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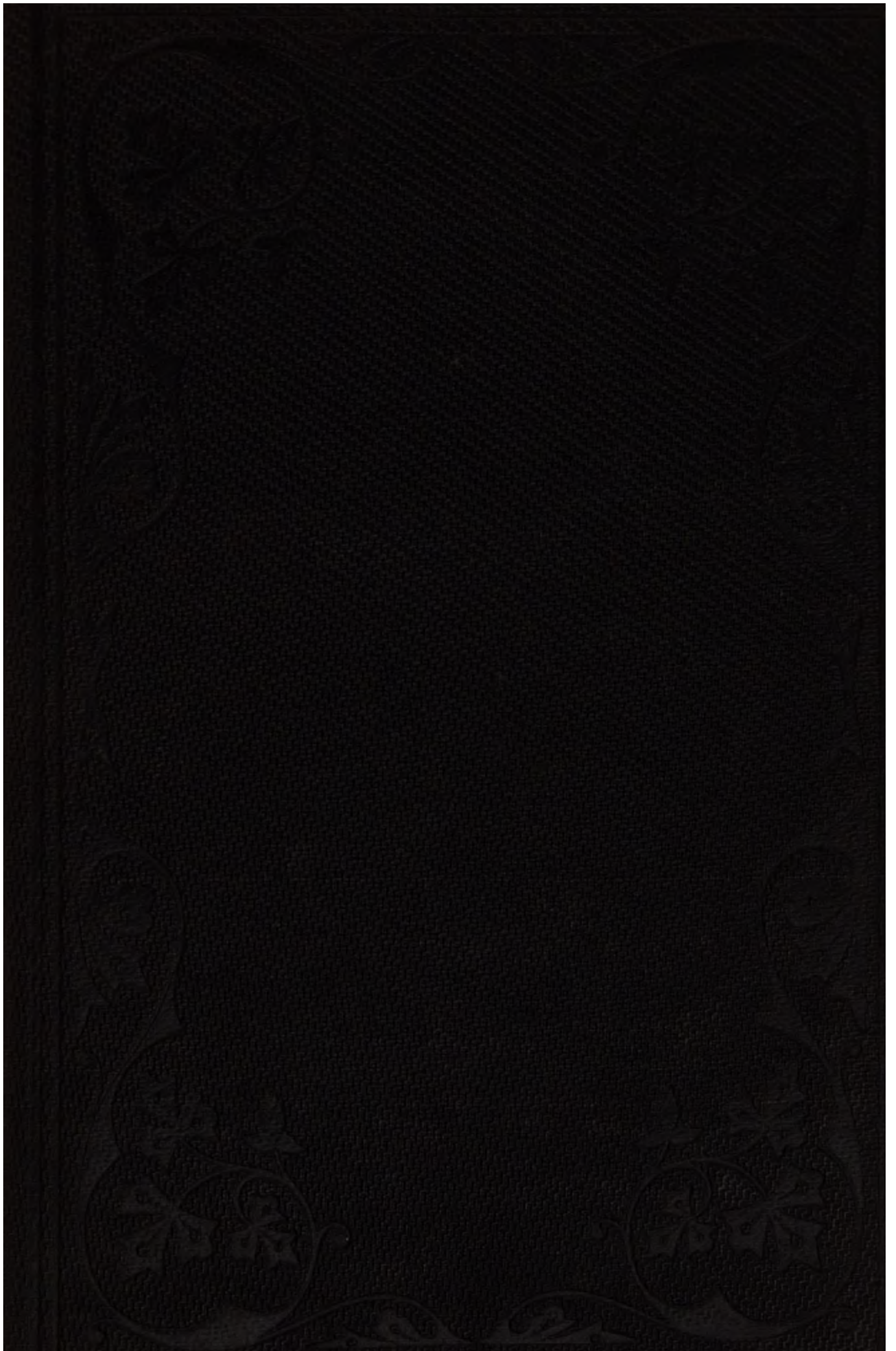
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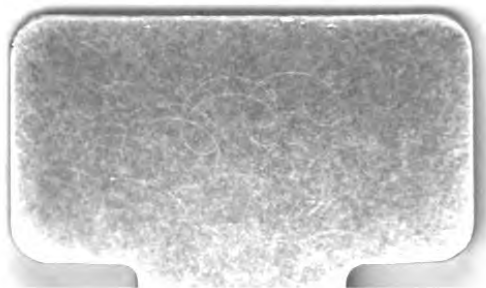


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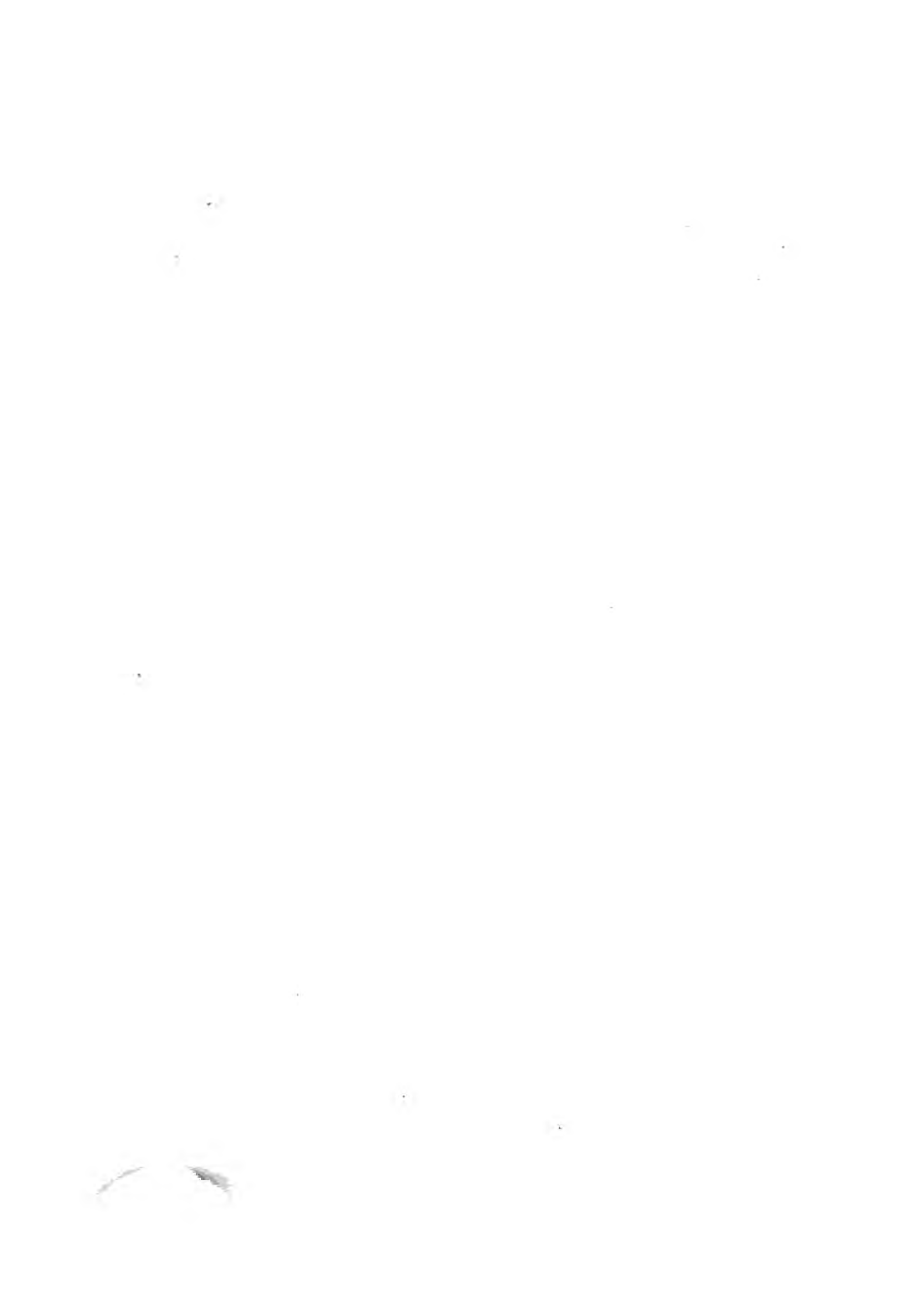




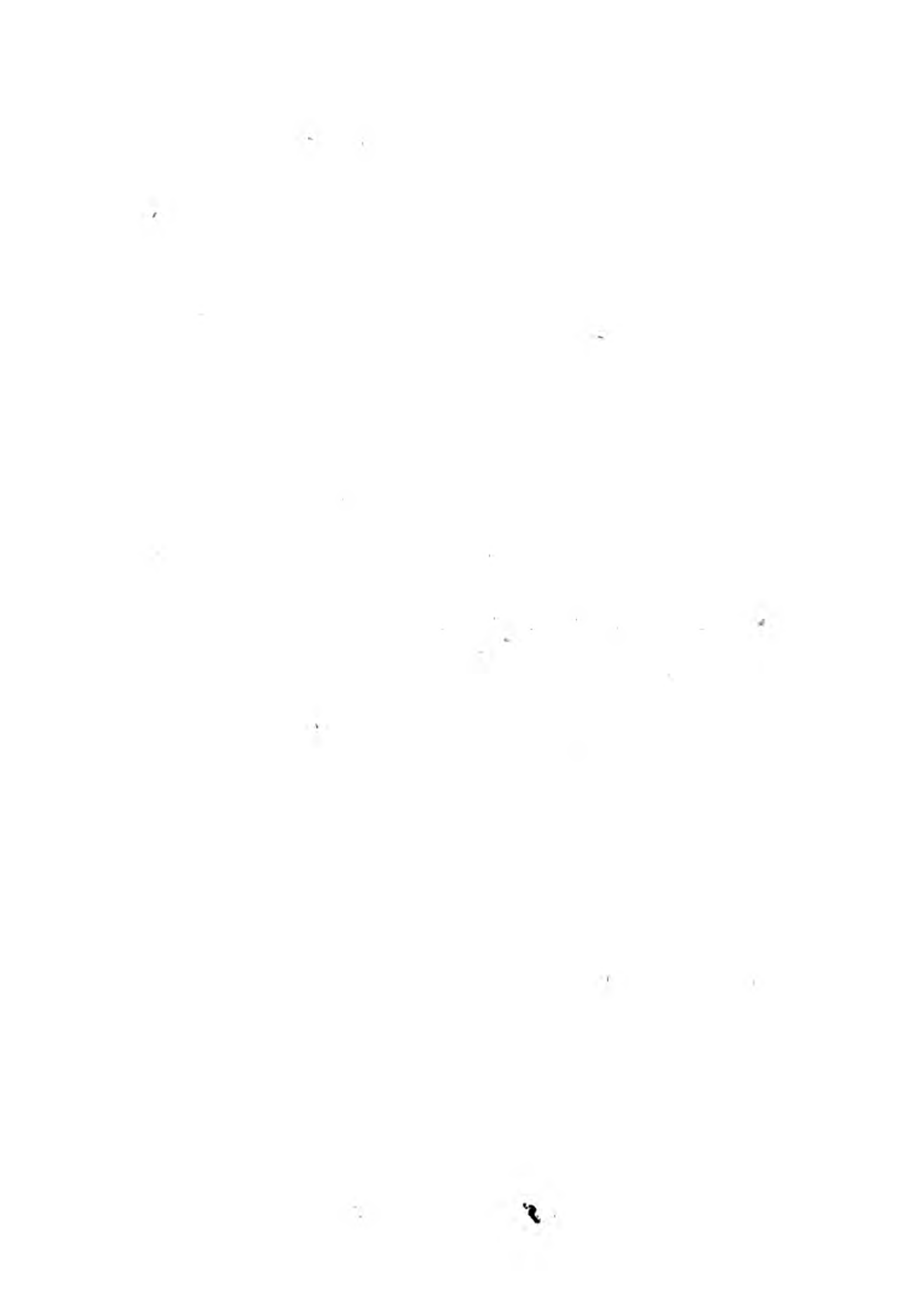
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**THE BIOGRAPHY OF SAMSON.**



THE  
BIOGRAPHY OF SAMSON ;

ILLUSTRATED AND APPLIED.

BY THE

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# BIOGRAPHY OF SAMSON.

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## CHAPTER I.

### THE CHARACTER—ITS FORM AND ITS BEGUN DEVELOPMENT.

THE Biographical Sketch of Samson, given by Divine Inspiration in the Book of Judges, and beginning at chapter xiii. verse 24, is one of the most characteristic and tragical that was ever penned. It is full of incident and variety, and of more than marvellous achievements, effected by preternatural strength, and heroic daring, and fierce and seemingly even fiendish revenge: All this being strangely blended, with a facility to be softened, and so as even to be made the dupe of a woman's wiles—her pretended fondness and designing fascination—and all terminating in that which, though doubtless it was an act of genuine faith and repentance, and clearly admits of being so explained, has, at first sight, more the look of

malignant mortal hatred, secretly vowing vengeance and goaded on by despair.

The fiery ebullitions of such a soul is a wonder quite terrible and yet illuminating, much like the eruptions of the most dreadful volcanic fires, scattering light and with it terror over the face of the world. And, therefore, though of course like the other characters of that book, it forms but a part of that vast and variegated tissue of Scripture allegory and symbol, in which the judge raised up and ruling for the time represents not Jesus Christ himself, so properly, as the conscience which he quickens and sustains in her contendings for the mastery over all those carnal passions which the tyrant and treacherous Philistines were employed to typify ; yet this peculiar character of Samson being in all other respects unique, we so far conform to its eccentricity, as to treat it more in detail, so as to touch, however briefly, on most of those leading points in which it serves to illustrate the besetting sins of many, who may be said to be men of like passions with him, and to be exposed, ever and anon, to substantially the same temptations as he ; which, possibly, they at times resist as he did, with *the same faith* ; and yet are they so frequently overcome, that like him also, they are often miserably wretched ; and, to all outward

appearance, the latter end of such men is so much worse than the beginning, that we having no comfortable and clear word of Divine revelation concerning them, as concerning this judge in Israel, it remains always doubtful concerning them, whether being hypocrites they perished, or whether they really believed and repented, and so after all were saved.

From this it will be seen, that that which chiefly strikes us in the character of this renowned Israelitish judge, is not so much any strange peculiarity in the kind or composition of it, as merely its vast strength and largeness ; he being, as it were, like Saul afterwards among the people, who was of the very same flesh and blood as they were, and only of far larger bone and muscle than they. Just so was the character of Samson identical with that of very ordinary men ; their character being only more diminutive than his—cast, as it were, in a much smaller mould—and so fashioned on a very reduced scale, that they perform no feats of any kind ; and are never noticed, and never known beyond the narrow circle of their own domestic relationships. And yet though like him the children of many prayers and of greatest promise, from and even before their birth, like him also may they turn out a heavy burden to the father that begat,

and a sore and ever bleeding wound in the bosom of her that bare them. Their sky hath been overcast even at the dawn, and, their sun going down in darkness whilst it was yet day, their name and their sad remembrance, if any they shall leave behind them, will but serve like this Israelite's as a beacon, to shew whereabouts those shifting sands, and eddying whirlpools, and sunken rocks do lie, on which so many adventurous souls have been actually seen to perish, and still more have suffered shipwreck so dreadful and so disastrous, that until we shall ourselves have died and risen again, we shall none of us ever know whether or not they did ever effect a landing.

This history, then, seems naturally to divide itself into three main or leading periods, which we shall afterwards distinguish separately, as our discussion proceeds. But first, we would explain the grounds on which, concurring with the general mind of the Church in this particular, as in all her doctrines, we cling to the belief that though like David who came behind him, Samson did make saddest shipwreck of the faith, and strangely enough from the very same blinding, and beguiling, and peculiarly brutalizing lust,—yet like David also and some others, he escaped at last as by a very hair's

breadth ; the Lord very evidently answering his very latest prayer, and to use the language of David, “forgiving his iniquity, whilst yet he took vengeance on his inventions ;” and as St. Paul has exhibited the same awfully alarming view of the Divine chastisements, “Delivering his body unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the Spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.”

The particulars, which when gathered and put together, clearly warrant this hope of Samson’s ultimate salvation, notwithstanding all his waywardness, and his apparently fierce revenge ; and his unquestionably broken vow, and his ever repeated lapses into licentious degradation, are not so much his having been like John the Baptist and others, the subject of hopeful prophecy before his mother conceived him, as that that gave rise to his being the subject even then of many a believing prayer for his guidance in his after years, as well as of many a thank-offering for the peculiar promise of his birth ; and its being said of him, as you see at his outset, chap. xiii. 24, 25, that “He grew, and the Lord blessed him, and the Spirit of the Lord began to move him at times,” whilst he was yet in his earliest youth or childhood ; and his prayer at the last, being not only itself heard and answered of the Lord, as it would



certainly not have been unless offered in faith and accompanied by repentance ; but that prayer being, moreover, so expressed, as none but one who had frequently prayed before, was at all likely to have expressed it. And when to all these three particulars, so conspicuous in his narrative, there is added the mention of his faith in the eleventh chapter of the Hebrews at the thirty-second verse, where, departing from the chronological order of arrangement as if on very purpose to draw like to like, or bring similar characters more closely together, you find this Samson and David placed almost side by side, as each exemplifying faith even very peculiarly,—when you add this to all the other particulars which I have just enumerated, I doubt not you will be satisfied that the golden chain of evidence, though otherwise perhaps defective, is sufficiently complete, so that we may take the comfort of reckoning it among things not conjectural only, or reasoned only, but very surely revealed, that though immeasurably inferior always to the Psalmist David as a saint, yet was this Samson like him at least in this, that both his relapses into sin, and his recoveries out of it, were due to the same cause, which drove both the one and the other to the very verge of destruction.

