

THE RAINBOW IN THE CLOUD

by William Bacon Stevens

Stevens' devotional on finding God's comfort and divine purpose in suffering, viewing affliction as God's purifying work and evidence of His loving character toward His children.

22 Chapters

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00.1-The Rainbow in the Cloud, Or,

The Rainbow in the Cloud, Or, Covenant Mercy for the Afflicted

Various Authors Edited by William Bacon Stevens, 1856

The Wilderness Wanderer by John East Christ, a Man of Sorrows by Edward Payson Songs in the Night Season by William Bacon Stevens The Weaned Child! by Octavius Winslow The Well-Spring in the Desert by James Buchanan (prayer in times of affliction) Jesus Veiling His Dealings by Octavius Winslow The Chastening Rod in the Father's Hand by James Buchanan Uses of Chastisement by James W. Alexander The Stones of the Heavenly Temple Prepared on Earth by William Bacon Stevens Covenant Promises Seen Through Tears by William Bacon Stevens Silent Suffering by Philip Doddridge Christ at Bethany by Robert Candlish The Noontide Eclipse by William Bacon Stevens The Setting Sun by William Bacon Stevens Christ the Keyholder of the Eternal World by James Buchanan The Compassionate High Priest by William Bacon Stevens The Sun Going Down While Yet Day by John Newton The White-Robed Throng! by Henry Venn The Refuge from the Storm by Robert Leighton

00.2-SOURCE NOTE AND SPECIAL THANKS

SOURCE NOTE AND SPECIAL THANKS

Grace Gems Editors (God's Servants) at <http://www.gracegems.org/> updated, revised, and adapted this beautiful material to modern English. They adopted a 'flowing poetic form' for most of the quotes as an aid to reflection and comprehension. <http://www.gracegems.org/19/literature.htm>
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00.3-PREFACE

PREFACE

We live in a world of sin — and hence in a world of sorrow, for "man is born to sorrow, as the sparks fly upward." The apostle Paul tells us that "We must go through much tribulation to enter the kingdom of God." The apostle John shows us, in one of the visions of the Revelations, that those who "were arrayed in white robes," who were led by the Lamb "into living fountains of water," and from whose eyes "God shall wipe away all tears" — "are those who have come out great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

Thus it is true that "The path of sorrow, and that path alone, leads to the land where sorrow is unknown." That being so, it befits us to learn how to transmute tribulations into blessings; how to turn God's chastening rod into a supporting staff; how to discern the rainbow in the cloud, while we are still wet with raindrops of sorrow!

It is the design of this volume to aid in doing this comforting work. It seeks to ameliorate sorrow — not by a kind of moral anesthetic, deadening the sensibility of grief, and making the heart less susceptible to woe — but rather by showing to the afflicted that chastenings are the sure evidenced of God's fatherly love.

Afflictions are the means whereby, when right used, "we become partakers of the divine nature." The furnace of affliction is but the purifying agent to purge away our dross — that the great Refiner may see His own image reflected in purified souls. In adding another to the many works designed to furnish consolation to the afflicted, the Editor feels that he is but meeting the ever-pressing needs of the human race, and the ever-earnest demands for comfort by those who are visited by bereavement and sorrow. The present work, without interfering with or displacing any of the valuable treatises which have lately been published, has yet a distinct character of its own, in the originality of its design, in the arrangement of its several parts, and in gathering together, from choice and diverse writers, English and American — the strongest and most scriptural consolation which can be offered to the sorrowful and stricken-hearted.

Believing, as the Editor does,

that all our springs of comfort are in Jesus Christ,

that they are applied to the soul by the Holy Spirit,

that they are to be sought for by the prayer of faith, and

that they result from the overflowing grace of our Heavenly Father

— he has aimed to keep these points prominently before the reader, being unwilling to lead him to any of the "broken cisterns" of earth for consolation, when the well-spring of Divine comfort, which can alone staunch his bleeding heart, is pouring forth its free and life-giving waters!

It is the lot of all to be visited with sorrow. There is "a time to mourn" marked out in every man's life; and when that time comes, and the fainting spirit turns away from the "miserable comforters" of earth — may all who consult these pages find in God a refuge from every storm, and "a very present help" in every time of trouble. And may they be enabled so to look at their sorrows, with the clear-sighted eye of faith, that they shall discern "a rainbow" in every cloud of affliction, and "covenant mercy" in every shower of grief.

01-The Wilderness Wanderer

The Wilderness Wanderer by John East

"Some wandered in wilderness, finding no way to a city where they could settle. They were hungry and thirsty, and their lives ebbed away. Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble, and He delivered them from their distress. And He led them forth by the right way — that they might go to a city of habitation." Psalms 107:4-7 This present world through which we are passing, may justly be called a wilderness; it is a solitary, and a barren way. It is a lonely and a dreary way we are traveling in; the path is strait and narrow, and few there are who walk therein. This world is no more our friend — than it is our home. The true Christian, therefore, who is born from above, whose home is in Heaven, and who is daily traveling thitherward — is the object of its malice, or else the subject of its ridicule. The soil of this present evil world is barren and unfruitful; it presents before our eyes many objects which are a hindrance to us in our way; but it is entirely desert and barren, with respect to any help it affords us in our spiritual progress. It produces little else but briars and thorns, which have a tendency only to entangle and wound the feet of those who pass through it. The many afflictions with which the people of God are exercised in the present life, are as a constant clog to the wheels of their souls, which makes them drag on heavily. And were they not sometimes favored with a view of the rest which remains for them — they would be almost ready to despair of getting safely out of this valley of tears, which they have, therefore, too great occasion to call a waste howling wilderness — a solitary and a barren land. This present world through which we are passing, is also properly compared to a wilderness — as it is likewise a dangerous way. A wilderness is a place not only barren and unfrequented — but is generally full of pits and wild beasts, which render it exceeding dangerous. For this reason, it is styled in Scripture a "vast and dreadful desert, that thirsty and waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions!" Deuteronomy 8:15.

We are called to pass through an enemy's country — this world is under the influence of our greatest and most inveterate enemy. The Devil is styled the prince of the power of the air, and the generality of this world's inhabitants are his willing slaves and vassals. While therefore we are passing through his territories — he will be sure to gain all the advantages he can against us. No sooner do we enlist ourselves under the banner of Christ Jesus — but Satan and the world immediately join in a league against us; as though they were resolved to rob the Redeemer of his spoil, and pluck those who are the purchase of his blood, out of his hands. There is a deep-rooted enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. Satan has an inveteracy against every one who bears the image of Jesus; and "as a roaring lion walks about seeking whom he may devour," 1 Peter 5:8. And, like an old serpent, he conceals his wiles that he may get the better advantage over us. You are, in this life, never free from his temptations — he is always contriving some temptation against us, or presenting it to us. And that we do not oftener fall into the snares which he lays to entrap us, is only owing to the care and vigilance of our Great Leader, and the grace which he is pleased to communicate to us out of his fullness. As for the world — "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life" — how prevailing have these been

to draw aside the believer from the God and guide of his youth! These Philistines are often upon us before we are aware of them — and there is an unbelieving heart always within, which is as constant fuel to the fire of temptations from without! So that, were not God pleased at particular times to open our eyes, and let us see that "those who are for us are more than those who are against us" — we would be ready to give up all in despair! On these accounts, the present state is compared to a wilderness. We wander here in the wilderness, in a solitary way, "we can find no city to dwell in, hungry and thirsty, our souls faint within us." But herein God leads his people by the right way, to the city of habitation. Every believer is as dear to him as the apple of his eye — and as near to him as his right hand. His love was fixed from everlasting upon them, and therefore his care and loving-kindness are ever exercised towards them. He may bring his people into the wilderness — but he cannot, in consistency with the perfections of his nature, or the promise of his grace — ever leave them there. They may, and often do seem to lose their hold of him; but he never does, he never can lose his hold of them. "For the LORD's portion is his people, Jacob his allotted inheritance. In a desert land he found him, in a barren and howling wilderness. He shielded him and cared for him; he guarded him as the apple of his eye!" Deuteronomy 32:9-10.

There is no getting to Immanuel's land — but by the way of the wilderness; which though it is not our rest itself — yet it leads us to our rest; it fits and prepares us for it. The afflictions which we meet with therein, serve also to make the heavenly blessedness the more desirable now, and delightful hereafter! God may therefore often lead us in a rough and unpleasant way — but he always leads us in the right way. Let us only take a view of these particular seasons, wherein we are most apt to question the loving-kindness of our God, and we may determine the happy outcome of all the rest.

Let us begin with the melancholy state and condition of those from whom God hides the light of his countenance. These are often ready to object against themselves, that they shall never "see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living." Methinks I hear them complaining with the church of old, "My way is hidden from the LORD; my cause is disregarded by my God!" Isaiah 40:27. And they condemn themselves for hypocrites, and mere professors — because of the uncertainty of their frames, and the unfruitfulness of their lives. They are for the present bewildered, as those that have lost the way. They have no sensible communion with Christ — no present discovery of the love of God, to take comfort in. But notwithstanding their fears, "this is the right way, wherein God leads us to the city of habitation." Were the reconciled countenance of a covenant God and Father always to be lifted up on us, we would be apt to prize the comforts we receive immediately from him, as more than the glorious person who was the purchaser and bestower of them! Were he never to hide his face, we would live upon the streams, rather than the fountains. We would be too ready to say with the three disciples, "Lord, it is good for us to be here!" We would be ready to make a stop at the banks of Jordan; or at least, we would pass that river with reluctance, indifferent towards what remains to be received by us in the heavenly world. In a word, God is pleased to give us at some times, a glimpse of our future glory — that he may excite our desires after the farther enjoyments thereof; and at other times is pleased wisely to withhold his hand in this respect — that we may be willing when he calls us, "to depart, and be with Christ." This, then, though it be a way less pleasant for us to walk in, is nevertheless the right way to the place where our hearts and treasure are both lodged; by this means, we are made to long after, and then are led to the city of habitation. The same may be said, concerning the various outward afflictions with

which the believer is exercised. They are, all of them, let them arise from whatever quarter — both useful to us, and necessary for us. God never sends an affliction to us — but when he sees it needful for us. And he never removes it from us — before it has answered the end for which he at first sent it. Outward afflictions are not accidental things, they come not by chance — but are sent to us by a wise and merciful Father, who causes them to answer the end for which he sends them. By them we are purged from our dross and tin. Grace is tried and refined in the furnace of affliction, and those who have tasted that the Lord is gracious, are hereby conformed to his heavenly image — made partakers of his holiness, (Hebrews 12:10) and more prepared for his heavenly kingdom.

Afflictions are a furtherance to us in our heavenward way — not a hindrance to us; though when we are exercised therewith we often conclude ourselves to be in a wilderness and desolate land. We must be first of all prepared for glory, before we can, in consistency with the perfections of our God — be received into it — and this is the end, and proves the blessed outcome of our present afflictions, "For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all!" 2 Corinthians 4:17. Hereby, then, it further appears, that God leads his people by the right way, though it may be a rough way, to the city of habitation.

Every one of the temptations of Satan answer the same general end. He is, indeed, styled, with an emphasis, "our adversary," 1 Peter 5:8. But he oftentimes proves, contrary to his own design and our expectation — our great friend! The powers of darkness are allowed to dwell among us, for the same reason that some of the Canaanites were left among the people of Israel; that is, to try us, and show us how weak we are without Christ; and how strong we are when we depend upon that grace which is treasured up in him. By all the advantages temptations gain against us — they only render us the more distrustful of ourselves. And the grace which we have already received, makes us the more in love with Christ Jesus, our glorious head, in whose strength we overcome them! Our temptations also make us more desirous of that city of habitation, which God has prepared for his people; where we shall join the heavenly host, in saying with a loud voice, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God have come, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down!" Revelation 12:10

Thus we see how God leads his people by the right way, that they may go to a city of habitation. If then God has prepared for his people a city of habitation; how great is that grace, how free and sovereign is that love — to which this was originally owing! All that we have in time, and all that we expect to enjoy to eternity — proceed alone from this spring of sovereign grace — this is the original fountain from which they all flow. The vessels of mercy were chosen from all eternity for glory, though they are prepared for it only in time. And to what can this unspeakable privilege be owing, or into what can it be resolved — short of the sovereign and distinguishing grace of God? This alone is what makes us differ from others!

Considered in ourselves, we were equally the objects of the anger and wrath of a holy God, with those "who are reserved in chains of darkness, to the judgment of the great day;" and had not the free grace of God found out an expedient for our salvation, we must equally with them, have suffered the vengeance of eternal fire. "But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions — it is by grace you

have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus!" Ephesians 2:4-7

Grace acts like itself, it gives all things freely. God deals with us as the "God of all grace;" for he gives us both grace here, and glory hereafter — and "no good thing will he withhold from those who walk uprightly." He first of all makes us his sons, takes us into the number of his family, and gives us a right and title to the privileges of his house in our justification! And in our sanctification, he gradually prepares us for the more immediate enjoyment of himself in the heavenly world; and then he calls us home to the glorious inheritance itself, "the city of habitation," which he had settled upon us before all worlds! And who of us can take but a slight view of these things, without crying out with the apostle, "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!" 1 John 3:1. Our eternal predestination to glory, and our actual preparation for it — are both of them owing wholly, and alone — to his free and sovereign grace. And to this shall we everlastingly ascribe it, when we come "to the general assembly, and church of the first-born, and to the spirits of just men made perfect." Are we to pass through the wilderness to this city of habitation? How much need have we of a guide to show us the way, and how thankful should we be to Him who has undertaken to perform this kind office for us. Were we left in this wilderness-world without a guide — our condition would be deplorable, and our ruin inevitable! We would then fall into the pits and snares which our enemies have made for the entanglement of our feet, and the destruction of our souls! Those who are more mighty than we, would assuredly prevail against us! We would be led captive by Satan at his will — there would be no withstanding his temptations — no escaping his malice and fury, or resisting those whom he employs against us in this desolate and dangerous way. But through grace — we have an unfailing Guide! Christ Jesus is styled the "captain of our salvation," and he faithfully discharges his office, which he has engaged to perform as such. He not only undertook to purchase salvation by his death — but to apply it likewise by his life. He goes before continually as our guide and leader — and marks out the path which we are to take. He communicates to us suitable help and refreshment, while we are in our way. He restores our souls when we have gone out of the way, and preserves us from the fury and violence, as well as the craft and subtlety of our many enemies. He is "a pillar of cloud to us for our covering by day — and a pillar of fire for our guidance by night." He is always at our right hand, so that we should not be greatly moved. Here lies our safety, and the strong ground of our hope — that we shall not fall short of our rest, or lose the prize we are so earnestly contending for. Christ himself is our life, and has graciously promised that he will never fail us, nor forsake us. May we, therefore, begin the work of Heaven before we come there, daily offering the sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving unto him, even the fruit of our lips. Using the same language here, as we hope to use forever hereafter. "Unto him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father — to him be glory and power forever and ever! Amen." Revelation 1:5-6 Is the way of the wilderness the right way to a city of habitation? How easy should this make us under all the temptations, trials, and afflictions with which we are now exercised. "All this is for your benefit — so that the abundant grace might, through the thanksgiving of many, redound to the glory of God," 2 Corinthians 4:15. This should make us willingly submit to the various trials we meet with on our wilderness passage. There is a crown of glory reserved in Heaven for all those who shall continue faithful unto death — a city of habitation where the weary pilgrim shall rest — rivers of

pleasure, where we shall be refreshed and delighted. There he will have ample amends for all the difficulties he has been exposed to in the present life. The view of this recompense of reward will make death itself pleasant, and hang out a lamp sufficient to enlighten even that dark valley. Can none get admission into this city of habitation but the "redeemed of the Lord?" Let this lead us to Jesus Christ, the only person "Who is made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption," 1 Corinthians 1:30. "God has exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior, that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins!" Acts 5:31. No one can save us from our sins — but He whom God has set forth to be an atoning sacrifice for our sin, through faith in his blood. Hither, then, must the convinced sinner fly, as his city of refuge! On his righteousness, must we all depend for a right and title to eternal life; and his Spirit alone can fit and prepare us for it.

If we have not Christ's perfect righteousness on us — then we are not his people. None but those who are arrayed with this fine linen, clean and white, shall be worthy to enter into this city of habitation. Let us, therefore, be importunate with God to lead us unto Christ, and enable us to believe in him to the saving of the soul. Such he has purchased glory for, and he lives to prepare them for it! There, as their forerunner — he has already entered for them; and there, as the captain of their salvation — he will at last bring them, and present them faultless before the throne of his Father's glory, with exceeding joy!

"And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying: Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away!" Revelation 21:3-4 "Heaven!" No sickness there —

No weary wasting of the frame away,

No fearful shrinking from the midnight air,

No dread of summer's bright and fervid ray. No hidden grief —

No wild and cheerless vision of despair,

No vain petition for a swift relief.

No tearful eyes, no broken hearts are there.

Care has no home —

Within the realm of ceaseless prayer and song;

Its billows break and melt away in foam.

Far from the mansions of the heavenly throng. The storm's black wing —

Is never spread athwart celestial skies;

Its wailings blend not with the voice of spring,

As some too tender floweret fades and dies. No night distills —

Its chilling dews upon the tender frame.

No moon is needed there. The light which fills
That land of glory, from its Maker came. No parted friends —
O'er mournful recollections have to weep;
No bed of death enduring love attends,
To watch the coming of a pulseless sleep. No blasted flower —
Or withered bud, celestial gardens know;
No scorching blast, or fierce-descending shower
Scatters destruction like a ruthless foe. No battle word —
Startles the sacred host with fear and dread;
The song of peace, creation's morning heard,
Is sung wherever angel minstrels tread.
Let us depart —
If home like this awaits the weary soul.
Look up, you stricken one! Your wounded heart
Shall bleed no more at sorrow's stern control. With faith our guide —
White-robed and innocent, to lead the way,
Why fear to plunge in Jordan's rolling tide,
And find the ocean of eternal day!

02-Christ, a Man of Sorrows

Christ, a Man of Sorrows by Edward Payson

"He was despised and rejected by men — a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth."
Isaiah 53:3-7

It has been supposed by many, that the sufferings of our Lord were rather apparent than real; or at least that his abundant consolations, and his knowledge of the happy consequences which would result from his death, rendered his sorrows comparatively light, and almost converted them to joys. But never was supposition more erroneous. Jesus Christ was as truly a man as any of us, and, as man, he was as really susceptible of grief, as keenly alive to pain and reproach, and as much averse from shame and suffering, as any of the descendants of Adam. As to divine consolations and supports, they were at all times bestowed on him in a very sparing manner, and in the season of his greatest extremity, they were entirely withheld. And though a knowledge of the happy consequences which would result from his sufferings, rendered him willing to endure them — it did not, in the smallest degree, take off their edge, or render him insensible to pain.

No, his sufferings, instead of being less — were incomparably greater than they appeared to be. No finite mind can conceive of their extent; nor was any of the human race ever so well entitled to the appellation of the Man of Sorrows, as the man Christ Jesus. His sufferings began with his birth — and ended only with his death. In the first place, it must have been extremely painful to such a person as Christ — to live in a world like this. He was perfectly holy, harmless, and undefiled. Of course, he could not look on sin — but with the deepest abhorrence! It is that abominable thing which his soul hates. Yet during the whole period of his residence on earth, he was continually surrounded by it, and his sensibilities and feelings were every moment tortured with the hateful sight of human depravity. How much sorrow the sight occasioned him, we may in some measure learn from the bitter complaints which similar causes extorted from David, Jeremiah, and other ancient saints. They described, in the most striking and pathetic language, the sufferings which they experienced from the prevalence of wickedness around them, and often wished for death to relieve them from their sufferings. But the sufferings of Christ from this cause were incomparably greater than theirs. He was far more holy than they, his hatred of sin incomparably more intense, and the sight of it proportionably more painful! In consequence of his power of searching the heart — he saw unspeakably more sin in the world, than any mere man could discover. We can discover sin only when it displays itself in words and actions. But he saw all the hidden wickedness of the

heart, the depths of that fountain of iniquity, from which all the bitter streams of vice and misery flow! Every man who approached him was transparent to his eye. In his best friends — he saw more sin than we can discover in the most abandoned reprobates!

He saw also, in a far clearer light than we can do — the dreadful consequences of sin, the interminable miseries to which it is conducting the sinner — and his feelings of compassion were not blunted by that selfish insensibility which enables us to bear with composure the sight of human distress. On the contrary, he was all sympathy, compassion, and love. He loved others as himself, and therefore felt for the sufferings of others as for his own! If Paul could say, "Who is weak — and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin — and I do not inwardly burn?" — then much more might Christ. In this, as well as in a still more important sense, he took upon himself our griefs, and bore our sorrows. As he died for all, so he felt and wept for the sufferings of all. The temporal and eternal calamities of the whole human race, and of every individual among them — all seemed to be collected and laid upon him. He saw at one view — the whole mighty aggregate of human guilt and human wretchedness; and his boundless benevolence and compassion made it by sympathy — all his own.

It has been said by philosophers, that if any man could see all the misery which is daily felt in the world — he would never smile again. We need not wonder then that Christ, who saw and felt it all — never smiled, though he often wept.

We may add, that the total contrast between the Heaven which he had left, and the world into which he came — rendered a residence in the latter, peculiarly painful to his feelings. In Heaven he had seen nothing but holiness and happiness and love. In this world, on the contrary, he saw little but wickedness and hatred and misery — in ten thousand forms! In Heaven he was crowned with glory and honor and majesty, and surrounded by throngs of admiring, adoring angels. On earth, he found himself plunged in poverty, wretchedness, and contempt — and surrounded by malignant, implacable enemies! My friends, think of a noble prince, educated with care and tenderness in his father's court, where he heard nothing but sounds of pleasure and praise, and saw nothing but scenes of honor and magnificence — sent to labor as a slave in a rebellious province, where himself and his father were hated and despised! Think of a person of the most delicate and refined taste, going from the bosom of his family and the magnificent abodes of a polished city — to spend his life in the filthy huts of the most degraded and barbarous savages, and compelled daily to witness the disgusting scenes of cruelty and brutality which are there exhibited! Think of a man endowed with the tenderest sensibilities — compelled to live on a field of battle, among the corpses of the dead and the groans of the dying, or shut up for years in a madhouse with wretched maniacs, where nothing was to be heard but the burst of infuriated passions, the wild laugh of madness, and the shrieks and ravings of despair! Think of these instances, and you will have some conception, though but a faint one . . .

of the scenes which this world presented to our Savior,

of the contrast between it and the Heaven he left,

of the sorrows which embittered every moment of his earthly existence,

and of the love which induced him voluntarily to submit to such sorrows.

Another circumstance which contributed to render our Savior a man of sorrows, and his life a life of grief — was the dreadful reception he met with from those whom he came to save! Had they received him with that gratitude and respect which he deserved, and permitted him to rescue them from their miseries — it would have been some alleviation of his sorrows. But even this alleviation was in a great measure denied him. Some few, indeed, received him with affection and respect, though even they often grieved him by their unkindness and unbelief; but by far the greater part of his countrymen, he was treated with the utmost cruelty and contempt! Many of them would not allow him even to remove their bodily diseases, and still greater numbers were unwilling that he should save them from their sins. Now to a noble, sensitive, pure mind — nothing is so cutting, so torturing as such conduct. To see himself despised, slandered, and persecuted with implacable malice, by the very beings whom he was laboring to save; to see all his endeavors to save them, frustrated by their own incorrigible folly and wickedness; to see them by rejecting him, filling up to the brim their cup of criminality and wrath, and sinking into eternal perdition within reach of his vainly-offered hand — to see this, must have been distressing indeed! Yet this Christ saw all this. Thus he endured the contradiction of sinners against himself; and how deeply it affected him, we may infer from the fact, that though his own sufferings never wrung from him a tear — he once and again wept in the bitterness of his soul over rebellious Jerusalem, exclaiming, "O if you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace — but now it is hidden from your eyes!"

Another circumstance that threw a shadow of gloom and melancholy over our Savior's life, was his clear view, and constant anticipation of — the dreadful agonies in which it was to terminate. He was not ignorant, as we happily are, of the miseries which were before him. He could not hope, as we do, when wretched today — to be happier tomorrow. Every night, when he lay down to rest — the scourge, the crown of thorns, and the cross, were present to his mind! And on these dreadful objects, he every morning opened his eyes, and every morning saw them nearer than before. Every day was to him like the day of his death — of such a death too, as no one has ever suffered before or since. How deeply the prospect affected him, is evident from his own language: "But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is completed!" Luke 12:50 Such are the circumstances which prove that our Savior was, during life — a man of sorrows. Of the sorrows of his death — we shall say nothing. The bitter agonies of that never-to-be-forgotten hour, the torturing scourge, the lacerating nails, and the racking cross — we shall pass in silence. Nor shall we now bring into view the tenfold horrors which overwhelmed his soul — rendering it exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death. These we have often attempted to describe to you — though here description must always fail. Enough has been said to show the justice of that exclamation which the Prophet utters in the person of Christ: "Behold and see, all you who pass by — if there is any sorrow like my sorrow! Reproach has broken my heart, and I am full of heaviness. I looked for some to pity — but there was none; for comforters — but I found none!"

What was our Savior's conduct under the pressure of these sorrows? "He was oppressed and afflicted — yet he opened not his mouth. He was brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent — so he opened not his mouth." Never was language more descriptive of the most perfect meekness and patience! Never was prediction more fully justified by the event, than in the case before us. Christ was indeed led as a lamb to the slaughter. Silent, meek, and unrepining — he stood before his butchers, as innocent and as patient as a lamb. No murmurs, no complaints, no angry recriminations escaped from his lips. If they were opened, it

was but to express the most perfect submission to his Father's will, and to breathe out prayers for his murderers!

Yes, even at that dreadful moment, when they were nailing him to the cross — when nature, whose voice will at such a time be heard, was shuddering and convulsed in the prospect of a speedy and violent death; when his soul was tortured by the assaults of malignant fiends, and his Father's face hidden from his view — even then he possessed his soul in patience to such a degree, as to be able to pray for his murderers!

We must attempt to bring the scene more fully to your view. Come with us, a moment, to Calvary. See the meek sufferer, standing with hands fast bound in the midst of his enemies; sinking under the weight of his cross, and lacerated in every part by the thorny rods with which he had been scourged. See the savage, ferocious soldiers seizing with barbarous violence, his sacred body, forcing it down upon the cross, stretching and extending his limbs, and with remorseless cruelty forcing through his hands and feet — the ragged spikes which were to fasten him on it! See the Jewish priests and rulers watching with looks of malicious pleasure the horrid scene, and attempting to increase his sufferings by scoffs and blasphemies! Now contemplate attentively, the countenance of the wonderful Sufferer, which seems like Heaven opening in the midst of Hell, and tell me what it expressed. You see it indeed full of anguish — but it expresses nothing like impatience, resentment, or revenge. On the contrary, it beams with pity, benevolence, and forgiveness. It perfectly corresponds with the prayer, which, raising his mild, imploring eye to Heaven, he pours forth to God: "Father, forgive them — for they know not what they do!"

Christian — look at your Master, and learn how to suffer! Look at your Savior, and learn to admire, to imitate, and to forgive. But why, it may be naturally asked: Why is this patient innocent sufferer thus afflicted? Why, in his life, in his death — is he thus emphatically a man of sorrows? To this question, our text returns an answer, and an answer which ought to sink deep into our hearts; for in it we are all most deeply interested: "Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all!" Isaiah 53:4-6.

Here, we see the true cause of our Savior's unparalleled sufferings. He was cut off, says the Prophet — but not for himself. He knew no sin — but he was made sin, made a curse for us. We have all strayed from the path of duty. Yes, you and I, and all our race, have forsaken the God who made us, and chosen the path that leads to Hell. God's violated law condemned us to die. Justice demanded the execution of the sentence. There was apparently no remedy. It is true that God, as our Creator and Father, was sufficiently inclined to spare us; but his holiness and justice forbade him to do it, unless a suitable atonement could be found. There was but one individual in the universe who could make such an atonement, and that being, prompted by infinite compassion, offered himself for this purpose. The Father, with equal love, accepted the offer. To carry it into effect, the Son assumed our nature, and appeared on earth; and the bitter cup, which the divine law condemned us to drink — was put into his hand, and he drank it to the last drop! We were condemned to live a life of sorrow and pain — and therefore he lived such a life. We were condemned to shame and everlasting contempt — and therefore he hid not his face from shame

and spitting. We were condemned to die under the curse — and therefore he died the accursed death of the cross. We were condemned to lose the favor and endure the wrath of God — and therefore Christ was forsaken by his Father in the agonies of death. We were condemned to perish without mercy — and therefore Christ had no mercy, no pity shown him in his last moments. We were condemned to remain under the power of death, until by satisfying divine justice, we could restore ourselves to life — and therefore Christ remained in the grave until he had made full satisfaction, and then resumed the life he had laid down. Thus he bore our sins, or, what is the same, the punishment of our sins in his own body on the tree — that we being dead unto sin, might live unto God.

What was the manner in which Christ was treated, when he thus came as a man of sorrows to atone for our sins? "He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not." How literally this prediction was fulfilled, we have already seen. Yet who but an inspired prophet would have predicted that such would be the reception of such a person, coming from Heaven on such a design? We would naturally expect that he would be received with the most lively emotions and demonstrations of grateful joy, by the beings whom he came to save.

Even after we were told that, instead of thus receiving, they rejected and condemned him — we would have expected that when they saw his lamb-like patience and meekness, and heard him praying for his murderers — they would have relented and spared him. And when this could not prevail, we would have hoped that the miracles which attended his crucifixion, and especially his resurrection from the dead — would convince them of their error, and cause them to relent. But none of these things, nor all of them united, could conquer the inveterate malice of his enemies!

Living and dying, rising and reigning, he was still despised and rejected by men. Neither his miracles, nor his sorrows, nor his meekness, nor his patience — could shield him from hatred and contempt. But what was his crime? What had he done? I answer, he was good — and went everywhere doing good; he dared to speak the truth; he reproved men for their sins, he testified to the world that its deeds were evil. Above all, he bore the image of God — of that holy God whom sinners hate. These were crimes never to be forgiven; crimes, for which nothing but his blood could atone; crimes, which in their view rendered him unworthy of that commiseration which men usually feel for the vilest malefactors when in the agonies of death. Nor were those who treated him in this manner, worse than the rest of mankind. As in water face answers to face — so the heart of man to man. The truth of this assertion is abundantly proved by the manner in which all succeeding generations have treated Christ. He has always been despised and rejected by men — and he is so still. It is true, he has long since ascended to Heaven, and therefore cannot be the immediate object of their attacks. But his gospel and his servants are still in the world — and the manner in which they are treated, is sufficient evidence, that the feelings of the natural heart toward Christ are not materially different from those of the murderous Jews! To sum up all in a word, it is certain that all who do not receive the instructions of Christ with the temper of a little child — reject him as a prophet. All who do not trust in his merits alone for salvation — reject him as a Savior. And all who do not habitually and sincerely obey his commands — reject him as a king. This being the case, the conduct of multitudes among us fully justifies us in asserting, that Christ is still despised and rejected by men. Was Christ a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief? Then we need not be surprised or offended, if we are often called to drink of the cup of

sorrows. We will find the world to be a valley of tears. This is one of the ways in which we must be conformed to our glorious Head. Indeed, his example has sanctified grief, and almost made it pleasant to mourn. One would think, that Christians could scarcely wish to go rejoicing — through a world which their Master passed through mourning. The path in which we follow him — is bedewed with his tears and stained with his blood.

It is true, that from the ground thus richly watered and fertilized — many choice flowers and fruits of paradise spring up to refresh us, in which we may and ought to rejoice. But still our joy should be softened and sanctified by godly sorrow. When we are partaking of the banquet which his love has spread for us — we should never forget how dearly it was purchased! "There's not a gift his hand bestows — but cost his heart a groan!" The joy, the honor, the glory through eternity shall be ours — but the sorrows, the sufferings, the agonies which purchased them were all his own. Was Christ wounded for our transgressions; were the iniquities of all his people laid upon him — then, surely, our iniquities shall never be laid upon us. He has borne and carried them away. He was made sin for us — that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. Away then, with all guilty unbelieving fears. Whatever your sorrows or trials may be — he knows by experience, how to sympathize with you. Has your Heavenly Father forsaken you, so that you walk in darkness and see no light? He well remembers what he felt, when he cried, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me!" Has Satan wounded you with his fiery darts? He remembers how sorely his own heart was bruised when he wrestled with principalities and powers, and crushed the head of the prince of darkness. Are you pressed down with a complication of sorrows, so as to despair even of life? The soul of Christ was once exceeding sorrowful, even unto death. Are you mourning for the danger of unbelieving friends? Christ's own brethren did not believe in him. Does the world persecute and despise you, or are your enemies those of your own household? Christ was despised and rejected by men, and his own relations stigmatized him as a madman. Are you suffering under slanderous and unjust accusations? Christ was called a gluttonous man, and a drunkard, a friend of publicans and sinners. Are you struggling with the evils of poverty? Jesus had nowhere to lay his head. Do Christian friends forsake or treat you unkindly? Christ was denied and forsaken by his own disciples. Are you distressed with fears of death? Christ has entered the dark valley that he might destroy death.

O, then, banish all your fears! Look at your merciful High Priest who has passed unto the heavens, and triumphantly exclaim with the apostle, "Who shall separate me from the love of Christ!"

"He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away. For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was stricken. Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer. After the suffering of his soul, he will see the travail of his soul, and be satisfied; by

his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities." Isaiah 53:1-12.

03-Songs in the Night Season

Songs in the Night Season William Bacon Stevens, 1856

"Where is God my Maker, who gives songs in the night?" Job 35:10 The night is proverbially a time of festivity and song. The cares and business of the day are then over; the taxed mind and the wearied muscles seek relaxation; the stillness of the evening invites to those pleasures which cannot be enjoyed amidst the bustle and din of business; and the darkness calling off the mind from the outdoor duties and gaieties — turns it to those domestic or social or festive gatherings, where the gladness of the heart testifies its existence by singing and the voice of melody. But the vast majority of these songs are earth-born, and designed only for earthly ends. The bacchanalian chorus, the moonlight serenade, the orchestral concert, the parlor melody, the love-lorn ditty, and the trumpet-rousing strains of martial music — are each of terrestrial birth; and though they may deeply affect the heart, rousing it to wildest joy or sinking it to pensive sadness — yet are they evanescent, and soon are among the things of a forgotten past. No such songs, though sung with unrivaled art, though swelling with delicious melody, though rich in tones of "linked sweetness long drawn out," satisfy the soul. Who that has listened to the most rapturous songs, to those which in our imagination come nearest to angelic harmony — has not, as its last cadence fell on the ear, and its last echo died away, felt a pang of sorrow that such tones must die as fast as they are uttered? that, with a soul fitted to enjoy such vocal richness, we can obtain it so seldom and so briefly? And to all this, has there not often been joined the wish: Oh! that there were songs that would never cease to thrill! Oh! that there were voices that would never lose their tone and melody by age! Oh! that there were places where we might ever abide, and listen at will to the treasured melodies of tongue and harp in their loftiest manifestation!

There are such places — there are such voices — there are such songs. Yet when I tell you of them, the very hearts that profess most to desire them will turn away with scornful looks, and perhaps deride them as the outbursts of hot-brained enthusiasm or of canting hypocrisy. But sneer as you may — curl your lip until it becomes rigid with scorn — mock until you have exhausted the vocabulary of calumny, and defame until you are startled by your own blasphemy — I tell you in a freedom that invites investigation, and with a boldness that challenges denial — that the religion of Jesus Christ furnishes such songs, tunes such voices, and opens such places of perpetual and sublimest melody; for the mansions of glory forever resound with saintly voices singing the songs of Moses and the Lamb. But you may say that this is all true — but what I want is a present gladness of heart — a present song of joy — amidst the daily cares, trials, perplexities, and bereavements of this mortal life; and where can I find such? My answer still is — in the gospel of the Son of God, and there alone! The time when these songs are mostly needed and desired, is in the night season; not the period of physical darkness — but . . .

the night season of the soul;

the night season of humiliation;

the night season of adversity;

the night season of sorrow;

the night season of sickness;

the night season of death.

It is just in these times, that the true Christian rejoices in God his Maker, who gives him songs in the night. In the life of every individual there are periods of humiliation which take down his pride and bend his spirit to the dust. It may be that the person has occupied some post of honor or profit from which he has been removed — it may be that some unexpected blot has marred and stained his family name — it may be that failure in business has injuriously affected his character, and required him to take a lowly social position; and that in consequence, the mirthful and the fashionable, who flutter only around the candle of the prosperous, turn their heads at his approach, renounce his society, and cast themselves loose from his family circle — it may be that he is visited by some sore and noisome disease, or by some unexpected deformity that clings to him like a thorn in the flesh, and ever humbles him by a consciousness of its presence — it may be that false reports have tarnished his fair name, and caused him to be marked and avoided — indeed, there are so many causes of humility actively at work, that it would be in vain to attempt to enumerate them. Some one of these, however, occasionally affects each person, and makes him bow his head in humiliation. Does the Bible furnish us any songs for such a night season, when the darkness of adversity, of desertion, of reproach, and of deep self-loathing — stretches over us a black and starless sky? Yes, it does! It is furnished in the beautiful words of the prophet Habakkuk, who, as if himself suffering under just such trials — dictates to the chief singer upon his stringed instrument the following exquisite ode: "Even though the fig trees have no blossoms, and there are no grapes on the vines; even though the olive crop fails, and the fields lie empty and barren; even though the flocks die in the fields, and the cattle barns are empty — yet I will rejoice in the LORD! I will be joyful in the God of my salvation!" Habakkuk 3:17-18.

What a precious song is this, for the night season of humiliation and adversity! It teaches that no earthly changes should ever shake our confidence in God; that His favor is not dispensed to us according to our worldly advantages and position; that His ways of dealing are disciplinary, and will, if rightly improved — work out for us an exceeding weight of glory.

What though the honors you once wore are taken from you? If you are Christ's, there is reserved for you "a crown of life!" What though your earthly reputation is unjustly stained? There is laid up for you in Heaven a robe of spotless white, with which to array your ransomed spirit! What though you have, through circumstances beyond your control, failed in your business and shattered your fortune? You have in store for you above, treasures that never fail — the treasures of Divine redeeming grace! What though you know not whence shall come the next supply of daily bread, or where at night you shall find a place of rest; or how, when one change of clothing is worn, you shall obtain another? Your Savior passed through just such trials. He was often hungry; he had not what the foxes and the birds had — a place where to lay his head — and his clothing was the gift of poor but loving friends. You cannot in any condition of adversity, go into lower depths than Jesus went; and no Christian should be unwilling to follow his steps, though they pass through the lowly and rugged places of life.

Only take his hand in the strong clasp of faith, and never relax your hold, and Jesus will make the valley of humiliation radiant with the light of his own countenance — will put into your mouth songs of praise, and guide you into final and unending joy!

