

Laws from Heaven for Life on Earth.

ILLUSTRATIONS
OF THE
BOOK OF PROVERBS.

BY THE
REV. WILLIAM ARNOT,
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TO THE READER.

THESE illustrations of the Proverbs are not critical, continuous, exhaustive. The comments, in imitation of the text, are intended to be brief, practical, miscellaneous, isolated. The reader may, however, perceive a principle of unity running through the whole, if he takes his stand at the outset on the writer's view point—a desire to lay the Christian System along the surface of common life, without removing it from its foundations in the doctrines of Grace. The authority of the instructions must be divine: the form transparently human. Although the lessons should, with a pliant familiarity, lay themselves along the line of men's thoughts and actions, they will work no deliverance, unless redeeming love be everywhere the power to press them in. On the other hand, although evangelical doctrine be consistently maintained throughout, the teaching will come short of its purpose unless it go right into every crevice of a corrupt heart, and perseveringly double every turn of a crooked path. Without "the love wherewith He loved us" as our motive power, we cannot reach for healing any of the deeper ailments of the world: but having such a power within our reach, we should not leave it dangling in the air; we should bring it down, and make it bear on every

sorrow that afflicts, and every sin that defiles humanity. The two extremes to be avoided are, abstract unpractical speculation, and shallow, powerless, heathen morality; the one a soul without a body, the other a body without a soul—the one a ghost, the other a carcass. The aim is to be doctrinal without losing our hold of earth, and practical without losing our hold of heaven.

Most certain it is that if the Church at any period, or any portion of the Church, has fallen into either of these extremes, it has been her own fault; for the Bible, her standard, is clear from both imputations. Christ is its subject and its substance. His word is like Himself. It is of heaven, but it lays itself closely around the life of men. Such is the Bible; and such, in their own place and measure, should our expositions of it be.

Had our object been a critical exposition of the Book, it would have been our duty to devote the larger share of our attention to the more difficult parts. But our aim from first to last has been more to apply the obvious than to elucidate the obscure, and the selection of texts has been determined accordingly. As there is diversity of gifts, there should be division of labour. While scientific inquirers re-examine the joints of the machine, and demonstrate anew the principles of its construction, it may not be amiss that a workman should set the machine a-going, and try its effects on the affairs of life.

W. A.

CONTENTS.

	Page
I. THE PREACHER	9
II. THE BOOK—PROVERBS	15
III. THE ROOT OF KNOWLEDGE	19
IV. THE FAMILY	25
V. FILIAL LOVE A BLOSSOM OF BEAUTY	30
VI. THE FOE AND THE FIGHT	34
VII. FILTHY LUCRE	57
VIII. THE CRY OF WISDOM	64
IX. A REVIVAL	72
X. SOWING DISOBEDIENCE, REAPING JUDGMENT	78
XI. SEEK AND YE SHALL FIND	88
XII. PERILS IN THE DEEP	97
XIII. THE MEANS OF SAFETY	104
XIV. A GOOD MEMORY	106
XV. THE ART OF PRINTING	110
XVI. TRUST	116
XVII. THE HEALTH OF HOLINESS	121
XVIII. CAPITAL AND PROFIT	123
XIX. A FATHERLY WORD ON FATHERLY CORRECTION	126
XX. TREASURES FOR THE TAKING	134
XXI. GAINFUL MERCHANDISE	136
XXII. LENGTH OF DAYS IN THE HAND OF WISDOM	139
XXIII. A PLEASANT PATH	142

	Page
XXIV. WISDOM MAKING AND MANAGING WORLDS	144
XXV. CONFIDENCE IN GOD THE TRUE SAFEGUARD FROM TEMPTATION	147
XXVI. THE RIGHT THING DONE AT THE RIGHT TIME	152
XXVII. THE CURSE AND THE BLESSING UPON THE HOUSE	158
XXVIII. PRECEPT AND EXAMPLE	161
XXIX. HOLD FAST	163
XXX. THE PATH OF THE JUST	166
XXXI. THE FOUNTAIN AND ITS STREAM	171
XXXII. FAMILY JOYS	179
XXXIII. THE METHOD OF PROVIDENCE FOR RESTRAINING EVIL	185
XXXIV. SEVEN HATEFUL THINGS	188
XXXV. MOTHER'S LAW	190
XXXVI. THE WORTH OF WISDOM	197
XX XVII. HATE EVIL	200
XXXVIII. RANK AND RICHES	202
XXXIX. THE REDEEMER ANTICIPATING REDEMPTION	205
XL. THE MARRIAGE SUPPER FOR THE KING'S SON	200
XLI. REPROOF	213
XLII. THE TALENT AND ITS PRODUCT	219
XLIII. THE PLEASURES OF SIN	221
XLIV. THE PLACE AND POWER OF A SON	229
XLV. DILIGENT IN BUSINESS	234
XLVI. POSTHUMOUS FAME	236
XLVII. THE WISE TAKE ADVICE: FOOLS ONLY GIVE IT	238
XLVIII. THE CENTRE OF GRAVITY	240
XLIX. THE WELL OF LIFE	242
L. EXPERIENCE KEPT FOR USE	245
LL THE MONEY POWER	247
LII. THE LIPS AND TONGUE	251
LIII. THE BLESSING OF THE LORD MAKETH RICH	254
LIV. A FOOL'S SPORT	261

CONTENTS.

vii

	Page
LV. FILM REALIZED, AND HOPES FULFILLED	263
LVI. THE PAINING WHIRLWIND AND THE SURE FOUNDATION	273
LVII. THE GREATNESS OF LITTLE THINGS	274
LVIII. HONESTY IS THE BEST POLICY	279
LIX. ASSORTED PAIRS	285
LX. DIPLOMACY	288
LXI. THE DESTROYER OF A NEIGHBOUR	290
LXII. A TALEBEARER	292
LVIII. DEBTS AND SURETIES	294
LXIV. VIRTUE ITS OWN REWARD	303
LXV. EVERY SEED BEARS FRUIT OF ITS OWN KIND	305
LXVI. GOD'S PEOPLE ARE GOD'S DELIGHT	307
LXVII. A JEWEL ILL SET	308
LXVIII. THE DESIRE OF THE RIGHTEOUS	312
LXIX. SCATTERING TO KEEP, AND KEEPING TO SCATTER	315
LXX. THE WATERER IS WATERED	319
LXXI. RAISING THE MARKET—THE PRACTICE AND THE PENALTY	323
LXXII. THE TREE AND ITS BRANCH	327
LXXIII. THE WISDOM OF WINNING SOULS	333
LXXIV. A BITTER BUT HEALTHFUL MORSEL	336
LXXV. A HUSBAND'S CROWN	340
LXXVI. THE TENDER MERCIES OF THE WICKED	343
LXXVII. LIES, THE SNARE THAT LIARS ARE CAUGHT IN	345
LXXVIII. HOPE DEFERRED	347
LXXIX. GOD'S WORD THE PRESERVER OF NATIONS	350
LXXX. THE HARD WAY	352
LXXXI. THE CHOICE OF COMPANIONS	355
LXXXII. THE FATHER WHO HATES HIS SON	359
LX XXIII. SECULARISM	367
LXXXIV. FLIGHT, THE SAFETY OF THE WEAK	373
LXXXV. SYMPATHY	375

	Page.
LXXXVI. A MAN IS RESPONSIBLE FOR HIS BELIEF	378
LXXXVII. THE BACKSLIDER	384
LXXXVIII. THE TRUSTFUL AND THE TRUTHFUL	388
LXXXIX. THE FOOL'S CONFIDENCE	392
XC. WITNESS	396
XCI. THE PLACE OF REFUGE	401
XCII. ENVY, THE DISEASE AND THE CURE	406
XCIII. THE MERCIFUL	410
XCIV. THE TWO DEPARTURES—THE HOPEFUL AND THE HOPELESS	417
XCV. THE TRUTH IN LOVE	424

ILLUSTRATIONS OF THE BOOK OF PROVERBS.