Now, both these remarkable men having been

saved, as by the very rarest miracles of grace, and it not being from reasoning merely on the case of either of them, but from Revelation alone, that we could ever have been satisfied that after sinning as they did, they had yet been saved, and there being no such Revelation given us respecting any at the present day, it follows of necessity and by irresistible inference, that by sinning at the present day as they did, even those who may be verily saints after all in the sight of God, will die under a cloud in the sight of men. We shall not be able to say whether, after having so defiled their garments, and stained them, as it would seem, indelibly, they ever did really repair to the fountain set open in the house of David, and there thoroughly wash them clean in the blood of the Lamb. We must be anxious to think they did, and be more than willing to hope the best. But the only thing that can supply the place of a revelation to us respecting the blessedness of the state of the dead in our day, being our knowledge of their having lived consistently as believers in Jesus, and that knowledge being denied us, or rather the reverse of it being known, what can we say in such a case, but that though we do hope the best, we can affirm nothing, even until the whole "mystery of God" concerning ourselves as

well as all other men "shall be finished," and he be glorified everlastingly, "both in them that perish, and in them that are saved."

And so, dear reader, let me here adjure and charge you, that as you would not yourself die thus under a cloud, leaving parents, and Christian friends, and ministers, and many disconsolate believing kindred, to try and mitigate their appalling fears respecting your departed spirit's ultimate destination, by picking up, and comparing, and piecing together any slight and superficial symptoms of your having turned you to God ; striving hard to eke out for themselves in that way a something to hold by and keep them up from despair, and yet finding that the links of the chain of evidence in your case are by much too few, and short, and slender for it, so that count and reckon them as they may, there is still a frightful deficiency ; your relapses into sin of some sort, if not into gross and grovelling sensualities, having been so frequently repeated, though as frequently, perhaps, repented of and abhorred ; and that thus, with all their anxiety to make out a case for their own comfort, they are so baffled and distressed that for them there can be no comfort, but in striving then to forget and to let you and your case alone,—dear reader, I say, that as you would not

entail this misery on your kindred, and run the still dreader hazard of dying in doubt yourself, so that you who had bidden fair at one time for even the highest assurance of God's love, and had thought—and not without reason—that one day you might consciously fall asleep in Jesus, with the light of His countenance, as it were, reflected quietly from your own, and having a secret delight and a confident triumphing in God, to tell you as certainly as even embassies of angels could, that “neither death nor life, nor things present nor things to come, shall ever separate you from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus,”—if you would not, I say, after all these high aims and aspirings, and even foretastes of the coming glory, —if you would not still die in doubt, or even in total darkness, as a dog dies, having gotten only instead of the fear of reverence no other sort of fear in death but the fear of terror,—the appalling dread of damnation,—oh! be entreated to lay to heart now such melancholy histories as this present is, so as to be vigilant, and to pray, and to strive mightily to resist, and so to rid yourself of “the sin, whatever it be, that doth most easily beset you,”—“fleeing especially,” as holy Scripture saith, “those youthful and fleshly lusts which war against the soul, and drown men in destruction and per-

dition," and see that you "follow righteousness, faith, charity, and peace, with them that call on the name of the Lord out of a pure heart."

From these prefatory remarks we now proceed to explain how this strain of exhortation is both suggested and enforced by each of the three great periods into which, as I have said, this remarkable life of Samson may be seen to divide itself.

The first, then, and by far the shortest of them, is comprised in these two short verses, (xiii. 24, 25,) which, with more than their usual tact and discrimination, the dividers of our Bible into chapters have made to stand out and aloof, as it were, dreading absolute pollution, from almost all the subsequent details of Samson's life. These two short but quite beautiful verses, so tastefully set apart, remind me of the garden of Eden, hedged in as it has been fancied, and seen, I could suppose, with the light upon it of some bright morning's sun, when the dew was yet lying fresh upon the opening flowers and all the fruit-bearing trees were most rich in bloom ; but with this obvious and striking difference, that *there*, and whilst the garden continued thus unblighted and undefiled, there was no living child. But *here* you have, as it were, the garden and one like unto the believing, lov-

ing, generous, and gentle, and above all devout and dutiful Abel, worshipping and walking before God therein, and so delighting his pious parents with the evident fulfilment in him thus far, even of all their prayers and their very utmost hopes and desires. Or, perhaps, taking careful note of the peculiar anxieties and prayers, and more especially of the Nazaritish vow which had preceded the birth of both, he is still liker to little Samuel, then also a very child, as he ministered before the Lord ; for of him also it is said, in terms very similar to, and substantially identical with, the verses before us, though more amplified or enlarged, that “ Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel, from Dan even to Beersheba, knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord. And the Lord appeared again in Shiloh ; for the Lord revealed himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the Lord.”

Here then, as I take it, ends the first period of this Judge's life—the period of his comparatively unsullied innocence, and holiness, and peace, when the child, so like to Abel and to Samuel, grew, and the Lord blessed, or was daily and hourly blessing him ; and the Spirit of the Lord began

to move him at times within the camp of Dan, or within the settlement of his tribe.

We have sought in our strong sympathy for one so marvellously mighty, and, above all, at one time so singularly good, who nevertheless through temptation, did turn to be for a long season so wretched, and, as contrasted with his own former self, so singularly vile,—we have sought for that reason to persuade ourselves, that that period of his so conspicuous faith, and all but angelic piety, lasted longer without a break ; so that even after his going down to Timnath, as related at the opening of the next chapter, (xiv. 1,) and “ seeing a woman in Timnath, of the daughters of the Philistines,” and his taking her for his wife, we might have conceived him to have been still obedient, as at first, to both the outward revelation and the inner and more hidden movements and monitions of the Lord his God. And some, I daresay, will still continue to think so, founding as they will do, not very unreasonably, on the fourth verse of that chapter, where you read, “ But his father and his mother knew not that it was of the Lord, that he sought an occasion against the Philistines.” Taking this along with the previous context, it certainly does look at first sight as if it meant

to say, that his father and his mother erred in objecting to his proposed marriage with the Philistian maiden, they not knowing, or not being aware that the Lord had himself prompted Samson, or instigated, or put him upon such a marriage, however expressly contrary was any such marriage both to the express law of the Lord, and to the whole design of his ordinances.

But our objection to that is, that surely the Lord could not prompt or instigate Samson to transgress the law ; however, certain it is, that the devil could. And if it should be replied, "Nay, verily, but there was no need of that, since in behalf of this mighty champion of the covenant that law was in this instance, and for the time, repealed," I answer, that that does not look to be at all likely ; and that, at all events, had it been so, either the inspired historian would have told us, or, as appears to me quite certain, Samson in that case would at once have told his parents so, the better to secure both their concurrence and his own vindication. But instead of all that explicitness, there is not even a hint of such a thing, unless as we may think that fourth verse contains it, by affirming that "his father and his mother knew not that his proposed *marriage* was of the Lord." But reading over the verse more thought-



fully in its connexion with the other verses, you will at once perceive that it is merely *his* "*seeking an occasion against the Philistines,*" that is there affirmed to have been of the Lord. The Lord incited him to *that*—even "to seek an occasion against the Philistines," or in other words, to seek out and make a good, and great, and most righteous ground of quarrel with them ; a thing which certainly could have been done in many ways, without his going in the face of one of the most patent and conspicuous of all the laws of the covenant. And most righteously, as well as soon, might such a quarrel have been found, considering as it is added at the latter clause of that verse, "for at that time the Philistines had dominion over Israel." In fact, that latter clause seems to be introduced purposely to shew how reasonably the Lord urged him to seek a ground of quarrel with the Philistines, and how very soon and righteously he might have found it in any one of a thousand ways, seeing that they had usurped dominion over Israel, and like the Egyptians, whom the Lord destroyed for so doing, held them under the cruelest and most grinding of all bondage.

But I should not have dwelt upon this particular point so long, nor perhaps have thought it

necessary to notice it at all, if it served no other purpose than to mark distinctly and make good an artificial or arbitrary distinction in the current of this narrative. It is because it serves to indicate the first rise and the begun development of those youthful lusts in the future man, of which the young especially are warned as "warring against the soul, and drowning them eventually in destruction and perdition." And still further, because it discovers to us somewhat of the horrid depth of the deceitful working of the heart ; and shews how, not the natural reason and conscience alone, but even faith itself may be cunningly outwitted and over-reached, as it were, by the particular besetting sin or lust, which makes its own cunning use of what faith suggests ; taking advantage of that, so as to encourage itself thereby, in following out its own lawless purpose the more resolvedly.

To explain this then, observe, that what Samson was here moved or incited unto by the Lord, was not and could not possibly be to marry the Philistian maiden, but it was merely, as his inspired biographer has told us, "to seek an occasion," or a just and obviously righteous ground of quarrel, and consequently of insurrection, and revolt, and vengeance against those heathen tyrants from whom she sprang, and who were all of them fore-

doomed of God. *That*, and no more than that, being what the Lord incited or moved him unto; and he being no stranger, no more than was Samuel after him, to the peculiar fact of his being a Nazarite set apart for the Lord, even from the very day that his gracious mother conceived him, what so right and necessary as for him, when he felt himself so moved by the Lord, to have inquired, even somewhat anxiously, of the Lord himself, in what manner of way he might provoke that quarrel so as best to succeed? This would have been acting consistently with his previous character and profession. It would have been doing, in fact, precisely as Samuel did under old Eli's advisement, when he answered the Lord and said, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth." But this Samson, though as carefully instructed doubtless as ever Samuel was in his day, had another and far more perilous mission to fulfil; and a man of war as he was to be, and for that so special purpose constitutionally framed, there was a power and a force in all his passions as they grew and gathered strength, which even faith itself, without much prayer, and probably also even fasting, could not possibly have restrained. And so, finding himself moved, or stirred and incited by the Lord to find a quarrel with the Philistines, and incited

simultaneously, or very soon after, by his own constitutional and most characteristic propensity, what did this poor, bewitched, and infatuated, and still youthful believer do? Did he inquire at the Lord, think you; or ask advice of his wise and godly parents as to the particular way and method in which he should proceed to lay snares for the Philistines, and so entangle and find manifest ground and occasion to attack and destroy them? No, he who had been once, and but lately, so teachable and so devout, is now altogether of another spirit. It looks almost as if the devil here entered into him, for he stops to take counsel in this matter neither of God nor man. God having moved him to seek a quarrel with the Philistines, but not as yet having shewed him—and doubtless because he had not *asked* to be shewn—in what manner to proceed; and Samson meanwhile, in an evil hour, having seen that daughter of the Philistines, of whom he reported that “she pleased him well,” he resolved *of his own accord*, and *at his own risk*, and eventually as is evident, *to his own ruin*, to take that woman to wife; doing it, you observe, in the very face of the law, and against the all too feeble remonstrance of his parents, who said, much like the good old and over-indulgent Eli to *his* children, “Is there never

a woman among the daughters of thy brethren, or among all thy people, that thou goest to take a wife of the uncircumcised Philistines ?”

Now mark how all this is confirmed by the reply which he made ; for that reply is like a little window in his breast, through which you can look in and see, as it were, the quickened throbbing of the blood as it rises and rushes impatiently from the heart. “ And Samson said unto his father, (verse 3,) Get her for me, for she pleaseth me well,” or, as you read upon the margin, “ she is right in mine eyes.” His parents had grounded their objection on the known law, as well as custom, concerning marriages in Israel, so that at all to meet their objection he should have been able to say—and therefore doubtless would have said it, had it been consistent with truth—that the Lord had dispensed with that law in his case, and had moved him to that marriage. But that not being the fact, and he being both too proud, and also too conscientious, to help himself by a lie, says nothing of the sort. Nay, he does not even tell his parents that God had been moving him at all. And why—for the reason of his evading that is important, as it opens out his character, and makes you better acquainted with him ? the reason is this ; he lets his father and

mother both remain quite ignorant of the fact of his having been *at all* moved in this matter by the Lord,—he keeps them in the dark about that, because well did he know, from their so anxious and intimate dealings with the Lord concerning him, that had he dropped even a hint to them in this matter, about any so special interference of the Lord, they—and his so quick and sensitive, as well as thoughtful mother especially—would have instantly asked him whether or not the Lord, *besides* merely instigating him against the Philistines, had told him *how to proceed*. They would have charged him solemnly to beware of taking even a single step in this matter on his own separate advisement and responsibility. They would have spoken somewhat to this effect:—“Since the Lord is moving you in this great affair, which we have had continually in our sight, and by which the whole mystery of God concerning you and myriads yet unborn will assuredly be finished, or wound up for ever; ask you counsel of the Lord now, with patience, and continual penitence and prayer.” And so, lest Samson should have brought down upon himself that answer which would have baulked him of his aim, he makes no reference to the Lord at all, but replies abruptly, and even somewhat proudly and cavalierly to his own

father, and with that tone of high-minded, hot, and arrogant assurance, which, with his advancing years, he had begun now to assume and manifest, "Get her for me, for she pleaseth me well." How melancholy, and already almost complete the change. How is not the gold become dim, and the most fine gold how changed ! And how or by what means hath it been changed ? so that he who was once and but lately so teachable, amiable, and devout, should have learned to be, though it were only in this, so wilful and impetuous withal, and selfish, as if the seeing that *he* was pleased were the only thing in the universe that any had to consider. The explanation is but too evident. His passion was now inflamed by that visit to Timnath as was David's afterwards, when he had stood and looked on Bathsheba, and as was that of our mother Eve, when she too had stood and lingered and looked, or continued looking on the forbidden fruit. And this lust so "conceived was fast bringing forth sin ;" that very sin which we shall by and by see "finished, and bringing forth death."

Such then was the sad and shameful commencement of the second period of this marvellous Israelite's career. But we must reserve all our farther applications of it, to what we would call

every-day sort of characters, composed as we have said of very much the same ingredients, combined too in very much the same proportions, and only put together in smaller quantities, so as to be without the characteristic intensity, which so reveals them as that they cannot be hid.

And before shutting up this chapter, let me just point again to this fact, as strikingly exhibiting the deceitfulness of sin, that though Samson doubtless well knew that he was moved now by the Lord to seek a quarrel with the Philistines, yet he would not farther consult the Lord about it. And why, but because, as we have seen, the Lord would have laid an instant interdict on that which he was resolved to gratify. Thus he takes encouragement from the Lord to quarrel with the Philistines, to which quarrel he is naturally much inclined ; but asks nothing from the Lord at all where he feared that instead of encouragement he would get denial, and perhaps rebuke. In other words, he takes counsel of the Lord, and strengthens himself therewith, when it concurs with his own likings ; but where it would cross his own likings, he cuts short the conference and takes his own wilful way. And still, if possible to make it plainer, he makes his own use of the Lord and his counsel so far where it pleases himself,



but beyond that he would forget him, and deliberately cast him off. Dear reader, it is dreadful to think that any creature should be capable of acting thus towards the gracious Being who both created and sustains him. But such is naturally and constitutionally the ungodliness of man. And even after he has been regenerated there will recur upon him temptations by which, if he strive not watching unto prayer, he will certainly be led away, and it may be ruined for ever. Such is temptation, and the deceitfulness of the heart, and the devices of the devil; and so essential, therefore, is close habitual communion with Christ and His Spirit, to a creature who, having both sinned thus, and being so prone to sin, so needs to be forgiven and sanctified, or renewed in the spirit of his mind, in order to his being saved; and so precious to all believers the assurance, that "Christ is exalted a Prince and a Saviour, to give them both repentance and the remission of their sins."

## CHAPTER II.

CONSEQUENCES OF CONTINUED DEPARTURE FROM  
THE LORD.

THE second of the three great periods of Samson's life is of so great breadth and largeness as to reach even from the beginning of the fourteenth chapter to the twenty-first verse of the sixteenth. Thus, the average length of three whole chapters is occupied with the details of this second period alone. And though we have already discussed the opening passage of it, in which we found what we take to be the key that unlocks the varied treasures that lie within the whole compass of this story; and to those who have any pleasure in gathering that sort of riches, it might be enough that we have already put into their hands the key, so that at all hours of the day and night, they may now ransack and rifle that treasure-chest for themselves, yet we think there may be many who will reckon themselves the better for any such help in the handling of it as we may be able to render them.

Our own impression being, that even such confessedly inspired histories many of us may, at least at one time, have accustomed ourselves to read with but the same sort of interest in the wonderful and the hazardous, as though this Samson had been in almost nothing different from the Ishmaelite in his day, ever restless and rushing into broils and mortal combats as a game ; or still liker perhaps in his feats of matchless strength and intrepidity, to the marvellous darings—the fiery and fierce descents upon us of one of our own borderers—the outlawed and ever roving and irresistible mountaineer.

How strange, dear reader, that we should have ever looked upon this believer in that light, and that it should ever have been forgotten, that besides so much that is pathetic and mournful as well as marvellous in his story, this most heroic Israelite was, as I have shewed you, a very Israelite indeed—an illustrious though oft a most erring, and therefore a most sorely chastened servant of our Lord and Saviour—a believing member of our own Redeemer's body, and therefore in him our brother by the only kind of relationship that can never never be dissolved ; and how more especially for our learning it was that the Lord raised him up, and threw into the composition of him, that

marvellous and mighty strength and energy of the passions, by which both the good and the evil that were in him, broke forth, as it were, in flames that were irrepressible, and by which he was ere long, and but in his prime, consumed. Truly, when I think of this, and see how certainly he both lived and died a martyr in the cause of that Church which is Christ's body ; God having so evidently raised him up, and so framed him on very purpose for our learning, that in him, as in a mirror or molten looking-glass, each individual member of the Church may see some at least of the leading features of his own character portrayed, with this difference only, that as I shewed you, these features in him are on a much larger scale, and, consequently, are much more easily decyphered and discussed than in the case of more ordinary men ; when I consider this, I say, I do take shame to myself for having so often treated this wondrous record with so little reverence, and so having for a long time seen so exceedingly little in it, either to edify or alarm me.

And yet it is as far as possible from my design to try to compensate for this indiscretion now, by attempting to rifle these chapters of all their wealth, which would be in fact attempting to exhaust

that which is indeed inexhaustible. But, resuming the thread of our discussion, just about where we broke it off, I would touch upon those points, which look to me like small glimmering and variously coloured lamps, planted, as it were, along the whole course of this dark passage, by which this mighty Israelite descended, or rather was dragged down and driven by his own fierce lusts and passions, and in despite of his partially renewed, and, so far, almost angelic nature,—till he landed himself in that lone and cruel prison, where, however unwillingly, for a while we intend to leave him, ruminating and repining and reflecting bitterly upon his misery ; and where, though bereft of sight, and condemned to hopeless blindness and imprisonment and hard labour, I could conceive him for a while, to have been even far more galled and fevered by his fierce remembrance of his wrongs, and of the triumph over him of those he scorned, than even by the torture of his cruel wounds, or the sore burden of the chains which oppressed and bruised him.