Most forcibly was this illustrated in the case of Paul and Silas. They had been arrested in Philippi, a Roman colony, for boldly preaching in the name of the Lord Jesus; and having by the orders of the magistrates been severely scourged, were thrust into the inner cells of the prison, and, lest they should by any means escape, their feet were made fast in the stocks. This was to them a deep humiliation. Paul was a Roman citizen, and so was Silas; and yet, they had been beaten with many stripes, they had been hooted and reviled by the rabble of the town — they had been traduced and vilified by lying and malicious tongues — they had been imprisoned in the lowest, darkest, filthiest cell of the Philippi jail, and they had received the still further indignity of having their feet cruelly fastened in the stocks. What deep affliction! you say; what barbarous treatment! — how it must have chafed and humbled their spirits! — how it must have suggested in them plans of deep and far-reaching revenge! Could there be joy for them? Behold them — their clothes have been so torn by the multitude that they hang in tatters about them. Their backs have been cruelly torn to the quick, by the lictor's thongs, and the open unwashed wounds still smart with pain. Their feet are confined in such a manner as to give them no possibility of rest; and the cold, damp, inner dungeon wraps around their half naked, bleeding, exhausted bodies its chilling and unhealthy air. Can there be joy for them? The city of Philippi is asleep — the excited populace are at rest — the thronged streets are empty, and the two strangers who had so engrossed the public mind are now forgotten in the deep slumbers of darkness. But Paul and Silas sleep not. Their pains and their constrained position will not allow them to close their eyes. And how are they employed in these wakeful hours? Hark! It is midnight! but its stillness is broken by the voice of singing. Listen! It is no song to Bacchus — no hymn to Diana — no ode to Venus — nor yet do these sounds proceed from the halls of revelry or the abodes of wealth. They issue from the prison walls — it is the voice of strange melody struggling upwards from the inner cell — it is Paul and Silas, the beaten, imprisoned, bleeding servants of God, praying and singing praises unto God. They had found and were then rejoicing in "God their Maker," who had given them "songs in the night." The season of bereavement is emphatically a night season to the human heart. The joys that once gave it delight are withdrawn; the scenes in which it once reveled with pleasure are vanished; a beloved one has been removed from the chambers of life to the chambers of death; and the eye, the voice, the hand, the form that ministered so much to its joy and comfort, is closed and hushed, and palsied, and cold, in the silent grave. You sit in darkness in your darkened dwellings — you feel that one of the great lights that ruled the day of your life has been put out, and there are deep shadows resting upon your spirit, which time and grace can alone remove. To some, these night seasons recur with distressing frequency. The bright days of prosperity are short — and the dark hours of sorrow are as long and dreary as the nights of an Arctic winter. To others, there is a long and sunny period of gladness, and years pass without a sorrow to cloud the sky; when suddenly, perhaps, there steals in between your heart and the sun — the black form of death; and lo, for a time the darkness of a total eclipse shrouds your soul; or, in the more expressive language of the Bible, "your sun has gone down while it was yet day." And when these night seasons of sorrow come over the soul; when, tossed upon the billows of affliction, you can say with imperilled and shipwrecked Paul, that "neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and the storm continued raging!" what can give you relief? What can give light in your darkness? What

can draw aside the curtains of your night season, and let in the bright and congenial light of day? Friends cannot do it, though their sympathy is indeed grateful to the mind. Society cannot do it, for you shun it as something discordant to your soul. Worldly pleasures cannot do it, for you see them in their vanity as you never before saw them, and loathe them as nauseous to your taste. At such times, nothing can support and comfort you but a living faith in Jesus Christ, and an abiding trust and confidence in the promises of Almighty God. And when your soul looks away for its comfort from everything of an earthly character, and turns its wistful eye of faith to God — then it is, that He "gives songs in the night."

What a night of bereavement was that which afflicted Job, when all his children, ten in number, were suddenly cut off at a blow; and when in addition to this he was as suddenly stripped of his riches and his honors, broken up in his family, robbed of his flocks and herds, and blasted in all his possessions! And yet, what a song in the night did God his maker put in his mouth when, instead of sinning and charging God foolishly — he caused him to say in the confidence of a lofty and unwavering faith, "the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord!"

What darkness brooded over David in his manifold afflictions and bereavements! Yet though he says "the waters are come in unto my soul," though he was "weary with crying" — his "throat was dried" — his "eyes failed," and he was "altogether poor and sorrowful," yet he says in the same Psalm which records this deep distress, "I will praise the name of God with a song, and will magnify him with thanksgiving." And this is the language of all the true children of God, because they know that "affliction comes not forth of the dust, neither does trouble spring out of the ground;" that it is their heavenly Father who takes away their relatives and friends, and that in thus chastening them, he is showing his love and interest in them, and so shaping his dealings as to develop their graces, bring out the highest polish of Christian character in them, and prepare them in the most perfect manner for the rewards of grace in Heaven.

If we could so rise above our momentary feelings and our narrow relations to the persons and things around us, as to take in, in one broad view, the whole compass of our lives, and the future as well as present bearings of these afflictive dispensations — could we, in fact, survey them from the point of view which God occupies, or even from that one which we shall stand at in the eternal world — then, instead of murmuring and repining, instead of charging God with harshness, and stigmatizing his dealings as unkind — we would the rather rejoice at the occurrence of afflictions. We would see how indispensable they were to the perfecting of the work of the Holy Spirit; how without them we would perhaps lose our souls; how with them and by them as a necessary instrumentality — we are fitted for higher and holier joys in glory.

Such considerations would put songs into our mouths, and cause us in every hour of sorrow's night season — to sing aloud with gladness, and to rejoice in spirit, even while the iron was gashing its painful way into the deepest recesses of our affections.

Stricken and mourning Christian, remember that there is no season of sorrow so dark, that God cannot find his way to your soul; and no night so black with grief, that he cannot and will not light it up with "the pillar of his presence," to guide your feet, and to fill you with comfort.

Sickness is emphatically, in the estimation of the world, a night season. Suffering, restlessness, anxiety, seclusion, days of weariness and nights of anguish — are the sad and sin-engendered

accompaniments of the lot of nearly every child of Adam. Few have reached adult age, over whose life sickness has not passed; whose clayey tabernacle has not been shaken by the earthquake commotions of disease, and rent by the shakings of frequent sickness. We have been made to feel . . .

the frailty of flesh and blood,

the folly of earthly joys,

the uncertainty of human schemes.

We have been borne, as it were, upon the sick litter, to the very brink of the grave; been made, perhaps, to look down into its narrow depths, and then returned again to friends and health — to teach us . . .

the slenderness of our hold on life,

the nearness of the tomb,

the daily advances of an opening eternity.

Yet, distressing as the period of illness is — the Bible furnishes for it songs set to heavenly music, melodious with angelic harmony. It assures the sick that "the Lord will strengthen him upon the bed of languishing;" that "he will make all his bed in his sickness;" that "he will be merciful unto him, and heal his soul." Illness points the sufferer to Jesus the Great Physician, who has balm for every pain, and healing medicines for every sickness.

What a song in the night season of disease, did Hezekiah find, when, having turned his face to the wall and prayed — God granted him length of years instead of cutting off his days in his strength. And what a joyful prayer does David put into the mouths of the sore distressed, when he teaches us to say, "O Lord my God, I cried unto you, and you have healed me. Lord, you have brought up my soul from the grave: you have kept me alive, that I should not go down to the pit. Sing unto the Lord, you saints of his, and give thanks for a remembrance of his holiness. For his anger endures but a moment; in his favor is life. Weeping may endure (or, as the original more forcibly declares, may lodge) for a night — but joy comes in the morning." As if sorrow was only a wayfarer who turned in for a night's lodging, to arise up and depart when the sun of the morning shone in at the casement.

There are no solaces for hours of sickness, like those found in the Bible; there is no comforter in disease, like the presence of Jesus Christ; there is no light that can shine into and dissipate the darkness of the chamber of afflictive illness, like the light of divine truth; and nothing can furnish the heart with gladness, or fill the mouth with a song — but the sweet words and inbreathings of the Holy Spirit. And now we come to the last night season that visits us on earth — the night season of death. There may be those who have never known the darkness of adversity, of sorrow, of affliction, of disease — but all will know the night time of death. Though your sun of life from its rising hour has rolled through an unclouded sky — yet, however bright its morning, however dazzling its meridian — the hour of its setting must come — the evening of life, the night time of death is at hand. Friends as dear as your own life, must be parted from — scenes as precious with a hundred fond associations, must be abandoned — objects of interest in which the mind has long

been absorbed, must be given up — the cherished hopes of years must be thrown away, and everything that fastened down your hearts to earthly scenes and objects, must be sundered, and forever. Will God our Maker, the same God who takes away our breath — will he give songs in the night season of death? Yes, for he has promised, "Behold at evening-time it shall be light," and that "the redeemed of the Lord shall return and come to him with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads." Death is to be dreaded only by those who have not made their peace with God; by those who do not receive and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ as the Prophet, Priest, and King of their souls. To those who have truly repented of their sins, who have made an unreserved surrender of their souls to Jesus Christ, and who are leading a new life, following the commandments of God and walking daily in his holy ways — death has no terrors. They feel that they deserve eternal punishment — but they know that Christ has borne the curse for them, and that therefore it will not fall upon their heads. They feel that they are utterly unworthy of salvation, and that it is not of themselves — but the free and sovereign gift of God — yet they know also that Christ has wrought it out for them, and will freely bestow it upon their souls. They know that they do not deserve Heaven, that after doing all that they have done for Christ, they are but unprofitable servants — yet they know that they shall be received up into glory for Jesus' sake — through Jesus' merits — by virtue of Jesus' intercession.

"Father I will that those also whom you have given me — be with me where I am, that they may behold," yes! and that they may share too, "my glory!" Hence having loved the Savior, having lived for the Savior, having committed the soul into his eternal keeping — the Christian is not afraid of death. His sun as it goes down, sinks not to its rest in sorrow. His night of death as it draws on, sends no foreshadowing gloom into the soul. On the contrary, full of the peace of God, rejoicing in hope, strengthened by faith in Christ — he finds himself joyful while all around are sad and weeping. And as the shadows deepen over his mortal life, there rises from his lips the hymn of praise to the abounding grace of God, and there is put into his mouth the song of triumph, "Oh death, where is your sting! Oh grave, where is your victory! The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law — but thanks be unto God who gives us the victory through Jesus Christ our Lord!"

These are some of the "songs in the night" given us by "God our Maker." Who does not desire to learn these songs? Who does not wish to sing them? They can be learned only as we sit at the feet of Jesus and learn of him. They can be sung only as our souls are filled by the Holy Spirit. But all are invited to come to Jesus and learn them; for his language is, "Come unto me all you who labor and are heavy laden — and I will give you rest!" And all are promised the renewing of the Holy Spirit — if they will but seek in faith the blessed Savior, through whom alone they can have peace and acceptance with "God our Maker, who gives songs in the night!"

"Midnight Hymn"

"I rise at midnight to thank You for Your righteous judgments!" Psalms 119:62 In the mild silence of the voiceless night,

When, chased by airy dreams, the slumbers flee;

Whom, in the darkness, does my spirit seek,

O God — but Thee?

And, if there be a weight upon my breast,
Some vague impression of the day foregone,
Scarce knowing what it is, I fly to Thee,
And lay it down.

Or, if it be the heaviness, that comes
In token of anticipated ill —
My bosom takes no heed of what it is,
Since 'tis your will.

For, O, in spite of past or present care,
Or anything beside — how joyfully
Passes that silent, solitary hour.

My God, with Thee!

More tranquil than the stillness of the night,
More peaceful than the silence of that hour,
More blessed than anything, my bosom lies
Beneath Thy power.

For, what is there on earth, that I desire.
Of all that it can give, or take from me?
Or whom, in Heaven, does my spirit seek,
God — but Thee?

04-The Weaned Child! By Octavius Winslow

The Weaned Child!

By Octavius Winslow

There are few lessons taught in God's school more difficult to learn, and yet, when really learned, more blessed and holy — than the lesson of weanedness. The heart resembles the vine, which as it grows, grasps and unites its feeble tendrils to every support within its reach. Or, it is like the ivy, which climbs and wraps itself around some beautiful but decayed and crumbling ruin. As our social affections develop and expand, they naturally seek a resting-place. Traveling, as it were, beyond themselves, breathing love and yearning for friendship — they go forth seeking some kindred spirit, some "second self," upon which they may repose, and around which they may entwine. To detach from this inordinate, idolatrous clinging to the animate and the inanimate creatures and objects of sense — is one grand end of God's disciplinary dealings with us in the present life. The discovery which we make, in the process of his dealings, of the insufficiency and insecurity of the things upon which we set our affections — is often acutely painful. Like that vine, we find that we grasped a support at the root of which the cankerworm was secretly feeding — and presently it fell! Or, like that ivy, we discover that we have been spreading our affections around an object which, even while we clung to and adored it, was crumbling and falling into dust — and presently it became a ruin! And what is the grand lesson which, by this process, God would teach us? The lesson of weanedness from all and everything of an earthly and a created nature.

Thus was David instructed, and this was the result: "But I have stilled and quieted my soul; like a weaned child with its mother, like a weaned child is my soul within me." It may be profitable, tried and suffering reader, briefly to contemplate this holy state, and then the way by which the Lord frequently brings his people into its experience.

Every true believer, whatever may be the degree of his grace — is an adopted child of God. It is not the amount of his faith, nor the closeness of his resemblance to the family, that constitutes his relationship; it is the act of adoption by which his heavenly Father has made him his own. If he can only lisp his Father's name, or bears but a single feature of likeness to the Divine image — he is as much and as really a child of God as those in whose souls the lineaments are deeply and broadly drawn, and who, with an unfaltering faith, can cry, "Abba, Father!" Doubtless there were many of feeble faith, of limited experience and of defective knowledge — mere babes in Christ — in the church to which the apostle inscribed his letter; and yet, addressing them all, he says, "Behold, what manner of love is this — that we should be called the children of God!" But it is the character of the weaned child we are now to contemplate. All believers are children — but are all believers weaned children? From what is the child of God thus weaned? The first object from which our heavenly Father weans his child, is the idol SELF! Of all idols, this he finds the hardest to abandon! When man in paradise aspired to be as God--God was dethroned from his soul, and the creature became as a deity to itself. From that moment, the idolatry of self has been the great and universal crime of our race! In the soul of the regenerate, divine grace has done much to dethrone

this idol--and to reinstate God. The work, however, is but partially accomplished. The dishonored and rejected rival is reluctant to relinquish his throne, and yield to the supreme control and sway of another. There is much yet to be achieved before this still indwelling and unconquered foe lays down his weapons in entire subjection to the will and the authority of that Savior whose throne and rights he has usurped. Thus, much still lingers in the heart which the Spirit has renewed and inhabits, of . . .

self-esteem,

self-confidence,

self-seeking,

and self-love.

From all this, our Father seeks to wean us! From our own wisdom, which is but folly;

from our own strength, which is but weakness;

from our own wills, which are often as an uncurbed steed;

from our own ways, which are crooked;

from our own hearts, which are deceitful;

from our own judgments, which are dark;

from our own ends, which are narrow and selfish

--he would wean and detach us, that our souls may get more and more back to their original center of repose--God himself! In view of this mournful exhibition of fallen and corrupt self — how necessary is the discipline of our heavenly Father that extorts from us the Psalmist's language: "But I have stilled and quieted my soul; like a weaned child with its mother, like a weaned child is my soul within me." Self did seem to be our mother — the fruitful parent of so much in our plans and aims and spirit that was dishonoring to our God. From SELF, God would gently and tenderly, but effectually, wean us — that we may learn . . .

to rely upon his wisdom,

to repose in his strength,

to consult his honor, and

to seek his glory and smile, supremely and alone. And O how effectually is this blessed state attained when God, by setting us aside in the season of solitude and sorrow, teaches us that he can do without us. We, perhaps, thought that our rank, or our talents, or our influence, or our very presence — were essential to the advancement of his cause, and that some parts of it could not proceed without us! The Lord knew otherwise. And so he laid his hand upon us, and withdrew us from the scene of our labors, and duties, and engagements, and ambition — that he might hide pride from our hearts — the pride of self-importance. And O, is it no mighty attainment in the Christian life to be thus weaned from ourselves? Beloved, it forms the root of all other blessings! The moment we learn to cease from ourselves — from our own wisdom, and power, and

importance — the Lord appears and takes us up. Then . . .

his wisdom is displayed,

and his power is put forth,

and his glory is developed,

and his great name gets to itself all the praise.

It was not until God had placed Moses in the cleft of the rock, that his glory passed by. Moses must be hidden — that God might be all. Our heavenly Father would also wean us from this poor, perishing WORLD — which is a great snare to the child of God. It is true that Christ has taken him out of, and separated him from, the world; assailed by all its evils, and exposed to all its corrupting influences. The intercessory prayer of our Lord seems to imply this: "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that you should take them out of the world, but that you should keep them from the evil." And O what an evil does the Christian find this world to be! In consequence of the earthward tendency of his affections, and the deep carnality with which the mind is imbued — things which God designed as blessings to soothe and soften and cheer — become, by their absorbing and idolatrous influence, powerful snares! Rank is a snare, wealth is a snare, talent is a snare, friendship is a snare.

Rank may foster pride and ambition;

wealth may increase the thirst for worldly show;

talent may inspire a love of human applause;

and friendship may wean the heart from Christ, and betray us into a base and unholy compromise of Christian profession.

Now from this endangering world, our heavenly Father would shield, by withdrawing us.

It is not our rest — and he agitates it;

it is not our portion — and he embitters it;

it is not our friend — and he sometimes arms it with a sword! The world changes, it disappoints, it wounds us! And then, thankful to expand our wings, we take another and a bolder flight above it.

Ah! beloved, how truly may the Lord be now sickening your heart to the world, to which that heart has too long and too closely clung! It has been your peculiar snare; your Father saw it, and wisely and graciously laid his loving, gentle hand upon you, and led you away from it — that from a bed of sickness, or from a chamber of grief, or from some position of painful vicissitude — you might see its sinfulness, learn its hollowness, and return as a wanderer to your Father's bosom, exclaiming with David, "My soul is even as a weaned child!" This weanedness of which we speak, often involves the surrender of some endeared object of creature affection. The human heart is naturally idolatrous. Its affections, as we have previously remarked, once supremely centered in God. But now, disjoined from him, they go in quest of other objects of attachment — and we love and worship the creature rather than the Creator. The circle which our affections traverse may not indeed be a large one; there are perchance but few to whom we fully surrender our heart. So

circumscribed may the circle be, that one object alone may attract, absorb, and concentrate in itself, our entire and undivided love — that one object to us is as our universe — and all others are comparatively indifferent and insipid. Who cannot see that in a case like this, the danger is imminent of transforming the heart — Christ's own sanctuary — into an idol's temple, where the creature is loved and revered and served more than he who gave it! But from all idolatry, our God will cleanse us; and from all our idols, Christ will wean us. The Lord is jealous, with a holy jealousy, of our love. As poor as our affection is — he asks its supreme surrender. That he requires our love at the expense of all creature attachment, the Bible nowhere intimates. He created our affections, and he it is who provides for their proper and pleasant indulgence. There is not a single precept or command in the Scriptures which forbids their exercise, or which discourages their intensity.

Husbands are exhorted to "love their wives, even as Christ loved his church." Parents are to cherish a like affection towards their children, and children are bound to render back a filial love not less intense to their parents. And we are to "love our neighbors as ourselves." Nor does the Word of God furnish examples of Christian friendship less interested and devoted. One of the choicest and tenderest blessings with which God can enrich us, next to himself, is such a friend as Paul had in Epaphroditus, a "brother and companion in labor, and fellow-soldier;" and such an affectionate friendship as John, the loving disciple, cherished for his well beloved Gaius, whom he loved in the truth, and to whom, in the season of his sickness, he thus touchingly poured out his heart's affectionate sympathy: "Beloved I wish above all things that you may prosper and be in health, even as your soul prospers."

Count such a friend, and such friendship among God's sweetest and holiest bestowments. The blessings of which it may be to you the sanctifying channel, are immense. The tender sympathy — the jealous watchfulness — the confidential repose — the faithful admonition — above all, the intercessory prayer, connected with Christian friendship — may be placed in the inventory of our most inestimable and precious blessings.

It is not therefore the use, but the abuse, of our affections — not their legitimate exercise, but their idolatrous tendency — over which we have need to exercise the greatest vigilance. It is not our love to the creature against which God contends — but it is in not allowing our love to Himself to subordinate all other love. We may love the creature, but we may not love the creature more than the Creator. When the Giver is lost sight of and forgotten in the gift — then comes the painful process of weaning! When the heart burns its incense before some human shrine, and the cloud as it ascends, veils from the eye the beauty and the excellence of Jesus — then comes the painful process of weaning! When the absorbing claims and the engrossing attentions of some loved one are placed in competition and are allowed to clash with the claims of God, and the attentions due from us personally to his cause and truth — then comes the painful process of weaning! When creature devotion . . .

deadens our heart to the Lord,

lessens our interest in his cause,

congeals our zeal and love and liberality,

detaches us from the public means of grace,

withdraws from the closet, and from the Bible, and from the communion of the saints — thus inducing leanness of soul, and robbing God of his glory — then comes the painful process of weaning! Christ will be the first in our affections — God will be supreme in our service — and his kingdom and righteousness must take precedence of all other things. In this light, beloved, read the present mournful page in your history. The noble oak that stood so firm and stately at your side, is smitten;

the tender and beautiful vine that wound itself around you, is fallen;

the lowly and delicate flower that lay upon your bosom, is withered;

the olive branches that clustered around your table, are removed;

and the "strong staff is broken and the beautiful rod"

— not because your God did not love you, but because he desired your heart. He saw that heart ensnared and enslaved by a too fond and idolatrous affection — he saw his beauty eclipsed and himself rivaled by a faint and imperfect copy of his own image — and he breathed upon it, and it withered away!

"The day of the Lord Almighty shall be upon all . . . pleasant pictures." When an eminent artist, who had concentrated all the powers of his genius upon a painting of our Lord celebrating the last supper, observed that the holy vessels arranged in the foreground were admired to the exclusion of the chief object of the picture — he seized his brush and dashed them from the canvas, and left the image of Jesus standing in its own solitary and unrivaled beauty.

Thus our God oftentimes deals with us. O solemn words! "The day of the Lord Almighty shall be upon all . . . Pleasant Pictures" — all pictures that veil and eclipse the beauties of him who is the "brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person" — God will obliterate.

Filial submission to God's will, is, perhaps, one of the most essential features in this holy state of weanedness of which we speak. "But I have stilled and quieted my soul; like a weaned child with its mother, like a weaned child is my soul within me." There are some beautiful examples of this in God's Word.

"And Aaron held his peace." Since God was "sanctified and glorified," as terrible as was the judgment, the holy priest mourned not at the way, nor complained of its severity, patient and resigned to the will of God. He "stilled and quieted his soul; like a weaned child with its mother." Thus, too, was it with Eli, when passing under the heavy hand of God: "It is the Lord — let him do what seems him good unto him." He bowed in deep submission to the will of his God. Job could exclaim, as the last sad tidings brimmed his cup of woe, "The Lord gave — and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." And David was "silent and opened not his mouth, because God is the one who had done it." But how do all these instances of filial and holy submission to the Divine will — beautiful and touching as they are — fade before the illustrious example of our adorable and blessed Lord: "O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it — may your will be done." Ah! how did Jesus, in the deepest depth of his unutterable sorrow, "still and quiet his soul, like a weaned child with its mother, like a weaned child is my soul within me." Such, beloved, be the posture of your soul at this moment. "Be still." Rest in your Father's hands, calm and tranquil, quiet and submissive, weaned from all but himself. O the

blessedness of so reposing!

"Sweet to lie passive in his hands,

And know no will but his."

"God is love!" It is written upon your dark cloud — it breathes from the lips of your bleeding wound — it is reflected in every fragment of your ruined treasure — it is pencilled upon every leaf of your blighted flower — "God is Love."

Adversity may have impoverished you;

bereavement may have saddened you;

calamity may have crushed you;

sickness may have laid you low

— but, "God is Love!"

Gently falls the rod in its heaviest stroke;

tenderly pierces the sword in its deepest thrust;

smilingly bends the cloud in its darkest hues

— for, "God is Love!" Does the infant, weaned from its accustomed and pleasant fount, cease from its restlessness and sorrow while reposing calmly and meekly upon its mother's arms? Just so, let your soul calmly, submissively rest in God. How sweet the music which then will breathe from your lips in the midnight of grief: "But I have stilled and quieted my soul; like a weaned child with its mother, like a weaned child is my soul within me." And who can bring you into this holy position? The Holy Spirit alone can! It is his office . . .

to lead you to Jesus;

to reveal to you Jesus;

to exhibit to your eye the cross of Jesus;

to pour into your heart the grace and love and sympathy of Jesus;

to bend your will and bow your heart to the government of Jesus

— and thus make you as a weaned child. The work infinitely transcends a merely human power. It is the office and the prerogative of the Divine Spirit — the "Spirit of holiness" — who only can sever between flesh and spirit, to bring you into the condition of one whose will in all things is completely merged in God's. And what is his grand instrument of effecting this? The cross of Christ! Ah! this is it. The Cross of Christ! Not . . .

the cross pictured;

the cross engraved;

the cross carved;

the cross embroidered;

the cross embossed upon the prayer-book, pendant from the maiden's neck;

the cross glittering on the cathedral's spire, and springing from its altar. Not the cross as blended with a religion of Gothic architecture, and painted windows, and flaming candles, and waving incense, and gorgeous pictures, and melting music, and fluttering surplices! O no! but the cross — the naked, rugged cross — which Calvary reared, which Paul preached, and of which he wrote, "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world."

Faith, picturing to its view this cross — the Holy Spirit engraving it on the heart in spiritual regeneration — the whole soul receiving him whom it lifts up, as its "wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption" — gently and effectually transforms the spirit which was chafened and restless, into the "meekness and gentleness of Christ."

O what calmness steals over his ruffled soul! O what peace flows into his troubled heart! O what sunshine bathes in its bright beams — his dark spirit, who from the scenes of his conflict and his sorrow — flees beneath the shadow and the shelter of the cross. The storm ceases — the deluge of his grief subsides. The Spirit, dove-like — brings the message of hope and love; the soul, tempest-tossed — rests on the green mount, and one unbounded spring clothes and encircles the landscape with its verdure and its beauty.

Child of God, chastened by the Father's love — look to the cross of your crucified Savior — and fix upon it your believing, ardent, adoring gaze!

What is your sorrow as compared with Christ's? What is your grief as gauged by the Lord's? Your Master has passed before you, flinging the curse and the sin from your path, paving it with promises, carpeting it with love, and fencing it around with the hedge of his divine perfections. Press onward, then, resisting your foe resolutely, bearing your cross patiently, drinking your cup submissively, and learning, while sitting at the Savior's feet, or leaning upon his bosom — to be like him, "meek and lowly in heart." Then, indeed, shall "I have behaved and quieted myself as a child that is weaned of his mother: my soul is even as a weaned child."

"Quiet, Lord, my froward heart,

Make me teachable and mild,

Upright, simple, free from art;

Make me as a weaned child.

From distrust and envy free,

Pleased with all that pleases Thee.

What You shall today provide,

Let me as a child receive;

What tomorrow may betide,

Calmly to Your wisdom leave.
'Tis enough that You will care,
Why should I the burden bear?
As a little child relies
On a care beyond its own;
Knows he's neither strong nor wise—
Fears to stir a step alone—
Let me thus with You abide,
As my Father, Guard, and Guide.
Thus preserved from Satan's wiles,
Safe from dangers, free from fears,
May I live upon your smiles
Until the promised hour appears;
When the sons of God shall prove
All their Father's boundless love!"

"Glory in Affliction"

Jesus, I my cross have taken,
All to leave and follow thee;
Naked, poor, despised, forsaken,
You, from hence, my all shall be!
Perish every fond ambition,
All I've sought, or hoped, or known--
Yet how rich is my condition,
God and Heaven are still my own.
Let the world despise and leave me,
They have left my Savior too;
Human hearts and looks deceive me,
You are not, like them, untrue.
And while you shall smile upon me,

God of wisdom, love, and might,
Foes may hate, and friends may scorn me,
Show your face--and all is bright.
Go, then, earthly fame and treasure,
Come disaster, scorn, and pain,
In your service pain is pleasure,
With your favor loss is gain!
I have called you, Abba, Father,
I have set my heart on thee,
Storms may howl, and clouds may gather,
All must work for good to me.
Man may trouble and distress me,
'Twill but drive me to your breast,
Life with trials hard may press me,
Heaven will bring me sweeter rest:
Oh! 'tis not in grief to harm me.
While your love is left to me.
Oh! 'twere not in joy to charm me.
Were that joy unmixed with thee.
Soul, then know your full salvation,
Rise o'er sin, and fear, and care,
Joy to find in every station.
Something still to do and bear.
Think what spirit dwells within you;
Think what Father's smiles are thine,
Think that Jesus died to save you,
Child of Heaven, can you repine?
Haste you on from grace to glory.
Armed by faith, and winged by prayer,

Heaven's eternal days before you;
God's own hand shall guide you there.
Soon shall close your earthly mission,
Soon shall pass your pilgrim days,
Hope shall change to glad fruition,
Faith to sight, and prayer to praise!

05-The Well-Spring in the Desert

The Well-Spring in the Desert by James Buchanan

"This is my comfort in my affliction." Psalms 119:50 "Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray." James 5:13 The Bible opens a spring of comfort for the afflicted, by giving them free access to the throne of grace, and inviting them to enjoy the privilege of prayer. This is, indeed, the Christian's privilege at all seasons; and never will he feel himself to be in a right or comfortable state, whatever may be his outward prosperity — if he allows himself to neglect that blessed ordinance, by which fellowship is maintained between Heaven and earth, and fellowship enjoyed by the creature with the Creator. And he who, whether in prosperity or adversity, makes it his daily practice to go to the throne of grace, and in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, makes his request known unto God — will, from his own experience, bear testimony to the truth of the promise, that "the peace of God which passes all understanding, shall keep his heart and mind through Christ Jesus." But while prayer is a duty incumbent at all seasons, and a privilege which the highest prosperity affords no reason for neglecting — it is, in many respects, peculiarly seasonable in the time of affliction.

Affliction is favorable to the spirit of prayer. For, wherein does the true nature of prayer consist? It consists in the desire of the heart, offered up to God; and what is better fitted to awaken earnest desire — than the pressure of affliction? In the day of prosperity, when every need or appetite of our nature is supplied, we may not be conscious of any very strong desire, and are too apt to forget the fact of our dependence upon God, in respect to the supply of our temporal needs. And even in regard to our spiritual necessities, we are prone, when surfeited with worldly prosperity, to become cold and lukewarm in our desires after the communications of divine grace — by which alone they can be supplied. Is there one Christian who has not experienced the deadening effect of uninterrupted prosperity on the spiritual desires and holiest affections of his nature? And if even Christians are too often lulled asleep by its influence, how much more may those be cradled into profound forgetfulness of God, who have never known the necessity, nor made the deliberate choice, of a better and more enduring portion? But when their prosperous course is broken by severe affliction — the minds of both classes are brought into a new state! The Christian is then thrown back on the inward resources of his religion, and will then feel their necessity and value. And even in an unsanctified bosom, such strong natural longings will spring up, as may, under the blessing of God, lead the worldling himself to seek after a better portion than the world. In so far as affliction is the means of awakening earnest desire, and exciting a sincere feeling in the heart — it is favorable to the spirit of prayer; for that feeling, or that desire, if directed towards God, is prayer.

Again, prayer is an expression of our dependence on God — and it is in affliction that we are most sensible of our helplessness. It is by affliction that we are made to feel how little of what most nearly concerns our happiness is under our own control — and how absolutely our interests are at the disposal of God's higher control. What, for instance, can impress the mind with so deep a sense of helplessness, as the pressure of disease in our own people, which no human skill can

arrest or cure; or the gradual decay and final dissolution of a beloved friend, at whose couch we watch by day and by night; and are only more and more confirmed in the conviction, that unless God interposes — vain is the help of man? In so far as affliction teaches us our dependence on God, it is favorable to the spirit of prayer; for why, in such circumstances, should we refrain from expressing that dependence which we feel, and acknowledging that helplessness which we cannot deny — especially when we know that God has a sovereign control over all events — and that, if we procure his aid, we obtain the benefit of unerring wisdom and almighty power?

Again, affliction is favorable to the spirit of prayer, because, when it is either sudden or severe, it is usually associated in the minds of men with a sense of guilt, and an apprehension of divine displeasure. We insist not on the reasons of it — but on the bare fact that such an apprehension is universally felt by those who are exposed to imminent danger, or plunged in deep distress; and that, by the constitution of our nature, such a connection is established between suffering and sin — as that the former cannot be, to any great extent, endured, without being accompanied with a deep sense of personal demerit and guilt. That such a connection does exist, is evident from the dreadful apprehensions which are experienced and expressed by the most ungodly and careless, when they are suddenly brought into imminent danger. Many will then tremble, and think of God, who cared nothing for reflection before. Have we not seen a family, enjoying a long course of prosperity, and as unmindful of God and religion, as if they were ignorant that they had a God to worship, and souls to be saved; but when one of their number was suddenly seized by the hand of death, the whole of that mirthful household were also seized with religious fear, and none more anxious than they to procure the aid of a minister's consolations, and a minister's prayers! Have we not known a crude and thoughtless sailor, spending every hour of fair weather and prosperous winds in jovial mirth — night after night retiring to his cot without thinking of the God above, or of the Hell beneath him — and even, when the first gale arose that was to founder his ship, reckless of the coming storm; but when the crash was heard, and when, from the force of habit, the first word upon his lip was an oath, that oath died away into a prayer, when the foaming waters burst across the deck, and lashed him into the mighty deep! In the 107th Psalm, we find the tendency of affliction to produce prayer, illustrated by many beautiful examples — as in the case of the Jews wandering in the wilderness, in a solitary way, hungry and thirsty, and their souls fainting within them. Or in the case of those who, by reason of personal distress, "sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, being bound in affliction and iron, because they rebelled against the words of God." Or in the case of those who go down to the sea in ships, whose soul is melted because of trouble — in each case, it is added, "they cried unto the Lord in their trouble."

It is true, that in all these cases, prayer may, in the first instance, be nothing more than the cry of nature in distress; the desires of such people may not, at the outset, be purely spiritual; and the sense of guilt which they experience, may be characterized more by the terrors of remorse, than by the tenderness of true repentance. Be it so; this does not hinder the usefulness of affliction, as a means in God's hand, of leading them to pray.

God acts on the minds of men by rational inducements; and seeing that, in their natural state, they are dead to the influence of higher and more spiritual motives — he has recourse to their sentient nature; their hopes and their fears are addressed in the promises and threatenings of Scripture — and their love of happiness, and aversion to suffering, are appealed to in the absence of holier principles. When God sends affliction, he appeals to their natural feelings; and the lessons which it

is fitted to teach, are so many motives to a religious life — motives which, although, in the first instance, addressed to the mere natural feelings, and hopes, and fears of the sufferer — may, nevertheless, through these — arrest the attention, and reach the conscience, and ultimately renew the heart. The impressions which are made during a season of affliction, may be the result, in a great measure, of mere natural feeling; but they may, nevertheless, be the means which the Holy Spirit has chosen for the commencement of a saving change; and if they lead the sufferer to pray, they bring him under a new influence, whereby the sentient feelings which at first prompted him, may gradually and imperceptibly rise into gracious and devout affections. At all events, let no sufferer be debarred from the throne of grace, because he is in doubt as to the spirituality of his affections, or depressed by a sense of guilt; let him remember, that as a sinner he is invited, and that his present affliction is designed to induce him to pray; and should he still question his warrant or his prospect of acceptance — let him remember the words of the apostle to Simon Magus, "You are in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity; but pray to God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you." As affliction prepares the mind for prayer — so prayer relieves the mind in affliction.

Prayer is often the means of averting the evils with which we are threatened, and of delivering us from those under which we labor. Its efficacy, both for defense and delivery — is frequently stated in express terms, and illustrated by striking examples in the Sacred Writings.

It is recorded of Hezekiah, that when he heard the message of God by the mouth of Isaiah the prophet, saying, "Set your house in order — for you shall die, and not live!" he "turned his face toward the wall, and prayed unto the Lord, and said, Remember now, Lord, I beseech you, how I have walked before you in truth, and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in your sight! And Hezekiah wept sore. Then came the word of the Lord to Isaiah, saying: Go and say to Hezekiah, Thus says the Lord, the God of David your father, I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears — behold, I will add to your days fifteen years." "And Isaiah said: Take a lump of figs; and they took and laid it on the boil, and he recovered."

Thus was a sore disease removed, and early death prevented by the efficacy of prayer; and Hezekiah had reason to sing for joy: "You have, in love to my soul, delivered it from the pit of corruption, for you have cast all my sins behind my back! The Lord was ready to save me, therefore we will sing my songs to the stringed instruments, all the days of our life, in the house of the Lord." The history of the people of Israel affords many interesting examples of the effect of prayer in delivering from outward trouble, as well as of the tendency of affliction to impress the most careless with the necessity and value of prayer. These examples are thus beautifully referred to in the 107th Psalm: "give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good; for his mercy endures forever. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom he has redeemed from the hand of the enemy. They wandered in the wilderness in a solitary way; they found no city to dwell in. Hungry and thirsty, their souls fainted in them. Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble — and he delivered them out of their distresses. For he satisfies the longing soul, and fills the hungry soul with goodness." Nor was the efficacy of prayer, in preventing or removing trouble, confined to the Jewish people, although they lived under a dispensation which was in many respects supernatural and miraculous. We are taught, on the contrary, to regard the examples which their history presents, as so many indications of the unalterable principles on which the general government of the world is conducted; and in so far as the point now before us is concerned, the same principle is

recognized and embodied in a promise in the New Testament itself: "If any man is afflicted, let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: and the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he has committed sin, it shall be forgiven him." And in more general terms, our Lord has said to all his disciples, "Ask, and you shall receive; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." "Whatever you ask in my name, believing, you shall receive." To this, many may be ready to oppose their own experience, and may be unwilling to admit the efficacy of prayer in preventing or removing outward calamity, when they remember with what frequency and earnestness they supplicated for mercies which before, nevertheless, withheld, and deprecated trials which were, nevertheless, sent or continued with them. They may remember that, when threatened with bereavement, they wept sore, and besought the Lord to spare and restore the object of their fond affections; and yet, that he allowed disease to take its course, until it terminated in death.

These facts, which no Christian minister will seek either to deny or to conceal, may have had the effect of staggering the belief of many in the efficacy of prayer; and where they have not had this effect, they may occasionally puzzle even the minds of believers, and overwhelm them with deep anxiety, by suggesting the awful thought, that, since their prayers have received no direct answer — they must either not be of the number of God's people at all, or they must "have prayed amiss." But these conclusions are not warranted by Scripture, and they arise from a misapprehension, not so much of the promise annexed to prayer, as of the very nature of prayer itself. No prayer is scriptural, which does not express a desire in unison with the will of God; and where the purpose of God is, as in most cases it must be, secret or unknown to us — no prayer is scriptural in which the expression of our own desire is not limited by a holy acquiescence in his will. We are not entitled, for example, to pray absolutely that God's chastening hand may be withdrawn from us, or that the life of a relative may be spared, or that we may be blessed with worldly prosperity. All these desires, however natural and however strong, must be limited by, and subordinated to, the will of Him who knows what is best for us, and who has graciously taken the management of our case into His own hands. This is strikingly implied in the very structure of that form of prayer which our Lord himself gave to his disciples; for it is a very remarkable fact, that the three first petitions of that prayer are expressive of . . .

a desire for God's glory,

acquiescence in God's will, and

zeal for the extension of His kingdom. And it is not until after we have thus ascribed sovereignty to Jehovah, and cast ourselves absolutely into His hands — that we are permitted to broach one petition for our own particular interest, even to the extent of daily bread!

It is only, therefore, when our desires are in unison with the divine will — that we have reason to expect a direct fulfillment of our requests. And this consideration is fraught with much interesting instruction, and with great practical comfort in regard to the efficacy of prayer; for it assures us, that if we should happen to pray in a right spirit — but, from ignorance, should ask what is not really good for us — that God will not take advantage of our ignorance or weakness, so as to visit us with a curse, when we are seeking a blessing. There can be no doubt that, were every desire which we express in prayer to meet with a direct and literal fulfillment, the efficacy of prayer might, through our ignorance of what is really for our good, become a source of calamity rather than of

comfort! As it is related of one who, being possessed of great wealth, and having an only son, and that son laboring under a very sore disease, and being repeatedly counseled to resign him into God's hand, and to acquiesce in his appointment, even should God be pleased to take him away, did, nevertheless, so far yield to his natural affections, as resolutely to refuse any act of submission, and could not bring himself to utter one word of acquiescence in such a result. But this same man, many years after, was seen dishonored and beaten in his old age, by that very son whom he was so loath to lose; and mourning, in the bitterness of his heart, over filial ingratitude and disobedience, as the heaviest curse of his gray hairs! But when our petition is limited by acquiescence in the sovereign disposal of Almighty God — even should we ask amiss, God will neither withhold what is truly good for us, nor give what he knows to be bad. And thus the omniscient wisdom of God is our security against the effect of our own ignorance, or weakness in prayer.

It is chiefly in reference to external comforts or privileges, that we are ignorant of God's will and our own interest; for, on that subject, we have no Scripture revelation to guide us. But for spiritual blessings, in so far as these are necessary for the safety of the soul — we have a stronger assurance of an answer, in proportion as we have better evidence both of its being God's will to bestow, and of its being our interest to receive them.