I. THE PREACHER

"The Proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel."—i. 1.

GOD'S word is like God's world: it combines unity of pervading principle, with endless variety in detail. The whole Bible, considered as one book, stands entirely apart from all other writings; and yet every several portion of it is distinguished from every other portion, as much as one merely human writing is distinguished from another. This combination results from the manner in which it has pleased God to make known his will. One Divine Spirit inspires; hence the unity of the whole. Men of diverse age, taste, and attainments write; hence the diversity of the parts. Although the books are written by Moses, David, Solomon, they are all alike the word of God: therefore they exhibit a complete separation from all other writings, and a perfect consistency among themselves. Again, although they are all one as being the word of God, they are as much the genuine product of different human minds, as the ordinary writings of men are the work of their authors: therefore there is in matter

and manner, an unconstrained, natural, life-like diversity. It was God who "spake unto the fathers," but it was "by the prophets" that he spoke; not by their tongues only, but their understandings, memories, tastes; in short, all that constituted the men. There is as much individuality in the books of Scripture as in any other books. There is as much of Moses shining through the Pentateuch, as of Gibbon in the Decline and Fall. As are the articulating lips to the soul whose thoughts they utter, so are the prophets to the Holy Spirit, whose mind they reveal.

Every writer was chosen by God, as well as every word. He had a purpose to serve by the disposition, the acquirements, and the experience of each. The education of Moses as one of the royal race of Egypt was a qualification necessary to the leader of the exodus, and the writer of the Pentateuch. The experience of David, with its successive stages, like geologic strata, touching each other in abrupt contrast, first as a shepherd youth, then as a fugitive warrior, and last as a victorious king, was a qualification indispensable to the sweet singer of Israel. God needed a human spirit as a mould to cast consolation in, for every kindred in every age. He chose one whose experience was a compound of meekness and might, of deep distress and jubilant victory. These, when purged of their dross, and fused into one by the Spirit's baptism of fire, came forth an amalgam of sacred psalmody, which the whole church militant have been singing ever since, and "have not yet sung dry."

Solomon did not, like David, pass his youth in pastoral simplicity, and his early manhood under cruel persecution.

Solomon could not have written the twenty-third psalm—"The Lord is my Shepherd;" nor the fifty-seventh—A psalm of David when he fled from Saul in the cave. His experience would never have suggested the plaintive strains of the ninetieth psalm—A prayer of Moses the man of God—"Lord, thou hast been our dwelling-place." But, on the other hand, Solomon went through a peculiar experience of his own, and God, who in nature gives sweet fruit to men through the root sap of a sour crab, when a new nature has been engrafted on the upper stem, did not disdain to bring forth fruits of righteousness through those parts of the king's experience that cleaved most closely to the dust. None of all the prophets could have written the Proverbs or the Preacher; for God is not wont, even in his miraculous interpositions, to make a fig-tree bear olive berries, or a vine figs: every creature acts after its kind. When Solomon delineated the eager efforts of men in search of happiness, and the disappointment which ensued, he could say, like Bunyan, of that fierce and fruitless war, "I was there." The heights of human prosperity he had reached: the paths of human learning he had trodden, farther than any of his day: the pleasures of wealth and power and pomp he had tasted, in all their variety. No spring of earthly delight could be named, of whose waters he had not deeply drunk. This is the man whom God has chosen as the schoolmaster to teach us the vanity of the world when it is made the portion of a soul, and He hath done all things well. The man who has drained the cup of pleasure can best tell the taste of its dregs.

The choice of Solomon as one of the writers of the Bible, at first sight startles, but on deeper study instructs. We would have expected a man of more exemplary life a man of uniform holiness It is certain that in the main; the vessels which the Spirit used were sanctified vessels. "Holy men of old spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." But as they were all corrupt at first, so there were diversities in the operation whereby they were called and qualified for their work. There were diversities in the times, and degrees of their sanctification. Some were carried so near perfection in the body, that human eyes could no longer discern spot or wrinkle; in others the principle of grace was so largely overlaid with earthliness, that observers were left in doubt whether they had been turned to the Lord's side at all. But the diversity in all its extent is like the other ways of God; and He knows how to make either extreme fall into its place in the concert of his praise. He who made Saul an apostle, did not disdain to use Solomon as a prophet. Very diverse were the two men, and very diverse their life course; yet in one thing they are perfectly alike. Together in glory now they know themselveselves to have been only sinners, and agree in ascribing all their salvation to the mercy of God.

Moreover, although good men wrote the Bible, our faith in the Bible does not rest on the goodness of the men who wrote it The fatal facility with which men glide into the worship of men may suggest another reason why some of the channels chosen for conveying the mind of God were marred by glaring deficiencies. Among

many earthen vessels, in various measures purged of their filthiness, may not the Divine Administrator in wisdom select for actual use some of the least pure, in order by that grosser argument to force into grosser minds the conviction that the excellency of the power is all of God? If all the writers of the Bible had been perfect in holiness—if no stain of sin could be traced on their character, no error noted in their life, it is certain that the Bible would not have served all the purposes which it now serves among men. It would have been God-like indeed in matter and in mould, but it would not have reached down to the low estate of man—it would not have penetrated to the sores of a human heart. For engraving the life lessons of his word, our Father uses only diamonds: but in every diamond there is a flaw, in some a greater and in some a less; and who shall dare to dictate to the Omniscient the measure of defect that blinds Him to fling the instrument as a useless thing away?

When God would leave on my mind in youth the lesson that the pleasures of sin are barbed arrows, he uses that same Solomon as the die to indent it in. I mark the wisdom of the choice. I get and keep the lesson, but the homage of my soul goes to God who gave it, and not to Solomon, the instrument through which it came. God can make man's wrath to praise him, and their vanity too. He can make the clouds bear some benefits to the earth, which the sun cannot bestow. He can make brine serve some purposes in nature which sweet water could not fulfil. So, practical lessons on some subjects come better through the heart and lips of the weary repentant king,

than through a man who had tasted fewer pleasures, and led a more even life.

Two principles cover the whole case. "All things are of God;" and "All things are for your sakes." We can never be sufficiently familiar with these two: (1.) The universality of God's government; and (2.) The special use for his own people to which he turns every person and every thing. All Solomon's wisdom, and power, and glory and pleasure were an elaborate writing by the finger of God, containing a needful lesson to his children. The wisdom which we are invited to hear is Divine wisdom; the complicated life-experience of Solomon is the machinery of articulation employed to convey it to the ears of men. In casting some of the separate letters, the king may have been seeking only his own pleasure, yet the whole, when cast, are set by the Spirit so that they give forth an important page of the word of truth.

The thought recurs, that the king of Jerusalem was not from his antecedents, qualified to sit in the chair of authority and teach morality to mankind. No, he was not: and perhaps on that very account the morality which he taught is all the more impressive. Here is a marvel; NOT A LINE OF SOLOMON'S WRITINGS TENDS TO PALLIATE SOLOMON'S SINS. How do you account for this? The errors and follies were his own; they were evil. But out of them the All-wise has brought good. The glaring imperfections of the man's life have been used as a dark ground to set off the lustre of that pure righteousness which the Spirit has spoken by his lips.