I could conceive him lying there more wretched, in fact, for a season, than even Job was ; because, besides being still more solitary, and shut up in now the most hopeless darkness, and with heathen adversaries exulting over him, and naturally his

untamed spirit being far prouder and more vengeful than was that of Job,—besides that, he was stung to the quick with reflections, doubtless, on all this as being the bitter fruit of his own folly ; tracing it back, as he did, to that most luckless visit which, in an evil hour, he had paid to Timnath, and the all but irremediable rupture which then ensued between his own soul and God, from whom, as I shewed you, he then withdrew, knowing that if he had asked any farther counsel from that quarter, he must have mortified his favourite and fast kindling desire. In short, though the misery of Job seems to have been far more prolonged ; and through his greater disposition, as well as opportunity, to complain, and to be communicative, and to plead for sympathy from his fellows, the grief and anguish of his soul has been far more particularly unfolded and explained, yet I doubt much, if ever in point of intensity and amazement, it even equalled the speechless and sudden pang, which smote this once so blessed and rejoicing believer, when his felt powerlessness in the hands of his savage tormentors told that “the Lord was departed from him.”

Job's own melancholy and morbid reasonings, it is true, had made him suspect, and often fear and tremble lest so dread a blight had befallen him.

But this backslidden believer knew it because he felt it. He had sure witness of it in himself, in his quite unresisting helplessness in the hands of adversaries to whom the Lord had sold him ; and in their lordly lifting and transferring of him from place to place as their property ; and in his lone captivity and sore labour, as ever and anon they roused him to renew his monotonous and mean and most intolerable toil—even to grind in the prison-house.

Thus, then, closed the *second* of the three periods of this renowned Israelite's career ; and what a contrast it presents to that sunny and short-lived morning of his days, when, like Samuel and Isaac and Abel, as I shewed you, and other godly children of rare promise and of faithful and persevering prayer, he bade fair to fulfil even all his godly parents' desire.

And let none of my readers, more especially such as may be conscious of their being less inclined to religion now in their youth, or in their somewhat more ripened years, than they either themselves remember, or have been told that they were in childhood, when they took a far greater interest in prayer, and in the Bible, and in Jesus Christ, and in the will of parents, and in all that

is dutiful, and kind, and courteous, and well pleasing, than they are ever seen to be taking now,—let none of you, I say, put aside this sad history, as you may be greatly tempted to do, as if it were not really and substantially an enlarged image of yourselves. For he was not more strictly bound by the Nazaritish vow than you are now by your baptism. And though the gracious movements of God's Spirit were more open and peculiar in his case than in yours, they were not more real, nor more intimate, nor more gracious than in yours, when you took so graciously to the Lord and to all goodness. And you have been told most anxiously and incessantly of what he never knew or could have conceived of, but from the sacrifices—even of Christ once crucified, and now risen and reigning, and speedily to return to judge us; and so the difference is clearly in the vast accumulation of inducements upon our side, to be sanctified to the Lord and serve him. And yet many such as you might find that the most hopeful piety of your youth and childhood has either long since, and apparently for ever, fled, or has somehow worn away and withered into nothing: and that just as in this case, so in yours, might a skilful and at all experienced diviner of the secret histories of souls be able to point out to you *when*, and also



*why*, precisely it was, that you either abruptly or all at once, turned away from the Lord, or, as is far more common, began gradually to grow remiss and careless, self-willed and froward, "loving this present evil world," in some one or several of its countless varieties of sinning and self-pleasing; so that you may be absolutely caring nothing now, though with occasional checks such as this back-slidden believer felt from the Word and Spirit of God, you be fast speeding to that pit where the darkness and distress of all that fall into it is ever goading them to despair.

Dear reader, to arrest this progress downwards and turn you back to Christ Jesus the Lord, who now calleth to you, "Why will ye die?" be entreated to mark this, that that false step which Samson took at first so resolvedly in the way of self-pleasing went far to decide his whole future history. For though, as we purpose to shew in our next chapter, it was not until he had *actually married* the daughter of the Philistines at Timnath that he got to be so involved, as that nothing short of some quite dreadful interposition on the part of God could deliver him; and the Spirit of God did continue even for some time after *that* to uphold him in gifts, which made him a scourge and avenger on the Philistines, seeing that for that

purpose mainly had He raised him up ; and it was only when he had run on so far in very wantonness and debauchery as to have revealed to Delilah the mysterious secret of his strength, thus, Esau-like, having sold his birthright, as it were, even for a mess of pottage,—though it was only then, I say, that the Lord, long-suffering and gracious, *altogether* departed from him, yet how very unlike was he all along, even from his *first* going down to Timnath till he was lifted into Gaza's prison,—how exceedingly unlike was he to the child of such brightening promise and of such pious parents, and of so many and so fervent prayers, who had at one time been described by the Spirit in substantially the same terms as was Samuel, afterwards the devout and dutiful, and who in much also resembled Abel and Isaac, the heir even of all the promises of the Lord. That step which he took in “ departing from the Lord, *without waiting for his counsel,*” and without even inquiring for it, and for this secret and sensual reason, as I shewed you, that he was intent on gratifying his own lawless desire,—that one step sent him forward upon a course where the further that he travelled he was only the more embroiled ; and he even treated his parents after that with but little reverence ; and he seems soon to have

felt himself, as if far more at home amid the altogether godless friendships and festivities of the heathen, until their deceitfulness and injustice maddened him to take dire revenge ; and after various most eventful evolutions, of the most considerable of which we have still to treat, the lust which he had first indulged broke out afresh and so repeatedly as to send him headlong on that frightful ruin which himself felt to be complete, when, as we read at the 21st verse, “ The Philistines took him, and put out his eyes, and brought him down to Gaza, and bound him with fetters of brass, and he did grind in the prison-house.”

And now, to mark more particularly some few of those glimmering lamps, as I have termed them, which somewhat relieve the gloom of that dark and descending passage along which Samson hurried, or, in other words and more literally, those better dispositions which at least were akin to goodness, and which still continued to linger, and to hang, though more and more loose about him, and even for one brief space to revive, as we are yet to see, notwithstanding all his abandonment. The first of these that strikes us is his still remaining and lingering, and quite peculiar regard for his parents, as indicated at the 16th verse of

this 14th chapter, where he says, " Behold I have not told it to my father nor my mother, and shall I tell it thee ?" As we formerly noted, there had been a closeness, a want of becoming communicativeness, on his part with his parents on the high and interesting matter of the Lord's dealings with his soul. There had been a disposition, in fact, to conceal it from them, lest they should have counselled him otherwise thereupon than he was at all willing to be counselled : and even so at the sixth verse of this chapter, where the good, and only far too indulgent pair, having had their rightfully conscientious scruples overborne, are travelling down with him to Timnath, you find him practising the same concealment, and doubtless for the same reason : for it is remarked at that sixth verse, after recording his first exploit, by the returning energy of the Spirit with miraculous *gijts*, though not with *graces*, that " he told not his father or his mother what he had done." And it is instructive to see how this secretive disposition being so indulged, had grown and gained upon him so, that it turns out at that sixteenth verse, that he had not even told them the solution of the riddle ; everything which might have led to their speaking of the Lord's dealings with him, being now sensitively shunned, and every additional act of

concealment having of course rendered it more difficult for him to begin to be quite frank and communicative. All this was bad—even exceedingly bad and dangerous. For by the constitution of what I take to have been his passionately kind and cordial, as well as most murderously resentful, nature, he must have company and friends, and even confidants ; and not finding them at home, he must go and seek them out for himself abroad, and be thus ever in danger of casting himself into the arms of those who lure him only to destruction.

And from this be warned all you, who from whatever cause are already turned, or are but turning to be reserved with the father that begat or the mother that bore you, as if they were not best of all entitled to take to do with their own. If you are taking up with other friends more readily ; and are begun already to be more communicative to other counsellors out of doors ; shutting your mouth, because you are more than willing now to shut your ears to such godly counsel, as both by their natural anxiety, and their Christian vows they find it incumbent on them to give—if you feel impatient of such restraint, and would even presume to treat it not a little imperiously ; having, chosen for yourselves counsellors of another spirit,

and more likely to concur with the desires and devices of your own heart, which are many, then just see here how like sleepwalkers, with eyes glistening and staring wide, yet visionless as the blind, are you treading now on the very brink of that hidden gulf, into which if you fall but once, it may be never to rise again. Oh, flee then that youthful self-will or self-pleasing which, whatever it chance to be, has so estranged you, first of all from your Father in heaven, and next from your earthly father ; and which, if suffered to go on, will rend you from all your kindred, so that to restore you to them and to your senses, it may be as necessary for you, as it ever was for this Israelite, for God to cast your soul into prison, and there to feed you with the bread and the water of affliction, mingling even every morsel of your bread with weeping, and giving you, as it were, a cup of trembling and of tears to drink.

But that which was bad—even exceedingly bad in Samson—I have noticed chiefly, because it seemed necessary in order to make quite plain and perspicuous, what, even in this particular affection of filial piety, still savoured of good about him. For is it not plain from his argument and explanation at that sixteenth verse, that his sense of filial piety,

or of what was due to his parents more especially, as being entitled to his fullest confidence, still lingered about his heart, and had a certain felt hold and influence after all. True, it had been so heavily discouraged by his connexion with the uncircumcised at Timnath, that it had no longer the same control, and was very fast losing more ground, so that it was in great danger of being wholly supplanted by and bye by other and strange attachments, which however oft and severely checked as you see they were, were growing rapidly, and choking everything in his heart. But at this stage of his descending hellwards, it would be slanderous to say, that he had gotten to be so shamefully and unnaturally hardened. He was *coming to it*, but he was not *at it*. He was about half-way to it; being exactly in this position, that he would not tell *them* what he ought, and therefore, or for that single reason, even if there were not another—as we shall presently see there was—he would not tell it all. He had withdrawn his confidence from *them*, and that I call the one-half, which, as any of us may see, was soon followed up by what I would term the other half—even his giving his confidence away to the uncircumcised altogether. But he was not prepared for that as yet. He had been far too kind, and dutiful, and devoted to his

parents at one time, to turn them adrift at once, and put another most base and treacherous confidant in their room. His heart had at one time been quite full of love of this sort,—filial or child-like love—and though it was now almost empty, because insensibly drained of it, the sweet taste and the delightful fragrance were still retained, and he felt he could in no wise consent all at once, to exchange and part with it altogether. And had the poor infatuated creature stopped there, and begun to bethink himself, and to fear that certainly he must be travelling hellward, since even that kind of love which stands next to the love of God, was so very nearly extinguished in him—had he begun thus to fear, and to try to turn, and to pray, and to call to remembrance the former days, when, as if in Paradise, he had been himself so happy, and had made his father and his mother glad, then bright as morning would have come forth his days again, and even all the pleasure of the Lord would have been seen prospering in his hand.

Now, it happens but too often, I fear, that the dutiful love and reverence of children for their parents is not even so tenacious as this. Samson's did not last so long as it should have lasted, and eventually it appeared to be even quite extin-



guished. But you see from this sixteenth verse, that he had striven to retain and to keep it sacred, and gave it up at last by degrees, and with, I dare say, a sore struggle. It did certainly survive his very early youth or mere boyhood ; and though he had given it several checks, you see it strong in him when he is ripe in years, a full-grown married man. Even then it helps to hold him back from that frightful ruin which was impending, and it keeps up a bar and an impediment in his way, which he felt it somewhat difficult to overpass. And so, but for his own wayward and most worthless courses, it would have kept by him even all his days, or, at least, till like a worthy descendant of Isaac and the patriarchs, and after their grand example, he had comforted his aged father and mother in their decline ; and had wept over them in death, and with a deep and a holy reverence had carried each of them in faith to their own appropriate resting-place, where he thought himself to be buried, and where as we are afterwards told his brethren and all the house of his father laid him.

And, so here, dear reader, as my last words on this subject to you, who may be now in youth, and still privileged to have parents living, let me charge you to consider, whether your naturally

loving reverence for them be at all duly preserved and manifested. Are you not perhaps but too frequently making violent inroads and cruel breaches in it, by untoward, unkind, and even irreverent ways of speaking, more especially to her that bare you? Are you really "keeping your heart here with all diligence;" cultivating this filial love and piety within you, as you would cultivate the love of God? And are those of you who are now in advancing years, resolved to cherish, preserve, and perpetuate it till you die, whatever other connexions in life you may be induced to form, and however it may fare with you amidst the many changes, whether prosperous or adverse, which may be yet awaiting you in the world? If you are not so minded, I protest I cannot but look upon you as being in this thing like unto the beasts that perish; for of them alone is it naturally and constitutionally true, that such love disappears when they reach their maturity, and feel that they are independent, and can quite shift for themselves. But if, on the contrary, you will hold it part of your religion, and in the next degree to the love of God, and so will cultivate this grace with patience, penitence, and prayer, as being well pleasing to Christ, then shall the light of his countenance be made to shine upon you;

and because not from natural affection only, but also to please God in Christ Jesus, thou hast honoured thy father and thy mother, and hast often denied thyself, in order to keep this "first commandment with promise," this peculiarly precious promise shall assuredly be fulfilled to thee, "thou shalt have manifold more in this present life, and in the world to come, the life everlasting."

## CHAPTER III.

## THE MARRIAGE AND ITS MISERIES.

WHEN we quitted Samson in prison, having seen him merely lodged and left there, we purposed to return to visit and sympathize with him in his misery. For however painful it be to go back and look upon it, reminding us as it does of what we have seen many suffer or reap, from what is termed in Scripture, "sowing to the flesh," instead of "sowing to the Spirit," there are lessons to be learned there on which it is well to ruminatè ; both to warn us of snares in which our own feet may at any time, and in all various ways, be sore entangled, and to quicken us to devout everlasting gratitude to God, and pity for other men, if, through more specially favourable dispensations both of his providence and sovereign grace towards ourselves, we may have hitherto at all escaped. We therefore still purpose to return, to look in, as it were, through the grated window of that

gloomy cell, where it would appear that thousands of the uncircumcised Philistines, on the great day of their idolatrous festival, had gone down in tumultuous crowds, and with great joy, to gaze. But there are yet several other things to be noticed along the line of that dark passage, by which, as I shewed you, he might, as it were, be said to have descended, being dragged and driven along by his own ill regulated, always impassioned, and often so ruling as through repeated indulgence to have become quite resistless desires. And lest we should lose ourselves and each other there, where there are, as it were, so many sharp turns and windings, and but little more light than what we carry in our hand, and get from those few irregularly scattered lamps of which we already spoke, which seem to glimmer in the distance, with a faint, sickly, and ever struggling light, until at last they are all extinguished, let us more attentively take precise note of what formed, as it were, the entrance or very mouth of that dark and descending way.

Observe then, that Samson could not be said to have fully entered it, just at his first visit to Timnath, when he merely saw and was smitten with the Philistian maiden ; neither just when

accompanied by his far too easy and indulgent parents, he returned thither, and besides merely "*seeing*," "*talked*" with her, and so evidently by *talking* had his godless and lawless lust and liking the more confirmed and inflamed. He had not then fairly entered into, or *turned him into* this dark and descending cavern, which might be said to have been to him spiritually "the valley of the shadow of death." Even at the eighth verse of the fourteenth chapter, which tells of his third and last visit to Timnath under that enticement, I do not consider him to have been fully and fairly entered ; nor, till we attend him to the tenth verse, where we see nothing more of him but his broad back as it were fairly turned upon the light of heaven, and he travelling down with his face as fairly and firmly hellward. It was when, as at the tenth verse, we are told he and his too facile and indulgent father, besides travelling down together, as they had done before, and merely *talking* of the marriage, had actually held the feast of its celebration, according to the rude and somewhat revelling customs of the uncircumcised in the land ; polluting and blasphemously profaning that holy ordinance of marriage, as most probably they did by pouring forth what they would term libations and sacrifices to Dagon their

god, as at other times, and as at all events you see they did when afterwards they came to triumph over the apparently final ruin of this mighty champion of Israel.—Dear reader, it was *then*, and only at that tenth verse, that *by the completion of the marriage* he was so *irretrievably* committed that he could not possibly have been extricated,—however oft, as we shall afterwards see, he was arrested—but by miracles of *grace* far greater than any or even all those miracles of mere *gifts*, by which he continued to be for yet a good while distinguished.

Previous to the actual completion of the marriage he had, no doubt, by his talk, brought himself into difficulties; and of the promise or pledge of marriage which, at the seventh verse, if not sooner, he had doubtless given to the woman, we without hesitation say, that if she inclined to hold him to it, he durst not even then have recalled it on the plea that his capricious fancy had changed, and he for some reason or none had lost his conceit of her. Had he so changed, and so pled to be off merely on *that* ground, I would not have known whether most to have pitied him as an imbecile, or to have scorned and hated him as a selfish and heartless villain. But then, on the other hand, if from no

such merely capricious fluctuation of his fancy and regard to his own feelings, but from his reason and conscience rising up and rebuking him for having ever at all so yielded to his own fancy, as to have deliberately preferred the creature to the Creator ; and to have purposed to go and separate himself from God, and from his people for that creature's sake, by marrying her in the open face of the recorded and written law of the Lord,—suppose that thus at that seventh verse, and before he actually married, he, stung with religious remorse on *that* ground, had resolved to retire, and said, “ How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God ? ” There is no doubt that such a retreat, though made thus from devout and conscientious conviction, must have humbled, and more or less afflicted him even till he died. And yet would it have been his clearly incumbent duty, so that that very instant he ought assuredly to have resiled. *That* seems to me indisputable. But then, when you come to the tenth verse and find him *actually married*, you raise a case for all the casuists when you ask, whether it would not have been still as much as ever his duty to have retired, by suing out a divorce, had he come *even then* to have been convinced of his sin, and distressed by true religious compunction ? To that



I answer, that so much might have been said *then* on both sides, or both for and against, that were a council of learned and legal casuists called in to sit upon it, from any observations I have had of them and of their ways, I should expect to find them, after very long and very keen debate, shewing by a vote that they were about equally divided. And so perhaps it is well, that from the constitution of human nature, such cases can but rarely and almost never arise. So far at least was it from occurring in Samson's case,—so very far was he from taking a religious remorse *after* marriage, whatever he may have occasionally felt *before* it, that when, as you read at the twentieth verse and subsequently, his wife was taken from him, and so given to another man, as to have made out a virtual divorce independent of him, and presented him therewith, he, instead of grasping at that as a very godsend, and as a fair and inviting opening for his again returning to be right with God, was only the more incensed and maddened to indiscriminate revenge. And so had the particular lust, which at first ensnared him, grown and thriven by indulgence, that though for a while thereafter reflection checked it, and his better principles, as we shall see revived, it so sought out and did find occasion to return

upon him, that the sixteenth chapter opens and proceeds with a disclosure of repeated acts, by which he did eventually render himself even most exceeding vile.