It may be doubtful how far God will be pleased to grant, or how far it would be for our real welfare to obtain — exemption from outward trials, or the uninterrupted enjoyment of worldly prosperity. But we know from Scripture, that the blessings of God's grace are of such a nature, that He must at all times be willing to dispense them, and that we cannot pray for, or receive them — without being substantially benefitted. We have greater confidence, therefore, of a literal fulfillment of our petitions, when we supplicate the grace of a penitent spirit — than when we pray for a prosperous outward estate, since the former must, at all times, be an object of delight to God, and a real blessing to ourselves; whereas the latter may be fraught with danger to our higher interests, and may, therefore, by God's unerring wisdom, be withheld. In this view, also, our prayers may be really answered — although the special evil which we deprecate is, nevertheless, inflicted, and the good which we supplicate is, nevertheless, withheld. For what is our prayer? Why, that God would deal with us according to the counsels of unerring wisdom, and give or withhold according to his sovereign will. That being our prayer, it is answered — even though it should be by crosses. And, in this, God magnifies his grace, by bringing the substantial blessings which we need out of the unlikeliest means, nay, out of those very evils which we are most eager to avoid! We see, hence, not only that the prayers of his people are answered — but that they cannot fail to have their fulfillment! For the desires of their hearts are going forth in unison with the divine will — and that will is omnipotent! In these circumstances, however, the unbelieving mind will be ready to reason against the utility of prayer altogether, and to say that God's will, being omnipotent, must have its effect, whether we pray or not. But, by those who can entertain this idea, it is not duly considered, that prayer is in the moral world, what any other ordinary cause is in the physical world — a means established by God himself — a link in the grand chain of cause and effect, which not only comprehends both the physical and moral departments of his government — but combines the two, and establishes a very intimate relation between their several parts — a cause, in fact, which is not less regarded by God than any other secondary agent in nature. It might, therefore, with the same propriety be affirmed, that God's omnipotent will must cause the pre-determined harvest to

spring up from the earth, without the agency of manual labor — as that God's will must cause the fulfillment of such of our desires as are in unison therewith, without the agency of prayer.

And, be it observed, that even were we unable to obviate the difficulty, we cannot fail, at least, to perceive, that it is founded on a principle directly the reverse of that on which our Lord argued; for, so far from regarding the infinite knowledge, or the sovereign will, or the almighty power of God — as superseding the necessity of prayer on the part of man — he refers to these as the very ground and reason, nay, as the strongest motive and encouragement of prayer! "For your heavenly Father knows that you have need of these things." Were we to act on any other principle, we must virtually declare that we will not pray — unless we are allowed to dictate to God, or assured that our desires shall overrule the decision of omniscient wisdom!

Even when prayer is not effectual in averting or removing the evil which we fear or endure — yet it imparts to the believing mind the strongest of all consolation — that which arises from the persuasion that God's will is answered by the event, and that any other result would have been, in the judgment of unerring wisdom, neither so good in itself, nor so beneficial to our real interest.

Besides its effect in averting threatened calamity, or procuring positive blessings at the hand of God — prayer exercises a beneficial influence on the mind — and thus fits it for suffering, and relieves it when calamity comes. The degree of sorrow which is occasioned by affliction, depends a great deal more on the state of mind in which it finds the sufferer — than on the amount of the calamity itself. The same trial which overwhelms one person — may be sustained with composure and comfort by another; and that, too, although both are equally sensitive in their feelings. This difference depends on the preparation which they have respectively made for the event. If the one has been careless, while the other was thoughtful; and, above all, if the one has been negligent in fortifying his mind by prayer and supplication, while the other, under a deep sense of his liability to affliction, and his dependence on God, has betaken himself, in the exercise of humble trust and confidence, to the throne of grace, and has been enabled there to repose the burden of his anxieties on the Lord — it cannot but be, that the latter will feel very differently from the former, when the event occurs. And that event, however calamitous in itself, will be the less overwhelming to him — in proportion as he was the better prepared to meet it, and the more accustomed to regard it in connection with the will of Him, who is at once the God of Providence, and the hearer of prayer. And as prayer, offered up in anticipation of sufferings, puts the soul in a right state of preparation — so, by virtue of its natural influence, it has the effect of relieving the mind of those feelings, which severe calamity, when it does come, must, in all cases, in a greater or less degree, awaken. Prayer before affliction — fits the mind for suffering; prayer under affliction — relieves the mind of its sorrow. So long as the feelings of the sufferer are restrained and pent up within his own bosom, they prey upon his internal peace. But when they find a channel through which they obtain utterance and expansion, their depressing power is mitigated, and the heart is, in part at least, relieved of its burden. Hence excessive grief is often mitigated by copious weeping — much more by communion with a dear and confidential friend — but most of all by prayer, which is the heart's communion with God, the best and nearest of friends.

Those who have witnessed the strong agony of grief, occasioned by some sudden and unexpected calamity, and have watched, with intense concern, its progress and results — can best appreciate the benefit of such outlets to human feeling, and they will testify, that as soon as

the grief of their friend found vent in tears or in free conversation — they felt that the worst was already past. And, above all, if the sufferer retired to his chamber, and, on his bended knees, poured out his soul to God in the confidence of prayer — a calm serenity and composure ensued, which showed that the crisis was over, and that, too, although he may have prayed with strong crying and tears.

It may be difficult to account for the relief which a suffering spirit derives from the gushing of tears, unless it is resolved into a natural harmony between the physiology of the body, and the deep emotions of the mind. It may be difficult, also, in some cases, to account for the relief that is derived from the mere utterance of the heart's fullness into the ear of another, unless it be referred to the principle of sympathy, whose law seems to be, "that it redoubles joys — and cuts griefs in halves; for, as there is no man that imparts his joys to his friend — but he rejoices the more; so there is no man that imparts his griefs to his friend — but he grieves the less."

But, whatever difficulty may be felt in ascertaining the reason why such outlets of feeling are so proverbially the means of relieving sorrow — surely there can be none in accounting for the relief which a pious mind experiences in unbosoming its sorrows in the very presence and ear of its God! For there, at his footstool — who dare arraign the wisdom, or blame the rectitude, or question the sovereignty — of Him from whom affliction comes? In prayer, the mind is brought into immediate contact with the Supreme Will; the sovereignty of God is recognized and felt; the wisdom of his dispensations acknowledged; and the very misery which leads the sufferer to the throne of grace, is the means of placing him in a position in which he feels that he must adore the divine goodness, and trust in it still, notwithstanding all that has occurred, otherwise he has neither help nor hope. By the very act of bending the knee before his footstool, the Christian makes all these acknowledgments, and gives a practical expression of his confidence in God's faithfulness and love — he repairs to God as his friend — a friend that will not leave him nor forsake him. And if such acknowledgments are made, and such feelings are awakened, in the hour of prayer — is not his spirit thereby placed in the best condition for at once procuring the mitigation of his sorrow, and improving by the calamity which has called it forth?

It is, indeed, wonderful, how the mind clears up its views of God's dispensations, while engaged in prayer. At first, thick clouds may seem to darken his prospect — but, as he proceeds, streaks of light break through, and shine in upon his spirit, and, "while he sits in darkness — the Lord is a light to him." "While David kept silence, his bones waxed old, through his roaring all the day long;" while "he restrained prayer, his spirit was straitened;" but no sooner did he pour out his heart before God, than he "was compassed about with songs of deliverance." In such a case, much sorrow may still remain — but the bitterness of grief is past. The subdued and humble feeling which affliction is designed to produce, and by which it operates, in part, its beneficial results — will characterize the sufferer, long after the agony of grief has subsided into calm resignation. His soul will no longer resemble the troubled sea which cannot rest — but will be like "a weaned child." And this wholesome conversion of the excitement of violent sorrow into the mild virtue of suffering affliction with patience — is best produced by the agency of prayer.

"The Fountain"

"On that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity!" Zechariah 13:1

Come to Calvary's holy mountain,
Sinners! ruined by the fall;
Here a pure and healing fountain
Flows to you, to me, to all —
In a full, perpetual tide.
Opened when the Savior died.
Come, in poverty and baseness.
Come, defiled without, within;
From infection and uncleanness,
From the leprosy of sin,
Wash your robes and make them white;
You shall walk with God in light.
Come, in sorrow and contrition,
Wounded, impotent, and blind;
Here the guilty, free remission,
Here the troubled peace may find;
Health this fountain will restore;
He who drinks will thirst no more.
He who drinks shall live forever:
'Tis a soul-renewing flood;
God is faithful—God will never
Break his covenant in blood,
Signed when our Redeemer died,
Sealed when he was glorified!

06-Jesus Veiling His Dealings

Jesus Veiling His Dealings Octavius Winslow

"Jesus replied: You do not realize now what I am doing — but later you will understand." John 13:7 Our Lord, when he spoke these words, had just risen from the lowliest act of his most lowly life. Around that act there was thrown a veil of mystery which partially concealed its significance and its end, from the view of his wondering disciple. There was much in this simple but expressive incident of the Savior's life, which filled Peter's mind with perplexing thought. His first feeling was that of resistance, to be followed by one of astonishment, still deeper. He had marked each step in the strange proceeding — the loosened sandal, the bathing of the feet, the replacing of the robe; but the deep significance of the whole was to his view wrapped in impenetrable mystery. And how did the Savior meet his perplexity? Not by denying its mysteriousness, but by a promise of clearer light later on. "You do not realize now what I am doing — but later you will understand." And this explanation and assurance satisfied the mind of the amazed disciple. Simon Peter exclaimed, "Then wash my hands and head as well, Lord, not just my feet!" John 13:9

Each individual believer has a personal interest in this subject, especially those to whom these pages are inscribed — the Father's chastened ones. These words imply a concealment of much of the Lord's procedure with his people. In the preceding chapter we contemplated, under the similitude of the night-season, the present pilgrimage of the saints; a night, however, not entirely rayless, nor songless; not without some harbingers of the joyous morning, nor some key-notes of the entrancing melody with which that morning of joy will be ushered in.

It is our wisdom to know that no pure, unmixed sorrow, ever befalls the Christian sufferer. Our Lord Jesus flung the curse and the sin to such an infinite distance from the church, that could his faith but discern it — the believer would see nothing but love painting the darkest cloud that ever threw its shadow upon his spirit. Akin to the preceding subject, is the one upon which we now propose briefly to address the suffering reader. It speaks of a veiling of Christ's dealings, with the promise of an unveiling in a day far sunnier and happier than this. "You do not realize now what I am doing — but later you will understand." With regard to our heavenly Father — there can be nothing mysterious, nothing inscrutable to him. A profound and solemn mystery himself — yet to his infinite mind there can be no darkness, no mystery at all. His whole plan — if plan it may be called — is before him. Our phraseology, when speaking of the divine procedure, would sometimes imply the opposite of this. We talk of God's fore-knowledge, of his foresight, of his acquaintance with events yet unborn; but there is in truth, no such thing. There are no tenses with God — no past — nor present — nor to come. The idea of God's Eternity, if perfectly grasped, would annihilate in our minds all such humanizing of the Divine Being. He is one ETERNAL NOW. All events to the remotest period of time, were as vivid and as present to the divine mind from eternity, as when at the moment they assumed a real existence and a palpable form. But all the mystery is with us, poor finite creatures of a day. And why, even to us, is any portion of the divine conduct thus a mystery? Not because it is in itself so — but mainly and simply because we cannot see the whole

as God sees it. Could it pass before our eye, as from eternity it has before his — a perfect and a complete whole; we would then cease to wonder, to cavil and repine. The infinite wisdom, purity, and goodness — which originated and gave a character, a form, and a coloring, to all that God does — would appear as luminous to our view as to his, and ceaseless adoration and praise would be the grateful tribute of our loving hearts.

Throw back a glance upon the past, and see how little you have ever understood of all the way God has led you. What a mystery — perhaps, now better explained — has enveloped his whole proceedings! When Joseph, for example, was torn from the homestead of his father, sold, and borne a slave into Egypt, not a syllable of that eventful page of his history could he understand. All was to his mind, as strange and unreadable as the hieroglyphics of the race, whose symbolical literature and religion now for the first time met his eye. And yet God's way with this his servant was perfect. And could Joseph have seen at the moment that he descended into the pit, where he was cast by his envious brethren — all the future of his history as vividly and as palpably as he beheld it in after years, while there would have been the conviction that all was well — we doubt not that faith would have lost much of its vigor, and God much of his glory. And so with good old Jacob. The famine — the parting with Benjamin — the menacing conduct of Pharaoh's prime minister, wrung the mournful expression from his lips, "All these things are against me!" All was veiled in deep and mournful mystery.

Thus was it with Job, to whom God spoke from the whirlwind that swept every vestige of affluence and domestic comfort from his dwelling. And thus, too, with Naomi, when she exclaimed, "Call me not Naomi — call me Mara! For the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the Lord has brought me home again empty." How easy were it to multiply these examples of God's veiled and yet all-wise dispensations. And is this the way of the Lord with you, my reader? Are you bewildered at the mazes through which you are threading your steps; at the intricate circumstances of your present history; the incidents which seem so entwined and interlaced one with the other, as to present to your view, an inextricable labyrinth? Deem yourself not alone in this. No mystery has lighted upon your path, but what is common to the one family of God: "This honor have all his saints." The Shepherd is leading you, as all the flock are led, with a skillful hand and in a right way! It is yours to stand if he bids you, or to follow if he leads. "He gives no account of any of his matters," assuming that his children have such confidence in his wisdom, and love, and uprightness, as, in all the wonder-working of his dealings with them, to 'be still and know that he is God.' That it is to the honor of God to conceal, should in our view, justify all his painful and humiliating procedure with us. "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing," as it will be for his endless glory by and by fully to reveal it all. But there is one thing, Christian sufferer, which he cannot conceal. He cannot conceal the love that forms the spring and foundation of all his conduct with his saints. Do what he will, conceal as he may; be his chariot the thick clouds, and his way in the deep sea — still his love betrays itself, disguised though it may be in dark and impenetrable providence. There are undertones, gentle and tender, in the roughest accents of our Joseph's voice. And he who has an ear ever hearkening to the Lord, and delicately attuned to the gentlest whisper, shall often exclaim — "Speak, Lord, how and when and where you may — it is the voice of my Beloved!" But we have arrived at an interesting and cheering truth — the full unveiling of all the Lord's dealings in a holier and a brighter world. "You do not realize now what I am doing — but later you will understand." That there is a present partial understanding of God's will and ways

concerning us, we readily concede. We may, now and then, see a need be for his conduct. The veil is just sufficiently lifted to reveal a portion of the 'end of the Lord.' He will make us acquainted .

. .

with the evil which he corrects,

with the backsliding which he chastens,

with the temptation which he checks, and

with the dangerous path around which he throws his hedge

— so that we cannot escape. We see it, and we bless the hand outstretched to save us!

He will also cause us to be fruitful. We . . .

have mourned our leanness,

have confessed our barrenness, and

lamented the distance of our walk, and

the little glory we bring to his dear name —

and lo! the dresser of the vineyard has appeared to prune his sickly branch, "that it may bring forth more fruit!" "By this therefore shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged; and this is all the fruit to take away his sin." The deeper teaching, too — the result of the divine chastenings — has revealed to some extent the 'end of the Lord' in his mysterious conduct.

O there is no school like God's school; for "who teaches like Him?" And God's highest school is the school of trial. All his true scholars have graduated from this school. "Who are these who are clothed in white? Where do they come from? These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb and made them white." Revelation 7:13-14. "Blessed is the man, O Lord, whom you chasten and teach out of your law." Ask each spiritually, deeply-taught Christian, where he attained his knowledge — and he will point you to God's great university — the school of trial. But there is a time coming, a blessed time of "good things to come," when the darkness will all have passed away, the mystery of God will be finished, and the present conduct of our Savior will be fully cleared up. "You do not realize now what I am doing — but later you will understand." O that "later," what a solemn word to the ungodly! Is there, then, a later? Jesus says there is; and I believe it, because he says it. That later will be terrible to the man that dies in his sins. It will be a later, whose history will be "written in mourning, lamentation and woe." It had been better for you, reader, living and dying, impenitent and unbelieving — had you never been born, or, had there been no later. But there is a later of woe to the sinner — as of bliss to the saint. "These shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal." (Matthew 25:46.) The position which the Christian shall occupy hereafter, will be most favorable to a full and clear comprehension of all the mysteries of the way. The "clouds and darkness" — emblems in our history of obscurity and distress — which now envelop God's throne, and enshroud his government of the saints, will have passed away; the mist and fog will have vanished; and breathing a purer atmosphere, and canopied by a brighter sky, the glorified saint will see every object, circumstance, incident and step — with an eye unobscured by

a vapor, and unmoistened by a tear. "Now we know in part — then shall we know even as we are known." And what shall we know? All the mysteries of Providence. Things which had made us greatly grieve — will now be seen to have been causes of the greatest joy. Clouds of threatening, which appeared to us charged with the agent of destruction — will then unveil, and reveal the love which they embosomed and concealed. All the mysteries of faith too will be known. "Now we see through a glass, darkly; (in a riddle) but then face to face. Now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known." The great "mystery of Godliness" will develop and unfold its wonders. His everlasting love to his church — his choice of a people for himself — his sovereign grace in calling them — all, all, will shine forth with unclouded luster to the eternal praise of his great and holy name. O what a perfect, harmonious, and glorious whole will all his doings in providence and grace appear, from first to last, to the undimmed eye, the ravished gaze of his white-robed, palm-bearing church.

Many and holy are the lessons we may gather from this subject. The first is — the lesson of deep humility. There are three steps in the Christian's life. The first is — humility; the second is — humility; the third is — humility. "You shall remember all the way which the Lord your God led you these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you, and to prove you, to know what was in your heart." In veiling his dealings, Jesus would "hide pride" from us. How loftily and self-sufficiently would we walk — did we see all our present and future history plain before us.

We would ascribe to our own wisdom and skill, prudence and forethought — the honor which belongs to Christ alone. Let us, then, lie low before the Lord, and humble ourselves under his mysterious hand. "The meek will he guide in judgment, and the meek will he teach his way. All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies." Thus writing the sentence of death upon our wisdom, our sagacity, and our strength — Jesus, the lowly one — seeks to keep us from the loftiness of our intellect, and from the pride of our heart, prostrating us low in the dust at his feet. Holy posture! blessed place! There, Lord, would I lie; my trickling tears of penitence and love, falling upon those dear feet that have never misled, but have always gone before, leading me by a right way, the best way, to a city of rest.

"To cure you of your pride — that deepest-seated ill,

God humbled his own self — will you your pride keep still?"

We should learn from this subject, to live by faith amid the enshrouding dealings of our God. Therefore are those dealings often so dark. Could we ever see all the road — faith would have no play; this precious, this Christ-honoring, this God-glorifying grace would lie dormant in the soul. But, in "leading the blind by a way that they know not," he teaches them to confide in the knowledge, truth, and goodness of their Divine escort — and that confidence is the calm unquestioning repose of faith.

"My spirit on your care,

Blest Savior, I recline;

You will not leave me to despair,

For you are love divine.

"In you I place my trust,
On you I calmly rest;
I know you good, I know you just,
And count your choice the best.
"Whatever events betide,
Your will they all perform;
Safe in your breast my head I hide,
Nor fear the coming storm.
"Let good or ill befall,
It must be good for me;
Secure of having you in all,
Of having all in thee."

H.F. Lyte

Oh, sweet, consoling words of Jesus! — "What I am doing." Not what men do — not what angels do — not what you do — but, "What I am doing." Is the loved one wrenched from your heart? — "I have done it!" says Jesus. Is the desire of your eyes smitten down with a stroke? — "I have done it!" says Jesus. Is it the loss of property, of health, of position, of friends, that overwhelms you with grief? — "I have done it!" says Jesus.

"You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand." How many a mother has this promise soothed, while with an anguish such as a mother only knows, she has gazed upon the withered flower on her bosom! How many a father, standing by the couch of death, grasping the cold clammy hand of the love of his heart, has felt the power of these words, more sweet and more soothing than an angel's music — "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand." Wait, then, suffering child, the coming glory — yielding yourself to the guidance of your Savior, and submitting yourself wholly to your Father's will.

"Peace in Affliction"

O Lord! how happy would we be,
If we could cast our care on thee,
If we from self could rest;
And feel at heart that One above,
In perfect wisdom, perfect love,
Is working for the best.
How far from this our daily life!

Ever disturbed by anxious strife,
By sudden wild alarms;
O could we but relinquish all
Our earthly props, and simply fall
On your Almighty arms! Could we but kneel, and cast our load,
E'en while we pray, upon our God;
Then rise with lightened cheer,
Sure that the Father who is near
To still the famished raven's cry
Will hear, in that we fear.
We cannot trust him as we should,
So chafes fallen nature's restless mood
To cast its peace away;
Yet birds and flowerets round us preach,
All, all the present evil teach
Sufficient for the day.
Lord, make these faithless hearts of ours,
Such lessons learn from birds and flowers,
Make them from self to cease;
Leave all things to a Father's will,
And taste, before him lying still,
E'en in affliction, peace.

Jesus replied: "You do not realize now what I am doing — but later you will understand." John 13:7

07-The Chastening Rod in the Father's Hand

The Chastening Rod in the Father's Hand by James Buchanan

"This is my comfort in my affliction." Psalms 119:50 "He does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men." Lamentations 3:33

One of the most solemnly interesting inquiries to which the thoughts of a reflecting mind can be directed is — To what cause are we to attribute the prevalence and the unequal distribution of affliction in the present state? And the solution of this question will lead to another of equal importance and interest, namely — How far these afflictions should affect our confidence in God, or our future hopes under his government? In reference to the first of these questions, namely — To what cause we are to attribute the prevalence and the unequal distribution of affliction in the present state — both reason and Scripture concur in ascribing every affliction with which men are visited, to the purpose and providence of God. Suffering does not arise accidentally in his dominions — but is the product of his deliberate counsel, and the result of laws which he has established for the government of his subjects. It is neither a necessary adjunct, nor a casual accident of our nature; not necessary, for omniscient wisdom and almighty power might constitute even a created being without suffering — such are now the angels in Heaven, and such was man before the Fall; nor accidental, for that were to exempt the happiness of his creatures from God's control, and virtually to set aside his overruling providence.

It is true, that suffering sometimes proceeds so immediately and so manifestly from the conduct of individual men, that to their follies or vices it may be ascribed as its proximate cause — the horrors of disease being the natural fruit of profligate manners, and the hardships of poverty resulting naturally from habits of indolent indulgence, or improvident thoughtlessness. But even in such cases, these afflictive results are determined by a law which God has established — a law which attaches health and comfort to frugal and temperate habits — and entails disease and poverty on the opposite vices. And God being the author of that constitution of things under which we live — to his sovereign will we must look as the ultimate cause of such a connection between sin and its appropriate misery.

And, in other cases, as in the dread visitation of famine, or pestilence, or the more ordinary occurrence of family bereavement — we see his hand, as it were, visibly stretched forth: "Is there evil in a city," says the sacred writer, "and the Lord has not done it?" "I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create evil! I the Lord do all these things." It was the Lord who rained fire and brimstone out of Heaven on the cities of the plain; it was the Lord who sent the deluge on the earth, until all men and every living thing died; it was the Lord who glorified himself in the destruction of the Egyptian army. And he still guards us against the foolish notion that the sufferings of life are accidental, lest we should thereby be led to overlook his hand in them, and so "to despise the chastening of the Lord."

Every affliction, then, with which any of us is visited — is the result of God's deliberate purpose. No evil befalls us without his permission or appointment. Nor are our afflictions to be regarded as the results of the careless or capricious exercise of almighty power; but, on the contrary, they are to be ascribed to the most comprehensive wisdom, acting according to principles which are fixed and determined as laws of the divine government. God is not a careless or inattentive spectator of what passes among his subjects; he does not send evil among them at random, nor without cause, nor without a well-defined end in view. Such capricious exercise of almighty power is incompatible with the possession of omniscient wisdom. He cannot be taken by surprise, neither can he act from the impulse of momentary feeling. Every attribute of his nature, and every principle of his government, are alike stable and excellent; and from these, not from caprice or passion — does affliction spring.

Far less can affliction be ascribed to the deliberate exercise of divine cruelty, or the sudden gust of revenge. If the comprehensive wisdom, the almighty power, and the perfect independence of God, forbid us to imagine that he can, in any case, permit evil to arise through negligence or caprice — then surely the infinite benevolence which prompted him to communicate being to his creatures, and to open up for them so many sources of enjoyment, may well forbid the thought that he is capable of nourishing one vindictive feeling, or of taking delight in the infliction of suffering. Infinitely great, and glorious, and happy in himself — what possible motive can exist in the divine mind for the exercise of these cruel and vengeful passions, which he has forbidden his own creatures to nourish, and by which, where they are indulged, his creatures are debased? Shall we attribute to the most glorious Being in the universe — those evil passions by which only the basest of mankind are animated; and which, wherever they exist, render the character hateful, and the bosom which contains them wretched as well as guilty?

God forbid! All nature bears witness to the benevolence of its author; and that benevolence assures us, that whatever evils may exist under his government, they are not inflicted in the exercise of cruelty, or for the gratification of passion — that to whatever other cause they may be ascribed, they cannot be referred to any disposition on the part of God, that would lead him unnecessarily to make his creatures unhappy, or to take pleasure in their suffering. And, in addition to the testimony of nature, God does most solemnly disclaim every such feeling, and assures us, "that he afflicts not willingly, nor grieve the children of men." In these words, it is not denied that affliction proceeds from the hand of God; on the contrary, it is admitted that he does afflict and grieve the children of men: but then, in regard to the disposition and feelings with which he does so, it is affirmed that he "afflicts not willingly." This cannot be understood to signify that affliction comes without the will, or contrary to the purpose of God, or that he does not approve of the painful discipline to which his people are subjected. On the contrary, every suffering which he inflicts, is the fruit of his deliberate wisdom, and the object of his holy approbation. But when it is said that he "afflicts not willingly" — we are given to understand that he has no pleasure in the misery of his creatures, considered in itself, and apart from its causes and ends; that he does not lift the rod merely to render them unhappy, and far less to gratify his own passion; that, but for moral considerations, physical happiness is with him a far more pleasing thing than physical suffering; and that, while he has no pleasure in making his subjects wretched — he does delight in their comfort and well-being. This view, indeed, of the feelings with which God contemplates the sufferings of his creatures, necessarily arises out of the simplest idea which we can form of his

character, as a perfectly wise and good Being; and to what cause, then, it may be asked, are we to ascribe the sufferings which do actually prevail under his administration? The Bible enables us fully to answer this question, by the views which it presents of God's character, as the Governor of the world — and of the present state, as one of sin and trial.

God is revealed, not only as a being of infinite moral perfection and blessedness — but as the righteous moral governor of his intelligent creatures. And the course of his providence is represented as not only comprehending the means by which he preserves them in existence — but also as constituting the discipline by which the ends of his moral government are fulfilled. To the idea of a moral government, a law of some kind is absolutely essential; and a law of any kind being given, it was necessary that it should be accompanied with such sanctions of reward and punishment, as might put a difference between the obedient and disobedient subjects of it. Hence, if by any means sin should appear, God determined that suffering should arise along with it; and in the very structure of our own being, he has instituted physical checks as well as moral restraints to disobedience, and has connected therewith not only the pangs of an accusing conscience — but also a numerous train of diseases, and the sentence of death.

These arrangements, by which suffering is inseparably connected with sin, are far from being arbitrary; they flow necessarily from the perfections of the divine nature. Could we, indeed, entertain, for one instant, the monstrous idea, that God, although possessed of infinite power, and wisdom, and benevolence — was nevertheless, in moral respects, a being of a neutral character — that he had no holiness, no rectitude, no justice — that he had no predilection for one style of moral character in his subjects, more than another — that ingratitude, and sensuality, and deceit, were not more offensive to him than the opposite virtues — then, and then only, could we conceive of him lavishing the wealth of almighty power and unbounded beneficence on all his creatures alike, and making no difference between seraphic virtue and satanic guilt. But, being holy and just, as well as good — he must necessarily approve of what is congenial to his own character, and conformable to that law which is but the transcript of his character, and the expression of his unchangeable will. Although, therefore, from the benevolence of his nature, he must delight in the diffusion of happiness — yet, from the holiness and rectitude of his character, the principle, that sin should be connected with suffering — must be the object of his moral approbation.

Farther, men are not only represented in Scripture as the subjects of a moral government — but as subjects placed in a very peculiar and interesting state, a state of acknowledged guilt — yet of delayed punishment, in order to their probation and trial for an everlasting destiny hereafter. Their present state is not one of "retribution — but of respite." Sentence has been passed against them as guilty — but the effect of that sentence has been for a time suspended, in order to the application of means, on the part of God, for their redemption. And being neither like the angels — perfectly holy and happy; nor like devils — absolutely lost, they occupy a middle state, which may be either the scene of their education for Heaven, or of their preparation for Hell. To one or other of these departments of the invisible world — all will before long be transferred; but, meanwhile, they are dealt with as creatures that have incurred condemnation — but who, through the mercy of God, are capable of rising to glory.

These two views, the one of God's character — as a moral governor and judge; and the other of mankind — as sinners in a state of respite and trial — satisfactorily account both for the sufferings

which men endure, and for the unequal distribution of them. Were there no sin — there would be no suffering; or were this the place of strict retribution — suffering would be awarded according to the amount of guilt. But it now being a middle state, enjoyment and sorrow are so intermingled as to prove, at once, the benevolence and the rectitude of God. To the great moral ends of this economy, the discipline of affliction is, in many respects, needful; and hence the varied evils with which God has seen meet to visit us. Of these afflictions, viewed as parts of his own procedure, and a means of beneficial discipline — God must be supposed to entertain a holy moral approbation; and yet, in none of his dispensations, however dark and distressing, does he take pleasure in inflicting unnecessary suffering, or in making his creatures unhappy; for it is expressly declared, that "he has no pleasure in the death of the sinner," and that "he does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men."

These views throw an interesting light, both on the character of God — and on the nature and design of affliction under his government. As God is to be regarded both as an affectionate father and a righteous judge — so affliction is presented in two lights in Scripture, in each of which, it is compatible with the most perfect benevolence in the divine mind. It is there represented as being partly corrective and partly penal. At one time, the chastisement of an affectionate father — at another, the award of a righteous judge. While, in both, it is declared to be the result of sin. In neither case is it the spontaneous infliction of one who delights in suffering for its own sake — but the result of principles from which no wise father or judge will ever depart in the management of his children or subjects. The meaning of the declaration, that "God does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men," may, perhaps, be best illustrated, if, conceiving of him as the father and governor of his rational creatures, we take as an illustration, the parallel case of an affectionate father, or a benevolent judge, among ourselves.

Take the case of an earthly parent — suppose him to be endowed with all the tenderest sensibilities of nature. Conceive of him as delighting in the health and welfare of his children, and, in the exercise of every benevolent affection, lavishing on them all the riches of a father's kindness and a father's care. You say, on looking at his kind countenance and his smiling family — this is an affectionate father. But a secret canker of ingratitude seizes one or more of his children — they shun his presence, or dislike his society, and at length venture on acts of positive disobedience. He warns them, he expostulates with them — but in vain, they revolt more and more; and at length, in the exercise of deliberate thought, he lifts the rod and chastens them! And he who once was the author of all their happiness — has become also their calm but firm reprove. And who that knows the tenderness of a father's heart, will not acknowledge — that as severe as may be the suffering inflicted, such a man does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of his love!

Again, conceive of a man of benevolent feelings invested with the office of a benevolent judge — conceive of Howard, the unwearied friend of his race, who visited the prisons of Europe to alleviate the miseries of the worst and most destitute of men — conceive of such a man sitting in judgment over the life or liberty of another; and can you not suppose that, while every feeling within him inclined him to the side of mercy, and his every sensibility would be gratified, were it possible to make the felon virtuous and happy — he might, notwithstanding, have such a deep moral persuasion of the importance of virtue and order to the well-being of the state, that he could consign the prisoner to a dungeon or the gallows, and that, too, with the perfect conviction that it was right and good to do so. While, still, every sentiment of the heart within him, if it could be

disclosed, would bear witness that he afflicted not willingly, and that he had no pleasure in the death of the criminal!

Such a father and such a judge is God; and the sufferings which he inflicts, whether they be viewed as corrective or penal — are compatible with the loftiest benevolence in the divine mind. And unquestionably, the fact, that "God does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men," may, in one light, be regarded as a ground of consolation, inasmuch as it assures us that the Almighty Being, in whose hands our destinies are placed, has no pleasure in the mere infliction of suffering — that, in his holy mind, not one passion exists which can be gratified by it — and that, even "as a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear him."

We confine our present meditation to the mere negative view of affliction, that it is not the result of a capricious or cruel delight in suffering on the part of God. Hereafter we shall see abundant reason to believe that it is, under a system of grace — the result of pure and comprehensive benevolence, and the means of much positive good. In the meanwhile, let us not allow even the darkest aspects of God's providence to shake our faith in the benevolence of his character. And when, through the sharp inflictions of his rod, we are tempted to entertain hard thoughts of Him — let us remember the precious truth, that "God afflicts not willingly, nor grieves the children of men." But while these views are, in some respects, highly consolatory, inasmuch as they assure us of the benevolence of God — yet, to every reflecting mind, another question will suggest itself, to which, without such a revelation as is contained in the Gospel, no satisfactory answer can, in our opinion, be returned. The benevolence of God being admitted, the question arises — How far the afflictions which do prevail, notwithstanding, should affect our hopes of future happiness under His government? To those who rest their hopes of exemption from future punishment on the mere general benevolence of God, this should be a very serious and solemn inquiry; for God is, at this moment, a Being of infinite benevolence — and yet, suffering to a great extent prevails in his empire; and the question may well be entertained, whether, being afflicted now under his administration, we may not, for the same reasons — be equally or still more afflicted hereafter? And this inquiry becomes the more serious, when we connect affliction with the causes to which it is ascribed.

What are these causes? why, they are the sins with which we are chargeable on the one hand — and the holiness and justice of God's character on the other hand. But an effect can only be prevented by the removal of its cause. And is it not a very solemn reflection, that the holiness and justice of God are unchangeable attributes of his nature; and that, if we continue to be chargeable with sin, they must, for anything we know, perpetuate our sufferings? So far from allaying our apprehensions from this cause, the fact that God "afflicts not willingly, nor grieves the children of men," gives a very solemn sanction to the moral principles of his government, when, notwithstanding his benevolence, he does visit his creatures with severe calamity. The benevolence of God being admitted, the whole course of his providence may be regarded as a very solemn exhibition of the holiness and justice of the divine government. And unless, in these circumstances, we can discover some way of escaping from guilt, or can entertain the delusive hope, that God's holy and righteous government is to be radically changed — we cannot fail to have many dark thoughts, and many anxious fears, respecting our future prospects. We see that God is wise, and righteous, and benevolent — and yet notwithstanding, or rather for that very reason — we feel that God is pouring many a bitter ingredient into our cup — that he is visiting us

with trials of a very severe and confounding nature. And can we help inquiring whether it will be so forever? Whether this life is to be the pattern of our immortal existence? Or whether, in the eternity which awaits us, we have reason to expect either the unmingled good, or the unmingled evil which are combined, at present, in the chequered scene of life? We want some assurance, on this point, to remove our doubts, and misgivings, and fears; and, without such assurance, we feel that our eternal prospects are dark and uncertain indeed.

These misgivings are not without a foundation in reason; for manifold as are the proofs which our own experience supplies of the benevolent character of God, and as explicit as is the sanction which Scripture gives to the indications of nature — there are many things, notwithstanding, both in nature and in Scripture, which are fitted to awaken alarm respecting the relation in which we stand to that august Being, and the mode in which he may yet deal with us here and hereafter.

God may be perfectly wise, and just, and good; yet, conceiving of him as the moral Governor and Judge of mankind — we cannot fail to understand that he must put a difference between the righteous and the wicked — that his administration may require the sanction of punishment, and that the very perfection of his character may thus become the strongest reason for the infliction of suffering, where his law has been dishonored, and his authority despised. The infinite power, and rectitude, and wisdom of God, which, to innocent beings, must be a source of the highest and purest delight — may thus become, to fallen creatures — the occasion of alarm, and suspicion, and jealousy; and a secret distrust of their interest in his favor will prey upon their minds, even in the midst of all the riches of his benevolence which nature displays.

Accordingly, may I not appeal to every human being, whether he has not felt in his own bosom many a secret misgiving respecting his personal interest in the favor of his Judge, and many a dark foreboding in respect to his future prospects, and that, too, while he could not shut his eyes to the evidence, nor bring himself to deny the reality of God's wisdom, and rectitude, and love? The reason is, that every man knows and feels that he is guilty; that he has violated the law, and forsaken the service of God; and that God, being a righteous governor, may, notwithstanding his benevolence — be disposed to punish transgressors. Conscience makes this suggestion, and the course of God's providence confirms it; else, why so much suffering, if a benevolent God entertains no hatred against sin? The feelings of our own minds must convince us, that the present course of God's providence is utterly irreconcilable with the idea, either of his wisdom or benevolence, unless, in our own conduct, he finds a holy reason for his method of dealing with us. And no conscience can be so blinded as not to perceive much in the state and conduct of every man, that may warrant a Holy God in inflicting suffering and death. The Bible does unquestionably, in the first instance, confirm the testimony of nature and conscience in respect to the present state of trial. It acknowledges the existence of sorrow and suffering, under the government of a most wise and benevolent God. It declares that, notwithstanding the moral faculties which God has given to us, and the moral indications which the course of providence affords — good and evil are not here dealt out according to the strict measure of desert. And the reason which it assigns for the sufferings that prevail in the world, is the prevalence of sin; while it attributes the regular distribution of good and evil, to the nature of the present state, as one of respite and trial for an eternal state after death. Had its communications stopped at this point, it would have confirmed our worst fears, and deepened our most distressing thoughts; for, when revealing, as it does, the benevolence of God — it declares notwithstanding, that even under his government — sin must be

connected with suffering. And when it points to an eternal state, where the principles of his holy and righteous administration shall have their ultimate outcome, and be more fully unfolded — how could we avoid the apprehension that we are obnoxious to our Almighty Judge, and in danger of an eternal state of retribution from his righteous hand? So far from allaying these apprehensions, in the first instance, or declaring them to be unreasonable in themselves, or inconsistent with our just deserts — it is one leading object of the Bible to confirm their certainty, to impress their truth on the heart, and to assure us that judgments, infinitely more dreadful than those which prevail in the present world, await the transgressors of the Divine law, in a future state of strict judicial retribution. The Bible sanctions all the judgments which conscience has ever pronounced against us; it delineates our characters in the darkest shades of guilt; and it affirms that, notwithstanding the benevolence of God — sin cannot escape punishment, without inferring a violation of those eternal principles on which the government of the universe is conducted, and on the maintenance of which, the glory of God, and the happiness of his obedient creatures depend. Are any who now meditate on this serious subject along with me ready to exclaim: How, then, can the Bible be our comfort in affliction — the Bible, which presents a more humiliating view of our character, and a more distressing view of our state, and a more alarming view of our everlasting prospects, than what is contained in any other book, or what has been suggested from any other quarter, or what, fearful and desponding as we are, we have ever been willing to entertain? Ah! brethren, you see how true it is, that the Bible does not seek to comfort you by denying the evils of your condition, or by withdrawing your attention from them, or by soothing you with partial views of their extent, or by delusive expectations of their removal.

It probes your case to the very bottom! It unfolds all the evil that is within, or around, or before you. And this it does, not only from a regard to truth, which, however dark and distressing, cannot be compromised in any communication from God to his creatures — but also, and especially, with a view to shatter your confidence in every spring of spurious comfort, and every false ground of hope, and to lead you in simplicity to a ground of consolation, which alone can cheer your hearts amidst your present sorrows, and support your spirits in the prospect of what is yet before you; and which, bearing as it does the impress of God's hand, shall endure, when all other confidences are shattered, and all other hopes destroyed!

"Sanctified Affliction"

Lord, unafflicted, undismayed,

In pleasure's path how long I strayed:

But you have made me feel your rod,

And turned my soul to you, my God.

What though it pierced my fainting heart,

I bless your hand that caused the smart;

It taught my tears awhile to flow —

But saved me from eternal woe.

