threescore years, even through trials and sufferings for His sake, will an eternity of bliss be too small a recompence? Will he indeed have earned it? And if another be called in the last years of a mispent life, whose whole time and powers have been devoted to another master, what less than the same eternity of bliss has God from the beginning promised to all who, early or late, turn to him in penitence and faith? In a covenant of works, this equal distribution were unjust; but the gospel is a covenant of grace—salvation without merit—eternal life a free gift from God, never earned, and given to whom He will; but only given to those who enter into his vineyard, into his service here. Does it seem then, that it does not signify when we enter: we can put it off without loss, to a later hour? Nay, but observe the text, it intimates no such thing. Suppose those who were found at the third hour had refused to go, would the messenger have come to them again? Suppose the first had declined the wages which the Lord proposed, esteeming the pleasures of sin for a season, greater riches than the gift of godliness; does it in any wise appear by the parable, that they would have been sent for again at the eleventh hour? No such thing is intimated; indeed the answer of the last implies the contrary: and who of us, invited now, urged now to enter the service of God, the vineyard of Christ, with the promise of eternal happiness, pardon, peace, and glory everlasting, whatever the hour, whatever our age, can venture to refuse it now, because some have gone later, and been welcomed? How do we know that they were ever called before, as we are at this moment? and how do we know that we shall be so again? It is much

to be assured, and this is the gracious purport of the parable, that be the hour what it may, however young, however old, we may enter now into Christ, and receive the full benefit of his atonement, the certain enjoyment of all his promises, without reference to the past, except in forgiveness of it. But above all, let us observe, that though there were many hours at which the labourers might enter, there was an hour at which they could not: the messengers went out at the eleventh hour, but they went no more. Let us work while it is day, for the night cometh, in which no man can work.

PSALM xvii. 1—15.

1 Hear the right, O Lord, attend unto my cry; give ear unto my prayer, *that goeth* not out of feigned lips.

2 Let my sentence come forth from thy presence; let thine eyes behold the things that are equal.

3 Thou hast proved mine heart; thou hast visited *me* in the night; thou hast tried me, *and* shalt find nothing: I am purposed *that* my mouth shall not transgress.

4 Concerning the works of men, by the word of thy lips I have kept *me from* the paths of the destroyer.

5 Hold up my goings in thy paths, *that* my footsteps slip not.

6 I have called upon thee; for thou wilt hear me, O God: incline thine ear unto me, *and* hear my speech.

7 Shew thy marvellous lov-

ingkindness, O thou that savest by thy right hand them which put their trust *in thee* from those that rise up *against them*.

8 Keep me as the apple of the eye; hide me under the shadow of thy wings.

9 From the wicked that oppress me, *from* my deadly enemies *who* compass me about.

10 They are inclosed in their own fat; with their mouth they speak proudly.

11 They have now compassed us in our steps; they have set their eyes bowing down to the earth;

12 Like as a lion *that* is greedy of his prey, and as it were a young lion lurking in secret places.

13 Arise, O Lord, disappoint him, cast him down: deliver my soul from the wicked, *which* is thy sword:

14 From men *which are* thy hand, O Lord, from men of the world, *which have* their portion in *this* life, and whose belly thou fillest with thy hid *treasure*: they are full of children,

and leave the rest of their *substance* to their babes.

15 As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, after thy likeness.

This seems a bold appeal from the lips of a sinner; of one who at another time is taught to say, his iniquities are more in number than the hairs of his head. To evade the difficulty, some have even supposed it exclusively the language of Christ in his humanity. Such no doubt it is, but not exclusively; the prophetic language of Jesus in his humanity, is the spiritual language of every believer in Him: this was assuredly the language of David's heart, as well as his of whom David was the type. There is a sense in which every believer can make this appeal to an omniscient God; an appeal to his justice, his judgment, and his truth. "Thou hast proved my heart." "Thou hast tried me, and found nothing." "I am purposed, that my mouth shall not offend." The Jew could make it, whatever his transgressions might have been, or his uncleanness that day contracted, if, in the way of God's appointment, he had laid his hand upon the burnt-offering, and presented in faith the evening sacrifice; the law of God could find nothing in him to condemn. The Christian can make it, when, though his sins be as scarlet, they have been made white as snow; though red like crimson, they have been made as wool. The law may come, justice may come, the eye of Deity may search him through: there will be found in him no unexpiated sin. Jesus has borne all away. The believer may challenge Omniscience itself, to find a sin that Jesus has not atoned for. But this is not all.

The child of God can appeal to God also, that there is in him no unrepented, as well as no unpardoned sin—that there is in his heart no cherished guile, no wilful acquiescence in the wicked works of men—that there is an honest, stedfast purpose, however weakly executed, not to offend, even by a word; even by a thought of the heart at midnight, where only God can witness it. And if it still appears too confident a language, let us observe the prayer that is interposed at every sentence. The boast, if boast it may be called, is of no more than the intention; for all else, the Psalmist commits himself to God, to hold up his goings; to save by his right hand, them that trust Him, to save from his deadly enemies. What enemies? The wicked—them that speak proudly—them that have their treasure in this life—the rich, the full, the prosperous—enemies whom no man fears, but he who is fully purposed to walk in righteousness, and watches every moment, and prays every moment, that his footsteps slip not. In the words of such a one, the inclining ear of God hears no presumption, though, repeating the prophetic language of his Lord, he asks to be kept as the apple of his eye, as the thing most precious in his sight.

JOB v. 17—27.

17 Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth; therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty.

18 For he maketh sore, and bindeth up; he woundeth, and his hands make whole.

19 He shall deliver thee in

six troubles; yea, in seven there shall no evil touch thee.

20 In famine he shall redeem thee from death; and in war from the power of the sword.

21 Thou shalt be hid from the scourge of the tongue; nei-

ther shalt thou be afraid of destruction when it cometh.

22 At destruction and famine thou shalt laugh; neither shalt thou be afraid of the beasts of the earth.

23 For thou shalt be in league with the stones of the field; and the beasts of the field shall be at peace with thee.

24 And thou shalt know that thy tabernacle *shall be* in peace; and thou shalt visit

thy habitation, and shalt not sin.

25 Thou shalt know also that thy seed *shall be* great, and thine offspring as the grass of the earth.

26 Thou shalt come to *thy* grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in in his season.

27 Lo this, we have searched it, so it is; hear it, and know thou *it* for thy good.

When sin makes man to be at enmity with God, all things become the enemies of his peace, and, in some sense, inimical to his happiness. Prosperity corrupts him, and affliction breaks his heart—men are full of mischief, and nature is full of dangers—terror breaks in upon tranquillity, and apprehension murders joy. Above all, sin and death, those insidious enemies, mixed up with every thing, in ambush every where, make peace of mind impossible. How changed is all, when God and man are reconciled; then man has no enemies, his peace is made with all things, and all things work him good. Wounds once mortal, now are briefly healed—the festering sore becomes a passing pang—accumulated troubles have no real evil in them: for all are come of love, all are blessed by love, and increase of happiness is the issue of them all. The harmful things of this life, so fearful to the sinner's apprehension, when the righteous man contemplates them, have all disarmed themselves. Famine and pestilence, the tongue of malice, and the blade of war, have become but instruments in the hand of love, without whose motion they cannot strike, nor reach a mark without its guidance. Now

indeed the sword has become a ploughshare, and the spear a pruning-hook, to cultivate the garden of the Lord, and gather the fruit into his garner. The good things of this life, they have lost their bane; a bribe no longer in the hands of Satan, but sweetest boons of love—a draught no longer poisonous by sin, but mixed entire of mercy. And death, he need not keep himself in ambush now, ambassador of everlasting joy. There is no war with the vassals, when there is reconciliation with the Lord—all are in league together, for us, or against us, as God is—if God be for us, unless there is something independent of Him, there is not one thing that will harm us. Happy are we, if we believe it; thrice happy, if we know it. A believer's rest is not all futurity—his blessedness is not all made up of an hereafter; he is blessed now, because he is at rest; that condition which the world, in its utmost plenitude of gladness, does not know. Pleasure there is, and joy there is, and something that men call happiness; but peace without God, there is not.

2 THESSALONIANS ii. 7 to the end.

7 For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth, *will let*, until he be taken out of the way.

8 And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming:

9 *Even him*, whose coming is after the working of Satan,

with all power and signs and lying wonders.

10 And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth that they might be saved.

11 And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie:

12 That they all might be

damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

13 But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.

14 Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

15 Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word or our epistle.

16 Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace,

17 Comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work.

The mystery of iniquity has never ceased to work, and whatever is especially pointed at, as “that Wicked to be revealed,” it is manifest it still exists, since it was only to be destroyed with the brightness of the Saviour’s coming. There are characters in the description of his working, which answer to some things that have been, and to some things that are; but what most deeply concerns ourselves, is the character of those who are deluded by it, designated so awfully as “them that perish.” It is said, “God shall send them strong delusion, that they may believe a lie.” We often hear it argued, by persons who receive a false religion, or a false view of religion, that they are honest in what they profess, and desire to be right; and is it likely that God will allow them to be deceived? It appears, under some circumstances, that He will, and even leave us to perish in our mistake. But why? Because when his own truth was set before us, we did not love it—we were not satisfied with it—it was too simple, too humble, perhaps too holy a thing for us to stand by, and we determined to inquire farther. This is the secret of all heresies, of all corruptions of the faith. No man forsakes sound doctrine, who

loves it—no man rejects it whom it pleases. This is not the condemnation of those who never knew the Gospel; but of those who having learned the truth, received not the love of it, grew weary of its sameness; despised the heavenly manna, and like them of old, demanded stronger food: something newer, something deeper, something more exciting to the imagination, and more gratifying to the intellect. God let them of Israel take their way: they ate of other food, and perished in the eating. And He lets those who have professed the truth, have fed perhaps for a season with delight upon sound and wholesome doctrine—when it palls upon their appetite—when it proves too humbling for their pride, too simple for their wisdom, too quiet for their ambition, too narrow for their independence; or, it may be, too pure for their indulgence: God does allow them, whether they be churches or individuals, to forsake the right way, and perish in the deceivableness of unrighteousness. Had such but loved the truth; had they felt its fitness, had they perceived its beauty; had they fed their sufficed souls from day to day on its plain promises, and holy precepts and abundant blessedness, Satan would have exhibited in vain for them his lying wonders, acceptable only to those who wish a change: and God will send no delusion, nor permit any, to those who having tried the pure Gospel, love it, and are satisfied.

ST. LUKE xxi. 25—36.

25 And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with

perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring;

26 Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after

those things which are coming on the earth : for the powers of heaven shall be shaken.

27 And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.

28 And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads ; for your redemption draweth nigh.

29 And he spake to them a parable: Behold, the fig-tree, and all the trees ;

30 When they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand.

31 So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand.

32 Verily I say unto you, this generation shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled.

33 Heaven and earth shall pass away ; but my words shall not pass away.

34 And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares.

35 For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth.

36 Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.

At this point of the chapter, the divine preacher loses sight of the prefigurative subject, the destruction of Jerusalem ; in contemplation of the greater, the final destruction, of which it was to be the precursor and the shadow: a transition very common in the prophetic Scriptures wherein, as if the vision of the seer expanded in contemplation of his subject, from the type he passes insensibly to the antitype ; from the partial and imperfect fulfilment, to the perfect and the final. Jesus had foretold to his disciples their own approaching persecutions, to be followed by the days of vengeance upon Israel, until the time of the Gentiles should be fulfilled. Then by a natural, though unmarked transition, passes over that time, to tell them what would follow on its completion. The times of the Jews being ended, destruction was to ensue, as he had described. The times

of the Gentiles ended, another destruction, the most terrible and the last, was to take place, of which the description is given in the words we have been reading. It was not said for their sakes who heard it first: they had for the most part been taken to their rest before the first destruction; and it was not they who were bidden to look out for the second. Their part in the prophetic picture was amply realized; they were betrayed, they were hated, they were put to death, before the day of desolation came. In it the followers of Jesus did not share; for in the fall of Jerusalem, we are told, no Christians perished. The remainder of the prophecy is ours; it is we that are to see, to know, and to be prepared. Do we say, as they did, when shall these things be, and what sign shall there be of them? We have read the answer. In our variable seasons, we do not know the exact day in which the fig-tree and all the trees will shoot forth; but we watch them, and when they do begin to open, we know that summer is at hand. It is in like manner we are to expect and to observe our Lord's approach. Admit that we do not know, and cannot know the day; we have some intimations, though obscure ones, of the period; and plainer indications are to be seen as it approaches; when we begin to see them, we are to know that it is coming. Such is God's command; forbidding altogether the supposition that we either cannot or need not know. The only question left for us to ask, is, Do we see them? Are those things beginning to come to pass, which are to precede the coming of the Son of man with power and great glory? By comparing the peculiar character of our times, and the events that mark it, with the description of the last days in this and other parts of Scripture, we may form



some opinion on the subject. If we think so, the mistake, should it prove one, can do us little harm; the expectation is to make us happier, and the preparation to make us better. "Then lift up your heads." Yes, in the face of this foretold destruction, at the very beginning of this distress, this perplexity, this failing of men's hearts for fear, the Christian is to lift his head in holy confidence that his redemption draweth near, the redemption of his body from the dust, as of his soul from death. "Take heed to yourselves." Your want of observation will not postpone the day—your unreadiness will not prolong the time. As a snare shall it come upon the unobservant, the unwilling, the unaware: while as it was of old, in the fulfilment of the first prediction, so will it be in the second: there will be some, of whom not a hair of the head shall perish, "who shall escape all these things." Once it was those who were hated of all men for Jesus' sake—it may be so again; but certainly it will be those who watch and pray always, that they may be accounted worthy "to stand before the Son of God."

EXODUS xxxi. 12th verse to the end.

12 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

13 Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily my sabbaths ye shall keep: for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the LORD that doth sanctify you.

14 Ye shall keep the sabbath

therefore; for it is holy unto you: every one that defileth it shall surely be put to death: for whosoever doeth any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people.

15 Six days may work be done; but in the seventh is the sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD: whosoever doeth any

work in the sabbath-day, he shall surely be put to death.

16 Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations, *for* a perpetual covenant.

17 It is a sign between me and the children of Israel for ever: for *in* six days the LORD

made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed.

18 And he gave unto Moses, when he had made an end of communing with him upon mount Sinai, two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God.

This was not the first institution of the Sabbath. It had been ordained in paradise, and recognized in the prohibition to the Israelites to gather manna on the seventh day. As that prohibition was not accompanied by any explanation of God's purpose in it, we must infer that the people understood it, and had previously observed the separation of the Sabbath to the Lord, afterwards renewed with such peculiar sanctions of threatening and of promise. It had been always a law, it was now to become a sign also; a memorial of the past, a type of the future, and a pledge between God and man. It could not cease with the Jewish ritual, because it did not begin with it; nor has the change of the day from the first in the week to the seventh, made any difference in the nature or obligation of it. The institution, in its moral character, is what it always was, the setting apart for divine service of a seventh portion of all our time on earth, for a moral obligation never changes. In its character of a sign, which is arbitrary and may vary, as the Sabbath was on the last day a memorial of the finishing of God's work of creation, "when He rested from all his work which he created and made;" so on the first day is it a memorial of the finishing of the work of redemption, when, by his resurrection from the dead, Christ perfected for ever them that believe, and rested

from his more painful labours. And again, as it was on the seventh day a type and pledge of that resurrection, and of the rest of his people in Christ; so on the first day is it a pledge and foretaste of their eternal rest in heaven. Consider this, for in despising the Sabbath, we despise all that it signifies—all that it commemorates—all that it is a sign of between God and ourselves—his bounties past, and promises to come. He who did this of old, was to be cut off from among his people, to be put to death. It seems a severe judgment for a sin of which men think so lightly; but the justice of it appears in the reason we have given, because the defiling of the Sabbath was a mark of contempt for what the Sabbath signified: for Him who had created them; for Him who was to redeem them; and for the rest prepared for them hereafter. Is it less so now? Do they who neglect and profane the holy day, not show that while occupied in the use or enjoyment of created things, they are unmindful of Him, who in six days made them all? Do they who feel it no privilege to spend a day with God, not show that they have not entered into the rest of peace and reconciliation with Him, which the labour of redemption purchased? And they who find the Sabbath a weariness, unless they may be occupied with earthly things, what do they but prove, that the heaven of which it is a figure and a foretaste, is not desired, and would be a weariness too? The penal sanction, the sentence of temporal death, attached as a type or figure to the Mosaic law, passed away with the dispensation to which it belonged; but the judgment which this sentence typified, which it prefigured, remains for ever: and whoever defileth the Sabbath, that soul shall be

cut off from among his people still. God owns not the Sabbath-breakers for his people here, and will not receive them as such into his eternal rest.

1 TIMOTHY, vi. 6—16.

6 But godliness with contentment is great gain.

7 For we brought nothing into *this* world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.

8 And having food and raiment, let us be therewith content.

9 But they that will be rich, fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.

10 For the love of money is the root of all evil; which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

11 But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness.

12 Fight the good fight of

faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses.

13 I give thee charge in the sight of God, who quickeneth all things, and before Christ Jesus, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession;

14 That thou keep *this* commandment without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ:

15 Which in his times he shall shew, *who is* the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords;

16 Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen.

The love of money has always been allowed to be a vice; but man makes distinctions God has never made, and does not extend his reprobation to the love, however excessive, of what money is designed to purchase: to desire wealth, in order to keep it for ourselves, is esteemed mean; to desire wealth in order to spend it for ourselves, is esteemed noble. This may pass very well as the judgment of a world which profits more by our expen

diture, than it would by our accumulations, and takes nothing into account beyond our social duties. But it is not the judgment of God; He forbids his people to desire wealth at all, under any pretext or for any purpose, not so much from self-negation, as simply because it is not desirable. As a possession, riches are not desirable to a child of God: they are a gift of which it is so hard to pay the usury, that the responsibility is what no wise man should desire to feel. They are a snare, nay a legion of snares, which no sinner conscious of his own weakness, should desire to find upon his path. They are a weight which he who runs a race would scarcely choose to carry, unless he wishes to run wearily, and come latest in. Great possessions have destroyed the peace of many; they never have been known to purchase it for any one; and peace is the Christian's privilege; his exclusive privilege in a troubled world, whose treasures cannot pay for it, to give or take away. But if wealth as a possession is not desirable, as a pursuit it is destructive: the apostle says, "destruction and perdition." As an acknowledged end, it seems impossible the believer should pursue it; but Satan is so subtle, and our hearts are so deceitful, well might this same apostle exclaim, "When the law said, thou shalt not covet, sin revived, and I died." From this stronghold of earthliness, it is the part of faith to free us: we must be content with such things as we have, and desire no more than it shall please God to throw into our lap; few of us but have more already,—how very much more—than that which we are required to be content with—food and raiment. If they who profess to hold the world for dross, and count all things but loss for Christ, are seen to be struggling after riches with as much earnestness, as much distraction of mind, and ex-

penditure of time, and interruption of godly quietude, as those who make no affectation of despising them; the world has a right to say, and it does say, that their profession is not honest. Alas! if God should say this of any of us! He cannot be deceived with names; He knows what is meant by raising our families, keeping up our station, increasing our opportunities of usefulness. He has not commanded us to do any one of these things, but He has forbidden us to covet other wealth, than that which is bestowed eternally by Him, "who only hath immortality."

ISAIAH xxxv.

1 The wilderness, and the solitary place, shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose.

2 It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing; the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon; they shall see the glory of the LORD, and the excellency of our God.

3 Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees.

4 Say to them *that are of a fearful heart*, Be strong, fear not; behold, your God will come *with vengeance*, even God *with a recompence*; he will come and save you.

5 Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped:

6 Then shall the lame *man* leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the

wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert.

7 And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water: in the habitation of dragons where each lay, *shall be* grass, with reeds and rushes.

8 And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called, The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it *shall be* for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err *therein*.

9 No lion shall be there, nor *any* ravenous beast shall go up thereon, it shall not be found there: but the redeemed shall walk *there*.

10 And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs, and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

The prophecies of the Old Testament, like all its types and histories, have a threefold sense, moral, spiritual and literal. To those who heard them first, they contained lessons of obedience, faith, and patience; exhibiting throughout the rewards of righteousness, and the punishments of transgression: pardon to the penitent, rejection to the unfaithful, comfort to the afflicted, abasement to the proud; the realization of all the moral sanctions affixed to the laws of God as delivered to that people. Future to us, as well as to them, remains the literal meaning: we may differ in opinion about the manner of it, the time of it we shall never know, till it is seen; but such a fulfilment it must have. They of old so understood it, and thought when the Messiah appeared, the time was come: his disciples asked him, "Wilt thou now again restore the kingdom to Israel?" his reply to which gave no negative to their expectations of a temporal restoration; but confirmed them by asserting, that the time of it was in the Father's power, and not for them to know; while he assures them that the spiritual kingdom, the most important far to them, should commence immediately under the power of the Holy Spirit; thus marking the distinctness of the two. To us, as to them, the spiritual meaning of these prophecies is the most important: fulfilled already before our eyes; fulfilling individually in our hearts, if we be members of Christ's kingdom. How many a desert and desolated heart has bloomed afresh under the consolations of the Spirit; raised the song of gladness in the midst of this world's disappointments! When our knees have trembled with apprehension, and our hands fallen to our sides in the sense of helplessness, and our hearts been sick within us; has not a supernatural courage been imparted, and

hope against hope reanimated our bosoms, at the thought that God will help us? Nay, were we not all once blind to the love of God, and deaf to the voice of God, and dumb in the confession of his name, and halt in the paths of righteousness? And in the same barren and ungodly world in which we once walked so wearily, so idly, so unrefreshed and misdirected; with evil, moral, spiritual and temporal evil, to encounter at every step; has not the Gospel made for us a straight, bright path, in which we cannot lose ourselves, and cannot be lost of God: the highway of the redeemed of Christ, lighted and watered, and defended from above, and terminating in the everlasting Zion?

ST. MATTHEW xxviii. 5—20.

5 And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified.

6 He is not here; for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.

7 And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you.

8 And they departed quickly from the sepulchre with fear and great joy, and did run to bring his disciples word.

9 And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him.

10 Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me.

11 Now when they were going, behold, some of the watch came into the city, and shewed unto the chief priests all the things that were done.

12 And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers.

13 Saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept.

14 And if this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him, and secure you.

15 So they took the money, and did as they were taught;

and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day.

16 Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them.

17 And when they saw him, they worshipped him : but some doubted.

18 And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power

is given unto me in heaven and in earth.

19 Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost ;

20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you : and, lo, I am with you always, *even* unto the end of the world. Amen.

Among many points of importance in this passage there is one of peculiar interest to ourselves on earth—it is the supremacy of the crucified Jesus, as disposer and governor of all things. “ All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.” Unto Him, who had so recently made experience of the weakness and misery of man ; who had just given such a proof of his unbounded love to man ; who had the form of manhood still upon Him, and was about to take it with Him to his universal throne. The whole government of this world was given into his hand. How delightful a thought to those that believe He died for them ! If one of a family be invested with an earthly government, it gives a prospect to all its members of advancement and protection. By whom, if we might choose, would we desire to be governed, to be judged, or to be provided, but by our most tried and surest friend : by the one on earth, who had shown for us the most love, the most sympathy, the most generous self-sacrifice ? To hear that such a one was henceforth to have the disposal of our destiny, would be enough to fill the heart with confidence, and rid it of every care. Such a one is Jesus. If we believe that for us He suffered the miseries of life and the agonies of death, we know that there was never love like his love ; we feel that we have no friend so

tried as He. Yet He, even Jesus, is our ruler here ; the sole disposer of our destiny ; for the Father hath committed all things into his hands. It is impossible to believe this, and let the mind dwell upon it with a realizing attention, without feeling every care give way, every apprehension vanish, respecting our temporal condition ; while in place of them the most exalted expectations, the most high and holy confidence, takes possession of the soul. With Jesus on the throne, the good of all the kingdom is before us, and we feel that all is ours. We go to Him with our wants, with our apprehensions, with all our schemes and undertakings, not as ordinary suitors to the court, but as the brethren and intimates of the prince, whom He has already placed nearest to himself, invested with his honours, and loaded with his favour. Is it reasonable, nay, without much unbelief, is it possible that we should go with downcast looks, and agitated hearts, uneasy for the present and fearful for the future, like one who has no sure dependence ? This assurance, when the apostles first received it from their risen Lord, was intended to enable them, and did enable them, to go forth on their new, and to themselves perilous mission. Why, but because it is not believed with a realizing faith, does it prove insufficient to keep our minds at rest in the ordinary difficulties and interests of life ?

2 CHRON. xx. 14—25.

14 Then upon Jahaziel, the son of Zechariah the son of Benaiah, the son of Jeiel, the son of Mattaniah, a Levite of the sons of Asaph, came the

Spirit of the LORD in the midst of the congregation ;

15 And he said, Hearken ye, all Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem, and thou king Jeho-

shaphat; 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.

16 To-morrow go ye down against them: behold, they come up by the cliff of Ziz; and ye shall find them at the end of the brook, before the wilderness of Jeruel.

17 Ye shall not *need* to fight in this *battle*; set yourselves, stand ye *still*, and see the salvation of the LORD with you, O Judah and Jerusalem: fear not, nor be dismayed; to-morrow go out against them; for the LORD *will be* with you.

18 And Jehoshaphat bowed his head, with *his* face to the ground: and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell before the LORD, worshipping the LORD.

19 And the Levites, of the children of the Kohathites, and of the children of the Korhites, stood up to praise the LORD God of Israel with a loud voice on high.

20 And they rose early in the morning, and went forth into the wilderness of Tekoa: and as they went forth, Jehoshaphat stood and said, Hear me, O Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem; Believe in the LORD your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper.

21 And when he had consulted with the people, he appointed singers unto the LORD, and that should praise the beauty of holiness as they went out before the army, and to say, Praise the LORD; for his mercy *endureth* for ever.

22 And when they began to sing and to praise, the LORD set ambushments against the children of Ammon, Moab, and mount Seir, which were come against Judah; and they were smitten.

23 For the children of Ammon and Moab stood up against the inhabitants of mount Seir, utterly to slay and destroy *them*; and when they had made an end of the inhabitants of Seir, every one helped to destroy another.

24 And when Judah came toward the watch-tower in the wilderness, they looked unto the multitude, and, behold, they *were* dead bodies fallen to the earth, and none escaped.

25 And when Jehoshaphat and his people came to take away the spoil of them, they found among them in abundance, both riches with the dead bodies, and precious jewels, (which they stripped off for themselves,) more than they could carry away: and they were three days in gathering of the spoil, it was so much.

Christians in this life are in the same position that Israel was: surrounded with enemies whom God does not think proper to remove—the world, the flesh, the devil—enemies whom they are to resist, but never to ex-

terminate while they remain on earth. Against this "great company" we have indeed no might, when they come against us as they will do, to drive us out of our inheritance. We can only say, with Jehoshaphat, "Our eyes are upon thee." The passage just read is the reply to such an appeal, make it when and make it where we will—"The battle is not yours, but God's." In some sense the believer has no enemies; for though there be an host engaged with God on his account, there is nothing spiritual or temporal that can harm him—all must, in the issue, work him good, and leave him the richer for their spoils; the better and the happier for whatever has seemed most adverse. "Ye shall not need to fight in this battle." How vainly have our hearts sometimes trembled before anticipated ills; trials that we feel we cannot bear; temptations we have not strength to resist; difficulties, without a human possibility of escape. Such was Israel's position between the Red Sea and the hosts of Pharaoh, and such Jehoshaphat's at this moment. Our fears are as needless as theirs; God will not let us meet an enemy that is too much for us. In such unequal battles, and we know not how many such are averted by an unseen Providence, we shall not be called upon to engage: they are exclusively the Lord's. We have only to do what Israel did; for they did not slumber in their tents, in a half-hoping, half-desponding expectation of what might happen; they rose early, they went forth with cheerful, confident alacrity by the way that their enemies were coming, in simple reliance on the word of God. "Believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper." Faith was the principle of action, and the condition of success. Above all, they sang the song of victory before

the day was won. This is the believer's peculiar privilege ; he need not keep his songs for heaven ; he need not limit his praises to what he has, or has had, nor his triumphs to victories gained. He can praise God beforehand for all that he shall need, for all that he desires ; and if the song of gratitude for mercies past be grateful to the Almighty's ear, far more so is the song of faith, which gives joyful thanks for all that is to come. It was when this began, Ammon, and Moab, and the inhabitants of Seir fell.

ROMANS xiv. 1—12.

1 Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, *but* not to doubtful disputations.

2 For one believeth that he may eat all things ; another, who is weak, eateth herbs.

3 Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not ; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth : for God hath received him.

4 Who art thou that judgest another man's servant ? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up : for God is able to make him stand.

5 One man esteemeth one day above another : another esteemeth every day *alike*. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.

6 He that regardeth the day, regardeth *it* unto the Lord ; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard *it*. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord ; for he giveth

God thanks : and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not ; and giveth God thanks.

7 For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself.

8 For whether we live, we live unto the Lord ; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord : whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's.

9 For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living.

10 But why dost thou judge thy brother ? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother ? for we shall all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ.

11 For it is written, *As I live*, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.

12 So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.

Whether it be ourselves or others who are weak in the faith, this caution is necessary. Young and undecided characters are liable to be much injured by having their attention withdrawn from what is vital and essential in religion to endless inquiries and discussions respecting what is doubtful. There are truths about which no man is permitted to have his own opinion; which he that believes is saved, he that believes not is condemned. It is these truths with which the doubtful inquirer should occupy himself, and with such the more established in the faith should entertain the weak; for they are the things about which no man can be wrong and live. St. Paul assumes these when he says, "Whether we live or die we are the Lord's." If this is sure, we may well leave the rest to God and the individual conscience. Not as matters of indifference: nothing is indifferent that affects the Christian character: but as matters which each one must settle between himself and God, because the judgment of man is too fallible to entitle any one to form a standard of consistency. The things to which St. Paul alludes, as constituting the doubtful disputations of those days, viz. the distinctions between clean and unclean meats, the peculiar sanctity of certain days, &c., may well represent the many things about which real Christians differ in the present time—such as the observance of ordinances, compliance with customs, whether of the church or of the world, the use and enjoyment of the superfluities of life, dress, company, expenditure, studies, and pursuits; and the thousand other things about which the divine directions have been given rather generally than specifically. The apostle does not say that these things do not signify—every thing signifies in which there may possibly be sin; but he affirms that the dis-

cussion of them is unprofitable, because it is not the means by which they can be decided. Forbidding us to judge others, since God can do for them what we cannot, keep them from error and make them stand, he assumes that we have a rule by which we may always judge ourselves; thus putting an end to anxiety on the one hand and censoriousness on the other. If we would observe his rule, our decisions in all doubtful matters would be greatly simplified; and when we erred, it would not be much or long. St. Paul supposes that whether we do a thing or abstain from it, we give God thanks. It would not be often, I conceive, that an honest mind could go before the throne of God with specific thanks for an unlawful gratification; and I am sure that anything for which such thanks could not be given, might be decided at once to be unlawful. And if it were an observance from which we think ourselves freed, the rule would seldom fail us; it is only Christ that sets the conscience free, and He must have thanks for all: not verbal acknowledgments, such as the Pharisee made, but grateful, heartfelt thanks for each thing as it occurs. This, with that simplicity of purpose, that reference to God in all things, and fixing of the mind on God in all things to which the apostle alludes, when he says, "Whether we live or die it is unto the Lord," would relieve us from all dependence on the judgment of others, and all anxious dependence on our own: leaving us simply to give account of ourselves to God, who judges the intention rather than the act.

PROVERBS iii. 13—26.

13 Happy *is* the man *that* findeth wisdom, and the man *that* getteth understanding :

14 For the merchandise of it *is* better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold.

15 She *is* more precious than rubies : and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her.

16 Length of days *is* in her right hand ; *and* in her left hand riches and honour.

17 Her ways *are* ways of pleasantness, and all her paths *are* peace.

18 She *is* a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her ; and happy *is every one* that retaineth her.

19 The LORD by wisdom hath founded the earth ; by un-

derstanding hath he established the heavens.

20 By his knowledge the depths are broken up, and the clouds drop down the dew.

21 My son, let not them depart from thine eyes : keep sound wisdom and discretion.

22 So shall they be life unto thy soul, and grace to thy neck.

23 Then shalt thou walk in thy way safely, and thy foot shall not stumble.

24 When thou liest down thou shalt not be afraid ; yea, thou shalt lie down, and thy sleep shall be sweet.

25 Be not afraid of sudden fear, neither of the desolation of the wicked, when it cometh.

26 For the LORD shall be thy confidence, and shall keep thy foot from being taken.

If we believe there is a supreme wisdom by which the foundations of the earth were laid, a divine understanding by which the heavens were established, does it become us to consider any thing upon that earth a chance, any thing beneath those heavens a fortuity ? Are we to suppose that folly disposes of what wisdom made, and mistake regulates what understanding planned ? If we believe that by the knowledge of the Almighty the dews descend, and the waters rise to preserve the natural world, can we think it is without his knowledge, or independently of it, the affairs of this world are conducted ? Is it likely that while infinite goodness occupies itself about the season's courses, the course of man's affairs is committed to human ignorance ? And if this would seem, as it must seem, a

strange and impossible supposition, does it become us, professing to walk by faith in the Most High, to express so much, or feel so much anxiety, as we often do, about the politics, as it is called, of the kingdoms of this world, the aspect and promise of the times? Attentive to them we should be, because our country may need our assistance, and must need our prayers. But surely we should not be anxious, we should not be afraid—we should not watch the mighty fabric of society as we would a vessel broken from its moorings, to see on which rock or quicksand it will run itself, no longer guided by the helmsman's hand. When a Christian looks into public affairs, it should be to see what God is doing; when he meddles in them, it should be distinctly by God's leading; and surely when he talks of them, it should not be in the apprehensive and desponding language of an unbelieving world, that both expects and intends to rule itself. Then, whatever we may see, whatever part we may be led to take, whatever may be the topics of the common talk, we shall lie down fearless, and rise up in hope; we shall sleep confiding, and awake rejoicing; the future is in hands where the child of God at least can trust it. The misconduct of the wicked may grieve him for their sake, but cannot alarm him for himself: their desolation when it cometh will not be his. Least of all can the mistakes and mismanagement of men disturb his mind; for he knows there is one above them who makes no mistakes, and leaves nothing to other management.

GENESIS xxii. 1—13.

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

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

3 And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt-offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him.

4 Then on the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place afar off.

5 And Abraham said unto his young men, Abide ye here with the ass ; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you.

6 And Abraham took the wood of the burnt-offering, and laid *it* upon Isaac his son ; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife : and they went both of them together.

7 And Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said, My father : and he said, *Here am I,* my son. And he said,

Behold the fire and the wood ; but where *is* the lamb for a burnt-offering ?

8 And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt-offering : so they went both of them together.

9 And they came to the place which God had told him of : and Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order ; and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood.

10 And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son.

11 And the angel of the LORD called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham : and he said, *Here am I.*

12 And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him : for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only *son*, from me.

13 And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and, behold, behind *him* a ram caught in a thicket by his horns ; and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt-offering in the stead of his son.

As an act of obedience to the divine command, nothing can be more beautiful than this narrative. There was no question, no hesitation, apparently no reluctance on

Abraham's part : he asked no explanation from God, and no advice from man ; directions plainly and unequivocally given were simply and immediately obeyed. God's design could not be understood, but his command could not be mistaken ; which renders the narrative most striking as a specimen of pure obedience. But it is not as an act of obedience, or of resignation, though it comprehends both, this transaction is chiefly to be considered. It was the faith of Abraham that was so deeply tried, and so strikingly exhibited ; his obedience and resignation were but the offspring and manifestation of his faith. This the apostle Paul declares when he says, " By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac ; and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, that in Isaac shall thy seed be called ; accounting that God was able to raise him up even from the dead." Had Abraham been resigned, in the ordinary sense, to part from his only child, it would have been giving up the promise of God that he should have seed in him. Such a renunciation is not required of any one : the requisition was, that, relying still upon the promise of posterity in Isaac, he should do that which seemed to render it impossible. Had Abraham thought, that, when he struck the sacrificial knife into the bosom of his child, he should indeed part from him and his promised heritage for ever, it would have proved not the strength but the weakness of his faith. Manifestly he did not think so. He did not give up Isaac because he was willing that God should revoke his blessing, but because he knew that he could not revoke it : when he rose up early to put to death the heir of promise, he believed that he would be still his living heir. His faith was astonishing ; his obedience, as it ever will

be, proportioned to his faith. To us, it is not an example of resignation to the will of God in bearing evil ; reason and philosophy have taught as much as that. It is an example of Christian faith, teaching what nothing else has ever taught, to believe the seeming evil good ; to trust God's word at the very moment when He seems to break it, and know that He will bless us in taking every blessing from us ; in pain, in sorrow, in destitution, to believe that all things work together for good to them that love Him ; in darkness, in sadness, in contrition, to believe that we shall be restored to peace and holiness ; and having the promise of the life that now is as well as of that which is to come, to see in all that happens to us, and all that is required of us, nothing but the unexplained goodness and faithfulness of God. If we have Abraham's confidence, we shall do as Abraham did—yield without a question to whatever is required of us, and thus become imitators of his obedience also ; and resigned we shall be, not to evil as such, but to seeming evil as a real good.

HEBREWS xii. 1—11.

1 Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,

2 Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith ; who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set

down at the right hand of the throne of God.

3 For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.

4 Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.

5 And ye have forgotten the exhortation, which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chas-

tening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him :

6 For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.

7 If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons, for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not ?