I should not have dwelt upon this so long, but for its serving to illustrate this most alarming fact, that there is a certain stage of confirmed advancement in the lustful progress and career of every one whose heart departeth from the Lord,—there is a certain mark or milestone, as it were, standing on the side of the broad road that leadeth to destruction, which, if the sinner pass swiftly in the dark as he is exceedingly apt to do, the difficulties in the way, even of his ever thinking to return, accumulate so fast, and so rapidly do they thicken round him, that *there* he may indeed be said to have entered spiritually into “the valley of the shadow of death,” so that it is only by suffering like Samson afterwards, perhaps even many times more than all the bitterness of death, that he can ever come out of it.

Samson had still much more to suffer ere ever he was delivered ; and very much farther was he allowed to go in sin and sensuality, and even in what was equivalent to open apostasy from the faith, ere ever he was finally arrested, and “his

body delivered to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." But still the *actual completion* of his marriage with the Philistine was the step that was so decided, that after that deed was done he really could not help himself, and morally speaking, he could not possibly return. Even the very day before that, he had been much like a child playing with its hand upon the hole of the asp ; in greatest danger no doubt of being bit or stung unto death if thus wantonly it still continued to play. But with his actual marriage it may be said, that he was so bitten and empoisoned, in the very current of the blood, that with anything short of the destruction of the flesh, his immortal soul and spirit could never possibly be medicated or set free at all. Or, to return to our former illustration, I would say, that though previous to his actual marriage he was very grievously offending God, by the very proposal of it, and more especially by his shifts and concealments in order to exclude the light of believing and restraining grace, which annoyed, because it threatened to thwart him ; and so might he be said to have been, even then, as near as possible to the entrance of that dark and descending cavern, or " valley of the shadow of death," where souls once entered almost

never appear again ; yet was it only when he had actually married the Philistine that he had fairly turned his back upon the light of heaven, and was, for a very long time at least, contentedly travelling hellwards. His lust had by that time conceived and brought forth that particular overt act of sin, which, when it was perfected, or had done its worst, by leading on to innumerable other sins, brought forth death.

And thus it is, dear reader, with even all manner of evil, or at all inordinate desires ; for which reason, chiefly, we are exhorted to flee from them. They may inveigle and allure you on to the ever open mouth of that dark passage, or still more dismal death-like valley. In the course of your giddy light-hearted tamperings with sin—more especially where there has ever previously existed anything like a heartfelt acquaintance and intimacy with the Spirit of holiness and of God—you so grieve that Spirit by your wilfulness and lust together, and your distaste, or it may be positive dread and hatred of His counsel, that He straightway withdraws from you, as He withdrew in this case from Samson, as the God of all grace, leaving you to commit yourself, in an unguarded hour, to some step of your own choosing, which embitters your whole future life, and casts you

aside at last, a melancholy wreck and a monument as this lapsed believer was, and will be even for ever, of the rigour with which the Lord, most merciful as He is and gracious, must needs very oft resent His own creature's slighting of Him, and turning with determined obstinacy from His ways.

And so having gone back and seen Samson again, as it were, at the cave's mouth, and with his face and his steps too fairly turned and moving hellward, goaded and driven now, far more than lured along by the consequences of that lawless and godless marriage; observe next how very soon it turned his godless mirth into heaviness, if not to melancholy, and threatened to mire him for ever in domestic wrangling and broils. For look at that sixteenth verse again, where he gave what I have no doubt was one chief reason for his not telling his wife the riddle,—namely, his not telling his parents of it. And why he had not told his parents we have already fully explained, very little to his credit, in so far as it arose from his having been now for some while reserved even with his own mother; while, at the same time, it certainly did shew how the affections of his better nature were still lingering about his heart.

But let us look at that answer now, as being that of a husband and not merely of a son ; for he sustained both these relations, and in both it became him to acquit himself as a believer and a pattern to the saints. Now, seen in this light, it very remarkably bears out and verifies even all that I have said of that godless and lawless marriage, as having been to him like the mouth or horrid entrance of the valley of the shadow of death. For, in the first place, though Samson well knew that between husband and wife there should be no secrets reserved ; and that none living should come between them with a preferable claim for aught ; “ these twain being one flesh,” for which cause it is also written, “ a man shall leave father and mother, and cleave unto his wife,”—although, I say, Samson knew that, and at this comparatively early period of his departure from the Lord, it was not every occurrence that would have tempted him to make light of his words ; yet let us not press upon him too hardly. Let us, without at all seeking to extenuate, and far less to excuse his offence, think of the difficulty and the dilemma into which he had thrown himself by that most luckless, because most godless, of all marriages. For grant that it *was* his clear duty on the general principle to have first put his trust

in his wife ; I ask, have you no pity for the man who, in an evil hour, has committed himself to a marriage of that kind, which made that and almost every other moral duty a sort of downright impossibility? Had he “married in the Lord,” as the son of such a father, and still more of such a mother, so intellectual and so devout, might have been expected to do, how would he have trusted, and loved, and all but worshipped the woman with whom he was so united ; a man as he appears to have been of the intensest fondness, and ready to fight to the death for the just rights of everybody, because of his own innate and invincible adherence to truth and equity. But how could he trust such a woman as *that*? The thing was plainly impossible, unless he had been an idiot, or so blinded and beguiled, by his still more maddened lust, as in the case of Delilah, that for the time then being his very senses departed from him. And so at the seventeenth verse, when, yielding to the woman’s tears, and to those incessant importunities wherewith she plied him, and which upon a nature so soft and flexible as his are invariably irresistible, he discloses to her the riddle, observe, it is not said, that he told her because he loved her, or because, like a fool, he trusted her, or because he saw and felt it to be his duty ; no,

he told her, and could have told her for no other conceivable reason, than because, like the importunate widow with the unjust judge in the parable, she, as it is here said, "for seven days lay sore upon him," in other words, she teased and tormented him night and day, until she worked it out and wrung it from him.

And neither let us bear too hard upon the woman, for besides that you learn from the fifteenth verse that her own kinsfolk and acquaintance threatened her murderously, and even her whole father's house with fire, unless she should pluck the secret from his breast, and make them a present of it—besides that, I say, which might more than have excused here, her so resolute pertinacity, she considering herself a married wife, naturally, and not unreasonably, believed herself to be wronged by the preference awarded by her husband, even to his own mother. The direct avowal of that on his part, must needs have deeply wounded her bosom, and caused it very sore to bleed, even had it been far less soft and tender than not improbably it was. It was nature's self that had told her of the rightful preference of the wife to the utmost confidence of her own husband, so that when he so expressly spoke of his preferring his father and his mother to her, what else



could she think, but that she was deeply wronged, if not utterly degraded by him? For, how could she consider, as most probably she did not know, that it was at least a very questionable thing, whether a marriage so formed against the written law of the Lord conferred any right at all, or should not upon reflection have been utterly cancelled? She could not be supposed to know that, and therefore even if she had not been pressed and driven on by the most savage threats of her own people, she would naturally have "lain sore upon him," as it is said, in that unhappy matter of the secret; thus pressing him to do what he felt himself forcibly restrained from doing, both by his believing reverence for his parents, and by his evidently well grounded fears and suspicions, that in an evil hour of his heart's continued departure from the Lord, he had married to his misery, both as respected this present world, and too possibly also as respected the world which is yet to come.

The abstract here given of his apparently brief matrimonial life, is too barren of details to give us a finished picture of it. But enough is said to shew that this beginning of dissensions seems to have been followed by such bitter disputes and wrangles, as made Samson's residence with his wife quite uncomfortable to both, so that for a

season he left her ; returning, after a while, with what appears to have been a peace-offering, which he carried in his hand, he being a creature so constituted, that his resentments could never last, and that whenever the storm of wrath had blown over, and he had softened into himself again, there was none so ready as he to confess that he had spoken harshly, or that he had done the thing that he ought not, and of which he was now ashamed.

Such, then, are some of the uncountable and enormous ills arising out of those marriages which are made on the strength of vain fancies, or of grosser passions which never last—marriages, in the making of which God and his glory are not in the least regarded ; and his counsel so far from being sought and waited for, because above all things desired, is really the object of suspicion, dislike, and hatred, if regarded at all. I ask you, dear reader, if you can really suppose that God after sending you his Son for no other purpose than to interest you intensely about himself, as one who is more to you than a father, and than all your earthly kindred together—can you think that He can take it well, to find himself, even by professing Christians, so often as he is, in such matters overlooked, and left out altogether ? Oh,

think not to escape with this, more especially if at any former period of your life you have had any at all intelligent and confidential intercourse with God. For loath as he ever is to part with any one of us to the devil, and impossible as it is that he should ever consent to quit you, unless you shall yourself provoke him to it, he declares especially of all those of you, who have ever at any time truly known his name, and really believed in him, that "he will visit your transgressions with the rod, and your iniquities with stripes;" that "you shall be judged in the world now, that you may not be judged or condemned along with the world hereafter;" and that, in a word, the misery and distress and, peradventure, the very death of this backslidden believer, who could not otherwise have been reclaimed, is but, as it were, a picture and a prophecy of what must be fulfilled in you, if "after having tasted of the good gift of God, and the powers of the world to come," you turn thus wilfully away from him, to "fulfil any one of all the deceitful lusts whether of the flesh or of the mind."

There are various other traits of character of this prince and great man in Israel, which are well worthy of very special note, though we shall not

enlarge on them: such as his calm, considerate forbearance where, perhaps, you might have expected wrath, when, as at the 18th verse, he found that his wife had wronged him. He seems, with his characteristic softness and susceptibility to a woman's weakness, and especially to a woman's tears, to have made at once a fair and generous allowance for her; shewing that when, as at the 19th verse, and often afterwards, he was roused, and his anger is said to have been kindled, and it is seen bursting forth as in flames of scorching and consuming fire, the fuel that supplied and the gusts that fanned it, were very different from pride and selfishness and severity, that it was a deep sense of his country's wrongs, and a belief that it behoved him to resent them, and if possible to rid her of her tyrants and her misery. In other words, I think it can be proved, by a collation of particulars with which, to my eye, these darker passages are spangled, that while the main ingredient of his character had quite ceased to be piety, it still continued to be patriotism, and that a sense of outraged and still unvindicated justice it was which ever provoked him to retaliate. For what else was it but his keen sense of that which made him say at the third verse of the 15th chapter, "Now shall I be more blameless than the Philistines, though I do

them a displeasure ;” and again at the seventh verse, where he coolly takes the gauge and measure of his wrath, resolving to proportion the outlet of it to the exact amount of the injury done him, saying, “I will be avenged of you, *and after that I will cease.*” And, though it be anticipating to mention it at this stage of our exposition, see how in his dying moments it gleams forth again, like the last, and therefore the very brightest flash of an instantly expiring flame,—“Strengthen me, I pray thee,” he says, “only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes.”

The consistency of this and of some other seeming inconsistencies, with his really believing and repentant character, we propose to explain, and turn also to some profit, after considering that temporary and brief revival of his religion which ensued upon the dreadful shock which it seems the dissolution of the marriage gave him. That revival which may be termed a most instructive episode in this sad tragedy extends from the 8th verse of chapter xv. to the close of it, and we shall consider it fully in our next.

## CHAPTER IV.

## THE TRANSIENT REVIVAL.

THIS period of brief revival at which we are now arrived, is both characteristic and confirmatory of those expositions which we have already given, and also of those others which we have still to offer. And besides all that, there belongs to it a peculiar interest of its own, much like that which, when one is exceedingly anxious about the speedy improvement of the weather, he takes in the apparently hopeful brightening of the sky ; more especially when it so happens that a sunny morning has been overcast, and followed by ever threatening gloom. As one who disconcerted by such very unlooked for overcasting of the dawn is oft and anxiously endeavouring to discern the face of the sky, and sees that as the weary hours are approaching noon, the dimmed figure of the sun has begun to be visible in the midst of the leaden firmament above, where the clouds here and there are rending and melting

away, and that great luminary, as it were, rejoicing in his renovated strength and splendour, is just to look out again and smile anew upon the world—with just such an anxiously watching, fearing yet trusting, and ever hoping desire, did the mother of this great Israelite—if indeed she was yet alive—stand watching the progress of this wondrous change coming over him, symptomatic, as it seemed, of begun recovery in the backslidden spirit of her first-born, and probably her only son. For a creature as she was, so full of both faith and hope and wisdom as well as love, I doubt not in the least that habitually she ever strove to count upon his restoration. And, doubtless, also she thought that now would be the time, the set time and the season, when the Lord would revisit and revive him, not only as he had done hitherto continually, as the God of all power and gifts, but far more peculiarly as he had wont to visit him in his youth, as the God of all grace or goodness, and thus restoring his soul.

There are many things in this passage which to her so ever anxiously observant and meditative eye, would doubtless have seemed to indicate, that the tide of his affections was now really turning, and tending heavenward once more. It may be granted that all that she really saw of that sort was

but superficial and slight. But just as even the slightest of all bodies, such as a bit of broken straw or a feather floating lightly upon the wave, will shew with quite sufficient certainty and clearness the else imperceptible shifting and reflux of the current ; and the disinterment of even so much as one separate scattered fragment of bone, will, to such as are skilled in comparative anatomy, reveal the whole secret of the structure and the history of the once living creature that had owned it ; or even as the bones in the valley of the vision of Ezekiel which were very many and also exceeding dry, were nevertheless brought together, and the sinews and the flesh and the skin came upon them, and the breath also entered by the word of the Lord, and they lived and stood upon their feet an exceeding great army,—even so, dear reader, however broken and fragmentary and even dry also as very dust and ashes, or as separate particles of sand, these notices of Samson's spiritual history may, doubtless, still seem to be, yet if you gather them all together, you will see that in the scattered and broken and now time-worn fragments to be so gathered out of these verses, you have very much more than the dry and deathlike skeleton of this now seemingly reviving and repentant Israelite ; quickened as he seems here to have been



for a little, by God's spirit in his conscience, and stirring as if he were now again to be visited by a second spiritual resurrection.

It is indeed true, that as it actually turned out, no great spiritual resurrection followed immediately thereupon, and the reason of that may be thus explained. Suppose that in the valley of Ezekiel's vision to which we have just referred, there had been so great a shaking of the bones as had brought them orderly together ; and that the flesh and the skin had covered them ; and that something very like a return of actual breathing had begun ; but that somehow or other this seemingly just restored and resuscitated life was checked at that very point, and the compacted living frame of the body was once more rent in pieces, and scattered by the winds. Or suppose that Lazarus though half raised had never been released from the grave-clothes which both hand and foot had bound him ; and that death after all had triumphed so far as to have taken him back again even from the grave's mouth ; and this just because though he had heard the voice of Christ, and had joyfully consented to come forth as he heard it, yet just as he was arising and they were to have loosed him and let him go, he heard the syren voice of another and consented to lie down again ; and animation be-

came again suspended, though never afterwards was it quite extinct—suppose this, I say, and though it be a very violent supposition no doubt, yet in no degree is it stranger than are those very frequently fitful and merely transient revivals out of a death in trespasses with many of which our own eyes have seen the Spirit of God visiting the souls of now living men ; and of which this notable passage in the life of this backslidden believer is one of the most conspicuous and admonitory which even inspired histories have recorded.

The fact is, that if Samson had either been in no great degree revived here, or if he had been wholly and entirely revived here, as we shall afterwards see he was, when the Lord again drew nigh and effectually called and converted him even in the iron hold of the prison-house, I do not say that in that case his memoirs would have contained so little, that one might have likened them to his own dead lion's carcase without any portion of the honey ; but, then, the honey besides being less in bulk, would have been also far less sweet and nourishing. And to see how this is, let me fix your attention particularly on the sixth verse of this 15th chapter, where you see that retaliating upon Samson for having destroyed their corn-fields and vineyards, the uncircumcised

Philistines in their brutal rage and desperation believing himself to be irresistible, and resolved at the same time to terminate a connexion which had bred them nought from the beginning of it but vexation and distress and death, came up, and horribly cruel and cowardly as they were, what did the wretches do? They seized upon the weak and defenceless wife and the father-in-law together, and they actually did that now which they had threatened to do before; and the very terror of which had driven the poor unfortunate and most miserable woman to betray the as good as sworn secret of the wedded husband that loved her. For these uncircumcised Philistines set fire to the property, so that both she and her father perished in the flames.