O, had you left me unchastised,
Your precepts I had still despised,
And still the snare in secret laid
Had my unwary feet betrayed.
I love your chastenings, my God,
They fix my hopes on your abode;
Where, in your presence fully blessed,
Your stricken saints forever rest!

08-Uses of Chastisement

Uses of Chastisement James W. Alexander

"Every man," says the excellent Bishop Hall, "has his turn of sorrow, whereby (some more, some less) all men are in their times miserable. I never yet met with the man that complained not of something or other. Before sorrow comes — I will prepare for it. When it is comes — I will welcome it. When it goes — I will take but half a farewell of it, as still expecting its return."

There is then no one who can take up these humble pages without finding in them something applicable to his own case. And, therefore, I am encouraged to proceed with the following address to sufferers, of whatever kind.

It is only in the Word of God that we learn to consider affliction as a blessing. The utmost which the most refined philosophy can effect, is to remove from our sorrows that which is imaginary, to divert the attention from the cause of distress, or to produce a sullen and stoical resignation, more like despair than hope. The religion of the gospel grapples with the evil itself, overcomes it, and transforms it into a blessing. It is by no means included in the promises made to true Christians — that they shall be exempt from suffering. On the contrary, chastisement forms a necessary part of that paternal discipline, by which our heavenly Father fits his children for their eternal rest and glory. The Psalmist asserts the blessedness of the man who is chastened by the Lord, with this qualification as necessary to constitute it a blessing, that he is also instructed in divine truth. Psalms 44:12. By this we understand that the influence of chastisement is not physical; that mere suffering has no inherent efficacy; but that the afflictions of this life are, in the hand of God — instrumental in impressing divine truth upon the heart, awakening the attention of the believer to the consideration of . . .

his own character and situation,

the promises of the gospel,

and the rewards of Heaven. The child of God is assured that all things work together for his good. In this is plainly included the pledge, that chastisements and afflictions shall eventually prove a blessing; and this is verified by the experience of the whole church. The subject can scarcely ever be inappropriate. We are all familiar with suffering, in our own persons — or the persons of those whom we love. We are either now enduring — or shall at some future time endure severe afflictions. Among our readers, it is natural to suppose that some are at this very moment laboring under burdens of grief. Some, it may be, are experiencing the infirmities and pains of a diseased body, others are mourning over the loss of friends and relatives, and others still are living in the dread of trials yet to come. There are few of us therefore to whom the inquiry may not be interesting: How is affliction a blessing?

1. Chastisement is useful, because it tends to convince the believer of his misery, and shows him that without Christ he cannot be happy. And in order to bring this subject more directly before the

mind, let me for a moment consider my readers as suffering under the pangs of some great affliction. You will at once agree with me in the position, that if you had more faith, you would have less trouble of mind; or rather, that if you had sufficient faith, you would be altogether clear from the deep impressions which afflict you. Because we very well know from our own experience, that there are cases in which the most severe bodily pains, or mental distresses, have, so to speak, been neutralized by considerations of a spiritual kind. This is exemplified in the history of the whole Christian Church, and of every individual believer, and most remarkably in the sufferings and death of the Martyrs. There is then a certain point of elevation in divine trust, confidence in God, reliance on the providence, grace, and promise of God; that is, a certain degree of faith, which would entirely free you from these trials of mind. I take it for granted that you heartily concur in this, and that you feel at this very moment of suffering that no gift of God would so effectually bless you, as this gift of faith. Your trials and afflictions, therefore, produce in your soul a deep feeling of need.

You are now sensible that you need more of the presence of Christ — that your piety is not in sufficient exercise to make you happy under your chastisements. In the moments when forebodings and fears become most oppressive, you are most strongly impressed with the truth, that you still lack a great deal; and your desires are quickened for that measure of faith which shall enable you, with filial confidence, to leave all in the hands of God. If these are your feelings, you are now ready to acknowledge, that chastisement has already produced in you one part of its intended effect. You are brought to feel that you are totally dependent on God for your comfort; that nothing but high measures of piety can render you independent of these clouds of trial, and that the attainments which you have made are insufficient to this end. You are brought to desire of God, that grace which shall be sufficient for you, and to say, with the disciples: "Lord, increase our faith!" This is one great end of chastisement — to humble man from his self-sufficiency, and make him feel, in the most profound manner, that in God he lives, and moves, and has his being.

Afflicted brethren, you never felt in your hours of ease (we venture to affirm) so fully dependent upon God's will, as you do at this present time. Perhaps, if entire prosperity had continued, you would never have felt this persuasion; thus a most important point is gained in your spiritual progress. It is so in this respect — it prepares you for receiving the blessing. It is not God's method, in the ordinary economy of His grace, to give favors of a spiritual kind — until the soul feels its need of them. He "will be inquired of for these things," even when he purposes to grant them. It is in answer to earnest longings, pantings, hungering and thirstings of the spirit — that the Lord manifests himself in the most remarkable manner.

You have been brought by chastisement to the very point, where you ought to desire to be brought; and where perhaps nothing but this affliction would have brought you — the total renunciation of your own strength, and the casting of yourself upon the strength of God. Now you begin more deeply to feel your need of Christ. Now you are convinced that something more is necessary than that vague and intermitted trust which you commonly indulge; that Christ must be embraced by your faith, and not visited merely by occasional devotions; in a word, that you must constantly be "looking to Jesus." If these things are so; if you are persuaded that nothing except strong faith can heal your wounded spirit; if you are conscious that you still lack such faith; if you earnestly and constantly desire it; the question becomes exceedingly interesting to you: "Can I attain it?" And if this could be at once answered in the affirmative, to your full satisfaction, it would

go far towards an entire banishment from your soul of these poignant distresses.

Now in proportion as your soul is engaged in seeking this inestimable blessing — in just that proportion will your acts of faith be increased. As Christ becomes more and more present to your mind, you will, with more and more confidence, lean upon him with son-like assurance. And, therefore, without endeavoring to resolve the question, when, how, or in what precise manner, God will give you the grace which you need, it is sufficient for our present purpose to know, that one great end of your affliction is answered, when you are led to commence and persevere in a faithful and earnest application to Christ, as the great Physician.

Ah! how little do Christians ponder on the truth, that by their lives of carelessness — they are rendering afflictions necessary! While they are at ease in Zion, forsaking their first love, and declining from the path of strict piety — the cloud of affliction is gathering darker and darker over their heads; that cloud of judgment and of mercy which is to drive them up from their unlawful resting-places, and alarm them into a renewal of their pilgrimage.

Afflicted brethren! you thought not, while you were at ease, that these trials were in reserve for you, though often forewarned by the preachers of the gospel, and the experience of your brethren. The trial has now come; you have now to retrace your steps; you now feel that none but Christ can bring you back to happiness; and you are humbly asking for the blessings of his hand. Thus it is, that chastisement convinces the believer of his misery, and shows him that afar from the Savior — he can never be at peace.

2. Chastisement is useful, as it leads the believer to see and feel his exceeding sinfulness. It is one of the strongest proofs that our sanctification is imperfect, and our self-love inordinate — that we are wrought upon so much more readily by God's stripes than by His favors. Though the Lord's goodness ought to lead us to repentance — yet we generally observe that the heart grows hard under the smiles of Providence, and thus loudly calls for the necessary strokes of God's correcting hand. It is a favorable indication of reigning grace, when any soul, in the sunshine of great worldly prosperity, is considerate, humble, and constant in walking with God. In too many cases, it is far otherwise. And when sudden affliction breaks in a storm upon the head of one who has been relapsing into carnal security, the surprise and consternation are great and almost insupportable. After the first tumult of the soul, it is natural to look around for some solace or support; and in the case of a true Christian, the resort will at once be to the consolations of piety. Like the little child which strays from its watchful and tender parent during the hours of play, but hastens back at the approach of alarm — so the believer, overtaken by calamity, awakes from his dream, and endeavors to retrace his steps to the neglected mercy-seat. But ah! in how many cases does he here learn his lamentable distance from God; and how mournfully is he made to cry, "O that I knew where I might find him!" He who is habitually walking with God does not suffer this, for the whole armor of God protects him from the most unexpected assaults: "He is not afraid of evil tidings, his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord;" but the slumbering and lukewarm professor sinks disheartened. In vain does he apply himself to earthly solaces for alleviation of his grief. With shame and pain of conscience, does he endeavor to ask deliverance of his offended Father. Every petition that he utters, is accompanied with a sense of weakness. The blessedness which once he spoke of, is gone; the habit of devout waiting upon God, is suspended; the way to the throne of grace, is obstructed. How confidently would he offer his petitions, if he were persuaded of his own

acceptance; how gladly would he plead the promises, if he felt his title to them secured in Christ! But alas! it is not with him as in days that are past, when the candle of the Lord shone on him. Now his repentings are kindled — now he knows how evil and bitter a thing it is to forsake the Lord, and to depart from his fear; and when he considers how long God has borne with him, how many favors he has received, and how brutish has been his ingratitude — his heart is broken, his tears flow, he seeks the lowest place in the dust of abasement, wonders that affliction has not long since overtaken him for his carelessness and neglect, and bows before the Lord without a murmur. At such a time, the language of the afflicted soul will be: "Why does a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins? Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord — let us lift up our heart with our hands unto God in the heavens. We have transgressed and have rebelled — you have covered yourself with a cloud that our prayer should not pass through. My eye trickles down and ceases not, until the Lord looks down and behold from Heaven." When chastisement has its proper operation, the believer will seek not to be comforted merely — but to be taught of God. "Blessed is the man whom you chasten, O Lord — and teach him out of your law." He seeks to know why God contends with him, and lies very low in contrition, when the still small voice of the Lord says to him, "The Lord has a controversy with his people, and he will plead with Israel: my people, what have I done unto you, and wherein have I wearied you — testify against me!" And this exercise leads to godly sorrow which is not to be repented of.

It is under deep affliction, that we feel most deeply the connection between sin and misery — and acknowledge that the connection is just and holy. Smarting under the rod, we know that the Lord has not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities; and that it is of his mercies that we are not consumed.

Times of affliction afford some natural facilities for cultivating repentance. Occasions of sin are then removed; the world is excluded. The man confined to the silence of the sick-room, or the house of mourning, cannot, by idle pursuits, divert his mind. He is forced to think; and to think of his sins. He considers his ways, bewails his transgression, and renews his covenant. He learns to confess, "Surely it is fit to be said unto God: I have borne chastisement, I will not offend any more. That which I see not — teach me; and if I have done iniquity, I will do so no more." Job 34:31.

Now, in these experiences of the afflicted, there is a real consolation. Such tears are sweet, and it will probably be the unanimous testimony of all true penitents, that they have enjoyed a tender and refined delight in those moments of grief, in which they came to God as a forgiving God, and heard him say to their souls, in accents at once of gentle rebuke and comfort: "Behold, I have refined you — but not with silver; I have chosen you in the furnace of affliction." "For my own sake, I will defer mine anger." "For a small moment have I forsaken you — but with great mercies will I gather you. In a little wrath I hid my face from you for a moment — but with everlasting kindness I will have mercy on you, says the Lord your Redeemer."

3. Chastisement is useful as a trial of faith. To use another expression of Bishop Hall, "untried faith is uncertain faith." There often is in professors of religion, enough of the semblance of piety to lull their consciences while they are prosperous — but not enough of the reality to support them in the time of trial. Adversity makes the exercise of faith needful, and puts the strength of that faith to the test. It is compared to the fire, the furnace, the refining-pot or crucible, because it not only purifies — but tries; it not only consumes the dross — but ascertains the gold!

There is no true believer who does not desire this trial. The very supposition of being found lacking at the day of judgment, fills him with horror. His daily supplication is: "Search me, God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

Christian reader, give a moment's thought to this question, "Is your faith sufficient to support you in the hour of death, if that hour (as is very possible) should soon and suddenly arrive?" Are you not ready to sink under ordinary afflictions? How then will you bear this greatest of trials? To adopt the language of Jeremiah (12:5), "If you have run with the footmen, and they have wearied you — then how can you contend with horses? And if, in the land of peace, wherein you trust est, they wearied you — then how will you do in the swellings of Jordan?" This trial of your faith is plainly important, and it is the office of chastisement to constrain you to such a trial. If your standing in the covenant is so firm, through humble trust in God, that you can say, "But he knows the way that I take, when he has tried me I shall come forth as gold!" — you are happy indeed. But this conviction is not likely to be strong in those who have not passed through the furnace. The apostle Peter, in comforting the dispersed saints, explains to them this end of their chastisement, "In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith — of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire — may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed."

We have already seen, in the course of our meditations, some of the ways in which faith is tried by affliction. If any are afflicted — he will pray. But there can be no comfort in prayer, where there is not a belief that prayer is heard, and will be answered. The supplication of one who pours out strong crying and tears, in a great fight of afflictions, is a very different thing from the formal addresses of one at ease. The sufferer cannot be consoled, until he finds that God is his friend; he cannot find this without faith: and in this manner, most directly, chastisement convinces the soul, that it is still unprovided with the shield of faith, or awakens the exercise of this grace, with great and unspeakable satisfaction. And thus the tribulations which have followed one another through life, give us stronger and stronger reliance on God, for the approaching hour of death.

4. Chastisement is useful, as it strengthens faith, by leading the believer to the promises, and especially to the Lord Jesus Christ. There is no expression in the Word of God better suited to reconcile the Christian to trials, than that of the Apostle Paul: "God chastens us for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness" — partakers of His holiness! What words are these! This is the very summit of your desires. This you have been toiling for, and longing after. This you have earnestly implored — and are you now ready to shrink from the very means by which your Father in Heaven is about to promote your sanctification? By no means will you be led to relinquish this appointment of God for your good. Now it is by these very trials, that your graces are to be invigorated.

We have seen that such trials disclose the reality and degree of our faith. We may go further, and observe, that faith is greatly increased and strengthened by the same process. Faith is strengthened by exercise. As any natural faculty becomes dull, and often useless, by lack of exercise, or the removal of its proper objects — so faith languishes and seems ready to perish, when those truths which are to be believed are long kept out of the mind. The most valuable truths

of the Christian are, "the exceeding great and precious promises." He does not feel his need of these promises while he is indulging in that self-pleasing which usually accompanies prosperity. In penning these lines, it is said advisedly, no man can fully value health who has not been sick — nor appreciate the services of the kind and skillful physician, until he has been healed by him. And thus also, no man can fully prize, or fully understand the promises of the Scriptures — until they are made necessary to his support in adversity. Many of the most precious portions of revelation are altogether a dead letter to such as have never been exercised by the trials to which they relate. The believer who is in sufferings or straits of any kind, comes to God by prayer; and in attempting to pray, he seeks some promise suitable to his precise needs. Blessed be God! he needs not to search long — so rich are the treasures of the Word. These promises he takes as the very truth of God. He pleads them at the throne of grace; he believes them, relies on them, rejoices in them. This is faith; these exercises are vital exercises of the renewed soul. So long as the Christian is oppressed with affliction, these exercises must be continual; and in proportion as the trial is great, must the faith be great also — so that he often finds every earthly support cut away, and is taught with implicit trust, to hang on the simple word of Divine faithfulness. This is emphatically the life of piety; and it is encouraged, developed, and maintained in time of trial.

Affliction is sanctified when we are made to feel that nothing can satisfy us but God, and when we actually wait upon God, and rely on him as our only hope. It is then that the believer finds the promises confirmed to him; "Whom the Lord loves — he chastens, and scourges every son whom he receives." "No chastening for the present is joyous — but grievous," etc. Then he rolls his burden on the Lord, commits his way to Him, leans upon Him, trusts in Him with all his heart — so that with a meaning altogether new, he can sing with the church: "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth gives way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging!" Psalms 46:1-3

Some professors entertain the mistaken opinion that the only relief which is afforded to the Christian in suffering, must arise from some hope of speedy deliverance or escape. This is so far from being true, that perhaps the greatest solace under afflictions is derived from direct acts of faith upon the Lord Jesus Christ, and communion with Him; in which the soul is so much absorbed that the present suffering is forgotten, and the mind wholly occupied in its exercises of piety. And herein the chastisement is profitable. In pain, and despondency, and grief — we go to Jesus as to a friend who sticks closer than a brother. We pour our sorrows into his friendly ear, and ask his aid. And then, when he reveals to us his love, and speaks his promises, and unveils his face, even though he gives no assurance that we shall be set free, he does more — he gives us Himself, and faith is refreshed and nourished by receiving him. And shall we not regard as a mercy — that sickness, or that bereavement, or that alarm, which so embitters the world's cup, as to lead us to Christ, that we may see his beauty, and be filled with his love?

Prosperity leaves us to wander, and offers temptations to wandering. Afflictions alarm us, and drive us back to the right path. Prosperity casts a glittering but delusive veil over divine realities, and encourages unbelief. Afflictions rend and destroy this covering, and show us the truths of the eternal world. Prosperity seldom leads to increase of faith. Affliction, by God's blessing, is, in many cases, made the instrument of sanctification to such as are truly pious.

Dear brethren, that God who "does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men," offers you in your trials these "peaceable fruits of righteousness." Taste of the sweetness of his promises, and each of you shall say with David: "It is good for me that I have been afflicted!"

5. Chastisement is useful, because it leads the believer to exercise entire submission to the Divine will. It is an undeniable truth, and one of which the child of God is very deeply convinced, that "the Lord reigns;" that it is infinitely right and fit that he should reign; and that the first duty of every intelligent being, is to submit promptly, cheerfully, and unreservedly to every ordinance and dispensation of God.

It is not very difficult to keep the soul in correspondence with this truth, so long as our self-love is not interfered with, nor our present happiness invaded; but when the sovereignty of God is manifested in despoiling us of our most precious possessions and delights — then our souls are often ready to falter, and our weakness betrays itself, when with hesitating lips we endeavor to say, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" It is common to hear those who are ignorant of the Scriptures caviling at the representation of Job as a man of eminent patience; but where, except in his biography, shall we look for the instance of a man, suffering in one day the total loss of immense wealth, and of ten beloved children, and still saying, "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away — blessed be the name of the Lord!"

Without exercise, Christian graces do not grow, and severe afflictions are probably intended to cultivate this important grace of entire submission. Nothing is more common than for people under chastisement to indulge in such thoughts as these — "I could endure almost any affliction better than this; it is that which I have most dreaded, for which I was least prepared, and now it has overtaken me! It is so strange, new, and unexampled — that I am disheartened, and my soul sinks within me!" These are the symptoms of a rebellious and unsubdued will; the murmurings of a proud and stubborn heart, which must be humbled in the dust. This is just the trial by which, perhaps, God graciously intends to bring down the vain imaginations and high thoughts of your soul into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And patience will not have had its perfect work in any case, until the afflicted soul is prepared to make no reservation, to claim no direction — but to give up all into the hands of the most wise, most righteous, and most merciful Creator.

If the suffering were less, it would not have this humbling efficacy, and he mistakes the nature of the covenant, who supposes that such peculiar trials are excluded. It was, no doubt, a painful visitation as sudden and alarming as a stroke of lightning — when Aaron beheld his sons consumed by fire from the Lord. It was a solemn sanction to that rule, "I will be sanctified by those drawing near to Me; and I will be honored before all the people." Yet, on seeing and hearing these things, "Aaron was speechless." Leviticus 10:3. It is a bitter medicine — but the soul which is convinced of God's justice and goodness, lays down every thought of rebellion and discontent.

When, in the time of the Judges, the children of Israel gave themselves up in a shameless manner to the worship of idols, they fell under the wrath of God, and were oppressed by the Ammonites and Philistines for eighteen years. Still, when they came to themselves, and cried to the Lord, they joined to their repentance lowly submission, and said, "We have sinned — do unto us whatever seems good unto you." Judges 10:1-18. This is the temper which sanctified affliction always begets, so that the prostrate soul dares no longer to impose its own terms on Jehovah — but yields itself to his sovereign discretion. There is peace in such a surrender, a peace which is

altogether independent of any expected mitigation of the stroke.

Wave after wave often goes over the child of God, before he is brought to this state of self-renunciation. Murmuring may for a time prevail, yet the Great Physician, who applies the painful remedy, cannot be baffled, and triumphs to his own glory and the unspeakable benefit of the believer's soul. The Scriptures afford us striking examples of this yielding up of everything into the hands of God; particularly in the case of David, whose history and experience are given in detail. One of the sharpest inflictions which fell upon this pious man, was the rebellion of his monstrous son, Absalom; and one of the most affecting scenes in the course of this transaction, is the flight of the aged king with the ark — "All the country wept with a loud voice, and all the people passed over." Now, what was the language of David under these circumstances? "Then the king instructed Zadok: Return the ark of God to the city. If I find favor in the LORD's eyes, He will bring me back and allow me to see both it and its dwelling place. However, if He should say, 'I do not delight in you,' then here I am — He can do with me whatever pleases Him!" 2 Samuel 15:25-26

Now, we have here exemplified the very frame of soul which each of us should endeavor to maintain under chastisement. For we are not to speak thus, "I can bear this because it cannot be avoided, or, because I hope it is the last of my sufferings." No, my brethren, we are not thus to limit the Holy One of Israel; but let each of us with filial homage say, "Lord, I am in your hands, in the best hands! I deserve your stripes, I yield myself to your dispensations. May your will be done!" Happy is he who, like David, can look back upon chastisements and say, "I was silent, I opened not my mouth, because You are the one who has done this!"

"Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time;" yet, if his rod should long abide upon you, if you are ready, like Job, to cry, from repeated and continued strokes, "He has set me up for his mark. He breaks me with breach upon breach. He has fenced up my way so that I cannot pass, and he has set darkness in my paths!" Yet even then, "remember the patience of Job, and the end of the Lord," and say, "Though he slays me — yet will I trust in him!"

Some may be disposed to think, in the time when all God's waves and billows go over them, that they could acquiesce and be comforted, if they perceived any way of escape, if they could reasonably expect deliverance — and this is the whole of what is sometimes called Christian resignation. Yet the comfort in this case is merely worldly. The grace of God can do more than this; it can make you willing still to endure, and in enduring still to praise.

Say not, "I could be content if I were sure of deliverance." God has not promised absolutely to remove the chastisement. Perhaps it is his holy will not to deliver. Perhaps it is this very thing in your afflictions which is to insure you the blessing from the Lord. The apostle Paul earnestly desired, and thrice besought the Lord to deliver him from that trial which he calls the thorn in his flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet him. Yet, as far as we are informed, it was continued to the end of his life. But mark the glorious amends, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness." Upon this declaration, which we shall presently consider more in detail, he goes forward under his burden, singing as he pursues his pilgrimage, "Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me; therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake — for when I am weak, then am I strong." The sweet support under every possible calamity

is, that God can turn it into a blessing, and that if we have faith, he will do so. With respect, therefore, to the use of afflictions, "all things are possible to him that believes."

6. Chastisement is useful, because it leads the believer to look for complete happiness in Heaven only. And at this stage of our reflections, let us rejoice, dear brethren, that the consolation offered is liable to no exception or abatement; it is adapted to every case; perfect and entire. If the comfort which you need depended upon the hope of deliverance in this world, there would be many cases which we would be forced to leave as hopeless — for there are many in which no expectation of exemption in this life can be indulged. But let the worst, most lingering, and most aggravated instance of suffering be presented — and the hope of Heaven is still sufficient to mitigate its ills.

You may have been reduced to hopeless poverty; you may have suffered from the treachery and ingratitude of supposed friends, from cruel mockings and continual calumny; you may labor under incurable disease, or follow to the grave beloved objects of your affections, who can never be replaced in this world. Still, there is a country, and you are rapidly approaching it, "where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest." It is well if you have learned to look beyond all secondary, earthly, imperfect comforts — to God, the source of good, and to that world where all tears are wiped away. It is well if the trial of your faith has enabled you to say, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day." This is a benefit of affliction, which is striking and great in proportion to the failure of earthly consolation. For it may be doubted, whether any man fully yields himself up to the view and foretaste of Heaven — until he is disentangled and torn away from all hope of blessedness on this side the grave. It is natural to seek resting-places by the way; and trials, losses, sufferings, bereavements, are thrice blessed when they engrave upon our hearts, that we have here on earth no continuing city — but must seek one above. So long as we can flatter ourselves with any refuge in this world, we are prone to lean on an arm of flesh, and to look upwards only for the supply of what is deficient here. But let all expectation of worldly peace and satisfaction be cut off, and the released soul which is truly sanctified and full of faith, rises like a bird from the snare, and rejoices to say, "My soul, wait only upon God — for my expectation is from him. Then I shall be satisfied when I awake in your likeness!" Do not think, however, to enjoy this fruit of chastisement, while you cast longing and lingering looks on that country whence you came out. Nothing but the hope of a glorious resurrection, upheld the apostle Paul, when troubled on every side, perplexed, persecuted, cast down, and (as to the outward man) perishing. Hear the method of his escape out of sorrow — "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

He is the happy man who dwells most on the thoughts of Heaven. Like Enoch, he walks with God. Like Job he can say, "I know that my Redeemer lives!" Like David he glories, "You will show me your salvation." Like Paul he triumphs, "For I am now ready to be offered," etc. This happiness we sometimes witness; but where have we found it? In the house of prosperity, where death has never invaded the family circle; where all have more than heart could wish; where health, and opulence, and honor unite to expel all care? No! but in the hovel of the poor, where one affliction has followed another, until earthly hope is almost extinct. In the darkened chamber of mourning, whence all that was most loved and cherished, has taken its last flight. In the bed of lingering, incurable disease, and in the very gasp of death! Here true religion has set up her trophies; here is happiness, here, where things hoped for are substantiated to the believing soul, where unseen

things are evidenced to faith, by divine influence. In every case of suffering, it is the prime wisdom of the Christian to fix his eyes upon the heavenly crown. In every other hope you may be disappointed, in this you cannot. Try, as you may, all other fountains for your solace, there is a time coming when you must be driven to this. Become familiar with the meditation of heavenly glory! Daily contemplate that joyful deliverance from evil, that indissoluble and ecstatic union with the Lord Jesus Christ! Then, when death lays upon you his cold hand, you can say, "I am prepared for this hour. I have longed for this deliverance to meet my Lord in his temple. I have lived in communion with the blessed Lord of Heaven!" "Lo, this is my God, I have waited for him, and he will save me! This is the Lord, I have waited for him — I will rejoice and be glad in his salvation!"

"Christ the Purifier!"

"He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver." Malachi 3:3

He who from dross would win the precious ore,
Bends o'er the crucible an earnest eye,
The subtle searching process to explore,
Lest the one brilliant moment should pass by.
When in the molten silver's virgin mass
He meets his pictured face as in a glass.
Thus in God's furnace are his people tried;
Thrice happy they who to the end endure;
But who the fiery trial may abide?
Who from the crucible come forth so pure?
That He whose eyes of flame look through the whole,
May see his image perfect in the soul? Nor with an evanescent glimpse alone,
As in that mirror the refiner's face;
But, stamped with heaven's broad signet, there be shown
Immanuel's features full of truth and grace.
And round that seal of love this motto be,
"Not for a moment — but — eternity!"

09-The Stones of the Heavenly Temple Prepared on Earth

The Stones of the Heavenly

Temple Prepared on Earth William Bacon Stevens

"In building the temple, only blocks dressed at the quarry were used, and no hammer, chisel or any other iron tool was heard at the temple site while it was being built. 1 Kings 6:7 The Temple of Solomon was the noblest structure ever built by human hands. In the Architect who devised it, in the materials employed, in the labor bestowed, in the costliness of the work, and in the grandeur of its whole design — it surpassed the proudest edifices of the world. From its first erection in the wilderness until the time of Solomon, over four centuries, the "Tabernacle," containing the ark of the covenant and its sacred treasures, was but a movable tent pitched where peace or convenience would permit. When David selected Jerusalem to be his royal city, and "the Lord had given him rest round about from all his enemies," he said to the prophet Nathan, "Lo, I dwell in an house of cedars — but the ark of the covenant of the Lord remains under curtains," thus expressing his uneasiness that he should be more sumptuously lodged than the ark of God, and intimating his desire to build a house of the Lord. This very proper desire, the Lord would not allow him to execute, because he had been a warrior, and his hand had been stained with human blood; but He announced to him through the prophet, that his son should build a house for Him, and thus accomplish what he had so piously designed. Though divinely hindered from building the house, he yet busied himself in collecting materials for it of the most ample and costly character, and four years after his decease, Solomon, who reigned in his stead, began the work of erecting the Temple which his father David had planned in all its parts, by the Spirit of God. Seven years were consumed by an immense army of laborers in this gigantic work, before the Temple crooned the summit of Mount Moriah, and was dedicated to the worship of the one living and true God.

There it stood for many years, the pride of Israel and the glory of the world. Grand in the massiveness of its structure — magnificent in the arrangement of its courts and porches, and gates, and holy, most holy places — splendid in the glittering radiance which its walls of dazzling whiteness flashed upon the beholder as the morning or evening sun was reflected from it, "glistening stones," glorious as a Temple erected for the worship of Almighty God — but pre-eminently honored as the place where the Most High condescended to dwell between the Cherubim in the Holy of Holies by a visible emblem, and where he communed with his anointed servant from off the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant. In every aspect, human and divine, it was the most remarkable building ever erected on earth — remarkable in its human aspects — in its foundations — its materials — its structure — its costliness — its splendor; and in its divine splendor — as the only house of wood and stone in which Jehovah resided by the symbol of His presence. Leaving, however, the many interesting points suggested by this stupendous work, let us bend our thoughts upon the remarkable fact spoken of by the sacred historian in the 1st Book of Kings: "In building the temple, only blocks dressed at the quarry were used, and no hammer, chisel or any other iron tool was heard at the temple site while it was being built." 1 Kings 6:7

It is difficult to understand how a work so vast and so complicated could be erected in such a silent manner. And this fact will appear the more remarkable if we consider the nature and dimensions of materials used. The heavy work was all of stone or marble, and some of the great and costly stones spoken of in the Book of Kings were blocks eighty feet long, ten high, and twelve wide, and many of its pillars were socketed in solid masonry. Its massive rafters were tenoned and mortised into corresponding beams; yet these ponderous masses were hewn, squared, carved and fitted to their places before they were brought to Mount Moriah, with such accuracy and skill, that Josephus says that "the smallest interstices were not perceptible between the stones," and yet no hammer, axe, or any tool of iron was needed to adjust them to their several places, and frame them together in grand yet harmonious proportions. How all this could be accomplished in so unusual a manner, can only be accounted for by supposing that God presided over his own Temple, and gave the builders this unusual art and skill. This gorgeous Temple was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar nearly twenty-five hundred years ago. Another and another temple has risen on the same spot and met the same fate; the Lord of the Temple himself has come into his earthly court, not by the emblematic Shekinah — but in bodily form, and has gone back to his original glory; the nation which worshiped in those sanctuaries has been scattered to the four winds of Heaven; yet the deep instruction furnished by this passage remains — let us, through God's assistance, attempt to search out and apply the lesson. In the New Testament the Church is termed "God's building" — "the temple of God" — "the temple of the Holy Spirit" — "the temple of the living God" — "a holy temple of the Lord" — "a habitation of God in the Spirit" — "the house of Christ." These terms denote that as God by the bright symbol of his glory manifested his presence in the movable tabernacle erected by Moses, and the stately temple built by Solomon — so does he by his spirit dwell in the hearts of Christians as individuals and in the church collectively. In looking then at this Christian temple, let us observe:

first, the stones of which it is composed;

secondly, the preparation of them;

and thirdly, their destination.

1. Peter says of Christians, that as living stones they are built up into a spiritual house. A stone is a shapeless mass of rock. It is inert — lifeless — it could never free itself from its native quarry — could never fashion itself into classic shape and beauty, and could never set itself up as a lintel or column in any edifice of man. And such by nature is the spiritual state of all men — having no power to move — hear — see — feel — believe, because of the moral inertia which makes them as passive, hard, insensible as the stones of the earth. Hence, when God would express the hardened condition of a person or people, he speaks of such as having "hearts of stone." But believers having been hewn out from the quarry of humanity by the electing grace of God, are termed living stones; not inert masses of rock, not senseless blocks of marble — but full of life, feeling, action; and they are thus designated because Christ, as the tried corner stone, the sure foundation, is called a living stone, and diffuses his own life through all parts of the spiritual temple which rests on him. So that every stone in it, from the foundation of the apostles and prophets to the topmost coping — is made a precious, a glistening, a living stone, through the preciousness and glory and life of Jesus, the prince of life. So long then as the soul of the believer rests on Jesus Christ alone for salvation, and on nothing else, it has spiritual life — build it upon any other

foundation, and it is a senseless stone still — only as laid by the Holy Spirit upon the foundation of the prophets and apostles, Jesus Christ being the chief corner stone, can it receive in itself the life of Christ, and become through the impartation of his own vitality, a living stone.

2. The way in which these living stones are prepared for the temple, furnishes a subject of interesting and profitable thought. The wood and stone used in Solomon's Temple were carefully prepared at a distance from the place where the edifice was to be built. The sacred house was planned out in minutest detail by David, under the direction of the Spirit of God. Each stone, column, lintel, beam, rafter, had its special and appointed place — but as yet the wood was waving its branches in the forests of Lebanon, and the stone was unquarried in the mountains of Judea.

Under the direction of appointed overseers, the Hebrew workman went up to the sides of Lebanon and cut down the designated tree, and there, before carrying it to Jerusalem, he trimmed and fashioned it by much hewing and carving for its destined place. The Phoenician stonecutter went to the mountain and split out masses of rock from the quarry, and there, by many ponderous blows, he dressed it and shaped it for its appointed position. Many an axe and sharp-edged tool passed over that tree before it became a stately pillar — and many a hammer and instrument of iron was used on that once unsightly block before as a polished stone it was fitted for the Temple's wall.

Most beautifully does all this illustrate the way of God in building up His spiritual and living temple. In the mind of Him who sees the end from the beginning, and who has devised all things in the counsel of his own will, this temple is already planned in its minutest part — He knows each living stone that shall compose its walls — He has designated them for their several places before the foundation of the world, though as yet many of them are still swaying their green branches in the forests of worldliness, or lie buried in the stony ledges of hardened impenitence. But the Great Architect knows what tree and what rock he wants, and he lays the axe of converting grace at the root of this tree, and speaking by his Spirit to the insensate stone, his word becomes, in his own expressive language, as a fire, and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces. But when the tree is thus felled, when the stone is thus quarried out — is it immediately fitted for its destined place in Heaven? In most cases we answer, no. Though at conversion the child of God is a marked man, though he is justified freely by the grace that is in Christ Jesus — yet how much spiritual trimming and dressing, how much hewing and squaring does he need to fashion him aright for the position which the Divine Architect intends he shall occupy hereafter! There are sharp angles of character to be rounded off — unsightly protuberances of conduct to be chipped away — many roughnesses of temper to be smoothed down — many flaws and cracks of mind and heart to be chiseled out! And then, when the general form of the stone is prepared, how much severe friction is required to give it the right polish, and bring out all its beauties — so that its smooth surface may fling back the rays of the Sun of Righteousness! Our earth is the place where this is to be done; for, as there was no noise of any axe or hammer, or tool of iron heard on Mount Moriah while the Temple was building — so in the New Jerusalem above, there will be heard no crushing strokes of conviction, no sharp hewings of an awakened conscience, no sound of preparatory discipline. Heaven is not the place to prepare men for glory — but to receive them when prepared! Earth, then, is the preparing place for Heaven, and the preparation is effected by the axe, the hammer, and the tools of iron of God's wise dispensations. All of God's dealings with us have respect to our future existence; and these are so wisely adapted to the peculiarities of

each case, that no two persons pass through the same course, and no two result in the same development. We are not arbitrarily classed together like plants under certain species, and then each group made to experience the same indiscriminate treatment. Far from it! Each individual in the whole training of his moral nature is as much under the eye and care of God — as if there was no other being in the universe! And there is not a peculiarity of mind or heart or body — not a changing phase of life from the cradle to the coffin — that is not expressly met by infinite wisdom in the arrangement of his Providence and Grace. Nor does he set in motion a course of preparation suited to your case, and then, leaving it like a piece of machinery to do its allotted work — go off to some other part of his wide domain to superintend some other of his vast designs. No! For as the refiner of silver never removes his eye from the molten mass in the crucible of his furnace, until he sees his own image reflected in the purged and shining metal — so God never leaves the individual soul which he has placed in the furnace fires of this world — until he either sees his own image reflected in the purified spirit, or proves it to be but sinful dross. The greater part of the preparation to which we are subjected as professing Christians, is of a disciplinary character, and hence is fitly represented by the axe, the hammer, and the tool of iron. Prosperity not only is the destruction of fools — but in the great majority of cases, prosperity hardens the heart of the nominal Christian, so that Christ himself was forced to say how hard shall those who have riches enter into the kingdom of Heaven," and for many hundreds of years, God by the voice of Jeremiah has complained, "I spoke unto you in your prosperity — but you said: I will not hear. This has been your manner from your youth, that you obeyed not my voice."

Afflictions come more immediately to the heart, and operate with a more searching and purifying influence upon the life. These show one his weakness and sinfulness — lay open the moral anatomy of his nature — subject his principles to severest test, and cause him to retire into the chambers of his soul and learn there in the light of the Bible and in the light of conscience — his relations and duties to God and man.

Now the axe seems driven into the root of his happiness — now he is broken as a block of granite under the blows of the hammer of God's Word, and now the iron of a sore adversity has entered into his soul — and he feels himself stricken, smitten, and afflicted. In these dispensations, however severe — he is being fitted by the hand of God himself for a place in glory. God knows for what position in that heavenly temple he has designed us, and he knows when we are prepared for that position; nor will he permit us to receive a single blow or cut more than is necessary to accomplish his divine purpose concerning us.

Let the Christian, then, who is passing through fiery and discouraging trials and afflictions, remember that God is thus hewing and squaring him here, that as a well-prepared and living stone, he may by and by be built up into the living temple not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. The preparing process may be severe; the strokes frequent and heavy; the hewing into shape — painful to the flesh; the polishing into beauty — rasping to the spirit; yet every blow aids to bring it into form; and every tool of iron, though it cuts deep — leaves behind some chiseled beauty; and every grating file of sorrow that rasps the sensitive fibers of the heart — only gives it a higher polish, and makes it reflect a brighter glory. And who will complain of such severe dealings — when such blissful ends are attained by it? Who will murmur at the roughness of a road — which leads to such eternal joys? Who will repine at any chastenings, and not rather esteem them as light afflictions which are but for a moment, when his Heavenly Father assures him that they

shall work out for him a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory? And Oh, let the afflicted saint remember also that as those portions of the earthly Temple which were to be most conspicuous and beautiful, had more cutting and carving and polishing than others — so those whom God designs for eminence in glory, for pillars in his temple — are subjected to heavier blows, deeper chiselings, severer raspings in the process of bringing out in them higher beauties and a more excelling glory.

3. And this leads us to consider, lastly, the end for which these living stones, thus prepared on earth, are designed. We have seen that the stones quarried out and elaborately hewn by the Sidonians, were taken after due preparation to Jerusalem and set up in the Temple. As the house erected for God by Solomon was the most magnificent of all earthly structures, and was designed to show forth the praise of God, and be his earthly abode — so when he would speak of the glory of Heaven, where he dwells in full and visible presence, where he is worshiped in pure and perfect devotion, where he receives his people into close and holy communion, and where he manifests the unveiled perfections of the Godhead — he speaks of it under the figure of a temple — a house — a building. Of a temple, because he is worshiped there. Of a house, because he entertains his children there in its many mansions or apartments. Of a building, because it has been slowly augmented since the foundation of the world. The real end, then, for which God has chosen us in Christ Jesus before the world began, and fitted us on earth by his providential dispensations, is, "that in the dispensation of the fullness of time he might gather together in one, all things in Christ, both which are in Heaven and which are on earth, even in Him." And this recapitulation of all things in Christ is to be effected by building all things on Christ as the sure foundation which God himself has laid in Zion. And Christians, as living stones, chosen by God and precious, "In whom all the building fitly framed together, grows unto a holy temple in the Lord. In whom you also are built together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." This structure the same apostle designates in another place as "a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." And now if we will with the eye of John gaze into the opening Heaven, we shall with him behold no temple there. Why? because, says this beloved disciple, "the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple thereof!" Ah yes! Christ, in whom all things are gathered together — on whom as a cornerstone, all living stones are built — in whom dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily — is the temple of Heaven! And because we are Christ's, we also, by being, in the words of Paul, "partakers of the divine nature," become a holy temple of the Lord, having for its walls salvation, and for its gates praise. This spiritual temple God is now building up, and it progresses just as fast as the living stones are prepared to take their places above. The first living stone ever built upon this precious cornerstone was righteous Abel, and since then Enoch, and Noah, and Abraham, and Moses, and David, and Daniel, and multitudes of others having been hewn and squared here — have been fitted into their places in this living temple. But since Christ came, how gloriously has it increased! Apostles, and martyrs, and confessors, and saints; the aged, the middle aged, the young; the rich, the learned, the poor and the ignorant; kings, and captains, and statesman, and scholars — have been added layer upon layer! Sometimes, when persecution has raged — a thousand stones a day; and sometimes long years have passed, and scarcely a living stone has been transferred to Heaven. And this building process is going on every day, in our midst, under our own eyes. The loving child, the youth of promise, the doating mother, the cherished wife, the fond husband, the venerated parent, the beloved sister, the manly brother — all have been taken from our midst! And while household after household have put on mourning clothes, and uttered

piercing cries of anguish as the beloved but stricken one has been taken away — angels have shouted for joy that another living stone has been set up in the heavens, to abide forever in glory! And who of those who hope that we are living stones, who are now passing through the trials and afflictions of our needed preparation; who of us will next be taken — in what family will God select the next living stone that shall be borne from this earthly to that heavenly temple? Or if God keeps you longer on earth, and causes you to suffer trials and afflictions of mind and body, and home and friends, and business and fortune — can you, will you repine when you know why he keeps you here, and what these tribulations are designed to accomplish in you?