8 But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.

9 Furthermore, we have had fathers of our flesh, which corrected *us* ; and we gave *them*

reverence : shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live ?

10 For they verily for a few days chastened *us* after their own pleasure ; but he for *our* profit, that *we* might be partakers of his holiness.

11 Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous : nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.

Witnesses, who having run the race themselves and won it, hang like a cloud over our path to watch our progress and cheer us to the goal : while we keep our eye intently fixed on Him who gained it first, and sits with the wreath of victory in his hand, ready to place it on our heads. Thus benignant, thus persuasive is the language of divine consolation. It gives no reproof to sorrow ; it makes not light of affliction ; it does not come as the friends of Job did, to make charges against us, remind us of God's justice, and threaten us with his power. " Ye have forgotten"—the gentlest remonstrance—forgotten, what ? Not our sins ; they make the very anguish of our sorrow. Not the judgments of the Almighty ; that is the very thought that overwhelms us : poor comfort in the memory of these—but here is not a word of them. Ye have forgotten that which tells you not to fear them ; not to fear any thing ; not to faint at any thing. Not at the contradiction of sinners ; this wearied not Him to whom they were more opposed than they can be to you : who was more revolted by their sinfulness, more wronged by their opinions, more pained by their opposition than ever

sinner can be among fellow-sinners. He endured it and despised it, for the joy, the very same joy's sake, which is before us. Not for providential ills; these are the very tests and pledges of our Father's love, conveying at once the proof of adoption and the promise of sanctification—through them faith sees our title and our fitness. This last is the sweetest thought of all. Our earthly fathers chastened us, and we never took it to prove any thing but affection in them; but they chastened us according to their own short-sighted pleasure; sometimes injudiciously, sometimes unnecessarily, more in retribution of our faults, perhaps, than for any future benefit. Not so our Father in heaven. He has but one purpose when he afflicts us, and that an unerring one; but one motive when He rebukes us, and that a loving one—"that we may be partakers of his holiness." I believe that no child of God suffers one pain that can be dispensed with in his purification: nothing as mere punishment irrespective of improvement; because if he did, though it should be but a temporal judgment, it would be in a manner expiatory; and Christ has not paid the whole penalty of the believer's sin, if even the smallest part remains for us to pay. This makes no difference to the fact that God will visit in this life the sins of his people. He says He will; we see He does.—He must, because the fire only will burn out the dross; and to remain unholy is to remain unblest. But it makes a difference to the believer's view of his afflictions; to the spirit in which he accepts them; to his consolation under them. Do we know the restlessness of sin? Do we know the weariness of our mental infirmity? If we do, we know well that, grievous as the chastening may be, it is a small price for the peaceable fruits of righteousness.

ST. JOHN xvi. 5—15.

5 But now I go my way to him that sent me; and none of you asketh me, Whither goest thou?

6 But because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your heart.

7 Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.

8 And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment:

9 Of sin, because they believe not on me;

10 Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more;

11 Of judgment, because

the prince of this world is judged.

12 I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.

13 Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself, but whatsoever he shall hear, *that* shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.

14 He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew *it* unto you.

15 All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall shew *it* unto you.

16 A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, A little while, and ye shall see me; because I go to the Father.

Our Lord's specification of the office of the Holy Spirit, sufficient in itself to silence some opinions that have been entertained about it, confirms from his own lips the important truth that Jesus Christ is the one great subject of revelation, the whole manifestation of deity upon earth, the only theme of gospel preaching, and the only source of comfort. The Comforter himself had none to give, but as he gathered it of Him: the voice of inspiration had nothing to say but what it heard of Him; the Spirit of truth had no truth to communicate but that which concerned the Saviour of mankind. Does it not strike us how vain, how worse than nothing, must be any profession of religion of which He is not the all in all—the

ground of all hope, and the subject of all praise. By Him the Father does all that He does on earth—the government is upon his shoulders—the single medium of communication between Deity and humanity—the ladder whose head is in heaven, and its foot in dust :—Creator, Redeemer, Governor, all in one. Of Him the co-equal Spirit learns and speaks, in all that affects the interests of man. If we think we have been taught any thing by the Spirit irrespective of Christ, we are deceived—it is not his teaching. Perhaps we are convinced of sin ; but if unbelief in Christ be not the sin we are convinced of, it is not the Spirit's testimony. We may be convinced of righteousness ; but if it be not the righteousness of Christ, accepted for us before the Father's throne, we have learned of some one else. We may be instructed of a judgment to come ; but if we do not know that He, the Son of man, the crucified Jesus, will judge both the prince who has usurped his kingdom, and the people who have refused to have Him to reign over them, again our instructor is not the Spirit of truth. Such is our Lord's plain testimony in this passage ; he claims for Himself the power, the possession, and the glory. What shall we think of a religion—of our own religion, if it be such—that keeps Jesus in the background—affects the gifts of the Spirit more than the atoning blood from which they are derived—values its graces more than the love of Him from whom they flow—prefers to rest any where rather than on the name of Jesus ; and divide the glory any way, rather than give it all to Him.

faith, repentance, love How do we know if we are thus qualified to be made whole in Christ? Miserable sinner! do you know that you are a leper, white as snow? If you do, you have all the qualification Naaman had. Wash in the spiritual Jordan, and be clean. The Syrian's spirit stays with us often to the very last: when we have washed, we scarcely can believe that we are healed, and are for doing great things still. The simplicity and entireness of the cure still baffles our confidence; a sort of spiritual ambition keeps possession of us, that cannot be satisfied. We must have greater evidence, greater faith, greater devotion, and when do we know we have enough? Thus does the ease, and not the difficulty, disturb our faith. Nothing is so hard to nature as to believe that nothing is required before the cure, but to use the remedy; and nothing after it, but "henceforth to offer neither burnt-offering nor sacrifice unto other gods but unto the Lord."

JONAH i. 1— 15.

1 Now the word of the Lord came unto Jonah, the son of Amittai, saying,

2 Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me.

3 But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.

4 But the Lord sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken.

5 Then the mariners were afraid, and cried every man unto his god, and cast forth the wares that *were* in the ship into the sea, to lighten *it* of them: but Jonah was gone down into the sides of the ship; and he lay, and was fast asleep.

6 So the shipmaster came to him, and said unto him, What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise,

call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not.

7 And they said every one to his fellow, Come, and let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this evil *is* upon us. So they cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah.

8 Then said they unto him, Tell us, we pray thee, for whose cause this evil *is* upon us. What *is* thine occupation? and whence comest thou? what *is* thy country? and of what people *art* thou?

9 And he said unto them, I *am* an Hebrew; and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, which

hath made the sea and the dry *land*.

10 Then were the men exceedingly afraid, and said unto him, Why hast thou done this? (for the men knew that he fled from the presence of the Lord, because he had told them.)

11 Then said they unto him, What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us? (for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous.)

12 And he said unto them, Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you: for I know that for my sake this great tempest *is* upon you.

Every typical story of the Old Testament is full of moral and spiritual truth, distinct from its figurative sense. In the committal of Jonah to the deep, to save the vessel and the crew with whom he had embarked, the three days burial and apparent death in which he lay, the faith which he maintained in the deep darkness of his soul, his safety from corruption and resurrection to life, to be the means of bringing the condemned city to repentance—in all these things we know that Jonah was a figure of Him that was to come. His disobedience was no type, but a sad image of man's perversity and folly, hoping to evade the will of the Almighty, and escape his observation. How impotent the attempt, might well have been foreseen; yet so besotted was this man of God in his rebelliousness, that he lay sleeping in the very storm he had provoked, and never bestirred himself to call upon his God. Is Jonah's case without a parallel? Or is it not rather the common effect of sin indulged, so to stupify our sense of it that conscience

falls to sleep in the commission, and leaves the soul really unconscious of the Lord's displeasure, until some awful intimation of it wakes us. Happy, indeed, that we should be so awakened by whatever calamity may overtake us. Whence we are led to remark the conduct of these mariners, containing, as I think it does, an important truth. They too, from feelings of humanity, were unwilling to yield to the manifest will of God, and give up his servant to his displeasure. Their resistance was unavailing; if persevered in, it would not have saved Jonah, safest always in his Master's hands, but would have involved themselves in his destruction. I think it is an instructive lesson to Christians, and Christian communities, that no tenderness of feeling should induce us to countenance a brother living in opposition to the word of God. The command is express in the gospel, that if any brother walk disorderly, he is to be disowned—not to his injury, but in order that he may be reclaimed. Charity suggests that if he be thrown off he will perish: if his Christian brethren disown him, who will bring him back to God? The world and Satan will ingulph him to perdition. So thought the mariners: but their humanity would have been far more fatal to the prophet than his Master's wrath. The child of God is safe under his Father's rod; but most unsafe in a course of disobedience, in which they who see him slumber forbear to waken him, and with a mistaken charity assume that he may be safe.

PSALM lxxvii. 1—13.

1 I cried unto God with my voice, *even* unto God with my voice; and he gave ear unto me.

2 In the day of my trouble I sought the LORD: my sore ran in the night, and ceased not: my soul refused to be comforted.

3 I remembered God, and was troubled: I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed. Selah.

4 Thou holdest mine eyes waking: I am so troubled that I cannot speak.

5 I have considered the days of old, the years of ancient times.

6 I call to remembrance my song in the night: I commune with my own heart, and my spirit made diligent search.

7 Will the LORD cast off for

ever? and will he be favourable no more?

8 Is his mercy clean gone for ever? doth *his* promise fail for evermore?

9 Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies? Selah.

10 And I said, This is my infirmity, but I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High.

11 I will remember the works of the Lord; surely I will remember thy wonders of old.

12 I will meditate also of all thy work, and talk of thy doings.

13 Thy way, O God, is in the sanctuary: who is so great a God as our God?

Whether from outward trials, or from inward conflicts, there are moments when words so sorrowful as these, become the language of the believer's heart. It may be, when some temptation yielded to, or doubtful course pursued, has separated between him and God, and the sense of sin takes such hold of him, that he cannot look up. Or it may be, when Satan takes advantage of adverse circumstances, or physical depression, or hope delayed, to shake his confidence, and obscure his faith. He calls to mind in his anguish, those days of bygone peace, when God seemed his friend, and the fresh beams of love and joy shed tints of heavenly blessedness around him; when he walked in the light of God's

countenance, and feared not. He calls to mind those nights when his waking was for song, and not for tears; when he was bestirred with gratitude, but not with grief. The remembrance of what he once enjoyed, adds agony to his woe. Is it God that has changed? This is the bitterest thought of all; and Satan takes care to tell him so. Is He who was once his friend, become his enemy? Is the tender father changed into the angry judge? That mercy in which he trusted once, and of old so sweetly tasted, but now perceives not, is it gone for ever? Those promises on which his hopes were once so firmly built, now seemingly no longer kept, no longer made to him, have they failed eternally? Was he deceived in God, or deceived in himself, or why is he thus forsaken? The enemy of our souls has answers for all such questions, is present at all such communings. While we are searching for evidences of God's love to us, he presents us with our own defections: when we are looking for the promises, he reminds us of our unanswered prayers; when we try to trace back the workings of providence, he lets us see nothing but our own mistakes; and buries every mark of grace received, under the memory of sins committed. In such sad hours we must do as David did: we must remember our "infirmity." It is ours to change, not God's; it is with us to depart, not Him; our faith has failed, but not his promises: we may forsake, He cannot. The very suspicion of it is our infirmity; the very thought is sin. Let us contemplate his character—let us meditate upon his works—let us read and think of all that He has done in ages past, for his people in every age; if possible, let us inquire of his doings from them that have made trial of his

faithfulness. We shall find it impossible his love can fail, his pardon be refused, or his mercy wearied. So shall we recover our confidence; or while the gloom remains, be satisfied that it arises from some infirmity of our own, wait submissively for better days, or penitentially retrace the steps we have gone from Him.

ROMANS v. 1—11.

1 Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ.

2 By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

3 And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience;

4 And patience, experience; and experience, hope;

5 And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto us.

6 For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.

7 For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die.

8 But God commendeth his love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

9 Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.

10 For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.

11 And not only so, but we also joy in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.

It is a ground of much regret, and I think humiliation, that believers in this life so seldom attain, or at least so seldom own they have attained, this joy and confidence in God. It cannot be that God is reluctant to fulfil his promises to their full extent, and purposely keeps back his children from the utmost enjoyment of

them. Unlikely as this would seem, if duly considered, men are not unapt to say He does so, by inference at least; for they say that they must wait for their assurance till it please God to give it them; and hitherto it has not pleased Him to admit them to the full enjoyment of that hope which maketh not ashamed. True, we must wait for every thing till God gives it; of Him we must ask it, and from Him alone expect it. But it may be doubted, whether it is ever his pleasure to withhold what He has both promised and commanded; whether He would not be always pleased, much better pleased, that his people on their part made not so many difficulties, but took simply and wholly his offers and assurances, and all the blessedness attached to them. I apprehend, most frequently, if not always, the delay is with ourselves; it is we who will not take, not He that will not give, the peaceful security of faith; and whether unwittingly, or whether wilfully, place something between ourselves and Christ, that makes the full vision of our bliss impossible. Oftener than any thing, perhaps, it is our contentedness to be without it; we are satisfied to be in doubt; we are satisfied with a vague uncertain hope, and will not use the means to attain to more. Yet surely it is a base contentedness, to wait without, as servants who know not what their Lord doeth, when we are invited to enter in as children, and partake of his counsels; and surely it is to be meanly in love with penury, not to long to enter into our rich inheritance. It seems humility, and were it a question of merit, it might be so; but where the tender is a gift, it is oftener pride than humility that hesitates. If it be said, that our sins prevent us, two doubts suggest themselves: it cannot be pardoned sin

forbids our joy; that is the very ground of it; it must be, either that some trust in ourselves still hangs about us, which vacillates of course under the sense of sin; or we are wilfully allowing ourselves in some questionable course, and therefore doubtful if sin has not still dominion over us. In either case, it is not good to be contented with our condition, and it rests with ourselves to amend it; we can give up our self-righteousness, or leave our doubtful practices; or if we think we cannot, we should give God no rest by day or night, till He send us strength to do so. There is no reluctance with Him—He only waits to be inquired of by us. If, when we were enemies, we were reconciled, and being reconciled, are saved; how much more, it may well be added, shall we be made glad by the knowledge of our salvation!

JOHN i. 35—49.

35 Again, the next day after, John stood, and two of his disciples;

36 And looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God!

37 And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus.

38 Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye? They said unto him, Rabbi, (which is to say, being interpreted, Master,) where dwellest thou?

39 He saith unto them, Come and see. They came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with

him that day: for it was about the tenth hour.

40 One of the two which heard John *speak*, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother.

41 He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messiah, which is, being interpreted, the Christ.

42 And he brought him to Jesus. And when Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art Simon the son of Jona; thou shalt be called Cephas, which is, by interpretation, A stone.

43 The day following Jesus would go forth into Galilee, and

findeth Philip, and saith unto him, Follow me.

44 Now Philip was of Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter.

45 Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.

46 And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see.

47 Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!

48 Nathanael saith unto him, Whence knowest thou me? Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig-tree, I saw thee.

49 Nathanael answered and saith unto him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel.

Jesus made on earth a perfect exhibition of the works and attributes of Deity as they concern humanity. In his own character He showed us what God is towards us; in his life and conversation what God would have us be towards Him, and in his works on earth, the manner of his secret working now in heaven. By signs and wonders, by miracles and parabolic figures, he subjected to mortal sense, the spiritual workings of his grace; and there is no part of his acting as man, that is not a revelation of his will as God. As such, we may contemplate the choice of his disciples. He had not one rule for choosing them, and another now; nor another method of calling them, nor another argument to bring them; the separation was made as it is now, and ever has been, with this difference; that what Jesus did then by his own voice, he does now by the voice of the Spirit. Let us examine the process, it may throw light upon a subject sometimes thought obscure. In the election of these first disciples, there is something totally beyond our reach: its originating cause is not so much as hinted at; their previous lives are not alluded to; they are not shown to have been distinguished by

any thing from the people round them ; nor to be any more fitted or prepared than others for the high destiny to which they were preferred. Here all is mysterious, super-human, inscrutable ; it would seem we must not ask, since all clue to an answer is withheld. But in the calling of these chosen twelve, how plain and simple is the process. There is no ostensible constraint upon their will, no apparent exercise of power to find them, or to bring them ; they seem to come to Christ of their own mind, though afterwards informed they could not, unless the Father draw them ; as if they chose Him, though He assures them afterwards the choice was his. The first two hear of Christ through the ministry of John, and on his testimony, Jesus observes them seeking Him before he addresses himself to them. A third is informed by his brother of what he himself believes, and is induced to go before he has received any invitation. Philip does not appear to have been seeking or inquiring at all when Jesus found him ; but the moment he heard the command to follow, he obeyed it. Nathanael when informed of Philip's discovery, did not believe it, thought it very improbable ; but with a guileless simplicity of heart, which won the commendation of our Lord, willing to be convinced, he consents to go and see. Such was, and such is the simple process by which our Lord's disciples are chosen from an unbelieving world, that hearing the same ministers, does not receive their testimony ; informed where Christ has been found, will not go after him ; commanded by himself to follow Him, will not obey ; persuaded by those who have obeyed his call, want the candour to listen, and the honesty of heart to be convinced. So simple practically, is a doctrine that seems in theory so difficult.

2 CHRONICLES vi. 12—21.

12 And he stood before the altar of the LORD, in the presence of all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands.

13 (For Solomon had made a brazen scaffold of five cubits long, and five cubits broad, and three cubits high, and had set it in the midst of the court; and upon it he stood, and kneeled down upon his knees before all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands toward heaven.

14 And said, O LORD God of Israel, *there is no god like thee in the heaven, nor in the earth; which keepest covenant, and shewest mercy* unto thy servants that walk before thee with all their hearts:

15 Thou which hast kept with thy servant David my father that which thou hast promised him; and spakest with thy mouth, and hast fulfilled *it* with thine hand, as *it is* this day.

16 Now therefore, O LORD God of Israel, keep with thy servant David my father that which thou hast promised him, saying, There shall not fail thee a man in my sight to sit upon the throne of Israel; yet so

that thy children take heed to their way to walk in my law, as thou hast walked before me.

17 Now then, O LORD God of Israel, let thy word be verified, which thou hast spoken unto thy servant David.

18 (But will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house which I have built!)

19 Have respect, therefore, to the prayer of thy servant, and to his supplication, O LORD my God, to hearken unto the cry and the prayer which thy servant prayeth before thee:

20 That thine eyes may be open upon this house day and night, upon the place whereof thou hast said that thou wouldst put thy name there; to hearken unto the prayer which thy servant prayeth toward this place.

21 Hearken, therefore, unto the supplications of thy servant, and of thy people Israel, which they shall make toward this place: hear thou from thy dwelling-place, *even* from heaven; and when thou hearest, forgive.

Solomon, as the builder of the temple, was a type or prefiguration of Christ, appointed by the Father to raise up a spiritual house, in which His gracious presence might abide for ever, and his name be eternally exalted. The temple was a type of the church of God, the Gospel

church, of which Christ himself is the chief corner-stone, as well as the builder. Every word, therefore, of this beautiful prayer, offered at its dedication, has a direct application to ourselves, and may become our prayer. Nay, more, it is the prayer of Christ for us. How deeply interesting, how suitable to our necessities is its language ! Christ, presenting to the Father his accomplished work, done by his appointment, done according to his will, pleads the promise, and claims the blessing that had been annexed to it. He owns the house which he has builded, is in itself not worthy ; is not meet for Him whom " heaven, and the heaven of heavens cannot contain." It may well be asked, if God will in very deed dwell with men upon the earth. But his word shall be verified. In the person of the Son, God has dwelt once with men in human form ; in the person of the Holy Spirit, He dwells continually in the hearts of his people : in presence invisible, but not unperceived, He abides with his church on earth, until it be removed into his presence in heaven. Unworthy as we are, the church of Christ is that to which the promises are made, the house which God has builded for himself by the Redeemer's hand ; and it is He who in this passage, claims their fulfilment on our behalf. And what is the purport of his prayer ? That our prayers, the prayers of his people, should be accepted when offered toward the place where He has set his name. In the day of distress, in the day of suffering, in whatsoever sore, in whatsoever sickness, in war, in famine, and in oppression ; above all, in sin, and under those judgments sin may bring upon us, if we turn our hearts, and turn our eyes towards the place of the mercy-seat, toward Christ the corner-stone of his own temple, the ark of the covenant,

and the great antitype of all its mysteries, the Father's eyes are open, and his ears attent unto the prayer : He will hear from heaven and forgive. Such is our Saviour's supplication ; and He that prays, and He that grants are one ; it cannot be refused. And if we are not of his people ; if we are strangers hitherto to the covenant of his grace, and the influences of his Spirit, there is a provision for the stranger too : when smitten by his outstretched arm, and impressed by the greatness of his name, we come into the gospel sanctuary, and seek the mediation of the Saviour's prayer.

ISAIAH i. 1—12.

1 The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.

2 Hear, O heavens ; and give ear, O earth ; for the Lord hath spoken : I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me :

3 The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib : *but* Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider.

4 Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evil-doers, children that are corrupters ! they have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward.

5 Why should ye be stricken any more ? ye will revolt more and more. The whole head

is sick, and the whole heart faint.

6 From the sole of the foot even unto the head *there is* no soundness in it ; *but* wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores : they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment.

7 Your country *is* desolate, your cities *are* burned with fire : your land, strangers devour it in your presence, and *it is* desolate, as overthrown by strangers.

8 And the daughter of Zion is left as a cottage in a vineyard, as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city.

9 Except the Lord of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah.

10 Hear the word of the

Lord, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah:

11 To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord: I am full of the burnt-offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts;

and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats.

12 When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand to tread my courts?

It is well for us to consider against whom is this solemn judgment given, containing, as it does, the most impressive evidence of man's entire corruption. And upon whom pronounced? Not upon the heathen worshippers of other gods, upon the corrupt descendants of Esau or of Ham, the heaven-abandoned heritors of Adam's sin. This people, so corrupt from head to foot, so sick, so incurable, was man in his most favourable circumstances; man, when all had been done that could be done to improve his fallen nature. Chastisements and mercies, revelations, miracles, and divine communications; laws the most explicit, and providences the most extraordinary: all that Deity itself could devise, if we may so speak, had been exhausted upon this people, to try if there were any circumstances under which the nature of Adam's seed could be amended. How does the result of the experiment confound the pride of those who think the fall but partial, and the natural heart still capable of recovery under favourable culture! What could be done more for his vineyard, that He had not done? What earthly culture can be like that bestowed upon Israel? Will man succeed in perfecting, what God himself did not succeed to mend? This trial of a people severed from the corrupted mass of humanity, and placed in the most advantageous circumstances, was intended by one great experiment to testify, and will testify eternally, that

nothing can make good the seed of the first Adam ; unless born again, created anew in Jesus Christ. These services which God abhors, these offerings which He calls an abomination ; they were the services and the offerings He had himself appointed : the festivals and sacrifices were of his own choosing ; yet he declares, that his soul hateth them. They were offered with unclean hands, and unbelieving hearts ; Christ was not seen in them, and sin was not repented in them : and God denies that He required any such. Can we think there is acceptance for any services of ours, for our prayers, our ordinances, our alms-deeds, and our moralities ? Compliances with the letter of his law as theirs were ; but no more required of us, than theirs of them, without the spirit, and without the faith, and without the sanctification of heart, in which they are to be presented. Man has been ever the same, and his wisdom is to know it. Judaism failed, and Christianity has failed to reach the natural heart, unless softened and changed by divine grace ; and “ Except the Lord of hosts had left us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah.”

ST. LUKE x. 3—16.

3 Go your ways : behold, I send you forth as lambs among wolves.

4 Carry neither purse nor scrip, nor shoes : and salute no man by the way.

5 And into whatsoever house ye enter, first say, Peace be to this house.

6 And if the Son of peace be there, your peace shall rest upon it : if not, it shall turn to you again.

7 And in the same house remain, eating and drinking such things as they give : for the labourer is worthy of his hire. Go not from house to house.

8 And into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you, eat such things as are set before you :

9 And heal the sick that are therein, and say unto them, The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you.

10 But into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you not, go your ways out into the streets of the same, and say,

11 Even the very dust of your city, which cleaveth on us, we do wipe off against you : notwithstanding, be ye sure of this, that the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you.

12 But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable in that

day for Sodom than for that city.

13 Woe unto thee, Chorazin ! woe unto thee, Bethsaida ! for if the mighty works ha been done in Tyre and Sidon which have been done in you, they had a great while ago repented, sitting in sackcloth and ashes.

14 But it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment than for you.

15 And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted to heaven, shalt be thrust down to hell.

16 He that heareth you heareth me ; and he that despiseth you despiseth me ; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me.

It is worthy of remark, that the first message to be delivered by those who propagate the gospel is a message of peace ; the denunciations of a broken law and a despised faith may follow, but they do not precede, the message. First say, " Peace be to this house." Before you inquire who is within, before you know if it will be welcomed, announce the blessing you have been sent to offer—to offer to all, without inquiry and without discrimination. The Son of peace knows whether his Spirit is there to give effect to the message, and prepare for it a welcome in the house ; we cannot know, nor need we, for our commission is the same in any case. Wherever we enter we are to make known, in the first place, the offer of peace through the gospel—the proposals of pardon and reconciliation through Jesus Christ. This is so plainly the direction, it seems extraordinary that any one should doubt the order in which divine truths are to be set forth ; esteeming it necessary to

alarm the conscience by the terrors of the broken law, before the balm of the gospel can be administered ; to withhold the promises till the penalties of sin have been effectually appreciated ; in short, to give the precepts of the gospel first, and the doctrines afterwards. This is not God's way. In paradise He gave the doctrine of peace even before he pronounced the curse. Our Saviour began his sermon with the blessings, proceeded to the doctrines, and gave the moral precepts last. Wherever we have a scripture example how to teach, this is the observed order. And if it is the way to teach, it is the way to learn ; we must make peace with God in Christ ; we must have the kingdom of God brought nigh unto us, even set up in our hearts, before any effort at obedience can be successful. The passage would seem to contain an answer too to those who think that believers only are to be addressed in the preaching of the truth. The apostles had but one thing given them to say to all. They were to enter everywhere ; if they were received, they were to say, " The kingdom of heaven is come nigh unto you ;" thus imparting to the believer all the blessings it implies. If they were not received, they were still to say the same—" Notwithstanding be ye sure the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you"—leaving to the unbeliever all the consequences of having rejected it. Unbelief can make no difference to the fact ; Jesus Christ has been crucified for us ; his salvation is made known to us ; his kingdom, in all its blessings, is ours, if we will receive him ; but whether we will or not, it must equally be established, and we must be comprehended in it : if not in its blessings, in its judgments. Christ has not died in vain to any man ; since they who do not enter into his rest, by reason of unbelief, will have to abide the con-

sequences of their rejection of Him: and "it shall be more tolerable in that day for Sodom than for that city."

JOB xvii. 1—16.

1 My breath is corrupt, my days are extinct, the graves *are ready* for me.

2 *Are there* not mockers with me? and doth not mine eye continue in their provocation?

3 Lay down now, put me in a surety with thee; who is he *that* will strike hands with me?

4 For thou hast hid their heart from understanding: therefore shalt thou not exalt *them*.

5 He that speaketh flattery to *his* friends, even the eyes of his children shall fail.

6 He hath made me also a by-word of the people, and aforetime I was as a tabret.

7 Mine eye also is dim by reason of sorrow, and all my members *are* as a shadow.

8 Upright *men* shall be astonished at this; and the innocent shall stir up himself against the hypocrite.

9 The righteous also shall

hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall be stronger and stronger.

10 But as for you all, do ye return, and come now: for I cannot find *one* wise man among you.

11 My days are past, my purposes are broken off, *even* the thoughts of my heart.

12 They change the night into day: the light is short because of darkness.

13 If I wait, the grave is mine house: I have made my bed in the darkness.

14 I have said to corruption, Thou *art* my father: to the worm, Thou *art* my mother and my sister.

15 And where *is* now my hope? as for my hope, who shall see it?

16 They shall go down to the bars of the pit, when *our* rest together is in the dust.

It is a nice point to administer godly consolation. The friends of Job spoke many excellent truths. There is a high tone of moral beauty in their discourses, an elevated view of God's power and greatness, and a manifest intention to do Him honour. As Creator, as moral governor of the universe and sovereign disposer of all things, we cannot find anywhere more striking exhi-

bitions of the Deity than in some of these chapters. Yet we have the declaration of God himself, that they did not speak of Him the thing that was right. To the sufferer they intended kindness, else had they not come to him in his affliction; but from want of sympathy in his character, and understanding of his condition before God, they bitterly aggravated his mental anguish. The occasion of their failure seems to have been that their arguments were not what we should now call gospel consolations: they were drawn wholly from God's moral, not his spiritual rule; they looked not at all beyond the present life, nor beyond the actions of man to his principles of action. Their words exhibited the doctrine of human merit as the ground and measure of divine favour; and this world as the scene of its distribution, in earthly rewards and punishments. Job repelled this with indignation; because if moral character were the claim to God's favour, and this world's prosperity the measure of it, he knew his own integrity. We have the testimony of God, that there was no man like him; and, no doubt, the touching picture he drew of his own uprightness and benevolence was a just one. Such arguments tended to exalt rather than to humble him, and they did exalt him; but, alas! such exaltation brought no comfort to his soul. It was not till, putting out of sight the comparative excellence of man with man, Job measured himself by the holiness of God, that he became vile in his own eyes; and, thus abased, was brought within the reach of divine comfort. It is in vain to tell the chastened spirit of the justness and power of the Almighty: it is still more in vain to turn his memory back upon himself, or forward upon time, or around him upon the destinies of men. He must be taught that he is nothing, and has nothing,

and can deserve nothing—that good in this life, or the life to come, is not of merit, but of gift; and this world not the believer's heritage—that sorrow here is no token of God's wrath, but very often of His saving love. He must find peace in believing, not that he is the best of men, but that he is the "chief of sinners;" not in holding fast his integrity, but in repenting in dust and ashes.

ST. LUKE xxii. 24—34.

24 And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest.

25 And he said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors.

26 But ye *shall* not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve.

27 For whether *is* greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? *is* not he that sitteth at meat? but I am among you as he that serveth.

28 Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations:

29 And I appoint unto you a

kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me;

30 That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

31 And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to *have* you, that he may sift *you* as wheat:

32 But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.

33 And he said unto him, Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison and to death.

34 And he said, I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me.

We cannot fail to be impressed, on the reading of this passage, with the contrast that is between the confidence of Peter now, and that which he exhibited on another oc-

casation. The same ardent affection and honest purpose animated him on both occasions ; he as much meant to follow his Master to prison and to death at the time he said it, as before to walk with Him on the waters of Gennesareth. But how differently grounded was his confidence, and how different the tone of his expressions ! a bold affirmation instead of a petition—instead of a holy confidence that the power would be given with the command, a proud assertion that he had it in himself. His fearlessness, before so beautiful, was now ill-timed. He had been warned of the designs of Satan against him, with a gracious intimation that by his Master's intercession only he would be recovered from the snare. It became Peter now to fear—not the prison and the death he boasts about, but the temptation and the sin of which his Master warned him. These the disciples of Christ are bidden to “ fear always ;” to dread, to fly from, and tremble to encounter. And as his courage was ill-timed, his confidence was misplaced. Had God required him to follow to prison and to death, he would have made him ready by his grace, and Peter might justly have trusted that he should be made able. But, in himself, he could not be ready, and he was not able, however he might be willing. The believer has a will to do all things for the love of Christ ; but he has the power to do nothing. He is honest in his purpose, as certainly Peter was, but how to perform he finds not : he will fail always, he will fail in everything, if he trusts to his resolutions and good will. When Peter's love suggested the desire, he should have said, in like manner as before, “ Bid me to follow thee to prison and to death ;” thus confessing that the decision and the power were with the Lord, his the desire only. As on God's word we cannot trust too much, on

our own resolves we cannot trust too little. While the greatest degree of confidence in God brings the most glory to Him, and the most security to ourselves, the least measure of confidence rested upon ourselves, brings inevitable failure and confusion. The watchful Master, who, in the one instance, reproached his servant with a doubt, while walking triumphant over nature's laws, had now to pray that just faith enough might be left him in his gross transgression, to receive the look of pardon when it was turned upon him. So different are the results of confidence equally honest, but differently placed—of love equally sincere, but manifested in a different spirit. We need only compare the two instances to see all the distinction between a holy and an unholy confidence.

HEBREWS xiii. 5—16.

5 *Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.*

6 So that we may boldly say, *The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.*

7 Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of *their* conversation:

8 Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.

9 Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines:

for it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace; not with meats, which have not profited them that have been occupied therein.

10 We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle.

11 For the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned without the camp.

12 Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate.

13 Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach.

14 For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come.

15 By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the

fruit of *our* lips, giving thanks to his name.

16 But to do good, and to communicate, forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.

Man is so prone to err, and so capricious in his errors, that no sooner has Almighty wisdom set a hedge about him on the one side than he loses his way on the other; no sooner is he cautioned against one extreme, than he needs a remonstrance against the very opposite. What but omniscient foresight could have provided way-marks, so exact as the holy Scriptures afford, to make sure the Christian's course? In the church men have at all times been prone either to despise the ministers of God, or to be blindly led by them; to set no value on their opinions and example, as if God could not teach us by them, or credulously to accept their testimony, as if they could not lead us from the truth. Neither is the case. God does teach us by them, and has ordained them to that very end: to set no value on preaching or other pastoral instruction, is to contravene his purpose, and say we can do without what He has provided for us. But ministers can only benefit us as they speak to us the word of God: if they have one word after their own fancy to subjoin, it is not safe to listen. They can only guide us aright, as the end of all their conversation is Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. If they take one erratic step in search of something else, it is not safe to go with them. Stability in religion is of immense importance. The doctrines are not divers, and they are not strange; they are not one thing to-day, another to-morrow, and off to an opposite extreme the next day: they are not something to startle and surprise us, which

no one before has ever heard or thought of! The first appearance of such characters in a preacher, should put us on our guard. Above all, it must be Jesus, and him only, whom they teach; there must be no adding to his sacrifice, for justification, for sanctification, for peace here, or security hereafter. They who serve the altar must not meddle with the hallowed thing; if they lay so much as a finger on it we must distrust them. Our steadiness, and our permanent peace, to whatever temporary excitements that name may be unduly given, will mainly depend on our keeping the same uniform and beaten track, by which the saints before us have attained their rest—advancing, indeed, but not altering our course. If any will teach us new songs of praise, new fruits of the lips to the glory of Jesus' name, some fresh good to be done, or bliss to be communicated, let us listen to them, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased. But whoever it be that brings us new discoveries in the doctrines of the gospel, notions strange and diverse upon the way of salvation, we cannot be too cautious of being "occupied therewith."

ISAIAH lv. 1—13.

1 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.

2 Wherefore do ye spend money for *that which is not bread*, and your labour for *that which satisfieth not*? Harken

diligently unto me, and eat ye *that which is good*, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.

3 Incline your ear, and come unto me, hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, *even the sure mercies of David*.

4 Behold, I have given him *for a witness to the people*, a

leader and commander to the people.

5 Behold, thou shalt call a nation *that* thou knowest not ; and nations *that* knew not thee shall run unto thee, because of the Lord thy God, and for the Holy One of Israel ; for he hath glorified thee.

6 Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near.

7 Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts : and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him ; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

8 For my thoughts *are* not your thoughts, neither *are* your ways my ways, saith the Lord.

9 For *as* the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

10 For as the rain cometh

down, and the snow, from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater ;

11 So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth : it shall not return unto me void ; but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper *in the thing* whereto I sent it.

12 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.

13 Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir-tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle-tree : and it shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign, *that* shall not be cut off.

Throughout the Scripture we shall not find, in any single passage, so full, so beautiful, so entire an exhibition of the religion of Jesus : its doctrines, promises, consolations, and conditions, all in one. We may almost say it contains the entire gospel. An attempt to explain it would tend only to obscure the sense, but we may dwell upon the passage with benefit and delight. If the enemies of divine truth could deprive us of every word but this, it would surely be enough to lead us forward in the way of salvation, and support us in it. How can we, reading it, believe the religion of the Old Testament differed from that of the New ? First, the persons to whom the gospel is sent, for whom its blessings are prepared.

Where are they more distinctly specified? They that want and have not, and have not means to purchase; who have spent their all in vanities, and find themselves unsatisfied; longing for the wine of gladness and the milk of consolation; but having nothing to present in return to Him who can alone impart it. Then, the blessings offered—life, the soul's life, which is eternal; delight, the soul's delight, which is divine; good, present and eternal good, in never-ending fulness; above all, security—a covenant of mercy that is sure to everlasting. Next, the source and origin of these blessings, "The Lord thy God," "The Holy One of Israel," and his beloved, Jesus, whom he has given—given even unto death—to be our Saviour, leader, and our guide to glory. Then the time: the invitation is limited—to-day, while it is called to-day. A time will be when God cannot be found. And the conditions: repentance, the forsaking of sin, the change of our unrighteous thoughts; turning to the Lord, to God in prayer, to Christ in faith, for mercy and for pardon, promised abundantly and freely. Then there is the office of the Holy Spirit, accompanying the word, and giving it effect according to the pleasure of the Lord. And lastly, there is the triumph and the bliss of the redeemed. A mourning people breaking forth with songs of joy; a troubled people restored to perfect peace: a world that sin has blighted and planted with thorns and briers, bearing again the fruits of righteousness and the flowers of bliss;—all terminating, as all must terminate, in the glory of God; in the exaltation of Christ; in that sign and name which shall be everlastingly exalted in his people. Such is the prophetic picture of the Gospel; all promise, holiness,

security, and bliss, without one discouraging or saddening word.