Now, just think for a moment how this must have struck Samson's mother, had she been still alive, and watching the ever more and more unfortunate evolutions of that ungodly and disastrous marriage, which from the very first proposal of it, she had said she disliked; though with a feminine facility and a mother's indulgent fondness she had been drawn in to countenance the celebration of the wedding. We can never forget our first acquaintance with her, when with that instant

sympathy with truth which makes sanctified genius, both in its discoveries and its reasonings, so like to inspiration, she said, "If the Lord *were* pleased to kill us, he would not have received a burnt-offering and a meat-offering at our hands ; neither would he have shewed us all these things ; nor would as at this time have told us such things as these." Now, just imagine a mother so anxiously watchful as she, and at the same time with a judgment so comprehensive, penetrating, and devout—just imagine her standing by, and remembering how she had blamed herself—as beyond all reasonable doubt, both she and her husband would each have blamed themselves, though neither would have blamed the other—for having so feebly objected, and so fondly yielded at the beginning of this sad affair ; and remembering also how her very saddest and worst forebodings, of ever accumulating wretchedness and sin, had been verified by that marriage ; and how at one time she had seen it as good as dissolved, without her interference, by an unlooked for separation ; and seeing now, how in despite of her son's most mad attempts to reclaim, and to replace that evil marriage on the same footing as before, it was now by just such another interference of the Philistines themselves, dissolved in one moment, utterly, and for ever—

imagine, I say, the mother of Samson then living, and with such a shrewd and sanctified spirit as was hers looking so intently on ; and then judging of what you know must necessarily have been *her* reflections had she been then alive, you can all the better appreciate the views of Samson himself, more especially when it is said, that after having avenged himself, and doubtless also, as he thought, the memories of the most cruelly injured of the dead, by “smiting the Philistines hip and thigh” —meaning, as it is thought, not only “smiting” or felling them to the ground, but also smiting them with his thighs, or trampling them in his fury, as he threw them—to use his own words at the 16th verse—“heaps upon heaps” together—you can, I say, all the better appreciate the views of this mighty and marvellous Israelite, when immediately after that, as it is added at the 8th verse, “he went down and dwelt in the top of the rock Etam.”

Dear reader, we were never blinder or more mistaken, did we liken him here to a retreating tiger, or to the nobler lion whom he slew, or to any other infuriated animal of prey, when after having torn their many struggling victims, and left them lying quite breathless and dead, they are themselves returning sluggishly and slow, each one of

them alone, to his own solitary den, or secluded lair in the thicket, where he is to lie down and sleep, and perchance to dream until recovered from that fit of cruel ravening, and excessive gorging of himself with blood. And almost equally mistaken should we be, did we degrade him here by a comparison with either the wild warring Ishmaelite, or the untameable mountaineer, returning each to his own impregnable fortress in the desert ; brooding over both his real, and his mere imaginary wrongs ; and scowling death and defiance on all that dare to pursue him. Do think of the son of such a mother, and how though most true it is that *grace* is not hereditary, yet all observation proves that mere intellectual and moral gifts very often are, and seem oftenest to come by the mother's side ; and then consider besides how surpassing wonderful each of those steps of providence must have appeared to him, which I have but just enumerated—such as, his having rushed into that marriage most wilfully as we saw ; and his having afterwards striven to make the best of it ; and in spite of himself, his being involved in such wretched wranglings and broils, as forced on a separation ; and how though by the interference of another meddler, he had been as good as divorced, he had striven to be again enthralled ; till now that “ He

who maketh the wrath of men to praise Him," did by the wicked hands of these cruel Philistines themselves, sovereignly compel or force him to be as free as he had been at first before his luckless visit to Timnath—think of that, I say, dear reader, and you will see that even if he had inherited nothing of his mother's wondrous talent and tendency to reason, and reflect, and speculate, most certainly must he, who once had had believing and intelligent intercourse with God, have been struck to the heart with the evident as well as awful interposition of God now, even of that mighty Being, whom I doubt not he distinctly remembered that he once had loved, and had in fact continued to love, ever until, through the luxuriant growth and expansion of his own lustful desires, he began to dislike his holiness ; and in no wise to desire, but rather to dread his counsel ; and to be even more than willing to forget, that he had said, that " He will be sanctified of all them that draw near unto Him."

From all this, I think it plain, that Samson retires here astonished, to bury himself in solitude, and there to meditate and to pray, and to try if amid the great complexity of sins and temptations, with which through that godless marriage he had ruinously entangled another far more helpless, and

doubtless also, considering her ignorance, far less criminal than himself—to try, I say, if through that entanglement he can discover any straight and certain pathway for his own return unto God. He therefore seeks to be quite alone ; for it was, when a perfect stranger to the world and to all its ways, that he had formerly known the Lord. It was when he was but “growing,” or coming to his strength in manhood, that he had been wont to meet with the Lord “who blessed him,” and moved him graciously by his Spirit in those days, “at times in the camp of Dan.” Impossible it was for him ever to forget *that*, so long as memory remained ; and in the hour of this saddest and most strange, and to him in all the circumstances, most bewildering of all bereavements, he certainly could think of nothing else, but how possibly to resume his lost position with God, and to be as it were a child again.

And is not this borne out by all your own observation of the piety of youth reviving, and again seeming to break forth and bud, as it were by an after-growth, when it appeared to have suffered blight, or to have been uprooted for ever. There is in most cases, I would say, far more hope of *it* than of “a tree which is cut down, that it will



sprout again, and that through the scent of water it will bud, and bring forth boughs like a plant." And let all you fathers and mothers in our Israel take all the courage and comfort out of this, which some of you very greatly need, when either you are labouring with but little seeming success, to cause the good seed of the word to spring up in your children's souls; or when after seeing it beautiful in bloom, there seems a worm at the root to fasten on it, as on Jonah's gourd, or a biting east wind which withers it, and in the bitterness of your soul, on witnessing this seeming utter frustration of all a father's or a mother's assiduities and prayers, you are sorely tempted like Jonah for the while to say, "It is better for me to die than to live."

Dear reader, let this experience of Samson encourage you still to pray and to persevere with patience, even should the piety which you had implanted seem in after years to be blighted, or shorn even with the ground. Try you and persuade yourself, or to speak more properly, let the Lord himself persuade you, while you continue in prayer and patience, exercising your own self especially in contrition, for all your own frequent acts of remissness both in prayer and performance on your children's behalf—whilst you are continuing

thus to act, permit the Lord to persuade you, that of that stem of piety, the root to this very hour may still continue alive ; and that “ through the scent of water it may bud, and bring forth boughs like a plant.” For if you can really believe this, so as to act patiently and perseveringly upon that hopeful belief, even in the face of all unlikelihood, you will never be disappointed, and the Lord will eventually fulfil to you even all your desire.

But neither let it be forgotten that most extreme is often the difficulty of so continuing to believe and act, and therefore most extremely doubtful is the issue, even of all real conversions ; not indeed finally, but at such intermediate steps, as was this of Samson at Etam. And of course many times more doubtful in their issue are all those conversions which are possibly but apparent, “ having,” as Jesus Christ affirmed, “ no root in themselves.” And therefore leaving it to time, which tries all things and shews of what sort they are, to shew, as it will at length, whether it had a root under ground or no, do you carefully weed and water it, and cultivate, and keep, and dress it, assured that never possibly can it die if you do not through indifference or despair neglect it, but would rather night and day sit and water it with your tears.

Nor let it ever be forgotten, that—as we are reminded here, and shall be still more awfully reminded at the close—it is rarely or never without affliction acting as a furnace, and as a forcing heat, that youthful piety that had withered and been shorn even with the ground, can be made to “sprout again, and send forth its boughs as a plant.” It is not the mere “scent of water,” either springing from the ground or falling down in genial showers, and with gleams of sunshine out of heaven,—it is not that alone that will revive it, and keep it growing till it bear savoury and well ripened fruit again according to its season. The furnace of affliction must be intensely heated, and made to glow even as for the smelting of hardest iron or of brass, to aid as it were by an artificial violence the gentler action of the sun : and even all this care and consideration of the great and good Husbandman, may for the time being be defeated and brought to nought, partly through the obvious inherent difficulty of reanimating that which had almost quite expired ; and partly also from the untimely interruption and discontinuance of that particular expedient which had been employed to revive it.

And so it fared now with Samson in the particular instance before me. Had he been but

suffered to remain for a while in that meditative solitude “on the top of the rock,” where he had hoped to be inaccessible ; and where I dare to say he often thought of another—even Moses—who had also fled to the wilderness, when, having slain the Egyptian, he found himself as little comprehended and sympathized with by the degraded Hebrews of his time ; and to whom the Lord appeared at the burning bush when he too was forsaken and left to be quite alone—had this now convinced, stricken, and alarmed, and seemingly more than half penitent because most sorely chastened Israelite, been but suffered to devote himself, as he here intended, to farther self-examination, penitence, and prayer, I cannot but persuade myself that even like that same Moses, when he descended from the mount with God, carrying the tables of the law renewed, and his face shining as it were the face of an angel, even so would this penitent have descended, and shewn himself far holier, and wiser, and fitter in every way to judge and to rule for the Lord in Israel. But just as this present evil world, with either its business, or its cares, or its amusements, or its not unfrequently most heartless and injurious provocations, returns and intrudes upon many of you, and distracts and dissipates all your reviving piety and penitence

into nothing, even so did it fare at this time with this sore stricken Israelite, who had so almost decidedly now turned him once more to the Lord, and had been almost fully persuaded to exemplify and fulfil henceforward all his fond mother's desire.

It might be tedious to follow him step by step with the same particularity to the close of this chapter. But enough may be easily gathered out of it to confirm and throw much light upon all that we have here advanced. We have remarked frequently how his conscientious concern to fulfil his commission against the Philistines never seems to have forsaken him, nor ever even to have flagged, sustained and fortified as it was by his own passionate hatred of them. But see now in particular, how by his solitary communings with God at Etam, his conscience seems to be so strengthened and refined, that, as the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth verses shew, he would have no quarrel with his own brethren, even though, as of old they would have treated Moses, they now actually treated him, "binding him with cords, and delivering him up to the Philistines." And then again, though the intermediate verses between that and the eighteenth, narrate little more

than a repetition of one of those feats of marvellous strength and daring, by which his whole career had hitherto been distinguished, you find him at that eighteenth verse calling upon the Lord, as no doubt at Etam he had continued to do in secret. And though, as it is there expressed, his prayer was but brief and summary, it was probably not more so than in the circumstances it had need to be; while it contains internal evidence that he trusted in the Lord, and considered himself as His servant, and ascribed to Him his deliverance, and—most remarkable of all—that, as appears from the nineteenth verse, he was quite as thankful for his relief from thirst, as he had been anxious to obtain it; for we are told there, that “when he had drunk, and his spirit had come again, and he had revived, he called the name of that place Enhakkore,” or, the well of him that cried or called upon the name of the Lord. Thus most devoutly did he follow now, and thus far, in the footsteps of the holy patriarchs, who in this very manner had been wont to commemorate all their signal deliverances, or gracious communings with God.

And so from first to last was this a hopeful period; dating, as you observe it did, from that dissolution of the marriage which so convinced,

and alarmed, and compelled him to consider his ways, and turn anew to the Lord, as to give great hope of his future life corresponding to that earliest and brightest sunshine of his days, to which we must ever and anon refer, as giving a cast and a character of its own to the entire narrative—even the first morning of his days, when “as a child he grew, and the Lord blessed him, and the Spirit of the Lord began to move him at times, in the camp of Dan.” But alas, this so precious interval would seem to have been brief, and this just because, as may be clearly inferred from the last verse of the chapter, prosperity somehow returned, and peace along with it; and both prepared the way for those relapses into pollution which precipitated him into that horrid prison, or rather furnace let us call it, which might be said to have been heated for him even seven times seven, and from out which, as we have often said, he was saved, “yet only so as by fire.”

## CHAPTER V.

THE RUINOUS RELAPSE, AND HOW TO HAVE  
PREVENTED IT.

WHEN it is said at the beginning of the 16th chapter that “*then* went Samson to Gaza,” the meaning undoubtedly is, not that *immediately* after the prayerful deliverance which the Lord had wrought for him at Lehi, and which he himself had most devoutly acknowledged and recorded, he went down to Gaza, and there made himself *immediately* or *straightway* so exceedingly vile. For besides the more than improbability of his sinking all at once into such a quagmire, or stumbling at the very outset over such a precipice, these two so very opposite acts of his—the one at Lehi and the other at Gaza—are carefully separated in the narrative by the insertion between them of a reference to the entire period of his reign for twenty long years; which reference being repeated at the close of the next chapter, where it occurs in its own proper order, there seems to be



no reason for its having been inserted here, unless to intimate, that there did certainly intervene some very considerable space of time between the so hopeful revival of his soul at Lehi and his so extreme grossness and quite dreadful debasement both at Gaza and subsequently in the valley of Sorek.

This insertion of the note respecting the period of his reign was thus intended to signify that it was only at or about the close of those twenty long years, and whilst he was yet in the noonday prime and blooming vigour of his days, being, as it would seem, close verging on the 38th or 40th year of his age, that he so very miserably fell again. It was *then*, and not sooner, that having evidently crushed, by his exploit at Lehi, at least the very proudest and cruelest of those uncircumcised Philistines, and made himself to be dreaded by them all as being quite dangerous and quite invincible; and so finding that, on the one hand, neither would they now ever dare to exact so cruelly on the Israelites, nor, on the other hand, were these pusillanimous Israelites at all inclined to back him in following out further his schemes for their deliverance—it was just *then*, and not sooner, that having thus found himself, as it were, wedged in and fixed between these two sets or factions of equally mean and spiritless compro-

misers, and being worse than openly deserted, because much flattered and fawned upon by those of his own country who would talk much of their obligations to him—it was *then*, that with his most deplorable and childlike susceptibility to the praise of other flatterers than women, he began to relax his efforts, and to grow, not unwillingly, remiss in the discharge of the duties of his own peculiar vocation, which he had received from the Lord, so that you read never a word more of his gallant enterprises and exploits, as the sworn scourge and destroyer of the Philistines for the deliverance of Israel ; and he turned, I doubt not, to think, that just as these flatterers told him, he had accomplished all, or nearly all, that he had to do, and that having well earned his nation's gratitude, he should settle down and be at rest, enjoying all his now rich and well earned honours as a judge and a divider among his brethren, and letting the Philistines and their now greatly modified tyranny and extortions alone.

I am the more anxious, dear reader, to mark this emphatically, that you may not be ignorant of Satan and his devices. For you would greatly mistake his policy, and lay yourself so much more open to the force and subtilty of his wiles, did you

fail distinctly to see, that though it certainly was Samson's "*besetting sin*" that recurred and ruined him at last, it did not recur *immediately*. Certain it is, that it never enticed or tempted him to form another marriage with the Philistines; he being far too acutely sensible of his past sufferings, and I doubt not also of his egregious sins in that matter, to commit himself to another such marriage, or, indeed, to another marriage at all. But it does seem to be made almost as exceeding plain, by the silence of the historian as to any further service rendered by him to the Lord on behalf of Israel, and by the insertion here of that reference to the twenty long years of his reign or presidency, that before Samson fell so exceeding far as to indulge himself again in any form in his constitutionally besetting lust, his spiritual character had been going on quietly deteriorating for at least a very long period, and wasting secretly away; and that it was only after his spiritual sense had been so sore enfeebled, and his spiritual sufferings in former days so long forgotten, that his constitutionally besetting sin, for which he had most severely smarted, broke forth again as a fire which had only been smothered when it seemed extinct, and suddenly at last was he enveloped in the raging flames of it.

It is well to be warned by this instance, which

is but the type and representative of many thousands more, that your constitutionally besetting sin, more especially if it be exactly the same as Samson's, or even any one of all the lusts of the flesh, has the faculty of retreating and hiding itself, and lying in ambush, and watching there its opportunity ; so that when, like Samson at the rock Etam, and still more decidedly at Lehi, you seem to have given it a mortal stab, and it is driven off and retires for the time and leaves you, it is still but as a repulsed and retreating tiger, who, although disabled by a gunshot wound, will as certainly return by and bye in the dark, after long watching his opportunity, knowing well, as it were, where to find you, by tracking along the scent of the blood which had trickled from his side. Thus your besetting sin, as it retires, leaves always a tracing of itself behind it, by which it will most certainly return, not immediately, but after weeks, or months, or even after half a lifetime, if you keep not up the general tone and spirit of your believing character, and live, as it were, so armed, and so elevated, and so entrenched, as well as vigilant, that it can never dare to come nigh unto you.

I wish you, in other words, to learn, from the sad experience of this well-nigh ruined believer here, that those besetting sins of believers which

have been very severely rebuked and chastised, as had been this lust of Samson, by the frequent domestic miseries of his marriage, and more than all, by its most horrid termination—those besetting sins after having been so severely humbled, very rarely or never return at once. The way that they get round about and overcome us again is this. Other sins less constitutional, or, at all events, less suspected, prepare insidiously the way for the deadly return of that one, which is thought to have been destroyed. And your self-confidence growing fast, with this pleasant feeling of your security; and kind friends and relatives commending, and even more than lending sanction to your fond opinion of yourself; and thus you, having every day less and less the feeling of your entire dependence upon God; and the sense of your own vileness, which had been wont to make the fountain of Christ's blood, and the mighty strengthening of His Spirit, once so precious to you, being then quite deadened, or fast dying away; and thus you, being separated and seduced again from the Lord, not at all by your constitutionally besetting sin, but by very various other temptations, under the combined and unremitting action of which the whole believing tone and temper of your spirit has again been vulgarized and even utterly

destroyed—*then*, though not till then, it is that the first and most constitutional of all your sinful propensities returns, like a wounded and sleeping tiger, that springs again from the thicket with tenfold greater fierceness and fatality than ever ; and thus upon thousands and tens of thousands of believers, or seeming believers, is verified this dreadful warning of St. Peter, that “ if after having escaped the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning.”

To prevent that, dear reader, it is clearly not enough that you watch against the return of the particular sin, till, judging from appearances, you shall have reason to suppose it dead, and yourself completely delivered from it. That will prevent its return *immediately*. But to prevent its return for ever, or if you would not really invite and render almost absolutely certain its return at last, you must beware of Samson’s folly, of whom it is here made so exceeding plain, that though for long he indulged not his peculiarly besetting sin, yet encompassed as he began to be by other snares and temptations of all various sorts, which in the day of his revived prosperity insidiously thickened

round him, he evidently grew remiss and careless, and quite negligent of God, and of all the labour that had been assigned him in his peculiar vocation ; his spirit of faith and of repentance thus daily and hourly withering and dying away, until his believing character had sustained, not an absolute death, but a great and well-nigh irremediable degradation. And *then* it was, that the first and most destructive of all his lusts found opportunity to return, and all but utterly destroy him.