II.

THE BOOK—PROVERBS.

"To understand a proverb, and the interpretation;
the words of the wise, and their dark sayings."—i. 6.

IT is safer and better to assume that all men know what a proverb is, than to attempt a logical definition of it. As a general rule, the things that are substantially best known are hardest to define.

Proverbs are very abundant in all languages, and among all peoples. Many of them, though they seem fresh and full of sap on our lips to-day, have descended to us from the remotest antiquity. They deal with all manner of subjects, but chiefly with the broadest features of common life. The peculiar charm and power of the proverb are due to a combination of many elements. Among others are the condensed antithetic form of expression and the mingled plainness and darkness of the meaning. Often there is something to startle at first; and yet, on closer inspection, that which seemed paradox, turns out to be only intenser truth. Like those concentrated essences of food, which are so much used by travellers in our day, the proverb may not present to the eye the appearance of the wisdom that it was originally made of; but a great quantity of the raw material has been used up in making one, and that one, when skillfully dissolved, will spread out to its original dimensions.

Much matter is pressed into little room, that it may keep, and carry. Wisdom, in this portable form, acts an important part in human life. The character of a people gives shape to their proverbs; and again, the proverbs go to mould the character of the people who use them. These well worn words are precious, as being real gold, and convenient, as being a portable, stamped, and recognised currency.

As a general rule, proverbs spring from the people at large, as herbage springs spontaneously from the soil, and the parentage of the individual remains for ever unknown. Very few proverbs are attached, even traditionally, to the name of any man as their author. From time to time collections of these products are made, and catalogued by the curious; and the stock is continually increasing as the active life of a nation gives them off. In other cases, books of proverbs have an opposite origin. Persons who appreciate the proverbial form cast their own thoughts in that mould, and so make a book of sentences, which are proverbs in their nature, although not, in point of fact, generated by casual contact of mind with mind in miscellaneous human life. It is altogether probable that, as to its construction, the Book of Proverbs partook of both kinds. It is probable that Solomon gathered and recast many proverbs which had sprung from human experience in preceding ages, and were floating past him on the tide of time; and that he also elaborated many new ones from the material of his own experience. Towards the close of the book, indeed, are preserved some of Solomon's own sayings, that seem to have fallen from

his lips in later life, and been gathered by other hands.

Even in this one book the proverb appears under considerable diversity of form. Both in the beginning and towards the close, occur arguments, more or less lengthened, of continuous texture. But even in these the several links of the connected chain are cast in the proverbial mould; and the great central mass of the book consists of brief sayings, more or less arranged, indeed, but almost entirely isolated.

Considering how great a place proverbs hold in human language—how great a part they act in human life—it was to be expected that the Spirit would use that instrument, among others, in conveying the mind of God to men. Proverbs, like hymns and histories, are both in human life and in the Bible—in the Bible, because they are in human life. If you wished to convey a message to a number of countrymen in France, you would not speak in Latin in order to display your own learning; you would speak in French in order to accomplish your object. God's will to man is communicated by means of instruments which man already uses, and therefore understands.

A greater than Solomon spoke in proverbs. He who knew what was in man sometimes took up that instrument, to probe therewith the secrets of the heart. Some he gathered as they grew in nature, and others he created by his word; but the old and the new alike are spirit and life, when they drop from the lips of Jesus.

Of the proverbs current in the world many are light, and some are wicked. Those of this book are grave and good.

God's words are pure, whether he speaks by the prophets of old, or by his own Son in the latter day. "More be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey, and the honey-comb. Moreover, *by them is thy servant warned.*"—Psalm xix. 10, 11.

The book from which the following studies are selected is peculiarly rich in "warnings," and the age in which we live peculiarly needs them. "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth."

III.

THE ROOT OF KNOWLEDGE.

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge:
but fools despise wisdom and instruction."—i. 7.

THE royal preacher begins his sermon at the beginning. He intends to discourse largely of knowledge and wisdom in all their aspects, and he lays his foundation deep in "the fear of the Lord." This brief announcement contains the germ of a fair-reaching philosophy. Already it marks the book divine. The heathen of those days possessed no such doctrines Solomon had access to a Teacher who was not known in their schools

"The fear of the Lord" is an expression of frequent occurrence throughout the Scriptures. It has various shades of meaning, marked by the circumstances in which it is found; but in the main it implies a right state of heart toward God, as opposed to the alienation of an unconverted man. Though the word is "fear," it does not exclude a filial confidence, and a conscious peace. There may be such love as shall cast all the torment out of the fear, and yet leave full bodied, in a human heart, the reverential awe which all, creatures owe to the Highest One. "There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared." "Oh fear the Lord, ye his saints; for there is no want to them that fear him!" "I am the Lord thy God;" behold the ground of submissive reverence:

"which brought thee up from the land of Egypt;" behold the source of confiding love. What God inspires awe; what God has done for his people commands affection. See here the centrifugal and centripetal forces of the moral world, holding the creature reverently distant from the Creator, yet compassing the child about with everlasting love, to keep him near a Father in heaven. The whole of this complicated and reciprocal relation is often indicated in Scripture by the brief expression, "the fear of God."

"Knowledge" and "wisdom" are not distinguished here; at least they are not contrasted. Both terms may be employed to designate the same thing; but when they are placed in antithesis, wisdom is the nobler of the two. Knowledge may be possessed in large measure by one who is destitute of wisdom, and who consequently does no good by it, either to himself or others. A lucid definition of both, in their specific and distinct applications, is embodied in a proverb of this book, xv. 2, "the tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright" We take the two terms of this text as in effect synonymous,—the best knowledge wisely used for the highest ends.

What is the relation which subsists between the fear of the Lord and true wisdom? The one is the foundation, the other the imposed superstructure; the one is the sustaining root, the other the sustained branches; the one is the living fountain, the other the issuing stream.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge: the meaning is, he who does not reverentially trust in

God, knows nothing yet as he ought to know. His knowledge is partial and distorted. Whatever acquisitions in science he may attain, if his heart depart from the living God, he abides an ignorant man. He who in his heart says "no God," is a fool, however wise he may be in the estimation of the world, and his own.

But how does this judgment accord with facts? Have not some Atheists, or at least Infidels, reached the very highest attainments in various departments of knowledge? It is true that some men, who remain willingly ignorant of God, who even blaspheme his name, and despise his word, have learned many languages, have acquired skill in the theory and application of mathematics, have stored their memories with the facts of history, and the maxims of politics—this is true, and these branches of knowledge are not less precious because they are possessed by men whose whom life turns round on the pivot of one central and all-pervading error; but after this concession, our position remains intact. These men possess some fragments of the superstructure of knowledge, but they have not the foundation; they possess some of the branches, but they have missed the root.

The knowledge of God—his character and plans, his hatred of sin, his law of holiness, his way of mercy—is more excellent than all that an unbelieving philosopher has attained. If it be attainable, and if a Christian has reached it, then is a Christian peasant wiser than the wisest who know not God. It is a knowledge more deeply laid, more difficult of attainment, more fruitful, and more comprehensive, than all that philosophers know.