ST. LUKE xvii. 1—10.

1 Then said he unto the disciples, It is impossible but that offences will come: but woe unto him through whom they come!

2 It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones.

3 Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him.

4 And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him.

5 And the Apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith.

6 And the Lord said, If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou plucked

up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you.

7 But which of you, having a servant plowing, or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat?

8 And will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink?

9 Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not.

10 So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.

The excellency of the divine legislation in a world whose final judgment is suspended till the redemption of God's people shall be complete, is worthy of the closest observation. It is necessary for them that the wicked should remain, lest, if the tares be rooted up, the wheat perish with it—be removed before it ripens. It is necessary that they should suffer in the offences that must result from such a state of things; because their own

hearts require the discipline of affliction. Such offences are in the order of God's providence; He directs, makes use of, and in that sense orders them. But not in any sense that affects the responsibility of the offender. God does not originate the evil; every offence against his people, abundantly beneficial as it is to them, being judged by the intention, not the issue, is considered a transgression against himself, and as such requited. And what are his people to consider of these trespasses, so seeming evil, and so really good to them? To rebuke them as sins, most certainly, for God so holds them; but to forgive them, and leave to Him the retribution. As touching ourselves, all wrongs are to be accepted as a good from God, as much in the order of his providence, as if the trial came direct from Him. As touching the perpetrator, they are to be contemplated as sins, without excuse, committed against the Lord. His enemies it is for Him to deal with; they are not ours, although they mean to be. To nature this is hard. The apostles thought so, and asked the only power by which the difficulties of practice in religion are to be met—the strengthening of the principle. That every moral difficulty would yield to this, our Saviour testifies by declaring its sufficiency for what to man seems even a physical impossibility. There is no need for us to calculate the difficulties of a godly course; if the mountain, or the sycamore tree were in the way, they must transplant themselves at the bidding of a faith that goes forward in reliance on the truth of God, walking in the way of his commands. Our care should be of a quite different kind; namely, that when we have done these duties so difficult to nature, obeyed these requirements so seeming hard, and perceive within us the supernatural results of

the implanted principle, we take no credit to ourselves; make no mention of merit on our own behalf; count not our attainments what they should be, or, at their best, other than unprofitable to Him who has given us what He had a right to demand from us—the will to serve Him, and such measure of the power as we may have.

JOB xxxiii. 14—30.

14 For God speaketh once, yea twice, *yet man* perceiveth it not.

15 In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed;

16 Then he openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction,

17 That he may withdraw man *from his* purpose, and hide pride from man.

18 He keepeth back his soul from the pit, and his life from perishing by the sword.

19 He is chastened also with pain upon his bed, and the multitude of his bones with strong *pain* :

20 So that his life abhorreth bread, and his soul dainty meat.

21 His flesh is consumed away, that it cannot be seen; and his bones *that* were not seen stick out.

22 Yea, his soul draweth near unto the grave, and his life to the destroyers.

23 If there be a messenger with him, an interpreter, one among a thousand, to shew unto man his uprightness;

24 Then he is gracious unto him, and saith, Deliver him from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom.

25 His flesh shall be fresher than a child's: he shall return to the days of his youth:

26 He shall pray unto God, and he will be favourable unto him: and he shall see his face with joy: for he will render unto man his righteousness.

27 He looketh upon men, and *if any* say, I have sinned, and perverted *that which was* right, and it profited me not;

28 He will deliver his soul from going into the pit, and his life shall see the light.

29 Lo, all these *things* worketh God oftentimes with man,

30 To bring back his soul from the pit, to be enlightened with the light of the living.

We observed on a former passage in this book, that

amid many fine sayings, and abstract truths contained in the speeches of Job's incompetent friends, there was nothing applicable to his condition, and therefore nothing calculated to humble or to console him. A very striking contrast is the address of Elihu. Instead of exhibiting the Almighty as a moral governor, rendering to every man, with rigid equity, rewards and punishments in this life according to his merits, Elihu presents at once the gospel exhibition of the case. He presents man fallen, suffering, perishing: the sentence of death already in him, and the torturing hand of death already on him, to consume his life with pain, and his soul with care, and deliver up both to the grave and the destroyer; but insensible to his condition—bent on his own purposes—proud in his supposed integrity—warned once, warned twice, spoken to by God continually of his danger, and yet perceiving it not. And he presents God, as He is in Jesus Christ, breaking in upon this fatal slumber by supernatural influences, but calling often before the dulled spirit hears; nay, constrained to give him hearing that he may hear, before his instruction can be sealed; delaying the hour, keeping him back from the pit, that he may have time to seek mercy; pursuing him with chastisements, to bring him to contrition. And then if the messenger of truth draws nigh, if he convinces the sinner that God is holy when He judges, and just when He condemns; and calls forth the prayer for grace and mercy, and the confession, "I have sinned, and perverted the right, and it profited me not;" then is the word of peace pronounced: "Deliver him from going down into the pit: I have found a ransom for him." And then is the deliverance begun; the furrowed brow of anguish beams anew with joy; the worn spirit re-

sumes the fresh activity of youth, and the healthful tone of childhood; suffering having done its work, gives place to a most blessed prosperity, as in the case of Job; or it remains to perfect it, a curse no longer, but an accepted medicine administered by love, and with such bright light around, such sense within of renewed existence and inextinguishable life, that sorrow and pain, and death, have changed their colouring, and become but the ministrators of eternal joy. How soon was Job comforted, after Elihu had spoken!

PSALM xxxii.

1 Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

2 Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.

3 When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long.

4 For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. Selah.

5 I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah.

6 For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found: surely in the floods of

great waters they shall not come nigh unto him.

7 Thou art my hiding place; thou shalt preserve me from trouble; thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance. Selah.

8 I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye.

9 Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee.

10 Many sorrows shall be to the wicked: but he that trusteth in the LORD, mercy shall compass him about.

11 Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, ye righteous: and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart.

The terms righteous and upright in heart, by which

the joyous expression of this last verse is limited, might seem to say, such gladness is not for us, did we detach it from the previous verses. They are terms of frequent occurrence in the Psalms ; and while to the proud, they have served as a pretext for the claims of human merit, a contradiction to the Gospel's most humiliating truth ; to the humble, they may seem an exclusion from the joys in which the righteous only are called to participate. In the psalm we have read, the foreseer of all things has provided for both these misconstructions ; and with one such explanation, so clear, so explicit, it is without reason that we anywhere mistake the meaning of these terms. The joy that ends the psalm, and the blessing that begins it, are indissolubly united ; the recipients are one, the characters inseparably one. The glad at last, are the blessed at first ; the righteous are they, whose sin is covered ; the upright are they, to whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity. If we would trace the process by which this condition, with all its joyousness, is come to, not a link is wanting in the chain, we have it all before us. First, the subject of the blessing. He who is holy ? No ; but the sinful, whose transgression is not pardoned only, but so covered, that there shall seem to be none. He who is innocent ? No ; but the guilty, whose iniquity is considered not his, in such a manner, that he shall appear guiltless. Next, the reception of the blessing. In the silence of self-abasement, in the anguish of contrition ; with a heart broken under the chastisements of the Almighty, and without guile in the acknowledgment of its sins ; by penitence, by confession, and by prayer. Lastly, the effects of the blessing—confidence, security, guidance, submissiveness, and gratitude. Thus have we the entire Gospel in this short

psalm ; it wants but the name of Him, who had not yet been named on earth, Jesus Christ, through whom all this is done. It is thus the sinful become the righteous in the language of God, and the fallen become the upright in his sight. And it is thus, the sorrowful may become the glad ; the broken heart may burst anew with joy, and the saddest and the sinfullest among us, may be entitled to the language of exultation, that closes this, and pervades the following psalm. If we be indeed participants in the blessing, let not God be wanting of the shout of praise.

EPHESIANS vi. 10—24.

10 Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.

11 Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

12 For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

13 Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

14 Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness ;

15 And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace ;

16 Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.

17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God :

18 Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints ;

19 And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel,

20 For which I am an ambassador in bonds : that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

21 But that ye also may know my affairs, *and* how I do, Tychicus, a beloved brother and faithful minister in the

Lord, shall make known to you all things :

22 Whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose, that ye might know our affairs, and that he might comfort your hearts.

23 Peace *be* to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

24 Grace *be* with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Amen.

We cannot but be struck with the graphic force of the apostle's language; but we may not be so immediately impressed with the most important intimation given in it. The Christian, as here spoken of, is no longer the timid sheep among the wolves, the unresisting object of the world's hatred—the meek, the patient, the unrecriminating—bearing all things, forgiving all things; turning the left cheek to him that smiteth the right; and of him that bereaves him, not asking it again. He is now the warrior armed in his own defence from head to foot, and bearing offensive weapons against his foes. He is described in the attitude of one who has an arduous struggle to maintain; who must not walk unprepared, nor lie down unguarded, nor afford his enemies a moment of advantage, by being off his guard. This is no picture of careless, self-indulgent ease; there must be much work to do to warrant such terms as these. But the essential point of the passage, is in the nature of our enemies. It is not against the authorities of this world, the Christian is to arm himself; with these he has been told rather to suffer wrong, than to enter into conflict against flesh and blood: “the servant of the Lord must not strive.” These are far other enemies, and it is with the reality of their existence, this passage should impress us. Do we believe it? Do we realize to ourselves the fact, that we have day by day to defend ourselves against an invisible force, actively engaged in our destruction? It is

a tremendous thought; it is not a thing that can be believed in lightly. How, if we could behold at some moment, these powers of darkness in battle array against us? We should not think lightly of them then. And is an enemy less formidable for being unseen? The word of God has disclosed to us the awful secret. If we do not believe it with a realizing faith, we shall make sport of the danger, and take no measures to resist it: we shall not fear an ambush in the paths of pleasure, or a surprise in our moments of insobriety; we shall not suspect a bribe in the flatteries of earth, or treason in the movements of our bosoms. And we shall not discover the strength of our enemies, only because we make no resistance to their power: they will lead us captive at their will. If we believe it, we shall do what the apostle bids us do; be always watchful, always guarded, attentive to every sign of enticement, or whisper of temptation, as well as prepared for every more palpable assault: we shall live as in the garrisoned fortress of an enemy's country, with every inlet of evil closely shut. And because mortal defences are inefficient against supernatural foes, hopeless to contend in our own strength against powers so subtle, so invisible, we shall make haste to put on us the armour of God: his truth to secure us against their deceptions—his righteousness to defend us from their temptations—the gospel of his peace, to enable us to walk calmly and fearlessly in the midst of them; above all, the shield of faith, which, believing all that God has said, and trusting in all that He has promised, will make harmless their assaults; praying always that the Spirit will do his part in our defence, and watching always, that we may do our own.

ST. MATTHEW xii. 22—32.

22 Then was brought unto him one possessed with a devil, blind, and dumb: and he healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw.

23 And all the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the Son of David?

24 But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils.

25 And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand:

26 And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand?

27 And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast *them* out? therefore they shall be your judges.

28 But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you.

29 Or else how can one enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? and then he will spoil his house.

30 He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad.

31 Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy *against* the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men.

32 And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the *world* to come.

This passage, and similar ones, indicative of a sin for which there is no pardon, have been an occasion of uneasiness to some minds, lest they might ignorantly have committed it; while others, finding it inexplicable, have rather rashly concluded, it is sin which cannot be now committed. Taking the whole testimony of Scripture to solve the passage, I cannot perceive the fitness of either supposition. There always was, and always will be, one sin for which there remaineth no more satisfaction, and of course no pardon; the rejection of Christ's atonement.

St. Paul says of the unpardonable sin, that he does not say, we are to pray for it. Do we ever pray, dare we pray, that one who *finally* rejects the blood of Jesus, shall be forgiven? We know it is impossible; we dare not ask it, we may not wish it, for then were He indeed dishonoured in his death. And we as certainly know from the whole testimony of Scripture, that all other transgression, however aggravated, however accumulated, can be expiated and forgiven, through the accepted blood of Christ. That it is called sin against the Holy Ghost, is apparent, because it is the Holy Ghost that testifies of Christ—the Spirit never testifies of himself—but his testimony is resisted when Christ is denied. Such perhaps was the sin of Esau, who, knowing by revelation of the Spirit, that Christ and his kingdom were the promised inheritance, contemptuously sold it for a mess of pottage; whence it is said of him, that he found no place for repentance, though he sought it with tears. Such, doubtless, was the sin of Balaam, who, knowing by his own prophetic inspiration, the blessing intended for God's chosen people, endeavoured to defeat it, and taught Amalek to compass their destruction. And such was the sin of some, no doubt, to whom our Saviour is speaking in the text. By works that none but God could perform, and holiness none could gainsay, the Spirit testified that Christ was God; and they rejected him, not in ignorance, but because they hated holiness, and hated God. "Now have ye hated both me and my Father." Such was not the sin of all. "Father, forgive them." There was pardon for them that shed his blood—there is none for them that despise it. There was pardon for Saul who persecuted Jesus, before he knew him—there was none for those, who,

after having known Him, fell away. Sin against the Son may be forgiven. Alas! how much must be forgiven to all of us, before we can be saved! What offence, what neglect, what secret unbelief and open denial of his name! All this there is pardon for in his own precious blood. But if there be any that knowingly resist the Spirit's testimony; convinced in judgment, but unchanged in heart; satisfied of the truth of the Gospel, but unsatisfied with its conditions; and for the love of earth, and for the love of sin, do finally and wilfully refuse it: where is it possible that they can find a pardon?

EXODUS xxxii. 7—14.

7 And the LORD said unto Moses, Go, get thee down; for thy people, which thou broughtest out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves:

8 They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them: they have made them a molten calf, and have worshipped it, and have sacrificed thereunto, and said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which have brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.

9 And the LORD said unto Moses, I have seen this people, and, behold, it is a stiffnecked people:

10 Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation.

11 And Moses besought the LORD his God, and said, LORD, why doth thy wrath wax hot against thy people, which thou hast brought forth out of the land of Egypt with great power, and with a mighty hand?

12 Wherefore should the Egyptians speak, and say, For mischief did he bring them out, to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth? Turn from thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against thy people.

13 Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, thy servants, to whom thou swarest by thine own self, and saidst unto them, I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have spoken of will I give unto your seed,

and they shall inherit it for ever. of the evil which he thought to do unto his people.

14 And the LORD repented

It is in vain for us to reason against the efficacy of prayer; that it is consistent with the wisdom and immutability of God, who foresees all things, and foreknows all arguments, to change his mind upon the solicitation of a creature such as man. If we believe the Scripture, nothing is more indisputable, nothing more plainly asserted, or more frequently exemplified. Not that God changes his mind; his mind is all and always good towards us: but in a manner not submitted to our apprehension, because perhaps beyond its compass, He does suspend his purposes upon our prayers; He makes his gifts contingent upon our asking, and averts his wrath upon our supplications. We were better occupied with the immense importance of this fact, than with its improbability: God has not only said it, but He has proved it continually. If we could read the secret workings of providence, we should perceive, that He is continually proving it anew; we should see, day by day, what we gain by praying, what we lose by not praying; what blessings we might have had, or might have had sooner, had we asked them trustingly; what sufferings we might have been spared, had we prayed repentingly. You may say, this is very unlikely; nothing has befallen without the will of God; and what He wills must come to pass, whether we pray or not. This is good reasoning, good philosophy; but God says otherwise; He proves it otherwise. I am persuaded we have no warrant in Scripture for saying of any blessing we have missed, or any sorrow we have suffered, that our prayers could have made no

difference. It is one of the most important of the many things about which we must not reason, but believe. We have been reading an instance in which God speaks as if He were even unwilling to be prayed to, lest it should impede his vengeance. Not that he was really unwilling, but He said it purposely to exhibit the power of the prayer, which if offered, He could not resist; He makes as if He would rather not be asked, because if He is asked, He will not refuse. Moses understood it as an encouragement. We, if we want any thing, if we fear any thing, may we not find in it an encouragement too? But nothing in the passage is more remarkable, than the argument Moses makes use of. He offers no excuses, he pleads no temptation; he makes no promises for the future, and appeals not even to the divine mercy for his people. God's own promise, his own glory—these are the potent spell which omnipotence itself could not resist. Who shall say how often, since the time of Moses, a like prayer has proved alike irresistible, when poured from the penitent bosom of the believer; in some moment, perhaps, when he has had nothing else to say? Unable to extenuate, afraid to promise, doubtful of the mercy he has abused, and the love he has outraged, nothing has been left to him to say but this, "Thou hast promised to save me: how will the enemy triumph if I am lost!" In the beautiful language of our church, "O Lord, arise, help us and deliver us for thine honour." Never has prayer so offered in sincerity been unheard. The passage contains yet more encouragement; for Moses was a type of Christ, and it is thus that the Son pleads with the Father for his people, and prevails.

JEREMIAH xviii. 1—11.

1 The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying,

2 Arise, and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause thee to hear my words.

3 Then I went down to the potter's house, and, behold, he wrought a work on the wheels.

4 And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter : so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it.

5 Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying,

6 O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the Lord. Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel.

7 *At what* instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck

up, and to pull down, and to destroy it ;

8 If that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them.

9 And *at what* instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it ;

10 If it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good, wherewith I said I would benefit them.

11 Now therefore go to, speak to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I frame evil against you, and devise a device against you : return ye now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good.

In all God's dealings there is something that confounds the intellectual pride of man. Man chooses to be great, to be wise, to be spiritual, and would be treated as if he were so. God deals with him as a child, as a creature of sense, to whose incapacity all high things must be levelled by comparison with the meanest. The actions enjoined upon the ancient prophets, to exhibit in sensible signs the messages they were inspired with, would seem to us in beholding them, perhaps do seem to us sometimes in the reading, almost ridiculous ; or, at the least, unnecessary to illustrate their words. But God knows our nature better than we know ourselves ; and if we feel

disposed to look with contempt, as now the disposition is, on all external signs, and forms, and ordinances of devotion, we shall do well to observe how adverse to our opinion has always been the mind of Him who made us, and should know us best. In Eden, God appointed sensible signs of spiritual things ; as, no doubt, the trees of life and knowledge were. Throughout all time afterwards he did the same—an action, calculated to arrest the attention, generally accompanied the miracles of Moses ; even when the blessing and the curse of the Almighty were suspended on the obedience of the people, he was commanded to put the one upon Mount Jerizim, and the other upon Mount Ebal ; as if external memorials were necessary to the full effect of all moral impressions. So in the present instance, and others throughout the prophetic scriptures, the seer is to do something, or to behold something, figurative of that which he is to learn or to teach. Surely it is a vain imagination that externals are indifferent to our spiritual condition. The truth exhibited to the prophet in this simple emblem is of the deepest moment ; it exhibits two opposite facts. Not only is man passive and resistless as the clay in the potter's hand, but He, in whose hand he is, can change his design, and new make his work, if he sees fit to do so ; He can break his best workmanship, and cast it from him ; or if it be marred in his hand, He can make it anew to perfectness. But while His power is exhibited as thus absolute, His will is shown to be contingent. It is no impeachment of His sovereignty that it should be so ; but only an exercise of his sovereignty that He makes it so to be. Thus unlike is the Christian's providence to the sceptic's fatality. There is no evil however pronounced, however decided

upon in this life, from which God may not be moved to pity and to spare; there is no good He may not be provoked by sin to withhold or to withdraw. Are men so indifferent to suffering that they could live carelessly if they believed these facts?

ST. JOHN x. 24—38.

24 Then came the Jews round about him, and said unto him, How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly.

25 Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye believed not: the works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me.

26 But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you.

27 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me:

28 And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.

29 My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand.

30 I and my Father are one.

31 Then the Jews took up stones again to stone him.

32 Jesus answered them,

Many good works have I showed you from my Father; for which of those works do ye stone me?

33 The Jews answered him, saying, For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God.

34 Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods?

35 If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the Scripture cannot be broken;

36 Say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God?

37 If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not.

38 But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him.

It is not one of the least trials of a man of God in an unbelieving world, that he is open to the charge of presumption whenever he asserts his real character. To be one with Christ seems as proud a claim on his lips as

did that of Jesus to be one with the Father ; while the sense in which he calls himself a child of God, though not the same in which the Son asserted it, is equally distinct from the sense in which all men are so, and equally offensive. This passage, therefore, whilst it contains the strongest evidence that Christ was God, by proving that the Jews so understood his words, contains also much encouragement and much admonition to those who, following after Him in all lowliness of heart and secret self-abasement, are yet reproached with making themselves to be better than others, the peculiar favourites of Heaven. It is encouraging to view Jesus under a similar imputation, and instructive to observe how he received it. They saw a man, and heard him assert that He was God ; we see the sinner, and hear him assume to be a saint. The unbelief of the Jew was not excusable, because his own scriptures, which he was bound to study and believe, had so clearly described the Messiah, the Son of God, who was to come, that Christ might have been recognized as the predicted person. We, in that Word which we profess to believe, might find descriptions too—of persons who were once children of wrath even as others, but who are washed, who are cleansed, who are justified—the very character the saint pretends to. It must be true of somebody. Should we be surprised that some lay claim to it, and scoff at their pretensions without examining them ? But how did Jesus deal with the unbelievers ? “ If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not.” If he had not done that which no mere man could do, Jesus did not require them to believe that he was God. If men do not see in us something that nature does not produce, we have no right to expect them to believe us the subjects of divine grace.

That conformity to the will of God, that renunciation of ourselves, that separation from the world, which are the fruits of faith; the holiness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost which nature's wild olive tree was never known to bear, are the only evidence we can offer that we are one with Christ, children of God by adoption of his Spirit. It is true the world will not admit this evidence—they did not so with Christ. It ill becomes the servant to be impatient of what the Master bore, or more anxious than He was to vindicate himself from charges of assumption. Christ asserted his deity, and pleaded the works of deity to prove it. The believer asserts that he is one with Christ, but can only plead the effects of grace upon his heart. It becomes him there to leave it, without being too tenacious of his own honour.

JOEL ii. 18—27.

18 Then will the LORD be jealous for his land, and pity his people.

19 Yea, the LORD will answer and say unto his people, Behold, I will send you corn, and wine, and oil, and ye shall be satisfied therewith: and I will no more make you a reproach among the heathen:

20 But I will remove far off from you the northern army, and will drive him into a land barren and desolate, with his face toward the east sea, and his hinder part toward the utmost sea, and his stink shall come up, and his ill savour shall come up, because he hath done great things.

21 Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice: for the Lord will do great things.

22 Be not afraid, ye beasts of the field: for the pastures of the wilderness do spring, for the tree beareth her fruit, the figtree and the vine do yield their strength.

23 Be glad then, ye children of Zion, and rejoice in the LORD your God; for he hath given you the former rain moderately, and he will cause to come down for you the rain, the former rain, and the latter rain in the first month.

24 And the floors shall be full of wheat, and the fats shall overflow with wine and oil.

25 And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpillar, and the palmerworm, my great army which I sent among you.

26 And ye shall eat in plenty, and be satisfied, and praise the name of the LORD your God,

that hath dealt wondrously with you : and my people shall never be ashamed.

27 And ye shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the LORD your God, and none else : and my people shall never be ashamed.

The whole of the Bible history is a true, and not an allegorical history ; is an account of things that really happened as they are told. If this is the case with what is past, we must suppose it to be the case with what is future ; that the prophecies when fulfilled will be a real history. But the Bible narrative, whether past or to come, is a typical as well as a real history ; it has always a spiritual sense, in which it relates to the church of Christ, as well as a literal one in which it relates to the Jews, the standing type of the church. While, in the latter sense, it is a subject of holy admiration and curiosity respecting the providence of God, it is, in the former sense, most properly our own ; its consolations are ours ; its promises to us ; and, without depreciating the literal interpretations of prophecy, as such, it is certainly not too much to say, that what concerns ourselves is of more importance to us than what concerns another. Thus, while we read with deepest interest the narrative of Israel's release from bondage, and arrival in the promised land, its vital importance to ourselves depends on its being a figure and a pledge of our own redemption from the bondage of sin and death, and ultimate possession of the heavenly Canaan. The passage we have read, will, I make no doubt, be some time literally fulfilled to the Hebrew nation on their restoration to their native land. In the meantime it contains promises and blessings for

ourselves, which wait not the lapse of time to be fulfilled. They wait only the occasion to which they are promised. "God waiteth to be gracious." What is that occasion? A day of deep calamity; a "day of darkness and of gloominess, of clouds and thick darkness; with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning." Do we know days like these? "Then turn unto the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil." These are the very moments to which is made the most brilliant promise of felicity contained in the whole Bible. We have just read it. Do you think there is no truth in it? If you are in sorrow now, do you think He cannot make you glad? Can He who has made your heart desolate, not make it to bloom afresh? And He who has sent the cankerworm, and the caterpillar, and the palmerworm, his great army of trials, and losses, and afflictions, on purpose to bring you to this point, that you may rend your heart and turn to Him, do you think that He cannot, or will not, do the rest, and give you again the years of blessedness? When was He known to fulfil his threatening, and stop short of his promise? There is no instance of it in the scripture story, which is a continued series of the same reverses; sorrow to the sinful, gladness to the penitent. The stopping short is with us: it is we that cut the thread. When God has done the first part of his work, we lose time in doing ours: we are not humbled, we are not turned, we do not cry to Him to do the rest. If many a tale of human misery has ended there—if many a bosom's wilderness has never bloomed afresh—if the sad have not been comforted, and the broken-hearted not been healed, the failure has not been with God.

I COR. xi. 23—34.

23 For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the *same* night in which he was betrayed took bread :

24 And when he had given thanks, he brake *it*, and said, Take, eat : this is my body, which is broken for you : this do in remembrance of me.

25 After the same manner also *he took* the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood : this do ye, as oft as ye drink *it*, in remembrance of me.

26 For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.

27 Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink *this* cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.

28 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of *that* bread, and drink of *that* cup.

29 For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.

30 For this cause many *are* weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.

31 For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged.

32 But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.

33 Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another.

34 And if any man hunger, let him eat at home ; that ye come not together unto condemnation. And the rest will I set in order when I come.

A close examination of this passage would tend to check at once the apprehension and the carelessness of those who approach the Lord's table. The sacrament is not, as some think of it, an awful ceremony, to be modestly shrunk from, or fearfully performed. Solemn, indeed, it is ; but solemn from its deep and heart-touching interest, not from any mysterious terrors that are in it. It is essentially a feast ; a feast of love and peace. Observe the time of its institution. " The same night in which He was betrayed." That was no time of anger ; no moment for other recollections of his people's sins,

than by the expiation of them He was about to consummate: love, pity, fellowship, forgiveness, no thought but these were in the Saviour's bosom, when he appointed this memorial of himself. The institution came not like those of other times, in characters of greatness; in thunders from Zion, or voices from heaven, or awful, supernatural appearances of the Deity. It came from Jesus; Jesus, a man—a dying man—to his followers and companions, whom He was about to leave; as if on purpose to divest it of all terror, and give it no character but of gratitude and love. "In remembrance of me." What had they to remember of Him? Not one act of vengeance; not one exercise of wrath. They had nothing to recall of their beloved Lord, but his gentleness and love. It was not the Lion of Judah, the Son of God upon his judgment-seat, they were to think of as oft as they drank it—it was the dying Lamb, the willing sacrifice, and Saviour of the sinful:—"His blood shed," "his body broken;" emblems of intensest love. Should we take of them with gloomy and mistrustful hearts, with trembling and reluctant hands? Think you He let fall into that cup one drop of gall, or breathed a thought of reproach over that bread? No; He mixed it and He left it all of mercy, that we might partake of it with glad and grateful hearts. Who, then, are they that take it unworthily? The apostle says who they are, and surely some who hesitate, on account of the awful sentence annexed to it, have not fully examined what is said. It is those who do not discern the Lord's body; who take it without reverence, without love; without belief in the efficacy, or value of the benefits of Jesus' blood. It is those who take it as a ceremony, a religious ordinance, a duty, without any realizing perception, any heart-felt remem-

brance of Him whom it represents, or feeling of interest, or sense of blessedness in Him. It is the want of spiritual perception in the using of the ordinance, carelessness, impenitence, and unbelief, the apostle is here reproofing, as may be seen by the context; not any want of moral fitness or preparedness in themselves. To our unworthiness it presents a remedy, not a prohibition. It is not said that because many are weak, and sickly, and asleep, therefore they may not take it; but because in taking it they discern not the Lord's body, partake not spiritually of its blessings—"for this cause many are weak and sickly among you and many sleep."

GENESIS xlii. 25—36.

25 Then Joseph commanded to fill their sacks with corn, and to restore every man's money into his sack, and to give them provision for the way; and thus did he unto them.

26 And they laded their asses with the corn, and departed thence.

27 And as one of them opened his sack, to give his ass provender in the inn, he espied his money; for, behold, it was in his sack's mouth.

28 And he said unto his brethren, My money is restored; and, lo, it is even in my sack: and their heart failed them, and they were afraid, saying one to another, What is this that God hath done unto us?

29 And they came unto Jacob their father unto the land of

Canaan, and told him all that befell unto them, saying,

30 The man, *who is* the lord of the land, spake roughly to us, and took us for spies of the country.

31 And we said unto him, We *are* true men; we are no spies:

32 We *be* twelve brethren, sons of our father: one *is* not, and the youngest *is* this day with our father in the land of Canaan.

33 And the man, the lord of the country, said unto us, Hereby shall I know that ye *are* true men: leave one of your brethren *here* with me, and take *food* for the famine of your households, and be gone;

34 And bring your youngest brother unto me; then shall I

know that ye *are* no spies, but *that ye are true men*: so will I deliver you your brother, and ye shall traffic in the land.

35 And it came to pass, as they emptied their sacks, that, behold, every man's bundle of money *was* in his sack: and when *both* they and their father

saw the bundles of money, they were afraid.

36 And Jacob their father said unto them, Me have ye bereaved *of my children*: Joseph *is* not, and Simeon *is* not, and ye will take Benjamin *away*: all these things are against me.

To Jacob, for a long time past, every thing had seemed "against him:" depressed by sorrow, and, no doubt, convinced of sin, he was disposed to interpret every thing darkly, and look for evil rather than for good. "Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away." Not one of these things were so. How blind is man to read the ways of Providence! Neither the future, nor the present, nor the past, were as Jacob supposed them. The pain of his first bereavement he had indeed endured, with all the length and bitterness of reality. There is no promise of God that his people shall not suffer; it is necessary for their purification, and necessary for the accomplishment of greater good; but, as with the patriarch, so is it with all: the dispensations of God are full of life and light, the darkness is in the cloud that veils them from us. Jacob saw through it in part, when himself and his family were preserved from famine by the exaltation of his lost son in Egypt; and doubtless he gratefully acknowledged that his sufferings were repaid, and his sins most leniently dealt with, while spending his last years in peace, under the protection of his beloved Joseph. So, for the most part, the servant of God finds even in this life the explanation of his trials, and not seldom a full compensation for them in the event. But this is the least part of God's purpose. If Jacob had died before he heard of

Joseph, would he, in eternity, have seen less goodness and less beauty in the dispensation? Joseph himself read no further than the present, when he said, "God hath sent me hither to preserve life;" but what an immense deal more than this was involved in Joseph's removal into Egypt! The whole destiny of God's elected people, and, in them, the spiritual history of all mankind. It was a link in the great work of man's redemption, which could not have been dispensed with without an alteration in the whole chain of events that followed it. Wide as it seemed of the mark, the removal of the seed of Abraham into Egypt, was the first step towards their possession of the promised land. It is so always: whatever be God's dealings with us, they have always a purpose beyond the present life, for ourselves or for others. The world subsists only till He shall have accomplished the number of his elect, and every thing in it is directed to that end. This is that mystery which we cannot read; but we are bound to believe it always. Adverse circumstances, of which we feel the pressure while we see not the benefit to ourselves, may affect the spiritual interests of many—it may be of our children, of our best beloved. Should we say they are "against us?" It is more than we know, or can know, with respect to our own immediate benefit: in the great results of all sublunary things, we know the contrary. When tempted to anticipate evil, as Jacob did, we may remember that the moment in which his adversity seemed to have reached its height, was the eve of its termination; it was when all seemed gone, that all was given back to him.

MATTHEW xiv. 22—33.

22 And straightway Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship, and to go before him unto the other side, while he sent the multitudes away.

23 And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone.

24 But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary.

25 And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea.

26 And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear.

27 But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of

good cheer; it is I; be not afraid.

28 And Peter answered him, and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water.

29 And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus.

30 But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me!

31 And immediately Jesus stretched forth *his* hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?

32 And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased.

33 Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God.

There are in this narrative truths of the deepest importance. Most deep of any, and most important to ourselves, is the conclusion to be drawn from our Saviour's words to Peter, by comparison of the state of mind which he encouraged with that which he reproveth in his disciple. When Peter, anxious to rejoin his Master, and wishing to do what he saw his Master doing, felt that nothing was necessary to it but his Master's word, he met with no repulse. It was impossible that he should; for never was there a state of mind more in unison with the spirit of the gospel than his words imply. "If it be thou." He needed but to know it was Jesus whom he saw, and all beside was easy; the sea was no obstacle—

the difficulties did not signify—the impossibility was nothing—his Lord was God! Let Him but bid him come, let Him but bid him do it, and wherever that Lord was, whatever that Lord was doing, Peter believed that he could follow Him, and do it too. Was it a presumptuous confidence? It was all that God requires of any one: to behold in Christ, the Saviour; to recognize his Godhead; to wish to go to Him; to desire to imitate Him; to believe that we want only his command for doing any thing. For such a mind the Saviour has but one reply at any time, “Come.” The grant was as single as the faith that asked it; as full and free as the confidence that bespoke it; and had Peter’s faith not failed him, the boisterous wind had stirred itself in vain—the disciple would have walked the water as securely as his Lord. He wants nothing else at any time to walk securely where his Saviour bids him “Come.” But faith in man is vacillating ever; and if no hand were put forth to hold him, the failure of it would very shortly sink him in the deep; did it serve him to set out, it would fail him by the way. But, observe our Lord’s rebuke. He does not say, Why didst thou venture? Why didst thou presume? Why so impatient and so confident? Such would have been the words of men; but the words of Jesus were, “Wherefore didst thou doubt?” It is his language ever; it is the gentle remonstrance that He makes with every one who falters in their trust, after accepting his invitation to come to Him. If we will not honour Him by a firm and abiding confidence, he will let danger so approach us as to get himself honour by our rescue; but it is still the doubt, and not the confidence, that He reproaches; it is the doubt, and not the confidence, that brings the danger.

MICAHA vii. 7—20.

7 Therefore I will look unto the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me.

8 Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord *shall be* a light unto me.

9 I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him, until he plead my cause, and execute judgment for me: he will bring me forth to the light, *and* I shall behold his righteousness.

10 Then *she that is* mine enemy shall see *it*, and shame shall cover her which said unto me, Where is the Lord thy God? mine eyes shall behold her: now shall she be trodden down as the mire of the streets.

11 *In* the day that thy walls are to be built, *in* that day shall the decree be far removed.

12 *In* that day *also* he shall come even to thee from Assyria, and *from* the fortified cities, and from the fortress even to the river, and from sea to sea, and *from* mountain to mountain.

13 Notwithstanding, the land shall be desolate, because of them that dwell therein, for the fruit of their doings.

14 Feed thy people with thy

rod, the flock of thine heritage, which dwell solitarily *in* the wood, in the midst of Carmel: let them feed *in* Bashan and Gilead, as in the days of old.

15 According to the days of thy coming out of the land of Egypt will I show unto him marvellous *things*.

16 The nations shall see, and be confounded at all their might: they shall lay *their* hand upon *their* mouth, their ears shall be deaf.

17 They shall lick the dust like a serpent, they shall move out of their holes like worms of the earth: they shall be afraid of the Lord our God, and shall fear because of thee.

18 Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth *in* mercy.

19 He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities: and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.

20 Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob, *and* the mercy to Abraham, which thou hast sworn unto our fathers from the days of old.

Under the image of Jerusalem, fallen before her enemies, and laid desolate for her sins, there is presented to us the most painful position of a believer in an ungodly world. When cast down by the rebuke of the Most

High, writhing under the displeasure of the Almighty, he mournfully recognizes the chastisement of some committed sin. How changed the language now from what we have sometimes read it. "Lord, thou knowest mine uprightness? Try me, O Lord, if there be any way of iniquity in me?" No, such is not the tone of supplication now. The believer, conscious of having provoked the anger of his Father, sensible that he lies under his just displeasure, has changed his language; but it is still the language of faith. To the unrighteous world, glad at his falling, he says nothing in defence of himself, in extenuation of his sin. "I have sinned, I have fallen, I sit in darkness; but mercy has not left me, God has not forsaken me, I shall arise again." To himself he says, and it is the most important feature of the case, "I will bear the indignation, because I have deserved it." While the heart rebels against the punishment, the sense of having provoked it only embitters the suffering: but that is a beautiful state of feeling, pleasing in the sight of God himself, in which the believer welcomes the punishment, because it is deserved; gives his consent, as it were, to the infliction, because he knows what has occasioned it, assured that as soon as it is over he shall be received again into his Father's arms with undiminished love. There is a steadfastness, and fearless, though mournful, confidence in this position, which makes sorrow scarcely painful, and gilds the dark hour of penitence with hope and peace, and thoughts of joy to come. Thus is the language of this passage a triumphant language in the midst of defeat and shame. Towards God the believer's tone is still all confidence; the brief dishonour which his sins have brought upon himself shall terminate in the greater glory of the Lord, when He

puts forth his hand to recover and to save, his grace to heal, his pity to forgive. His judgments upon his people shall fill his enemies with fear; his loving mercy, with confusion and abasement. God will punish—He has always said he will—his children in love, his enemies in wrath; but the end how different! While the enemies of Israel, the Canaanites and the Amalekites, perished out of the land, and were no more—Israel, his typical people, are kept for pardon still: deep as their sin has been, prolonged as their punishment has been, favour is laid up for them, and the promise to Abraham is remembered. So with the spiritual seed, which they prefigured. Whatever our sin has been, whatever is our punishment, while we own the one and accept the other, be sure that He will turn again—He will have compassion upon us—He will subdue our iniquities by this very chastisement, and cast the sin that provoked it into the depths of the sea.