Keep before your souls, God's ultimate purpose — and it will make you always to rejoice in God's present dealings. Look frequently at the glorious end — and you will murmur less at the sorrows of the way. And remember that the moment that you are fitted in the eye of the Great Architect to take your place as a living stone above — he will place you there, whether with the preliminary call of sickness or the sudden summons, "Come up hither!" And when up there all the preparation and disciplines of earth are over, and as the saints look back to the quarry whence they were hewn, and compare their rough and unshapen appearance then, with their present grace and beauty — will they not bless God who did not leave them in the stony ledge of impenitence, or lying as unseemly blocks at the quarry's mouth; but who caused to pass over them the axe and the hammer, and the tool of iron of his afflictive dispensation — and thus made them living stones fitted to abide in eternal beauty in the New Jerusalem above? But this exceeding glory will be ours, only as we become living stones, by being united to Jesus Christ the cornerstone, by a living faith. Have we this faith? Do we cling to Christ alone? Have we hid our lives in him by a self-consecration that will never recall its covenant vows? Do we walk by faith, and does this faith purify the heart, enabling us to resist the devil, overcome the world, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God? Have we evidences that we are now, as the apostle says, "temples of the Holy Spirit?" Are our souls under the constant, controlling, sanctifying, influences of this blessed Spirit? For if we are not temples of the Holy Spirit on earth — we can never become "living stones" in the temple of Heaven. Does Christ dwell in our hearts by faith, and do we feel the presence and the preciousness of such an indwelling Savior? If we do, then have we daily evidence that we are of his chosen ones, and that before long, after a few more strokes from the axe and the hammer — he will raise us to glory! But if not, oh wait not another day — but, while the Spirit of God even now strives with your soul, embrace the offers of his abounding grace, that you also may so look for, and long for his appearing, as to be constrained to say with the enraptured spirit of the banished apostle: "Amen. Even so, come quickly, Lord Jesus!"

10-The Rainbow; Or, Covenant Promises Seen Through Tears

The Rainbow; Or,

Covenant Promises Seen Through Tears William Bacon Stevens

"I set my rainbow in the cloud." Genesis 9:13 "And there was a rainbow round about the Throne." Revelation 4:3

We have joined together the two extremes of Holy Writ — yoked in one text, passages from Genesis and from Revelation — placed beside each other as kindred truths, sentences written by Moses and by John; one, relating to the old world more than forty-three centuries ago, and the other, referring to a scene in that "new heavens and new earth wherein dwells righteousness," which is yet to be revealed.

Thus beautifully harmonizes the whole Word of God. Thus are its beginning and ending made to meet and form one circle of truth, having Christ for its center, and Infinitude for its circumference. Nor need we wonder at this unity of purpose, thought, language, and doctrine: it was all dictated by the same Divine Spirit, it is all occupied with the same Divine salvation, and its united aim is to advance the glory of God, and the redemption of man. The passages quoted at the head of this chapter, introduce to our notice two striking, sublime, and at the same time symbolic scenes — in each of which we have a personal interest, and both commend themselves to our earnest attention. The first carries us back to the morning of the post-diluvial world. The Deluge had ceased, "The fountains also of the deep and the windows of Heaven were stopped, and the rain from Heaven was restrained." The ark containing the eight survivors of the old world rested on Mount Ararat, the dove had been sent forth, and, after returning with an olive leaf in her beak, was again let go, and came back no more. The land became dry, the covering of the ark was removed, and Noah and his family went out of their floating habitation, and stood once more on the firm dry earth, the source of a new generation. The pious patriarch built an altar to the Lord, and the sweet savor of his sacrifice rose up acceptably to Heaven, and God returned to the worshipers promises of rest and peace. But God did more than merely give a promise. He entered into a formal covenant with Noah and his sons, the purpose of which was, that "all flesh should not be cut off any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth." This covenant was ratified by a seal of signal beauty and expressiveness: "And God said: This is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you, and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations. I set my rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth. And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the rainbow shall be seen in the cloud and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant." A few days, perhaps, after this solemn transaction, there is seen a gathering of clouds in the heavens, the sky is quite overcast, the dark masses roll in intermingling convolutions, the wind rises and sweeps down the mountain gorges — the big drops of rain fall with a heavy patter, the thunder mutters its distant warnings, and all conspire to fill their minds with terror and alarm. They recall the scene a few months back, when the first waters of the deluge fell,

and the first of the fountains of the great deep was broken up; and a secret and unwillingly admitted fear steals into their minds, lest perchance another storm may sweep them from the earth! But it is only for a moment; they think of God's promise, they remember his covenant, and, lo! as they gaze upon the dark clouds — they discern delicate tints and many-colored stripes, acquiring each moment more perfect brilliancy and form, until the whole eastern sky is spanned by the seven-fold rainbow of promise; and, as they look upon the beautiful arch, they recall the covenant of God, and rejoice in the assurance of safety thus given, beholding, as they do, upon the very storm which created alarm, the seal and signet-ring of a covenant-keeping God. As a token of God's gracious assurance, it is very peculiar. It never appears but at the time when the rain is falling, and hence, viewed in itself, is rather a ground of apprehension than of peace. But God has chosen that to be a pledge of our security, which is, in itself, an intimation of our danger — that our trust might be, not in any change of terrestrial arrangements — but in the simple Word of God, a pledge repeated to us by each new-born rainbow, as it carries our thoughts back to the days of Noah, and the covenant token then first pointed out.

Look then upon the rainbow, whenever it appears in its many-colored glory, and praise Him who set it in the clouds as the perpetual token of his covenant love. "Very beautiful is it in the brightness thereof, it compasses the whole Heaven with glory, and the hands of the Most High have bended it." But another rainbow is spoken of in the Bible. The apostle John opens his Apocalypse with the announcement "At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in Heaven with someone sitting on it. And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian. A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne!" Revelation 4:2-3. The rainbow is not introduced here as a mere ornament — but as a most expressive emblem. Our eye is first directed to the throne, that habitation, as the Psalmist terms it, of justice and judgment, and to the majestic appearance of Him who sat upon it — compared here to two precious stones, the jasper and carnelian; the jasper, as we gather from other passages, representing the essential holiness; and the blood-red carnelian — the punitive justice of God, Which declares "without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin."

Lest, however, we should be repelled by this holiness of God, and overawed by his retributive justice — there is also seen, overarching this throne and Him who sits upon it, a rainbow — the symbol of grace returning after wrath, to testify of God's covenant of mercy in Christ Jesus. It is said to be a rainbow like unto an emerald, because to the eye of the holy apostle green was the predominating color, and green is of all colors the most refreshing and agreeable.

We may not, we cannot, look with unblinking eye upon the jasper-like holiness of Jehovah, for it is that dazzling glory which, filling Heaven with its effulgence, causes it to have "no need of the sun or the moon to lighten it." We may not, we cannot, gaze upon the blood-red carnelian-like justice of the Almighty, for the shocking glare would scorch the eyeballs of the mind with its scenes of burning and deserved wrath! But we may and can look upon the heavenly rainbow, "in sight like unto an emerald," and the great sign and seal of this covenant of grace, hung up over the throne of Heaven, where "He who sits upon the throne" can ever look at it, and ever repeat to his children the promise, "For the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed — but my kindness shall not depart from you, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, says the Lord that has mercy on you."

What beautiful imagery Scripture employs in exhibiting the truths of God! Were we so familiar with the figurative language of the Bible, as to be reminded of blissful truths every time we beheld those objects, which have been employed to illustrate sacred ideas — how would it invest the material world with new beauty, and paint every picture of nature in the hues of Heaven! The sun would then ever tell us of Christ, "the light of the world." The moon would remind us of the Church, deriving all her brightness from "the sun of righteousness." The well-spring would speak in sparkling language of the "fountain open to cleanse from sin and impurity!" The river would remind us of that stream of "living water, as clear as crystal, flowing out from the throne of God and the Lamb." The grass would preach to us of the frailty of man, "today growing up, tomorrow cut down and withered." The "lily of the field," would beautifully set forth the protecting care of the Almighty. Our Lord drew illustrations of his doctrine from the stars, the sea, the birds, the fish, the clouds, the fields; and the Holy Spirit has used the forms and changes of the visible world to embody forth eternal truths; so that we may truly say that God has made nature the eloquent expounder and advocate of revelation.

When, therefore, we employ such a striking emblem as the rainbow to set forth some of the precious truths of God, we are but following in the track of Scripture, and using God's own covenant seal to illustrate God's own promises. The rainbow is made up of seven colors, caused by the different angles at which the light is refracted and reflected from the falling drops of rain. The conditions under which it can be seen are, that there must be rain falling at the time; that there must be sunlight at the time; and that the beholder must be between the two. Let us look, then, if we can see on the dark and showery cloud of sorrow — the rays of the Sun of Righteousness so refracted as to form the rainbow of mercy, at once inspiring hope and exciting thanksgiving.

1. We turn to Isaiah, the evangelical prophet, and find the first of these prismatic promises in the comforting words, "But now, O Jacob, listen to the LORD who created you. O Israel, the one who formed you says: Do not be afraid, for I have ransomed you. I have called you by name; you are mine! When you go through deep waters — I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty — you will not drown. When you walk through the fire of oppression — you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you. For I am the LORD, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior!" Isaiah 43:1-3. How much and how beautiful the light refracted from this glowing passage! As if God had said. Fear not, for He who created you out of nothing, He who formed you in the shape and fashion of humanity, He who redeemed you from the dominion of death, He who so knows you as to call you by name, and to grave you on the palms of his hands, and to make you unto him a chosen peculiar people — will not forsake you in any emergency or trial. But "when you pass through the waters" of affliction — "I, the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior," will be with you! When you go through "rivers" of sorrow — "I, the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior," will not allow them to overflow you! When "you walk through the fire" and along the flame-enkindled pathway of persecution — "I, the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior," will not allow you to burn — but will protect you from the fiery trial.

What wide promises, what divine assurance! How full of hope and comfort to the sorrowful and the persecuted!

2. A few pages on, and we find another promise for our covenant rainbow; one, too, which has specific relations to the rainbow of the deluge, for that token was evidently present to the mind of

God when the words were uttered: "For a small moment," says Jehovah, speaking to his ancient people, "for a small moment have I forsaken you — but with great mercies will I gather you. In a little wrath I hid my face from you for a moment — but with everlasting kindness I will have mercy on you, says the Lord your Redeemer." "For," he continues, "to me this is like the days of Noah, when I swore that the waters of Noah would never again cover the earth. So now I have sworn not to be angry with you, never to rebuke you again. Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken, nor my covenant of peace be removed," says the LORD, who has compassion on you!" Isaiah 54:8-10. This strong promise, made originally to the Israelites, is reaffirmed to each individual believer; for each child of God experiences moments when God seems to forsake him, and periods of darkness when his face seems hidden from him by intervening wrath or sorrow. And at such times we are tempted to murmur, as if we had a right to perpetual sunshine, forgetting that it is our iniquities which have separated between us and God, and our sins which have hid his face from us, that he cannot hear. Yet if we are in truth his children, and do seek to honor and glorify him — he will let it be but a small moment that he forsakes us, and but a passing gush of wrath in which he hides his face from us. The cloud between us may for a little while be black, angry, tempestuous, electrical; but when the gust is over and the Sun of Righteousness again shines out — then will the bright arch of hope span the vanishing cloud! For God declares that, as when he looks upon the rainbow, he remembers his covenant with Noah never again to bring the waters of the deluge upon the earth, so this promise that He would not forever be angry with you nor rebuke you, shall be to him a token never finally to remove his covenant of peace. Sooner far shall the everlasting hills depart; sooner far the deep foundations of the earth be moved — than God's promise fail or his covenant of peace be removed.

3. Sitting with our Savior upon the grassy mount, and listening to the sermon he delivered there, we find another tinted promise of a dye so heavenly, that it at once finds its place as one of the seven-fold colors in this rainbow of hope. The words are few but condensed, the promise is brief but of intensive force, of infinite expansibility — it is the verse "Blessed are those who mourn — for they shall be comforted." But how comforted? Not with earthly sympathy, for that gives but little solace; not with worldly support, for the world has no balm for a broken heart; but comforted with the choice blessings of the Divine Comforter, by which . . .

strength is imparted to the weak,

light to the darkened,

joy to the saddened,

peace to the troubled,

and hope to the sinking spirit.

I know that this passage refers not so much to the mourning over the the various afflictions of life — as to mourning over indwelling corruption and remaining sin. But then, what sorrow is greater to bear than a sin-burdened spirit? What grief more heavy than the weight of an oppressed and fainting soul just waking up to a consciousness of its danger? These are sorrows that the world knows nothing of; they lie out of the range of earthly vision, hidden away in the heart, pondered over in secret, confessed perhaps to none — yet how deep and poignant they are! They drink up

the spirit, they weary the heart, they at times crush the soul! Yet though so dark and stormy, the slanting light reflected from the face of Jesus, draws out of this angry cloud, a ray of bright and gladdening hope, adding another stripe to the covenant rainbow of promise — as it is seen through the tears of a godly, penitential sorrow.

4. But our Savior furnishes another prismatic color for our covenant arch in the invitation, "Come unto me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." There is here no restriction as to the people invited — none as to the rest promised. Whether then you labor under the cares, trials, and perplexities of life; whether you are burdened by the crushing weight of poverty, sorrow, and sickness; whether you labor under the sharp convictions of sin from which you struggle to free yourself, or whether you are burdened by a sense of weighty guilt and a conscious deserving of eternal woe — in each case you are invited to Jesus with the promise of heavenly rest. There is no mind laboring under any of the burdens of life, there is no soul overworked and exhausted by the pressing cares of this mortal state, there is no heart aiming to work out its own righteousness under the taskmasters of formalism and morality — which will not be at once relieved of its burden and find rest in Christ!

Sooner can you find in the Bible instances of the sick and the blind going to Him for healing, and sent away uncured — than you can produce an instance of a laboring, burdened soul, accepting the invitation which calls him to the Savior, and not finding the rest which the Savior covenants to give. You may search the Evangelists through, and not find an instance of rejection to the petitioners for Christ's mercy when he was on earth. And were the records of the inner experience of all Christians since the day of Pentecost open to our inspection — we would be equally unsuccessful in noting any instance of a laboring, burdened soul being turned away from Jesus and deprived of his promised rest. And such rest! The rest of one who has found what he has long sought and deeply needs. The rest of one who has been wearied and overborne with ineffectual seekings after peace and hope; a rest from the dominion of sin, from the harrowing assaults of the adversary, from the restless wanderings of unbelief; a rest in the assured confidence of faith; a rest not of passive indifference, or inactive repose — but full of lively emotions, of holy zeal, of outgoing love; the forecast shadow of that eternal rest which remains for the people of God.

When, then, we reflect upon the person who issues the invitation, Jesus Christ, proving his large-hearted love by giving his life for the ransom of his enemies; when we consider the nature of the rest which he offers — spiritual, holy, rejoicing, unending; and when we mark the broadness of his invitation — all you who labor and are heavy laden — thus covering the whole human race, for there is no man that lives and has not some laboring care, and some burdening sorrow; and when, to all these precious facts, we add the individual experience of the truth of this promise, by each disciple of Jesus for nearly two thousand years — then we cannot fail to observe how glowingly such a promise shines on the sorrow-clouds of earth, bending over the laboring and heavy laden child of sin, at least one of the colors of the Christian rainbow of hope. In the last interview of our Savior with the apostles before his crucifixion, he gave them many and peculiar consolations in view of his near removal from them. But though those precious chapters in John's gospel beginning with the cheering words, "Let not your heart be troubled," were originally addressed to the sorrowing band that clustered around Him on that night of His agony and arrest — yet are they also appropriate and even designed for believers in all ages, for they form an important part of that Scripture which, at all times, and to all people, "is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction,

for instruction in righteousness."

5. Among the many thrilling sentences uttered on that memorable night, there is one so terse, so full of thought, so rich in comfort, that we may well claim for it a place in Mercy's triumphal arch. It is the passage "I will not leave you comfortless, I will come unto you." The original is, I will not leave you "Orphans." Accordingly Wycliffe, in his translation, renders it, "I will not leave you Fatherless;" while the Rhiems version, following more closely the Greek word, reads, "I will not leave you Orphans." An orphan is indeed sad and comfortless; his earthly props and counselors have been taken away, a painful void is made in his life, and his heart is stricken and desolate.

It is not, however, of natural orphanage that the words of Jesus apply, it is of that spiritual desertion, that loss of the props and supports of the Christian life, which too often occurs with the careless, unwatching, and prayer-restraining professor. In those days when doubt perplexes the mind, and shadows of earthiness fall upon the spirit, when there is no comfort in devotion, and zeal smoulders in the ashes of a once blazing activity, when there is the first relenting of sorrow for such a cold or lukewarm state, and the awakening soul begins to feel the great lapse which it has made, and the grievous errors which it has committed; when the sense of deserved desertion and spiritual destitution gains ground and almost oppresses the heart, and the Christian feels that he is well near fatherless in the moral universe — an abandoned orphan with no spiritual parentage to which he can cling — then it is that there is seen stretching across this dark cloud, that hue of glory which streams from the words of Jesus, "I will not leave you orphans!"

You may seem to be forsaken and disinherited; you may think from the severity of God's dealings, that your Heavenly Father has forgotten you or cast you out from his presence; and you may feel as homeless, parentless, portionless orphans! Yet it is only in the seeming thereof. Christ's promise stands out in full prismatic beauty, the sign of that covenant of grace which assures you, with lips of peace and truth — I will not leave you orphans! I will come to you —

come to you in the cheering influences of my love;

come to you in the precious outpourings of my Spirit;

come to you in the imparted strength and comfort of my Spirit;

come to you in sickness, in suffering, in sorrow;

come to you with the oil and wine of gospel truth;

come to you in the light of my own countenance, making your dark soul radiant with joy, and painting upon the lowering vapor, whose showers have but just discharged themselves upon your head — the overarching rainbow of covenant peace and hope!

6. The sixth color of this "bow in the cloud" is added by the pencil of the apostle Paul. No one of the apostles endured more persecution and affliction — or had richer experience of sustaining grace under them, than this holy martyr. His estimate of sorrow, therefore, is the more valuable, because it is evolved by the deep experience of his own life, and is the deliberate judgment of one who had tried the world and Christ, and thus was prevented from giving one-sided evidence in the matter. This judgment he has recorded in his second letter to the Corinthians; and, while it expresses his personal experience, is yet a type of all affliction endured for Christ's sake, or so

borne as to be subservient to His glory. His words are, "For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal!" 2 Corinthians 4:17-18.

It will perhaps increase our idea of the intensive force of this passage, if we place beside it that brief catalogue of the Apostle's sufferings which he has drawn up in this same epistle. "I have been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked!" 2 Corinthians 11:23-27.

Few of us could run up such a catalogue of personal sorrow as this — yet how does he speak of it? As a light affliction, but for a moment! And not only so — but an affliction which is an instrument of working out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. Mark the two scales under the respective heads of affliction and glory; observe the diminuendo of the former, and the crescendo of the latter. The "affliction" was "light" as to its character; and "but for a moment" as to its duration. While the "glory" has "weight" as being heavy with blessing; is "eternal" as to its permanence; is "exceeding," as passing human conception; is "far more exceeding," as expressive of its unspeakable excellence. So intense was the feeling of the Apostle here, that the usual superlatives could not embody forth his thought, and he was forced to make a new word to give utterance to his emotion:

it is glory,

it is a weight of glory,

it is an eternal weight of glory,

it is an exceeding and eternal weight of glory,

it is a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory!

What a climax! Like the rainbow, its foot, indeed, rests on earth — but it arches upward to Heaven, spanning the dark cloud of affliction with a rainbow of beauty! And if the Apostle could say this of himself — so persecuted, afflicted, tormented — then ought not each child of sorrow to look at his own trials as light and momentary? We can do thus, if we have such a living faith in Christ, that we cling solely to his atoning blood, and hence regard all the adversities of life, as the chastenings of parental love — designed to fit us to enjoy the far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, which shall be ours when the light affliction, which is but for a moment, shall be done away forever!

We are too much disposed to shroud ourselves with our sorrows, to dwell in the settlings down of the cloud, and have our hearts ever kept wet by its weeping showers. So long as we do this, we cannot have peace or comfort. We must go towards the sunshine, and just in proportion as we get into the fuller light of Jesus' face — is the rainbow more clearly seen in the cloud, and the

covenant promise of Jehovah more rejoicingly believed. It is only "while we look not at the things which are seen — but at the things which are not seen," that we are enabled to lift up ourselves above surrounding and often depressing influences. The "things seen" are the present sorrows, with their accompanying trials and sadness, and upon these we morbidly look — and as we look, we magnify, distort, add weight to them, and thus increase the burden! While, would we but look away from our trials, and open wide the lids of faith's eye towards unseen and the eternal realities, gazing by this spiritual vision upon the future glories and blessedness of those who through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of Heaven — we would be so ravished with delight, that every sorrow would be cheerfully borne, and not a cloud of affliction could skirt the horizon of our life, upon which we could not discern the rainbow of the covenant!

7. The last color in this prismatic arch, is furnished by "the Beloved Disciple," and is drawn from a revelation to him of some of these very "things which are unseen and eternal." The Apostle, in his vision at Patmos, had "beheld, and, lo, a great multitude which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands." While he listened to their ascriptions of praise, one of the celestial host approached and asked him, by way of calling his attention to the scene, "Who are these who are arrayed in white robes? And where did they come from?" The surprised Apostle answered, "Sir, you know." In reply to this the heavenly visitant said unto him, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore, they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes!" Revelation 7:14-17 Can human thought add anything to this picture? No! All that we can do is to ponder word by word over the terms of this description, to strive to take in one by one the ideas which they convey:

the white robe,

the branch of palm,

the cleansing blood,

the posture before the throne,

the mighty chorus,

the Lamb in the midst of the throne,

the absence of hunger and thirst,

the feeding in green pastures,

the drinking from living fountains, and

the wiping away from our eyes all tears by the very Father's hand, whose chastening rod had caused their flow! Did we dwell more upon these terms, we would realize more than we now do — that they are designed to assure us of what will be our state when we pass the valley of tears, and

stand upon the Mount Zion above! Yes, every one of these blessings shall be ours — if we have been washed in the blood of the Lamb. If tribulations are the necessary preparative, if there can be no weight of glory unless there has been previously the light affliction — then let us welcome sorrow, welcome suffering which endures but a moment here — but which brings eternal joy hereafter. And now we have laid side by side, seven rich and precious promises, as the seven colors of the rainbow — each lovely in itself, but combined, forming that arch of covenant glory which God has equally "set in the cloud" of sorrow on earth, and "around the throne" in Heaven. Behold it in its varied but exquisite hues! Is it not beautiful as it springs upward — as it swells heavenward — as it bends downward, curving over our sorrow-drenched hearts, with assurances of present sunshine and of future bliss!

Having thus far looked upon the "cloud" and the "rainbow in the cloud" — let us now cast one glance at the SUN whose refracted and reflected rays make this arch of glory.

Many are the passages in the Bible which represent Christ as the light of the world; and Malachi especially designates him as the "Sun of Righteousness." Striking and appropriate comparison! Christ is a "Sun" — the great light-producing, light-imparting center of the moral universe. Christ is a "Sun of Righteousness," whether we regard Him as infinitely righteous in Himself, or as shedding abroad righteousness upon a dark and sinful world. Christ is a Sun of Righteousness that casts no shadow. The material sun casts shadows — nay, more, has immense dark spots on its bright disc — but the Sun of Righteousness is immaculate — unblemished in Himself, and like a vertical sun, makes no shadow. Christ is a Sun of Righteousness that cast no shadow — and that never sets. The earthly sun has its risings, its meridians, its setting, and the light of midday is soon followed by the dark of midnight. Not so with Christ; He shines out from the zenith of the spiritual firmament, and there is no going down of His light — no evening to shroud his departed rays. Once shining — forever shining — without a shadow — without an eclipse — without a sunset!

Such is the Sun whose refracted rays paint the rainbow of hope on the cloud of sorrow. For though the promises which I have adduced, like the different stripes of the rainbow, are of different hues — yet the light which produces them is the pure and colorless essence of Divine glory. In this light it is our privilege, as Christians, to dwell. Abiding in this light, we have peace, hope, joy, and prove ourselves to be "the children of light" through faith in Christ Jesus. Hence unrenewed men have no comfort or solace in any of the trials and afflictions of life. The heart must be surrendered to Jesus Christ, it must be washed in His atoning blood, it must be sanctified by His holy Spirit — before we can become "children of light and of the day;" but when through the sovereign grace of God, we receive this "adoption of sons," then is it our peculiar privilege to see God's love in every dispensation of His hand — and to see His rainbow of covenant promise in every cloud of sorrow!

"The Rainbow" When the sun with cheerful beams

Smiles upon a lowering sky,

Soon its aspect softened seems,

And a rainbow meets the eye;

While the sky remains serene,

This bright arch is never seen.

Thus the Lord's supporting power
Brightest to the saints appears.
When affliction's threatening hour
Fills their sky with clouds and fears;
He can wonders then perform,
Paint a rainbow on the storm.
All their graces doubly shine,
When their troubles press them sore;
And the promises divine
Give them joys unknown before,
As the colors of the bow
To the cloud their brightness owe!

11-Silent Suffering

Silent Suffering Philip Doddridge

"I was silent; I would not open my mouth, for You are the one who has done this!" Psalms 39:9

I believe that there are many of us who have frequently heard this Psalm read upon funeral occasions; and we must, no doubt, approve the propriety of the choice, as it contains some very weighty reflections on the mortality of human nature, expressed with great solemnity, and intermingled with proper devotional addresses to that great and solemn Being who has in righteous judgment passed that sentence on sinful man, by which we and our friends are brought down to the dust. For it is he, as the Psalmist well expresses it (verse 5), who has made our days as a mere hands-breadth, and our age as nothing before him; so that every man, in his best state, is altogether vanity! When the mind is agitated with strong affections, it is difficult to restrain the tongue from some undue liberty of speech — at least, there may be an inward language, audible to the ear of God, which may be displeasing to him — if there is not a care to impose silence upon every repining thought, as well as to keep the mouth as with a bridle. But it is the design of the providence of God, in conjunction with his ordinances, to teach us, whatever our trials may be, however dear the enjoyments which we may lose, and however heavy the burden which we may bear — to be dumb with silence, after the example of the pious Psalmist, and not to open our mouths — because whatever it is that has fallen upon us, has come from the hand of God!

1. Let the Christian reflect — that God can do no wrong to him, or to any of his creatures.

Let him not only consider the sovereignty of the Almighty's dominion, which is such that no creature can pretend to contend with him — but also the essential rectitude of his nature, which is such that none can have any right to censure, or to complain of what he does. My soul! he has done it, who holds the reins of universal empire — He, who does what he pleases in the armies of Heaven, and among the inhabitants of earth! He has done it — who spoke the creating word, and it was done! He who is the potter — and every creature, on earth and in Heaven — but as clay in his hand, to be molded according to his own will. And shall the thing formed say to him that formed it: Why have you made me thus? Well may it be said in that connection, "Nay, O man! Who are you that replies against God? Let the potsherd strive with the potsherd of the earth; but woe unto him who strives with his Maker!" This is a silencing thought — nor does it impose merely such a silence as proceeds from the dread of superior power, or the despair of being able to make anything out by resisting it; but with the conviction of such sovereign authority and dominion, is necessarily connected that also of infinite perfection. Nothing can tempt Omnipotence in any instance to do evil. The infinite understanding of God must ever see what is right; his all-perfect mind, seeing it, must approve it; and, approving it, must do it, being infinitely above all temptation to deviate from it. Good is the word of the Lord that he has spoken, for this very reason — because it is his word; because it is spoken by him.

O my perverse heart! what would you say? Would you dare to fly in the face of God himself? Would you dare to charge him with tyrannical administration? Would you dare to say: "Lord, you are now beginning to act unworthy of yourself — you govern other beings wisely and well; but you neglect me, and avail yourself of your irresistible power to overbear my rights, and to oppress me in judgment!" God forbid! who would not rather say: "Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, before I utter such a word; yes, let my mind lose all its rational faculties, rather than harbor such a thought!"

2. Let the Christian further recollect — what God has done for him, as a reason why he should be silent under what God now does to him. Were he only to consider himself as the creature of God, without attending to what is peculiar to him as being a Christian, he might see enough to silence his complaints. "Has not the blessed God given to me my being? Such a being — with such noble powers and endowments as I possess! Has he not set me here at the head of this visible creation — in this spacious and magnificent palace, which he has raised for the human family, and furnished and adorned in this commodious, grand, and beautiful manner? Has he not been the guardian of my infancy, and my childhood — and in riper years, my guide and my benefactor in numberless instances? Has he not given to me all that I have — every comfort in life, personal or relative? When I look around about me upon all that I can call my treasure, my possession — does not everything bear his name, as it were, inscribed upon it as the donor: "The gift of God!" May I not be reminded of his bounty by all that I possess; yes, by all that I lose, and all that I suffer? This member, which is the seat of pain or disease — did he not form it? And has he not given to me the easy and comfortable use of it during these many years, though he now lays his hand upon it? This friend, who is now laid in the grave — was she not a creature of his, whom he formed and gave to me; and in whom, perhaps, he blessed me for many years? And is such a friend and benefactor to be quarreled with, because he sometimes takes back, a little of what he has given?" But this is not all. I am speaking to you now as Christians: and then consider how the account rises. "Has not God blessed me with the knowledge of his gospel, and of his Son? Has he not sent to me the tidings of grace and salvation by him? And has he not by his Holy Spirit made him dear and precious to my heart; and given to me some cheerful and comfortable hope of a saving interest in him as my Redeemer and my Savior? And can there be matter of complaint against him, when I consider this? Has not his arm brought salvation to my view? A salvation which he himself wrought out in so wonderful a manner? And ought not that consideration to reconcile me to everything else which comes from so good a hand?"

3. Let the Christian recollect — what God might have done with him, and to him, as a further reason for being silent under the afflicting of the Divine hand.

"The hand of God has now touched me and pained me. True! but it has not destroyed me. He has not, as Job expresses it, let loose his hand against me, and cut me off. And might he not have done that? He has taken away this and that comfort. True! but might he not have taken away all; and have stripped me quite naked and bare? Yes, might he not have taken away my soul — and destroyed my very existence? Or, what would have been ten thousand times worse, have supported it only to make it miserable? God has chastised me with rods — but what are those scorpions with which he might have scourged me, and have been righteous in doing it! Have you not, my soul, by numberless provocations, most righteously exposed yourself to his everlasting vengeance? What if you had, even now, been in the abodes of the damned, surrounded with

eternal darkness and despair! Would he have been unjust in speaking, and unrighteous in judging thus? Be silent then, my heart, before him! And let not God hear the lightest murmur — but rather let me fall down upon my knees, and adore his sovereign goodness that he has yet spared me; and, much more, that he gives me any hope that he will save me."

4. Let the Christian consider — what God is now doing in a wider extent of the prospect, than can arise merely from the view of any present affliction.

"You, O Lord, have done this! You have afflicted my body; you have disappointed my prospects; you have blasted my hopes; you have slain my friends. But this is not all that you are now doing! You still continue your goodness to me; you cause your sun to arise, and your rain to descend upon me; you feed and cloth me daily. You spare to me many dear and valuable friends, whom it were base and barbarous ingratitude to slight, because some are taken away. You are still continuing to me the liberty of access to the throne of grace; encouraging and inviting me, if I have not this or that remaining comfort in the creature — to come to You; to tell you my sorrows and my complaints; to seek in You what I have lost elsewhere, and more than I have lost. Yes, you are continuing to me the liberty of your house, and the privileges of your ordinances. I am not banished from the solemn assembly by the violence of my enemies, who would gladly long before this, have introduced universal confusion and desolation, and have burnt up all Your churches in the land. I am not his prisoner at home, as many of my Christian brethren are, in this land of liberty. Blessed be his name! I can come up to his house, as it is this day. Yes, he spreads his own table for me. As if all these blessings of mine were not, as indeed they are not, sufficient — he sets before me the body and blood of his own Son; gives him to me as the bread of life that comes down from Heaven. And is this a day and hour in which to be complaining of him? As if it were not enough that I am here, unless it were with such and such a fellow creature; possessed of so much silver and gold; arrayed in such or such apparel; with such and such degrees of health and strength and spirits! Oh! surely it may be enough that I am here as a member of Christ, as a child of God! Especially when with that is connected this further thought, as an heir of glory!" Which leads me to add,

5. Let the Christian further consider — what God will further and hereafter do for him — and it must surely silence him under whatever God has now done. And if you ask, what? Let the Jewish Psalmist answer in these emphatic words, "You shall guide me with your counsel — and afterwards receive me to glory!" Has God forsaken me, that I should murmur and complain? Is he now doing the last office of kindness and love that he ever intends? No; he will never leave me nor forsake me. This is still his language, "Fear not, for I am with you: be not dismayed, for I am your God!" He will choose my inheritance for me. He will watch over me for good, and cause all things to work together for my truest advantage. He will subdue my iniquity; he will strengthen my graces; and, having begun the good work in me, he will carry it on until the day of the Lord. In a little while, perhaps, a very little — he will do what to an eye of sense indeed looks like a dreadful work — but to faith, wears a most cheerful aspect. He will, by his Providence, say to me, as to Moses, Go up and die. But that act of his, which consigns this mortal sinful body to the dust and worms — will be the most gracious act that he ever exerted since he regenerated my soul by the power of his Spirit. Then farewell to all my pains and my fears, my disappointments and my sorrows at once! Farewell, for a little while, to all my surviving friends; and welcome more perfect and glorious friends. Welcome the dear deceased Christians, over whom I have so often wept. Welcome,

above all, the bosom of my Savior, in which I also shall rest with them. O abyss of joy and delight! And yet not all that I hope. The resurrection of the body shall complete the plan of my perfect happiness, with all the chosen in the everlasting enjoyment of God, of Christ, of one another, in forms of devotion and glory; of glory and felicity which eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither has entered into the heart of man. And shall not all be taken well from a hand which will do all this? A hand which, even while it afflicts — has this great end of all in view, that the light afflictions, which are hut for a moment, may work out a far more exceeding and an eternal weight of glory!

Whatever it may please God to work, there is something not only quieting but elevating in these considerations — something which may not only silence a Christian's complaint — but engage him to break out into a song of praise "The Weaned Child"

Quiet, Lord, my froward heart,
Make me teachable and mild,
Upright, simple, free from art;
Make me as a weaned child.
From distrust and envy free,
Pleased with all that pleases Thee.
What you shall today provide,
Let me as a child receive;
What tomorrow may betide.
Calmly to Your wisdom leave.
'Tis enough that You will care,
Why should I the burden bear?
As a little child relies
On a care beyond its own;
Knows he's neither strong nor wise
Fears to stir a step alone —
Let me thus with You abide.
As my Father, Guard, and Guide.
Thus preserved from Satan's wiles.
Safe from dangers, free from fears,
May I live upon your smiles
Until the promised hour appears;

When the sons of God shall prove
All their Father's boundless love!

12-Christ at Bethany

Christ at Bethany by Robert Candlish

"Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died!" John 11:21

"When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died!" John 11:32

"It is better," says the wise man, "to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, for death is the destiny of every man; the living should take this to heart. Sorrow is better than laughter, because a sad face is good for the heart. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning — but the heart of fools is in the house of pleasure!" Ecclesiastes 7:2-4

If this is true generally of the effect which should be produced by familiarizing the heart with the devout contemplation of death, and of the grief which death occasions — it must be especially true when we have Jesus as our companion. It was our Lord's custom, in his visits to Jerusalem, to retire in the evenings, after the toils and trials of his daily ministry in the temple, to the quiet village of Bethany, and the peaceful abode of Lazarus — that he might there repose amid the holy endearments of a congenial family circle. That house is now the house of mourning. Let us visit it in the company of Jesus, and observe how he is received there, and how his presence cheers the gloom. The sisters, Martha and Mary, greet him with the same pathetic salutation, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died!" and this might seem to indicate an entire similarity in their sorrow. But if we look a little closer, we see a striking difference of demeanor, corresponding to the marked difference of their characters generally. And this difference is marked in our Lord's different treatment of them. In every view it is an interesting study, from which we may learn,

in the first place, How much sameness there is in grief;

secondly, How much variety there is in grief; and,

lastly, How much compass there is in the consolation of Christ, as capable of being adapted to all varieties of grief — to grief of every mold and of every mood.

We speak chiefly throughout of the grief of true Christians; for we think we are warranted in assuming that, notwithstanding their great contrast in respect of natural temperament — the two sisters were partakers of the same grace.

1. At present, we advert to the SIMILARITY of their common sorrow — the sameness of their grief. For it is remarkable, that two people so different in their turn of mind, as we shall afterwards see that these sisters were — so apt to view things in different lights, and to be affected by them with different feelings — should both utter the same words on first meeting the Lord Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." It shows how natural such a reflection is in such a season — how entirely the heart, when deeply moved, is the same in all — and how much all grief is alike. The sisters, however otherwise dissimilar, were united in their fond affection for their

departed brother, as well as in their grateful reliance on that divine friend "who loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus." They had sat and watched together beside their brother's bed of sickness. They joined together in sending unto Jesus, saying, "Lord, behold, he whom you love is sick." In their distress, they both thought of the same remedy, and applied to the same physician. It was a joint petition that they dispatched, and they did not doubt that it would prevail. Together they waited anxiously for his coming. They reckoned the very earliest moment when he could arrive; and as they looked on their brother's languid eye, and saw him sinking every hour and wasting away, Ah! they thought, how soon their benefactor might appear, and all might yet be well. But moments and hours rolled on, and no Savior came. Wearisome days and nights were appointed to them. Often did they look out and listen; often did they imagine that they heard the expected sound, and the well-known accents of kindness seemed to fall upon their ears. But still he came not. Ah! what were their anxious thoughts, their earnest communings, their fond prayers, that life might be prolonged at least for a little longer, to give one other chance, one other opportunity, for the interposition of Him who was mighty to save even from the gates of death! And how were their own hearts sickened, as they whispered to the sick man a faint hope, to which they could scarcely themselves any longer cling. Still the time rolls slowly on. The last ray of expectation is extinguished; the dreaded hour is come; it is over — their brother has fallen asleep; Lazarus is dead! And now four days are past and gone since he has been laid in the silent tomb. The first violence of grief is giving place to the more calm — but far more bitter pain of a desolate and dreary sadness — the prolonged sense of bereavement which recollection brings along with it, and which everything around serves to aggravate and embitter. The house of mourning, after the usual temporary excitement, is still — it is the melancholy stillness of the calm, darkly brooding over the wrecks of the recent storm — and amid the real kindness of sympathizing friends, and the formal attentions of meddling strangers — the sisters, as each familiar object recalls the past, are soothing, or suppressing, as best they may, those bitter feelings which their own hearts alone can know — when suddenly they are told that Jesus is at hand!