What right has an unbelieving astronomer to despise a Christian labourer as an ignorant man? Let them be compared as to the point in question, the possession of knowledge. Either is ignorant of the other's peculiar department, but it is an error to suppose the astronomer's department the higher of the two. The Christian knows God; the astronomer knows certain of his material works. The Christian knows moral, the astronomer physical laws. The subjects of the Christian's knowledge are as real as the heavenly bodies. The knowledge is as difficult, and perhaps, in its higher degrees, as rare. It reaches further, it lasts longer, it produces greater results. The astronomer knows the planet's path; but if that planet should burst its bonds, and wander into darkness, his knowledge will not avail to cast a line around the prodigal and lead him home. He can mark the degrees of divergence, and predict the period of total loss, but after that he has no more that he can do. The Christian's knowledge, after it has detected the time, manner, and extent of the fallen spirit's aberration, avails farther to lay a new bond unseen around him, soft, yet strong, which will compel him to come in again to his Father's house and his Father's bosom. The man who knows that, as sin hath reigned unto death, even so grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord, possesses a deeper, more glorious, and more potential knowledge, than the man who calculates the courses of the planets, and predicts the period of the comet's return.

Men speak of the stupendous effects which knowledge,

in the department of mechanical philosophy, has produced on the face of the world, and in the economy of human life; but the permanence of these acquisitions depends on the authority of moral laws in the consciences of men. If there were no fear of God, there would be no reverence for moral law in the bulk of mankind. If moral restraints are removed from the multitude, society reverts to a savage state. Inventions in art, though once attained, are again lost, when a community feed on venison, and clothe themselves with skins. So, "the fear of the Lord" is a fundamental necessity, on which high attainments, even in material prosperity, absolutely depend. True knowledge in the spiritual department, as to the authority, the sanction, and the rule of morality, is a greater thing than true knowledge in the material department, for the moral encircles and controls the economic in the affairs of men.

The man whose knowledge begins and ends with matter and its laws, has got a superstructure without a foundation. In that learning the enduring relations of man as an immortal have no place, and the fabric topples over when the breath of life goes out. But this beginning of knowledge, resting on the being and attributes of God, and comprehending all the relations of the creature, is a foundation that cannot be shaken. On that solid base more and more knowledge will be reared, high as heaven, wide as the universe, lasting as eternity.

The knowledge of God is the root of knowledge. When branches are cut from a tree and laid on the ground at a certain season, they retain for a time a por-

tion of their sap. I have seen such branches, when the spring came round, pushing forth buds like their neighbours. But very soon the slender stock of sap was exhausted, and as there was no connection with a root, so as to procure a new supply, the buds withered away. How unlike the buds that spring from the branches growing in the living root! This natural life is like a severed branch. The knowledge that springs from it is a bud put forth by the moisture residing in itself. When life passes, it withers away. When a human soul is, by the regeneration, "rooted in Him," the body's dissolution does not nip its knowledge in the bud. Transplanted into a more genial clime, that knowledge will flourish for ever. Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, what it will grow to.

IV.

THE FAMILY.

"My son, hear the instruction of thy father,
and forsake not the law of thy mother."—i. 8.

THE first and great commandment is the fear of God, and the, second, which is next to it, and like to it, is obedience to parents. Wherever the root is planted, this is the first fruit which it bears.

The teaching of the Decalogue, and of the Proverbs, though circumstantially different, is essentially the same. On the one hand we have the legislator formally recording a code of laws; on the other, the aged, prosperous, and witty monarch collecting the best sayings that had been current at his court in that Augustan age of Hebrew literature. The cast of the writings corresponds with the position of the men; yet there are evident marks of the same spirit as the teacher, and the same truth as the lesson. The ten commandments are divided into two tables. The first lays the foundation of all duty in our relation to God, and the second rears the superstructure in the various offices of love between man and his fellow. In the Decalogue the fear of God, lies deepest as the root; and of the manifold duties which man owes to man, the branch that springs forth first is filial love. It is precisely the same here. The beginning of the commandment is "Fear the Lord" and the earliest outcome is,

"My son, hear the instruction of thy father." This verse of the Proverbs flows from the same well-spring that had already given forth the fifth commandment.

God honours his own ordinance, the family. He gives parents rank next after himself. Filial love stands near, and leans on godliness.

God is the author of the family constitution. He has conceived the plan, and executed it. Its laws are stamped in nature, and declared in the word. The equal numbers of the sexes born into the world, the feebleness of childhood at first, and the returning frailty of age, are so many features of the family institute left by the Creator indented on his work. They intimate not obscurely the marriage of one man with one woman, the support of children by parents, and the support of decayed parents by their children grown. There are many such laws deeply imprinted in nature; and in nature, too, a terrible vengeance is stored up, which bursts with unerring exactitude on the head of the transgressor.

One of the wonders of that little world in the dwelling is the adaptation by which all the powers of the elder children are exerted for the protection of the youngest. A boisterous and impulsive boy, able and willing to maintain his rights by force of arms against a rival older than himself, may be seen to check suddenly the embryo manhood that was spurting prematurely out, and put on a mimic motherliness, the moment that the infant appears, bent on a journey across the room, and tottering unsteady by. A condescending look, and a winning word, and a soft arm around,—all the miniature man is put forth in

self-forgetting benevolence. How exquisitely contrived is this machinery in nature, both for protecting the feeble thing that receives the kindness, and softening the rude hand that bestows it! There is fine material here for parents to watch and work upon. The stem is soft, you may train it; the growth is rapid, you must train it now.

In proportion as men have adopted and carried out the ordinance in its purity, have the interests of society prospered. All deviations are at once displeasing to God and hurtful to men. The polygamy of Eastern peoples has made the richest portions of the earth like a howling wilderness. The festering sores opened in the body of the community by the licentiousness of individuals among ourselves, make it evident, that if the course, which is now a too frequent exception, should become the general rule, society itself would soon waste away. It is chiefly by their effects in deranging the order of families, that great manufactories deteriorate a community. Though the socialist bodies, being so sickly and diseased in constitution, have never lived much beyond infancy amongst us; yet, as they are founded on a reversal of the family law, their effects, as far as they have produced effects, are misery and ruin. The Romish priesthood, abjuring the divinely provided companionship of the household, and adopting solitude, or something worse, have ever been like a pin loose in the circling machinery of society, tearing every portion as it passes by. In the constitution of nature there is a self-acting apparatus for punishing the transgression of the family laws. The divine institute is hedged all round.

The prickles tear the flesh of those who are so foolish as to kick against them.

In practice, and for safety, keep families together as long as it is possible. When the young must go forth from a father's house, let a substitute be provided as closely allied to the normal institution as the circumstances will admit. Let a sister be spared to live with the youths, and extemporize an off-shoot family near the great mart of business, with a dwelling that they may call their own. The cutting, though severed from the stem, being young and sapful, will readily strike root, and imitate the parent. This failing, let a lodging be found in a family where the youths will be treated as its members, participating at once in the enjoyments and restraints of a home. When the boy must needs be broken off from the parental stem, oh, throw him not an isolated atom on the sea of life that welters in a huge metropolis. Nor pen him up with a miscellaneous herd of a hundred men in the upper flat of some huge mercantile establishment, a teeming islet lapsed into barbarism, with the waters of civilization circling all around. If you do not succeed in getting the severed branch engrafted into some stock that shall be an equivalent to the family, and so exercise the natural affections, the natural affections checked, will wither up within, or burst forth in wickedness. The youth will be ruined himself, and the ruined youth will be an element of corruption to fester in the heart of the society that neglected him.

Honour thy father and thy mother. This is the pattern shown in the mount. The closer we keep to it,

the better will it be both for the individual and the community. God is wiser than men,

Children obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right, and all right things are profitable. To violate the providential laws is both a crime and a blunder.