PSALM lxxiii. 3—17.

3 For I was envious at the foolish, *when* I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

4 For *there are* no bands in their death; but their strength *is* firm.

5 They *are* not in trouble *as other* men; neither are they plagued like *other* men.

6 Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them *as* a garment.

7 Their eyes stand out with

fatness: they have more than heart could wish.

8 They are corrupt, and speak wickedly *concerning* oppression: they speak loftily.

9 They set their mouth against the heavens; and their tongue walketh through the earth.

10 Therefore his people return hither; and waters of a full *cup* are wrung out to them:

11 And they say, How doth

God know ? and is there knowledge in the Most High ?

12 Behold, these *are* the ungodly who prosper in the world ; they increase in riches.

13 Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency.

14 For all the day long have

I been plagued, and chastened every morning.

15 If I say, I will speak thus ; behold, I should offend *against* the generation of thy children.

16 When I thought to know this, it *was* too painful for me,

17 Until I went into the sanctuary of God ; *then* understood I their end.

How mournful a spectacle to the believing mind is the prosperity of the ungodly ; so fearless, so high-minded, so insensible to their condition ! It seems as if heaven, earth and hell, had conspired to keep up their delusion. The prince of darkness adds something to his wages every day, lest satiety should waken a doubt of their sufficiency : some new luxury, some new pleasure, some accumulation of property, or increase of name. The world throws its good opinion, its love and flattery into the treasury of delusion ; and it seems as if God himself concurred in it, for He draws nothing out—exact no token of dependence—sends no message of providence to demand a possession from them, and remind them of the tenure by which they hold the rest. “They are not in trouble as other men.” They live undisturbed, and die unawakened, for death’s approach cannot dissolve the charm ; the fascination is continued in their children. “They die and leave the rest of their substance to their babes,” and often die in peace. “The wicked have no bands in their death.” God has done with them, and Satan will give them no disturbance. Have we, like the Psalmist, ever looked with doubtful mind upon a sight like this, contrasting it perhaps with the condition of the righteous, poor, afflicted, chastened

day by day ; their blessings taken from them, their substance wasting, their children sickening, or they about to leave them unprovided ? And have we at some such moment been tempted to exclaim, " Verily, I have washed my hands in vain : " if the Lord our God be God indeed, why are his people in affliction, and the ungodly in prosperity ? It is because the heirs of heaven must be purified from the dross of earth, and affliction is the fire that must do it. It is because prosperity is the very aliment of pride, and pride is the disease of which man will die eternally. They who are to die eternally, may feed on : God has no motive, but His mercy, to interrupt the feast, of which the poisoned viands are but the slow executors of his justice. Unsanctified prosperity—it is the most awful position in which a sinner can be placed—that slippery place, whence they will glide insensibly into destruction. If we have been ever there, let us tremble to look back on it, and be grateful for any misfortune that has removed us from it. It is a messenger from God, it is a token of his remembrance of us, that at least He has not put us out of mind, as them that are already dead. It may be a messenger of grace and mercy ; let us give it entertainment ; let us hear its errand, lest there never come another.

1 JOHN v. 9—21.

9 If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God, which he hath testified of his Son.

10 He that believeth on the

Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God, hath made him a liar ; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son.

11 And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.

12 He that hath the Son, hath life: *and* he that hath not the Son of God, hath not life.

13 These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.

14 And this is the confidence that we have in him, That, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us:

15 And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.

16 If any man see his brother sin a sin *which is not*

unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it.

17 All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death.

18 We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not: but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not.

19 *And* we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.

20 And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true: and we are in him that is true, *even* in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.

21 Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.

The vague uncertainty about their eternal destiny, in which men choose to live, has no warrant in the word or will of God; it has no justification, even in reason and common sense. That the one great concern of life should be at the same time the one great uncertainty, is irreconcilable equally with all. Groundless hopes, and groundless fears do not constitute the separation God intends between his people and the world: characters indefinite and illegible, are not the way-marks he has set upon the paths of life and death; this is man's doing. But is it reasonable? Is it rational? Is the only thing that is of real importance, exactly that to which certainty is not necessary? Is the one thing needful, the very thing to which a doubt may with safety be attached? It

would be senseless to say this ; but we say, that we have not the means of knowing, it does not admit of demonstration. It admits of more clear demonstration, and we have more certain means of knowing it, than the most part of the things we say we know. For of all that we accept for certainty in this life, the greater part is received upon the testimony of men ; is a matter of credence, not of experiment. Society could not exist, if men dealt with each other's witness, as they do with God's, refusing to be assured of any thing they have not realized. No persons taking God's word with as full a reliance, as they continually place upon each other's, need remain in any doubt whether they are at this time walking in the way of life or death. And if it is the future to which we attach the ideas of uncertainty, because of our propensity to sin, the same reliance on the same word, would make us certain still. There is but one sin of which man need die ; because for every other he will be forgiven, if he asks it : this sin, it is expressly said, the believer born of God cannot commit ; and how can he, since it can be no other than the rejection of the Spirit's testimony of Jesus Christ, the reception of which constitutes the new birth unto righteousness. On the other hand, is not there as fixed a certainty of death, as here of life ? that he who ultimately rejects Christ, as testified of by the Spirit, and witnessed to by the Father, makes of God in Trinity a liar, and cannot be forgiven, and must die eternally. " We know, that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness." The apostle had no means of knowing either of these things that are not equally accessible to ourselves.

1 CHRONICLES xvii. 16—27.

16 And David the king came and sat before the Lord, and said, Who *am* I, O Lord God, and what *is* mine house, that thou hast brought me hitherto?

17 And *yet* this was a small thing in thine eyes, O God; for thou hast *also* spoken of thy servant's house for a great while to come, and hast regarded me according to the estate of a man of high degree, O Lord God.

18 What can David *speak* more to thee for the honour of thy servant? for thou knowest thy servant.

19 O Lord, for thy servant's sake, and according to thine own heart, hast thou done all this greatness, in making known all *these* great things.

20 O Lord, *there is* none like thee, neither *is there any* God beside thee, according to all that we have heard with our ears.

21 And what one nation in the earth *is like* thy people Israel, whom God went to redeem *to be* his own people, to make thee a name of greatness and terribleness, by driving out nations from before thy people,

whom thou hast redeemed out of Egypt?

22 For thy people Israel didst thou make thine own people for ever; and thou, Lord, becamest their God.

23 Therefore now, Lord, let the thing that thou hast spoken concerning thy servant, and concerning his house, be established for ever, and do as thou hast said.

24 Let it even be established, that thy name may be magnified for ever, saying, The Lord of hosts *is* the God of Israel, *even* a God to Israel: and *let* the house of David thy servant *be* established before thee.

25 For thou, O my God, hast told thy servant that thou wilt build him an house; therefore thy servant hath found *in his heart* to pray before thee.

26 And now, Lord, thou art God, and hast promised this goodness unto thy servant;

27 Now, therefore, let it please thee to bless the house of thy servant, that it may be before thee for ever: for thou blessest, O Lord, and *it shall be* blessed for ever.

Such is the language of the believer in every age. As David knew no reason why he should be taken from the sheepfold to sit on the throne of Israel; why he had been selected from among many brethren, and many families of the same tribe, to be established in prophetic greatness for ages yet to come; a house distinguished

above all that dwell upon the earth ; so the believer, looking back upon what he has been—upon what he might have been—upon what others are, who were once no other than himself—amazed at the power of God, and confounded at his own unworthiness, can only sit before the Lord and say, “ Who am I, and what is my house ? ” “ According to thine own heart, hast thou done all this greatness.” Whether like David, we look back through the way that God has brought us hitherto—through a succession of follies borne with, mistakes counteracted, and sins forgiven long ; visits of providential interferences, to bring us where we are, and make us what we are, in spite of Satan and the world—in spite very often of ourselves : whether we look back through all these, to the rock whence we were hewn, and the hole of the pit whence we were digged—that state of insensibility and spiritual degradation, in which we all were born, bond-slaves of sin and death ; or whether with David, we look forward to the great things that are promised and prepared for us hereafter, we can have nothing to say of the past, but what David said : “ Who am I ? ” “ O Lord, there is none like thee, nor any God beside thee.” And we can have nothing to ask for the future, but that which David asked : “ Now, O Lord, let the thing that thou hast spoken concerning thy servant, and concerning his house, be established for ever.” The believer wants no more. “ Do as thou hast said.” Often this is the only prayer that suits him ; he sees in God’s word such amazing goodness, such astonishing wisdom, such overwhelming blessedness, he can find nothing in his heart to wish or to say, but simply this : “ Do as thou hast said.” And as from first to last, we shall find nothing in ourselves to distinguish us from other sinners, that

God should have put this great blessedness upon us, to be made of his own people for ever ; “ The Israel whom he went to redeem, to be his own people ;” and “ became their God ;” so have we no reason to give, why the blessing should be continued to us, and the promised goodness fulfilled, but his own glory—his own name’s sake, that it may be magnified for ever, in the salvation of his people—in the house of David, the true David, the Christ, the real Beloved of the Father.

ST. LUKE ii. 8—18.

8 And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over the flock by night.

9 And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them ; and they were sore afraid.

10 And the angel said unto them, Fear not : for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

11 For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

12 And this *shall be* a sign unto you ; Ye shall find the babe wrapt in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of

the heavenly host, praising God, and saying,

14 Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

15 And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.

16 And they came with haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.

17 And when they had seen *it*, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child.

18 And all they that heard *it* wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds.

Has it ever occurred to us, to wonder what became of the peace on earth which those angels came from heaven

to proclaim ? Possibly it may, for in the aspect of the world at large, no change has taken place to verify the proclamation. Foreign wars, and civil tumults, have continued to desolate the nations ; slaughter and bloodshed are as familiar to modern, as to ancient story. And in the nearer fields of social and domestic life, the angelic mission seems little better verified. If something of the rudeness of other days has been softened by the civilization that accompanies Christianity, the result is so very much unlike to the prediction, it is almost proverbially established, that peace in this life is not to be expected. And nearer still, in the interior of our own bosoms, there are some present, perhaps, who, between the cares and the feelings that distract them, do not know what it is to feel at peace. What has become then of the blessing so solemnly, so gloriously announced ? Was it a mistake, since nobody enjoys it ? Be assured it was not. God has been glorified, and his good will towards men has been manifested in the birth and death of Christ : it cannot be, that the remainder of the annunciation took no effect—that man must wait for heaven, to enjoy what was promised on earth. Some hearts among us, no doubt, have already testified to what we say ; but if any have not, let them be assured, that the blessing which angels at the birth of Christ announced, and he at his departure hence bequeathed, is within mortal reach : amid the strife of nations, amid the jar-rings of society, and the cares and passions of humanity, peace may be, and is enjoyed. It is needless to say where. The world makes no claim to it ; it has its pleasures, its joys, its triumphs, but never pretends to peace ; and Satan, deceitful as he is, has made nobody believe that he can give it, though he can promise every

thing beside. Its dwelling is in the bosom of the believer ; the exclusive portion of God's children. " The peace of God which passeth understanding." The understanding of those who have it not, it does indeed surpass ; and those that have it, wonder at its sweetness. This peace was well annexed to the news of the Saviour's birth ; because it is derived exclusively from Him. It is the peace of a conscience which sin does not disturb, because it is already pardoned through his blood, and in progress to be subdued by his Spirit. It is the peace of a mind that sees every thing good which God has done, and knows that whatever He may hereafter do, will be the same. It is that peace of a contented spirit, which has nothing to desire, because it has the promise of all things, in the world that now is, and that which is to come ; and nothing to fear, because Almighty love has engaged for its security. Do we not at once feel, that if all restless desires, and all careful apprehensions could be removed, our hearts would be immediately at peace. Be assured that this can be. " Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee." Men wondered, as well they might, at the things which were told them by the shepherds ; but they who have believed them, have amply proved their truth ; if we have not, it is because we have not believed them.

JEREMIAH xxxv. 12—19.

12 Then came the word of the Lord unto Jeremiah, saying,

13 Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Go

and tell the men of Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, Will ye not receive instruction to hearken to my words ? saith the Lord.

14 The words of Jonadab the son of Rechab, that he commanded his sons not to drink wine, are performed; for unto this day they drink none, but obey their father's commandment: notwithstanding I have spoken unto you, rising early and speaking; but ye hearkened not unto me.

15 I have sent also unto you all my servants the prophets, rising up early and sending *them*, saying, Return ye now every man from his evil way, and amend your doings, and go not after other gods to serve them, and ye shall dwell in the land which I have given to you and to your fathers; but ye have not inclined your ear, nor hearkened unto me.

16 Because the sons of Jonadab the son of Rechab have performed the commandment of their father, which he commanded them; but this peo-

ple hath not hearkened unto me:

17 Therefore thus saith the Lord God of hosts, the God of Israel, Behold, I will bring upon Judah, and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, all the evil that I have pronounced against them: because I have spoken unto them, but they have not heard; and I have called unto them, but they have not answered.

18 And Jeremiah said unto the house of the Rechabites, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Because ye have obeyed the commandment of Jonadab your father, and kept all his precepts, and done according unto all that he hath commanded you;

19 Therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Jonadab the son of Rechab shall not want a man to stand before me for ever.

A message such as this might well be sent to us; every one of us who have not obeyed the word of the Lord, and hearkened to his instruction. Nature, fallen as it is, attests the obedience that is due to a parent's law, the compliance that is owing to a father's wishes; and nature's unassisted strength has often proved sufficient to enforce them. Early instruction, and remembered example, has often made duties and privations easy and inviolable in after life; while the maxims of our fathers have ever been esteemed a sacred thing. There is, perhaps, nothing more intuitively shocking to the moral sense, more painful even to our uninstructed feelings, than ingratitude. Nature too, with all its blindness, can bear witness to the justness of this ap-

peal from the Lord of Hosts to the rebellious house of Israel, that they had not rendered him the obedience, which even the children of this world render to their fathers. We can all wonder that, visited as they were, instructed as they were, experienced from day to day in the power and goodness of their God—intreated, persuaded, reminded, we can all wonder, that it was possible for Israelites to betake themselves to other gods, and despise the commandments of the Lord. It is only when the appeal is to ourselves, that nature makes no response; that the heart remains insensible to its hardness and ingratitude. God has done all for us, that ever he did for them. Beside his written word, his preached Gospel, his hand in the visible things of the creation, there is not one of us who has not received from him special and individual messages: some stirring of the conscience, some voice of warning, some gracious persuasions, some whisper of his Spirit, that we might have heard; nay, did hear, although we hearkened not. From the day we are born, till we lie down in death, we are the objects of his bounty, and the subjects of his instruction; the message comes every day, and it is still the same message: "Return ye now every one from his evil way, and amend your doings, and go not after other gods, to serve them. "How is it, that no conviction seizes upon us, that no shame overtakes us, that no sense of ingratitude awakens in our hearts? How is it, that our very nature is not revolted by the perception, that we love any thing, fear any thing, obey any thing, rather than the word of God? This insensibility is in itself so monstrous, it would in all other cases be so unnatural, there needs a revelation to explain it. And will man still dispute the entire corruption of his heart, and his desert of everlasting woe?

2 CHRON. xxxii. 25—33.

25 But Hezekiah rendered not again, according to the benefit *done* unto him; for his heart was lifted up: therefore there was wrath upon him, and upon Judah and Jerusalem.

26 Notwithstanding, Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart, (*both* he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem,) so that the wrath of the Lord came not upon them in the days of Hezekiah.

27 And Hezekiah had exceeding much riches and honour: and he made himself treasures for silver, and for gold, and for precious stones, and for spices, and for shields, and for all manner of pleasant jewels;

28 Storehouses also for the increase of corn, and wine, and oil; and stalls for all manner of beasts, and cotes for flocks.

29 Moreover he provided him cities, and possessions of flocks and herds in abundance; for God had given him substance very much.

30 This same Hezekiah also stopped the upper water-course of Gihon, and brought it straight down to the west side of the city of David. And Hezekiah prospered in all his works.

31 Howbeit, in *the business* of the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon, who sent unto him to inquire of the wonder that was *done* in the land, God left him to try him, that he might know all *that was* in his heart.

32 Now the rest of the acts of Hezekiah, and his goodness, behold, they *are* written in the vision of Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, and in the book of the Kings of Judah and Israel.

33 And Hezekiah slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the chiefest of the sepulchres of the sons of David: and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem did him honour at his death. And Manasseh his son reigned in his stead.

When men write biography, to exalt the creature, or as they think to save the honour of religion, the misdeeds of godly men are suppressed, and their sins extenuated. Not so when the Holy Spirit dictates; then the creature's share is weakness, inconsistency, and sin—God's is the glory, the excellence, and perfection. How impressive a lesson should we have lost, how striking an exhibition of God's dealings with his people would have been withheld from us, had Hezekiah's failure been sup-

pressed ; for his story is or may be the secret history of every one—the parallel of God’s dealings with every one it must be—for in Him is no caprice or variability. Hezekiah prayed, and was heard ; he trusted, and was saved ; he humbled himself, and was exalted. Herein all the goodness and the praise is God’s ; his arm got the victory, his hand poured in the abundance, his Spirit dictated the prayer that won it. Hezekiah thought it was his own, and took the honour to himself ; he exalted himself, and was abased. When strangers came, he showed them his treasures instead of showing them his God, the only thing he had to glory in. What was “in his house” was not his ; for while he was yet showing it, the divine purpose had transferred it to the king of Babylon—a lesson for the proud heart’s secret swell ! What do men see in our houses, and hear of in our conversation—God, or the things that God has given us ? Surely the best of us make our boast amiss—it is He that is ours—all these things are his. Hezekiah might have showed them a treasure that never was transferred to Babylon—the loving-kindness of his God. Therein he had indeed whereof to boast, with no unhallowed exaltation. But his heart was lifted up, and “God left him.” How much is in those words ! God did not first withdraw his grace that pride might take possession of Hezekiah’s heart. Pride had entered ; God saw it there, while the king was insensible of it : to show him his own sinfulness, it was necessary it should manifest itself in the outward act ; then was restraining grace withdrawn, that he might know what was equally in his heart, whether or not he had an opportunity to betray it. The distinction is important ; God does not first leave his people that they may fall into sin, in order to humble

them ; but when He perceives in them some secret sin, He leaves them to the temptation that will call it forth, that they may perceive it, and be abased. No sooner was Hezekiah humbled thus, than all that was personally painful in the sentence was recalled. God's purpose stood, as it ever must ; His word was without change or revocation, as affecting the ultimate design ; but it could be so changed, so modified by prayer and humiliation, that on him whose sin provoked its announcement the stroke fell harmless. The captivity of Jerusalem had been determined for her own sins, as she had many times been warned ; Hezekiah, by his ingratitude, brought on himself her judgments ; but by his penitence, and the example of his humiliation to the people, its execution was remitted, till they who so repented could no more suffer in its infliction—an example to nations—to the godly in a nation : divine vengeance on the unrighteous cannot be averted ; it may be delayed, for the sake of them that humble themselves.

ST. JAMES i. 13—27.

13 Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God : for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man :

14 But every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.

15 Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin : and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.

16 Do not err, my beloved brethren.

17 Every good gift, and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

18 Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures.

19 Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath :

20 For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.

21 Wherefore, lay apart all filthiness, and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.

22 But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.

23 For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass :

24 For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straight-

way forgetteth what manner of man he was.

25 But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth *therein*, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.

26 If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain.

27 Pure religion, and undefiled before God and the Father, is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.

There is, if I may so speak, a peculiar niceness and delicacy in the touching of St. James, when he portrays the Christian character ; it is like the last careful application of the sculptor's chisel to the already formed and well-proportioned statue. His holy exhortations are at once suited to and descriptive of a church still compassed with infirmities ; full of error, full of inconsistency ; surrounded with enemies, and betrayed to them by its own faithlessness—such a church, as while its worst components are false professors, and its best but miserable sinners, the church of Christ will ever continue to be on earth. In this state of imperfect renovation, where the old nature and the new are in perpetual conflict, two cautions are peculiarly needful ; namely, that we charge no part of the remaining evil upon God, as if sin could for any purpose originate in his will ; and that we ascribe no portion of the good to any one but Him, as if man, even in his renewed state, were capable of originating it in himself. And because this is the case to the last, as

much as it was at the first, when of his own will, and not of ours, He begat us anew in Christ Jesus, it becomes us to be very humble, very teachable, very little confident in word or deed about our own doings and opinions; attent to hear, slow to dispute, patient of others' infirmities, and watchful of our own. Above all, as unable to take a step alone, yielding ourselves wholly and simply to the dictates of the divine word. But there are two ways of accepting the word of God. There are those who neither deny its truth nor its fitness: who when their own character is presented to them by reflection from its pages, can neither deny the accuracy of the representation, nor its inconsistency with the law, by the side of which it is exhibited. But the impression stays no longer than the mirror is before them, than the law is in their sight; it is without, not within their hearts, and therefore not always present; and the moment it is withdrawn, their own deformities are forgotten. But the law, which, although it is in fact the same, St. James designates the perfect law of liberty, because it is that which the heart loves, and consents to, and would obey by choice without constraint, is written by God within the heart, and never is withdrawn, and never out of sight, and therefore cannot be forgotten. What a beautiful summary of religion is the last verse! 'The fulfilment of every duty, and the abstinence from every sin, attesting the principle by its results—"We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren"—and "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."

ISAIAH xxvi. 1—13.

1 In that day shall this song be sung in the land of Judah; We have a strong city: salvation will *God* appoint for walls and bulwarks.

2 Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in.

3 Thou wilt keep *him* in perfect peace, *whose* mind is stayed on *thee*; because he trusteth in thee.

4 Trust ye in the Lord for ever: for in the Lord JEHOVAH is everlasting strength.

5 For he bringeth down them that dwell on high; the lofty city, he layeth it low: he layeth it low, *even* to the ground; he bringeth it *even* to the dust.

6 The foot shall tread it down, *even* the feet of the poor, and the steps of the needy.

7 The way of the just is uprightness: thou, most upright, dost weigh the path of the just.

8 Yea, in the way of thy judgments, O Lord, have we waited for thee; the desire of

our soul is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee.

9 With my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early; for when thy judgments *are* in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.

10 Let favour be shewed to the wicked, *yet* will he not learn righteousness: in the land of uprightness will he deal unjustly, and will not behold the majesty of the Lord.

11 Lord, *when* thy hand is lifted up, they will not see: *but* they shall see, and be ashamed for *their* envy at the people; yea, the fire of thine enemies shall devour them.

12 Lord, thou wilt ordain peace for us: for thou also hast wrought all our works in us.

13 O Lord our God, *other* lords beside thee have had dominion over us; *but* by thee only will we make mention of thy name.

That city is Christ; those walls and bulwarks are Christ; and Him only has God appointed for salvation. Where, then, are we to find the perfect peace, that thing so strange to this uneasy world, men almost doubt if God can keep his promise? It lies within the gates set open for them that keep the truth. Perhaps we have been looking for it somewhere else; but I am sure we have not found it. On the heights of this world's prosperity, in the loftiness of this world's pride, uncertainty,

brevity, insecurity, at least were there to trouble us ; for He bringeth it to the dust. In the abundance of God's goodness, in the multitude of his mercies, and the promises of his gospel, that land of uprightness, there is no peace even there, without the city gates—God's majesty is not regarded in them, his righteousness is not learned in them, without the faith of Christ. And in afflictions, when his hand has been lifted up against us, we may have been ashamed, we may have been consumed, but we have not been comforted and at peace, unless in the love of Christ. If in joy, if in sorrow, if in religion itself, we have not found rest, till we begin to wonder what that extraordinary promise means, we shall do well to consider whether we have really entered the city of salvation, or whether other lords have not still dominion over us. God promises peace only to those whose minds are stayed on Him ; but there are many things men trust in beside God, which invalidates the promise. And if they think they can trust God without Christ, it is again invalid, because it is made only to them that are within the walls and bulwarks of salvation ; in other words, who are in Christ. This is the secret of our failure ; either we do not stay our minds wholly on God, or we do so on a wrong ground, and thus no peace ensues. If we look for salvation in any thing but Christ, there can be no spiritual peace ; if we love any thing better than Christ, there can be no temporal peace ; if we obey any one rather than Christ, there can be no conscious peace. While we do not know that He has borne our griefs, our griefs disturb us ; while we do not know that He has taken away our sins, our sins disturb us ; unless we are assured that He has merited heaven for us, the thought of eternity disturbs us ; and unless we believe that in Him we live,

and move, and have our being, the cares of time disturb us. There are truths to be learned before the gates are opened, we must believe in Christ: there are walls to pass, we must go to Christ; a city to enter, we must be found in Christ. When this is done, it is not with God if there is any failure. Our peace will be proportioned to our trust; if the one is not perfect, it is only because the other is not; if the promise is not performed to the very letter, it is only because the condition is not. It is not possible that God should give us peace, while we believe not that He can, or that He will. But has any mind, so stayed, not found it?

DEUT. v. 22 to the end.

22 These words the Lord spake unto all your assembly in the mount, out of the midst of the fire, of the cloud, and of the thick darkness, with a great voice; and he added no more: and he wrote them in two tables of stone, and delivered them unto me.

23 And it came to pass, when ye heard the voice out of the midst of the darkness, (for the mountain did burn with fire,) that ye came near unto me, *even* all the heads of your tribes, and your elders;

24 And ye said, Behold, the Lord our God hath shewed us his glory and his greatness, and we have heard his voice out of the midst of the fire: we have seen this day that God doth talk with man, and he liveth.

25 Now therefore why should

we die? for this great fire will consume us: if we hear the voice of the Lord our God any more, then we shall die.

26 For who *is there of* all flesh, that hath heard the voice of the living God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as we *have*, and lived?

27 Go thou near, and hear all that the Lord our God shall say; and speak thou unto us all that the Lord our God shall speak unto thee, and we will hear *it*, and do *it*.

28 And the Lord heard the voice of your words, when ye spake unto me; and the Lord said unto me, I have heard the voice of the words of this people, which they have spoken unto thee: they have well said all that they have spoken.

29 O that there were such

an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever!

30 Go say to them, Get you into your tents again.

31 But as for thee, stand thou here by me, and I will speak unto thee all the commandments, and the statutes, and the judgments which thou shalt teach them, that they may

do *them* in the land which I give them to possess it.

32 Ye shall observe to do therefore as the Lord your God hath commanded you: ye shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left.

33 Ye shall walk in all the ways which the Lord your God hath commanded you, that ye may live, and *that it may be well with you*, and *that ye may prolong your days in the land which ye shall possess*.

The most remarkable thing in this passage is the request of the people of Israel that they might not hear the voice of God any more; that they might no more receive the commandments directly from himself. His glory once seen, his greatness once manifest, they perceived that it was too much, and implored a mediator. Have we so beheld his glory, so contemplated his greatness, so listened to the thunders of his law, that without a mediator we can no more approach Him? For it is so, whether we have perceived it or not; and if we have not perceived it, it is because we have not so seen God, as to appreciate his greatness, and be impressed with his glory, and understand the holy requirements of His law. God, without Christ, cannot be approached. He is as a fire that consumeth; to deal with Him without a mediator is to die. Israel did not know this till He showed himself; and sinners do not know it, till He speaks to them by his Spirit, to make known what He is, and what He requires. The moment this is sufficiently felt, the sinner has no refuge but in Christ: he dares not look again, he dares not speak again—the glory confounds him, the greatness overwhelms him. “I have heard of thee with the hearing of the ear, but now my

eye seeth thee : behold, I am vile ; I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." This is the language of every heart as soon as God is truly known, and then there is no remedy but one. We call upon Christ, as they upon Moses, to stand ever between us and the Father ; to bring his commands to us ; to take back our petitions to Him ; to shadow his glory, so that human eyes may gaze on it ; to manifest his greatness, so that human hearts may love it ; to exhibit his holy law in such characters of graciousness and love, that it may seem no longer terrible, but full of peace and joy. Observe with what acceptance this desire of the Israelites is received by God : " They have well said all that they have spoken." We scarcely find elsewhere so strong a commendation. " O that there were such a heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep my commandments always." This godly fear, this sense of their unfitness for His presence, this humble desire to hide themselves under shelter of another more holy than themselves, the appointed type of Christ who was to come ;—this was the very posture of mind to which, had they continued in it, God would have granted them every desire of their hearts, every blessing in their land, all that would make it to be well with them, and with their children for ever. God has not changed ; to the same Spirit in Christ all things are promised, in time and in eternity.

1 COR. xiii. 1—13.

1 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

2 And though I have *the gift of prophecy*, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge ; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains,

and have not charity, I am nothing.

3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed *the poor*, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.

4 Charity suffereth long, *and* is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,

5 Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil;

6 Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;

7 Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

8 Charity never faileth: but whether *there be* prophecies,

they shall fail; whether *there be* tongues, they shall cease; whether *there be* knowledge, it shall vanish away.

9 For we know in part, and we prophesy in part;

10 But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.

11 When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

12 For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.

13 And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.

The apostle, in showing to us a more excellent way, or rather the most excellent state of a believer upon earth, does not mean to set at nought the things that by comparison he depreciates; on the contrary, he has previously declared that all these outward manifestations of the Spirit of God within us, these actings, as it were, of our devotion, are earnestly to be coveted, in the measure in which God has promised to impart them: in extraordinary gifts when such were in the churches, in ordinary ones when those have ceased. He does not mean that the strongest exercise of faith, the most unlimited benevolence, the most accurate knowledge of divine things, and courage to maintain them at any sacrifice, are no parts of the Christian character. But they are not, as men are apt to think they are, the tests by which our attainments in religion are to be estimated; by themselves they could not prove the existence of divine life in the soul, and still less can they be the measure of our

progress in it. These, the actings of religion, are all good ; but its essence lies within, and they are not the measures of it. We think much, far too much, of those men of God who are distinguished in such things, in the power of communicating divine truth, in pious exertions, or acts of martyrdom ; as if they were necessarily the most exalted saints, and more advanced in holiness than any other men. But this is not always so. There is a higher thing ; there is that life itself from which these things emanate ; which is eternal, while they are temporal ; which will go on increasing, while they pass away with the occasion for them. In this passage it is termed charity, a word not only inadequate, but having in our language no such sense ; and if we say love, we mean more than the word commonly signifies. We mean the love of God shed abroad in the heart ; not ours for Him, nor his for us distinctively—but that which He is—that which He exhibited in Jesus Christ—that which is of God, and which we dwell in when we dwell in Him—that, in short, which will hereafter be our heaven. St. Paul describes it by the characters it assumes in this life, so strongly contrasted in every feature with the likeness of the first Adam in the unrenewed spirit. We may call it spirituality, holiness, nearness to God, assimilation to Christ, all modes of the same being. It is that to the perfecting of which both faith and hope are subservient, and which having perfected they will be no more required. Originating in love, and going forth in love, it is that righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost, which constitute the divine life on earth, and will do so for ever. Many a lowly saint, by man unheeded, has more of it than the most eminent in the church of Christ.

ST. LUKE ix. 51—62.

51 And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem.

52 And sent messengers before his face; and they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him.

53 And they did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem.

54 And when his disciples, James and John, saw *this*, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?

55 But he turned and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of.

56 For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save *them*. And they went to another village.

57 And it came to pass, that as they went in the way, a certain *man* said unto him, Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest.

58 And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air *have* nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay *his* head.

59 And he said unto another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father.

60 Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead; but go thou and preach the kingdom of God.

61 And another also said, Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell which are at home at my house.

62 And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.

Two sorts of persons are reprov'd by our Lord in this passage; characters opposite to each other, but equally opposed to the spirit of the gospel. Those, on the one hand, who are warmed and animated by divine love, really and singly zealous for the truth, but of a spirit that truth does not sanction, nor love acknowledge as its own. It is a spirit impatient of what the Master bears with, intolerant of what He excuses, ignorant of his designs, and not willing to wait his time of grace; mistaking the commission with which sinners are sent to sinners; and, instead of ambassadors, making of themselves judges and avengers. Instead of simply proclaiming

the gospel, with its powerful threats and enticing promises, waiting to see how much and how far it will please God to accompany their teaching with his grace, these too eager disciples of a long-enduring Lord seem more intent on detecting error than recommending truth, and manifest great bitterness of spirit against all who either reject their testimony or dissent from their opinions. If they cannot immediately bring others to their own standard of truth, fallible creatures as they are, and slow themselves in the attainment of it, they are ready to reject and condemn them as the enemies of all truth; and if their bitterness does not call down fire from heaven, it is at least in too much haste to call up the fire of hell, to consume all who differ from them. In accidental or designed contrast with these, are the persons spoken of in the concluding verses; called upon to follow Christ, and professedly willing to do so, but with so much coldness, so much deliberation, our Lord pronounces them unfit to be his servants. Do we not recognize in these characters the counterpart of many—perhaps ourselves among the number—who after the call of the gospel to follow Christ has been heard, and by the will assented to, have found so many earthly ties, so many supposed domestic duties in the way of an open and decided adherence, that our Saviour has been made to wait till the world could be satisfied to let us go? Unfit servants, indeed, for a Master who left his home in heaven for us; and most unfit for a kingdom which cannot be enjoyed with a divided heart. There is not, and cannot be a tie, however natural, a duty, however positive, between us and the commands of God, the requirements of the gospel; because the moment any such duty or tie comes into that position, it ceases to be

one. Excuses we may find many, but reasons there can be none, why any one of us should delay to become followers of Christ.

NUMBERS xxiii. 18—28.

18 And he took up his parable, and said, Rise up, Balak, and hear; hearken unto me, thou son of Zippor:

19 God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?

20 Behold, I have received *commandment* to bless; and he hath blessed; and I cannot reverse it.

21 He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel: the LORD his God is with him, and the shout of a king is among them.

22 God brought them out of Egypt: he hath as it were the strength of an unicorn.

23 Surely *there is* no enchantment against Jacob, neither is *there* any divination against

Israel: according to this time it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel, What hath God wrought!

24 Behold, the people shall rise up as a great lion, and lift up himself as a young lion: he shall not lie down until he eat of the prey, and drink the blood of the slain.

25 And Balak said unto Balaam, Neither curse them at all, nor bless them at all.

26 But Balaam answered and said unto Balak, told not I thee, saying, All that the LORD speaketh, that I must do?

27 And Balak said unto Balaam, Come, I pray thee, I will bring thee unto another place: peradventure it will please God that thou mayest curse me them from thence.

28 And Balak brought Balaam unto the top of Peor, that looketh toward Jeshimon.

This, like most other narratives of the Old Testament, is only the drawing aside of the veil that hangs between the providence of God, and those who are the subjects of it; between his loving kindness and the objects of His care. It is the disclosure, not the events disclosed, that is extraordinary. The same thing goes on elsewhere than on Mount Peor—an attempt to curse whom God

has not cursed, and to defy whom God has not defied. It is even possible that some one of ourselves may be the Balaam whom Satan urges forward to the adventure ; and the only difference be that our eyes are not opened, as that false prophet's were, to see the futility of the attempt. Nothing is more common. God has a people, a spiritual Israel in the world, whom He has blessed, and no man can reverse it ; for Christ's sake He has blotted out their iniquities, and shut his eyes upon their perverseness ; by his Spirit He has brought them out of the bondage of sin, out of the Egypt of this world's vanities, to which they were enslaved. He has promised to bring this people to a heavenly Canaan, and He will not lie ; He has undertaken to save them, and He will not repent ; He has said that He is ever with them, and shall He not do it ? But Satan is still trying to defeat this end, and interpose a curse between them and their blessing ; and He finds ungodly men as willing to be his agents as Balaam was. We may be encouraged by the assurance that they are as little able. God has disclosed in this story the secret of what passes between Him and our enemies ; his determination to save what they are determined to destroy ; and their utter powerlessness to reverse the sentence. They may speak the words which Balaam, as a prophet, was not allowed to speak—words of high swelling vanity, which deride the separation, and deny the pretensions, and despise the faith and hope of God's devoted people—or words of argument and persuasion, designed to turn them aside from following the Lord—or words of reproach and harshness to distress them. But there is no enchantment against Jacob, no divination against Israel. Opposition and unkindness cannot harm or

hinder the redeemed. Let them not fear it, let their enemies not hope it. Every attempt, as it did here, but brings forth a new blessing. The assaults that are intended to shake the Christian's faith, and disturb his peace in God, are made to strengthen and establish them. What confidence, what exultation would have been in the tents of Israel, if they had overheard this colloquy! We are allowed to overhear it, for our encouragement, if we are in the ranks of the righteous; if we are against them, mark the impressive termination: "Blessed is he that blesseth thee, and cursed is he that curseth thee."

ECCLESIASTES ii. 12—23.

12 And I turned myself to behold wisdom, and madness, and folly: for what *can* the man *do* that cometh after the king? *even* that which hath been already done.

13 Then I saw that wisdom excelleth folly, as far as light excelleth darkness.

14 The wise man's eyes *are* in his head, but the fool walketh in darkness: and I myself perceived also that one event happeneth to them all.