And it is in this very way that those of ourselves, in whom religion revives and rids them for a while of their besetting sin—more especially if it happen to be either exactly this of Samson, or that of drunkenness, or gluttony, or indolence, or idleness, or mere unsettled volatility, or the pampering and pleasing of any one of all the many lusts of the flesh—it is precisely thus that they are again entangled, and perhaps quite ruined for ever. How often I have heard such poor and most pitiable sinners say, with the most perfect simplicity and candour, as well as the deepest shame and remorse, that they cannot possibly comprehend how that vilest of sins returned, and with seven times madder frenzy and fierceness than ever, after they had been so watchful and so wary, and withal too so successful in escaping it

for years, and for years together. The explanation is simply this, that while they have warded off the attacks of that particular lust for so long, by watching against *it* particularly, they have been like this believer allowing the general system of their faith and practice to go utterly to ruin, by their remissness in other duties ; their ever growing neglect or want of interest in God, and their ever increasing conformity to the world, and compromises therewith. And no wonder that after the spiritual nature has been so cruelly reduced and weakened, so as to be bedridden as it were, and dying of disease and starvation, the carnal nature returns and binds it there, and spoils even all its goods.

To watch against the return of the one particular lust whilst yet you neglect to strengthen and sustain the general habit of your faith and believing obedience, is to commit just such an error as would a military garrison, for instance, if because of their having well fortified their most vulnerable point, where the breach had wont to be made in front, they paid no heed to other operations which the besiegers carried on more covertly in the rear, both to cut off the supplies, and by fire and by undermining, to reduce the citadel to ashes. And so, just as the proper tactics there is not only to keep the sentries at the gates—and if they sleep



or desert shoot them, for we must have watchful sentries at the gates,—but over and above that we must do everything to preserve in highest health and efficiency the gallant veterans within ; even so do I beseech and charge you who, in fighting the good fight of faith, may have been like this believer here, so often beaten and discouraged, that you would almost surrender now, and can scarcely be inspirited to fight again. I beseech and charge you to consider that still there is hope, nay, assurance absolute, if besides merely watching against the particular besetting lust, whatever it may chance to be, you will strive to strengthen also your faith in the Captain of our Salvation, and in that triumph which is coming fast to all who, in His name, do set up their banners, striving in all things to be obedient and well pleasing to Him.

It is in evident harmony with this view of Samson's second and most shameful fall, as arising from a gradual and secret and complete decay or consumption of his whole inner man, or in other words, of his whole spiritual nature, that all the saints, or seeming saints, who resemble him in his falls are spoken of, as not only "making shipwreck of the faith," but the very particular term by which they are all distinguished everywhere, even all the

world over, or at least over Christendom, is that of "*backsliders*." That is to say they are spoken of as descending hellwards, not at all precipitously at first, but, as it were, by sliding or slipping smoothly down a gentle declivity, which is often of great length and only *terminates* in a precipice. The fall of an at all experienced saint from grace, being thus very rarely or never like that of Satan, when seen from the earth to fall "as lightning from heaven," because instantly as he sinned *there* where no sin can be suffered, mightier angels than he—as this revelation says—had seized and cast him headlong down to hell. The fall of an at all experienced saint on earth, where sin is borne with for a season, is much liker to the fall of water along the bed of a smooth and a noiseless river ; which, though its flow may be greatly quickened as it approaches the cataract, is not particularly disturbed or ruffled even on the very brink of it. But as for miles and miles together it had been smoothly gliding down, so it does still continue to glide, until in one instant it is dashed, and seems to rave and shudder as it falls, into the gulf below. And thus has St. Paul described that slow and exceeding smooth descending, which almost invariably precedes the final sudden catastrophe, when in his prefatory chap-

ter to the Epistle to the Romans, he speaks of the once considerably interested and enlightened mind, becoming every day more secularized and selfish and "vain in its imaginations;" and "of the foolish heart being darkened," as the earth in winter is both chilled and darkened by the withdrawal of the sun. For even as the backslider "does not like to retain God in his knowledge," God in most just resentment of it gives him over, for the time then being, "to a reprobate mind;" so that by and bye he does those things both openly and in secret, of which we are told, "it is a shame even to speak of them." And, "knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only doth he the same, but he also taketh pleasure in such as do them."

The detailed description of this now so utterly fallen, and quite shameless Israelite's proceedings here, we cannot pursue particularly. The very glaring grossness of it deters us, and makes it quite as needless as it would be offensive. Suffice it to say, that the repetition of the act at Sorek, after the danger which he had incurred and miraculously escaped at Gaza, is well fitted to remind us, how when the heart has gotten to be hardened up to a

certain pitch, or is to a certain degree depraved, deliverance from danger which would before have softened it even to weep floods of outbursting tears of gratitude and devotion, only hardens it then the more and tempts it to greater daring and defiance of all the irksome restraints of the holy law of the Lord. And at Sorek, therefore, with Delilah there breaks forth in Samson not only an utter recklessness of consequences, but an utterly profligate and sportive gaiety, than which nothing could more clearly indicate the total blindness of his mind; and which, knowing as we now do the issue, looks like a prophetic warning of that literal blindness which was so soon and so relentlessly inflicted.

But frivolous and loathsome as was that foolish talking and jesting here of Samson, there are two things in it which seem to me well worthy of some remark. The first is suggested by his saying at the seventh verse, "If they bind me with seven green withs or willows that were never dried, then shall I be weak, and be as another man." Literally understood that was utterly false, and might seem to have been thrown out like his other two very similar speeches, merely in sport, and to parry or stave off a questioning, which he had less than no mind to gratify. But

I think there was more of what may be called a sort of method in his madness there. For though I doubt not he meant that Delilah should understand it literally as she did, I think I can also distinctly enough perceive, that in his own secret thoughts and imaginings, it was the language of figure, representing how easily he, although the strongest of men, could, if taken on what we familiarly term his weak side, be persuaded to anything, and become the dupe and the victim of even the very weakest of mortals if just they were wicked enough and worthless enough and designing enough. "Bind me," says he, "with withs," or as we would say proverbially, "You could bind me with a straw; you and such as you, by flatteries and fondness and cunning management, could get a fond and facile creature like me, to do anything, however wicked as well as however weak." That most certainly was Samson's character, and I doubt not it was his secret meaning at the time—his sage, though by no means sad reflection upon himself. And how true and how prophetic the event of that very hour declared. It was in fact the language of poetry indicating both self-knowledge and a sort of strange presentiment, such as we have ourselves had opportunity to notice in the case of the wicked, who fell at last

into the bloody hands of the executioner: but in whom, as in Samson, there appeared a gleam of internal light warning them beforehand of all their pitiable weakness, and of that retribution which they had the utmost reason to dread.

The other two of his sayings are perhaps as remarkable for this, that though he durst not venture in the first of them to allude at all to his hair, yet he is evidently gathering courage as he proceeds; so that when pressed again for the third time, he does venture as at the thirteenth verse to say, "If thou weavest *the seven locks of my head* with the web." Dear reader, observe, and let us all be admonished, how this so importunate and persevering harlot like a bewitching sorceress is very fast gaining ground upon him. It is clear as day now, that she has gotten within his guard, and will have everything out of him by and bye; and be at least as wise and many times more dexterous and managing than he: for she has allured and pushed him on to the very brink of that giddy precipice, where it is evident his very senses reel and sicken, and get to be quite useless, and as good as abandon him. And so he makes in one moment, at the seventeenth verse, that awful disclosure which for all the years of his bygone life he had either anxiously hidden altogether from the

Philistines, or most effectually hindered their taking any advantage of. And then, as if she had drugged him even almost into the sleep of death—though it appears not that she used other villainous expedients than what, besotted as he was now, he felt to be the hellish incantation of her charms—he went to sleep upon the knees of that worse than accursed Jezebel; and sleep he did there so profoundly, that when he awoke with the griping hands of the ruthless Philistines upon him, he said in his sore stricken forgetfulness and stupidity, “I will go out, as at other times before, and shake myself: and he wist not,” or was not at all aware, “that the Lord had departed from him.”

As the God of all *grace*, the Lord might be said to have in a great measure departed from him, when rejecting the counsel of the Lord, he paid his third visit to Timnath, and there married the Philistine. But still in pursuance of the Lord's own purposes, and doubtless also out of pity and regard for his servant, he still continued to countenance him by still dispensing to him one of those miraculous *gifts*, which are all so perfectly distinct and different from *graces*, that we see a precisely similar separation every day in the case of some who seemed at one time pillars in the Church

and pre-eminent disciples of the Lord Jesus, and who, although they appear to have fallen utterly away from *grace*, through the lusts of the flesh, yet retain quite unimpaired all those mere *gifts* of reasoning, convincing, alarming, and converting other men, by which they preach the gospel, and manifest the kingdom of God with power unto other men, while yet it is but too evident that each of themselves may become a "cast away." And, what may be perhaps still more readily recognised as being in fact identical with this case of Samson, retaining his miraculous gift entire, and long after he had lost the grace which sanctifies, you behold in those, who are yet to be heard pleading piteously at the judgment-seat of Christ, that "in his name they had cast out devils, and done even many wonderful works," and yet to them it will be said, "Depart from me, I never knew you, ye workers of iniquity."

Samson had thus been in some measure deprived of sanctifying grace, even when at Timnath he so determinedly preferred his own counsel to the counsel of the Lord. But however small was the appearance of it in those days, the peculiar *grace* of God did still linger about him *then*, as if it had been exceeding loath to let him go altogether. And nothing seems to me more



certain than that on the horrid and heartrending dissolution of his godless marriage, the grace of God did return ; so that both at Etam and at Lehi there was a glorious though brief revival of the gracious spirit of his youth, and the light of the Lord's gracious and reconciled countenance was turned, and made directly to shine upon him. But since that he had fallen away again, as we have seen, through prosperity and the pride of life, inducing a general carelessness and indifference both to God and to his service ; and in that weakened state of his *graces*, mere *gifts* could do nothing, when his constitutional lust returned and renewed its attacks upon him, first at Gaza, and more fiercely still at Sorek, where he completed all by doing what he well knew was equivalent to the grossest profanation of the awful vow or oath by which from his birth, and even before it, he had been consecrated to the Lord. Farther than that it was not possible for him to go in his guilty career ; and because if the Lord had not now stripped him of his *gifts*, he would have cared little, or rather cared nothing, though all *grace* had departed from him instantly and for ever, what did the Lord do ? why, as much in pity and for the recovery of his servant, as in wrath to punish and chastise him, he stripped him of even

all his *gifts* now, as well as of everything. This was a proceeding which the poor miserable most wretched backslider, reduced by his own lusts, was evidently not prepared for. It took him by surprise and stunned him. He had never really conceived, that though he ventured to proceed to such extremities with the Lord, the Lord would so react upon him, and proceed to such extremities with him. And the first intimation he got, that the Lord was clean departed for the time then being, and had quite abandoned him, both as respected graces and gifts together, was his finding that he staggered as he rose, and fell helpless into the hands of those savage operators, who straightway proceeded to put out his eyes, and brought him down to Gaza, where they bound him far otherwise than with withs; even with fetters of brass they bound him, and made him "grind in the prison-house."

There is something in all this so mournful, more especially to us now, realizing as we do the close application of it to the experience of thousands of living men, who like him are fulfilling now the lusts both of the flesh and of the mind; and of whom we think it far too possible, that conscience in some of them will never effectually awaken till it find them on a deathbed; or till it find them

in the grave ; or till it find them actually at the judgment-seat of Christ—there is something in all this, I say, so mournful and so alarming, that we would rather defer our further remarks upon it, till we can pursue it in connexion with the second and last revival, which begins at the next verse—the twenty-second—and is continued not only hopefully, but, in the case of this one individual, even with full assurance to the close. It mitigates the gloom when we take up the two together. But meanwhile lest any should presume on such a certain restoration, who may be now sinning in like manner, and thinking that they will yet repent, and so finally be saved, let me remind them that such a recovery as was this of Samson, from a lust which is so enslaving, may almost be ranked with the repentance of the thief on the cross. So far at least is it from being very certain or very common ; more especially in the case of those who have been blessed with pious parents, exemplary friends and companions, and perhaps occasionally alarming convictions, from their knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ ; and that St. Peter means us to understand that generally, though blessed be God, by no means invariably, it will be found, that “the latter end of such men is worse than the beginning.”

## CHAPTER VI.

THE SIN AND SUFFERING PROLONGED ; BUT ISSUING IN  
A GRAND AND GLORIOUS RESTORATION.

VERY rarely and perhaps never, was there a more striking instance recorded than is this of Satan, the great deceiver, beguiling an unstable soul, and for the time then being, entirely blinding his mind. We have already sketched as it were an outline of that dark subterranean passage into which this believer had been very early lured, by the devil and his own youthful lusts together ; and which, with the exception of but one brief space, where light for a while did break in upon him, grew gradually darker and more dark, as he held on descending ; till after having gone repeatedly to sleep there, in his self-confident security, he awoke at last as it were in hell ; so suddenly did he find himself landed there, and so long was he left to lie there in total darkness ;

deserted of God ; tormented by malignant devils, besetting him in the shape of men ; his own most fierce, because now most impotent rage and resentment of their cruelties, and more especially of the baseness of Delilah that had betrayed him, burning round him as a fire ; while shame, and remorse, and unavailing regrets, and utter unbelieving hopelessness in fitful gusts swept ever and anon athwart him, and made the fierceness of the flames thereof still hotter and still more intolerable. And this, dear reader, reminds me, that though the notion of what has been termed a purgatory, or place for purifying the souls of the impenitent and unbelieving dead, and fancied to be lying somewhere between this our familiar earth and that scarce imaginable hell, from out of which eventually there is no redemption—though that strange notion be certainly nothing better than superstition and a dream, yet is there nothing truer than that for believing souls when backslidden through prolonged departure from the Lord, there verily is as it were a purgatory, not in the shades below, but *here* in this now living and still sinning world ; so that even Samson in that horrid cell, so blinded, and beset, and tortured, and all on very purpose both to punish and to purify, and so bring him to be himself again, is but a type or figure of thousands

and thousands more who are described in holy writ, as being spiritually blind and imprisoned, and bound in fetters of iron, the pains of hell laying hold on them, until goaded on by their misery, all hope in themselves expires, and out of the depths they begin to cry unto the Lord, to come and save them from their unspeakable distress. Dear reader, did we but think of this, and really believe how very soon those that are now "fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind" may be inclosed in that dark and despairing cell, we would be saved in this hour from ever entering it; and even if we were in it now, we would thus be delivered, though certainly not without much trouble in the flesh, and strong crying and tears.

And now, to shew somewhat more closely the application of all this to ourselves, observe, that even if Samson had never been a Nazarite, dedicated to the Lord, his sin in this matter would even then have been exceedingly great. For there being at least as much of natural reason and conscience in man as tells him that he ought in no wise to live like the beasts that perish, his sin in this thing was evidently against what is not improperly termed the Light of Nature. And then to that there was superadded the light of

the Seventh of the Ten Commandments ; for so Jesus Christ explained it, when, himself interdicting the indulgence of even licentious desire, he expressly said that to them “ of old time,” or under the Mosaic law, as was this Israelite, not only the very grossest of all licentious overt acts had been forbidden, but even all licentiousness. And Samson farther well knew, that it was just this sin of his that had so filled up the measure of men’s iniquity of old, as to have brought the flood upon the world ; and that because of the trespass of Moab, to which St. Paul has referred in his Epistle to the Corinthians, there had been slain in one day, by the indignant command of God, so many as three-and-twenty thousand of the children of Israel. But—what came much more specially and personally home to himself—he further well knew the nature of that Nazaritish vow which had been so early made for him by his parents ; to which also he had himself consented afterwards in his youth ; and which pledged him, not for a limited period only, but even for all the days of his life, just as our baptism has pledged ourselves, “ to crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present evil world.”

Now, while we have at least all the religious

knowledge that ever Samson had to enhance our responsibility, there is also between our Christian baptism and his Nazaritish vow a very much closer and more clearly designed resemblance than at first sight appears. For besides that, as I have just remarked, the vow in Samson's case extended over the whole term of life, the preserving of his hair was further like our baptism with water, in its being both a sign or symbol, and also a seal or certification of his having made such a covenant with the Lord, as it was exceedingly blessed to fulfil and as exceedingly dangerous to break. And so, neither the water nor the hair serving any other purpose than to signify that such a gracious covenant with God had been entered into by the party, is it not evident of Samson, that even had he succeeded in preserving his hair unshorn, as you see that he strove to the very last to preserve it, yet living as a sinner, and continuing so to live, it would certainly have availed him nothing, at all events after death, that he persisted till he died to wear the outward badge of the covenant? And does not this make it very plain that it will avail us just as little, and probably, indeed, far less, to hold as fast by our baptism, or by any or all the ordinances of the sanctuary, if we have not, as the Bible assures us,



what is signified thereby,—even “the answer of a good conscience towards God?” Our holding to the outward ordinance, and yet neglecting, and so forfeiting the inward spiritual grace, being like attaching the same or even greater value to the casket, or mere deal-box, after the precious jewel which it enclosed had been bartered or stolen; or fancying that the terms of a title-deed inferring mutual obligations should be strictly fulfilled in our favour by the other party, while yet we are making light of all that by the same deed he is as entitled to claim.