Love to parents ranks next under reverence to God. That first and highest commandment is like the earth's allegiance to the sun by general law; and filial obedience is like day and night, summer and winter, budding spring and ripening harvest, on the earth's surface. There could be none of these sweet changes, and beneficent operations of nature on our globe, if it were broken away from the sun. So when a people burst the first and greatest bond—when a people cast off the fear of God, the family relations, with all their beauty and benefit, disappear. We may read this lesson in the fortunes of France. When the nation threw off the first commandment, the second went after it. When they repudiated the fear of God, they could not retain conjugal fidelity, and filial love. Hence the wreck and ruin of all the relations between man and man. As well might they try to make a new world, as to manage this one wanting the first and second, the primary and subordinate moral laws of its Maker.

V.

FILIAL LOVE A BLOSSOM OF BEAUTY.

"For they shall be an ornament of grace unto thy head,
and chains about thy neck."-i. 9.

IT seems an instinct of humanity to put ornaments upon the person. It is greatly modified in its development by circumstances, but it is certainly a uniform tendency of our nature. It does not rank high among the exercises of the human faculties, yet it is quite above the reach of all inferior creatures. The propensity is fully developed in tribes that lie lowest in the scale of humanity; yet no germ of it can be traced in species that form the culminating point in the brute creation. By so many and so various marks may be known the abrupt and absolute separation between men who have fallen the lowest, and other sentient beings that occupy the summit of their scale.

Ornaments on the fallen, like many other innocent things, become the occasions of sin, but they are not in their own nature evil. It is probable that the pleasure which we derive from them springs originally from some association with moral qualities. There is some connection between sensible beauty and moral goodness, although the instances of deception are so numerous as to deprive that connection of all value as a rule of life. To deck with external beauty that which is morally corrupt within,

is a cheat which men practise on themselves and others; but adornment of the person, modest in measure, and adopted instinctively by an innate sense of propriety, is conducive to virtue, and consistent with Scripture.

Ornaments, however, are mentioned here not for their own sakes, either to commend or forbid them, but as a form of expression to convey emphatically the truth that moral qualities, after all, are the true adornments of a human being. All the graces of the Spirit are lovely; but here the foremost of relative duties, a child's reverential regard for a parent, is recommended as an ornament of surpassing beauty. Young men and young women, put that ornament on your heads—twine that chain of gold around your necks! These jewels from heaven, set deep within your souls, and glancing at every turn through the transparency of an unaffected life, will do more to make your persons attractive than all the diamonds that ever decked a queen.

The world and its history teem with types of heaven. Beauty, and the love that fastens on it, are types, and they have their antitypes on high. The ransomed Church is the bride of the Lamb, and she is adorned for her husband. When the adorning is complete, she is all glorious, and the King greatly desires her beauty. When he presents unto himself a church without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, then shall he see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied.

Put on now, oh son! daughter! put on these beautiful garments; love, obey, cherish, reverence your parents. These are in God's sight of great price. They are valued

not only by the spiritually minded disciples of Jesus, but even by every man of sense around you. They are thought becoming by all but fools. These ornaments will not be out of date when time has run its course. They will be worn on the golden streets of the New Jerusalem, when the fashion of this world shall have passed away.

Over against this beaming beauty, of similar shape and size, a dark shadow stands. Whithersoever that comely body turns, this ghastly spectre follows it. It is a daughter, emerging into womanhood, with ruddy cheek and sparkling eye,—with beads on her neck and bracelets on her arms,—who has so crushed a mother's heart, by constantly trampling down its desires, that the disconsolate mother never utters now the reproof which she knows would be despised. Personal beauty, aided by costly ornaments, cannot make that creature gainly. The deformity within will make itself felt through all the finery.

The evil spirit that possesses the heart will glance from the eye, and tinkle on the tongue, in spite of every effort to act the angel. Every mind that retains in any measure a healthful moral tone will, in close contact with such a character, infallibly be sensible of a discord. Felt repulsive, she will be repelled. The disobedient daughter will gravitate down to the companionship of those who, having no sense of harmony, recoil not from a spirit out of tune. She is miserable, and knows not what ails her. She has broken that commandment which holds a promise in its band, and been thrown over on the barbs of the counterpart curse. Those who see her impaled alive

there, should learn that the moral laws of God have avenging sanctions, even in the powers of nature. Godliness is profitable unto all things. The first commandment is fruitful, even in this life; and the second is like it,—like it in its heavenly origin,—like it in its holy character,—like it in its glad results. Honour thy father and thy mother,—this is an ornament of solid gold. Unlike the watering of superficial accomplishments, the more rudely it is rubbed, the more brightly it glows.

VI.

THE FOE AND THE FIGHT.*

"My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not."--i. 10.

THE verse, in brief compass and transparent terms, reveals the foe and the fight. It is a Father's voice. It speaketh unto us as unto children. With a kindness and wisdom altogether paternal, it warns the youth of the *Danger* that assails him, and suggests the method of *Defence*.

A glance at the three preceding verses will fix the character of the persons whom Solomon has here in his eye. They are not the ignorant, the outcast, the profligate. The stages over which he travels before he reaches this warning, show that he addresses the well-conditioned and hopeful portion of the community. In the seventh verse we have "the beginning of wisdom" laid in the fear of God; in the eighth, the earliest outcome from that unfailing source, the obedience of children to their parents; in the ninth, the beauty of this filial obedience, as the most winsome ornament that the young can deck themselves withal. We have wisdom presented first in its sustaining root, next in its swelling buds, and last in its opening bloom of beauty. The preacher fastens upon persons who have had the fear of God early implanted in their hearts, who have reverently obeyed their parents

* This chapter, with some additions, is published separately, as an Address to Young Men.

during childhood, and who in youth have been observed by others as adorning the doctrine of the Saviour. To these, as they are passing out of youth into the responsibilities of manhood, and from a father's house to the wide theatre of the world, he addresses this plain and pungent exhortation, "My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not."

The *Danger* is, "if sinners entice thee. "There are enticers and enticements; the fowler and his snare.

The *enticers* of youth may be divided into two great classes, the *internal* and the *external*. There are a multitude of evil thoughts in the little world within, and a multitude of evil men in the great world without.

The *sinner*s that entice from *within* are the man's own thoughts and desires. There is quite an army of these sinners in a young man's breast. Thoughts have wings. They pass and repass unobserved. They issue forth from their home in the heart, and expatiate over every forbidden field, and return like doves to their windows, through the air, leaving no track of their path. These thoughts become acquainted with sin. They are accustomed to visit the haunts of vice without detection. They revel unchecked in every unclean thing. They open up the way, and prepare a trodden path on which the man may follow. A gossamer thread is attached to an arrow, and shot through the air unseen, over an impassable chasm. Fixed on the other side, it is sufficient to draw over a cord; the cord draws over a rope; the rope draws over a bridge, by which a highway is opened for all corners. Thus is the gulf passed that lies between the goodly character of a youth fresh from his father's

family, and the daring heights of iniquity on which veteran libertines stand. The sober youth stands on the solid platform of religious and moral worth. No one can think it possible that he should go over to the other side. But from the brink on this side he darts over a thought which makes itself fast to something on these forbidden regions. The film no one saw, as it sped through the air; but it has made good a lodgment in that kingdom of darkness, and the deeds of wickedness will quickly follow when the way has been prepared. "Out of the heart," said He who knows it (Matt. xv. 19), "proceed *evil thoughts*." Yes; that is what we expected; but what come out next? "Murders, adulteries, fornication, thefts, false witness, blasphemies." A horrible gang! How quickly they come on! How closely they follow their leaders! Murders and adulteries march forth unblushingly; but they follow in the wake of *evil thoughts*. Oh, if the fountain were cleansed, the streams of life would be pure! So thought David, when, in an agony of grief despairing of his own efforts, he cried, "Create in me a clean heart, O God!" This is the root of the evil, and no cure will be thorough or lasting that does not reach and remove it.