15 Then said I in my heart, As it happeneth to the fool, so it happeneth even to me: and why was I then more wise? Then I said in my heart, that this also *is* vanity.

16 For *there is* no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool for ever; seeing that which now *is* in the days to come shall all be forgotten.

And how dieth the wise *man*? as the fool.

17 Therefore I hated life; because the work that is wrought under the sun *is* grievous unto me: for all *is* vanity and vexation of spirit.

18 Yea, I hated all my labour which I had taken under the sun; because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me.

19 And who knoweth whether he shall be a wise *man* or a fool? yet shall he have rule over all my labour wherein I have laboured, and wherein I have shewed myself wise under the sun. This *is* also vanity.

20 Therefore I went about to cause my heart to despair of all the labour which I took under the sun.

21 For there is a man whose

labour is in wisdom, and in knowledge, and in equity ; yet to a man that hath not laboured therein shall he leave it *for* his portion. This also is vanity, and a great evil.

22 For what hath man of all his labour, and of the vexation

of his heart, wherein he hath laboured under the sun ?

23 For all his days *are* sorrows, and his travail grief ; yea, his heart taketh not rest in the night. This is also vanity.

Well might the prophet call the boast of this world, "A refuge of lies," where the deluded spirit takes refuge in one lie from the disappointment of another. Solomon, having forsaken God, made trial of the world without Him, and left in this book the record of his experience. The time will come, nay, does come to every man, that he can set to his seal, that what he says is true ; yet how few of us believe it ! There is so much apparent difference between one thing and another, between one man's character and destiny, and another's, we come not without difficulty to the conclusion, that all is vanity alike. Viewed from the level of this low world, there seems a division marked enough between the wise man and the fool ; between the prosperous and the unfortunate ; the despised poor, and the luxurious great. But raise the soul only so high above the earth, that all shall be beheld from the same elevated point, its compass measured, and its boundary seen, and the marks of distinction disappear : vanity in the end, and vanity by the way, is the common character of all things. Men untaught of God, look with restless ambition towards the places of others, because those they occupy have failed to satisfy them ; and this is the secret of all human discontentment ; as long as there is any thing we have not tried, we think that that would do. But it would not do, be it what it might. The excellent things of this

world, though their excellency should be as that of light above darkness, its learning, its greatness, its wisdom, separate from God, and from eternity, are but a day's-work of toil with vexation for their wages. Nay, it was only when he made trial of these, that the preacher reached the summit of despair—hated his life, by reason of his vexatious labour; and gave a decision in favour of his follies. He was right. The higher endowments of intellect, and that superior judgment which men call wisdom, are not blessings, held apart from God; they add oftener to the sufferings of the possessor, than to his enjoyments. The greater the capacity, the less possible it is for the things of earth to satisfy it; the more intellectual and refined our feelings, the more are we susceptible of being pained, the more restless in our desires, and exorbitant in our demands; and while there is nothing but a vain and passing world to answer them, the more certain and bitter are our disappointments. Few persons possessed of mental superiority, unsanctified by grace, but have at some time exclaimed with the king of Israel, "Why was I then more wise?" So miserable a thing is this world's ambition, though its aim should be what men call best and highest. Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: "Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole of man"—the whole of his wisdom and happiness, as well as of his duty.

ST. MATTHEW xx. 1—16.

1 For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man *that is* an housholder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard.

2 And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard.

3 And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the market-place,

4 And said unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, I will give you. And they went their way.

5 Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise.

6 And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle?

7 They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right *that* shall ye receive.

8 So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the la-

bourers, and give them *their* hire, beginning from the last unto the first.

9 And when they came that *were hired* about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny.

10 But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny.

11 And when they had received *it*, they murmured against the good man of the house.

12 Saying, These last have wrought *but* one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day.

13 But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny?

14 Take *that* thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last even as unto thee.

15 Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?

16 So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen.

This fine parable, so familiar to all of us, is a striking similitude of what passes in the world, in more senses than one; for it is a likeness of what God does, and a likeness of what man does; of God who shows mercy, and of man, who charges that mercy with injustice. Yet, why injustice? If one be brought early in life

into God's service, and devote himself to it through all his threescore years, even through trials and sufferings for His sake, will an eternity of bliss be too small a recompence? Will he indeed have earned it? And if another be called in the last years of a mispent life, whose whole time and powers have been devoted to another master, what less than the same eternity of bliss has God from the beginning promised to all who, early or late, turn to him in penitence and faith? In a covenant of works, this equal distribution were unjust; but the gospel is a covenant of grace—salvation without merit—eternal life a free gift from God, never earned, and given to whom He will; but only given to those who enter into his vineyard, into his service here. Does it seem then, that it does not signify when we enter: we can put it off without loss, to a later hour? Nay, but observe the text, it intimates no such thing. Suppose those who were found at the third hour had refused to go, would the messenger have come to them again? Suppose the first had declined the wages which the Lord proposed, esteeming the pleasures of sin for a season, greater riches than the gift of godliness; does it in any wise appear by the parable, that they would have been sent for again at the eleventh hour? No such thing is intimated; indeed the answer of the last implies the contrary: and who of us, invited now, urged now to enter the service of God, the vineyard of Christ, with the promise of eternal happiness, pardon, peace, and glory everlasting, whatever the hour, whatever our age, can venture to refuse it now, because some have gone later, and been welcomed? How do we know that they were ever called before, as we are at this moment? and how do we know that we shall be so again? It is much

to be assured, and this is the gracious purport of the parable, that be the hour what it may, however young, however old, we may enter now into Christ, and receive the full benefit of his atonement, the certain enjoyment of all his promises, without reference to the past, except in forgiveness of it. But above all, let us observe, that though there were many hours at which the labourers might enter, there was an hour at which they could not: the messengers went out at the eleventh hour, but they went no more. Let us work while it is day, for the night cometh, in which no man can work.

PSALM xvii. 1—15.

1 Hear the right, O Lord, attend unto my cry; give ear unto my prayer, *that goeth* not out of feigned lips.

2 Let my sentence come forth from thy presence; let thine eyes behold the things that are equal.

3 Thou hast proved mine heart; thou hast visited *me* in the night; thou hast tried me, *and* shalt find nothing: I am purposed *that* my mouth shall not transgress.

4 Concerning the works of men, by the word of thy lips I have kept *me* from the paths of the destroyer.

5 Hold up my goings in thy paths, *that* my footsteps slip not.

6 I have called upon thee; for thou wilt hear me, O God: incline thine ear unto me, *and* hear my speech.

7 Shew thy marvellous lov-

ingkindness, O thou that savest by thy right hand them which put their trust *in thee* from those that rise up *against them*.

8 Keep me as the apple of the eye; hide me under the shadow of thy wings.

9 From the wicked that oppress me, *from* my deadly enemies *who* compass me about.

10 They are inclosed in their own fat; with their mouth they speak proudly.

11 They have now compassed us in our steps; they have set their eyes bowing down to the earth;

12 Like as a lion *that* is greedy of his prey, and as it were a young lion lurking in secret places.

13 Arise, O Lord, disappoint him, cast him down: deliver my soul from the wicked, *which* is thy sword:

14 From men *which are* thy hand, O Lord, from men of the world, *which have* their portion in *this* life, and whose belly thou fillest with thy hid *treasure* : they are full of children,

and leave the rest of their *substance* to their babes.

15 As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness : I shall be satisfied, when I awake, after thy likeness.

This seems a bold appeal from the lips of a sinner ; of one who at another time is taught to say, his iniquities are more in number than the hairs of his head. To evade the difficulty, some have even supposed it exclusively the language of Christ in his humanity. Such no doubt it is, but not exclusively ; the prophetic language of Jesus in his humanity, is the spiritual language of every believer in Him : this was assuredly the language of David's heart, as well as his of whom David was the type. There is a sense in which every believer can make this appeal to an omniscient God ; an appeal to his justice, his judgment, and his truth. "Thou hast proved my heart." "Thou hast tried me, and found nothing." "I am purposed, that my mouth shall not offend." The Jew could make it, whatever his transgressions might have been, or his uncleanness that day contracted, if, in the way of God's appointment, he had laid his hand upon the burnt-offering, and presented in faith the evening sacrifice ; the law of God could find nothing in him to condemn. The Christian can make it, when, though his sins be as scarlet, they have been made white as snow ; though red like crimson, they have been made as wool. The law may come, justice may come, the eye of Deity may search him through : there will be found in him no unexpiated sin. Jesus has borne all away. The believer may challenge Omniscience itself, to find a sin that Jesus has not atoned for. But this is not all.

The child of God can appeal to God also, that there is in him no unrepented, as well as no unpardoned sin—that there is in his heart no cherished guile, no wilful acquiescence in the wicked works of men—that there is an honest, stedfast purpose, however weakly executed, not to offend, even by a word; even by a thought of the heart at midnight, where only God can witness it. And if it still appears too confident a language, let us observe the prayer that is interposed at every sentence. The boast, if boast it may be called, is of no more than the intention; for all else, the Psalmist commits himself to God, to hold up his goings; to save by his right hand, them that trust Him, to save from his deadly enemies. What enemies? The wicked—them that speak proudly—them that have their treasure in this life—the rich, the full, the prosperous—enemies whom no man fears, but he who is fully purposed to walk in righteousness, and watches every moment, and prays every moment, that his footsteps slip not. In the words of such a one, the inclining ear of God hears no presumption, though, repeating the prophetic language of his Lord, he asks to be kept as the apple of his eye, as the thing most precious in his sight.

JOB v. 17—27.

17 Behold, happy *is* the man whom God correcteth; therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty.

18 For he maketh sore, and bindeth up; he woundeth, and his hands make whole.

19 He shall deliver thee in

six troubles; yea, in seven there shall no evil touch thee.

20 In famine he shall redeem thee from death; and in war from the power of the sword.

21 Thou shalt be hid from the scourge of the tongue; nei-

ther shalt thou be afraid of destruction when it cometh.

22 At destruction and famine thou shalt laugh; neither shalt thou be afraid of the beasts of the earth.

23 For thou shalt be in league with the stones of the field; and the beasts of the field shall be at peace with thee.

24 And thou shalt know that thy tabernacle *shall be* in peace; and thou shalt visit

thy habitation, and shalt not sin.

25 Thou shalt know also that thy seed *shall be* great, and thine offspring as the grass of the earth.

26 Thou shalt come to *thy* grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in in his season.

27 Lo this, we have searched it, so it is; hear it, and know thou it for thy good.

When sin makes man to be at enmity with God, all things become the enemies of his peace, and, in some sense, inimical to his happiness. Prosperity corrupts him, and affliction breaks his heart—men are full of mischief, and nature is full of dangers—terror breaks in upon tranquillity, and apprehension murders joy. Above all, sin and death, those insidious enemies, mixed up with every thing, in ambush every where, make peace of mind impossible. How changed is all, when God and man are reconciled; then man has no enemies, his peace is made with all things, and all things work him good. Wounds once mortal, now are briefly healed—the festering sore becomes a passing pang—accumulated troubles have no real evil in them: for all are come of love, all are blessed by love, and increase of happiness is the issue of them all. The harmful things of this life, so fearful to the sinner's apprehension, when the righteous man contemplates them, have all disarmed themselves. Famine and pestilence, the tongue of malice, and the blade of war, have become but instruments in the hand of love, without whose motion they cannot strike, nor reach a mark without its guidance. Now

indeed the sword has become a ploughshare, and the spear a pruning-hook, to cultivate the garden of the Lord, and gather the fruit into his garner. The good things of this life, they have lost their bane; a bribe no longer in the hands of Satan, but sweetest boons of love—a draught no longer poisonous by sin, but mixed entire of mercy. And death, he need not keep himself in ambush now, ambassador of everlasting joy. There is no war with the vassals, when there is reconcilment with the Lord—all are in league together, for us, or against us, as God is—if God be for us, unless there is something independent of Him, there is not one thing that will harm us. Happy are we, if we believe it; thrice happy, if we know it. A believer's rest is not all futurity—his blessedness is not all made up of an hereafter; he is blessed now, because he is at rest; that condition which the world, in its utmost plenitude of gladness, does not know. Pleasure there is, and joy there is, and something that men call happiness; but peace without God, there is not.

2 THESSALONIANS ii. 7 to the end.

7 For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth, *will let*, until he be taken out of the way.

8 And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming:

9 *Even him*, whose coming is after the working of Satan,

with all power and signs and lying wonders.

10 And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth that they might be saved.

11 And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie:

12 That they all might be

damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

13 But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.

14 Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

15 Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word or our epistle.

16 Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given *us* everlasting consolation and good hope through grace,

17 Comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work.

The mystery of iniquity has never ceased to work, and whatever is especially pointed at, as "that Wicked to be revealed," it is manifest it still exists, since it was only to be destroyed with the brightness of the Saviour's coming. There are characters in the description of his working, which answer to some things that have been, and to some things that are; but what most deeply concerns ourselves, is the character of those who are deluded by it, designated so awfully as "them that perish." It is said, "God shall send them strong delusion, that they may believe a lie." We often hear it argued, by persons who receive a false religion, or a false view of religion, that they are honest in what they profess, and desire to be right; and is it likely that God will allow them to be deceived? It appears, under some circumstances, that He will, and even leave us to perish in our mistake. But why? Because when his own truth was set before us, we did not love it—we were not satisfied with it—it was too simple, too humble, perhaps too holy a thing for us to stand by, and we determined to inquire farther. This is the secret of all heresies, of all corruptions of the faith. No man forsakes sound doctrine, who

loves it—no man rejects it whom it pleases. This is not the condemnation of those who never knew the Gospel; but of those who having learned the truth, received not the love of it, grew weary of its sameness; despised the heavenly manna, and like them of old, demanded stronger food: something newer, something deeper, something more exciting to the imagination, and more gratifying to the intellect. God let them of Israel take their way: they ate of other food, and perished in the eating. And He lets those who have professed the truth, have fed perhaps for a season with delight upon sound and wholesome doctrine—when it palls upon their appetite—when it proves too humbling for their pride, too simple for their wisdom, too quiet for their ambition, too narrow for their independence; or, it may be, too pure for their indulgence: God does allow them, whether they be churches or individuals, to forsake the right way, and perish in the deceivableness of unrighteousness. Had such but loved the truth; had they felt its fitness, had they perceived its beauty; had they fed their sufficed souls from day to day on its plain promises, and holy precepts and abundant blessedness, Satan would have exhibited in vain for them his lying wonders, acceptable only to those who wish a change: and God will send no delusion, nor permit any, to those who having tried the pure Gospel, love it, and are satisfied.

ST. LUKE xxi. 25—36.

25 And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with

perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring;

26 Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after

those things which are coming on the earth : for the powers of heaven shall be shaken.

27 And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.

28 And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads ; for your redemption draweth nigh.

29 And he spake to them a parable: Behold, the fig-tree, and all the trees ;

30 When they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand.

31 So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand.

32 Verily I say unto you, this generation shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled.

33 Heaven and earth shall pass away ; but my words shall not pass away.

34 And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you un-awares.

35 For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth.

36 Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.

At this point of the chapter, the divine preacher loses sight of the prefigurative subject, the destruction of Jerusalem ; in contemplation of the greater, the final destruction, of which it was to be the precursor and the shadow: a transition very common in the prophetic Scriptures wherein, as if the vision of the seer expanded in contemplation of his subject, from the type he passes insensibly to the antitype ; from the partial and imperfect fulfilment, to the perfect and the final. Jesus had foretold to his disciples their own approaching persecutions, to be followed by the days of vengeance upon Israel, until the time of the Gentiles should be fulfilled. Then by a natural, though unmarked transition, passes over that time, to tell them what would follow on its completion. The times of the Jews being ended, destruction was to ensue, as he had described. The times

of the Gentiles ended, another destruction, the most terrible and the last, was to take place, of which the description is given in the words we have been reading. It was not said for their sakes who heard it first: they had for the most part been taken to their rest before the first destruction; and it was not they who were bidden to look out for the second. Their part in the prophetic picture was amply realized; they were betrayed, they were hated, they were put to death, before the day of desolation came. In it the followers of Jesus did not share; for in the fall of Jerusalem, we are told, no Christians perished. The remainder of the prophecy is ours; it is we that are to see, to know, and to be prepared. Do we say, as they did, when shall these things be, and what sign shall there be of them? We have read the answer. In our variable seasons, we do not know the exact day in which the fig-tree and all the trees will shoot forth; but we watch them, and when they do begin to open, we know that summer is at hand. It is in like manner we are to expect and to observe our Lord's approach. Admit that we do not know, and cannot know the day; we have some intimations, though obscure ones, of the period; and plainer indications are to be seen as it approaches; when we begin to see them, we are to know that it is coming. Such is God's command; forbidding altogether the supposition that we either cannot or need not know. The only question left for us to ask, is, Do we see them? Are those things beginning to come to pass, which are to precede the coming of the Son of man with power and great glory? By comparing the peculiar character of our times, and the events that mark it, with the description of the last days in this and other parts of Scripture, we may form

some opinion on the subject. If we think so, the mistake, should it prove one, can do us little harm; the expectation is to make us happier, and the preparation to make us better. "Then lift up your heads." Yes, in the face of this foretold destruction, at the very beginning of this distress, this perplexity, this failing of men's hearts for fear, the Christian is to lift his head in holy confidence that his redemption draweth near, the redemption of his body from the dust, as of his soul from death. "Take heed to yourselves." Your want of observation will not postpone the day—your unreadiness will not prolong the time. As a snare shall it come upon the unobservant, the unwilling, the unaware: while as it was of old, in the fulfilment of the first prediction, so will it be in the second: there will be some, of whom not a hair of the head shall perish, "who shall escape all these things." Once it was those who were hated of all men for Jesus' sake—it may be so again; but certainly it will be those who watch and pray always, that they may be accounted worthy "to stand before the Son of God."

EXODUS xxxi. 12th verse to the end.

12 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

13 Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily my sabbaths ye shall keep: for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the LORD that doth sanctify you.

14 Ye shall keep the sabbath

therefore; for it is holy unto you: every one that defileth it shall surely be put to death: for whosoever doeth any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people.

15 Six days may work be done; but in the seventh is the sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD: whosoever doeth any

work in the sabbath-day, he shall surely be put to death.

16 Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations, *for* a perpetual covenant.

17 It *is* a sign between me and the children of Israel for ever: for *in* six days the LORD

made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed.

18 And he gave unto Moses, when he had made an end of communing with him upon mount Sinai, two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God.

This was not the first institution of the Sabbath. It had been ordained in paradise, and recognized in the prohibition to the Israelites to gather manna on the seventh day. As that prohibition was not accompanied by any explanation of God's purpose in it, we must infer that the people understood it, and had previously observed the separation of the Sabbath to the Lord, afterwards renewed with such peculiar sanctions of threatening and of promise. It had been always a law, it was now to become a sign also; a memorial of the past, a type of the future, and a pledge between God and man. It could not cease with the Jewish ritual, because it did not begin with it; nor has the change of the day from the first in the week to the seventh, made any difference in the nature or obligation of it. The institution, in its moral character, is what it always was, the setting apart for divine service of a seventh portion of all our time on earth, for a moral obligation never changes. In its character of a sign, which is arbitrary and may vary, as the Sabbath was on the last day a memorial of the finishing of God's work of creation, "when He rested from all his work which he created and made;" so on the first day is it a memorial of the finishing of the work of redemption, when, by his resurrection from the dead, Christ perfected for ever them that believe, and rested

from his more painful labours. And again, as it was on the seventh day a type and pledge of that resurrection, and of the rest of his people in Christ; so on the first day is it a pledge and foretaste of their eternal rest in heaven. Consider this, for in despising the Sabbath, we despise all that it signifies—all that it commemorates—all that it is a sign of between God and ourselves—his bounties past, and promises to come. He who did this of old, was to be cut off from among his people, to be put to death. It seems a severe judgment for a sin of which men think so lightly; but the justice of it appears in the reason we have given, because the defiling of the Sabbath was a mark of contempt for what the Sabbath signified: for Him who had created them; for Him who was to redeem them; and for the rest prepared for them hereafter. Is it less so now? Do they who neglect and profane the holy day, not show that while occupied in the use or enjoyment of created things, they are unmindful of Him, who in six days made them all? Do they who feel it no privilege to spend a day with God, not show that they have not entered into the rest of peace and reconciliation with Him, which the labour of redemption purchased? And they who find the Sabbath a weariness, unless they may be occupied with earthly things, what do they but prove, that the heaven of which it is a figure and a foretaste, is not desired, and would be a weariness too? The penal sanction, the sentence of temporal death, attached as a type or figure to the Mosaic law, passed away with the dispensation to which it belonged; but the judgment which this sentence typified, which it prefigured, remains for ever: and whoever defileth the Sabbath, that soul shall be

cut off from among his people still. God owns not the Sabbath-breakers for his people here, and will not receive them as such into his eternal rest.

1 TIMOTHY, vi. 6—16.

6 But godliness with contentment is great gain.

7 For we brought nothing into *this* world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.

8 And having food and raiment, let us be therewith content.

9 But they that will be rich, fall into temptation and a snare, and *into* many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.

10 For the love of money is the root of all evil; which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

11 But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness.

12 Fight the good fight of

faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses.

13 I give thee charge in the sight of God, who quickeneth all things, and *before* Christ Jesus, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession;

14 That thou keep *this* commandment without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ:

15 Which in his times he shall shew, *who is* the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords;

16 Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen nor can see: to whom *be* honour and power everlasting. Amen.

The love of money has always been allowed to be a vice; but man makes distinctions God has never made, and does not extend his reprobation to the love, however excessive, of what money is designed to purchase: to desire wealth, in order to keep it for ourselves, is esteemed mean; to desire wealth in order to spend it for ourselves, is esteemed noble. This may pass very well as the judgment of a world which profits more by our expen

diture, than it would by our accumulations, and takes nothing into account beyond our social duties. But it is not the judgment of God; He forbids his people to desire wealth at all, under any pretext or for any purpose, not so much from self-negation, as simply because it is not desirable. As a possession, riches are not desirable to a child of God: they are a gift of which it is so hard to pay the usury, that the responsibility is what no wise man should desire to feel. They are a snare, nay a legion of snares, which no sinner conscious of his own weakness, should desire to find upon his path. They are a weight which he who runs a race would scarcely choose to carry, unless he wishes to run wearily, and come latest in. Great possessions have destroyed the peace of many; they never have been known to purchase it for any one; and peace is the Christian's privilege; his exclusive privilege in a troubled world, whose treasures cannot pay for it, to give or take away. But if wealth as a possession is not desirable, as a pursuit it is destructive: the apostle says, "destruction and perdition." As an acknowledged end, it seems impossible the believer should pursue it; but Satan is so subtle, and our hearts are so deceitful, well might this same apostle exclaim, "When the law said, thou shalt not covet, sin revived, and I died." From this stronghold of earthliness, it is the part of faith to free us: we must be content with such things as we have, and desire no more than it shall please God to throw into our lap; few of us but have more already,—how very much more—than that which we are required to be content with—food and raiment. If they who profess to hold the world for dross, and count all things but loss for Christ, are seen to be struggling after riches with as much earnestness, as much distraction of mind, and ex-

penditure of time, and interruption of godly quietude, as those who make no affectation of despising them ; the world has a right to say, and it does say, that their profession is not honest. Alas ! if God should say this of any of us ! He cannot be deceived with names ; He knows what is meant by raising our families, keeping up our station, increasing our opportunities of usefulness. He has not commanded us to do any one of these things, but He has forbidden us to covet other wealth, than that which is bestowed eternally by Him, “ who only hath immortality.”

ISAIAH xxxv.

1 The wilderness, and the solitary place, shall be glad for them ; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose.

2 It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing ; the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon ; they shall see the glory of the LORD, *and* the excellency of our God.

3 Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees.

4 Say to them *that are* of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not ; behold, your God will come *with* vengeance, *even* God *with* a recompence ; he will come and save you.

5 Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped :

6 Then shall the lame *man* leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing : for in the

wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert.

7 And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water : in the habitation of dragons where each lay, *shall be* grass, with reeds and rushes.

8 And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called, The way of holiness ; the unclean shall not pass over it ; but it *shall be* for those : the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err *therein*.

9 No lion shall be there, nor *any* ravenous beast shall go up thereon, it shall not be found there : but the redeemed shall walk *there*.

10 And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs, and everlasting joy upon their heads : they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

The prophecies of the Old Testament, like all its types and histories, have a threefold sense, moral, spiritual and literal. To those who heard them first, they contained lessons of obedience, faith, and patience; exhibiting throughout the rewards of righteousness, and the punishments of transgression: pardon to the penitent, rejection to the unfaithful, comfort to the afflicted, abasement to the proud; the realization of all the moral sanctions affixed to the laws of God as delivered to that people. Future to us, as well as to them, remains the literal meaning: we may differ in opinion about the manner of it, the time of it we shall never know, till it is seen; but such a fulfilment it must have. They of old so understood it, and thought when the Messiah appeared, the time was come: his disciples asked him, "Wilt thou now again restore the kingdom to Israel?" his reply to which gave no negative to their expectations of a temporal restoration; but confirmed them by asserting, that the time of it was in the Father's power, and not for them to know; while he assures them that the spiritual kingdom, the most important far to them, should commence immediately under the power of the Holy Spirit; thus marking the distinctness of the two. To us, as to them, the spiritual meaning of these prophecies is the most important: fulfilled already before our eyes; fulfilling individually in our hearts, if we be members of Christ's kingdom. How many a desert and desolated heart has bloomed afresh under the consolations of the Spirit; raised the song of gladness in the midst of this world's disappointments! When our knees have trembled with apprehension, and our hands fallen to our sides in the sense of helplessness, and our hearts been sick within us; has not a supernatural courage been imparted, and

hope against hope reanimated our bosoms, at the thought that God will help us? Nay, were we not all once blind to the love of God, and deaf to the voice of God, and dumb in the confession of his name, and halt in the paths of righteousness? And in the same barren and ungodly world in which we once walked so wearily, so idly, so unrefreshed and misdirected; with evil, moral, spiritual and temporal evil, to encounter at every step; has not the Gospel made for us a straight, bright path, in which we cannot lose ourselves, and cannot be lost of God: the highway of the redeemed of Christ, lighted and watered, and defended from above, and terminating in the everlasting Zion?

ST. MATTHEW xxviii. 5—20.

5 And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified.

6 He is not here; for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.

7 And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you.

8 And they departed quickly from the sepulchre with fear and great joy, and did run to bring his disciples word.

9 And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him.

10 Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me.

11 Now when they were going, behold, some of the watch came into the city, and shewed unto the chief priests all the things that were done.

12 And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers.

13 Saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept.

14 And if this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him, and secure you.

15 So they took the money, and did as they were taught;

and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day.

16 Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them.

17 And when they saw him, they worshipped him : but some doubted.

18 And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power

is given unto me in heaven and in earth.

19 Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost ;

20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you : and, lo, I am with you always, *even* unto the end of the world. Amen.

Among many points of importance in this passage there is one of peculiar interest to ourselves on earth— it is the supremacy of the crucified Jesus, as disposer and governor of all things. “ All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.” Unto Him, who had so recently made experience of the weakness and misery of man ; who had just given such a proof of his unbounded love to man ; who had the form of manhood still upon Him, and was about to take it with Him to his universal throne. The whole government of this world was given into his hand. How delightful a thought to those that believe He died for them ! If one of a family be invested with an earthly government, it gives a prospect to all its members of advancement and protection. By whom, if we might choose, would we desire to be governed, to be judged, or to be provided, but by our most tried and surest friend : by the one on earth, who had shown for us the most love, the most sympathy, the most generous self-sacrifice ? To hear that such a one was henceforth to have the disposal of our destiny, would be enough to fill the heart with confidence, and rid it of every care. Such a one is Jesus. If we believe that for us He suffered the miseries of life and the agonies of death, we know that there was never love like his love ; we feel that we have no friend so

tried as He. Yet He, even Jesus, is our ruler here ; the sole disposer of our destiny ; for the Father hath committed all things into his hands. It is impossible to believe this, and let the mind dwell upon it with a realizing attention, without feeling every care give way, every apprehension vanish, respecting our temporal condition ; while in place of them the most exalted expectations, the most high and holy confidence, takes possession of the soul. With Jesus on the throne, the good of all the kingdom is before us, and we feel that all is ours. We go to Him with our wants, with our apprehensions, with all our schemes and undertakings, not as ordinary suitors to the court, but as the brethren and intimates of the prince, whom He has already placed nearest to himself, invested with his honours, and loaded with his favour. Is it reasonable, nay, without much unbelief, is it possible that we should go with downcast looks, and agitated hearts, uneasy for the present and fearful for the future, like one who has no sure dependence ? This assurance, when the apostles first received it from their risen Lord, was intended to enable them, and did enable them, to go forth on their new, and to themselves perilous mission. Why, but because it is not believed with a realizing faith, does it prove insufficient to keep our minds at rest in the ordinary difficulties and interests of life ?

2 CHRON. xx. 14—25.

14 Then upon Jahaziel, the son of Zechariah the son of Benaiah, the son of Jeiel, the son of Mattaniah, a Levite of the sons of Asaph, came the

Spirit of the Lord in the midst of the congregation ;

15 And he said, Hearken ye, all Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem, and thou king Jeho-

shaphat; 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.

16 To-morrow go ye down against them: behold, they come up by the cliff of Ziz; and ye shall find them at the end of the brook, before the wilderness of Jeruel.

17 Ye shall not *need* to fight in this *battle*; set yourselves, stand ye *still*, and see the salvation of the LORD with you, O Judah and Jerusalem: fear not, nor be dismayed; to-morrow go out against them; for the LORD *will be* with you.

18 And Jehoshaphat bowed his head, with *his* face to the ground: and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell before the LORD, worshipping the LORD.

19 And the Levites, of the children of the Kohathites, and of the children of the Korhites, stood up to praise the LORD God of Israel with a loud voice on high.

20 And they rose early in the morning, and went forth into the wilderness of Tekoa: and as they went forth, Jehoshaphat stood and said, Hear me, O Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem; Believe in the LORD your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper.

21 And when he had consulted with the people, he appointed singers unto the LORD, and that should praise the beauty of holiness as they went out before the army, and to say, Praise the LORD; for his mercy *endureth* for ever.

22 And when they began to sing and to praise, the LORD set ambushments against the children of Ammon, Moab, and mount Seir, which were come against Judah; and they were smitten.

23 For the children of Ammon and Moab stood up against the inhabitants of mount Seir, utterly to slay and destroy *them*; and when they had made an end of the inhabitants of Seir, every one helped to destroy another.

24 And when Judah came toward the watch-tower in the wilderness, they looked unto the multitude, and, behold, they *were* dead bodies fallen to the earth, and none escaped.

25 And when Jehoshaphat and his people came to take away the spoil of them, they found among them in abundance, both riches with the dead bodies, and precious jewels, (which they stripped off for themselves,) more than they could carry away: and they were three days in gathering of the spoil, it was so much.

Christians in this life are in the same position that Israel was: surrounded with enemies whom God does not think proper to remove—the world, the flesh, the devil—enemies whom they are to resist, but never to ex-

terminate while they remain on earth. Against this "great company" we have indeed no might, when they come against us as they will do, to drive us out of our inheritance. We can only say, with Jehoshaphat, "Our eyes are upon thee." The passage just read is the reply to such an appeal, make it when and make it where we will—"The battle is not yours, but God's." In some sense the believer has no enemies; for though there be an host engaged with God on his account, there is nothing spiritual or temporal that can harm him—all must, in the issue, work him good, and leave him the richer for their spoils; the better and the happier for whatever has seemed most adverse. "Ye shall not need to fight in this battle." How vainly have our hearts sometimes trembled before anticipated ills; trials that we feel we cannot bear; temptations we have not strength to resist; difficulties, without a human possibility of escape. Such was Israel's position between the Red Sea and the hosts of Pharaoh, and such Jehoshaphat's at this moment. Our fears are as needless as theirs; God will not let us meet an enemy that is too much for us. In such unequal battles, and we know not how many such are averted by an unseen Providence, we shall not be called upon to engage: they are exclusively the Lord's. We have only to do what Israel did; for they did not slumber in their tents, in a half-hoping, half-desponding expectation of what might happen; they rose early, they went forth with cheerful, confident alacrity by the way that their enemies were coming, in simple reliance on the word of God. "Believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper." Faith was the principle of action, and the condition of success. Above all, they sang the song of victory before

the day was won. This is the believer's peculiar privilege; he need not keep his songs for heaven; he need not limit his praises to what he has, or has had, nor his triumphs to victories gained. He can praise God beforehand for all that he shall need, for all that he desires; and if the song of gratitude for mercies past be grateful to the Almighty's ear, far more so is the song of faith, which gives joyful thanks for all that is to come. It was when this began, Ammon, and Moab, and the inhabitants of Seir fell.

ROMANS xiv. 1—12.

1 Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, *but* not to doubtful disputations.

2 For one believeth that he may eat all things; another, who is weak, eateth herbs.

3 Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him.

4 Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand.

5 One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day *alike*. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.

6 He that regardeth the day, regardeth *it* unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard *it*. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord; for he giveth

God thanks: and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not; and giveth God thanks.

7 For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself.

8 For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's.

9 For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living.

10 But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ.

11 For it is written, *As I live*, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.

12 So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.

Whether it be ourselves or others who are weak in the faith, this caution is necessary. Young and undecided characters are liable to be much injured by having their attention withdrawn from what is vital and essential in religion to endless inquiries and discussions respecting what is doubtful. There are truths about which no man is permitted to have his own opinion; which he that believes is saved, he that believes not is condemned. It is these truths with which the doubtful inquirer should occupy himself, and with such the more established in the faith should entertain the weak; for they are the things about which no man can be wrong and live. St. Paul assumes these when he says, "Whether we live or die we are the Lord's." If this is sure, we may well leave the rest to God and the individual conscience. Not as matters of indifference: nothing is indifferent that affects the Christian character: but as matters which each one must settle between himself and God, because the judgment of man is too fallible to entitle any one to form a standard of consistency. The things to which St. Paul alludes, as constituting the doubtful disputations of those days, viz. the distinctions between clean and unclean meats, the peculiar sanctity of certain days, &c., may well represent the many things about which real Christians differ in the present time—such as the observance of ordinances, compliance with customs, whether of the church or of the world, the use and enjoyment of the superfluities of life, dress, company, expenditure, studies, and pursuits; and the thousand other things about which the divine directions have been given rather generally than specifically. The apostle does not say that these things do not signify—every thing signifies in which there may possibly be sin; but he affirms that the dis-

cussion of them is unprofitable, because it is not the means by which they can be decided. Forbidding us to judge others, since God can do for them what we cannot, keep them from error and make them stand, he assumes that we have a rule by which we may always judge ourselves; thus putting an end to anxiety on the one hand and censoriousness on the other. If we would observe his rule, our decisions in all doubtful matters would be greatly simplified; and when we erred, it would not be much or long. St. Paul supposes that whether we do a thing or abstain from it, we give God thanks. It would not be often, I conceive, that an honest mind could go before the throne of God with specific thanks for an unlawful gratification; and I am sure that anything for which such thanks could not be given, might be decided at once to be unlawful. And if it were an observance from which we think ourselves freed, the rule would seldom fail us; it is only Christ that sets the conscience free, and He must have thanks for all: not verbal acknowledgments, such as the Pharisee made, but grateful, heartfelt thanks for each thing as it occurs. This, with that simplicity of purpose, that reference to God in all things, and fixing of the mind on God in all things to which the apostle alludes, when he says, "Whether we live or die it is unto the Lord," would relieve us from all dependence on the judgment of others, and all anxious dependence on our own: leaving us simply to give account of ourselves to God, who judges the intention rather than the act.

PROVERBS iii. 13—26.

13 Happy is the man *that* findeth wisdom, and the man *that* getteth understanding :

14 For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold.

15 She is more precious than rubies : and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her.

16 Length of days is in her right hand ; *and* in her left hand riches and honour.

17 Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.

18 She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her ; and happy is *every one* that retaineth her.

19 The LORD by wisdom hath founded the earth ; by un-

derstanding hath he established the heavens.

20 By his knowledge the depths are broken up, and the clouds drop down the dew.

21 My son, let not them depart from thine eyes : keep sound wisdom and discretion.

22 So shall they be life unto thy soul, and grace to thy neck.

23 Then shalt thou walk in thy way safely, and thy foot shall not stumble.

24 When thou liest down thou shalt not be afraid ; yea, thou shalt lie down, and thy sleep shall be sweet.

25 Be not afraid of sudden fear, neither of the desolation of the wicked, when it cometh.

26 For the LORD shall be thy confidence, and shall keep thy foot from being taken.

If we believe there is a supreme wisdom by which the foundations of the earth were laid, a divine understanding by which the heavens were established, does it become us to consider any thing upon that earth a chance, any thing beneath those heavens a fortuity ? Are we to suppose that folly disposes of what wisdom made, and mistake regulates what understanding planned ? If we believe that by the knowledge of the Almighty the dews descend, and the waters rise to preserve the natural world, can we think it is without his knowledge, or independently of it, the affairs of this world are conducted ? Is it likely that while infinite goodness occupies itself about the season's courses, the course of man's affairs is committed to human ignorance ? And if this would seem, as it must seem, a

strange and impossible supposition, does it become us, professing to walk by faith in the Most High, to express so much, or feel so much anxiety, as we often do, about the politics, as it is called, of the kingdoms of this world, the aspect and promise of the times? Attentive to them we should be, because our country may need our assistance, and must need our prayers. But surely we should not be anxious, we should not be afraid—we should not watch the mighty fabric of society as we would a vessel broken from its moorings, to see on which rock or quicksand it will run itself, no longer guided by the helmsman's hand. When a Christian looks into public affairs, it should be to see what God is doing; when he meddles in them, it should be distinctly by God's leading; and surely when he talks of them, it should not be in the apprehensive and desponding language of an unbelieving world, that both expects and intends to rule itself. Then, whatever we may see, whatever part we may be led to take, whatever may be the topics of the common talk, we shall lie down fearless, and rise up in hope; we shall sleep confiding, and awake rejoicing; the future is in hands where the child of God at least can trust it. The misconduct of the wicked may grieve him for their sake, but cannot alarm him for himself: their desolation when it cometh will not be his. Least of all can the mistakes and mismanagement of men disturb his mind; for he knows there is one above them who makes no mistakes, and leaves nothing to other management.