But the resemblance between Samson’s conduct as a Nazarite, and that of many who have been baptized may be profitably traced much farther. It is in the sixth chapter of the Book of Numbers, that we have the peculiar law of the Nazaritish vow very fully delivered. And from the details which are there given it is easy to see why Samson, even when he had grown to be quite disgustingly debauched, yet kept to the very last moment the religious secret of his hair, and fenced as if he would have fought to the very death to prevent the shaving of his head. Nothing easier than to explain why he so doggedly held by the mere sign and seal of the covenant, after, with his own wicked hands, he had thrown the entire

substance of the covenant to the devil. For you learn from that chapter in Numbers that it was by the actual shaving of the head, that when the vow was only for a limited period, the expiry of that period was formally announced, and the party so acting openly and decidedly proclaimed that he was free from it. But for Samson, who had vowed to serve the Lord as a Nazarite for the whole term of life—for *him* to take such a formal step as *that* required even more than human—it required Satanic audacity. To intimate to the Lord—his own and his father's God—as it were, formally and officially, that though pledged to Him for life he had now grown to be tired of Him and of His service, and was resolved to be quit of both, and would take his own wilful way in all time coming wheresoever it might lead—from intimating this expressly Samson naturally shrunk. He would not be at all concerned in it. He would not even let others do it for him. He was frightened to have a hand in any such devilish act of impiety and defiance, even after he had debauched himself to an almost incredible excess. And from precisely the same sort of still remaining religious fear, is many a licentious liver so clinging now either to his own baptism, or to his exemplary outward walk in all the ordinances of the sanctuary,

that it will in most cases be very long before he at all boldly and openly and for ever renounce them. Long after what had seemed to be the religious principle and piety of his youth have fled, so that, like this backslidden Israelite, he is "not only doing the things that are deserving of death, but also is taking pleasure in such as do them," even then, like him, too, he will have very great fears of venturing on anything that would seem distinctly to say, that he had actually renounced God and Jesus Christ altogether, and was prepared to abide the consequences. He feels that he must keep up for a while some sort of seemingly religious connexion, being in nowise as yet prepared to take up the dangerous position of a downright and declared infidel as well as profligate and profane. But in process of time from even this also he will fall away; the conflict of his convictions, and fears and forebodings of future evil, being all eventually settled by the ever encroaching and at length confirmed dominion of his wilfulness and his lusts. And even if he never did fall away from all mere profession of the faith, yet to reinstate faith itself, and so reclaim him to the love and the practice of a spiritual commandment, I certainly see nothing for it, but that God should seize hold of him and cast him into that fiery

furnace of affliction—that spiritual prison and real as sure as dreadful purgatory, of which Samson's wretchedness was a type, when, as we have already and so fully proved, he was forced, in the bitterness of his soul, to own that "the Lord had departed from him."

I should hope that, from all this, every youthful backslider may now at least perceive, that verily he is venturing to walk upon "slippery places," where "his feet shall slide in due season;" and that even more than probable it is that there is but a step between him now, and the same, or even much worse than the same, unspeakable distress; as when God departs from the habitual and hardened sinner's soul, not only for a season, as in this case, but even finally and for ever. And so, as my last words on this most painful of all topics, I say, to all who may be conscious, that though they heed not the awful comments of Christ Jesus the Lord, especially on that Seventh Commandment, and care not how much they grieve the Holy Spirit by their heedless infatuation there, having no real belief or comprehension as yet of what spiritual desertion means, yet, if the light of faith ever shine into the now darkened chamber of their understanding, there will just as certainly be awakened there, fears and faintings of heart,

and forebodings of a future and irremediable sorrow, ever goading them to despair.

Let us now, though very briefly, explain, how this naturally religious fear was in Samson's case eventually overborne, although it had so obstinately fenced and fought against, and triumphed for a time, over all the harlot's devices. If we have made it plain to you why he fought so desperately and so long to keep the secret hidden in his breast, and so to save himself from being implicated in anything so certain to provoke the anger of the Lord, as would have been the *formal* and quite *explicit* renunciation of his vow, we think we can now make it just as plain why he gave in eventually, and brought himself to be charged with that renunciation. For, observe again, how it is said at the 20th verse, that even after it was all over with him, "he wist not," or knew not, or was not at all aware, "that the Lord was departed from him." He had, therefore, ceased by that time to apprehend or dread any such terrible infliction. He had evidently gotten to be persuaded by that time, that surely the Lord would not be provoked to do aught so dreadful to him. His indulged passion for Delilah, and her importunities together, would set him upon trying to persuade

himself of that, and he would succeed in doing so ; thus getting rid of that religious fear which had made him for a while so stiff and so impracticable. And observe how naturally and plausibly he would reason himself out of that salutary fear into a feeling of self-confident and quite ruinous security. To give a handful of his various arguments, as a fair average and sufficient sample of them, I think that I could overhear him speaking thus in his heart :—“ That religious fear which restrains me, if not altogether groundless, is surely, *all things considered*, less formidable than I had imagined, for the Lord is merciful and gracious, and as such I have ever found him. And in clear proof of this, though I have indeed lost the *graces* of my character, all my *gifts* are entire ; shewing how unwilling he is to lose me and let me depart from Him altogether. And more than that, let me consider, that though I have indeed smarted severely for my sins, and more particularly for this same lust, which married me to the Timnite, yet how have I been delivered ! And how was not my soul revived, first at the rock of Etam and subsequently at Lehi ! all encouraging me to believe that even should I deliver up this secret now, or let her pluck it from my breast, and proceed upon it as she list, the forbearance of the Lord will be

extended to me now, or, at all events, considering the greatness of my temptation, He will restore me afterwards, and never will He suffer me to perish by the hands of those uncircumcised Philistines, who are all doomed irreversibly to the destruction which the whole race of them deserves." With many such specious arguments as these would Samson and the devil together be combating his religious fear, while Delilah kept up her incessant battery from without, so that sure as fate he would surrender, though for a while he continued fighting stoutly ; nor was there any possible safety for him but to have risen and fled as from out of a burning house, the rafters of the roof of which were falling around him. And so, accordingly, mark you the Divine wisdom of our being charged in the Scriptures not to *fight* with youthful lusts, unless when it so unfortunately happens that we are shut up to the necessity ; but, contrariwise, whensoever it is at all practicable, you are commanded to *flee* from them. Your safety consists mainly in shunning the provocative and getting out of the reach of it. And never once again, if possible, ever look in the way of it. And cease ever to think of it by occupying your whole time with present duty, and an entire devotion to the discharge thereof, as unto God in Christ

Jesus, who seeks "to purify you unto himself," and is coming to judge you. For when the devil and his legions see this habit of mind in any human creature, we are told that they "flee from him" and fasten upon some other who is more self-willed and careless, and likely to become their prey; whereas, of diligent believers, they instinctively know that they can absolutely make nothing, "because greater is He that is in them than he that is in the world."

It is, farther, of the last importance to note that Samson fell into that false and insidious reasoning about the mercy, or rather the indulgence or facility of God, just because he left the firm ground of the divine testimony, and abandoned himself very much to his own airy speculations. It must be admitted that his did appear to be a very natural way of reasoning. But that very thing should have made him regard it even not a little suspiciously, since the very fact of there having come to us a *preternatural revelation*, speaks volumes to the melancholy truth, not only of nature's defect, but even of nature's derangement. But so it was, that to combat his own nature's religious fears, he betook himself to what was really nothing better than his own nature's fancies about the great unseen Lord, and therefore Law-



giver of creation. And even as though he had never heard of the covenant which the Lord had made with man, and more peculiarly with his own nation, and in the firm and glorious faith of which his own God-fearing father, and even still more remarkably, that gentle and meek, most thoughtful and magnanimous of women, his own mother, had both lived, and, as now it would seem, had died—as if he had never so much as heard of that covenant, in which “mercy and truth were seen meeting together, and righteousness and peace embracing each other,” or inseparably blended, he begins to speak of mercy, as if there were neither truth, nor justice, nor honour, nor integrity in God, nor any one attribute in fact, which could secure to him the implicit and ever-during confidence of the whole obedient creation.

And so of ourselves, dear reader, who never do presume on the mercy of God, as an encouragement to sin, either in doing what is wrong, or in neglecting and deferring duty, unless when forgetting this Revelation, we forget that it is with God who has actually made a covenant with each of ourselves through Christ Jesus by sacrifice, that each of us hath to do—that this is a covenant sealed in the blood of Him who framed it—that therefore the mercy which is here set forth to us

is an awful, and, as we might almost term it, a terrible and dreadful mercy ; even as the justice which is here set forth to us is generous and compassionate, beyond all computation ; and that this wonderful covenant is, as I have shewed you, specially signified and sealed by our baptism, and by the other sacrament of the sanctuary, and this on very purpose that we may never never give in to our own wilful fancies about the facility of God, but know that “ he will love them that love him, and that all those that hate him he will utterly destroy.”

But being anxious to close, I hasten now to observe respecting Samson’s recovery, which forms the last of the three periods into which his eventful life was divided—and which extends, as I have said, from the twenty-second verse of this sixteenth chapter to its close—that even as it was his having indulged his own natural reasonings about God, instead of looking to the covenant in which God had revealed Himself—just as it was *that* that ruined him, so I reckon it very certain, that his persisting in that course for a while must have retarded his recovery. How long he was of recovering we can only conjecture, and very vaguely, from its being indicated only by the progressive growth

and restoration of his hair. It is plainly meant to be said, that ever until then, he had not gotten back his strength, but that with the completion of that slow process he did get to be himself again, not merely in *gifts*, but, as I formerly explained, he got to be himself entirely, and I doubt not even still more richly adorned both with *graces* and *gifts* than ever. And if you ask why this should have been connected at all or in any manner of way with the restoration of his hair, this answer is plain from all our previous arguments and explanations: the hair in his case, was what baptism is in ours, being both the sign and seal or certification of his own personal covenant with the Lord. And the Lord therefore employed the progressive growth of his hair most aptly, to signify the progressive growth of Samson's returning confidence in that covenant and in the renewal of it; his forgetting of which covenant we saw to be the immediate cause of his ruin.

I think I could go far in divining his meditations upon God and upon himself nightly, as he lay upon the earthen floor of that gloomy cell; and when he awoke in the morning to prosecute again in darkness, the heavy and ever hopeless drudgery of the day. I think I could go far in more than guessing at his meditations, when the

untamed and savage fury of his wrath having at length subsided, he began calmly to reflect and meditate and pray. But I forbear to make excursions on that illimitable field, not of wild flowers only, but of sweetest and most ripened fruit, and content myself with repeating—as that symbolical use of his hair, seen in the light in which I have striven to put it, can scarcely fail to suggest—that it would be some while before he recovered a clear and comprehensive conception of that covenant which he had both misconceived and forgotten. And that following out his own natural reasonings about God, now that he was in distress and well-nigh in despair, these reasonings would just be the very opposites or contraries of what he had so recently been deceived with, when he happened to be very sanguine. For when our mind is anxiously framing a religion for itself, the mood in which it happens to be for the hour is very much like a mould which fashions and decides the shape of it. If we make a religion at all for ourselves, we may almost be said to make it “in our own likeness.” If we excogitate and so create a religion for ourselves, we are sure at least to colour it with the hue of our own fancy, much as light takes on the particular colour of the stained window through which it passes. And so just as when this back-

slider was very sanguine, he had reasoned about God as though his single attribute were mercy, so now that he is fast sinking into melancholy, threatening to end in madness, he is sure to reason about God, as though in his mind there existed nothing but stern justice alone. Therefore it is, dear reader, that God has put into your hand and mine a written and well-ordered covenant, and bidden each of us ask ourselves not what *reasonest* thou concerning thy Maker and Redeemer, but what *readest* thou there concerning Him? And our plain and only security consists in remembering the "*Thus it is written, and thus saith the Lord,*" for the instant we slip from that anchor we are like ships "driven by fierce winds and clouds without rain," having no certain course to steer, and with a religion as shifting as the tides, and as capricious as the weather.

Now, it being so evidently some while ere Samson, in his great distress, regained his firm hold of the covenant, he lay during all that tempestuous interval as it were in the midst of a sea of storms, and, like St. Paul, driven to and fro in Adria, when, for many long days and nights together, "neither sun nor stars appeared, and all hope that he should be saved was broken away." But though only after a while, this so backslidden and

despairing saint did, in his blindness, grope about, till, feeling at length for the covenant, he laid, as it were, his still timid and trembling hand upon it. And immediately as he did that, his courage, though but slowly, rallied and returned and grew, as indicated symbolically or in a figure, by the gradual but sure as well as silent growth of the hair of his head again ; and by and bye he felt that he was growing stronger than ever. And when God in his providence brought on the day that all those uncircumcised, doomed and devil-like idolaters were assembled into one place, setting him conspicuously between the two great central pillars of it, to make him cruelly their sport ; he who was now again in sympathy with the mighty One who overrules the creation, through his recovered hold on the covenant, which in an evil hour he had let go, now lifted up his heart in prayer again unto heaven. And whilst he was yet speaking, He that dwelleth in the heavens hearkened and heard and gave him all his desire ; so that as the first morning of his days was bright as the sun and beautiful, his last moments were sublime as is sometimes the setting of that great luminary, when amazed we call to each other to look out and see, how he puts forth even more than all his strength again, and amid what surpassing

glories he is retiring from the world. All going to convince me of this most blessed truth, that however it may be in other places of creation, yet here, where all have sinned, God sets more value upon the solitary sincere repentance of every single one of us than even upon all the righteousness of all the righteous that never fell; and that judgment is indeed his strange work; and that there is none like unto Him that so "delighteth in mercy."

Nor let it be objected here that the last words of Samson's prayer, at the 28th verse, seem to savour of something like deep and settled revenge, which could hardly consist with the death of the righteous; or that he sought to die by his own hand, as if wearied of life, and quite impatient of his misery. Observe that the last of these two objections is at once removed by recollecting, that Samson's commission from the very first carried this, as it were, in the very fore-front or bosom of it, even that God had raised him up to try to ruin the Philistines; for which thing's sake, even as much as he must detest and abhor a marriage with them, must he, as a good soldier, take his life in his hand, and be ready at any moment to offer it up as a sacrifice. And neither is the

former of these two objections at all more difficult to deal with ; for, as if the Lord Jesus had meant to prepare us for solving this and many similar difficulties, does he not, in his sermon on the mount, remind us that this had been understood to be the law in the days of Samson,—“ An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.” So Samson had been taught in his day, even out of the Book of the Law of the Lord, instead of being taught as we are, to “ resist not evil, and to pray for our enemies, and thus to become the children of our Father which is in heaven.” Into the reasons for this great difference in the preceptive teaching of the Church, this is not the time to enter. But the mere fact of such a difference is sufficient to shew, that had Samson sat, as we are sitting, at the feet of the blessed Christ, and seen his meekness as blaspheming sinners carried him to prison and to judgment ; and followed in the train that attended him to Calvary ; and been afterwards told, as you have been, that when, for the last time, his lips were seen to move, he was praying for his murderers, saying, “ Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do”—dear reader, can you doubt that if this believer had been in any degree so privileged as ourselves, he who was now in all his service so dutiful and



magnanimous, would in this respect also have satisfied all your desire ?

And worthy therefore, I say, was he to be borne away from the ruins, and carried by many brethren and by all the house of his father, and laid in the place of his fathers' sepulchres as a prince and a great man, who had fought and had fallen gloriously that day, for Israel's liberties and for the honour of Israel's God. And though not a few of the many things we have had to say, as being either suggested to us by the Scriptures or literally recorded there, may have worn somewhat the air of chivalry and romance, yet have we all along striven to speak of him under the solemnizing conviction, that it is as but a little while and we shall actually see him raised along with ourselves in the day of the Lord, and standing probably among the foremost of those most blessed saints of whom it is written, that "they loved not their lives unto the death ; and they laid them down for the brethren ; and they overcame by the word of their testimony, and by the blood of the Lamb."

## CHAPTER VII.\*

## THE NEW EARTH PREPARING FOR THE PREPARED.

“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. 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. 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. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire. And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.”—REV. XX. 11—XXI. 1.

THERE is great interest to us all in these words, even when they are considered merely as being the words of another, and he too a most peculiar man, the last and most privileged of all the inspired and holy prophets of the Lord. But that

\* The six preceding Chapters were delivered in the ordinary course of lecture, on six consecutive Sabbaths at the close of last year. And what appears here as the Seventh Chapter is subjoined principally as comprising a fuller statement and application of the peculiar gospel than had been previously introduced; and partly also because of its having followed immediately after the former series, on the first day and Sabbath of this year, when the annual collection fell to be made on behalf of the District Mission maintained by the Congregation.

interest is of course immeasurably heightened when it occurs to us to consider, that these words, which he alone could employ in his day, are far more than probably the very same words which each of ourselves shall yet be heard to utter, adopting them as our own. For after we shall have actually seen, and ourselves been involved in these awful and amazing doings of eternity, we shall certainly never forget them ; and we shall at least for very long be conferring about them one with another almost continually. And should any of us ever chance to meet—as very probably we may—in those strange regions, any far travelled and inquiring members of the universal family of God, who in their own far distant settlements had been but imperfectly informed of these things, with intensest interest straightway shall we lay hold of them, and begin to discourse to them of this judgment which we had actually seen ; and of the consequent separation of our race into “ them that perished, and them that were saved ;” and of the destruction of our world by fire, saying, “ I saw a great white throne, and Him that sat on it,—even Christ,—from whose face our earth and our heavens fled away, and there was found no place for them.” And so, just as the Prophet described in these words the mere shadow or similitude which

he witnessed in his earlier day, even so shall we ourselves then, in these or very similar and substantially the very same words, describe the reality after it is all over. There being just this difference, that we shall then deliver ourselves with a weighty and quite dreadful sense of it, and with an infinitely clearer and more perfect comprehension of all that is implied and specified thereby, than it is even perhaps at all possible for any of us now to reach. For *here* at best, "we are seeing as but through a glass darkly," insomuch that we are often doubtful if we are really seeing at all. But there, dear brethren, "that which is perfect being come, all that is in part," and that is oftentimes so embarrassing, "shall have been done away."