The *sinner*s that entice from *without* are fellow-men, who, having gone astray themselves, are busy leading others after them. The servants of Satan seem to be diligent and successful. When a society, associated for economical or benevolent purposes, desires to enlarge the number of its members, a common method is to request every one to bring in two others. Thus the membership

is tripled by a single effort. This seems to be the principle of administration adopted by the god of this world. All his subjects are busy. "Ye are of your father the devil, and the deeds of your father ye will do." The deed most characteristic that the father of lies ever did, was to lead others after him into sin. To entice into sin is specifically "the deed " of the devil, and that deed his children will instinctively do. An evil-doer has a craving for company in his wickedness. He cannot enjoy solitary crime. He is impelled to seek company, as a thirsty man is impelled to seek water. It is his vocation to draw others after him into sin. By a natural necessity, the licentious recruit among the ranks of the virtuous; the drunken among the ranks of the sober. An enemy is amongst us: let the inexperienced beware.

How great the danger that every youth incurs as he issues forth from his parents' control, to take his place in the race of life, and on the stage of time! A dreadful conspiracy is organized against him. It is designed and directed by spiritual wickedness in high places; its agents swarm unseen in his own heart, a legion of evil spirits, as it were, possessing him already. Co-operating with these intestine foes, are the whole host of evil-doers who come in contact with him in the world. Young man, this life is not the place to walk at ease in. If you slumber there, the Philistines will be upon you. Though you have a Samson's strength, they will put out your eyes, and make you grind in meanest slavery, and triumph in your misery and death.

It is a power of nature that is taken and employed to

enslave men. The disposition in youth to go together is a law of the human constitution. Men are gregarious. The principle of association is implanted in their nature, and is mighty, according to the direction it gets, for good or evil. This great power generally becomes a ready agency of ill. How faithfully a youth clings to a companion who has obtained an influence over him! It often happens that the more vigorous mind has been imbued with wickedness. The very abandonment of that leading spirit adds to his power. There is a reckless hardihood attained, where the restraints of conscience are unknown, that acts like a charm on softer minds. One bold, bad spirit often holds many gentler natures, as it were, in a mesmerised state. They are not masters of themselves. They have been drawn into the vortex of the more powerful orb: destitute of an independent will, they flutter fascinated around him.

The *enticements*, like the enticers, are manifold. As addressed to well-educated, well-conducted youth, they are always more or less disguised. The tempter always flings over at least his ugliest side some shred of an angel's garment. An enemy who desired to destroy you by your own deed, would not lead you straight to a yawning precipice, and bid you cast yourself down. He would rather lead you along a flowery winding path, until you should insensibly be drawn into a spot which would give way beneath you. Enticements to moral evil will generally take that form. You will not be persuaded all at once to plunge into deeds of darkness, knowing them to be such. Few young men who have enjoyed a religious

education come to a sudden stand, and at once turn their back upon God and godliness. Most of those who do fall, diverge at first by imperceptible degrees from the path of righteousness. When it is intended, by a line of rails, to conduct a train off the main trunk, and turn it aside in another direction, the branch-line at first runs parallel with the trunk. It goes alongside for a space in the same direction; but when it has thus got fairly off, then it turns more rapidly round, and bounds away at right angles to its former course. As engineers avoid the physical, so the tempters avoid the moral difficulty. An abrupt turn is not attempted in either case. The object is far more surely attained by a gently graduated divergence. The importance of the ancient rule, *Obsta principiis* (resist the beginnings), can never be over-rated. The prize is great. Everything is at stake. Life is at stake, —both the lives. Time and eternity, body and soul; all that you have or hope, is to be lost or won. Watch the beginnings of evil. "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation."

We must name and briefly describe some of these snares. Their name is Legion. They cannot be numbered. We shall uncover and expose two from among the multitude of betrayers that lurk beside your path, one peculiar to large towns, the other common to all places.

High in the list of dangerous enticements to the young stands *the theatre*. We shall not waste time in a dispute regarding the possibility of obtaining innocent and harmless dramatic entertainments. Enough for our present

purpose is the fact that there are none such. The idea, wherewith some would fain excuse their sin, is a stage managed in accordance with pure morals. It is a vain imagination. Those who build and manage theatres do so with the view of a good investment and profitable employment. They know the tastes of their customers. They must either conform to these tastes, or lose money by opposing them. A theatre conducted on such principles as would make it safe to the morals of youth would not pay its proprietor. There are many enlightened and benevolent citizens who rear and maintain institutions which do not bear their own charges. They submit to loss from zeal for the public good: but these men never choose theatres as the instruments of elevating the community.

We scarcely know anything that would make us fear more for a young man than to hear that he was in the habit of attending the theatre. We know that the practice, besides its own proper evil, would not long stand alone. A man cannot take fire into his bosom without being burned.

Does the impatient spirit of youth attempt to ward off our word, by averring that we would smother the joys of the young under the gloomy cloud of religion? Oh, for a balance that could nicely discriminate the degrees of happiness that each enjoys! We would enter the competition with the merriest frequenter of the stage. We would set any sensible, God-fearing youth in competition with him, and show that, even as to present gladness, the theatre is a cheat and a lie. Once, on a Sabbath morn-

ing, as the writer was going to church through the streets of a large city, he saw, flaunting gaudily on the walls, the stage placards of the preceding Saturday evening. In large, lying letters, they announced, "A Cure for the Heartache." Avaunt, deceivers! Ye often inoculate your victims with the poison of that disease, but ye have no power to take it away. Can the company of rakes and courtezans minister consolation to a mind distressed? Will they parody the griefs that wring a human heart? Will they make sport of that deep-set disease that Jesus died to heal? When a sinner's heart is aching, he must bend his steps to another place—he must seek the skill of another Physician! We have sometimes thought the matter of attending the theatre, and similar scenes of midnight merriment, might be profitably put in the form of a dilemma, thus:—

The unconverted (having other work before them) have no time to be there.

The converted (having other joys within them) have no inclination.

The *customs* of society encouraging the use of *intoxicating drinks* constitute one of the most formidable dangers to youth in the present day. All are aware that drunkenness, in our country, is the most rampant vice. How broad and deep is the wave whereby it is desolating the land. It is not our part, at present, to register an array of facts tending to show how many are held helpless in its chain, and how deeply that chain cuts into the life of the victim. The extent and the virulence of the malady we shall not prove, but assume to be known.

Our special business is to remind the young of the *entice-ments* by which they are led into that horrible pit. It is specially true of this potent enemy, that it makes its approaches unsuspected and by slow degrees. We have known many drunkards. We have witnessed scenes of wretchedness which haunt our memory in shapes of terror still! We have seen a youth brought down by it from a place of honour and hopefulness, laid upon his bed uttering hideous groans, twisting himself, in mingled bodily and mental agony, like a live eel upon a hook. We have seen an old man, who knew that drink was making his life-springs fail fast away, yet, in spite of threats and persuasion, going drunk to bed every night. We have heard that man, when sober, say, "If there is one place of hell worse than another, it must be mine, for I know the right, and do the wrong;" and yet he drank himself to death. We have seen a female, with a gentle air and a tender frame, stand and tell that she had a batch of demons within her, uttering loud voices, and declaring that they had her surely bound over to hell. Reason had fled. Drink had brought madness on. And yet, whenever the delirium abated, she returned to the drink again. What need of cases? We have seen drunkenness in most of its stages, and forms, and effects; but we never yet met a drunkard who either *became a drunkard all at once*, or who *designed to become one*. In every case, without exception, the dreadful demon vice has crept over the faculties by slow degrees, and at last surprised the victim. The sinners with whom he kept company did not entice him to become a sot in a single night. They only invited him

to go into cheerful company. They suggested that religion, when rightly understood, did not forbid a merry evening. He went; and the evening was merry. Strong drink contributed to its merriment. He was sober. He had no intention of becoming a drunkard, either then or on any subsequent occasion. A drunkard, however, he now is. He is in the pit, and who shall pull him out! May God have mercy on the lost immortal, for he is beyond all help of man!