GENESIS xxii. 1—13.

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

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

3 And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt-offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him.

4 Then on the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place afar off.

5 And Abraham said unto his young men, Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you.

6 And Abraham took the wood of the burnt-offering, and laid *it* upon Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife : and they went both of them together.

7 And Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said, My father : and he said, *Here am I*, my son. And he said,

Behold the fire and the wood ; but where *is* the lamb for a burnt-offering ?

8 And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt-offering : so they went both of them together.

9 And they came to the place which God had told him of : and Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order ; and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood.

10 And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son.

11 And the angel of the LORD called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham : and he said, *Here am I*.

12 And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him : for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only *son*, from me.

13 And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and, behold, behind *him* a ram caught in a thicket by his horns ; and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt-offering in the stead of his son.

As an act of obedience to the divine command, nothing can be more beautiful than this narrative. There was no question, no hesitation, apparently no reluctance on

Abraham's part: he asked no explanation from God, and no advice from man; directions plainly and unequivocally given were simply and immediately obeyed. God's design could not be understood, but his command could not be mistaken; which renders the narrative most striking as a specimen of pure obedience. But it is not as an act of obedience, or of resignation, though it comprehends both, this transaction is chiefly to be considered. It was the faith of Abraham that was so deeply tried, and so strikingly exhibited; his obedience and resignation were but the offspring and manifestation of his faith. This the apostle Paul declares when he says, "By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac; and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, that in Isaac shall thy seed be called; accounting that God was able to raise him up even from the dead." Had Abraham been resigned, in the ordinary sense, to part from his only child, it would have been giving up the promise of God that he should have seed in him. Such a renunciation is not required of any one: the requisition was, that, relying still upon the promise of posterity in Isaac, he should do that which seemed to render it impossible. Had Abraham thought, that, when he struck the sacrificial knife into the bosom of his child, he should indeed part from him and his promised heritage for ever, it would have proved not the strength but the weakness of his faith. Manifestly he did not think so. He did not give up Isaac because he was willing that God should revoke his blessing, but because he knew that he could not revoke it: when he rose up early to put to death the heir of promise, he believed that he would be still his living heir. His faith was astonishing; his obedience, as it ever will

be, proportioned to his faith. To us, it is not an example of resignation to the will of God in bearing evil ; reason and philosophy have taught as much as that. It is an example of Christian faith, teaching what nothing else has ever taught, to believe the seeming evil good ; to trust God's word at the very moment when He seems to break it, and know that He will bless us in taking every blessing from us ; in pain, in sorrow, in destitution, to believe that all things work together for good to them that love Him ; in darkness, in sadness, in contrition, to believe that we shall be restored to peace and holiness ; and having the promise of the life that now is as well as of that which is to come, to see in all that happens to us, and all that is required of us, nothing but the unexplained goodness and faithfulness of God. If we have Abraham's confidence, we shall do as Abraham did—yield without a question to whatever is required of us, and thus become imitators of his obedience also ; and resigned we shall be, not to evil as such, but to seeming evil as a real good.

HEBREWS xii. 1—11.

1 Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,

2 Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith ; who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set

down at the right hand of the throne of God.

3 For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.

4 Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.

5 And ye have forgotten the exhortation, which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chas-

tening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him :

6 For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.

7 If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons, for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not ?

8 But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.

9 Furthermore, we have had fathers of our flesh, which corrected *us* ; and we gave *them*

reverence : shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live ?

10 For they verily for a few days chastened *us* after their own pleasure ; but he for *our* profit, that *we* might be partakers of his holiness.

11 Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous : nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.

Witnesses, who having run the race themselves and won it, hang like a cloud over our path to watch our progress and cheer us to the goal : while we keep our eye intently fixed on Him who gained it first, and sits with the wreath of victory in his hand, ready to place it on our heads. Thus benignant, thus persuasive is the language of divine consolation. It gives no reproof to sorrow ; it makes not light of affliction ; it does not come as the friends of Job did, to make charges against us, remind us of God's justice, and threaten us with his power. " Ye have forgotten"—the gentlest remonstrance—forgotten, what ? Not our sins ; they make the very anguish of our sorrow. Not the judgments of the Almighty ; that is the very thought that overwhelms us : poor comfort in the memory of these—but here is not a word of them. Ye have forgotten that which tells you not to fear them ; not to fear any thing ; not to faint at any thing. Not at the contradiction of sinners ; this wearied not Him to whom they were more opposed than they can be to you : who was more revolted by their sinfulness, more wronged by their opinions, more pained by their opposition than ever

sinner can be among fellow-sinners. He endured it and despised it, for the joy, the very same joy's sake, which is before us. Not for providential ills; these are the very tests and pledges of our Father's love, conveying at once the proof of adoption and the promise of sanctification—through them faith sees our title and our fitness. This last is the sweetest thought of all. Our earthly fathers chastened us, and we never took it to prove any thing but affection in them; but they chastened us according to their own short-sighted pleasure; sometimes injudiciously, sometimes unnecessarily, more in retribution of our faults, perhaps, than for any future benefit. Not so our Father in heaven. He has but one purpose when he afflicts us, and that an unerring one; but one motive when He rebukes us, and that a loving one—"that we may be partakers of his holiness." I believe that no child of God suffers one pain that can be dispensed with in his purification: nothing as mere punishment irrespective of improvement; because if he did, though it should be but a temporal judgment, it would be in a manner expiatory; and Christ has not paid the whole penalty of the believer's sin, if even the smallest part remains for us to pay. This makes no difference to the fact that God will visit in this life the sins of his people. He says He will; we see He does.—He must, because the fire only will burn out the dross; and to remain unholy is to remain unblest. But it makes a difference to the believer's view of his afflictions; to the spirit in which he accepts them; to his consolation under them. Do we know the restlessness of sin? Do we know the weariness of our mental infirmity? If we do, we know well that, grievous as the chastening may be, it is a small price for the peaceable fruits of righteousness.

ST. JOHN xvi. 5—15.

5 But now I go my way to him that sent me; and none of you asketh me, Whither goest thou?

6 But because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your heart.

7 Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.

8 And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment:

9 Of sin, because they believe not on me;

10 Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more;

11 Of judgment, because

the prince of this world is judged.

12 I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.

13 Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself, but whatsoever he shall hear, *that* shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.

14 He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew *it* unto you.

15 All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall shew *it* unto you.

16 A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, A little while, and ye shall see me; because I go to the Father.

Our Lord's specification of the office of the Holy Spirit, sufficient in itself to silence some opinions that have been entertained about it, confirms from his own lips the important truth that Jesus Christ is the one great subject of revelation, the whole manifestation of deity upon earth, the only theme of gospel preaching, and the only source of comfort. The Comforter himself had none to give, but as he gathered it of Him: the voice of inspiration had nothing to say but what it heard of Him; the Spirit of truth had no truth to communicate but that which concerned the Saviour of mankind. Does it not strike us how vain, how worse than nothing, must be any profession of religion of which He is not the all in all—the

ground of all hope, and the subject of all praise. By Him the Father does all that He does on earth—the government is upon his shoulders—the single medium of communication between Deity and humanity—the ladder whose head is in heaven, and its foot in dust :—Creator, Redeemer, Governor, all in one. Of Him the co-equal Spirit learns and speaks, in all that affects the interests of man. If we think we have been taught any thing by the Spirit irrespective of Christ, we are deceived—it is not his teaching. Perhaps we are convinced of sin ; but if unbelief in Christ be not the sin we are convinced of, it is not the Spirit's testimony. We may be convinced of righteousness ; but if it be not the righteousness of Christ, accepted for us before the Father's throne, we have learned of some one else. We may be instructed of a judgment to come ; but if we do not know that He, the Son of man, the crucified Jesus, will judge both the prince who has usurped his kingdom, and the people who have refused to have Him to reign over them, again our instructor is not the Spirit of truth. Such is our Lord's plain testimony in this passage ; he claims for Himself the power, the possession, and the glory. What shall we think of a religion—of our own religion, if it be such—that keeps Jesus in the background—affects the gifts of the Spirit more than the atoning blood from which they are derived—values its graces more than the love of Him from whom they flow—prefers to rest any where rather than on the name of Jesus ; and divide the glory any way, rather than give it all to Him.

ZECHARIAH vii. 4—14.

4 Then came the word of the LORD of hosts unto me, saying,

5 Speak unto all the people of the land, and to the priests, saying, When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh month, even those seventy years, did ye at all fast unto me, *even to me?*

6 And when ye did eat, and when ye did drink, did not ye eat *for yourselves*, and drink *for yourselves?*

7 *Should ye not hear* the words which the LORD hath cried by the former prophets, when Jerusalem was inhabited and in prosperity, and the cities thereof round about her, when *men* inhabited the south and the plain?

8 And the word of the LORD came unto Zechariah, saying,

9 Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, Execute true judgment, and shew mercy and compassion every man to his brother:

10 And oppress not the

widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor; and let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart.

11 But they refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears, that they should not hear.

12 Yea, they made their hearts *as* an adamant-stone, lest they should hear the law, and the words which the LORD of hosts hath sent in his Spirit by the former prophets: therefore came a great wrath from the LORD of hosts.

13 Therefore it is come to pass, *that*, as he cried, and they would not hear; so they cried, and I would not hear, saith the LORD of hosts:

14 But I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations whom they knew not: thus the land was desolate after them, that no man passed through nor returned; for they laid the pleasant land desolate.

The people of the land were God's own people—children whom He had nurtured and brought up: but they had rebelled against him. The priests were God's anointed ones; set apart for his own service; but they had refused to listen when He spake. There is a retributive justice stirring, to which it is most desirable that we give attention, particularly when evil things have overtaken us; when our pleasant land has been made desolate, and our comforts have been scattered to the winds; it is most

desirable that we trace back our misfortunes to their origin, to learn if it be not the fruit of our own tree that we are gathering, the harvest of our own field that we are reaping; that so our hearts may be more quickly broken, and humiliation prepare us for the return of peace. There are many ways by which God may be provoked to send affliction on us. It may be that by former sorrows we have not been humbled; our tears were not for shame; our mourning was not for sin. Because the seventy years' captivity was not enough to bring Israel to submission, a longer and a sadder captivity was to follow. When one sorrow does not suffice, another succeeds it; and another and another, till we consent to learn what God intends to teach us. Or it may be that in prosperity we have forgotten the promise of our tears; we have lost sight of Him; we have eaten for ourselves and drunk for ourselves, and in our plentitude rendered God no praise. Then assuredly we shall hear from Him: He will not, if He loves us, let us thus empoison our blessings to our own destruction. He will surely take them from us. There is yet another cause of suffering: we cannot be too fearful of it beforehand, or too sensible of it when it occurs. God sends us messages, and we will not hear them: He issues commands, and we do not regard them. Perhaps there has been something that we wished to do, something that we liked to do, or something that, like Jonas, we were determined not to do; remonstrances were heard in vain, advice fell disregarded on our wilfully closed ears: our own hearts, possibly, misgave us, but we made them hard as adamant, because it did not suit us to understand the voice of God, or the emotions of the Spirit. Then comes what must come. The infliction has very commonly a connexion,

more or less direct, with the sin that gave occasion for it. It is our wisdom, if possible, to trace it out; to find wherein we have offended, that we may be abased, and God may be justified when He judges; that we confess before Him the especial sin which led to the subsequent distress; not despondingly, as if we doubted of forgiveness; not vexedly, as if irritated against ourselves; but humbly and submissively, as accepting the requital of our folly. So will God's peace and love return to Israel.

JUDGES ii. 1—12.

1 And an angel of the LORD came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said, I made you to go up out of Egypt, and have brought you unto the land which I swore unto your fathers; and I said, I will never break my covenant with you.

2 And ye shall make no league with the inhabitants of this land; ye shall throw down their altars; but ye have not obeyed my voice: why have ye done this?

3 Wherefore I also said, I will not drive them out from before you; but they shall be as thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare unto you.

4 And it came to pass, when the angel of the LORD spake these words unto all the children of Israel, that the people lifted up their voice, and wept.

5 And they called the name of that place Bochim: and they sacrificed there unto the LORD.

6 And when Joshua had let the people go, the children of

Israel went every man unto his inheritance to possess the land.

7 And the people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the LORD, that he did for Israel.

8 And Joshua, the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died, *being* an hundred and ten years old.

9 And they buried him in the border of his inheritance in Timnath-heres, in the Mount of Ephraim, on the north side of the hill Gaash.

10 And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel.

11 And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim:

12 And they forsook the

LORD God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that *were* round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the LORD to anger.

This passage contains a most impressive lesson. Why did the children forsake the Lord God of their fathers, and become strangers to the works which He had done for Israel? It does not seem probable that they who had seen his works, and lived all their days devoted to his service, should neglect to teach their children what they knew. And why did the children follow other gods and bow themselves before them? Certainly not because the God of their fathers had broken his covenant with them. It was the result of the fathers' disobedience. They made a league with the inhabitants of the land; and since they desired the forbidden mixture, God, in his anger, let their enemies stay. They were required to throw down the idol altars; but since they could suffer the presence of things so offensive to their Lord, He, in his anger, let the snare remain. It was before these altars that the children bowed; it was by these people the children were corrupted. Can there be a more impressive warning, or one more needed? Made free from the bondage of sin, and separated unto God, the people of his kingdom are forbidden to associate themselves with sinners, or suffer willingly the presence of what is sinful. "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing." The command is positive, but it is most reluctantly obeyed—is it not too often disobeyed? "Neither did Ephraim drive out the Canaanites;" "neither did Jebulun drive out the inhabitants of Kitron." Each will keep something of the world that he renounces. One sees no harm in a

forbidden practice; another no danger in a forbidden place; the presence of God's enemies is desired; the things that offend him are easily endured; the plain command of separation is disputed against, and trifled with. Nay, are not our children brought to gaze upon the altars at which they may hereafter bow? Are they not associated with, perhaps intrusted to, those in whose steps they will hereafter walk, and whose idols they will hereafter serve? I wish the attention of every Christian parent might be fixed upon this chapter. Do we rely upon our precepts and example to counteract the evil influence to which we expose our children? So did perhaps the Israelites. Do we presume upon the covenant mercy of our God to bring them through the wilfully incurred temptation? Let us mark what He did in this case. For ourselves, many a thorn, rankling to the latest hour of existence, has been the punishment of such ungodly compromise. And which of us but might call some place "Bochim," in memory of the tears that such unfaithfulness has cost us?

ST. LUKE xvi. 1—12.

1 And he said also unto his disciples, There was a certain rich man which had a steward; and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods.

2 And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward.

3 Then the steward said

within himself, What shall I do, for my lord taketh away from me the stewardship? I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed.

4 I am resolved what to do, that, when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses.

5 So he called every one of his lord's debtors *unto him*, and said unto the first, How much owest thou unto my lord?

6 And he said, A hundred

measures of oil. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty.

7 Then said he to another, And how much owest thou? And he said, An hundred measures of wheat. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and write fourscore.

8 And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely; for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.

9 And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the

mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations.

10 He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much.

11 If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?

12 And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own?

This parable, like most others, is intended to convey a single truth: every apparent difficulty in it is removed, if we consider that the analogy between the story and that which it is intended to illustrate, is in the general inference, not in the minute particulars. The providence and forethought of the unjust steward, taking advantage of a temporary opportunity to provide for a foreseen period of destitution, and making the present so to subserve the future that he was prepared for the event, is the comparison applied to the Christian here, quite apart from the means he used—the means were wise in the wisdom of iniquity, since they served the end he had in view; and the end was wise in the wisdom of this world, since it tended to his own pecuniary interest. The believer's interest is to make use of his circumstances here, to secure himself an everlasting habitation hereafter; and his wisdom is to pursue the means by which that end may be most effectually accomplished. This is the whole design of the comparison, with the but too just comment, that the righteous are less assiduous and consistent than

the wicked in the pursuit of their own object. The mammon of unrighteousness, so called because the unrighteous one has now the predominance in it, is nevertheless the stewardship of the believer in this life: the things of which he is possessed, or which he makes use of in it; in short, this life itself. Unrighteous it is, by misuse, by perversion, and the influence of the wicked one, and thus it is not our friend; its pleasures inebriate, its cares distract, its riches and power corrupt us. But it may be made our friend;—of all that is in it, there is nothing that may not be made to subserve our eternal interest. By the interposition of divine grace and power, all does subserve it; and the wisdom here required of us is to work with that power, to be guided by that grace, in the use of this brief opportunity—that every thing with which we are intrusted, every thing with which we have to do, may become good to us here, and a security for our eternal good hereafter; verifying the apostle's words, "Whether the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come, all are yours, and ye are Christ's." Thus shall the accursed things become blessed, and the adverse things become favourable, and the unrighteous things be hallowed by redemption of the blood of Christ, and leave us indeed no enemy remaining. Alas! we are too often our own last enemy—our folly, our improvidence, our loss of opportunity, and neglect of means, remain to be vanquished when all beside is turned to our advantage; but until we be wiser in the administration of the little that is at our disposal here, how are we meet to be the inheritors of eternal wealth?

I KINGS xxi. 17 to the end.

17 And the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying,

18 Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, which is in Samaria: behold, *he is* in the vineyard of Naboth, whither he is gone down to possess it.

19 And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the LORD, Hast thou killed, and also taken possession? And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the LORD, in the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine.

20 And Ahab said to Elijah, Hast thou found me, O mine enemy? And he answered, I have found *thee*; because thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the LORD.

21 Behold, I will bring evil upon thee, and will take away thy posterity, and will cut off from Ahab every male, and him that is shut up and left in Israel.

22 And will make thine house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah, for the provocation wherewith thou hast provoked me to anger, and made Israel to sin.

23 And of Jezebel also spake the LORD, saying, The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel.

24 Him that dieth of Ahab in the city the dogs shall eat; and him that dieth in the field shall the fowls of the air eat.

25 But there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the LORD, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up.

26 And he did very abominably in following idols, according to all *things* as did the Amorites, whom the LORD cast out before the children of Israel.

27 And it came to pass, when Ahab heard those words, that he rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly.

28 And the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying,

29 Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself before me? because he humbleth himself before me, I will not bring the evil in his days: *but* in his son's days will I bring the evil upon his house.

Of the abundant instances of the efficacy of prayer recorded in the Holy Scriptures, this is perhaps the most extraordinary. It is not without reason inserted here; and we dwell upon it the rather, that it may have escaped the attention of some readers; or the important

intimation contained in it may be overlooked in some hour of need, when it might whisper consolation to the desponding soul. It has been sometimes asserted, that unregenerate nature cannot pray in any manner to be accepted by the Deity; a persuasion that operates most painfully and injuriously on the alarmed sinner who has not, or the scarcely awakened penitent who thinks he has not, any reason to believe himself the subject of divine grace. Prayer offered in the faith of Christ, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, is heard of course; but if we are not in Christ, if we are not partakers of his Spirit, can we pray effectually, or hope any benefit from our prayers? This is the thought of many a trembling soul in its deepest agony of contrition, unable to believe, in the moment of despondency, that this very agony is the Spirit's work. It may be the feeling, or perhaps the suggestion of Satan, to the more careless sinner, when some emotion of conscience, or of fear, would impel him to have recourse to prayer, could he believe the ear of Deity open to him. It is of immense importance therefore to be assured, whether nature can pray acceptably or not. I cannot venture to affirm, that nature ever did pray effectually without the stirring of God's Spirit; because this would seem to imply that man is capable by himself of some good thing, which we are forbidden to believe. But if every availing prayer is the work of grace, it must be in a manner in which grace acts on every man, not in its special influence on the regenerate soul: else could no prayer of the natural heart prevail. That man in his worst condition can pray, and may be heard of God, I think the case of Ahab puts beyond a question. In wickedness we are told that there was no one like him; and we have not the least reason to suppose he ever came

to permanent and effectual repentance, or died otherwise than under the extremest curse of God. Yet Ahab prayed once—perhaps it was the only time—in humility, in sincerity, and belief of God's threatening, and his prayer was heard—he was spared from witnessing the evil his sins had brought upon his house. Can there be a position worse than his, a moment more unfavourable, a heart more unfit, that any one should think it of no use to pray? Does it not rather appear that no prayer, by whomsoever uttered, provided there be in it the essentials of prayer, humility in ourselves, belief in the word and power of God, and sincerity in what we pray for, can go up to heaven without some effect beneficial to him that offers it?

EZEKIEL xxxvi. 22—33.

22 Thus saith the Lord God, I do not *this* for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for mine holy name's sake, which ye have profaned among the heathen whither ye went.

23 And I will sanctify my great name which was profaned among the heathen, which ye have profaned in the midst of them; and the heathen shall know that I *am* the LORD, saith the Lord God, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes.

24 For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land.

25 Then will I sprinkle clean

water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you.

26 A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.

27 And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do *them*.

28 And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God.

29 I will also save you from

all your uncleanness; and I will call for the corn, and will increase it, and lay no famine upon you.

30 And I will multiply the fruit of the tree, and the increase of the field, that ye shall receive no more reproach of famine among the heathen.

31 Then shall ye remember your own evil ways, and your doings that *were* not good, and shall loathe yourselves in your

own sight, for your iniquities, and for your abominations.

32 Not for your sakes do I *this*, saith the Lord God, be it known unto you: be ashamed and confounded for your own ways, O house of Israel.

33 Thus saith the Lord God, In the day that I shall have cleansed you from all your iniquities, I will also cause *you* to dwell in the cities, and the wastes shall be builded.

The honour of God is implicated in the salvation of his people. It is no assumption to say this, because He has said it himself, and drawn from it himself the blessed inference, that his people cannot be finally cast off, or left to take their portion with the world. In the typical Israel, this has been verified, no less frequently than it has been declared; and because there are promises to them as a nation yet unfulfilled, it appears to me impossible to doubt that there are temporal blessings yet in store for them. The election of the Jews to be a type of the election of grace, although a temporal, was not a temporary one; it is every where said to be for ever—the utmost extent of their national existence,—and the mention of it always terminates in prosperity: no where is the figurative dispensation described as terminating in desolation, in dispersion; which would be the case, if it were already terminated. To this extent the enemy would have a triumph; they would have taken from Israel their earthly heritage, and made the temporal election void. I cannot believe that God will suffer his name to be profaned by even such a triumph against the word of promise, by the revocation of even his temporal covenant. It appears to me, by the whole

tenour of the promises, that God's covenant with the Jews must terminate in a glorious restoration to their own land. But what most deeply affects ourselves, is the thing signified herein, the spiritual antitype of this temporal adoption. The Israel of God can never be forsaken—the adoption in Christ Jesus cannot be revoked—the Church of God, collectively or individually, may for their sins be made desolate for a season, and lie low before their enemies; but cannot be so lost to the distinguishing eye of Him who has chosen them out of the world, as to be finally amalgamated with it, to partake of its destinies, or perish beneath its enmity. From whence then have God's people any thing to fear? Not from their enemies, for these must be made to know that the Lord is God, by the sanctification of himself in us, before their eyes. Not from themselves, for He will cleanse us from our iniquities, and take away the heart of stone, and put his Spirit within us. Not from His abandonment, for it is for his own sake, his promise and his glory's sake, and not for any thing that we have done, that He is pledged to save us. God has made his own honour, and his people's safety one. The only thing we ought to fear, is, lest we be not his people; wherefore we are exhorted every one of us, to give diligence to make our calling and election sure.

ST. MATTHEW v. 1—12.

1 And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain; and when he was set, his disciples came unto him:

2 And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying,

3 Blessed are the poor in

spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

4 Blessed *are* they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

5 Blessed *are* the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

6 Blessed *are* they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

7 Blessed *are* the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

8 Blessed *are* the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

9 Blessed *are* the peace-

makers: for they shall be called the children of God.

10 Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 Blessed are ye, when *men* shall revile you, and persecute *you*, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.

12 Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

Is it too much to say, that whoever believes these words, believes the Gospel? I am sure there is nothing in it more adverse to our natural feelings, and the world's opinion; more impossible to receive, but in the faith of Christ; or to verify in any manner, but by the Holy Spirit's teaching. These are, in fact, the lineaments, sketched by a master's hand, of the true christian character, as separate and distinguished from the ungodly world. The poorness of spirit, is that sense of need, that conscious helplessness, that shrinking sensibility to danger, which can scarcely lift up so much as its head to say, "Lord, be merciful." The mourning is that deep contrition of the soul because of sins remembered, which the sense of their forgiveness but embitters; the remembrance which is so grievous, the burthen which is so intolerable to every awakened sinner. The meekness is that offspring of the former two, which manifests itself in the renewed character; the lowliness and submission and forbearance, that follow upon the discovery of our own guilt and helplessness. The hunger and thirst, are the restless desires the regenerate feel to be all that God

would have them ; to be freed from sin, and made perfect in holiness. The pureness of heart is that honest purpose, and upright intention, with which a believer devotes himself and all he has to God. The peacemakers are they, who because they are at peace with God, desire to be at peace with all, and withhold themselves from the strifes and contentions of this world's pride and emulation. The merciful are they, who, by a knowledge of their own misery, have learned indulgence towards the faults of others, and sympathy for their sorrows. The persecuted for righteousness' sake, the reviled for the sake of Jesus, are they whose contrition the world ridicules, whose humility it despises, whose appetite for righteousness it does not understand, whose sincerity it questions, and whose peace, if possible, it breaks. None answer to this description, but they who have received the Gospel in sincerity of heart. And who but they believe the blessedness of such a situation ? Not the worldly, for they despise it. Not the ungodly, for they oppose it. Not they who are halting between two opinions, hesitating between religion and the world, or they would surely be determined. So far from constituting the happiness of the natural man, there is enough in these beatitudes, to make him an object of contempt, or pity, to all around him. We are each one desirous to be blessed. Have we taken God's word, or man's, about the means ? If we are in any measure partakers of the character described, it need not be asked if we are partakers of its blessedness ; but if otherwise, do we believe the word of God, that such are the blest indeed ?

1 PETER ii. 11—23.

11 Dearly beloved, I beseech *you* as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul ;

12 Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles : that whereas they speak against you as evil doers, they may by *your* good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.

13 Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake : whether it be to the King, as supreme ;

14 Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evil doers, and for the praise of them that do well.

15 For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men :

16 As free, and not using *your* liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God.

17 Honour all *men*. Love

the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the King.

18 Servants, *be* subject to *your* masters with all fear ; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward.

19 For this is thank-worthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully.

20 For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently ? but if, when ye do well, and suffer *for it*, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God.

21 For even hereunto were ye called : because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps :

22 Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth :

23 Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again ; when he suffered, he threatened not ; but committed *himself* to him that judgeth righteously.

I think nothing is more manifest from the word of God, than that the followers of Jesus Christ living in a world to which they do not belong, and of which the kingdoms are not yet the kingdoms of their Lord, are abridged of what are sometimes called the equal rights of men : the right, that is, at all times to contend for what is due to them, and with earthly weapons, to maintain their claims ; even perhaps to struggle for the mastery, and aspire to rule. What has a stranger to do with the setting up, and putting down of rulers in a country that

is not his? What has a pilgrim to do with legislation, where he has not a home? Abraham dwelt long in the land which was his own by promise; but while not yet put into possession, he assumed no authority, sought no honours there, and took part in none of its contentions. "Man, who made me a judge and a divider over you?" was the indignant repulse of Him, who chose far other work in this world than to rule it, or maintain his own rights in it, and left to his followers a very different charge. If the church of Christ has any secular claims, they came not by inheritance from Him; Jesus bequeathed nothing of this world, but its hatred. What human policy has done, let human policy maintain. If it be the world's gift, let the world take it back; if it be God's they cannot. The disciple of Jesus has nothing to do with it: nothing, I am persuaded, that can entitle him to enter the noisy arena of this world's politics. "Hereunto were ye called"—not to the high places of earthly pride and power; but to quietness, subjection, and detachment: patient servants in a froward world, where all their glory is to suffer wrong, and all their praise to bear with the evil, without participation in the sin: disowned blessings of an adverse earth, where their only power is the word of truth and prayer, and all their defence is independence of it. If it be said, as it sometimes has been, that the people of God, whether as a body in public, or as individuals in the personal interests of private life, must seek their own with just the same tenacity, by just the same means, as jealously, as contentiously, as other men: maintaining their honours and their rights in every field of contention, public or private, instead of committing themselves to Him that judgeth righteously; then, if they must, this passage has no meaning in it.

GENESIS i. 26 to ii. 7.

26 And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

27 So God created man in his *own* image; in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.

28 And God blessed them; and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.

29 And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat.

30 And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein *there is life*, I have given every green herb for meat: and it was so.

31 And God saw every thing

that he had made, and, behold, *it was* very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day.

Chap. ii. 1 Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.

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

3 And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it; because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made.

4 These *are* the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens,

5 And every plant of the field before it was in the earth, and every herb of the field before it grew: for the LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and *there was* not a man to till the ground.

6 But there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground.

7 And the LORD God formed man *of* the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

A summary of man's first condition, a beautiful picture of his first happiness. Since then, our condition is changed indeed, but not so changed as we are. We talk of the bliss of paradise; and there are those who

think themselves hardly dealt with, that they should lose it by their first parents' fault. But consider what it was. It is not expulsion from Eden that constitutes our loss of happiness, nor the flaming sword of the cherubim that forbids our return to it. The bliss of paradise was not in the seed-bearing tree, nor in the peopled waters, nor the replenished earth; and might we have all these again, in our altered state of mind, they would be no bliss to us. It was the spirit that reigned there—the blessing of God that was upon it—the obedience of God that was in it. These are lost, and man himself is changed; this is the real fall. The earth is still fruitful, the moving thing still multiplies, the herb still bears its kind; but the image of God is gone—the obedience of God is gone—the blessing of God is gone. These were Adam's paradise; let us have these again, and we shall find one every where. And we may have them. Redeeming love has bought up the forfeited possession, and offers it us again, without money, and without price. That likeness in which he made us, he offers by his Spirit to renew—that willing subjection to himself, He invites us to return to—that blessing He graciously waits to give again. But man likes none of them. He would rather, if God permit him, remain the miserable sinner that he is: subjection is painful, and God's government an interference he could well dispense with; and on his blessing he sets but little value. To know how fallen we are, we have only to compare our ideas of happiness with the bliss of Eden, and see how little it would suit us. Ours is made up of things that are not lost: the really forfeited, we will not have again, because they are not to our taste. Small reason have the children to reproach the father, or think

God's sentence hard. He made all good, and man corrupted it; He offers to make all good again, and man prefers it as it is. He bestowed one paradise, and the father lost it; He offers another like it, and the children will not have it. I say another like it, because it is like in kind, though different in degree; and when the happiness of the redeemed shall be as much greater than Adam's, as it now is less, it will be still the same in kind: holiness, submission, and God's eternal blessing. Do we feel that we desire it? Should we like it?

LEVITICUS xix. 9—18.

9 And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field, neither shalt thou gather the gleanings of thy harvest.

10 And thou shalt not glean thy vineyard, neither shalt thou gather every grape of thy vineyard; thou shalt leave them for the poor and stranger: I am the LORD your God.

11 Ye shall not steal, neither deal falsely, neither lie one to another.

12 And ye shall not swear by my name falsely, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I am the LORD.

13 Thou shalt not defraud thy neighbour, neither rob him: the wages of him that is hired shall not abide with thee all night until the morning.

14 Thou shalt not curse the

deaf, nor put a stumbling-block before the blind, but shalt fear thy God: I am the LORD.

15 Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty: but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour.

16 Thou shalt not go up and down as a tale-bearer among thy people; neither shalt thou stand against the blood of thy neighbour: I am the LORD.

17 Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him.

18 Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD.

This is a portion of the moral law ; but a gospel argument is made use of to enforce it. Liberality, honesty and truth—veneration for God, and integrity to man—love, pity, and forgiveness ; all these as moral duties, are required of every man, and incumbent upon every man, without a law to enforce them, or a reason assigned for their observance. But God, when He requires them of his people, does give a reason ; beyond the moral obligation, beyond his own claim as sovereign lawgiver, or moral governor : He gives a pure gospel reason. At the end of the chapter it is said, “ I am the Lord your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt ; *therefore* shall ye observe all my statutes, and all my judgments to do them.” The nations that were before them, had the same moral obligations ; but they had defiled the land, their Maker had “ abhorred them ;” and as sovereign Lord of all, had cast them out, in strict impartial justice. Some persons fancy there was injustice in the invasion by one people of a land that belonged to another. But what made it theirs ? The land was God’s ; He lends, but never gives in such manner, as to part from his own propriety in what He grants. The Canaanites had defiled the land, and He took it back, to bestow it on others indeed ; but with the condition, that if they did the like, it should cast them out too : herein at least is no injustice. But a higher sanction is now added to the moral obligation, exactly applicable to ourselves, as believers under the gospel. The moral law is not abrogated, is not altered ; it is equally obligatory on every one in Christ or without Christ ; and he that transgresses against it, exposes himself to its penalties. But a more powerful, a more persuasive

argument for obedience is used by the gospel, as it is used in this chapter, superseding the former obligation without destroying it. "I am the Lord your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt"—"I the Lord am holy; I have severed you from other people, that you may be mine." This is the ground, the higher ground on which the believer's obedience stands, on which he renders it, and God requires it. There is enough for responsibility without this; but if it be so indeed, that God has redeemed us from the bondage of iniquity, and brought us to worship in his tabernacle—if He who is so holy, has indeed separated us from an ungodly world, to unite us to himself, and make us his in body, soul, and spirit, what a powerful appeal is made to us in this passage, to do the things set forth in it. Not because they are right—not because they are his law—that had been reason enough, and is reason enough to condemn whoever disregards them—but because we are his redeemed people, and He is in that peculiar sense the Lord our God. Thus does the law of love take place of the law of fear; not to loosen, but to increase our obligations to obedience.

GALATIANS vi. 1—15.

1 Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.

2 Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.

3 For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself.

4 But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another:

5 For every man shall bear his own burden.

6 Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things.

7 Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.

8 For he that soweth to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.

9 And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.

10 As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all *men*, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.

11 Ye see how large a letter

I have written unto you with mine own hand.

12 As many as desire to make a fair shew in the flesh, they constrain you to be circumcised, only lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ.

13 For neither they themselves who are circumcised keep the law; but desire to have you circumcised; that they may glory in your flesh.

14 But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.

15 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.

Man is too proud, corporately, as well as individually. The surprise he often expresses at the discovery of a fault, especially if it be the fault of a christian brother, is the result of an over-estimate of his own nature, in the person of another, an extension of the self-righteous spirit. God is not surprised. He treats man, from first to last, as a miserable sinner, in whom is no good thing: He puts the treasure of his grace into a base vessel, in which is neither intrinsic worth nor beauty. Man says he believes this; but if he did, he would rather be surprised when the smallest fruits of righteousness begin to show themselves: he would glorify God, and magnify the power of divine grace, for every good thing that appears, instead of wondering at the believer's imperfections. And whence are his impatience, his complaints, his anger against infirmities, that God bears with, that Jesus feels sympathy for, that the Holy Spirit takes time

to overcome? Are they not the offspring of nature's pride, indignant at every discovery of her corruption? We say continually, that there is no health in us. Do we mean this only of ourselves, or do we mean it not at all, that the symptoms of sickness so disturb our faith? In the spirit of meekness, as those that know there is in themselves no strength, and therefore expect none in another; that know themselves exposed to temptation, and therefore are not offended to see another fallen—as one who feels that he is nothing, and therefore has no right to expect a fellow-creature to be something: they that are spiritual, are to restore, not to reject the erring brother; to be humbled in him, not exalted against him, "Bearing each other's burden." And then the Christian is to return into himself, and bear his own; far heavier if he weigh it rightly, for he will know more evil of himself than ever he can see in others; or if there be any sin that is not in him, any temptation that has not overtaken him; in that will be his wonder and rejoicing, and to God the praise. There are those beside, who because they love not the gospel of the Lord, affect a great jealousy for his law; not that they themselves do keep it; but rather than admit the only test of salvation, faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, they demand to try all men by some other test, and if they are found wanting, do deny their pretensions to religion. But God forbid that we should glory, save in the cross of Christ. We make no pretensions but to be saved in Him; to be renewed in Him; to be miserable sinners justified by faith, and kept by grace. If this be not so, then is our glorying vain; but for the faults, the sins and imperfections that men see in us, or we feel in ourselves, they are indeed our burden, which we must bear for ourselves, and should

bear for each other, humbly, but without discouragement ; waiting till the new man be grown up to the fulness of the measure of the stature of Jesus Christ.

ST. MATTHEW xvii. 10—21.

10 And his disciples asked him, saying, Why then say the scribes that Elias must first come ?

11 And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elias shall truly first come, and restore all things.

12 But I say unto you, That Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them.

13 Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist.