It is verily but a little while, and as a watch in the night, so swift and suddenly will it come upon all the world, when we shall even every one of us be saying to ourselves, if not to each other, or to inquiring children of God come amongst us from some other and far distant provinces of creation, "I saw a great white throne, and Him that sat on it, even Christ, and all those things that we had so often read in the Book of His Revelation concerning Him and His judgment of us, I actually saw." It is thus that we shall all then speak from

memory ; even from the most vivid, intense, and indestructible recollection ; although at present, if we would speak of these things, there must be an effort of abstraction, and imagination, and conception, and of sympathy with God in the clear and completed manifestation of even all His greatness. There must, in other words, be a strenuous forthputting of all those faculties which, when quickened mightily by faith, serve as helps and as handmaids to it. And if we do really believe in this fast-coming judgment and destruction of our world, of which we find ourselves so often quite unfit to speak,—if we do really believe in this so as to feel that we are nearer to it to-day than we were even yesterday, and very sensibly nearer to it to-day than we were this time twelve-month, or than we were when we first believed ; then, or in that case, there is surely nothing so natural as for us to ask now, and not without some anxiety and fear, as well as amazement, where or in what conceivable situations and circumstances shall we ourselves be speaking thus ? To what now unseen and scarce imaginable region shall we all have been transferred, when we shall thus begin to speak and continue to discourse together, of our having actually seen and been surprised by the sudden departure, and, as appears

from various other Scriptures, the utter destruction by fire both of the heavens and the earth.

I would never have started that question, nor so much as alluded to it, if as an ambassador of Christ I had not felt myself quite competent to enable you to resolve it. And in order to this observe, that the last of the verses of our text so far explains this, for it shews you that by that time, like this Prophet, we shall all have seen in reality, what he saw only in a figure, namely, a new heavens and a new earth, superseding and being actually substituted for those which are now "waxing old," it is said, "and about to vanish away." That new earth being the very one which was promised to Isaiah the Prophet, when it was told him, "Behold I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind : and the new heavens and the new earth which I will make shall remain before me, saith the Lord." It will be the very same new earth, in short, which those primitive believers were ever looking for, who best of all understood and sympathized with the awful purposes of God, and the glorious prospects of the faithful ; and of whom it is written, that afraid as they naturally were—and who that at all believes is not thus

afraid—to think that they “were hastening to the coming of the day of God, when the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat,” yet did they reassure and comfort one another with continual references to that and other such exceeding great and precious promises of Him “who maketh all things new.” For they habitually said, for the more effectual tranquillizing of their own and each other’s souls, “Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.”

Now, dear brethren, it is in that new earth, with those far brighter, though quite sunless, heavens shining over it,—for “there will be no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine there,” for the glory of God will lighten that new earth, and the Lamb will be the light thereof—it is *there* that you will each most certainly be relating and ruminating on what you will by that time have actually seen and felt on that great and terrible day of the Lord—it is in that new and happy earth, the last asylum of all the tempted, afflicted, penitent, and often well-nigh despairing brethren and sisters of the Lord Jesus—it is *there*, and nowhere else, in all the awfully wide and diversified universe over which He the Almighty

Father of your spirit reigns, that you your own very self shall have your own local habitation and settled residence for ever, if so be that when warned, as now especially you are by the rapid flight of time, and the revolution of the seasons, and the everything that summons you to make fast and sure provision for eternity, you will just honestly set about disengaging your affections, as a true follower of Christ, from this present polluted earth, which is so soon to be destroyed ; and so be getting yourself quite ready to enter in and take possession of that other, and infinitely better, and therefore everlasting earth, which Christ, as He said, hath actually purchased, and hath gone before to prepare for you.

And so, dear brethren, to each of you in particular, as Christ's ambassador, I say, that it rests entirely with yourself, even with each of yourselves now, to make choice of and to fix your own peculiar home and place of residence for ever. For with a generosity that can scarcely be believed, it is so wonderful and so glorious, what hath the Lord our own Creator and Redeemer told us ! Why, he hath actually said, that notwithstanding our having all more or less sinned in " this present evil world," and so made it to become so exceeding vile and hateful to Him, that He cannot much



longer endure to look upon it, and must burn it ere long with unquenchable fire ; yet is He even now preparing another and a new earth for the future occupation of all those of you who are living here by faith, and so are preparing for *it*. And though not till the very last shall it be openly revealed, for this reason among others, that not till the very last will it be required for the open manifestation of His peculiar regard for you, yet nothing is more certain than that into *that* you will be transferred ; and *there* God himself “ will dwell with you and be your God ;” and to prove it, “ He will wipe away all tears from your eyes ;” and “ there shall be no more death, neither any more sorrow, nor crying ; neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things will have passed away.” And from all this it is plain that what Scripture calls the “ inheritance,” and “ the purchased possession” in that other and far happier earth, becomes yours at once simply by your accepting Christ’s generous gift of it, and so beginning straightway to live upon your prospects ; lifting off your affections from this present polluted earth, which is so soon to be destroyed, and laying out your all with a view to that new earth, which Christ says He has purchased, and is anxious above all things to prepare you to enjoy.

There are thus, observe, really two earths. For there is this one that hath waxed old, and is polluted and vile, the object only of the senses, and fit only to gratify them. And there is that other earth, purer and more spotless than is yonder sun in our firmament. But though it be quite as real as is this our familiar earth, it is apprehended only by faith ; and you can never walk worthy of it unless you “ walk after the Spirit” here, and “ crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts ;” and learning, as I said, to live much upon your prospects, be honestly endeavouring to lay out your time and your talents, and your personal influence, and, above all, your money—your pecuniary means and substance—for the recovery of lost souls, and the relief of the suffering poor and indigent around you : so that Christ, when you shall actually see Him sitting on that “ great white throne,” and yourself among the countless myriads of the arisen dead are standing before Him, shall certainly include you among the blessed of His Father, and bid you “ come and inherit the kingdom prepared for you, from the foundation of the world.”

Now, I know of nothing that will ever persuade any one of us really and honestly so to live—thus sacrificing *all* for Christ—unless our really believ-

ing that that new earth of which I have spoken, besides its being quite as real as is this present one, and besides its being actually preparing for us now under the immediate eye of the Saviour, is also gifted to us now, or made over to us now, under the best of all guarantees, even "the promise and the oath of God;" and this for the avowed purpose of His persuading us thereby "to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present evil world," and so preparing ourselves for residence in that world where none but the righteous can ever dwell, because *there* none but the righteous could find anything to enjoy.

And so here, before going farther, let me entreat all of you to observe *when* it is that Christ actually presents you with this greatest of all gifts—the free gift of "the inheritance," "the purchased possession"—and presses it on your acceptance. He does not defer doing so until he shall see that you have been, at least for some considerable while, endeavouring "to live soberly, righteously, and godly;" as if He thought it dangerous to press upon you the acceptance of this offer sooner, and must prudently reserve it till He can signify by the gift that you have made considerable progress in securing His approbation.

Dear brethren, there is perhaps no one mistake so very prevalent among men as that is, and there is none I am sure more certainly fatal. For it perfectly reverses the procedure of Christ here, who goes to everybody with this gift to whom the gospel is preached ; not excepting even those who may be living as licentiously as Samson lived when he was travelling up and down to Timnath and to Sorek, and making himself exceeding vile. And He tells everybody of this gift which He has purchased for as many and for no more than will accept it from His hand, and He presses everybody to accept it from Him. But multitudes will never do that, because many of them pay no heed to it ; and many of them doubt or deny that it is a reality ; and many more of them, who suspect that it may possibly be real, yet exceedingly dislike and dread any such interference of Jesus Christ as yet, between them and the world. Still again and again He presses the acceptance of this gift upon them, as well as on other people ; because well does He know that ever until they do distinctly accept it they will continue to live mainly for this present world, and so will perish along with it ; whereas would they but accept of this gift as having been bought with the very life's blood of that same Christ that offers

it; from that blessed moment they would be terrified to sin wilfully, lest so sinning against Christ they should miserably perish; and they would also habitually hate and positively abhor to sin, because of its being unfaithful and rebellious against Christ, to whom they were now willing to give up their all; having in proof of this begun first with giving to Him themselves.

Every single day and hour, therefore, that any of you defers accepting from the wounded, and as it were still bleeding hand of Christ that gift of eternal life, which He and He alone is entitled to offer you, and which He says He gives you on very purpose to create a liking in your souls for Himself and His service, and for that new earth especially into which, if you will but prepare for it as being His purchased, He will soon triumphantly transfer you,—every single day and hour, I say, that you defer accepting that offer of Jesus Christ, and so suffer your affections still to cleave to this world, and to fret and fever you about establishing here your rest, and laying up for yourselves or for your children treasure here, what are you really doing, but, as Holy Scripture saith, “denying the Lord that bought you;” and “refusing to receive the testimony of God concerning His Son,” and, in the awful language of the

Scriptures, “disbelieving the word of God, and making God a liar?”

Nevertheless, the general disposition and habit, even of such as are professing godliness, is to live as if we had nothing more to do with that new earth at present, than merely to reckon upon it as a refuge when this earth is destroyed, or when either a sudden fit of sickness or our rapidly advancing age shall warn us that our connexion here is just about to cease. “Wonderful comfort and relief,” you will hear occasionally serious people say, “to think of what is revealed, so that instead of having to go forth at death upon utter emptiness and nothing, there is a local habitation already provided for us; and to think that thither we shall be carried, perhaps in the arms of angels, or by our own deceased kindred returning for us, with whom we shall have residence for ever: and that there shall be neither pain, nor sickness, nor any separation, nor any more death; and there no sighing shall be ever heard, and no tears shall be ever shed. To think of this dispels our melancholy, and lifts us often far above all the cares and sorrows of the world. We love the great God of heaven, who in His boundless generosity has made for the short-lived and often suffering creatures of a day, this so rich and bountiful provision. And

how can we better prove it than by just making ourselves happy with all the various pleasures of this present world while it lasts, and taking to do with that other world and *its* so peculiar pleasures, only when its time, or what might be called its turn comes, and we can be here no longer.”

Dear brethren, I doubt not that this is substantially the religious reasoning of many a not very thoughtless, neither at all unreflecting, creature, who, through the blinding of his mind by the devil and his own lusts together, has always failed to perceive that his reasoning would be clearly and unanswerably good but for this simple fact, which at once and utterly destroys it, namely this, that God has told you of that new earth on very purpose to persuade you to deny yourself to this present one—to look upon yourself altogether as being not a settler here, but a stranger, and so to make no other use of this present world unless as it is here that you are to acquire and cultivate those graces,—that purity of heart, for example—that fervent piety and benevolence—that comparative indifference to wealth, and popularity, and power, and influence among men—that pity for lost and sinning but still recoverable souls, and, in a word, that sympathy with Christ in regard to

all the interests and objects of his peculiar kingdom among men, by which we are fitted for admission into His kingdom in glory. And so this being the gracious and the only reason for the Lord's having revealed to us that there shall be a new earth and heavens, when this present earth is destroyed, how dreadful the delusion that can persuade men to pervert this, by making no other use of the gracious promise of the new earth, than just to encourage themselves thereby in living only for this present life, and cultivating only those secular virtues, if virtues they can be called, which are essential to the existence of society as it is now constituted, but which will most certainly meet with less than no praise, or honour, or glory, "at the appearing of Jesus Christ."

The best cure that I know for that so diseased and delusive reasoning, which would represent the two earths as being no otherwise connected than as the one is to follow immediately upon the other's destruction, is just for us to observe, in the first place, that the reason which the Lord assigns for His destroying this present earth and creating that other is, that this earth is polluted, so that nothing short of death, and the decomposition which ensues in the grave, can ever cleanse the bodies of



us who have been born here ; nor can anything but the fire that is to reduce its elements to ashes so purify the earth itself, that He that formed it should ever look upon it again and say that He sees it to be good. And then observe, in the second place, that in harmony with this He says, that that other and better earth is destined exclusively for the abode of a pure and holy seed—a people perfectly righteous, and whose main and most characteristic peculiarity is this, that when Christ tells them of his having purchased that new earth for them, would they just as being his purchase receive it from his hands, and that thither he purposes to transfer them after they have been trained by his Word and Spirit here to hate sin and to follow holiness, and to die to this world, and to live unto God ; they take up their cross and begin to deny themselves straightway, and all this just because they verily and indeed believe Christ ; and every single soul of them can say from the heart truly, “ God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of Christ, whereby the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.”

And so now, dear brethren, if this be the only true religion, as I for one am convinced it is, and every other, being utterly without faith, will leave you short of salvation, then let each of us

habitually strive to deepen our own personal conviction that Christ Jesus the Lord has really come to ourselves, and really given unto us this exceeding gracious promise of a new heaven and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness ; and this for obviously no other conceivable reason than that we being induced thereby to walk in some measure worthy of our high calling, may be ready whensoever summoned, and however suddenly, to take our departure hence, and say to those who would strive to detain us here, and cannot endure the thought of even a temporary separation, " I am in a strait between two, but it is better for me to die than to live. It is far better for me to depart and to be with Christ."

Now, there is no surer or readier way to deepen this conviction, than just to be making practical use of whatever kind or degree of religious feelings or convictions we already have, by proceeding to act upon it, and so getting into the confirmed habit of doing particular and precise things, and, were it possible, even all things, in the name of the Lord Jesus ; that is to say, doing them under the felt conviction that He is observing you, and that you are doing them not to yourself or to other men only, but really to please Him who has

“purchased you unto Himself,” and has given you all you enjoy ; and who, as if it had been a small thing to have so sufficiently provided for you during the life that now is, has distinctly undertaken for the life everlasting, if so be that, instead of thwarting His gracious purpose you will really concur with it, and honestly persevere and try “to set your affections on things in heaven, and not on things on the earth.”

Depend upon it, it is much worse than a mere error of judgment which leads any of us to defer setting about this, till, instead of such occasional fears of death, and apprehensions about God and the strange doings of eternity, as are natural to all, we shall get at least something like the faith, and the hope, and the seeming heavenly-mindedness of the select and peculiar few, with whom we can never compare ourselves. This is much more than a mere error of judgment, as, in most cases at least, it arises from that depravity of the heart which so inclines it to live merely for this world, that it is glad of any plausible pretext for deferring to enter upon the life of faith, and an excuse it readily finds in thinking that it must defer till it get faith. But all this is delusion ; and could I but persuade those of you just to make a beginning, and though only on the strength of such

fears as may be now awakened within you, to do something immediately, with the view of getting clearer, and more confiding, and therefore more comfortable, and far happier and more hopeful views of your own interest in Christ Jesus, and in that new earth which he has gone before to prepare for all who are busy preparing themselves here to enjoy it,—could I but set you agoing thus, on this first day of another twelvemonth, to serve God in Christ Jesus, though only in this sorry style, and only with this intention of getting thereby to be right, it were “not to be despised,” though but “the day of small things.” For be sure, that within that sort of fear, which so urges you to performance, there lies enveloped and hidden the germ of true saving faith, much as the buds of plants and fruit-bearing trees in winter lie inclosed in the dun-coloured husk or shell, which, when the spring and the warmth come, they are quite sure to burst. Fear is thus transformed into faith, simply in the course of your making practical use of it, as a step to that far holier as well as happier attainment. And thus, while you are using what you have, though it be the lowest sentiment of all, “more shall be given you,” according to Christ’s promise. For really the fear that will thus act has at least the essence of faith in it, almost all

that it has to do being to break and throw off its crust, or, like spring-water which is muddy, to discharge its sediment; which certainly it will soonest do, if, instead of its remaining stagnant, you will make it run itself clear, by keeping up a constant flow and an open outlet continually.

And so then, dear brethren, whether we have already gotten the faith, and the fortitude, and the full assurance, in looking out upon eternity, on this memorable day, as on a lofty promontory we might take our stand, looking out upon the expanse of the mighty ocean, and reflecting, that just as the ark was actually seen by other men before the flood, lying out on the waters, even so can the eye of faith discern the new earth prepared already for the faithful, though most wisely hidden from the senses,—whether we have already gotten that precious far-seeing faith, or only *desire* to get it, we have the very same course to follow. Let us go to work with what we have; call it fear, or call it faith, or call it anything you will, but defer no longer to be up and be doing something, of which you can say, when with myriads of the new-risen dead you shall stand before Christ Jesus, that this thing you either did, or *tried* to do, for His sake and in order to please Him. This will be beginning well on the first day of the beginning twelve-

month ; and sure as prophecy, before the close of it, yea, far sooner with most of us, if we continue so doing, shall our prospects begin to brighten ; and we shall understand far better that hidden process whereby fear is insensibly transformed into faith, and the believer, sore tossed and driven for a while, gets far beyond the reach of those sickening fluctuations.

Now, I speak of *one* thing for distinctness sake ; and of that thing in particular which I should like most of all to begin with. It is the remark of everybody, that though the collections here are certainly as great, and probably much greater than in other similar congregations, yet this is very far from being the result of a universal or even a very general liberality—that the fact is they are made up by a section composed of all classes—those often who can least afford it, being among the happiest of all to give ; while many others of all classes, rich as well as poor, give very inadequately. It is in this way that the collections here, as well as everywhere else, though comparatively large, would be very much larger, could all be persuaded to think of Christ in this matter ; and really to consider how very soon he will have sent a messenger to remove and to place every one

of us where money is of no value ; but where it would be of infinite value to us, if we, in the presence of Him that sitteth on the throne, could have a secret consciousness—a sure though silent testimony—his Spirit bearing witness with our own Spirit the while—that we had denied ourselves here, and, in particular, had not grudged our money, but did cheerfully part with such things as we had, for His own and for His kingdom's sake. Ah! dear brethren, were this half duly considered, then not in this congregation only, but everywhere throughout the Church, our contributions would flow forth in streams of glorious profusion. And our Deacons' Courts besides being able to tell that they had cleared off all their debts, and “ owed no man anything, but to love one another,” could say that they had fed the hungry, and clothed the naked, and taught the ignorant, and reclaimed the vicious, and converted by God's grace innumerable souls, the predestinated heirs and future occupiers of that New Earth, which Christ, as He said, hath gone before to prepare for them. And—what, I am sure, I should be quite as much delighted with—many of you who are now distressed with religious fears, would thus get them very certainly if not soon transformed into saving faith. And by and bye you would wax strong in faith,

“well knowing in whom you have believed, and to whom you had been committing the keeping of your soul in well-doing, as into the hands of a faithful Creator.” And so then, dear brethren, in this same spirit, whether of fear only or of faith, let us do something to-day, as becomes the professed peculiar disciples of the Lord Jesus ; lest on the great day of his appearing, when we shall all rise from the dead, He bid us depart from Him, instead of saying—as He most certainly will, if we follow Him fully, and make believing sacrifices for His sake—“Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”











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