He has come at last — but he has come too late. His having come at all, however, is a comfort. He is welcome as their own and their brother's friend; he is welcome as their Lord. They never doubt his friendship; they question not his willingness, or his power, to do them good. But still, as they meet him, they cannot but look back on the few days that are gone; and as all their anxieties and alarms, their longing hopes and cruel disappointments, rush again upon their minds — they are constrained to give utterance to the crowded emotions of their hearts in the irrepressible exclamation, " Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died!"

It is the voice of nature that speaks in these words — the voice of our common nature mingling its vain regrets with the resignation of sincere and simple faith.

There is here, first, the feeling that the event might have been otherwise, "If you had been here — then my brother would not have died." We know not what has detained you. Some call of duty may have prevented you from coming; or, perhaps, our message did not reach you in time; or it may have been some merely casual circumstance that hindered you. If this sickness had happened but a little sooner, when you were in Jerusalem at the feast — or if we had taken alarm early enough, so as to send for you before our brother was so ill — or if our messenger had been more expeditious, and had used more despatch — or if we had but been able to lengthen out, by our care, our brother's sickness for a single week — had we not been so unfortunate in the occurrence

of this evil just when it did occur; or had we, when it occurred, used more diligence, and taken better precautions — then you might have been here, and "if you had been here — our brother would not have died!" Is it not thus that the heart speaks under every trying dispensation? Is it not thus that an excited imagination whispers to the forlorn soul? Who has ever met with any affliction — who has ever lost any beloved brother or dear friend — without cherishing some such reflection as this? If such or such a measure had been adopted; if such or such an accident would not have happened; if it had not been for this unaccountable oversight, or that unforeseen and unavoidable mischance — then so grievous a calamity would not have befallen me — my brother "would not have died!"

Alas! and is not the reflection, however natural — a sinful and sad delusion — proceeding upon a very limited view of the power and the providence of God our Savior? How did these sisters know that, if Jesus had been there, their brother would not have died? How could they tell whether he might not have ends to serve, which would have required that, even though he had been there, he must have permitted him to die? And were they not aware that, though he was not there — yet, if he had so chosen and so ordered it — their brother would not have died? Had they not heard of his being able, at the distance of many a long mile, to effect an immediate and complete cure? Did they not believe that he had but to speak — and it would be done; he had but to say the word — and, however far off he was, his friend and their brother would be healed?

Ah! they had forgotten who it was to whom they made this most touching and pathetic appeal; that he was one who, though not actually present — could have restored their brother if it had been consistent with his wise and holy will; and who, even if he had been present, might have seen fit, for the best reasons, to allow him to die. And are not these the very truths concerning him which you in your distress are tempted to forget, when you dwell so much on secondary circumstances and causes, instead of at once and immediately recognizing his will as supreme? You are overtaken by misfortune; you are overwhelmed in the depths of sorrow. You ascribe your suffering to what seems to be its direct occasion — whether it be your own neglect of some precaution which you might have taken, had you thought of it in time; or the fault of others, with whose skill or diligence your dearest hopes were inseparably connected; or something perhaps, in the course of events, over which neither you nor they could have any control. You fix upon the very date, the very scene, when and where your brother's doom seems to have been sealed; and you think that, if you had but suspected what was about to be the outcome, or if the help which you now see would have been available had then been within your reach; if you had been warned in time, or had taken the warning, or had been able to employ the right means of escape — you might not now have been left disconsolate; your beloved one might still have been spared to cheer you with his smiles, and share with you all your cares — your brother might not have died! So you are apt to think and feel. But however natural the thought — is it not in reality the very folly of unbelief — the dream of a soul forgetting that the Lord reigns? What! is it come to this, that you conceive of Him as limited by events which he himself ordains — as the slave of his own laws? You think that if a certain obstacle had not come in to prevent relief — then the calamity you bewail might not have happened. But notwithstanding that obstacle — might he not, if God had seen fit, have found means to avert the calamity? And are you sure that, even if the obstacle had been removed, he might not have seen fit still to let the calamity come? "If you had been here," say the mourning sisters, "our brother would not have died!" Nay, he might have answered, "I could have been here

— if it had seemed good to me. And, though I was not here — I might have easily kept your brother alive. And, though I had been here — I might have allowed him to die!"

Look, you afflicted ones, beyond second causes — to him who is the first cause of all things! Believe, and be sure that the circumstances which you regret as the occasion of your misfortune — are but the appointed means of bringing about what he determines! If evil comes upon you, if your brother dies — it is not because this or that accident prevented relief; it is not because God was not with you in sufficient time — but because it was his will. Be still, and know that he is God! But farther, secondly, there may be in this address of the sisters, somewhat of the feeling, that the event not only might have been otherwise — but would have been otherwise! There is at least an intimation of their having expected that the event would have been otherwise: "If you had been here — our brother would not have died!" And why were you not here? We sent to you — we sent a special message — a special prayer — and surely you might have been persuaded to come. Ah! why did you linger for two whole days after tidings of our threatened loss reached you? Why did you not make haste to help us? We could not believe that you would have treated us thus. You were not unmindful of us before. You regarded us as friends. You blessed our house with your presence; making it your resting-place, your home. You choose us before your own kinsmen. You selected our brother as the object of your especial affection. And we thought it would have been enough to touch your heart, simply to send to you, saying, "He whom you love is sick!" — that you had but to hear of his illness to rush at once to his relief! True, we had no right to dictate to you, and now we have no right to complain. But we cannot help feeling that if you had been here — our brother would not have died — and that surely you might have been here. It was not so very great a favor that was asked of you; and was he not worthy for whom you should do this? He loved you — he trusted in you; and you might have come, if not to preserve his life, at least to soothe and satisfy his dying hours. He looked for you — and you did not appear. To the very last he waited for you — and you hid yourself. He missed you, and he was not comforted.

Such are the instinctive complaints of nature in a season of sore trial, of bitter bereavement. Thus does the wounded soul rise against the stroke that pierces it, and turn round upon the hand that smites it. It is very hard for flesh and blood to believe, in regard to any crushing load of woe — that it is God himself who directly and immediately ordains it! It is far harder to believe, that in ordaining it — that he does not do wrong. Simply to be still, and know that he is God — is no easy exercise of resignation. To be sure that he does right, that he does well — is even more difficult still. You imagine that, if he had really been here, that it would have happened otherwise — your brother would not have died. And you feel as if you had some right to expect that if he would have been here — that it would have happened otherwise — that your brother should not have died. And you can give, perhaps, many reasons. You can point out many ends which might have been served, had your brother been spared — how faithful and successful he might have been — how noble a course he might have run. He was just prepared for entering into active life; he was just newly fitted for the service of God in the world; and it does seem strange and unaccountable, that at the very time when his life seemed to have become most valuable — when his character was ripening for increased usefulness — and when the mere word of the great Physician would have brought him back from the gates of death — he would yet have been allowed to die.

Ah! but remember that the Lord may have many purposes in view with which you may be unacquainted, which indeed you could not as yet comprehend. Only wait patiently for a little, and

you will see that "this sickness is not" really "unto death — but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified thereby" (verse 4). Would that you had been here! — you surely could have been here! — is the natural language of the mourner to his Lord. "Nay," says the Lord himself to his own disciples, "I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent you may believe" (verse 15). A hard saying this — who can always hear it? But consider who it is that speaks. It is your friend, your Savior! He might have been here, and might have taken care that your brother would not die; and may you not be sure that, if it had been for his glory, and for your good — he would have been here, and would have taken care that your brother should not die?

"He might have ordered this matter otherwise!" you say; and you almost think that he ought to have ordered it otherwise. But may you not believe that, had it been right and good — he would have done so; and that, if he has not — it must be for the best of reasons? What these reasons may be — you cannot tell. He may have need of your brother's services elsewhere. He may intend to make his death the occasion of showing forth his glory, and blessing your soul. Only be patient, and hope unto the end.

What he does, you may not understand now — but you shall understand hereafter. Meantime, as you are tempted to imagine that he might have interfered — nay, that he should have interfered — to prevent the calamity under which you suffer — may not that very feeling, on second thoughts, suggest the conviction, that if he has not so interfered, it must be because he intends to make to you some gracious discovery of himself, and to confer upon you some special benefit? Be not hasty, then, to judge him — but rest in the assurance that all things shall work together for good, to those who love God. And though he may seem to stand aloof when you would most desire, and most need, his interposition — yet when he does come, be sure that you receive him gladly — as did the sorrowing sisters.

Happy will it be for you who mourn, if in like circumstances you are enabled to feel as these sisters felt, and to meet your Savior's gracious advances as they did. In the hour of blighted prospects and disappointed hopes, when the evil which you deprecated has befallen you — you may think that consolation comes too late. Like Rachel, you may weep, and refuse to be comforted; like Jonah, when your gourd withers, you may almost be tempted to say that you do well to be angry. You may turn away when your Savior draws near; you may sit disconsolate when he calls. If he had come for the purpose of averting your calamity — if he had been here sooner, and had interposed his power to help — it would have been well, for then my brother would not have died! But the calamity has overtaken me — and my brother is dead — so what does it avail, that He is here now?

Beware of all such impatience, such natural irritability of grief. Reject not the Savior's visit of sympathy now, because he did not come to you exactly as you in your ignorance would have had him to come, and do for you exactly what you would have had him to do.

It is enough that He is with you now, to speak comfortably to you — to bind up your broken heart — to fill the aching void in your affections, and be to you, instead of all that you have lost. True, if he had been here before, your brother might not have died, and your brother, alas! is dead. But He is here now — He who is better than a thousand brothers — He who has the words of eternal life; who can speak a word in season to the weary soul; and, when flesh and heart faint, will be the strength of your heart and your portion forever.

Such might be the feelings common to the two sisters — such are the feelings of nature mingled with grace, common to all sanctified grief — as indicated in the affecting address, "Lord, if you had been here — my brother would not have died!"

Thus far, we trace in their conduct the working of a common grief.

2. But the sisters DIFFERED in their sorrow, as they did generally in the leading features of their characters, and their manner of thinking and acting in the ordinary affairs of life. They were people of very different temperaments and dispositions; and this difference is uniformly and strikingly brought out in their treatment of the Lord Jesus. Both looked up to him with reverence; both regarded him with full confidence and tender affection; and both were equally earnest and eager in testifying their esteem and love. But each in doing so, followed the bent of her own peculiar turn of mind.

Martha was distinguished by a busy, if not bustling activity in the despatch of affairs. She seems to have possessed great quickness, alertness, and energy, together with a certain practical ability and good sense, qualifying her both for taking a lead herself, and for giving an impulse to others; so that she was well fitted for going through with any work to be done, and always awake to the common calls and the common cares of the ordinary domestic routine of life.

Mary was evidently characterized by more depth of thought, more devotedness and sensibility of feeling. She was more easily engrossed in any affecting scene, or any spiritual subject; more alive at any time to one single profound impression, and apt to be abstracted from other concerns. And as their ways of testifying regard to the Lord Jesus in prosperity differed — so also did their demeanor towards him in adversity, (John 11:1-57.)

Martha was evidently the first to receive information of his approach (verse 20), either because to her, as the mistress of the house, the message was brought — or because, going about the house in her usual manner, she was in the way of hearing news. She went out in haste, impatient to meet the Lord, and to render to him the offices of courtesy and respect. She is ready to be up and doing; she can turn at once from the conversation in which her friends from Jerusalem have been seeking to interest her, and disengage her mind for active exertion.

Mary again is more absorbed in her grief; her sorrow is of a deeper and more desponding character; for while "Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming — went and met him; while Mary sat still in the house" (verse 20). This more absorbing intensity of Mary's grief, "the Jews who were with her in the house, and comforted her," seem to have remarked — when they said of her, as they saw her at last rise hastily and go out, "She goes unto the grave to weep there" (verse 31). They had not said this of Martha when she went forth. She might be bent on other errands. Mary could go — only to weep. And at first her feelings so overpower her, as to prevent her from going at all. The sudden arrival of her brother's friend is a shock too great for her; it tears the wound open afresh, and recalls bitter thoughts. She is plunged by the tidings into a fresh burst of sorrow, and can only "sit still in the house."

Thus, in different circumstances — the same natural temper may be either an advantage or a snare. Martha was never so much occupied in the emotion of one scene or subject, as not to be on the alert and ready for the call to another. This was a disadvantage to her when she was so hurried, that she could not withdraw herself from household cares to wait upon the Word of Life. It

is an advantage to her now, that she can, with comparative ease, shake off her depression, and hasten of her own accord to meet her Lord. The same profound feeling, again, which made Mary the most attentive listener before — makes her the most helpless sufferer now; and disposes her almost to nurse her grief, until Jesus, her best comforter, sends specially and emphatically to rouse her. Nor is it an insignificant circumstance, that it is the ever-active Martha who carries to her more downcast sister the awakening message — so ought sisters in Christ to minister to one another, and so may the very difference of their characters make them mutually the more helpful, "She went back and called her sister Mary aside. "The Teacher is here," she said, "and is asking for you." (verse 28). When the two sisters meet Jesus, the difference between them is equally characteristic.

Martha's grief is not so overwhelming as to prevent her utterance. She is calm, and cool, and collected enough to enter into argument. She can give expression to her convictions and her hopes. She can tell that her faith is not shaken even by so severe a disappointment. Having hinted what might seem to imply a doubt (verse 21), she is in haste to explain her meaning, and to give assurance of her undiminished confidence, "But I know, that even now, whatever you ask of God — God will give it to you" (verse 22). And then, as the conversation goes on, she is sufficiently self-possessed to listen to a discourse on the resurrection, and reason with the Lord upon the subject — as well as to make a formal declaration of her faith in him as the author of eternal life, "the Christ, the Son of God, who should come into the world" (verse 23-27). Not so her sister Mary. She indeed, when at last she is emboldened by her Master's kind message — goes forth to meet him, and her reverence, her devotion, her faith, are not less than those of Martha. But her heart is too full for many words. Her emotions, when she sees the Lord, she cannot utter. The passion of her soul she cannot command. She can but cast herself down, weeping, before him, and say, "Lord, if you had been here — my brother would not have died!" She adds not a word more. She lies prostrate and silent at his feet (verse 32).

Such are the different aspects which sorrow wears in minds of different stamps, and of different degrees of strength and of sensibility. But if it be the sorrow of a godly heart — it finds in Jesus, one who can with the most perfect tenderness and truth, adapt his sympathy and consolation to its peculiar character, whatever that may be. For it is most interesting and instructive, to observe how the Lord's demeanor towards the two sisters, in his first meeting with them on this occasion, was exactly suited to their respective tempers, and their different kinds of grief.

Martha's distress was of such a nature, that it admitted of discussion and discourse. She was disposed to converse, and to find relief in conversation. Jesus accordingly adapted his treatment to her case. He spoke to her, and led her to speak to him. He talked with her on the subject most interesting and most seasonable — on the resurrection of the body and the life of the soul. Martha had declared her unshaken trust in him as still having power to obtain from God all that he might ask (verse 22). And a wild idea, perhaps, crossed her mind that it might not even yet be too late — that the evil might, even now, be repaired. If so, it was but the imagination of a moment — the dreamy notion that sometimes haunts the desolate breast, when it strives in vain to realize the loss which it has sustained. A single sad thought brings the recollection, to which afterwards, as we have seen, in her characteristic spirit of attention to such details, she adverts, that her brother has been now four days in the tomb, and corruption must be doing its horrid work upon his body.

When, therefore, she hears her Lord's promise, "Your brother shall rise again," she applies it to his share in the general resurrection: "I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day" (verse 23, 24). Jesus is anxious to explain himself more fully. He speaks not of a resurrection merely — but of a resurrection in Himself — not of life only — but of life in Himself. "I am the resurrection, and the life: he who believes in me, though he were dead — yet shall he live; and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Believe you this?" (verse 25, 26.) For in fact, this is the only true comfort in reference to the future state. He is the only true comforter who can speak, not merely of the immortality of the soul, and of the resurrection of the body — but of Himself as the life of the immortal soul and the quickener of the risen body — the first-begotten from the dead — the first fruits of those who sleep. Ah, what consolation is it, that your brother lives and shall rise again — that he lives now in the spirit, and that he shall rise again in the body! The consolation I give is more effectual and complete by far. He lives in me. He shall rise with me. And what is the life which I continue, even after death, to sustain? It is the very life which I impart now — life before God; life in God; the life of a soul pardoned, justified, reconciled to God, renewed after the image of God, sanctified and made meet for the fellowship of God forever. And what is the resurrection which I give? Is it not a resurrection to glory — when these vile bodies shall be changed and fashioned like unto my glorious body? It is my own life that I impart to the believer now, and continue to him without interruption beyond the grave! It is of my own resurrection that I am to make him a partaker when I come again.

These, or such as these, are the only words which, spoken by one who has authority, can shed light on the dark tomb of a lost and buried brother — or on the darker sorrow of a surviving sister's heart. So the apostle felt when he said, "I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who are asleep — that you sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again — even so, those also who sleep in Jesus, will God bring with him" (1 Thessalonians 4:13-14). When Mary, on the other hand, draws near in the anguish of silent woe — Jesus is differently affected, and his sympathy is shown in a different way. He is much more profoundly moved. He does not reply to her in words, for her own words were few. Sorrow has choked her utterance, and overmastered her soul. But the sight of one so dear to him, lying in such helpless grief at his feet — is an appeal to him far stronger than any supplication. And his own responsive sigh, is an answer more comforting than any promise. "When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping," for it was a melting scene, "He groaned in spirit and was troubled." And when he had asked of the bystanders, "Where have you laid him?" and received the reply, "Come and see" — like Joseph, he could not refrain himself, and "Jesus wept" (verse 33-35).

O most blessed mourner — with whose tears your Savior mingles his own! O sympathy most unparalleled! To each of the two stricken and afflicted ones, the Lord addressed the very consolation that was most congenial. To Martha — he gave exceeding great and precious assurances, in words such as never man spoke. To Mary — he communicated the groanings of his spirit, in language more expressive to the heart than any spoken words could be. With Martha — Jesus discoursed and reasoned. With Mary — Jesus wept.

What a friend is this! What a brother! Yes, and far more than a brother! And how confidently may you come to him, you Christian mourners, in every season of trial! For, surely, he will give you the very cordial, the very refreshment, of which you stand in need. He is a patient hearer — if you

have anything to say to him; and he will speak to you as you are able to bear it. Your complaints, your regrets, your expostulations, your very remonstrances and upbraidings — may all be expressed to him. He will pity. He will comfort. His Holy Spirit will bring to your remembrance what Christ has said suitable to your case. He will recall to you the Savior's gracious words of eternal life, and suggest to you considerations fitted to dissipate your gloom, and put a new song in your mouth. And even if you cannot collect your thoughts, and order your words aright — if you are speechless with silence when your sorrow is stirred, and as you muse your heart is hot within you — oh remember, that with these very groanings which cannot be uttered, the Spirit makes intercession for you! And they are not hidden from him who, when he saw Mary weeping, groaned, and was troubled, and wept.

There is indeed enough of all varied consolation in that blessed book, which all throughout testifies of Jesus! For the sorrow that seeks vent in words, and desires by words also to be soothed — there is the Savior's open ear — there are the Savior's lips into which grace was poured. For the grief that is speechless and silent — there are the Savior's tears!

"Jesus wept! Then the Jews said — See how he loved him!" John 11:35-36 "Christ's Words to the Sorrowing"

Broken-hearted, weep no more!

Hear what comfort He has spoken:

Smoking flax, He ne'er has quenched,

Bruised reed, He ne'er has broken.

"You who wander here below,

Heavy laden as you go,

Come with grief, with sin oppressed,

Come to me and be at rest!"

Lamb of Jesus' blood-bought flock,

Brought again from sin and straying.

Hear the Shepherd's gentle voice —

'Tis a true and faithful saying,

"Greater love how can there be,

Than to yield up life for Thee?

Bought with pang, and tear, and sigh,

Turn and live! — Why will you die?"

Broken-hearted, weep no more,

Far from consolation flying;

He who calls has felt your wound,
Seen your weeping, heard your sighing,
"Bring your broken heart to me.
Welcome offering it shall be;
Streaming tears and bursting sighs
My accepted sacrifice!"

13-The Noontide Eclipse

The Noontide Eclipse by William Bacon Stevens

"In that day," declares the Sovereign LORD, "I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight!" Amos 8:9 The sudden shutting out of sunlight by an eclipsing moon, is a solemn and impressive scene. The face of nature wears, at such times, a strange and peculiar aspect. The animal creation is overcome with instinctive dread, and man, even though science has taught him to unveil this mystery of the skies, is awe-struck and humbled by the sublime phenomenon. As the earth enters the penumbra, and the rays of the sun are first shorn of their light and heat, there arises a general feeling of expectation mingled with fear. Millions of eyes are turned heavenward, and when at last the moon encroaches on the sun's eastern limb, and slowly but surely obscures his bright disc, nearly every face in the shadowy belt is gazing upon the apparently extinguished orb in wonder, and unwillingly admitted alarm. And is not the going out of a great life, like the noontide eclipse? Is there not in the covering up in the grave of a form, once noble, active, and influential, something like the obscuration of the midday sun?

There certainly is, and it requires but a slight effort of imagination to seize upon many of the points of parallel. In human estimation the horizon of life, that point where the confines of the two worlds, the present and the future, meet and intermingle, is the far-off period of old age. Every man looks forward to the setting of his sun of life behind that western horizon, and scarcely dreams that it may go out suddenly at midday. Hence, death, in the years of manhood or womanhood — after the powers of mind and body have reached their meridian height, and before the shadows of the evening begin to be stretched out — may be termed a noontide eclipse — a going down of the sun at midday.

It seems, at times, strange to us that God should so often call away people from the active and influential duties of middle life, when they are apparently in the very zenith of their usefulness, and most needed in the world. We can only stand by in mute wonder and submission, as we behold the great props of the nation or church stricken down — when their supporting shoulders were most needed to uphold the incumbent edifice; or witness the great lights of learning and science gradually fade away in the firmament — when their beams were most vivifying and enlightening. We ponder with ourselves, how differently we would have arranged the event; we even, perhaps, question the wisdom of the deed, and we ask, with an ill-concealed repining at the Divine will: Why does God these things? But in this we are both ignorant and foolish. We are so accustomed to associate human machinery with divine purposes, that, when we behold a person occupying an important post in the councils of the church or nation, we at once associate the idea of such a necessary connection between the two as to make his removal perfectly disastrous.

Here is one surrounded by a large family — its supporting life and center — to take him away is like removing the nave of a wheel — the radiating spokes have no support, and the wheel is crushed and splits asunder at the first revolution. Here is another, the head and leader of an important system of agencies for the extension of Christ's kingdom; nothing apparently can be

done without his aid and counsel; and to remove him would derange a whole system of well-devised plans, and, perhaps, destroy them altogether. Here is another, a minister of Christ, the pastor of a large and influential congregation, the wielder of great moral strength, the doer of important service to the church, the motive power to a moral engine, the value of which cannot be computed. His life seems essential to the church, vast schemes of benevolence are hinged on him, and to do without him is to have a noonday eclipse. He cannot be spared; he must live — or the cause he sustains, like a tower of strength, will fail. Such are, oftentimes, men's views of their fellow men, and taking it for granted that they are true, they act accordingly.

Several circumstances here conspire to make our views on this point exceedingly defective. One is, that we look only at a small segment of the great circle of life, while God regards, with omniscient eye, the whole circumference of our being. How often has our own experience taught us that things which we earnestly desire, and even sinfully covet as necessary to our usefulness or comfort — would have proved, had they been granted to us, sources of real evil and permanent sorrow! How often have we formed, as we supposed, wise plans; secured, as we thought, their completion, been suddenly disappointed in carrying them into full execution, wept bitter tears perhaps over our failure — and then found, a few months or years afterwards, that, had those plans been successful, and our long-cherished hopes been gratified, it would have been most disastrous to our peace, and ruinous to our well-being!

We make these mistakes daily; we are continually correcting and readjusting our hopes and aims, and all this arises from the fact previously stated, that we look at our life only in the small section which is presented to us day by day, and cannot take those comprehensive views which sweep around its entire circumference, and survey the whole at a glance. So when we see a standard-bearer of truth, a mighty man of intellectual valor, a great central light in the moral firmament, fall in the midst of the battle, or faint in the heat of the conflict, or go out like an eclipsed sun at midday — we feel too much as if some great calamity had befallen our world which could not be repaired, and are too often led into murmuring as unfitting as it is unwise. Could we, for a moment, occupy God's point of view, and see the plans of human existence as He sees them — we would immediately perceive the infinite wisdom of causing these dreaded eclipses in human life, and in thus cutting off our hopes at the moment of expected fruition. Not only is our range of thought limited to a very small segment of life's circle — but we still further err in basing all our views on things as they appear on earth. We judge according to the worldly aspects of the case, according to its temporal influence; not considering that the relations of each individual, not only to this earth — but to time itself, are but a very small part of his outstanding relations to a world to come, and the eternity that stretches away beyond the grave. "No man," says the Apostle, "lives to himself;" and we see, with our own eyes, how impossible it is for man to isolate himself from his fellows; and may it not be that other, though to us invisible connections, may link us to other classes of beings, and to future cycles of existence, which render the breaks and interruptions of earth necessary. And hence, those things which seem to mar the harmonies of life, and make discords and woes in society, are requisite to the filling up of God's designs, which take in all worlds, all space, all duration. We are, certainly, not prepared to pronounce any event disastrous, evil, or unwise — until we have made ourselves acquainted with all the bearings and influences of that event in all worlds, through all space, and for all time; until, in fine, we occupy the stand point of Divinity itself. Could we but feel more seriously than we do . . .

how small is the section of our knowledge,

how short-sighted is our vision,

what meager minds we possess,

what limits bound us on every side —

we would not, methinks, be so arrogant, presumptuous, or dogmatic; we would not question God's wisdom, or impugn his justice, or asperse his mercy; we would not give way to . . .

such impatient repining,

such fault-finding sorrow,

such sinful despair.

We would, on the contrary, comfort ourselves under bereavements, with the thought that God does all things well; that though inscrutable to us, they were wisely ordered by him, and his course would yet be vindicated from all cavils before the assembled universe, when the multitudes that circle about the Great White Throne shall shout with one acclaim "God is right — God is true — God is just — God is love!"

We shall then see how, while He made what we deemed our interest subservient to his glory — He yet made his glory our highest good, causing us to fulfill the great ends of being more and more, as we aim to advance his glory — the reflected splendor of which constitutes the highest bliss of saint and seraph, in earth and Heaven.

If then, the whole of life was summed up in what we see of it this side the grave — if we were made to be the dwellers for a little season on this earth alone — or if the great end of existence was to glorify and exalt ourselves — then, indeed, the removal of friends in the meridian hour, or the sudden extinguishment of hope when it flamed brightest in the zenith, might be regarded as a dire calamity — a sad eclipse. And we might even deem it cruel for God thus to cause the sun to go down at noon, and to darken the earth in the clear day. But as life here is but the dawn of an eternal being; as the earth is but the probationary school of a higher existence; as God's glory, and not self-interest, is man's chief end and aim — so are we debarred, by this exalted Christian philosophy, from unduly repining, or casting blame on God, when he obscures to us the greater lights which rule in the day of our moral, or social, or political firmament.

He never eclipses them until they have done all their appointed work. If the sun goes down at noon — it is because that was its ordained boundary. And not only may we have this assurance — but we may add to it another, namely, that God never removes his servants from earth until the hour has arrived when he requires their service nearer to his person in Heaven.

"Learn," says an old writer, "to pray moderately for the lives of Christ's people. Who can tell but what Christ and we are praying counter to one another? He may be saying in Heaven, 'Father, I will have such an one to be with me where I am' — and we saying on earth, 'Lord we would have him to be with us where we are.' We saying 'we cannot spare him as yet;' and Christ saying 'I will be no longer without him.' It is the force of this prayer of Christ, 'I will have them to be with me where I am' — which is the cause of the death of the godly. It is the force of this prayer that carries

away so many of the saints in our day."

These are the enlarged views which it befits us to take of what, in their earthly aspect, may be called noontide eclipses; especially when it respects our Christian relatives and friends. Every other view is narrow, unsatisfactory, and unscriptural. The coming in of death between us and the dear objects of our love and veneration, at a time when they appear to ride the highest and shine the brightest in their career of usefulness and honor — does not forever obscure their light, or obliterate their beams, any more than the intervening moon blots out the sun, which it yet for a time hides from sight. For though these loved ones are eclipsed to us — they are not obscured to the eye of God. We cannot see them again in the flesh, for they have passed within the veil; but they are still seen, still loved by their Heavenly Father, their Ascended Savior, their Divine Comforter. They shine with even a brighter light than before their obscuration; for they are fuller of light in themselves, and their beams are not dimmed by the clouds and vapors which so obscured their earthly luster. There is no eclipse in Heaven; the soul that once begins its lustrous glory there, will ever emit the same holy rays, with a perpetually increasing intensity of spiritual light!

He has gone to his God; he has gone to his home;

No more amid peril and error to roam;

His eyes are no longer dim;

His feet will no longer falter;

No grief can follow him;

No pang his cheek can alter.

There are paleness and weeping and sighs below;

For our faith is faint and our tears will flow;

But the harps of Heaven are ringing;

Glad angels come to greet him,

And hymns of joy are singing,

While old friends press to meet him.

O! honored, beloved, to earth unconfined,

You have soared on high, you have left us behind.

But our parting is not forever,

We will follow you by heaven's light,

Where the grave cannot dissever

The souls whom God will unite.

14-The Setting Sun

The Setting Sun by William Bacon Stevens

"The daylight is fading, and the shadows of evening grow long." Jeremiah 6:4

There is something at once grand and solemn in a setting sun. It is the sinking to rest of the great king of day; the withdrawing from the busy world, the light that has called out its activity; and the covering up with the veil of darkness, the scenes that glistened with the radiance of noon. As the sun rose in the morning, it awoke the world from slumber, and sent its teeming millions to their tasks and pleasures. As it poised itself for a moment in the meridian, it shone upon an active, bustling, life-filled hemisphere; and now that it touches the edge of the western sky, and gradually shuts its burning eye--it proclaims a day of work ended, a night of rest advancing, the cessation of toil and business, and the coming in of quiet, sleep, and silence. This change, though so little considered, is very marvelous and striking: from brightness--to darkness; from noonday with its garish light--to midnight with its somber blackness; from the din and bustle of intense activity--to the repose and silence of hushing slumber; from scenes mirthful and blithe in all the adornments of art, and decked with the painted splendors of meridian light--to scenes of stillness, darkness, and death-like sleep.

There is, however, in the setting of the sun of life that which is equally grand, still more solemn, and surpassingly sublime. For, The sun is but a spark of fire--

A transient meteor in the sky;

The Soul, immortal as its Sire,

Shall never die. The Soul, of origin divine,

God's glorious image, freed from clay,

In heaven's eternal sphere shall shine,

A star of day!

Though the soul, by virtue of its immortality, and the eternal interests connected with it, is thus infinitely superior to the sun, which is but a mass of inanimate matter, and which, when it has served its purpose, shall be blotted out--yet there are several striking analogies between the setting of the sun of nature, and the setting of the sun of life, which suggest profitable considerations. In speaking of a human sunset--we restrict our thoughts to those only who die in the Lord, and so sleep in Jesus. The sun when it sets, has run a whole day's circuit; his pathway has apparently traversed an entire arch of the heavens, and slowly, patiently--but surely, it has done its allotted work. And just so the aged Christian, when he dies, is described as having "run his race," as having "finished his course." He has perhaps traversed the allotted distance of human life. He has passed each of its threescore-and-ten milestones, and now stands at the verge of the horizon, waiting to sink to rest in the everlasting arms. He has toiled a whole day of life, and

has come to his grave at a "good old age," having "finished the work which was given him to do." And though all his labors have been imperfectly done, though he himself feels more deeply than he can express, his unprofitableness before God--yet he looks for acceptance, not to any merit or deservings of his own--but only for Christ Jesus' sake, who of God and by faith is made unto him "wisdom and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption."

We can contemplate with satisfaction, then, the aged disciple, having "borne the burden and heat of the day," patiently waiting for the stretching out of the evening shadows, and the hour of his own sunset. His life has been consecrated to Christ. He has endeavored to walk by faith, not by sight. He has set the Lord always before him, and has run with patience the Christian race, "looking unto Jesus." He has relaxed his hold upon the world; he has renounced all righteousness in and of himself. He looks alone for salvation to the perfect and finished work of his blessed Redeemer; and, resting his whole soul and its eternal interests in the pierced hands of Him who died that he might live--he quietly awaits his appointed time, and, strong in the abounding grace of God, he is enabled to say, with a modest, though well assured triumph, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of glory, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me in that day!"

Another point to be considered is, the fact that the setting of the sun is not always like the day which it closes. The morning may have been bright--and the evening hour dark with tempests; or the sun-rising may have been obscured by clouds and mists, which gradually faded away and left a clear sky at sunset. How often, after nearly a whole day of rain and dullness, has the descending sun broken through the clouds on the horizon, and shone out between the rifted vapors with a gorgeousness all the more glorious, because of the preceding gloom! Nay, how have those very storm mists, which gathered around the west in dark and heavy folds, or which rolled upwards in murky convolutions, been so gilded with his light as to shine like burnished metal, as if the sky was plated with Solomon's "three hundred shields of beaten gold," making the whole west a scene of inexpressible glory. So the sunset hour of Christian life does not always correspond to his previous day. We have seen the last hours of the believer shrouded in impenetrable gloom--and we have seen them gilded with hope and radiant with the forecast glories of the upper world. The way in which a Christian dies, is not always an index of his spiritual condition. He is to be judged by his life--not by his death. The great virtues which make up Christian character are neither developed nor called into action on a dying bed; and it is not in the emotions and feelings manifested there, that we are chiefly to look for evidences of a gracious state.

Self-denial,

the mortification of our passions,

the crucifying ourselves to the world,

the resisting of earthly temptations,

the putting into active exercise, and amidst opposing difficulties, the whole class of Christian graces which flow out from the simple principle of loving our neighbor as ourselves; and the manifestation of that life of faith, of prayer, of holiness, of zeal, which necessarily results from the constraining love of Christ in the heart--all these qualities and tests of character scarcely find a place on a dying bed, so that people thus situated have few opportunities to develop the true

evidences of the work of grace.

We read, indeed, of many marked and happy deathbeds--but we also read of many closing hours of Christian life, where the believer had no special manifestations of divine favor, where no time even has been given for the utterance of feelings, and where even a melancholy bordering on despair, has cast a somber hue over the going down of the disciple's sun. We have in our mind's eye, cases of each of these, where, however, not the slightest doubt existed as to the real conversion of the individual, or as to his final acceptance in the Beloved.

There are some Christians who may be called weepers and mourners nearly all their days; their deep consciousness of sin, their extreme sensitiveness to evil, their ever present fear to offend God--make their eyes to run down with tears night and day; and so perhaps it continues until the evening sun bursts through the falling mists, and paints a beautiful rainbow of promise on the raindrops of penitential sorrow.

There are others whose faith is blurred and indistinct; they have no clear and well defined appreciation of the great truths of the Bible; their sky of religious experience is overcast with a thin layer of cloud, which, while it does not shut out the light or heat of the sun, prevents the eye from viewing it distinctly, or from enjoying its unveiled splendor. They live, perhaps for years, in this almost twilight Christianity--but as they approach the grave the vapors become thinner and thinner, until a clear strip of blue lies above the horizon, and the descending sun shines out full-orbed and glorious before he sinks to his evening rest.

There are others, whose experience is April-like: a fleckered sky is over their heads, and alternate light and shadow fall upon their path: and sometimes these come to the grave rejoicing--and sometimes sorrowing; sometimes they go down amidst a blaze of golden glory--and sometimes massive doubts and fears are banked up like clouds over the west, so that they seem to set in darkness.

These varieties of Christian experience are literally innumerable; but whatever their nature, we must not judge of the validity of one's hope, or the genuineness of one's conversion--by his dying hour. Yet, when that dying hour accords with a long life of piety, or a true profession maintained in health and strength; when it is but a concentrating within itself of the glories which have been more or less visible in the whole track of his experience--then is it eloquent in its revelations of the riches and peace and joy, which God generally gives to those who are faithful unto death. And though we cannot order when or how our lives shall close upon earth--yet it should be our aim so to live as to secure, if God pleases--a serene, if not a triumphant exit, that our setting sun may, like the sun in the skies, grow large and more resplendent as it declines, until passing away, it shall leave behind it a trail of glory spread all over the place of our departure.

Another interesting thought connected with this subject is, that the sun is not lost or extinguished when it sets. This may seem a very trite remark concerning the natural sun--but it is not so trite when we speak of the soul-set in death. For are we not apt to grieve over the going down of our friends to the grave--as if they were to be forever hidden in its dark chamber, or as if the bright spark of their immortality had been suddenly quenched? They have gone from us; the horizon of death shuts them out of view; their light of love, of hope, of piety, shines no more upon us, and we shall never again behold them in the flesh. But they are no more lost, than the sun is lost when his

red disc rolls down behind the western hills! They are no more extinguished, than the burning orb of day is quenched when he sinks beneath the waves of the ocean. For, as the sun leaving us in darkness still lights up other lands--so our departed ones shine in another sphere of existence still, not lost, not extinguished--but, if the friends of Christ, made to glow with a brighter light and a more enduring glory.

When, therefore, we stand by their coffins, by their graves, or return sad and heavy-laden to their vacant dwellings--we should not mourn for them as those without hope, we should not give vent to grief as though they were lost to us altogether. They are hidden--but not lost, removed from our sight--but not extinct. They are still alive, only with a more exquisite vitality unfettered by sin, unencumbered by flesh, undefiled by the world, dwelling as redeemed spirits in the paradise of God. And this remark leads us to make one final observation, namely, that when we see the sun set--we know that it will rise again. And so when we see the body of our friends borne to the voiceless dwelling of the tomb--we know that they also shall rise again.

Every night of death is followed by a resurrection morning. How precious is the thought as connected with God's people, that they shall rise from the dead! How rise? With glorified bodies, upon which the second death has no power. Rise by what power? By the mighty power of God. Rise when? "When the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from Heaven with all his mighty angels, then shall they be caught up to meet him in the air!" Rise to what? To glory, honor, and immortality in the presence-chamber of God.

How these thoughts light up with brightness, every sepulcher of the righteous! How the doctrine of the resurrection throws a halo over every Christian's head-stone, and makes each open grave a little gate leading into glory!

Reader, have you lost a father, mother, brother, sister, wife, husband, child, or loved one--and were they Christ's before they died? Then lift up your heads, wipe away your tears, cheer up your hearts--for they shall come forth again before your face. Their sunset, though it left you in gloom and midnight sorrow--will soon be followed by the dawn of Resurrection day. And when the archangel's trumpet shall sound out over land and sea, awaking the myriads who slumber in earth's bosom, then shall your beloved ones who sunk to rest in Jesus--rise again, and go forth to meet and glorify their adorable Redeemer.

Thoughts like these cluster around the setting sun of the aged disciple of Jesus. Why should we wish to detain him? His work is done. Why desire to hold him back from the grave? It is through the gate and grave of death, that he passes to his inheritance above. Why be inconsolable at his departure? He is not lost, neither is the light of his mind or heart extinguished. Why mourn as those who have no hope, beside his tombstone? He shall not lie there long. He is planted there in the likeness of Christ's death--that he may rise with Christ to the resurrection of eternal life. And not many more days shall roll over you, before you and they shall all rise again; "those who have done good to the resurrection of life--and those who have done evil to the resurrection of damnation."

Rejoice rather when one you love, who is full of days and full of grace--sets like a sun behind the horizon of life. Rejoice, for he shall rise again! And when that morning of the resurrection dawns, it will usher in a day that has no clouds, a day that has no sunset--and a day that is followed by no

night of sorrow or of death!

"Life's Sunset" As calmly sinks the setting sun

To realms of gold in gorgeous skies;

When day and all its toils are done--

In glorious peace the good man dies. As glow the stars when darkness falls,

To cheer the close of fading day,

So, brightening hopes, when death appalls

From Heaven gleam to light his way. As peaceful clouds along the sky

Retain the glories of the sun.