14 And when they were come to the multitude, there came to him a *certain* man kneeling down to him, and saying.

15 Lord, have mercy on my son ; for he is lunatic, and sore vexed : for oft-times he falleth into the fire, and oft into the water.

16 And I brought him to

thy disciples, and they could not cure him.

17 Then Jesus answered and said, O faithless and perverse generation ! how long shall I be with you ? how long shall I suffer you ? bring him hither to me.

18 And Jesus rebuked the devil, and he departed out of him : and the child was cured from that very hour.

19 Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could not we cast him out ?

20 And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief : for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place ; and it shall remove ; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.

21 Howbeit this kind goeth not out, but by prayer and fasting.

Faith is belief in the testimony of another. Christian faith is belief in the word of God, which is the only testimony He has given us of his designs. Before the Scripture was completed, oral and mental testimonies were given direct from God, and of course were the subjects of faith. At the time in question, Christ in his

own person bore testimony to the purposes of the Father; and He had given commission and authority to his disciples to work miracles in his name, at a time when they had no other evidence to produce of their divine authority as ministers of his gospel. This commission being given them, was a subject of faith; and they were bound to believe they could do what Christ had commanded them to do: whence it is, that their want of faith in this instance, drew so bitter a reproach from their Master, followed by an assurance so strong, as to present a difficulty to some minds in the interpretation. "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain," &c. &c. The mountain was the first image that presented itself to the mind of our Lord, whose most familiar mode of instruction was by illustrations and comparisons, drawn from the objects around him. He used it, to designate any thing the most impossible to man's natural power. Its signification conveyed a truth as applicable to all believers, as to them that heard it first. For Christ did not say, "If ye have faith enough," as if there only needed a sufficient strength of faith to work any manner of miracle. He said, "faith as a grain of mustard seed," the least of all seeds; meaning, that the weakest faith was sufficient to effect the thing most impossible to man's unassisted powers, in conformity with the will of God. By the apostles it worked miracles, when they were commissioned to work miracles. It would have removed that mountain literally, and cast it into the sea, had that mountain stood in the way of any thing that God had given them to do. It does things more difficult, more out of nature every day, in every believer's heart. It removes that heart itself, more stub-

bornly fixed in sin, than the solid mountain on its base. It removes out of his way the powers of earth and hell, that stand between him and his God. It heaves off, and casts into the depths of oblivion, the weight of iniquity that is upon him. Faith will enable us to do whatever God has given and commanded us to do, however impossible it may seem; and really would be to our unassisted efforts. The reproach made to the apostles falls on us, whenever, with a duty before us, we shrink from the difficulties of it—whenever with a promise before us, we hesitate to take the comfort of it—whenever we are cast down, or appalled by obstacles, whether of a temporal or spiritual nature, that seem to stand between us and the peace which He has promised us in Jesus Christ—whenever, even in the concerns of this life, we see a mountain of untoward circumstances before us, and cannot rest in the belief, that God is able to remove them from our path.

1 COR. iii. 10—23.

10 According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise master-builder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon.

11 For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

12 Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble;

13 Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day

shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.

14 If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward.

15 If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.

16 Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and *that* the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?

17 If any man defile the

temple of God, him shall God destroy ; for the temple of God is holy, which *temple* ye are.

18 Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise.

19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God : for it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness.

20 And again, The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain.

21 Therefore let no man glory in men : for all things are yours ;

22 Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come ; all are yours ;

23 And ye are Christ's ; and Christ is God's.

There is but one true religion ; there has never been any other. All beside that man has called so, has been the device of man, but unacknowledged by the Deity. From the time that the woman's seed was promised to Adam, and sacrifices instituted to foreshow his death, religion has had but one foundation, which is Jesus Christ, and his atonement. On this one and only basis, divinely laid, and never altered, there has been much of other workmanship ; by deformity, by inconsistency, by instability, proved to be of man and not of God. Every new architect has had his own scheme of building, or at least his own ornaments to deck the edifice—every church has had something peculiar to itself ; almost every individual reserves to himself the right of private judgment on some point or other. Much of this has been miserable workmanship. Gold, indeed, there has been, and much precious truth in the various ordinances, liturgies and creeds of these separate churches and congregations ; but mixed sometimes with so much dross, such meretricious ornament, such worthless stubble, as cannot fail to be consumed, whenever God brings it to the proof ; and that with loss, for all error is more or less injurious ; wherefore the apostle bids us to beware of it :

the loss of labour, and of peace ; it may be to man even with much suffering ; to God the loss of that honour which can only be done Him by the truth. Yet so long as the foundation is laid aright, though a man may suffer loss, he cannot be lost. While Jesus Christ is the only hope of salvation, his atonement the only dependence, his blood the only plea, God does not reject the worship of that church, of that spirit, however much there may be in it that He owns not, and will finally rebuke. Whereas, be the superstructure as beautiful as it will ; let there be as many good things, as many fine things, as large an admixture of scriptural instruction, as much of moral or spiritual sentiment, as may be without this faith of Christ, God disavows it wholly, rejects it utterly. It is in vain to preach, in vain to hear, in vain to worship : an edifice without a foundation, must come to nought, and other can no man lay, than that which such builders reject ; therefore is it in the sight of God no church, no religion, no acceptable worship. The line that God has drawn, let not man refuse to see ; nor in admiration of another's wisdom, nor in reliance on his own, assume that there may be other criterions of devotion by which men are accepted or rejected ; other estimates by which religious ministrations may be valued.

PSALM xxvi.

1 Judge me, O LORD ; for I have walked in mine integrity. I have trusted also in the LORD ; therefore I shall not slide.

2 Examine me, O LORD, and

prove me ; try my reins and my heart.

3 For thy loving-kindness is before mine eyes ; and I have walked in thy truth.

4 I have not sat with vain persons, neither will I go in with dissemblers.

5 I have hated the congregation of evil-doers; and will not sit with the wicked.

6 I will wash mine hands in innocency: so will I compass thine altar, O LORD:

7 That I may publish with the voice of thanksgiving, and tell of all thy wondrous works.

8 LORD, I have loved the habitation of thy house, and

the place where thine honour dwelleth.

9 Gather not my soul with sinners, nor my life with bloody men;

10 In whose hands is mischief, and their right hand is full of bribes.

11 But as for me, I will walk in mine integrity: redeem me, and be merciful unto me.

12 My foot standeth in an even place: in the congregations will I bless the LORD.

An appeal to judgment has been sometimes thought at variance with the position of a dependent upon mercy—unmeet language for a suppliant sinner; and under this impression, as we have remarked on another psalm, some have thought it necessary to attribute these words to Christ, and to David only as a type of Him. If they are Christ's, they are his people's still the more, for all that is his is theirs. But they need not this interpretation. The appeal to God is made as every believer would make it, and should be able to make it; and we must not, I think, shrink from an examination of ourselves by it. There is a sense in which a Christian can appeal with confidence to the divine judgment. Deceitful as his heart is, and defective as his conduct is, he is sure of the integrity of his purpose; he knows what he desires; in whom he puts his trust; whose love is ever before his eyes, and whose truth is the light by which he walks. The Christian knows what he hates: how offensive to him is the company of sinners, how painful the presence of vanity and disguise, and all that opposes itself to holiness and truth. And he knows what he takes pleasure in: that it is every thing by which God's name is honoured, and every place in which his presence may

be enjoyed. Of his integrity thus far the believer does not fear to appeal to the judgment of his Maker, neither to declare it before men ; not to his own glory, but to the praise of Him whose wondrous work it is. But even should this not be so ; should he deceive himself as to his integrity, and be, in truth, less sincere in his choice than he believes himself : if there be still some love of sin, some dishonesty of purpose lurking in his heart, his invocation would not be altered—his language would be still the same, “ Examine me, O Lord, and prove me ; try my reins and my heart.” Discover every sin that I am unconscious of, lay open every hiding place of dishonesty, and distrust, and disobedience. Where the believer is deceived in himself, he least of all desires that God should be so, for then were his case hopeless indeed : his very consolation is that God cannot be mistaken in any thing that he beholds in him, and cannot be deceived by false pretences. Who would be so unwise as to hide from his physician the symptoms of disease ? Or why does he apply to one, but because he is not able to judge of the state of his own health ? The disciple of Christ has no sin that he desires to keep, and therefore none to conceal from Him who has undertaken to cleanse him from all sin : he has no expectation of attaining righteousness but by grace, and therefore would not have his want of it unperceived by Him who has promised to bestow it. His very integrity consists in this—that he would have his Father know all, and do all for him. If David’s language had been really the boast of a self-approving, self-confiding spirit, he need not have ended it with a prayer for redemption, and a cry for mercy.

LEVITICUS xxvi. 13—24.

13 *I am* the LORD your God, which brought you forth out of the land of Egypt, that ye should not be their bondmen; and I have broken the bands of your yoke, and made you go upright.

14 But if ye will not hearken unto me, and will not do all these commandments;

15 And if ye shall despise my statutes, or if your soul abhor my judgments, so that ye will not do all my commandments, *but* that ye break my covenant:

16 I also will do this unto you; I will even appoint over you terror, consumption, and the burning ague, that shall consume the eyes, and cause sorrow of heart: and ye shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it.

17 And I will set my face against you, and ye shall be slain before your enemies: they that hate you shall reign over you; and ye shall flee when none pursueth you.

18 And if ye will not yet for all this hearken unto me, then I

will punish you seven times more for your sins.

19 And I will break the pride of your power; and I will make your heaven as iron, and your earth as brass:

20 And your strength shall be spent in vain: for your land shall not yield her increase, neither shall the trees of the land yield their fruits.

21 And if ye walk contrary unto me, and will not hearken unto me; I will bring seven times more plagues upon you, according to your sins.

22 I will also send wild beasts among you, which shall rob you of your children, and destroy your cattle, and make you few in number; and your *high-ways* shall be desolate.

23 And if ye will not be reformed by me by these things, but will walk contrary unto me;

24 Then will I also walk contrary unto you, and will punish you yet seven times for your sins.

Such are the dealings of God with his people. There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus. Grace has broken the bands of death and the yoke of sin, and made them to go upright and justified in the blood of Christ. But they are not therefore freed from the moral government of God; they are, in fact, only brought under its more immediate and sensible control. God did not threaten to send Israel back into Egyptian bondage; and He does not threaten to send his regenerate

people, his adopted children, back to the chains of death and hell. But He does say that he will deal with them according to their works, and judge them according to their iniquities; not to destroy, but to reform them. It is of temporal, not eternal judgments, God is speaking here; and in reading the whole chapter we shall perceive that Israel had their choice—every temporal blessing was suspended on their obedience, while a fearful provision was made for the alternative. We, if we are of the family of God, have great promises for the present life: if they have not been fulfilled, it may be with us as it was with them of old—the conditions have not been kept. God does not proportion his blessings to our deserving; for we can merit nothing of Him. But He does proportion them to his own promises, and attach to them such conditions as He pleases. For example; when He promises peace to them that trust him, our trust does not deserve the peace; but it is the condition of it, and the only terms on which we can possess it. Who can say how peaceful and happy our lives might have been, had we walked nearer and more faithfully with God? When we make the choice that Israel made, and for the sake of some indulged sin or forbidden practice, fail in any one of God's commandments; breaking that covenant by which He engages to be our reconciled Father, and we to walk as dear children in his sight; although He does not cast us off for ever, He does most surely visit for our sins. But observe the mercy that pervades even his anger; it never strikes till it is provoked; it stops where we stop. The first appeal is to our gratitude; it is the remonstrance of love. "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt." How often, in some permitted sin, has this

persuasive word been sent to us, and we would not hearken! Threatening follows; but it pauses at the first affliction. Judgment is his strange work; it proceeds slowly and unwillingly. If the first trial does not humble us, and we will not give up the sin, He must punish us seven times more; yet still there is forbearance. God withdraws his protection, and withholds his blessing, but not yet is the punishment proportioned to the guilt. Surely it is with ourselves to stay the infliction here! If we will walk contrary, if we will continue the practice that offends him, plagues must follow proportioned to our sins, and God will walk contrary to us—will cause every thing to go ill with us till we consent to be reformed.

2 TIMOTHY ii. 1—13.

1 Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

2 And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.

3 Thou, therefore, endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

4 No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of *this* life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.

5 And if a man also strive for masteries, *yet* is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully.

6 The husbandman that la-

boureth must be first partaker of the fruits.

7 Consider what I say; and the LORD give thee understanding in all things.

8 Remember that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead according to my gospel:

9 Wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil-doer, *even* unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound.

10 Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

11 *It is* a faithful saying: For if we be dead with *him*, we shall also live with *him*:

12 If we suffer, we shall also reign with *him* : if we deny *him*, he also will deny us :

13 If we believe not, *yet* he abideth faithful ; he cannot deny himself.

Beside the sufferings common to all men, there is a sense in which believers suffer for Christ's sake, and with Him for the elect's sake, and in Him for their own sake—sufferings peculiar to themselves, and not participated in by the world. These sufferings are not expiatory—there is an altar of which they that minister must not in any wise partake. Not the smallest sin can be thus atoned for ; not the smallest failure or imperfection in our duties can be thus compensated ; in the character of expiation, God accepts no sacrifice but that of Jesus Christ. Neither are these sufferings meritorious, although they are made the condition of a reward. A gift is not less a gift for having a condition attached to it, if that condition be neither a procuring cause nor an equivalent of the gift. If I bequeath an estate, with the condition that the receiver assumes a certain name, or that he lives upon the property, it is not the less a free bequest. Faith is a condition of salvation, but not its meritorious cause ; repentance also is a condition, though it can merit nothing. In like manner suffering with Christ may be a condition of sharing his reward, though it can itself merit no reward. Our sufferings for Christ, those that are brought upon us by the profession of his name, may better be called honours than merits ; like some earthly dignities, first conferred, and then acknowledged as titles to something else. In this sense they are signs, evidences, or, as it were, certificates of our right to reign with him ; which is, I believe, the meaning in this verse : “ If we suffer,” &c. But St. Paul says he suffers also for the sake of others ; that is, for the good of others. As for the health of the human

body, some member of it is often put to pain ; so, no doubt, many Christians suffer that they may be more able to administer to others. In affliction we acquire the deepest knowledge of the human heart, and the quickest sensibility to its necessities, and the finest tact in administering to it. In affliction, too, we have often opportunities of ministration, which would not otherwise have occurred. And how often has the divine influence on a child, or a parent, or some other beloved one, had its beginning in some calamity fallen on those who would bear the infliction tenfold could they see in it the means of spiritual good to them they love. It may not be seen ; and yet it may be so. Lastly, the believer suffers for himself in Christ, that he may be made like to Christ, and so be fitter to reign with him. There is that in us which must die, there is that without us to which we must die, before we can live with Christ ; and suffering is commonly the means by which we are crucified to the world, and the world to us.

JOHN xvii. 9—21.

9 I pray for them : I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me ; for they are thine.

10 And all mine are thine, and thine are mine ; and I am glorified in them.

11 And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we *are*.

12 While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name : those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition ; that the scripture might be fulfilled.

13 And now come I to thee ; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves.

14 I have given them thy word ; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of

the world, even as I am not of the world.

15 I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil.

16 They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

17 Sanctify them through thy truth : thy word is truth.

18 As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world.

19 And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth.

20 Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word ;

21 That they all may be one ; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us : that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.

May it not be said that we all form too low an estimate of a Christian's privileges ? In this single passage we have expressions from lips that could not err, which, in their simplest acceptation, would seem to designate a state of being above all imagination blessed ; and if we could collate, from the whole Scripture, all that is distinctly stated of the believer's position now, irrespective of the future, we should have a description of blessedness such as very few of us enjoy on earth, or perhaps believe we might enjoy without presumption. In a single passage, we have nothing so strong, so beautiful as this ; which to our feeling, if not to our judgment, is made surer by being our Lord's own words ; at least, it gives them a personality, spoken as they were between the Father and Himself in presence of those whom they concern, which peculiarly commends them to the believer's heart. Of course we are contemplating a blessedness which is not of earthly kind, but it is designed for earth ; the Christian knows what it is, for it is what he longs for above all sublunary good. Why then does he not take possession of it ? Or rather, why does he not enter into the enjoyment of it ? For whether he enjoy his privileges or not, the condition of every child of God is what it is

here described ; what Jesus prays it may be—for when was prayer of his ungranted ? Himself at once the asker and the giver. And what does the prayer imply ? Security, in the power of God to keep his own ; safety from evil, in a world to which they do not belong, a world that hates them ; sanctification, not demanded of them, but conferred upon them ; perfection, not in themselves, but in that union which makes them one with a perfect Lord, partakers with him in all he is or has ; even in his own glory. What more than this can a believer want to make him blessed indeed ? He does want no more ; but his difficulty is to assure himself that he has this. Yet surely these are the words of one whose word might be taken, “Them also that shall believe on me”—the only appropriation made of this great blessedness. And the very reason given for the declaration of it is, “that they might have his joy fulfilled in them”—that being partakers in his life, they should not, through ignorance of their condition, be deprived of a participation in his joy. Did he not intend then that every member of his spiritual body should know it, believe it, and enjoy it ?

MALACHI iii. 7—18.

7 Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the LORD of hosts. But ye said, Wherein shall we return ?

8 Will a man rob God ? yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee ? In tithes and offerings.

9 Ye are cursed with a curse : for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation.

10 Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that *there shall not be room enough to receive it.*

11 And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he

shall not destroy the fruits of your ground : neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the LORD of hosts.

12 And all nations shall call you blessed ; for ye shall be a delightsome land, saith the LORD of hosts.

13 Your words have been stout against me, saith the LORD : yet ye say, What have we spoken *so much* against thee ?

14 Ye have said, It is vain to serve God ; and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the LORD of hosts ?

15 And now we call the proud happy ; yea, they that work wickedness are set up ;

yea, *they that tempt God* are even delivered.

16 Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another ; and the LORD hearkened, and heard it : and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name.

17 And they shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels ; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.

18 Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked ; between him that serveth God, and him that serveth him not.

“ What has God to complain of ? ” is the language of many a heart, though the lips be not bold enough to utter it. How bold, too often, to complain of Him ! Once He required, in tithes and offerings for his house, a small portion of the abundance He bestowed—a single wave-sheaf in return for a whole harvest ; but they gave him the blemished of their flocks, and the spoiled of their corn, and wondered that the windows of heaven poured out no blessing on them ; complained that they served God and kept his ordinances in vain. Now He requires the less costly offering of a devoted heart ; but He does not get it : the refuse of our thoughts—the coldest of our feelings—the weariest of our hours—these must do for Him. “ If I be a father, where is my honour ? and if I be a master, where is my fear ? ” This is the complaint of the Almighty ; but instead of regarding it, man goes on with his own complaining. Public difficulties or

private ills—gloomy forebodings or fretful retrospections—any thing that is, or has been, or by any possibility may be adverse to our wishes, suffices to make our words stout against the providence of God. Men think little of such talking : they will converse for hours upon the evils of the times, or the evils of their condition, and never suspect that their words are spoken against God ; that it is his government which is impeached when the proud are called happy, and the exaltation of the wicked is murmured at, and our calamities are charged to every thing but our own neglect of his demands upon us. But mark what is the mind of God about such talking. “ Against *me*,” saith the Lord. “ And the Lord hearkened.” How does it become Christians then to be careful of their talk : to mind that when they speak together, their words be such as are meet for Him to hear ; distinct from that language of the world which He reprobates. Spoken in his fear, spoken in his presence, whom the ungodly world forgets, it is impossible our language should be similar, although the subject of conversation be the same. It is not said what his people spake of ; but they spake as those that feared the Lord, and thought upon his name. There are many characters by which a jewel is distinguished the colour, the weight, the texture One mark by which the Lord distinguishes them that are his, is by their conversation.

JOB xxxi 19—35.

19 If I have seen any perish
for want of clothing, or any
poor without covering :

20 If his loins have not

blessed me, and *if* he were *not*
warmed with the fleece of my
sheep ;

21 If I have lifted up my

hand against the fatherless, when I saw my help in the gate ;

22 *Then* let mine arm fall from my shoulder-blade, and mine arm be broken from the bone.

23 For destruction *from* God was a terror to me, and by reason of his highness I could not endure.

24 If I have made gold my hope, or have said to the fine gold, *Thou art* my confidence.

25 If I rejoiced because my wealth *was* great, and because mine hand had gotten much ;

26 If I beheld the sun when it shined, or the moon walking in brightness,

27 And my heart hath been secretly enticed, or my mouth hath kissed my hand :

28 This also *were* an iniquity to be punished by the judge : for I should have denied the God that is above.

29 If I rejoiced at the destruction of him that hated me, or lifted up myself when evil found him ;

30 (Neither have I suffered my mouth to sin, by wishing a curse to his soul ;)

31 If the men of my tabernacle said not Oh that we had

of his flesh ! we cannot be satisfied.

32 (The stranger did not lodge in the street ; *but* I opened my doors to the traveller ;)

33 If I covered my transgressions as Adam, by hiding mine iniquity in my bosom ;

34 (Did I fear a great multitude, or did the contempt of families terrify me, that I kept silence, *and* went not out of the door ?

35 Oh that one would hear me ! behold, my desire *is* that the Almighty would answer me, and *that* mine adversary had written a book :

36 Surely I would take it upon my shoulder, *and* bind it as a crown to me.

37 I would declare unto him the number of my steps ; as a prince would I go near unto him.)

38 If my land cry against me, or that the furrows likewise thereof complain ;

39 If I have eaten the fruits thereof without money, or have caused the owners thereof to lose their life ;

40 Let thistles grow instead of wheat, and cockle instead of barley. The words of Job are ended.

There is no character so difficult to approach with the humiliating truths of the gospel as one strong in the sense of his own moral rectitude. To the vicious you can present his gross irregularities in evidence of the corruption of nature ; and his moral sense responds to the accusation. To the vain and frivolous you can exhibit the emptiness and uselessness of their existence ; and their vacant bosoms certify that so much at least of what

you say is true. But when a disciple of Jesus brings the gospel message to such a one as Job—when he comes to tell one so just, so virtuous, so generous and humane, that he is a miserable sinner, from the sole of the foot even unto the head unclean, the messenger of God feels almost embarrassed with his message; there is that before him which seems to falsify what he comes to say; and, humbled under a sense of his own sins, it needs all his faith in the divine word to lift his voice before one who appears so much better than himself. Yet contemplate the character of Job. Job was no empty boaster: undoubtedly he was all that he says he was, in relation to his fellow-creatures, and a finer character it is not in language to portray. The feelings of his heart, as far as he knew his heart or men could read it, were as noble and as guileless as his actions. God himself bears witness there was no man like him, adding reverence of the Deity to the eschewing of all moral evil. Whatever any natural man feels he is, let him compare it with what Job was, and see if it exceeds him. If not, this is the same Job who afterwards abhors himself, and repents in dust and ashes—the same to whom it is said, not by those miserable comforters whose ignorant talk about the Deity had condemned Job without convicting him, but by one who was before him in God's stead, young and backward in himself to speak, but to whom the inspiration of the Almighty had given understanding—by him it is said to the same Job, that he had spoken without knowledge, and his words were without wisdom—without knowledge of himself when he said, "I am righteous"—without that wisdom which is from above, the spiritual teaching of the Holy Ghost. Then who has a right to be surprised, if we bring them the same message? If we say, as Elihu to

Job, that notwithstanding their high moral rectitude, and the comparative beauty of the natural character, so long as they fortify and maintain themselves upon it against the humiliating demands of the gospel of repentance, in the sight of God they do but go in company with the workers of iniquity, and walk with wicked men.

1 PETER ii. 1—10.

1 Wherefore laying aside all malice and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings,

2 As new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby :

3 If so be ye have tasted that the Lord *is* gracious.

4 To whom coming, *as unto* a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious.

5 Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

6 Wherefore also it is contained in the Scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious : and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded.

7 Unto you therefore which believe, *he is* precious : but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner,

8 And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, *even to them* which stumble at the word, being disobedient : whereunto also they were appointed.

9 But ye *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people ; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light :

10 Which in time past *were* not a people, but *are* now the people of God : which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.

Jesus asked for his disciples, not that they should be taken out of the world, but that they should be kept from the evil of it. In the world, but not of it ; not intermingled, not confounded with it ; as a garden inclosed from the wilderness ; as a temple in a desert place ; as a tall fortress mid surrounding waters ; the people of God

stand alone in the community of men—distinct, though not withdrawn—separate, though not secluded—in constant intercourse with the world, but prominent by their unlikeness to it. And that which distinguishes them is the same at all times; the same everywhere: it is their acknowledgment of Jesus, and their assimilation to him. Let these be foregone, and the line of separation disappears; the fortress is dismantled; the fenced garden is laid open; the temple is unconsecrated, and its priests disrobed. Men have tried to draw some other line, to substitute some other distinction, less exclusive, and less offensive; but God refuses to acknowledge it. To them that believe Christ is precious: so precious, that he is never out of mind, or out of sight; never out of hearing to those that enter where his people are. His spiritual house is not a place where men come in and out, and see no vestige of him; no incense burning; no sacrifices offering; not a note of praise, or sign of adoration; where any one may come and go, and show Christ no reverence, and be welcome. This would be mockery even at an idol's shrine; but it is all the world desires. Keep only out of sight that stone of stumbling, that foundation disallowed; hide it, bury it, if it must be there, lest they hurt their taste or break their pride upon it; let his mute priesthood only not breathe his name, and there will be no need of separation. But this cannot be. His people are what He is; chosen, as He is, by the Father's love; precious, as He is, in the Father's sight; living stones of the same spiritual house; royal priests of the same holy nation. Like others not his people once, and once like others strangers to his mercy, they have been separated to this very end, that they should show forth his praises in a gainsaying world, that all who look on them

should be forced to think of Him. If they do this, they will be disallowed as He is. But shall God's peculiar people shrink from their peculiarity? Can they wish to be mistaken for something less offensive, less obtrusive, less distinct, and different from the world around them? It is impossible. Jealous of themselves in whatever can disguise or disgrace their holy calling, they desire only to be loved where their Lord is loved; to be welcomed where He is welcome: not fashioning themselves according to the former lust in their ignorance, to be acceptable to men, but aiming to be holy as He that has called them is holy, in all manner of conversation.

DEUT. iv. 32—40.

32 For ask now of the days that are past, which were before thee, since the day that God created man upon the earth, and *ask* from the one side of heaven unto the other, whether there hath been *any such thing* as this great thing *is*, or hath been heard like it?

33 Did *ever* people hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as thou hast heard, and live?

34 Or hath God assayed to go *and* take him a nation from the midst of *another* nation, by temptations, by signs, and by wonders, and by war, and by a mighty hand, and by a stretched out arm, and by great terrors, according to all that the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes?

35 Unto thee it was shewed, that thou mightest know that the LORD he is God; *there is* none else besides him.

36 Out of heaven he made thee to hear his voice, that he might instruct thee: and upon earth he shewed thee his great fire; and thou heardest his words out of the midst of the fire.

37 And because he loved thy fathers, therefore he chose their seed after them, and brought thee out in his sight with his mighty power out of Egypt;

38 To drive out nations from before thee, greater and mightier than thou *art*, to bring thee in, to give thee their land *for* an inheritance, as *it is* this day.

39 Know therefore this day, and consider *it* in thine heart,

that the LORD he is God in heaven above, and upon the earth beneath, *there is none else.*

40 Thou shalt keep therefore his statutes, and his commandments, which I command

thee this day, that it may go well with thee, and with thy children after thee, and that thou mayest prolong *thy* days upon the earth, which the LORD thy God giveth thee, for ever.

There is but one thing like it: one thing still more wonderful, of which this was the promise and the figure. The salvation of a people from the ruin of a world; a justified people in a world condemned; a family of God in the midst of the ungodly, is the wonder of heaven, the admiration perhaps of the whole universe. In all created worlds, it may be there hath not been any such thing as this great thing is: the redemption of the church among the sons of men. That God, who could have made himself a people out of the very stones, should have given such a ransom for the recovery of his lost ones, is a thought of too much magnitude for our minds to compass. How should we be able to read out a mystery which the pure spirits above were not able to look into? It is when the appeal is made personally to ourselves, as it was here to Israel, that the wonder is brought home to our feelings—is good for us to dwell upon—testifies to us that the Lord is God, our God; and provides the strongest motive to obedience. If any of us feel we are, or hope we are his people, it is good for us to consider it in our hearts, how we have become so. We were as others once, the born subjects of another king; till from the world where Satan reigns, God essayed to go and take us out; for no reason that can be suggested, but because He loved us. If we have had any experience in religion, we know how difficult a thing it was to do. By the voice of his Spirit He spake from heaven to our hearts; by trials and sufferings He melted and subdued

them ; by the great terrors of his wrath or the mighty hand of his mercy, he forced us out or led us out of our native land of bondage. And when this was done, how much was still to do ! Enemies greater and mightier than we are—temptations stronger than our resistance—sins stronger than our resolutions—difficulties too mighty for our faith,—we have encountered these at every step : they were in possession of every thing ; they occupied not our paths only, but our hearts ; our thoughts and feelings, and habits, and affections. They have been driven out from before us, by a power more supernatural than was exhibited to Israel, by interpositions more wonderful than ever Israel saw. Wherever we are upon our course to Canaan, this is what we have to look back upon : be it a longer or a lesser way, this is what the retrospect must show us ; and it is the deep, abiding consideration of it, that will give their full effect to the concluding words, “ Thou shalt keep therefore his statutes and his commandments,” and the annexed encouragement, “ That it may go well with thee, and with thy children after thee.”

MATTHEW xix. 16—26.

16 And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life ?

17 And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good ? *there is none good but one, that is God* : but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.

18 He saith unto him, Which ? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness,

19 Honour thy father and thy mother ; and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself,

20 The young man saith un-

to him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?

21 Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go *and* sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come *and* follow me.

22 But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions.

23 Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall

hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven.

24 And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

25 When his disciples heard *it*, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved?

26 But Jesus beheld *them*, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible.

An impressive example how much of the outward seeming of religion may be without the principle. This young man seemed to acknowledge Christ, inasmuch as he came to him for counsel, and called him "Master." But as Jesus was God, and had a right to be called good, I can only understand by his answer, that knowing the man's heart, that he did not believe him to be God, he asked why he ascribed to him an attribute of deity; thus rejecting the homage that was not offered to his divinity. In moral conduct, as far as human eye could penetrate, and as far as he had ever examined his own heart, probably the inquirer had been exemplary, and did not intend a boast. His duty towards God had not yet been named; and the love that Jesus felt for him, implies that there was in him all that is lovely in the natural character, probably all that man requires of man. That which at last convicted him of unfitness for the kingdom of heaven, was in the outward act no part of the moral law; for it had been no where written that a man should sell all that he has and give it to the poor; and, if he did St. Paul says, he might still be nothing. But the test, as

here used, contained at once the principle of both the law and the gospel. Of the law, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart." This did he not; since he loved his riches better. Of the gospel, which requires that we leave all for Christ. This he would not, but kept his wealth in preference. Manifestly, therefore, there was no real principle of religion in him; though to detect its absence and expose it, needed the eye and the words of Omniscience. It is an impressive truth: our Lord applies it more immediately to the rich, because the more a man has of this world's good, the more is he in danger of setting his heart upon it. But there are other things beside money in which a man may find himself too rich to part from all for Christ. He may be rich in wisdom, rich in good repute, rich in all outward manifestations of respect and duty towards a God whom he loves less than the gifts he has received from him, towards a Saviour whom he refuses while he calls him "Master." Well might Jesus illustrate the difficulty of such a renunciation, by a similitude of things impossible. The sorrow of the young man was not singular; many perceive the value of religion, and long to share its blessedness; but it requires too much. Yes, it requires more in renunciation of ourselves and of the world, than any thing but the power of God can induce us to consent to, and enable us to accomplish.

RUTH i. 1—17.

1 Now it came to pass, in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of

Beth-lehem-judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons.

2 And the name of the man ^{was} Elimelech, and the name of his wife Naomi, and the name of his two sons Mahlon and Chilion, Ephrathites of Bethlehem-judah. And they came into the country of Moab, and continued there.

3 And Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died; and she was left, and her two sons.

4 And they took them wives of the women of Moab; the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth: and they dwelled there about ten years.

5 And Mahlon and Chilion died also both of them; and the woman was left of her two sons and her husband.

6 Then she arose, with her daughters-in-law, that she might return from the country of Moab: for she had heard in the country of Moab how that the LORD had visited his people in giving them bread.

7 Wherefore she went forth out of the place where she was, and her two daughters-in-law with her: and they went on the way to return unto the land of Judah.

8 And Naomi said unto her two daughters-in-law, Go, return each to her mother's house: the LORD deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead, and with me.

9 The LORD grant you that ye may find rest, each *of you* in the house of her husband. Then she kissed them: and they lifted up their voice, and wept.

10 And they said unto her, Surely we will return with thee unto thy people.

11 And Naomi said, Turn again, my daughters, why will ye go with me? *are* there yet *any more* sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands?

12 Turn again, my daughters, go *your way*; for I am too old to have an husband. If I should say, I have hope, *if* I should have an husband also to-night, and should also bear sons;

13 Would ye tarry for them till they were grown? would ye stay for them from having husbands? nay, my daughters; for it grieveth me much, for your sakes, that the hand of the LORD is gone out against me.

14 And they lifted up their voice, and wept again: and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clave unto her.

15 And she said, Behold, thy sister-in-law is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods: return thou after thy sister-in-law.

16 And Ruth said, Entreat me not to leave thee, *or* to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people *shall be* my people, and thy God my God.

17 Where thou diest will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, *if ought* but death part thee and me.

Neither the beauty of this story, occurring, as it were,

in a sort of episode to the sacred history, nor the picture it exhibits of national manners, can be the main object of its introduction here. The Spirit of inspiration would not depart from his purpose, or step aside, to tell us of anything in this world unconnected with the history of redemption—the recovering of mankind from the ruin of the fall by the sacrifice of Christ. But in how many ways is this touching story connected with that great work. God has here, as everywhere, chosen the foolish things, and the small things of this world, to confound the mighty and the wise. Not among the princes of the earth was the Saviour's lineage to be traced; every distinction given Him among men was to be supernatural; never borrowed of this world's greatness. So with his genealogy—to give Him importance above every man, it was traced by the pen of inspiration: the only lineage, much as men pride themselves upon the point, that can be traced throughout: yet borrowing no consequence from that on which men pride themselves, the high station of their ancestry. The story of this Moabitish maid, gathering in the fields the boon of charity, forms no unimportant link in the Redeemer's history; for while in the male line the descent continued direct from Abraham, the adoption of the outcast world into the chosen family, was intimated by the marriage of Boaz with a Moabite; thus communicating to the promised seed of Abraham a Gentile descent also. From this circumstance the story derives its deepest interest; in that it becomes figurative of redeeming love, of our own adoption into the family of God. Aliens by birth and separate by nature, we may have much to part with before we can be united to the Lord. Loneliness and sorrow may seem to be in the change; it may be said to us, Thy sister is gone back,

thy gods are left behind—what we loved, what we trusted in cannot be brought along with us: our friends may leave us, and our idols must be left: but we are gainers in losing all for Christ. When the fixed determination of Ruth takes possession of the soul, her beautiful language becomes the language of our lips. There needs but to be stedfastly minded as she was, and the way is open, the acceptance sure. It matters not that we have been strangers; the commonwealth of Israel is free to us; the covenant with all its blessings, promises, and hopes is ours, if we will enter in. How much more did Ruth find than she expected in the house of her adoption, in the land of Canaan, in the family of the God of Israel!

PSALM xix. 1—14.

1 The heavens declare the glory of God: and the firmament sheweth his handy work.

2 Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge.

3 *There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard.*

4 Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun;

5 Which *is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race.*

6 His going forth *is from the end of the heaven, and his cir-*

cuit unto the ends of it: and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof.

7 The law of the LORD *is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple:*

8 The statutes of the LORD *are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes:*

9 The fear of the LORD *is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.*

10 More to be desired *are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honey-comb.*

11 Moreover, by them *is*

thy servant warned : *and in keeping of them there is great reward.*

12 Who can understand *his errors*? cleanse thou me from secret *faults*.

13 Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous *sins*; let them not have dominion

over me : then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression.

14 Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength and my redeemer.

The material world in all its curious workmanship, in all the magnificence of its beauty, does indeed declare the power of Him that made it, and should get him glory from the sons of men. But while the day and the night, and the firmament of heaven are represented as communicating to each other the wisdom of their Maker; while things inanimate are supposed to sing his praises, and exalt his name, the voice of man is not in unison with them, his ear has no understanding of their language. None of us, perhaps, are so insensible to natural beauty, as not to have, at some time, felt a pious exaltation of spirit towards the God of nature; but this is a transient, inefficient sentiment, which leaves the heart as far from God as ever: as much a stranger to his grace, although constrained to do brief homage to his power. Or if even in daily enjoyment of these beauties the mind maintains a more habitual sense of God's greatness in them, we may still be equally far from any true piety of spirit; unless we can pass with the Psalmist from things temporal to things spiritual: from God's works to his law, or as it is in the margin, "his doctrine," which alone converts the soul, and makes wise the simple. The testimony of the natural world has never done this; it can exhibit the glory of God, but cannot give to his fallen creatures an eye to behold it. The sun may rejoice to run his course, and

the moon to give her light; but man's hardened and corrupted heart cannot rejoice in any thing with a godly joy, apart from the statutes and testimony of the Lord; the testimony of his word, the statutes of his Gospel. Do we fancy that we worship God in his works, while his judgments and his righteousness are thoughts unwelcome to us? Such was not the Psalmist's adoration, and what can it avail us? The time is coming, when the sun shall withdraw himself, and the moon shall cease to give her light, and the beauties of the natural world shall perish. It is not in contemplation of these, that the servant of God is warned; nor to any feeling of devotion in beholding them, is the reward promised. We cannot better prove the value of such emotions when they arise, than by trying if we can proceed with this Psalm. While God's works delight the eye, do his laws rejoice the heart? Are his judgments sweeter to our taste, than those are to our sight; more desired, than the sweetest and the richest of nature's treasures? And does the contemplation bring us where David came—to a sense of our errors, and prayer against our sins?