Let young men, as they value their souls, beware of these Satan-invented customs prevalent in society, which multiply the occasions of tasting strong drink. These habits of sipping so frequently, on every occasion of joy or sorrow, of idle ease or excessive toil, in freezing cold or in scorching heat—these habits of a little now and a little then, seem to have been invented with fiendish ingenuity, to beget at last, in the greatest possible number, that fiery thirst which, when once awakened, will mercilessly drag its subject down through a dishonoured life to an early grave.

Leaning on the bank of the majestic river a few miles above Niagara, a little boat was floating on a summer day. A mother plied her industry in a neighbouring field. Her daughter, too young yet for useful labour, strolled from her side to the water's edge. The child leaped into the boat. It moved with her weight. The sensation was pleasant. Softly the boat glided down on the smooth bosom of the waters. More and more pleasant were the sensations of the child. The trees on the shore were moving past in rows. The sunbeams glittered

on the water, scarcely broken by the ripple of the stream. Softly and silently, but with ever-growing speed, the tiny vessel shot down the river with its glad unconscious freight. The mother raised her bended back and looked. She saw her child carried quickly by the current toward the cataract. She screamed, and ran. She plunged into the water. She ventured far, but failed. The boat is caught in the foaming rapids—it is carried over the precipice! The mother's treasure is crushed to atoms, and mingles with the spray that curls above Niagara. This is not a fiction; it is a fact reported in the newspapers of the day. But, though itself a substantive event, it serves also as a mirror to see the shadow of others in. The image that you see glancing in that glass is real. It is not single. It may be seen, thousand upon thousand, stretching away in reduplicating rows. Pleasant to the unconscious youth are the merry cup and the merry company. Lightly and happily he glides along. After a little, the motion becomes uneasy. It is jolting, jumbling, sickly. He would fain escape now. Vain effort! He is rocked awhile in the rapids, and then sucked into the abyss.

If many thousands of our population were annually lost in Niagara, the people, young and old, would conceive and manifest an instinctive horror of the smooth deceitful stream above it, which drew so many to their doom. Why, oh, why do the young madly intrust themselves to a more deceitful current, that is drawing a greater number to a more fearful death?

Such, young men, are some of your dangers. You

should be ready to consider earnestly the means of escape. Even this brief glance at the breadth of the battle-field, and the array of the foe, should stir us up to "prove" both the armour that we wear, and our aptitude in using it. If the result of such survey should be a sense of utter weakness in presence of the adversary, and a cry from the helpless to the Lord God of hosts, it will be well: our labour will not be lost.

The Defence prescribed is, "consent thou not." How may one successfully contend against these formidable foes? Observe the form of the Scripture injunction, "If sinners entice thee, *consent thou not*." It is a blunt, peremptory command. Your method of defence must be different from the adversary's mode of attack. His strength lies in making gradual approaches; yours in a resistance, sudden, resolute, total. For example, let a man who is now a drunkard look back on his course. He will find that he came into that state by imperceptible, unsuspected advances. But if ever he get out of that state, it is not by slow degrees that he will make his escape. It is not by lessening gradually the quantity of strong drink till he wean himself from the poison, and creep back from madness into himself again. The enemy can play at the graduated system better than he. His only safety lies in an abrupt, resolute refusal.

The same method that is best suited for recovery is also best for prevention. It is not by partial compliance and polite excuses that you are to repel enticements to sin. This is an adversary with whom you are not obliged

to keep terms. Gather from Scripture the attitude you should assume, and the language you should hold, "Get thee behind me, Satan!" "Save yourselves from this untoward generation." "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, and I will receive you." Much depends on the round, blunt refusal,—the unfaltering, undiluted, dignified "No" of one who fears God more than the sneer of fools. Many stumble from neglect of this principle. They intend to refuse. They will not go all the way into sin; but they will resist politely—they will keep terms with the enticers. They are not wining to let it be known that they are so timid about their own integrity. It might not be reckoned manly. They are like those who were disciples secretly for fear of the Jews. Your enticers are honourable men, and they would be hurt if you should meet their invitation by a prompt negative, and give your reasons. Well: and is it not enough for the disciple to be "as his Lord?" He was in the same position; "Master, in so saying thou condemnest us also." Out with it unreservedly, whenever and wherever companions would wile you into evil. If you begin to pare away the edges of your dedinature, lest it should bear too hardly upon your tempters—if you make excuses that are not the real reasons, in order that under cover of them you may glide out of the way without the disagreeable shock of a direct collision—you may escape for that time; but some day your excuse will fail, and your foot will be taken. If sinners entice thee, consent not. The shortest answer is the best.

They speak of consecrated places. We believe there

are consecrated spots on this earth, and desecrated spots too. That spot is consecrated in the eye of God and all the good, where a condemned transgressor has been born again, and taken into the number of God's children; that spot is desecrated which has been the turning-point where an immortal chose death rather than life. Many such places there are, both in rural lanes and in the city's thoroughfares. A youth is leaving his place of business in the evening, and making his way homewards. At a crossing he meets a knot of companions, who hail and stop him. They are convening to a place of danger, and deeds of sin. They invite him to go. He replies that he is going home. They insist—they cannot go without him. As he hangs back and hesitates, a leading spirit of the club suddenly cries out he knows the reason: "Our friend is going to set up for saint—he is going home to pray." A loud laugh runs round the ring. The youth is not prepared for this. He desired rather to go home, but he is not yet a good soldier of Jesus Christ. He cannot endure hardness. He gives way at this last thrust, and goes with them. That night he parts with a good conscience; and it is but another step to make shipwreck of his faith. That spot where evil spirits embodied formed a circle round the youth, and won him—that spot is desecrated. The blood of a soul is there. The writer was standing one day lately among a crowd of visitors under the dome of St. Paul's in London, gazing upward in silence on its grandeur, when a gentleman touched him, and requested him to remove his foot; he then pointed to a small cross mark made by a mason's chisel on the

marble pavement, informing the bystanders that a person who cast himself from the dome aloft, had fallen there and died. The group of living beings who had gathered round our informant stood instinctively back and sighed. The living were awed in spirit when they found themselves, standing on the spot that had been stained by the blood of a self-murdered man. Oh, if there were marks made in the ground at every place stained by the suicide of a soul, how thickly dotted the world would be with the startling symbols—how fearfully and tremblingly would the living thread their way between!

How much of the low spirits, the moody mind, the miserable incapacity, which abound, has been induced by violation of God's laws—both the natural marked in our constitution, and the moral revealed in the Bible!

Appetites indulged grow strong. Beware lest the cub which you fondle and feed, insensibly become the lion which devours you.

Friendship sealed by companionship in sin will not last long. It is not worth having. It deserves not to be known by that noble name. Friends that are glued together by the slime of their lusts will be torn asunder soon; and these foul exudations that seem now to bind them into one, will become the fuel to a flame of mutual hate, when first a spark of disagreement falls. They will bite and devour one another. The degree of their privacy to each other's wickedness will be the measure of their dislike and distrust.