In memory bright are floating by

His deeds of love in meekness done.

He dies!--as passed the dreary night.

The sun 'mid streams of light appears;

So, passed the valley, a holier light

Bespeaks the glorious crown he wears.

You, who art enthroned on high!

To me Your saving grace be given

To live, and like the good man die;

Like him, be crowned of you in Heaven!

15-Christ the Keyholder of the Eternal World

Christ the Keyholder of the Eternal World by James Buchanan

"When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hell." Revelation 1:17-18

Every clause of this sublime declaration, coming as it does from our glorified Redeemer, is pregnant with assurance and consolation to his believing people, and is specially fitted to banish those fearful and anxious forebodings which oppress their minds in the prospect of dissolution.

"I am the living one" — the first and the last, without beginning of days or end of years, self-existent, and, therefore, independent of every outward condition, and incapable of change. He asserts his supreme divinity as a reason why his disciples should "not fear;" and, surely, to every Christian mind, the fact, that the Son of Man, in whom they have trusted as their Savior, is "the Living One," may well furnish a ground of unshaken confidence, since it assures us that, happen what may, our trust is reposed on one, whose existence, and whose power to affect our welfare, cannot be destroyed by any event whatever, and that our interests for eternity are absolutely safe, being placed in his hands. But how much greater ought to be our confidence in him, and how much sweeter the consolation which his words impart, when he adds, "I WAS dead." He appears to the Apostle not simply as "the Living One," the self-existent Son of God — but as God manifested in the flesh, the Son of God in human nature, and even in his glorified state, "like unto the Son of Man," whom the beloved disciple had oftentimes seen and followed as the "man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief."

Let us attempt to conceive of the feelings with which the beloved disciple must have looked on his glorified Master; let us remember that he had companied with him on earth, that he had leaned upon his bosom, and that he knew the sad history of his crucifixion — and we cannot fail to perceive how the mere fact, that the same divine Redeemer now stood before him, and spoke with him of the decease which he had accomplished at Jerusalem, must have served to annihilate in the mind of the Apostle the fear of death, and to open up to his view such a glorious prospect into the invisible world, as would strip the pathway that led to Heaven of its terrors, however dark and dismal it might otherwise be. And to every Christian, the words of our Lord, "I was dead," will suggest reflections that should serve to fortify the mind against the fear of dissolution; or, at all events, to rebuke and mitigate the aversion with which it is usually contemplated. Did the Redeemer die — a Being who claims to himself the dignity of "the Living One" — a Being not only of infinite dignity — but of spotless purity, and who, from the beginning until the end of his existence on earth, was the object of God's supreme delight and approbation? And shall we complain that death is allotted as our portion also? We, who, as created beings, are insignificant — by inheritance, mortal — by actual guilt, polluted and debased? To us, death comes as wages earned by guilt; but even were it otherwise — did death come to us as an accident of our being — should we complain of the hardness of our lot, when Christ himself declares, "I was dead?" Did the

Redeemer die — as the surety and representative of sinners? Was his death a solemn expiation of our guilt, and an adequate satisfaction to God for the penalty which we had incurred? Is there no reason, then, to suppose, that dying, as he did, in the room and on behalf of the guilty — death met him in a more formidable shape, and put into his hands a bitterer cup than can now fall to the lot of any of his people; and that their dissolution will be greatly less terrible than it would have been, by reason of his enduring in their room the heaviest part of it? For what is it that mainly embitters death, and surrounds it, even when viewed at a distance, with innumerable terrors? Not surely the mere pain with which it is accompanied — for equal or greater pain we have often endured — not the mere dissolution of the tie between soul and body — for if that was before all, however our sensitive nature might shrink from the shock, our rational nature might enable us to regard it with composure — not the mere separation from the society and business of the present world — for that, however it may awaken a feeling of melancholy regret, can hardly account for the forebodings and terrors of which every mind is more or less conscious when it contemplates death.

No, it is something more than the mere pain of dying, or the mere dissolving of the elements of our being, or the mere separation from this world, that embitters the cup of death. "The sting of death is sin" — the same sin which gave us over as a prey to death, makes us also slaves to the fear of death; for, by the unvarying law of conscience, sin and fear are bound up together; and it is a conscience burdened with guilt, and apprehensive of punishment — which arrays death with terrors unknown to the inferior and irresponsible creation. But Christ died to expiate and cancel the guilt of his people; he has already endured, and by enduring, has taken away the penalty of their transgression. Death remains — but its sting is taken away; so that we may "thank God, who has given us the victory through Jesus Christ our Lord," and may exclaim with the Apostle, "Oh! death, where is now your sting! Oh! grave, where is your victory!" Did the Redeemer die — that he might show us an example of suffering affliction with patience, and be to us a pattern of faith and hope in our last extremity? And is there no consolation in the thought, that when You reach the shore of that dark water which divides time and eternity — we can fix our eye on one who, for our sakes, crossed it in triumph before us; and think of the love of our Redeemer, who, in compassion to our fears, became "bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh," that, by his own example, he might teach us how to die? Had he returned from earth to Heaven in triumph; had he avoided the dark valley himself, and, summoning his legions of angels, left the world by a direct ascension to glory, then, whatever lessons he might have taught, and whatever commands and encouragements he might have addressed to his followers, respecting their conduct in that last hour of darkness and distress — his instructions would have had little effect in comparison with the charm of his example, when, placing himself in their circumstances, and submitting to their fate, he "bowed his head and gave up the spirit;" and met death, as he commands his people to meet it, in the exercise of an unshaken confidence in God, and humble submission to his will. Where shall we find such another example of holy fortitude for our imitation? Where shall we find such another instance of success for our encouragement? Did the Redeemer die — that he might not only deprive death of its sting — but overcome him that had the power of death, and take it into his own hands? Let us, then, rejoice in his success; for once Satan had the power of death — but Christ has "carried captivity captive," and "Satan has fallen before him as lightning from Heaven." In that hour, which he did himself emphatically call "the hour and the power of darkness," when he was in more than mortal agony, travailing in the greatness of his strength, he vanquished death and Hell, and he wrested

from the hands of our greatest enemy, and took into his own possession, the keys of death and of the invisible world. Death still reigns — but Christ has now the dominion over death. In token of his victory, the Redeemer adds, "I am ALIVE FOR EVERMORE." The grave received — but it could not retain him; and while the fact of his interment may well serve to reconcile us to the peaceful grave, with all its loneliness and darkness, since it was embalmed by the presence of our Lord himself, the fact of his resurrection from the grave should enkindle the bright hope of a glorious morning, after that dark night has passed away.

For, did the Redeemer arise from the tomb? Then here, at least, is one example of restoration to life after the agony of death was past — one case in which the spell of death was broken, and the cerements of the tomb burst, and the power of Satan vanquished — one living monument of the immortality of man — one incontestable proof, that the same body which died, and the same spirit which departed, may meet again after that fearful separation. Christ has risen, and in his resurrection we find the ground of an eternal hope. Did the Redeemer arise from the grave in the same character in which he died — as the head and representative of his people? Then his resurrection is not only the proof — but the pledge; not only the evidence, but the pledge of our own. For if the head is risen, shall not the members of his body rise also? If, as our representative, he has passed into the heavens, shall not we, in whose name, and for whose behalf, he undertook and accomplished his mediatorial work, follow him in our order and time? Did we die with him — and shall we not rise with him? "If we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection." "If we are dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him." "Because I live, you shall live also." Did the Redeemer not only rise from the grave — but does he live for evermore? Is he the same yesterday, today, and forever? Not only eternal in his being — but unchangeable in his character, as our Redeemer? What, then, should cause us to despond, or make us afraid? Or "what shall separate us from the love of Christ?" Since Christ has died, yes, also, and has risen again, and is now and forever at the right hand of God, "I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall separate us from his love!" True, we know not what may yet befall us, nor into what untried circumstances, or state of being, we may hereafter be brought; we are sure that one day we must die and enter the invisible world; and we may well be concerned for an event which will have an everlasting outcome for good or for evil; but placing our trust in the efficacy of the Redeemer's death, and believing in the fact of his resurrection, we may take his own word as the rock of our confidence and hope, "I am alive for evermore. Amen;" and "because I live — you shall live also."

If these views of the death and resurrection of our blessed Lord are fitted to banish, or mitigate, the fear of dissolution, and to inspire the hope of a glorious immortality — then how much should their impression be aided by the sublime statement in the last clause of the passage, "I have the keys of Hell and of death!" The power of the keys is an absolute power — a royal prerogative. Christ's authority is not confined to the visible Church on earth; it extends to the invisible world, and embraces under its jurisdiction all the disembodied spirits, of whatever character: although they have left this world, they are still under the dominion of him, of whom it is said, that "at his name every knee shall bow, of things in Heaven, of things on earth, and of things under the earth; and every tongue confess that he is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

It is as the Redeemer, that he asserts his claim to the keys; that claim is founded on the fact, that "he overcame death and him that had the power of death, in order to deliver those who, through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage;" and it is expressly declared by the Apostle, that, for this end, Christ both died and rose again, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living." That he is the Lord of the dead, is here asserted, "I have the keys of Hell." In the original there are two terms, each of which is rendered by the word "Hell" in the English version; the one, however, literally imports the invisible world at large, while the other denotes that department of the invisible world which is specially appropriated to the punishment of the wicked. In the passage before us, the more comprehensive term is used; and here, as elsewhere, it is to be regarded as signifying not merely the place of future punishment, although that is unquestionably included in it — but, more generally, the world of spirits, the entire state of retribution, whether of reward or punishment. We learn from Scripture, that the whole of that vast world is divided into two departments, and only two — Heaven and Hell; and that between the two, a great gulf is fixed — an impassable gulf of separation: but separated as they are, Christ reigns over both; and when he says, "I have the keys of the invisible world," he asserts his dominion over all the spirits that have ever passed from this world, either into Heaven or Hell; and his absolute control over them in their final destination of happiness or woe. When it is affirmed, that he has also "the key of death," it is plainly implied that no spirit can pass out of this present world without his permission or appointment; and, more generally, that he is lord of the living not less than of the dead, and has a thorough control over everything that can in any way affect the lives of men. An absolute power over death necessarily presupposes a corresponding power over life and its affairs; and it is by the exercise of his providence in sustaining life, that he fulfills his purpose as to the time and mode of their departure hence. So that, combining these several views, we arrive at this grand and comprehensive result, that the Redeemer is possessed of absolute power over the course of our lives on earth, over the time and manner of our departure out of the world, and over that invisible state, in each of its great departments, on which our spirits enter when they leave their mortal tabernacles. And this noble testimony to the universal power and everlasting presence of Christ with his disciples, is fitted to suggest several reflections, which may be useful in dissipating their anxieties, and in fortifying their courage, when they contemplate either the future course of their pilgrimage here, or the solemn prospect of its termination, or the still more solemn, because untried and eternal, state on which they shall enter hereafter. Has the Redeemer the keys of death? Then this consideration ought to relieve our minds both of the anxieties and the regrets which we are too apt to feel, in reference to the changes of the present life.

It should mitigate the anxiety which often preys upon the mind when we look forward into futurity, and contemplate the prospect of our own dissolution. We should remember, that as the Redeemer alone has the keys of death — nothing can happen to send us forth from our work, before the time which he has appointed for our departure. Neither man nor devils can abridge the term of probation assigned to us by our gracious Master. Nor, until he is pleased to call us away, shall any power on earth or in Hell prevail against us — no accident, no hostile violence, no insidious snare, no dark conspiracy, can touch our life — but by his command! The same consideration should prevent or repress the anxiety which is too often felt respecting the mode and circumstances of our dissolution — not less than respecting the time of its occurrence. This consideration should repress, not only the anxieties which we feel in regard to the future — but also the regrets which we are too apt to cherish respecting the bereavements with which we have already been visited. It

is not less instructive and consoling, when viewed in reference to the death of relatives and friends, than when it is considered in respect to our own prospect of dissolution. For it teaches us, that the duration of each man's existence here is determined by the Redeemer — that it belongs to him to appoint a longer or shorter period to each, as he will. And in doing so, we have reason to be satisfied, that he determines according to the dictates of infallible wisdom, although the reasons of his procedure must necessarily be to us, for the present, inscrutable. We cannot tell why one is removed in infancy, another in boyhood, a third in the prime of manly vigor, and a fourth reserved to the period of old age; and, above all, why the most promising in talent and character, and the most useful in their several stations, are taken away — while others of inferior worth are often left behind. But suffice it for us, that this happens not by chance, neither is it the result of caprice or carelessness — but flows from that unerring wisdom, whose counsels are formed on a view of all possible relations and consequences, whether as to the visible or invisible, the present or the future states of being. The power of death being in the hands of the Redeemer, the duration of human life is, in every instance, determined by him; and none, therefore, ought to entertain the thought, either that death is, in one case, unduly premature, or, in another, unduly delayed. None live, either for a longer or for a shorter period, than infinite wisdom has assigned to them. And as reason teaches, that to his appointment we must submit, however unwilling — it being irresistible, and far beyond our control. So, as Christians, we should learn to acquiesce in it cheerfully, as the appointment of one who cannot err. That the determined hour had arrived, is a reflection that should serve to banish every useless regret — but that this hour was fixed by one in whose wisdom we confide, and of whose interest in our welfare we have the strongest assurance, is a thought which should not only induce resignation — but inspire comfort and peace.

For, when death does seize any of our friends, whether in the ordinary course of disease and decay, or by violence or accident — how consolatory to the mourning relatives is the thought, that it came at the bidding of the Savior, and that it has not arrived without his sanction and appointment! Otherwise, we might be apt to reflect, with unavailing regret, on certain needless exposures that might have been avoided, certain remedies whose virtues might have been tried, certain names high in professional reputation, who might have been consulted; or to dwell, with painful self-reproach, on certain accidents that might have been prevented, and injuries which timely care might have cured. The mind will often busy itself with such reflections after the loss of a near and dear friend; but the very intensity of feeling which is thus called forth, is a sufficient proof that any carelessness or negligence that may have been manifested — was far, very far, from being designed or willful. And although, where criminal negligence has been shown, no doctrine, however consolatory, can prevent regret, or should repress feelings of penitential sorrow. Yet, in other cases, where the heart bears witness to its own interest in the beloved object, the doctrine of Christ's absolute command over the keys of death, and the consideration that our friend was summoned away by a deliberate act of his sovereign wisdom — may well assuage the grief which such reflections on the commencement, progress, and treatment of the disease, are accustomed to awaken in the most sensitive and affectionate minds.

While this sublime statement should banish, or at least mitigate, the anxieties and regrets which we sometimes experience, in reference to the events of the present life, inasmuch as Christ's power over death implies a corresponding power over life and its affairs, it is equally fitted to fortify our minds for the last struggle of nature, since it assures us that Christ will then be present with us.

In the very article of death, it gives us comfort. For, has the Redeemer the keys of death? Then he presides over that dark passage which leads from this world to the next; his power does not terminate with our present life; it extends from the world which is smiling in the cheerful light of day, to that mysterious passage which lies amidst the sepulchers of the dead, and which, to our imperfect vision — is shrouded in impenetrable darkness. We know not the secrets of that passage. We cannot know what it is to die. The mind may then have views and feelings of which it is impossible for us at present to form any conception; for who shall attempt to describe what may be passing in the soul when, the tie that binds it to the body is breaking, and nature is undergoing dissolution? And what renders that scene still more solemn is, that we die alone — alone we enter on the dark valley. Friends and family may stand around our couch, and watch the progress of dissolution; but they cannot accompany us, neither are they sensible of what we feel, nor able in any way to help or deliver us. The spirit departs alone; and in that solemn hour of separation from human fellowship — in that solitude of death, when, placed on the verge of the invisible world, we know that all behind must be forsaken, and are ignorant of what may meet us as we advance — oh! how consolatory to reflect, that death itself is subject to the Redeemer's power — that he watches over the dissolution of his people, and keeps his eye, not only on the busy scenes of life — but also on the secret mysteries of death!

Yes, "precious in the sight of the Lord, is the death of his saints." There he is, where most we need a friend and comforter, standing at the gate of death, with absolute power over every enemy that can assail us, and with unquenchable zeal for our welfare. As dark, then, as the passage is, and unknown as are its dangers and pains — surely we may venture to commit ourselves into his hands, and to say with the Psalmist, "Yes, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil — for you are with me. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me;" for, says the Apostle, "all things are yours, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or life — or death." As Christ has the key of the invisible world at large, so has he the key of each ward or department — the keys of Heaven and of Hell. Has he the key of Hell? Then, knowing as we do, that there are rebellious spirits of great subtlety, and power, and malice, and that they are sometimes permitted to go about as roaring lions, seeking whom they may devour, we might have many an anxious fear, lest, in the dark hour of death, some such should be watching for our spirit, when it ventures alone into the invisible world. But "precious in the sight of the Lord, is the death of his saints" — to that death-bed, the watchful eye of the Savior is directed; he can and will restrain the malice of our enemies; and his promise is, that "whoever believes on him shall never come into condemnation," and that "none shall pluck them out of his Father's hand!" And has the Redeemer the keys of Heaven — that blessed asylum of purity and peace, where, in the midst of his redeemed, the Savior himself dwells? Then, in the hands of our best friend, one who is pledged to us by the sacredness of his word, and by the shedding of his own blood — in his hands is the power of admitting us. And will he shut the door against us? — he who, for the opening of that door, descended from Heaven to earth, and whose prayer was and is, "Father, I will that those who you have given me — be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory?"

No! The door of Heaven is thrown open for the reception of his penitent and believing people. Even now is he "preparing a place for them in his Father's house, where there are many mansions;" and thus will he receive and welcome them, on their departure hence:

"Come, you blessed of my Father — inherit the kingdom prepared for you!"

"Well done, good and faithful servants, enter into the joy of your Lord!"

"I am the Resurrection and the Life!" John 11:25

Dead in sin, and deep in shame,

Kindle, Lord, a vital flame;

Bid the clouds and darkness flee,

Bid me rise and rest in Thee—

Raise me Savior,

Raise to all eternity.

Breathe into this soul of mine

Life eternal, life divine;

Slay these passions, fierce and rife,

End, end this mortal strife—

Conquering Savior,

You the victory are and life.

Free from sin — from Satan free;

Let my life be hid with Thee;

Send your seraphs from the skies,

Seal this living sacrifice—

Risen Savior,

Ceaseless let this incense rise!

O'er the silence of the tomb,

May celestial vigor bloom;

When the world dissolves in fire,

Then in robes of light attire—

Then, Savior,

May I join the immortal choir!

16-The Compassionate High Priest

The Compassionate High Priest by William Bacon Stevens

"Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need!" Hebrews 4:14-16 In the Jewish economy, the High Priest occupied solemn and peculiar relations. A descendant of Aaron — anointed with the holy oil — clad in garments made for glory and for beauty — unblemished in person, sacred in office, and standing once each year before the mercy-seat in the Holy of Holies as the mediator between God and his people Israel — he became invested with a sacredness and a majesty of character befitting to him who stood among men as the representative of God. To this pompous office, the Jews had become much attached, and the design of Paul in the Epistle to the Hebrews was to transfer their love of this office as a Mosaic institution — to Christ, a High Priest greater than Aaron, in the new and Christian dispensation. This he does by showing how Christ was in all points equal to the Jewish high priest, and in many ways far exceeded him; thus establishing claims to their regard and obedience beyond those which pertained to the Aaronic priesthood. This position we shall better understand, by showing wherein they were analogous, and wherein the priestly office of Christ exceeded that of Aaron or his sons. The Aaronic high priest must be called of God. "No man," says Paul, "takes this honor upon himself; he must be called by God, just as Aaron was. So Christ also did not take upon himself the glory of becoming a high priest. But God said to him: You are my Son; today I have become your Father!" Hebrews 5:4-5 The Aaronic high priesthood was unchangeable. It could never depart from the family of Aaron. So Christ being made a High Priest, changes not, "but abides a priest continually." He "has an unchangeable priesthood." The Aaronic high priest was to be anointed with the holy oil. The very name of our Savior (Christ, or Messiah,) showed that he was anointed by God to execute his mediatorial office; set apart to the office, not with the anointing oil employed in the solemn consecration of Aaron and his sons — but with the antitype of that oil, "the Spirit of grace" poured upon him without measure by the hand of God. Acts 10:38 The high priest must be without blemish, and holy. He must be sound and healthy in body and mind. Aaron and his sons were also originally sanctified externally by a long series of most solemn offerings and ceremonies; their garments were styled holy, and "Holiness to the Lord" was engraved on a plate, which they were directed to wear upon their miters. "Such a High Priest," says Paul, "is Christ, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners," of whom even his enemies declared they found "no fault in him." His very garments were holy, for the sick and infirm but touched the hem of them — and they were made whole. The Aaronic high priest only could enter into the Holy of Holies once each year, and then only with blood. So Christ entered into the "most holy place" above with the blood wrung from him in Gethsemane and on Calvary. The Aaronic high priest only could make a ceremonial atonement for the sins of the people; and Christ, as the High Priest of our salvation,

"by a sacrifice and oblation of himself once offered, made a full, perfect, and sufficient" atonement for the sins of the world.

These are some of the more prominent analogies between the priesthood of Christ and the priesthood of Aaron; and, were we to pursue the comparison further — we would find that the symbolic and temporary ministrations of the one, had their end and perfection in the spiritual and unchangeable priesthood of the other. But there are qualities and attributes far above these, which show the superiority of Christ's high priesthood. The high priest of the Jews was a sinful being. The High Priest of the gospel was holy. The one, had to make atonement for himself as a sinner; the other, "knew no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth." The high priest of the Jews was a man — weak, frail, mortal man — born of dust to be buried in the dust. But the High Priest Jesus, "is the same yesterday, today, and forever." The high priest of the Jews was on earth, and only entered into the Holy of Holies once a year to make an annual expiation for the sins of the nation on the great day of atonement. But our High Priest is in Heaven, the true Holy of Holies, and there "he ever lives to make intercession for us;" so that not once a year merely — but at all times; not at Jerusalem only — but in all places, we can have "boldness of access to his mercy-seat." The Christian dispensation, then, outvies the Levitical in the glory and exaltedness of its great High Priest who has passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God. And hence the Apostle subjoins the exhortation to the Hebrews, "let us hold fast our profession," for they were particularly inclined to apostatize from Christianity, and go back to Judaism, being tempted by their unconverted brethren to regard the Mosaic religion and the whole Jewish ritual as far more elevated, splendid, and magnificent than the Christian — in comparison with whose temple, service, and gorgeous ceremonials — the origin and rites of the religion of Jesus appeared base and insignificant. By therefore showing these Hebrew Christians that we had a High Priest not only equal in office and dignity — but far more exalted than the high priest of the temple, he urged them to hold fast their profession, not to relinquish their grasp on Christianity, because there was no such external ritual in the primitive church — no such altars, sacrifices, offerings, priests, as in the Jewish church — for all these were more than met and answered by the plenitude of grace in the new dispensation.

And, in view of their peculiarly exposed position to the assaults of the tempter, he brings the touching argument, "for we have not a High Priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are — yet without sin." Ah, my brethren, this was just such a Priest as man needed — a Priest that could feel for him; a High Priest that was compassionate; a great High Priest who could be touched with the feeling of our infirmities — one in all points tempted as we are — yet without sin. There was nothing like this in the old dispensation. It was reserved for the gospel to introduce to man a High Priest, who, while exalted in the heavens, could yet be touched with the feeling of our infirmities — who was tempted with all the temptations of humanity — yet did not sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth.

Christ, then, our great High Priest, is touched with the feeling of our infirmities; and O, to creatures so full of infirmities as ourselves — how delightful to have a spiritual ruler who understands them, and is touched with them with an abiding sympathy.

Sin has shorn us of our glory, and strewn the earth with curses, and planted the path of man with infirmities and sorrows. We are prone to suffering — we are subject to disease — we are victims of adversity, and we stagger under the weight of our mental and physical infirmities, from the tiny

footsteps of childhood to the feeble tread of threescore and ten. Under these infirmities we groan being burdened; we feel the workings of the curse of sin, every day of our life; and the loss of limb and function and strength and health, which is everywhere going on around us — show us the sadness and misery of man's earthly condition.

These infirmities, through the influence of the body on the mind and soul — often lead us into sin and temptation, become avenues of assault upon the heart, and the means whereby faith is weakened, and love chilled, and hope repressed, and the soul bereft of its holy aspirations. In sickness, how much are we tempted to impatience and repining. In bereavements, how apt to murmur and complain. In adversity, how often do we show the restive and untamed spirit of a worldling! No infirmity of mind or body can overtake us, without begetting some unholy feelings towards our Creator.

Now Jesus, our blessed Master — suffered the ills of life when on earth; hunger, thirst, cold, poverty, reproach, buffetings, and all the infirmities of man. His compassionate heart is therefore touched by our sorrows, and deeply sympathizes with all our distresses. Frequently was this exhibited when on earth. He was moved with compassion when he saw the multitude scattered abroad as sheep having no shepherd. He had compassion on the multitude without bread — at seeing in the throng sick people, whom he healed — at the sight of blind men, whom he restored to sight — at a leper, whom he cured — at a child possessed of an evil spirit, which he cast out — at beholding a mother's grief, whose son he restored to life. Yes, his mission to man was prompted by mercy, and his life on earth was full of compassion.

We know how delightful it is when suffering under any sickness or calamity, to have the sympathy and pity of those we love; to feel that in their bosoms are kindred emotions of tenderness and regard, causing them to weep with those who weep. But how much more cheering is it to the Christian, bowed beneath some burdensome sorrow — to know that he has the compassion and sympathy of his Savior! To know that Jesus, the Son of God, our ever-living High Priest in Heaven — is touched with the feeling of his infirmities! The Christian can know no need, no affliction, no suffering — which Jesus does not feel, and towards which his compassions do not flow out! And this is not a mere inoperative compassion, expending itself in words and professions — but it is a sympathy joined to a willingness to do, and an ability to do, for our relief. For having been himself tempted, he is both able and willing to support those who are tempted. Many people have borne the same afflictions which befall us — who are not willing to sympathize with us. Many are willing to sympathize with us, who have not experienced like tribulations. And many are both able and willing to extend to us their compassion — who are yet unable to do anything for our comfort or relief. But our compassionate High Priest unites all these. He has been a man of sorrows, and acquainted with griefs, and can therefore sympathize experimentally with us. He is willing and prompted by the benevolence of his heart, to give to us his kind compassion; and, as God in the plenitude of omnipotence, "he is able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God through Him," and to "wipe away all tears from their eyes." The sympathy of Christ to his disciples on earth is a tender sympathy; for "as a father pities his children, even so he pities those who fear him." It is an extensive sympathy — there is not an infirmity of man which it cannot reach. It is a proportionable sympathy — answerable to our peculiar needs, and to every occasion. It is a perpetual sympathy — so long as he continues a High Priest, and we remain subject to infirmities — so long will our blessed Jesus be touched with the feeling of them.

Man has no such sympathy as this for his fellow-man. Angels who never wore our nature, can have none like it — it is only the man Christ Jesus, both God and man, who centers in himself this plenitude of mercy and this unselfish compassion. The reason why our great High Priest is so sensibly affected by our suffering condition, is stated by the Apostle to lie in the fact that "He was in all points tempted like as we are — yet without sin." The Greek word here used is more general in its meaning than the English word "tempted." It adverts both to trial by affliction, and temptations to sin; implying no more, however, than that of being susceptible to temptation, resulting from the possession of a human nature. It means then to put to the proof, to try the nature or character; and this proof can be made either by allowing one to fall into temptation, properly so called, where some strong inducement is presented to the mind, and where it becomes thus a trial of virtue; or by subjecting a person to afflictions or sufferings, so that his character is proved, that the principles and motives of conduct may appear. Jesus Christ was subjected to both of these in as severe a form as ever was presented to man; his whole life being little else than a long conflict of faith with sense — holiness with sin — virtue with temptation. Yet, blessed be God, the tempter was repelled, the sin was overcome, the flesh was nailed to the cross — for he rose from each assault a conqueror — vanquishing every foe, triumphing in every contest. He alone, then, who has conquered sin, and overthrown the tempter — can support us in the temptations of the one, or the assaults of the other, and enable us to be victor over both. When thrust at by the enemy of our souls — when attacked by his fiery trials, when seduced by his gilded lures, when teased by the insinuations and cheating whispers of this "father of lies" — it is cheering and animating to the half-subdued soul to know, that Jesus was tempted in all points like as we are; and that, having been tempted, he knows what humanity can endure, and will not allow us to be tempted above that we are able to bear. In Christ, we are invincible — though sin, death, and Hell wage war upon the soul. Out of Christ, we are the victims of the first temptation, and fall an easy prey to the spoiler of our souls.

Such being the nature of our compassionate High Priest — the Apostle argues thence our duty, and urges upon us our peculiar privileges. Is he thus tender towards our infirmities, and does he thus support us in our temptations? Then should we hold fast our profession. Why should we relax our hold, when He whom we serve is able and willing to sustain us? We serve not an impotent Prince or a weak Sovereign. He under whom we have enlisted, is omnipotent. The banner under which we are marshaled, is one that never yet was lowered to any foe; and the weapons by which we war, are "mighty through God, to the pulling down of the strongholds of sin and Satan." Why, then, should we relax our hold, when "the Lord Almighty is with us — and the God of Jacob is our refuge?"

Why should we go back to the world? The question there meets us, "What shall it profit a man, to gain the whole world — and lose his own soul?" What can the world give, in barter for your faith? What will it palm off upon you, in lieu of your hopes? What will it sell you, for the joys of the Spirit? O, go to its shambles, and its money-changers, and see what trade you can make for the religion of Christ; and when you have learned the price, decide whether you will hold fast your profession. Shall you give up the contest because it waxes warm? Shall you retreat because of the danger? Does the toil overcome you, and do you faint and grow weary because of the burden and heat of the day? Had your Savior been influenced by such motives, what would have become of your soul? Have we such a compassionate High Priest? then should we confide in him. He knows our

infirmities — he is cognisant of our needs — he is touched with our sorrows — he feels for us in our bereavements, and sympathizes in all our adversities. Divine wisdom could not have provided for the soul a more full and perfect counterpart in kind, though in degree infinitely removed above us. It is just such a High Priest as man needs; and there is no necessity of his moral nature that he does not meet and satisfy. And then, too, he is willing to aid and support us — more willing than we to ask. And should we not, therefore, confide in his mercy and tenderness? Look upon his face — do you see there a forbidding aspect? Are any frowns gathered there? Is repulse expressed there? Or does it not rather beam with a love as infinite as his own perfection, and glow with a smile of compassion, which is the sunlight of the soul?

If you cannot confide in Christ, in whom can you? If you fear to go to him with your cares and your sorrows — then to whom will you resort? He suffered for you; he sorrowed for you; he bled for you; he died for you. Shall not his sorrows, his tears, his stripes, his blood, his death — all experienced for you, beget your confidence? You confide in an earthly friend — but could all the men of earth combined, work out for your soul the ransom which Jesus made for it on Calvary? Oh, is it not, I ask, black ingratitude not to trust him? Is it not an insult to his love to withhold your confidence? Reason it out upon the principles which regulate human friendship, and see in what position it places you to your adorable Redeemer. Yes, confide in Him in all times, in all places, in all circumstances. Are you poor? He had nowhere to lay his head. Are you in distress? He too was afflicted with grief. Are you the object of reproach and scorn? He was despised and rejected by men. Are you persecuted? He was reviled, and buffeted, and scourged. Do you weep in silence? He shed tears, as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground. Are you mourning under bereavement? He wept at the grave of Lazarus. Do the pains of death take hold of you? They were endured by Christ in their highest extremity.

You cannot in your greatest woe, exceed his anguish — or in your keenest afflictions, excel his grief. And the valley of the shadow of death cannot appear darker and more terrible to you, than it did to the Crucified, when he cried, "my Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me." All these points are so many guarantees that your confidence is not misplaced — so many invitations to place your hope and trust in his loving-kindness. Confide fully in Christ; be not distrustful of his compassion, for "He is faithful, who promised."

"Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace." The mercy-seat of the Jewish temple was inaccessible to the multitude. Only the High Priest could go in before it once each year, and then only with blood and incense — but the throne of grace erected in the heavens, is accessible to all. It is a throne, because occupied by a King; and is the seat of the Majesty on high; but it is named Grace, because of the clemency and compassion of Him who sits upon it.

Approach this throne — and we are sure of an audience. The golden scepter of mercy is ever held out to us, and we are sure of grace to help in every time of need. Boldly go to that throne, and offer your request in faith upon the merits of Christ, and in confidence upon the mercy of that great High Priest who is passed unto the heavens, Jesus the Son of God — remembering that he is touched with the feeling of our infirmities, that he supports us in our temptations, and gives to all who call upon him, "grace to help in every time of need!"

"Clinging to Jesus"

Holy Savior, friend unseen,
Since on your arm you bid'st me lean,
Help me throughout life's varying scene,
By faith to cling to Thee!

Blessed with this fellowship divine,
Take what you will, I'll ne'er repine;
E'en as the branches to the vine,
My soul would cling to Thee!

Far from her home, fatigued, oppressed,
Here she has found her place of rest;
An exile still — yet not unblest.
While she can cling to Thee!

Oft, when I seem to tread alone
Some barren waste with thorns o'ergrown,
Your voice of love, in tenderest tone,
Whispers, "Still cling to me!"

Though faith and hope may oft be tried,
I ask not, need not, anything beside;
How safe, how calm, how satisfied.
The soul that clings to Thee!

Blessed is my lot, Whatever befall:
What can disturb me, what appal,
While as my rock, my strength, my all,
Savior, I cling to Thee?

17-The Sun Going Down While Yet Day

The Sun Going Down While Yet Day by John Newton

"She has given up the spirit; her sun is gone down while it was yet day" Jeremiah 15:9

Beautifully illustrative of the words of the weeping Prophet is the following account of the death of Miss Eliza Cunningham, written by her uncle, the Rev. John Newton, rector of St. Mary, Woolnoth, London. It has been slightly abridged — but no important matter has been omitted. In May, 1782, my sister Eliza Cunningham was at Edinburgh, chiefly on account of her eldest daughter, then in the fourteenth year of her age, who was very ill of a consumption. She had already buried an only son, at the age of twelve; and while all a mother's care and feelings were engaged by the rapid decline of a second amiable child — she was unexpectedly and suddenly bereaved of an affectionate husband. Her trials were great — but the Lord had prepared her for them. She was a believer. Her faith was strong; her graces active; her conduct exemplary. She walked with God — and he supported her. And though she was a tender and sympathizing friend, she had a happy firmness of temper, so that her character as a Christian, and the propriety of her behavior in every branch of life, appeared with peculiar advantage in the season of affliction. She returned to Anstruther a widow, with her sick child, who languished until October, and then died.

Though my sister had many valuable and pleasing connections in Scotland — yet her strongest tie being broken, she readily accepted my invitation to come and live with us. She was not only dear to me as my sister — but we had lived long in the habits of intimate friendship. I knew her worth, and she was partial to me. She had yet one child remaining, her dear Eliza. We already had a dear orphan niece, whom we had, about seven years before, adopted for our own daughter. My active, fond imagination, anticipated the time of her arrival, and drew a pleasing picture of the addition the company of such a sister, such a friend, would make to the happiness of our family. The children likewise — there was no great disparity between them either in years or stature. From what I had heard of Eliza, I was prepared to love her before I saw her; though she came afterwards into my hands like a heap of untold gold, which, when counted over, proves to be a larger sum than was expected. My imagination paired and united these children; I hoped that the friendship between us and my sister would be perpetuated in them; I seemed to see them like twin sisters, of one heart and mind, habited nearly alike, always together, always with us. Such was my plan — but the Lord's plan was very different, and therefore mine failed.

It is happy for us poor short-sighted creatures, unable as we are to foresee the consequences of our own wishes, that if we know and trust him, he is often pleased to put a merciful negative upon our purposes; and condescends to choose better for us than we can for ourselves. What might have been the outcome of my plan, could it have taken place, I know not; but I can now praise and adore him for the gracious outcome of his plan. I praise his name, that I can cheerfully comply with his word, which says, "Be still, and know that I am God." I not only can bow (as it befits a creature and a sinner to do) to his sovereignty; but I admire his wisdom and goodness, and can say from my heart, "He has done all things well!" My sister had settled her affairs previous to her removal,

and nothing remained — but to take leave of her friends, of whom she had many in different parts of the country. In February, 1783, I received a letter from her, which before I opened, I expected was to inform me that she was upon the road in her way to London. But the information was, that in a little journey she had made to bid a friend farewell, she had caught a violent cold, which brought on a fever and a cough, with other symptoms, which though she described as gently as possible, that we might not be alarmed, obliged me to give up instantly the pleasing hope of seeing her. Following letters confirmed my apprehensions; her malady increased, and she was soon confined to her bed. Eliza was at school at Musselburgh. Until then she had enjoyed a perfect state of health; but while her dear mother was rapidly declining, she likewise caught a great cold, and her life was soon thought to be in danger. On this occasion, that fortitude and resolution which so strongly marked my sister's character, was remarkably displayed. She knew that her own race was almost finished; she earnestly desired that Eliza might live or die with us. And the physicians advised a speedy removal to the South. Accordingly, to save time and to save Eliza from the impressions which the sight of a dying parent might probably make upon her spirits, and possibly apprehensive that the interview might make too great an impression upon her own, she sent this, her only beloved child, from Edinburgh directly to London, without letting her come home to take a last leave of her. She contented herself with committing and bequeathing her child to our care and love, in a letter, which I believe was the last she was able to write.

Thus powerfully recommended by the pathetic charge of a dying parent, the dearest friend we had upon earth, and by that plea for compassion, which her illness might have strongly urged even upon strangers, we received our dear Eliza as a trust, and as a treasure, on the fifteenth of March. My sister lived long enough to have the comfort of knowing, not only that she was safely arrived — but was perfectly pleased with her new situation. She was now freed from all earthly cares. She suffered much in the remaining part of her illness — but she knew in whom she believed; she possessed a peace past understanding, and a hope full of glory. She entered into the joy of her Lord on the tenth of May, 1783, respected and regretted by all who knew her.

I now perceived that the Lord had sent me a treasure indeed. Eliza's person was agreeable. There was an ease and elegance in her whole address, and a gracefulness, until long illness and great weakness bowed her down. Her disposition was lively, her genius quick and inventive, and if she had enjoyed health, she probably would have excelled in everything she attempted, that required ingenuity. Her understanding, particularly her judgment, and her sense of propriety, was far above her years. There was something in her appearance which usually procured her favor at first sight. She was honored by the notice of several people of distinction, which, though I thankfully attribute in part to their kindness to me, I believe was a good deal owing to something uncommon in her. But her principal endearing qualities, which could be only fully known to us, who lived with her, were the sweetness of her temper, and a heart formed for the exercise of affection, gratitude, and friendship.

Whether, when at school, she might have heard sorrowful tales from children, who, having lost their parents, met with a great difference, in point of tenderness, when they came under the direction of uncles and aunts, and might think that all uncles and aunts were alike, I know not; but I have understood since from herself, that she did not come to us with any highly raised expectations of the treatment she was to meet with. But as she found (the Lord in mercy to her and to us having opened our hearts to receive her) that it was hardly possible for her own parents to

have treated her more tenderly, and that it was from that time the business and pleasure of our lives to study how to oblige her, and how to alleviate the afflictions we were unable to remove; so we likewise found, that the seeds of our kindness could hardly be sown in a more promising and fruitful soil.

I know not that either her aunt or I ever saw a cloud upon her countenance during the time she was with us. It is true we did not, we could not unnecessarily cross her; but if we thought it expedient to overrule any proposal she made, she acquiesced with a sweet smile: and we were certain that we would never hear of that proposal again. Her delicacy however was quicker than our observation; and she would sometimes say, when we could not perceive the least reason for it, "I am afraid I answered you peevishly; indeed I did; if I did, I ask your pardon. I would be very ungrateful, if I thought any pleasure equal to that of endeavoring to please you." It is no wonder that we dearly loved such a child.