2 CORINTHIANS v. 1—10.

1 For we know that if our earthly house of *this* tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

2 For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven:

3 If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked.

4 For we that are in *this* tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life.

5 Now he that hath wrought us for the self-same thing is

God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit.

6 Therefore *we are* always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord ;

7 (For we walk by faith, not by sight :)

8 We are confident, *I say*, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.

9 Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him.

10 For we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ: that every one may receive the things *done* in *his* body, according to that he hath done, whether *it be* good or bad.

It is to be doubted whether there is any warrant in Scripture for the gloomy aspect under which believers often contemplate their departure out of this world, or the terms in which it is ordinarily spoken of by pious men ; and if there is not, it would be surely better to change them for something more in conformity with the divine representation of that momentous act. Why do we call it our end, our destruction ? why do we call that which brings it, fatal, that which removes it, safety ? Say, they are common words, and words do not signify ; but they are not Scripture language, as applied to them that die in Christ : they were made for other tongues, and are in use to designate a far other death, than that which the Christian should anticipate. And is it true, that they are but words which serve the purpose, and have no influence on our feelings, on the minds of those that use, and those that hear them ? I apprehend not. We are creatures of habit ; as much fettered by habits of thinking and feeling, as by habits of talking or acting. When we pause to consider it, we know that the language of the apostle here is just, and applicable to ourselves in Christ, as well as to him. We know that death is not an end to any thing, but that which burthens us—that it finishes nothing but mortality—is

fatal to nothing but itself, when swallowed up in life. St. Paul did not wish to die, to put off existence, and be unclothed of conscious being, to which all nature is averse. He did not reconcile himself to death, as we hear men try to do, for he knew that the change was life. We know it too; and by an effort, and upon occasions, can bring our faith to bear upon it. But why is it not habitual? Whenever we think of our departure hence, why do we not think of home, and heaven, and happiness consummated, as images never severed from that thought? Why is dissolution to our minds a termination, a cessation, a destruction to any thing but that which we desire to be rid of, or shall have done with; and not rather the attainment of all for which we live, or wish to live? It is so in fact. I speak of those who have the confidence that Paul had of salvation, because they have the same earnest of the Spirit: doubting of our salvation is a quite different subject; but the apostle is speaking of those who do not doubt, because they walk by faith. With such, I cannot but think these gloomy thoughts of death are a habit that might be put off; or should be at least discouraged, by giving them the lie whenever they present themselves: and I think we might assist each other, if not ourselves, to this happier anticipation, by conforming our language when we speak of it, more to that of Scripture, and less to that of the world, which lieth in wickedness, and must die indeed.

ST. MATTHEW viii. 1—13.

1 When he was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him.

2 And, behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.

3 And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean: and immediately his leprosy was cleansed.

4 And Jesus saith unto him, See thou tell no man; but go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded for a testimony unto them.

5 And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him,

6 And saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented.

7 And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him.

8 The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under

my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed.

9 For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it.

10 When Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.

11 And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven:

12 But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

13 And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the self-same hour.

Christ never granted any thing, except to faith. As if to silence for ever all question of human merit, he granted not even a temporal blessing to any man's deserving. He never said to any one, "Be it unto thee according to thy works, according as thou hast done." He noticed nothing in the character of those who came to him to be healed, but their belief; and they urged nothing for themselves but their misery, and his own

power to heal it. What Christ did on earth, is but the pattern and figure of what he does in heaven: these miraculous healings of the body were all emblematical of the spiritual healing of the soul. Men dispute against this method of salvation, as if it were too easy, or too indefinite; yet end in finding it too hard, and too exact. So would the centurion, had he been of their mind. Small comfort to him would have been the answer of our Lord, if the belief he expressed had been a false one. If he had thought, as he approached Him, that he was making a doubtful and improbable experiment upon his power to heal a disorder much more likely to be cured by other means—if he had not indeed believed that Jesus need but speak the word, and his servant would be whole. “As thou hast believed,” neither more nor less—“as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee.” Are we all content to abide by the same answer? Easy as the terms appear, I am afraid there are some who would get little by the grant, in answer even to their own prayers. Which of the things that we have asked, or are going to ask in prayer this morning, do we believe that God will give us? Our daily bread, our temporal interests, and all the concerns of this life for which we appeal to Heaven—do we really so believe in the care of Providence, that a similar answer would send us away contented, and at peace? It is an important consideration, for the same terms have been prescribed from the same lips, “Whatsoever ye ask, believing, it shall be done unto you.” In spiritual things, it is the sentence we must all abide eternally—it will be done unto us according to our faith. If we believe that God is our reconciled Father, —that Christ has redeemed us from death—has taken

away our sins, has perfected salvation for us—if we believe the power of his grace, the sufficiency of his merits, the imputation of his righteousness, the renewal of our hearts by his Holy Spirit; or whatever else of all that He has promised, and the word of God has authorized us to believe, our Lord's answer to the centurion will be enough for us, when He shall repeat it to us before the Father's throne.

2 PETER i. 1—12.

1 Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ:

2 Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord,

3 According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that *pertain* unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue;

4 Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises; that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

5 And besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge;

6 And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness;

7 And to godliness, brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness, charity.

8 For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you, that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

9 But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged of his old sins.

10 Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if you do these things, ye shall never fall:

11 For so an entrance shall be ministered abundantly, into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

12 Wherefore, I will not be negligent, to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth.

impatient of discourses that dwell much upon the duties of our high and holy calling: insisting on being continually persuaded to what we are convinced of, while that which we have not, and never shall have learned sufficiently, the Christian character, is a distasteful subject to us. Thus, while God has spread his table with diversity of food, meet for the spiritual sustenance of each separate guest, the sickly appetite insists on taking exactly that which is least suited to our condition. One other thought the words of the apostle cannot fail to leave upon our minds. When Peter exhorts his brethren to become what they ought to be, he grounds his argument upon what they are. It is a just inference, that if we would make progress in all holiness of life and conversation, that end will be best promoted by the habitual sense of what we are: Called to glory and virtue, possessed of all things that pertain to life and godliness, partakers of the divine nature; escaped from the corruption that is in the world, and already in possession of exceeding great and precious promises.

EPHESIANS iv. 20 to the end.

20 But ye have not so learned Christ,

21 If so be, that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus:

22 That ye put off concerning the former conversation, the old man which is corrupt, according to the deceitful lusts;

23 And be renewed in the spirit of your mind;

24 And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

25 Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another.

26 Be ye angry and sin not:

stated, than in those passages which bear directly upon Christian practice; as if the more arduous the work, the stronger must be the food to uphold us in it. So in the present chapter, an exhibition of purity, gentleness and truth, so becoming the religion of Christ, so unlike the tone of this world's society, is accompanied by the only principle that could produce it—the principle of having been separated from that world by the divine will, united to each other by a new bond of fellowship, forgiven for Christ's sake, and sealed eternally by his Spirit to redemption. These things are not mentioned as the reward of compliance, but as the reasons for it; they are not to be the consequence, but the cause of our obedience. If we look over the whole chapter, we shall find the general bearing of the argument to be, that having assured ourselves of our vocation, having settled our faith on a sure foundation, been united to Christ, and sealed to eternal life; there is no more need to occupy ourselves with the means of salvation, with varieties of opinion, and diversities of doctrine, such as will ever be current among men; but rather to give our whole attention to that which alone remains to be done, the conforming of the character to the new position in which we stand; growing up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ. And who has so much leisure to work the work of God in this life, as he whose salvation is finished for the next?

NUMBERS ix. 15—23.

15 And on the day that the tabernacle was reared up, the cloud covered the tabernacle, *namely*, the tent of the testimony: and at even there was upon the tabernacle as it were the appearance of fire, until the morning.

16 So it was alway: the cloud covered it *by day*, and the appearance of fire by night.

17 And when the cloud was taken up from the tabernacle, then after that the children of Israel journeyed: and in the place where the cloud abode, there the children of Israel pitched their tents.

18 At the commandment of the LORD the children of Israel journeyed, and at the commandment of the LORD they pitched: as long as the cloud abode upon the tabernacle they rested in their tents.

19 And when the cloud tarried long upon the tabernacle many days, then the children of Israel kept the charge of the LORD, and journeyed not.

20 And *so* it was, when the

cloud was a few days upon the tabernacle; according to the commandment of the LORD they abode in their tents, and according to the commandment of the LORD they journeyed.

21 And *so* it was, when the cloud abode from even unto the morning, and *that* the cloud was taken up in the morning, then they journeyed; whether *it was* by day or by night that the cloud was taken up, they journeyed.

22 Or *whether it were* two days, or a month, or a year, that the cloud tarried upon the tabernacle, remaining thereon, the children of Israel abode in their tents, and journeyed not: but when it was taken up, they journeyed.

23 At the commandment of the LORD they rested in the tents, and at the commandment of the LORD they journeyed: they kept the charge of the LORD, at the commandment of the LORD by the hand of Moses.

Independence is the wish of folly, and the boast of pride. There is no such thing, and if there were, it would be a state the most miserable to an imperfect creature. We say, "we will judge for ourselves." You are an ignorant creature, and will judge wrong for yourself. "We will act for ourselves." You are an erring creature, and will act ill for yourself. "We will depend upon ourselves." You are feeble, and cannot

help yourself. The wish is folly ; but the boast is fiction. The gods many, and lords many, that have had dominion over us, prove the conscious necessity of our nature to depend on something ; the impossibility of being at rest, without something to depend on. Dependence is the creature's happiness ; the most entire dependence is the most perfect happiness. Ignorance of this truth brought rebellion into heaven, and sin into paradise—makes great part of all our misery in the world, and not seldom robs even the Christian of his rest : so hard is it to unlearn an error bequeathed to us with our first parent's blood, instilled into our minds by the great enemy of truth, and encouraged by the insubmissive tone of all around us. With the conviction of our dependence, there does not always come a delight in it ; or we resist in the detail, what we admit in the aggregate. How blest was the dependence of Israel in this journey ; how safe, how happy. And yet not more than ours might be, if we would. There is a providence over us, as perceptible as that cloud, if we would see it—as constant as that beacon, if we would follow it. But we resist. When powers and opportunities call us to go forward, to be active and zealous in our christian course, we calculate the difficulties, and make an estimate of our strength ; wish for a path more suited to our weakness : let us wait at least, till we are stronger ; we shall surely perish by the way. When privation of powers and opportunities require of us to stand still, to do nothing, to be passive in God's hand, we are ill at ease—Stand still in the way to Canaan ?—Do nothing for ourselves, and nothing for God ?—This cannot be, we shall never reach heaven thus. If our way is bright and smooth, we mistrust it—Is it safe to be thus happy ? this ease will

ruin us. If our way is dark and troubled, distrust again— Is it right to be thus grieved? our cares will destroy us. Restless children! When Israel travelled by the cloud that led them, they did not look out for sunshine or for rain—they did not wish to loiter or to hurry—they did not fear their road would be the wrong one; or turn aside to find another for themselves. If we admire this beautiful image of dependence, the safety, the happiness of it; be assured, we are only less happy, because we are less submissive; less safe we are not, for that cloud is the prefiguration of the Spirit of God, leading forward his people to eternal life.

ST. MATTHEW xv. 21—31.

21 Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon.

22 And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.

23 But he answered her not a word: and his disciples came and besought him, saying, send her away; for she crieth after us.

24 But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

25 Then came she, and worshipped him, saying, Lord help me.

26 But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the

children's bread, and to cast it to dogs.

27 And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table.

28 Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.

29 And Jesus departed from thence, and came nigh unto the sea of Galilee; and went up into a mountain, and sat down there.

30 And great multitudes came unto him, having with them *those that were* lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, and cast them down at Jesus' feet; and he healed them:

31 Insomuch 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.

That the doctrine of divine election presents many difficulties to the understanding, cannot, I believe, be disputed; but while the metaphysical enigma is left unsolved by revelation, nothing has been spared by explanations or examples, to remove from this doctrine every practical difficulty. It might be wished, that every one whom it embarrasses, would deal with it as the woman of Canaan did; and why but for that purpose is it recorded of her? The disciples would have sent her away; no doubt, because they believed the divine blessings intended exclusively for God's chosen people, the children of Abraham according to the flesh. Jesus himself does not deny this, but re-asserts the doctrine in the strongest terms: though doubtless he had in his mind the spiritual Israel, whom that people prefigured. Neither does the woman deny it; she knew the separation God had made of a peculiar people for himself, to be the subjects of his preferential favour; and she assents to the truth of the doctrine, without a dispute against its justice. This Canaanite had a suit to urge too important to cavil at the terms. She had witnessed the Saviour's power—she had observed his benignity—her daughter was the victim of an incurable malady—she believed that Jesus could make her whole. With fervent simplicity of faith, that won the Saviour's commendation, as well as the boon demanded of him, she admitted the abstract truth that seemed to be her exclusion, and proceeded with her suit. How wise this woman was! she had seen no one in the throng re-

fused, and she believed there was no limit to his power, and she traced no unkindness in his countenance. Do we think there is any thing in divine election, that bars our approach to Christ? Let us be wise as she was, and follow up her plan: admit that we know no reason why we should be objects of his mercy, but that we need it; no reason why he should help our misery, but that he can: admit all that seems written against us, but persist. Jesus answered her in ambiguous language, not to repel her, but to try her faith; for he knew he had a people among the Gentiles also, to whom he had been sent. If there seem to be ambiguities in the doctrines of the Gospel, they are there for the exercise of faith; not as obstacles or discouragements to any that would approach to Christ. In his dealings with others there is nothing to discourage us; we have seen many healed, when saw we any one refused? In himself there is surely nothing—what have we observed in him, or heard of him, that seems like unwillingness to save? or where has he told us, that his willingness is limited by his power? If there be those among his followers, who, by their unsound conclusions, ignorantly send us away, or bid us cease to cry to him, they have not their Lord's sanction for what they do.

PSALM lvi.

1 Be merciful unto me, O God; for man would swallow me up; he fighting daily oppresseth me.

2 Mine enemies would daily swallow me up: for they be

many that fight against me, O thou most high.

3 What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee.

4 In God I will praise his word; in God I have put my

trust: I will not fear what flesh can do unto me.

5 Every day they wrest my words: all their thoughts *are* against me for evil.

6 They gather themselves together, they hide themselves, they mark my steps, when they wait for my soul.

7 Shall they escape by iniquity? in *thine* anger cast down the people, O God.

8 Thou tellest my wanderings: put thou my tears into thy bottle: *are they* not in thy book?

9 When I cry *unto thee*, then shall mine enemies turn back:

this I know; for God *is* for me.

10 In God will I praise *his* word; in the Lord will I praise *his* word.

11 In God have I put my trust: I will not be afraid what man can do unto me.

12 Thy vows *are* upon me, O God: I will render praises unto thee.

13 For thou hast delivered my soul from death; *wilt not thou deliver* my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living?

Such is indeed the fact; the enemies of the righteous may change their character, but as long as Christ has enemies on earth, his people must have them too. Say, they have now indeed changed their character; so that the pious christian, honoured and kindly entreated by all around him, might be thought the beloved of men, as well as of God. Say, that he feels no more the hand of oppression, nor hears any more the word of scorn; and they who once gathered themselves in open fight against him, have now indeed so hidden themselves, that he has no perception of their existence. Such has been at times the case, and is at this day the case with many of us. But we need not therefore put aside these Psalms, as if we had no enemies to fear. It was his spiritual, not his temporal enemies, David prayed against; these last we are to pray for: it was for his soul, not for his body, they lay in wait to destroy; if outwardly persecuted for righteousness' sake, it was in the hope to turn him from that righteousness—it was for hatred of it, and not of him, they did it. In this there has

been no change. Satan changes his instruments, but not his purpose. He can lay wait for our souls beneath the smiles of this world's approbation, as well as in the fires of martyrdom. He can mark our steps, and wrest our words, through the eye of admiration, and with the tongue of flattery, as fatally as ever he did by mockery and reproach. When is an enemy so dangerous, as when seemingly reconciled? Such is the world to the believer now. It is reconciled to his profession of a faith, with which it is as much at enmity as ever—it will not injure him here, but it will ruin his soul if it be possible—man would swallow up, not his mortal life, but the life of God that is within him. And those worst enemies, our own deceitful hearts, never are they so deluding and deluded, as when the enmity between the world and God appears to have subsided. In such a position, the Psalmist's language is fit to be our own; conscious, but fearless of the danger. And the ground of our confidence can only be what his was: God having delivered our souls from death, the death of sin, and made us alive in Jesus Christ, alive by grace, will not undo his gracious work, or allow others to traverse it. If dead he would not let us perish, living he will not let us die. If he has taught our feet to walk before him, He will not let them fall upon the way. Could our enemies have prevailed, we should never have been thus; could sin and death have kept us, we should never have been where we are. Memory of the past is our assurance for the future; experience of God's power is our security. Happy if we can say with David, "This I know, for God is with me."

DANIEL iii. 13—23.

13 Then Nebuchadnezzar, in his rage and fury, commanded to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. Then they brought these men before the king.

14 Nebuchadnezzar spake, and said unto them, *Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego? do not ye serve my gods, nor worship the golden image which I have set up?*

15 Now, if ye be ready, that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of music, ye fall down and worship the image which I have made, *well*: but if ye worship not, ye shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace: and who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?

16 Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter.

17 If it be so, our God, whom we serve, is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace; and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king.

18 But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will

not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.

19 Then was Nebuchadnezzar full of fury, and the form of his visage was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego: *therefore* he spake, and commanded that they should heat the furnace one seven times more than it was wont to be heated.

20 And he commanded the most mighty men that *were* in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, and to cast *them* into the burning fiery furnace.

21 Then these men were bound in their coats, their hose, and their hats, and their *other* garments, and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.

22 Therefore, because the king's commandment was urgent, and the furnace exceeding hot, the flame of the fire slew those men that took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego.

23 And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.

The faith of these children of the captivity, little less striking than that of their father Abraham, holds forth to us a different lesson, in the quite different manner in which it was exhibited. Abraham had a special com-

mand, and a special promise, that seemed at variance with each other: he manifested his faith by accepting both; and while in obedience to the command he prepared to cut off, as it seemed, the promise, he believed that God would restore to him the child on whom the promises depended. These children of Israel had no special promise of deliverance from the fiery furnace, and they made no profession of expecting it. They had a general command not to worship any other God, and a general promise that the God of Israel would be their recompence and their defence, under every trial of their fidelity to Him. On these they acted. When tauntingly asked, what God could deliver them from the furnace, they were not careful to answer in that matter. They asserted the power of God to save them even from the fire, if He thought proper; and the certainty, that by some means He would deliver them from the hand of the oppressor. But this was not the faith on which they were prepared to meet their fate. "If not, be it known unto thee, O king, we will not serve thy gods." Whether or not it should be the purpose of God miraculously to save them, their determination was the same; it was not on supernatural interference, or any special promise of this particular mercy, they relied; it was on the eternal faithfulness of God, whose laws they determined to keep, whatever might be the issue in his providence. It is a beautiful example. Faith must have a promise to rest upon. To what God can do, there is no limit; but for what he will do, we have no reliance but on his word; and if we have not a promise, it is no subject of faith. God has not promised to his people a miraculous deliverance from temporal ills, though very frequently he does in his providence most wonderfully deliver them.

He has not promised, that no man shall lose wife, or children, or houses, or lands, or life itself, for his name's sake : many have done so. Supernatural interferences, though always possible, are not the legitimate subjects of Christian faith, or of believing prayer. If the three children of Israel, by reason of some secret encouragement, expected this sort of deliverance, they expressly declared that it was not on such an expectation they grounded their refusal ; it was on the known command, in reliance on the known faithfulness of God, who has promised to render to them that suffer in his cause, tenfold of all they lose. It is this that He promises to us—it is this we are to believe, on this to act, and for this to pray. More, is fanaticism ; less, is want of faith.

ROMANS iii. 9—20.

9 What then ? are we better than they ? No, in no wise : for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin.

10 As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one :

11 There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.

12 They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable ; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.

13 Their throat is an open sepulchre ; with their tongues they have used deceit ; the poison of asps is under their lips :

14 Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness :

15 Their feet are swift to shed blood :

16 Destruction and misery are in their ways :

17 And the way of peace have they not known.

18 There is no fear of God before their eyes.

19 Now, we know, that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them that are under the law ; that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.

20 Therefore, by the deeds of the law, there shall no flesh be justified in his sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

There is no doctrine human nature so dislikes, so pertinaciously resists, as that which levels all moral distinctions at a stroke, and puts mankind upon one basis before the Lord, in universal equality of ruin. No difference? Is the unimpeached character no advantage? Is the feeling heart, the generous hand, the mild and kindly temper, no advantage? Is there no profit in the externals of Christianity, in the forms and proprieties of religion, and general deference for the name of God? Much every way; but like the advantages which the apostle ascribes to the Jews, they are gifts and opportunities committed to us of God, which so far from justifying us before Him, can only increase our condemnation. Natural disposition, education, circumstances, opportunity, make a great difference in the characters of men: all feet are not swift to shed blood—all mouths are not full of cursing and bitterness, nor tongues accustomed to deceit; yet the charge is universal, and the apostle emphatically asks, "Are we better than they." No perhaps—if all the advantages providentially bestowed on us were abstracted, we should be found worse. Neither the kindly dispositions we brought from our mother's womb, nor the favourable influences that have followed us in life, can be counted ours in merit; though they may in deepened responsibility. Moral susceptibilities, and intellectual perceptions, are distinctions made by the Almighty in our favour, as circumcision, and the oracles of God were to the Jew; and we, like them, build madly our trust upon them, as if they were distinctions of merit before Him. But if it be true that all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God, the question of moral differences will come to be very differently adjusted. In whom are those short comings

most inexcusable, those sins most abominable? Admit they be less gross to outward sense, and less injurious to society; are they not more wilful, and more secretly offensive to God, in the man to whom he has given the highest moral powers, as well as the best external opportunities? What the law saith, it saith to them that are under the law: God asks of every man, what he has done with what he has: what he is, compared with what he should be: and every mouth is stopped: all are guilty, equally guilty, in that they have not known the way of peace and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord—in that they have not had the fear of God before their eyes, and the love of Him in their hearts, living continually to his glory, in the way of his appointment, in full understanding of his law, and perpetual seeking of his holy will and pleasure—perfect in all his ways. He who has not done this, stands on a ground than which there is no lower; he stands condemned, and must be saved by grace.

JOSHUA xxiii. 11—16.

11 Take good heed therefore unto yourselves, that ye love the LORD your God.

12 Else if ye do in any wise go back, and cleave unto the remnant of these nations, *even* these that remain among you, and shall make marriages with them, and go in unto them, and they to you:

13 Know for a certainty that the LORD your God will no more drive out *any of* these nations from before you; but hey shall be snares and traps

unto you, and scourges in your sides, and thorns in your eyes, until ye perish from off this good land which the LORD your God hath given you.

14 And, behold, this day I *am* going the way of all the earth: and ye know in all your hearts, and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the LORD your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, *and* not one thing hath failed thereof.

15 Therefore it shall come to pass, *that* as all good things are come upon you, which the LORD your God promised you; so shall the LORD bring upon you all evil things, until he have destroyed you from off this good land which the LORD your God hath given you.

16 When ye have trans-

gressed the covenant of the LORD your God, which he commanded you, and have gone and served other gods, and bowed yourselves to them; then shall the anger of the LORD be kindled against you, and ye shall perish quickly from off the good land which he hath given unto you.

What God declares, is the only real certainty. The word of a man may be perfectly worthy of credit, and yet not be true; because he is liable to be himself mistaken. The promises of a man may be fully to be relied upon, and yet be not fulfilled; because he may not have power to do what he intends. Neither of these things can be supposed of God; and yet the testimony of God is that which man most obstinately refuses to receive, or receives with the least assurance; and thus while a thousand things are relied upon and acted upon with confidence as reasonable probabilities, the only infallible certainty is held in continual incertitude. Which of us believes, with an abiding assurance of the mind, that every thing contained in this Holy Book will come to pass, while we admit it to be the written word of God? Some of us do not believe the threatenings, and some of us do not believe the promises: if it were not so, some would not walk fearlessly on the way to death, and others joylessly on the way to life. We think we are not responsible for our unbelief; but if there are proofs sufficient that this is the word of God, we are responsible to believe it is so; and if we believe it is the word of God, as most of us say we do, we are responsible to believe every syllable that it contains. Every doubt is sin; and it is as much a sin to doubt a promise or a threatening, as to

doubt a fact or an occurrence related in it. You would think it sinful to doubt if God in the beginning made the world; but are you equally convinced that God will bring into judgment every secret thought? You would be shocked to doubt that Jesus is risen from the dead; but are you equally assured that He giveth his Holy Spirit to them that ask him? If it were so, we should neither be so bold in sin, nor so timid in hope, as we are found to be. The word of God should need no confirmation; but if it does, Joshua might well make to us the appeal he made to Israel. What has failed hitherto of all that God has spoken? As far as we have seen the issue, has not every thing turned out exactly as God said it would? Is there one thing we can fix upon, and say, in this He deceived us—this does not answer the description given of it—this bliss is less blessed—this misery is less miserable—the consequence has not followed the contingency—the reward has been disconnected with its conditions? The experience of every hour of our lives, justly contemplated, is a confirmation of the word of God; a contemplation in which his people should grow of all men most ashamed for their mistrustful doubts.

ST. MATTHEW xxv. 1—13.

1 Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom.

2 And five of them were wise, and five were foolish.

3 They that were foolish

took their lamps, and took no oil with them:

4 But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.

5 While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept.

6 And at midnight there was

a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh ; go ye out to meet him.

7 Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps.

8 And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil ; for our lamps are gone out.

9 But the wise answered, saying, *Not so* ; lest there be not enough for us and you : but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves.

10 And while they went to

buy, the bridegroom came ; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage : and the door was shut.

11 Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us.

12 But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not.

13 Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.

Few passages of Scripture have been subjected to more variety of interpretation in our day than this ; of the meaning of which I am not aware that any doubt till recently existed. To a simple reader, unpractised in human criticism, it would present perhaps as little difficulty as any portion of holy Writ. It were to be wished that those who think fit to occupy themselves, as I know not why they should not, with those parts of divine revelation which are not yet made fully manifest, wherein men are at liberty to have an opinion because God's intention is obscure, would not lay their venturous hands upon the vital parts of gospel truth, by playing, for I can scarcely call it anything else, with the texts that most plainly unfold it. Such is the case here ; since the only doubt that can be raised upon this parable, is what is the test that will at last divide to life or death the professors of the same religion, apparently walking the same way, and sharing the same expectations. How bold is man that he should venture even to think upon a point like this, as if God could have left it to him to discover ; still more to have a new opinion, a singular opinion upon it, at this late hour ! If one person refers the parable to the

final judgment, another to a previous coming of our Lord, very well. If one takes the division to be of the living only, another of the living and the dead at Christ's appearing, very well. They may have their opinions, and the believer's hope remains untouched, his faith unshaken. Our Lord puts forth this parable to show that of those who call themselves his servants, and expect to enter into his kingdom, some when he comes will be found ready, and some not ready; some will be acknowledged by Him, and some refused. How many, or where, or when, let men dispute about: the vital point is *why*. Vital to every man, but left to no man's judgment; since it is no other than the test by which every man's salvation will be determined. Has this been left in doubt? Is it not rather explained throughout the word of God? Nay, has the revealed word any other object but to show the way to the Redeemer's kingdom, the difference between them that shall and them that shall not enter? The declaration of the text is simple; the comment upon it is the whole Bible. If we are in doubt what is meant by that oil the foolish virgins had not, there is scarce a portion of holy writ that will not tell us; in varied terms indeed to make it plainer, but an unvaried meaning. God has never made but one test, but one distinction, but one line of separation. Man may obscure it, and often does; but he can make no other. It is impossible for this oil to be anything, but that "without which no man can see the Lord"—that which if a man is not "he cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven"—that which if he has not "he is none of Christ's."

JUDGES xvi. 23—31.

23 Then the lords of the Philistines gathered them together for to offer a great sacrifice unto Dagon their god, and to rejoice: for they said, Our god hath delivered Samson our enemy into our hand.

24 And when the people saw him, they praised their god; for they said, Our god hath delivered into our hands our enemy, and the destroyer of our country, which slew many of us.

25 And it came to pass, when their hearts were merry, that they said, Call for Samson, that he may make us sport. And they called for Samson out of the prison-house; and he made them sport: and they set him between the pillars.

26 And Samson said unto the lad that held him by the hand, Suffer me that I may feel the pillars whereupon the house standeth, that I may lean upon them.

27 Now the house was full of men and women; and all the lords of the Philistines were there: and there were upon the roof about three thousand men

and women, that beheld while Samson made sport.

28 And Samson called unto the LORD, and said, O Lord God, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes.

29 And Samson took hold of the two middle pillars upon which the house stood, and on which it was borne up, of the one with his right hand, and of the other with his left.

30 And Samson said, Let me die with the Philistines. And he bowed himself with all his might; and the house fell upon the lords, and upon all the people that were therein: so the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life.

31 Then his brethren, and all the house of his father, came down, and took him, and brought him up, and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol, in the burying-place of Manoah his father. And he judged Israel twenty years.

Doubtless God consults his own glory in the instruments He makes use of for the deliverance of his people. If they were always chosen from among the most holy and consistent of his servants, a portion of their success would be ascribed to that circumstance; and the interference of divine power be less manifest. In all times it

has been so, that the workers of great reformations and deliverances in the church, though men of talent and zeal, and really men of God, have been eminently defective in much that pertains to the christian character, often extremely culpable in the means they resorted to, and most unwise in many of their proceedings. Their success is no sanction of their faults : it only takes from man the honour, and leaves it where it is due ; and it is very necessary to observe this, lest we fall into the error of supposing that a great reformer, or successful champion of the faith, is necessarily a sure authority for opinions, or an example for life and conversation. Samson is a striking instance of this kind. That he was among the eminent in faith, we know by St. Paul's mention of him in the Epistle to the Hebrews, as well as by the miracles he was enabled to perform ; but his character is strangely inconsistent, and his history a most painful one, in the miseries he brought upon himself by his own folly. Few, I suppose, would wish to take literally the triumph of his death in compensation for the sufferings of his life ; and if they would not, they must not take the example of his life in the hope of final victory over sin and Satan at the close. In his death, Samson was a type of Jesus Christ, and a prefiguration of the triumph of the believer in Him. Of Christ, who when his enemies thought to have their full triumph, died, not by their hands, but of his own free will, " I lay down my life, no man taketh it from me," and in doing so freed his people from their bondage. Of the believer, whose final triumph over his spiritual enemies is only promoted by their devices against him ; whose bitter conflict with sin will end in its extermination ; and faith be

triumphant in victory, in the very moment when death and hell are prepared to take full possession. When death laid hold upon the Lord of life, death itself became the victim, and its power was destroyed. When it comes to take possession of the believer, every vestige of its former power falls away, and "death is swallowed up in victory."

JOSHUA vii. 1—12.

1 But the children of Israel committed a trespass in the accursed thing: for Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerab, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed thing: and the anger of the LORD was kindled against the children of Israel.

2 And Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which *is* beside Beth-aven, on the east side of Beth-el, and spake unto them, saying, Go up and view the country. And the men went up and viewed Ai.

3 And they returned to Joshua, and said unto him, Let not all the people go up; but let about two or three thousand men go up and smite Ai; *and* make not all the people to labour thither; for they *are but* few.

4 So there went up thither of the people about three thousand men: and they fled before the men of Ai.

5 And the men of Ai smote

of them about thirty and six men: for they chased them *from* before the gate *even* unto Shebarim, and smote them in the going down: wherefore the hearts of the people melted, and became as water.

6 And Joshua rent his clothes, and fell to the earth upon his face before the ark of the LORD until the even tide, he and the elders of Israel, and put dust upon their heads.

7 And Joshua said, Alas! O Lord GOD, wherefore hast thou at all brought this people over Jordan, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? Would to God we had been content, and dwelt on the other side Jordan!

8 O LORD, what shall I say when Israel turneth their backs before their enemies!

9 For the Canaanites, and all the inhabitants of the land, shall hear *of it*, and shall environ us round, and cut off our name from the earth: and what

wilt thou do unto thy great name?

10 And the LORD said unto Joshua, Get thee up; wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face?

11 Israel hath sinned, and they have also transgressed my covenant which I commanded them: for they have even taken of the accursed thing, and have

also stolen, and dissembled also, and they have put *it* even among their own stuff.

12 Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, *but* turned *their* backs before their enemies, because they were accursed: neither will I be with you any more, except ye destroy the accursed from among you.

Israel never fled before their enemies while God was with them; when He abandoned them they never stood. Their whole history is but a repetition of these facts; and God in no instance left them so to fly, but on occasion of some great transgression. It is the history of the church of God in this and every age. Our fears are misplaced when it is her enemies we fear; it is only her own corruptions that can endanger her. Our efforts are misplaced when we go out against her enemies, without first inquiring whether God is with us; it is only He who can maintain her. Whenever there are signs of danger, whenever there are appearances of weakness and decay, the first thing necessary is to inquire where the wedge of gold and the shekels of silver are hidden: the corruption may be with the few—only one had taken of the spoil of Jericho; but if the accursed thing be tolerated, be suffered to remain, the whole must turn their backs before their enemies, for God will turn his back upon the church, until the offensive thing shall be removed. It is an important consideration at this moment; when all seems preparing for a conflict. Whatever is true of the church of Christ is true of its members individually; and nothing is oftener reacted in the history of believers than this af-

fair of Ai. A Christian finds that he makes no progress in the divine life ; gets no victory over his sins ; is cast down and beaten back in every fresh struggle with the adversary, till his heart melts and becomes as water within him. He renews his resolutions, he implores strength from God, he goes again to the encounter ; but has he looked to the secret places of his bosom ? Is he sure there is not something kept that should be put away ? Some sinful practice perhaps, or forbidden association, or evil passion, of which he made a reserve when he separated from the world to devote himself to God. Such a thing is often the secret of our failures. We may be very honest in our struggle against sin in general, and yet have some one sin that we indulge ; we may fight manfully against the world without us, and yet have something of its pride within which we intend to keep. Many a year of unsuccessful warfare has thus been waged, and the reason not suspected. And Joshua's fear comes often to be realized ; the Canaanites shall hear of it. Mankind are quick to mark the failure of God's people ; and instead of attributing it as they should to some remaining sin, the great name of God is arraigned, as if he abandoned or disowned them.

REVELATIONS xxii. 10—20.

10 And he saith unto me, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book : for the time is at hand.

11 He that is unjust, let him be unjust still : and he which

is filthy, let him be filthy still : and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still : and he that is holy, let him be holy still.

12 And behold, I come quickly ; and my reward is

with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.

13 I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last.

14 Blessed *are* they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.

15 For without *are* dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie.

16 I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, *and* the bright and morning star.

17 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.

18 For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book:

19 And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and *from* the things which are written in this book.

20 He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly; Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.

These are the closing words of inspiration: the last that are, or ever, I believe, in this dispensation, will be of divine authority. St. John was the latest survivor of the inspired apostles, and these were probably his last written words. Having cast his prophetic eye through the whole remaining space of time, and read out the churches' destiny, John was inspired to write the things that he heard and saw. Thus the revelation of Jesus Christ remains complete, from the first promise of Him in Eden to the final consummation of his glorious work: the testament is closed; and he that testifies puts his signet on it, and inscribes it with his blessing and his curse. Blessed is he that reads, and he that keeps: cursed is he that adds to or takes from it. There is no promise of more; there is no need of more; and I think every word of this last address confirms the certainty that there will

be no more revelation, till Jesus himself appears. Contemplated thus, the passage is deeply interesting ; most meet conclusion for this precious book. All that is, or has been, is explained as far as concerns the welfare of man to know it : all that will be, is so declared that though as yet we understand it not, it will be fully developed as it occurs. To bring good out of evil, to bring life out of death, to make sin conduce to holiness, and misery to bliss ; and from the fall of man and his rebellion to educe the greater glory to the Creator, and the higher exaltation to the creature, has been the occupation of this long interval, the work of Deity throughout the course of time. But of this our text announces the termination ; gives notice of an hour at hand when evil must remain evil, and misery must remain misery, and the corrupt continue in corruption, and the fallen continue fallen for ever : with the blessed contrast that the holy and the happy shall be no more exposed to a reverse. We trace our own concern in every portion of this volume : how do we stand affected by the close ? Can we say " Come " to such an end as this ? The Spirit, the voice of the Triune Deity, desires that it should come ! The bride, the spiritual body of the redeemed, desires that it should come ; and all we who hear are bidden to repeat the wish. But lest there should be still some penitent voice that cannot—some trembling saint that dare not—as if mercy were determined to have the last word, a break is made even in this closing strain of confidence and joy, to give the invitation once again, that those who still thirst may come and freely drink ; that those who have not yet the certainty of life, may freely take it. If our hearts refuse to utter invocations that bid Jesus come to us, let us hear the last lingering word of mercy that bids us come to

Him; it began this holy book; it pervades every page of it; it loiters to the very last; outlives, as it were, the close of its own story: but still there is an end; there is a last "Amen," which seals our doom for ever.

THE END.

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