Wonderful is the frame of the human heart. The Lord claims and deserves it all; yet there is still room for all the charities, of relative life, and scope for their full play; and they are capable of yielding the sincerest pleasures this world can afford, if held in subordination to what is supremely due to him. The hectic fever, cough, and sweats, which Eliza brought with her from Scotland, were subdued in the course of the summer, and there appeared no reason to apprehend that she would die very suddenly. But still there was a worm preying upon the root of this pretty gourd. She had seldom any severe pain, until within the last two weeks of her life, and usually slept well; but when awake she was always ill. I believe she knew not an hour of perfect ease; and those who intimately knew her state, could not but wonder to see her so placid, cheerful, and attentive, when in company, as she generally was. Many times, when the tears have silently stolen down her cheeks, if she saw that her aunt or I observed her, she would wipe them away, come to us with a smile and a kiss; and say, "Do not be uneasy, I am not very ill, I can bear it, I shall be better presently;" or something to that effect. Her case was thought beyond the reach of medicine, and, for a time, no medicine was used. She had air and exercise, as the weather and circumstances would permit. For the rest, she amused herself as she could with her guitar or harpsichord, with her needle, and with reading. She had a part likewise, when able, in such visits as we paid or received; and our visits were generally regulated by a regard to what she could bear. Her aunt, especially, seldom went abroad but at such times, and to such places, as we thought agreeable and convenient to her. For we could perceive that she loved home best, and best of all when we were at home with her. In April, 1784, we put her under the care of my dear friend Dr. Benamor. To the blessing of the Lord on his skill and endeavors, I ascribe the pleasure of having her continued with us so long. But what can the most efficacious medicines, or the best physicians, avail to prolong life, when the hour approaches, in which the prayer of the Great Intercessor must be accomplished, "Father, I will that they whom you have given me may be with me where I am to behold my glory?" This was the proper cause of my dear Eliza's death. The Lord sent this child to me to be brought up for him; he owned my poor endeavors: and when her education was completed, and she was ripened for Heaven, he took her home to himself. He has richly paid me my wages, in the employment itself, and in the happy outcome.

Dr. Benamor advising a trial of the salt water, we passed the month of August, 1784, with her, partly at Mr. Walter Taylor's, at Southampton, and partly at Charles Etty's, of Priestlands, near Symington. While she was with these kind and generous friends, she had every accommodation

and assistance that could be thought of or wished for. And the bathing was evidently useful, so far as to give some additional strength to her very weak and relaxed frame, which assisted her in going more comfortably through the last winter. We were, therefore, encouraged, and advised to repeat our visit to Southampton this autumn. But the success was not the same. Her feet and legs had already begun to swell, and the evening before she took cold, which brought on a return of the fever and cough; and though Dr. Allen was successful in removing these symptoms in about a two weeks, and she bathed a few times, she could not persevere. However, the advantages of situation, air, and exercise, being much greater than she could have in London, and as we were with friends whom she, as well as we, dearly loved, she continued at Southampton six weeks; but she was unable to proceed to Mr. Etty's, who was very desirous of repeating his former kindness. The Lord strengthened her to perform her journey home without inconvenience. She returned the sixteenth of September; then she entered our door for the last time, for she went out no more, until she was carried out to be put into the hearse.

I have thus put together, in one view, a brief account of what relates to her illness, until within the last three weeks of her pilgrimage. I now come to what is much more important and interesting. Her excellent parents had conscientiously endeavored to bring her up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and the principles of religion had been instilled into her from her infancy. Their labors were thus far attended with success, that no child could be more obedient or obliging, or more remote from evil habits or evil tempers; but I could not perceive, when she came to us, that she had any heart-affecting sense of divine things. But being under my roof, she of course, when her health would permit, attended on my ministry, and was usually present when I prayed and expounded the Scriptures, morning and evening, in the family. Friends and ministers were likewise frequently with us, whose character and conversation were well suited to engage her notice, and to help her to form a right idea of the Christian principles and temper. Knowing that she was of a thinking turn, I left her to make her own reflections upon what she saw and heard, committing her to the Lord from whom I had received her, and entreating him to be her effectual teacher. When I did attempt to talk with her upon the concerns of her soul, she could give me no answer but with tears. But I soon had great encouragement to hope that the Lord had both enlightened her understanding, and had drawn the desires of her heart to himself. Great was her delight in the ordinances; exemplary her attention under the preaching. To be debarred from going to hear prayer at our stated times, was a trial which, though she patiently bore, seemed to affect her more than any other, and she did not greatly care what she endured in the remainder of the week, provided she was well enough to attend the public worship. The judicious observations she sometimes made upon what had passed in conversation, upon incidents, books, and sermons — indicated a sound scriptural judgment, and a spiritual taste. And my hope was confirmed by her whole deportment, which was befitting the Gospel of Christ. So that had she died suddenly, on any day within about a year and a half past, I would have had no doubt that she had passed from death unto life. But I could seldom prevail with her to speak of herself: if she did, it was with the greatest self-distrust and caution.

Soon after her return from Southampton, she became acquainted with acute pain, to which she had, until then, been much a stranger. Her gentle spirit, which had borne up under a long and languishing illness, was not so capable of supporting pain. It did not occasion any improper temper or language — but it wore her away quickly. Friday the thirteenth of September, she was down

stairs for the last time, and then she was brought down and carried up in arms.

It now became very desirable to hear from herself an explicit account of the hope that was in her; especially as, upon some symptoms of an approaching mortification, she appeared to be a little alarmed, and of course, not thoroughly reconciled to the thoughts of death. Her aunt waited for the first convenient opportunity of intimating to her the probability that the time of her departure was at hand. The next morning, Saturday the first of October, presented one. She found herself remarkably better; her pains were almost gone, her spirits revived; the favorable change was visible in her countenance. Her aunt began to break the subject to her by saying, "My dear, were you not extremely ill last night?" She replied, "Indeed I was." "Had you not been relieved, I think you could not have continued long." "I believe I could not." "My dear, I have been very anxiously concerned for your life." "But I hope, my dear aunt, you are not so now." She then opened her mind and spoke freely. I cannot repeat the whole; the substance was to this effect: "My views of things have been for some time very different from what they were when I came to you. I have seen and felt the vanity of childhood and youth." Her aunt said, "I believe you have long made a conscience of secret prayer." She answered, "Yes; I have long and earnestly sought the Lord, with reference to the change which is now approaching. I have not yet that full assurance which is so desirable; but I have a hope, I trust, a good hope, and I believe the Lord will give me whatever he sees necessary for me, before he takes me from hence. I have prayed to him to fit me for himself; and then, whether sooner or later, it signifies but little." Here was a comfortable point gained. We were satisfied that she had given up all expectation of living, and could speak of her departure without being distressed.

It will not be expected that a child at her age should speak systematically. Nor had she learned her religion from a system or form of words, however sound. The Lord himself was her teacher. But, from what little she had at different times said to me, I was well satisfied that she had received a true conviction of the evil of sin, and of her own state by nature as a sinner. When she spoke of the Lord, she meant the Lord Jesus Christ, the Great Shepherd, who gathers such lambs in his arms, and carries them in his bosom. She believed him to be God and man in one person; and that hope, of which she shall never be ashamed, was founded on his atonement, grace, and power. As I do not intend to put words into her mouth which she never spoke, I mention this lest any person should be disappointed at not finding a certain phraseology to which they may have been accustomed. Her apparent revival was of short duration. In the evening of the same day, she began to complain of a sore throat, which became worse, and, before Sunday noon, threatened an absolute suffocation. When Dr. Benamor, who the day before had almost entertained hopes of her recovery, found her so suddenly and greatly altered, he could not at the moment prevent some signs of his concern from appearing in his countenance. She quickly perceived it, and desired he would plainly tell her his sentiments. When he had recovered himself he said, "You are not so well as when I saw you on Saturday." She answered, that she trusted all would be well soon. He replied, that whether she lived or died, it would be well and to the glory of God. He told me that he had much pleasing conversation with her that morning; some particulars of which he had committed to writing — but that he had lost the paper. From that time she may be said to have been dying, as we expected her departure from one hour to another. When the doctor came on Wednesday, she entreated him to tell her how long he thought she might live. He said, "Are you in earnest, my dear?" She answered, "Indeed I am." At that time there were great appearances that a

mortification had actually begun. He therefore told her, he thought it possible she might hold out until eight in the evening — but did not expect she could survive midnight at furthest. On hearing him say so, low as she was, her eyes seemed to sparkle with their former vivacity, and fixing them on him with an air of ineffable satisfaction, she said, "Oh, that is good news indeed!" And she repeated it as such to a person who came soon after into the room, and said with lively emotions of joy, "The doctor tells me I shall stay here but a few hours more." In the afternoon she noticed and counted the clock, I believe, every time it struck; and when it struck seven, she said, "Another hour, and then!" But it pleased the Lord to spare her to us another day.

She suffered much in the course of Wednesday night — but was quite resigned and patient. Our kind servants, who, from their love to her and to us, watched her night and day with a solicitude and tenderness which wealth is too poor to purchase — were the only witnesses of the affectionate and grateful manner in which she repeatedly thanked them for their services and attention to her.

I was surprised on Thursday morning to find her not only alive — but in some respects better. The tokens of mortification again disappeared. This was her last day, and it was a memorable day to us. When Dr. Benamor asked her how she was, she answered, "Truly happy, and if this be dying, it is a pleasant thing to die." She said to me about ten o'clock, "My dear uncle, I would not change conditions with any person upon earth. Oh, how gracious is the Lord to me! Oh, what a change is before me!" She was several times asked, if she could wish to live, provided the Lord should restore her to perfect health? Her answer was, "Not for all the world," and sometimes "Not for a thousand worlds! Do not weep for me, my dear aunt; but rather rejoice and praise on my account." The last time she was asked this question, she said, "I desire to have no choice." We asked her if she would choose a text for her own funeral sermon? She readily mentioned, "Whom the Lord loves, he chastens." "That," said she, "has been my experience; my afflictions have been many — but not too many; nor has the greatest of them been too great; I praise him for them all." But after a pause, she said, "Stay, I think there is another text which may do better; let it be Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord. That is my experience now." She likewise chose a hymn to be sung after the sermon. But I must check myself, and set down but a small part of the gracious words which the Lord enabled her to speak in the course of the day. Though she was frequently interrupted by pains and agonies, she had something to say, either in the way of admonition or consolation, as she thought most suitable, to every one she saw. To her most constant attendant she said, "Be sure you continue to call upon the Lord; and if you think he does not hear you now, he will at last, as he has heard me." She spoke a great deal to an intimate friend, who was with her every day, which I hope she will long remember as the testimony of her dying Eliza.

Among other things she said, "See how comfortable the Lord can make a dying bed! Do you think that you shall have such an assurance when you come to die?" Being answered, "I hope so, my dear," she replied, "But do you earnestly and with all your heart pray to the Lord for it? If you seek him — you shall surely find him." She then prayed affectionately and fervently for her friend, afterwards for her cousin, and then for another of our family, who was present. Her prayer was not long — but her every word was weighty, and her manner very affecting; the purpose was, that they might all be taught and comforted by the Lord.

About five in the afternoon, she desired me to pray with her once more. Surely I then prayed from my heart. When I had finished, she said. Amen. I said, "My dear child, have I expressed your meaning?"

She answered, "Oh, yes!" and then added, "I am ready to say, Why are his chariot wheels so long coming? But I hope he will enable me to wait his hour with patience." These were the last words I heard her speak.

Towards seven o'clock, I was walking in the garden, and earnestly engaged in prayer for her, when a servant came to me, and said, "She is gone." Lord, how great is your power! how great is your goodness! A few days before, had it been practicable and lawful, what would I not have given to procure her recovery! yet seldom in my life have I known a more heartfelt joy, than when these words, She is gone, sounded in my ears. I ran upstairs, and our whole little family were soon round her bed. Though her aunt and another person were sitting with their eyes fixed upon her, she was gone, perhaps, a few minutes before she was missed. She lay upon her left side, with her cheek gently reclining upon her hand as if in a sweet sleep. And I thought there was a smile on her countenance. Never, surely, did death appear in a more beautiful, inviting form! We fell upon our knees, and I returned my most sincere thanks to God and my Savior, for his abundant goodness to her, crowned in this last instance by giving her so gentle a dismissal.

Yes, I am satisfied, I am comforted. And if one of the tears involuntarily shed could have recalled her to life, to health, to an assemblage of all that this world could contribute to her happiness — I would have labored hard to suppress it. Now my largest desires for her are accomplished. The days of her mourning are ended. She is landed on that peaceful shore, where the storms of trouble never blow. She is forever out of the reach of sorrow, sin, temptation, and snares. Now she is before the throne! she sees him, whom not having seen, she loved! She drinks of the rivers of pleasure, which are at his right hand, and shall thirst no more.

She was born at St. Margaret's, Rochester, February 6, 1771. She breathed her spirit into her Redeemer's hands, a little before seven in the evening, on the 6th of October, 1785, aged fourteen years and eight months.

I shall be glad if this little narrative may prove an encouragement to my friends who have children. May we not conceive the Lord saying to us, as Pharaoh's daughter said to the mother of Moses, "Take this child and bring it up for me, and I will pay you your wages." How solemn the trust! how important and difficult the discharge of it! but how rich the reward if our endeavors are crowned with success! And we have everything to hope from his power and goodness, if, in dependence upon his blessing, we can fully and diligently aim at fulfilling his will. Happy they who will say at the last day, "Behold, here am I — and the children which you have given me." The children of my friends will likewise see my narrative. May it convince them that it is practicable and good to seek the Lord early! My dear Eliza's state of languor prevented her from associating with young people of her own age, so frequently and freely as she might otherwise have done. But these papers will come into the hands of some such, whom she knew, and whom she loved. To them I particularly commend and dedicate this relation.

Oh! my dear young friends, had you seen with what dignity of spirit she filled up the last scene of her life, you must have been affected by it! Let not the liveliness of your spirits, and the gaiety of

the prospects around you, prevent you from considering that to you likewise days will certainly come (unless you are suddenly snatched out of life), when you will say, and feel, that the world, and all in it, can afford you no pleasure. But there is a Savior, and a mighty One, always near, always gracious to those who seek him. May you, like her, be enabled to choose him, as the Guide of your youth, and the Lord of your hearts. Then, like her, you will find support and comfort under affliction, wisdom to direct your conduct, a good hope in death, and by death — a happy translation to everlasting life.

I have only to add my prayer, that a blessing from on high may descend upon the people and families of all my friends, and upon all into whose hands this paper may providentially come.

John Newton

18-The White-Robed Throng!

The White-Robed Throng! By Henry Venn

"After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" Revelation 7:9-10

What a different scene, what a different world, separated only by a slight veil from that which we inhabit, is here exhibited to our view — a world into which we may enter by a single step, and in a moment of time! Here we see a busy world, eager in vain pursuits, agitated by mere trifles, contending about objects of no importance, and immersed in things which perish with the using. All is noise, and confusion, and vanity, and sorrow, and evil. But behold another world near at hand, composed of different beings, governed by different principles . . .

where all things are as momentous — as here they are frivolous;

where all things are as great — as here they are little;

where all things are as durable — as here they are transitory;

where all things are as fixed — as here they are mutable! That world has also its inhabitants — so numerous, that the population of this world is but as a petty tribe compared to them. It has its employments — but they are of the noblest kind and weightiest import; and compared with them, the whole sum of the concerns of this life is but as a particle of dust. It has its pleasures — but they are pure and spotless, holy and divine. There, perfect happiness, and uninterrupted harmony, and righteousness, and peace — ever prevail.

What a contrast to our present state! And is this blessed scene near us? May we be called into it in a moment? With what anxious solicitude, then, should we endeavor to realize it; and how ardently should we desire to be prepared for an admission into it! The number of the blessed inhabitants of Heaven is represented as infinite: "I beheld, a great multitude that no one could count!" And if we consider the infinite power and glory of him who created them; the magnificence, and even profusion displayed in the works of his hands; the end and design for which they were created, namely, to manifest his glory — we shall at once feel that their number must be, in the fullest sense of the word, infinite! Let us reflect, that to create a million, or a million of millions of the brightest and most glorious spirits, is as easy to the Almighty, as it was to create our first parents: he has but to will — and it is done.

Let us consider that he rejoices in the multitude of his works; that every part of the universe is filled with beings from the immeasurable systems of worlds, to the atom whose minuteness eludes the keenest sight. Let us reflect, that Heaven is the perfection of his works, the grand scene of his glory, the immediate place of his residence. There he is to be known, and adored, and glorified; there he is to receive the homage so justly due to his majesty. And shall this part of his works only

be scantily peopled? Shall those realms alone, which he made for himself, be without inhabitants? Shall Heaven alone be a blank in the creation? Our Lord, it is true, has said, speaking of the race of man, that "narrow is the way which leads to life, and few there be that enter in thereat;" but this expression relates solely to the earth we inhabit — one world amidst, perhaps, an innumerable multitude. It relates also, principally, to the time in which our Lord lived. Even this world, we trust, will not ultimately be barren — but produce numerous and faithful witnesses to the glory of the Redeemer. He made this earth the scene of his sufferings, and we may expect it to become the scene of his triumphs. Only allow the Gospel of Christ to prevail, as the prophets lead us to hope that in the latter days it will prevail; allow the world to continue, as there is ground to expect it will continue, to a period of which the infancy is scarcely yet past; and we may conclude, that even from this fallen world shall multitudes, as numerous as the drops of the morning dew, crowd into the realms of light, to ascribe glory, and praise, and honor, to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb forever! In considering the multitudes, beyond the power of calculation, which will people the realms of bliss, we must recollect, that, there, multitudes constitute happiness. On the earth, where a difficulty of existence is often experienced; where there exists a constant collision of interests; where one stands in the way of another; where jealousies and envyings, anger and revenge, pride and vanity, agitate and deform the world — numbers may tend to diffuse wretchedness and to multiply evil. Hence we flee for peace and joy from the crowded haunts of men, and court the sequestered habitation and the retired valley. But in Heaven, where there can be no thwarting interests; where the needs of one are never supplied at the expense of another; where every bosom glows with love, and every heart beats with desire to promote the general happiness — the addition of a fresh individual to the innumerable throng diffuses a wider joy, and heightens the universal felicity. The multitude assembled there is described as composed of all "nations, and kindred, and people, and tongues." Here, again, we must beware of forming our judgment from the feelings and views of this fallen world. There, it will be no cause of jealousy, or rivalry, or hatred, that one person received his birth on this, and another on that side of a river or sea. A man will not despise his brother on account of the different shade of his complexion; he will not seek his destruction because he spoke in another language; nor renounce communion with him because he praised the same God, with the same spirit of piety, in a house of a different form. All these petty distinctions will have either ceased to exist, or will be completely annihilated in the general spirit of love that will then animate every mind.

One pursuit will occupy every heart — each will strive to glorify God. There will either be no distinctions, or the distinctions be like the beautiful variety we see in the works of God — like flowers enriched with different colors to delight the eye, or with various perfumes to gratify the smell. Why should distinctions offend, or variety disgust? It is the dark and selfish pride of the heart which considers itself as the only standard of right and excellence, and therefore despises and hates every deviation from itself. Let the pride be removed — and the distinction would become a pleasing variety, instead of a source of hatred.

Alas! alas! what petty differences, engendered by pride, and nursed by the worst passions of the human breast — here separate, with unchristian hatred, those who are brethren . . .

the children of the same God,

the members of the same church,

taught by the same book,
partakers of the same hope,
redeemed by the same Savior,
influenced by the same Spirit,
traveling along the same road towards the same blessed country!

Religion! our best, our dearest, holiest guide — is your divine aim to be diverted, to sanction discord, to justify hatred, and to consecrate bigotry? No! Religion acknowledges nothing as her own work — but union and peace. In Heaven, her throne, no odious denominations will parcel out the regenerated church, no frivolous distinctions be allowed to break the unity of the members of Christ; but people of every nation, and kindred, and tribe, and tongue, will unite in one worship, will be animated with one spirit, will be actuated by one principle — and that, the principle of pure and universal love! The society of that blessed place is composed of angels and saints; of those, that is, who have never sinned against God — and those who, having sinned have been redeemed by the cross of Christ, and have "Washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" — of those who were created, and have continued, in the highest order of bright and glorious spirits — and of those who once were "dead in trespasses and sins," who "walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience," but who have been "quickened together with Christ, and raised up together with him, and made to sit together" with angels, and with the Lord of angels, "in heavenly places."

Yet the angels scorn not such society; they reproach not the children of men with their fall; they refuse not to receive them into their company. On the contrary, they rejoice when any sinner repents; they convey the departed Lazarus into Abraham's bosom; they become "ministering spirits to the heirs of salvation;" they worship with them in the same adorations; they answer in responsive chorus to their praises. What a model for the conduct and worship of the saints below! The employment of that innumerable company is represented as that of praise to God and to the Lamb, who redeemed them and bought them with his blood. In other parts of the Sacred Writings, where the employments of Heaven are described — worship and praise are represented as the chief occupation. We are not, however, to infer from this, that the exclusive employment is religious adoration; for we know that the angels, being of a still higher order and more spiritual nature, are frequently engaged in active commissions to execute the will of God. What are the precise occupations of the spirits of the just made perfect — we indeed know not; nor could we, perhaps, comprehend them. It is sufficient for us to rest assured that they are occupied in that work for which they are best qualified. It is sufficient for us to know, that, whatever the employments are which their Creator and Redeemer assigns to them — they are such as must tend to produce the greatest happiness, and to excite new and continual praises to God. For, in every description which is given us of the heavenly world — it is the voice of incessant praise and thanksgiving we hear; it is the overflowing of thankfulness for a state of exquisite enjoyment; it is the universal burst of gratitude, extending from one boundary of Heaven to the other. The voice of prayer itself is lost in the exultations of praise; the language of complaint is unknown; the lamentations of sorrow, and the sighs of grief, are never heard. The happiness of that innumerable

company is described in the most glowing colors: "They shall hunger no more, nor thirst any more; the sun shall not light on them" (to scorch them), "nor any heat" (molest them). The Lamb who is in the midst of the throne, shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of water; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes!" Here we see every source of evil, and even of inconvenience, removed — and every good bestowed, by the unrestrained bounty of Heaven.

Descriptions of this kind must be figurative — but the figures are evidently intended to convey to us the highest possible conception of unqualified good, and the total absence of all evil. The remaining part of the description both manifests the nature and the source of the happiness which they enjoy. They are "before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple — and He who sits on the throne shall dwell among them." The happiness which they enjoy is, then, a refined and holy happiness. It is not the sensual happiness of a Mohammedan paradise — but such as is suited to spiritual beings of the highest order and most exalted taste. It is a happiness founded upon religion and devotion, upon near and intimate access to the Lord of life and glory. And let not this happiness be judged of by those who, far from having enjoyed pleasure arising from such a source, have, on the contrary, experienced from it only pain and restraint. They know not what true piety is, nor are capable of appreciating its nature and excellence. To others, it will be sufficient to state, that piety is but another word for happiness. I do not mean this merely in the sense in which, without guarding them, the words may be understood, namely, that the effect produced by true religion is happiness. I use the words literally; and design to state, that religion itself, the act and exercise of it, is the purest and highest happiness.

It may here be necessary to rectify the general definition of religion. Religion is not merely the worship of God, or the exercise of obedience: it is the union of the soul with God; the conformity of the will with his will; the enjoyment of communion with him; and the transformation of every faculty of the soul to his image and likeness. Religion, here, is but the faint outline of this more sublime image of its nature; the outward expression of what it ought to be, and of what it is above.

Now happiness arises from a frame of mind harmonizing with the objects which surround us. When the soul, therefore, is molded into the perfect frame of religion in its most exalted state; when every affection and every faculty are put in perfect tune, and all are in unison with the divine Source of all good — then there must be happiness, arising from such a constitution, the most pure and perfect which a creature can enjoy. It is the happiness of God himself — of God, the source of all happiness. It is a state of mind in which that necessarily gives pleasure, which gives God pleasure; in which there is a participation of his feelings; in which the soul drinks at the fountain-head of all enjoyment; in which the bliss of the Almighty becomes the bliss of his creatures. Thus religion and happiness are exchangeable terms. They are, in fact, one and the same thing: and it is not more impossible that God should be unhappy — than that his devout servants, dwelling near his throne, and "serving him day and night in his temple," should taste of misery. To what an exalted height of happiness and glory, is then that innumerable company advanced! With what a glorious society do they hold communion! In what noble employments are they engaged! Of what refined enjoyments do they partake! Blessed spirits! your lot is fixed; your happiness is permanent and eternal. You will no more suffer pain or feel distress; your minds are cleansed from every taint of sin; your hearts are the everlasting abode of purity and joy. All around you is peace; everything is concerted, by almighty wisdom and infinite goodness — to banish the very elements of evil; to dispel the slightest shade of misery; to pour around you, in luxuriant

profusion — a profusion, designating the infinitely varied power of the Giver — all the richest stores of good!

How unlike this is our present state! What a different abode is this world below! Here, fear and terror, danger and violence, pain and suffering, sin and remorse, misery and grief, poverty and labor, the curse and the frown of justice — have fixed their abode. But, though these days he evil, give not way to despair.

Let me now present to you this innumerable company under a different aspect. Let me point out to you what was their former state, as well as what is their present state. Once, these were "men of like passions with yourselves; they have come out of great tribulation;" they once sighed and groaned under sufferings and sorrows, as deep and grievous as those by which any of you are afflicted.

What an invaluable and sure source of consolation it is to every pious Christian suffering under the weight of worldly calamities — to direct his contemplation to this glorious host above! Standing before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and with palms in their hands, methinks they say to him:

"We were once as you are;

we were assaulted by the same temptations,

we were stricken by the same arrows,

we drank deep of the same bitter cup,

we combated with the same enemies,

we felt all the sharpness and bitterness of the Christian warfare.

Often were we ready to faint; often we cried to God in an agony of grief, on the point of being swallowed up in despair. We felt all the weakness of our faith, and trembled under the infirmities of our common nature. Faint not therefore in your course. Behold the cloud of witnesses surrounding you. With one voice they bid you to 'lift up the hands which hang down, and strengthen the weak knees.' Be strong, fear not; your God will come — he will come with a recompense, and save you."

Let me conjure every weak, and every afflicted soul to contemplate these blessed inhabitants of Heaven. How changed are they from what they once were! Praises incessantly occupy their tongues — which once breathed out only complaints, and told of fears and apprehensions. Not a complaint can you make, which they have not made — not a temptation can you describe, to which they were not exposed. All your weakness, they felt — all your trials, they endured.

Some, like Lazarus, were afflicted with poverty;

some, like Job, were plunged from the height of prosperity to the lowest depth of adversity;

some, like David, were harassed by severe persecutions;

some, like Lot, were vexed by the unrighteousness of those around them;

some, like Eli, were cursed with unrighteous children;

some, like Peter, were shut up in prison;

some, like Manasseh, felt all the anguish of remorse;

some, like the apostles and the noble army of martyrs, were stoned or sawn asunder!

Yet, now, their sufferings have been long forgotten, or are remembered only to bless God, who "counted them worthy to suffer for his name's sake." One moment spent in Heaven — effaces forever the afflictions endured upon earth! Look to them, then, and indulge the delightful hope that one day "God may wipe away all tears from your eyes," and compensate all your sufferings. For the better confirmation of your faith, let me lastly refer you to the means by which this wonderful change was accomplished in them. "They washed their robes, and made them white with the blood of the Lamb." They bear in their hands the palm — as an emblem of victory in the good fight of faith; and they are clothed with white robes — to denote the purity of their hearts under the regenerating influence of the Holy Spirit. The first point to which our attention is here directed, is that "blood of the Lamb," in which their "robes have been washed and made white." This image is designed to show, that it was to the efficacy of the death of Christ, they trusted as the atonement for their sins. Christ was to them the hope of glory; that is, they founded all their hope of glory upon him. Their robes were formerly defiled and stained by sin; but they were "washed, they were cleansed, they were justified, they were glorified," by Christ. He it was who gave them Heaven, and who gave them the preparation for it. He is the Lord of the world above; he has the "keys of death and Hell." He opens — and no man shuts; he shuts — and no man opens. To him, trusting in his grace and mercy, they applied, as to the Savior of mankind — and he heard their cry, and was gracious and merciful unto them. He delivered them out of the "terrible pit and the mire, and set their feet upon a rock."

Behold then, the secret source of the wonderful change wrought in them — this grand translation from earth to Heaven, from ruin to glory. The Son of God came down from Heaven "to seek and to save those who were lost." They heard of his love; they needed his power; they approached him in faith; they received him as their Lord; and he acknowledged them as his disciples, interceded for them, delivered them out of their distress, and raised them to eternal glory. And is his arm shortened, that it cannot save? Is his ear heavy, that it cannot hear? Has he intermitted his gracious work? Are there no trophies of his power to be suspended in the kingdom of glory? Yes! He is "the same, yesterday, today, and forever." Approach him, then, with true faith and fervent prayer; "fight the good fight of faith," as they did, and you also shall receive the palm of victory! Seek for the sanctifying influence of the Spirit — and you shall receive the robe of righteousness granted to them!

"After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying: "Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!" Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes — who are they, and where did they come from?" I answered, "Sir, you know." And he said, "These are they who have come out of the great

tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore, "they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." Revelation 7:9-17

"And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true!" Revelation 21:3-5 Who are these in bright array?

This innumerable throng,
Round the altar, night and day
Tuning their triumphant song?
Worthy is the Lamb once slain,
Blessing, honor, glory, power,
Wisdom, riches, to obtain;
New dominion every hour!
These through fiery trials trod;
These from great affliction came;
Now before the throne of God,
Sealed with his eternal Name!
Clad in clothing pure and white,
Victor palms in every hand.
Through their great Redeemer's might
More than conquerors they stand!
Hunger, thirst, disease unknown,
On immortal fruits they feed;
Then the Lamb amidst the throne
Shall to living fountains lead!
Joy and gladness banish sighs;
Perfect love dispels their fears

And, forever from their eyes

God shall wipe away their tears!

19-The Refuge from the Storm

The Refuge from the Storm by Robert Leighton

Men, in great straits, when they are not able to make defense against pursuing enemies, run to their hiding place, as the Israelites did from the Philistines. When the men of Israel saw that they were distressed, they hid themselves in caves, in thickets, in rocks, in high places, and in pits," 1 Samuel 13:6; and so God's children, when they are too weak for their enemies, seek a safe and sure hiding place. "A prudent man foresees the evil, and hides himself," Proverbs 22:3. Certainly there is a hiding place for God's children, if we had but the wisdom to find it out — and where is it but in God? "Lord, you are my hiding place, you shall preserve me from trouble." So again — "In the time of trouble, he shall hide me in his pavilion; in the secret of his tabernacle, shall he hide me: he shall set me upon a rock," Psalms 27:5.

God's protection of his people is a secret, hidden mystery — as everything that pertains unto God is to the carnal man. The person hidden is seen abroad every day following his business — serving his generation — doing that work which God has given him to do — yet is he hidden, while he is seen, by the secret power and love of God dispensing all things for his protection, the man is kept safe by ways which the world knows not of. "You shall hide him in the secret of your presence from the pride of man," Psalms 31:20.

There is a secret power of God by which his people are upheld and maintained by one means or another, which they see not, and cannot find out. So there is that in God — that we may trust him with our souls, with our bodies, with our peace, with our goods, with our good name, with our all; all that concerns us between this and the day of judgment, as Paul did, "I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day." His soul and all its concerns, he dared trust in the hands of God. Our soul is much sought after; Satan, who has lost the favor of God himself, envies that others should enjoy it, therefore he pursues God's people with great malice and power; but let them put it into the hands of God, he is able to keep it. This hiding place is large enough for all that we have. "You shall keep them secretly as in a pavilion, from the strife of tongues." As the hearts of men are in the hands of God, so are their tongues, Exodus 11:7.

There is the same reason why we should trust God in all things — as when we trust him for one thing. And indeed, did we truly, and on Scripture grounds, trust him for one thing — we should trust him for all. If we did trust him with our souls, we should without anxious care trust him with our bodies, our secular interests and concerns also. There is safety until the trouble is over, and we may be kept as quiet in God, as if there was no danger. "Under the shadow of your wings will I make my refuge until these calamities are over and past." There is an allusion to the chicken under the hen's wing — when hawks or birds of prey are abroad, that are ready to seize upon them with their talons, they run to the hen's wings, and there they are safe.

"Come, my people, enter into your chambers, and shut the doors about you: hide yourself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast," Isaiah 26:20. Here we have an allusion to a storm which is soon over; it is as a little cloud, that will easily be blown over; but in the mean time here is a covert and defense. The use of God's protection and love is best known in a time of straits and difficulties. There is not only safety — but comfort also. Christians, it is not a dead refuge or hiding place — but, as the Psalmist says, "None of those who trust in God shall be desolate," Psalms 34:22. There are sweet supports, spiritual experiences, and inward comforts; so that a believer, who is hidden in the secret of God's presence, fares better than all those who have the world at their command, and go on in ease and plenty, if we judge of his condition by spiritual considerations. And not only will He be his protection — but He will be a sun, as well as a shield. Psalms 84:11. As a "shield," he will keep off all dangers from us. As a "sun," he will give all things that belong to our blessedness; "He will give grace and glory." The word of God shows not only what God can do herein — but what he will do for our sakes. To Abraham, God said, "I am your shield and your exceeding great reward," Genesis 15:1. Abraham might be under some dread that the kings he had lately vanquished would work him some trouble, and then God comes and appears to him and comforts him, and says to him, "Fear not, I am your shield." Here then we may rest; for where else can we hope to find a resting place, but in the arms of God's protection — in his attributes, promises, and providences? His word invites us so to make use of God — to enter into Him as a covert from the storm, while it seems to rage, and be likely to overwhelm us. "He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty," Psalms 91:1. He who commits himself to God shall not be thrust out — but shall be allowed to dwell there, and enjoy the benefit of a covert and defense; we have this assurance repeated again and again in Scripture. "Every word of God is pure; he is a shield unto those who put their trust in him," Proverbs 30:5. Do not think that these are careless expressions, dropped into the word of God by chance. Oh no! they are the sure and pure words of the Lord himself, that will yield comfort, peace, and happiness, to those who flee unto him — it is only to trust and to have. If you will glorify God by trusting him, and depend upon him according to his word — you will find it to be so.

We miss of our protection and defense by our doubts, unbelief, and distrust of God. All those who in time of danger are duly sensible of it, and make use of God as their refuge and hiding place — shall find him to be that to them, which their faith expects from him.

There is a keeping of the outward man, and a keeping of the inward man. As to the outward man, "all things come alike to all," Ecclesiastes 9:2; the Christian is safe, whatever becomes of the man; the Lord will keep him to his heavenly kingdom, 2 Timothy 4:17-18. What the Christian desires mainly to be kept is his soul, that he may not miscarry — blemish his profession, and dishonor God. I say, we cannot absolutely expect temporal safety. The righteous are liable to many troubles. Psalms 34:19, therefore, in temporal things, God will not keep off the temporal stroke — but leave us to many uncertainties, or at least hold us in doubt about it — that we may trust his goodness. When we trust God, we may trust all his attributes, not only his power, that he is able to preserve — but his goodness, that he will do what is best for us, that there may be a submission and a referring all to his will. God will certainly make good his promise — but this trust lies not in an absolute certainty of success as to temporal things. However, this should not discourage us from making God our refuge, because promises of better things are sure enough, and God's

keeping us in suspense about other things is no evidence that he will not afford them to us. It is his usual course (and few instances can be given to the contrary) to have a special regard to his trusting servants, and to hide them secretly. Those who know His name, will find that he has never forsaken those who put their trust in him. Psalms 9:10.

It is the only sure way to be safe; whereas, to perplex our souls with distrust, even about these outward things, dishonors God's faithfulness, and is the way to bring ruin upon ourselves. You see then, what respect the word has to this privilege, that God is a shield and a hiding place. The word discovers God under these figures; the word invites and encourages us to put God to this use; the word assures us of his divine protection; it directs us to the qualification of the people that shall enjoy this privilege, "those who trust God;" and it directs us to expect the blessing, not with absolute confidence of success — but in humble submission to his will. This quiets the heart in waiting God's leisure. "Our soul waits for the Lord, he is our help and our shield," Psalms 33:20. If so, then faith is quietly to wait God's leisure; until he sends deliverance, his promise must bear up our hearts, and we must be contented to tarry his time — our impatience must not make us outrun God. This will fortify the heart against present difficulties. When all visible helps are cut off — yet may we encourage ourselves in the Lord. When Israel was wandering in the wilderness, and had neither house nor home, then Moses, that man of God, pens that Psalm, "Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations," Psalms 90:1. What was lacking to sense, they saw made up in the all-sufficiency of God. And here is the use of faith, when in defiance of all difficulties, we can see an all-sufficiency in God to counterbalance that which is lacking to sense.

"Lord, you are my shield and glory, and the lifter up of my head," Psalms 3:3. David wrote this psalm when he was driven from his palace by his son Absalom; when he was in danger — God was his shield; when his kingdom and honor were laid in the dust — God was his glory; when he was under sorrow and shame, and enemies insulting over him; when the people rose against him, and he was in great dejection of spirit — "God was the lifter up of his head." This is getting under the covert of this shield, or within the compass of this hiding place!

"Into your hands I commit my spirit, for you have redeemed me, Lord God of truth," Psalms 31:5. David was then in great danger, the net was laid for him, as he said in a former verse, and when he was likely to perish, what does he do? He casts all his care upon God, and trusts him with his life, his safety: "Into your hands I commit my spirit." The use of faith is to quicken us to go on cheerfully in our path, and with a quiet heart resting on God's love, power, and truth. To persuade us to contentment in a time of trouble, though our condition is not what we desire — yet if we have but a hiding place, if God grants us a little liberty in our service, we ought to be content, if he will give us safety, though not plenty — for here on earth is not our rest. God never undertook in his covenant to maintain us in such a state, nor thus to enlarge our earthly portion; if he will grant a little peace and safety to us during the time of our pilgrimage — we ought to be content. And unless God be our hiding place, the strongest defences in the world are not enough to keep us from danger. All the shifts we run into, will only entangle us the more, drive us farther from God, and to greater suffering. Many thus run away from God's protection, and seek out means of safety for themselves; thus they do but plunge themselves into troubles so much the more. There is much sin and danger in departing from God; he can soon blast our confidences. God will blast our carnal shifts, Jeremiah 17:15-18. No hurt can come to us without God's permission. No creature can move or stir — but only by God's permission — but by his influence. Others may have a will to

hurt us — but not the power, unless given them from above, as Christ told Pilate. Satan is a raging adversary against the people of God — but he is forced to ask permission before he can touch either Job's goods or his person; he could not touch his skin, nor anything that belonged to him, without permission from God, Job 1:1-22. Nay, he must ask permission to enter into the herd of swine, Matthew 8:31.

Constantly then, make use of God. You may think this advice not needed by you, because you are at present out of fears and dangers; but what says the scripture? "Be not high-minded, but fear," — and again, "Blessed is the man who fears always." Are you not constantly to make use of God, whether your state be well or ill, and to live upon God at all times? All our comforts are from God — as well as our support in trouble. Certainly, he who lives upon God in prosperity — will live upon him in adversity. Oh! when you are at ease and abound in all things, and consider Him as the author of all your happiness, and the giver of all your gifts — you will learn better to make Him your refuge when all things fail. But he who lives upon the creature in prosperity — when the creature fails, will be in utter distress, and know not which way to turn for comfort.

"O LORD, the hope of Israel, all who forsake you will be put to shame. Those who turn away from you will be written in the dust because they have forsaken the LORD, the spring of living water. Heal me, O LORD, and I will be healed; save me and I will be saved, for you are the one I praise!" Jeremiah 17:13-14 "Jesus Our Hiding Place" When God's right arm is bared for war,

And thunders clothe his cloudy car,
Where, where, oh where! shall man retire,
To escape the horrors of His ire?
'Tis He, the Lamb, to whom we fly,
While the dread tempest passes by;
God sees His well-Beloved's face,
And spares us in our hiding place.
Thus, while we dwell in this low scene,
The Lamb is our unfailing screen;
To Him, though guilty, still we run,
And God still spares us for his Son.
While yet we sojourn here below,
Pollutions still our hearts overflow;
Fallen, abject, mean, a sentenced race,
We deeply need a hiding place.
Yet courage, days and years will glide,

And we shall lay these clods aside;
Shall be baptized in Jordan's flood,
And washed in Jesus' cleansing blood.
Then pure, immortal, sinless, freed,
We, through the Lamb, shall be decreed;
Shall meet the Father face to face,
And need no more a hiding place!

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