After all, above all, including all, a reason why you should not consent to go with sinners is, you thereby

displease God, crucify Christ, grieve the Spirit, and cast your own soul away.

The *means* of resisting.—We address those who have obtained a religious education. We do not speak here of the first and best means, the word of God and prayer. We assume that you know all that we could tell you regarding these, and only offer some suggestions on subordinate topics—such as *refinement of manners, profitable study, benevolent effort, and improving company*.

Refinement of manners.—I know well that it is the state of the heart within that decides the outward demeanour; but I know also that the outward demeanour has a reflex influence back upon the heart. I do not say that politeness will do as a substitute for religion; but politeness is of use as the handmaid of religion. Indeed, rude speech and manners are both the signs of moral evil already existing, and the causes of increasing it. In many districts of country, and among certain classes, rude habits are the open inlets to great crimes. To cultivate a refined and tasteful form of speech and manners would become a shield to protect from many prevailing temptations. Christianity, with its living power in the heart, will produce refinement in the manners; and outward refinement will throw a shield round inward principle, and keep it out of harm's way. We do not mean to encourage show and fashion. The fop is most wretched himself, and most repulsive to an onlooker; but we would not avoid this extreme by leaping into the extreme of vulgar rudeness. We would not like a youth to be gilded; but neither would we like him to be rough and

foul with rust. We would have him *polished* that is the medium. Some people are rusty: their harsh, ungainly manners eat out whatever is good in their own character, and saw the very flesh of those who come near them. Some people, again, are gilt: a very brilliant exterior they present, but the first brush of hard usage rubs off the gilding and reveals the base material beneath. A third class are polished; the polish, indeed, is on the surface, but it is a polish on the surface of solid worth; and, in the multifarious crosses of human life, the more it is rubbed the brighter it grows. This is the thing: not a gilding to hide the baseness, but a polish to set off and make more useful the real substantial excellence of the inner man. Even when the material is sound to the core, a polish on the surface both fits it for use and protects it from injury. If we have two youths equal as to strength and soundness of Christian principle within, but unequal as to habits of refinement in intercourse with others, he who has outward polish added to inward worth will be more useful and more safe.

Profitable study.—Occupation goes far as a means of safety. Add every day something to your store of knowledge. Study alternately books, and men, and things, Mere book-reading is not enough, without reflection and observation. Again, mere observation is not enough, if you do not enlarge your resources by the treasures which books contain. Both are best. You have many opportunities. You need not at any time be in want of a useful book. From experience we are able to say that a book perused intelligently, and with appetite in youth,

will retain its hold better than information acquired at a later day. The few books to which we had access when we were young are fresh in our memory still, both the good and the bad. The "Pilgrim's Progress" was greedily devoured, and indelibly impressed; but so also were other books in which a like genius glowed, without a like baptism of holiness. The young of this generation may always, have a book to read, and may choose a book that is worthy. Never let the machinery of your mind become rusty. The way to keep it sweet is to keep it going.

We have two opposite experiences to look back upon. In our retrospect are times of intellectual idleness, and times of intellectual diligence. We remember precious hours spent by a circle of youthful companions in silly, useless conversation, —a sort of slang which was directly vulgarizing, and indirectly demoralizing. We remember too, times devoted to useful study. We mean the leisure hours of a labour-day. The writer remembers the days when, as the dinner-hour was announced, and all gladly threw their work aside, he satisfied a fresh appetite during the first five minutes, and stretched beneath the shade of a tree, occupied the remaining fifty-five reading the wars of Caesar, and the songs of Virgil, in the language of ancient Rome. It made his afternoon's toil lighter. It made his neighbours respect him; and what is more, young men, it made him respect himself. In virtue of that employment, the enticers did not so frequently assail him; and he was supplied with an auxiliary means of defence. There are many branches of

useful knowledge, easily accessible, from which you may choose, each according to his taste. We earnestly counsel young men to scour up, and keep in use all the powers of understanding and memory which God has given them. It will sweeten your labour. It will be something softer to lean on between your flesh and the iron instruments of toil. How great the privileges of youth in this country, and at the present day! How great is the waste, if the museums, libraries, and public reading-rooms be not turned to good account!

Benevolent effort.—Every one, young and old, rich and poor, should always be trying to do some good. There is abundant opportunity, if there be the willing mind. Try to live in the world so that you will be missed when you leave it.

More especially if any young man trusts in Jesus, and loves souls, these affections will supply the impulse, and keep him going. Providence on God's part, and prudence on his, will soon shape out some useful work that he is able to do. You have not the gifts and graces to conduct with effect missionary work among the godless and ignorant? Well, if you have not the ten talents, are you willing, without the shame of pride, to labour away in the laying out of one? Will you become librarian, and distribute a few soiled books into more soiled hands in a needy district, at a stated hour on a Saturday evening? You are not clever enough to teach a school of destitute children, nor rich enough to pay another? Well, will you be the whipper-in of the ragged parliament for a given lane, and see that none of the honourable members be

absent from the lesson? If there were but the willing mind, every volunteer could be put into harness, so that his strength would not be overtasked on the one hand, nor wasted on the other. Over on the enemy's side all hands are called out, and every one is made to contribute to the mass of evil. The children of light should be wiser than they.

Improving company.—It is of great practical importance that young men have friends who will encourage and direct them. Union is strength. In the battle of life the want of a sympathizing companion may be the very point on which an otherwise brave combatant may at last give way. In this fight as well as others, "shoulder to shoulder" is a most potent principle, both for the defence and the onset. Here and there in history you may read of some hero, who single-handed has foiled an army; but, taking the common standard of humanity, even a brave man is easily overpowered by numbers when he stands alone. There are some points of analogy between that warfare and ours. To most men the sympathy of tried friends is a substantial support in the conflict with moral evil. Right-principled, true-hearted companions are often "the shields of the earth," which the all-ruling God has at his disposal, and throws around a youth to protect him from the fiery darts of the wicked one.

But, though the society of the good is an instrument of protection not to be despised, it is still subordinate. There is another Companion. There is a Friend that sticketh closer than a brother. "Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify

me" (Ps. 1. 1.5). That He might get into communion with us, and we with him, God was manifested in the flesh. The man Christ Jesus, God with us,—this is the companion by whose side a young man will be infallibly safe. We believe never youth could be more strongly assailed than Joseph in Potiphar's house. A sinner enticed him, —and oh, how many things conspired to give force to the temptation, as if Satan had concentrated all his strength, to break through the chain of purposed mercy for Israel in the fall of Joseph!—a sinner enticed him, but *he consented not*. How? Whence did this stripling derive strength to defy and repel such a cunningly-devised and well-directed onset? He was weak like another man, but he had help at hand. He had a companion whom he had chosen, and with whom he walked. God was not far from Joseph; Joseph was not far from God. His answer was, "How can I do this great evil, and *sin against God?*" There—there is Joseph's strength. Young man, you will be as strong as he was, if you lean on the Arm that supported him.

The best way of moving a young heart is to please it. The surest way of turning a person from one pleasure is to give him a greater pleasure on the opposite side. A weeping willow, planted by a pond in a pleasure-garden, turns all to one side in its growth, and that the side on which the water lies. No dealing, either with its roots or with its branches, will avail to change its attitude; but place a larger expanse of water on the opposite side, and the tree will turn spontaneously, and hang the other way. So it is with the out-branching affections of the human

heart. Follies and vices on this side are sweet to its depraved nature. The joys are shallow at the best, but it knows no other, and to these it instinctively turns; to these it grows forth. It acquires a bent in that direction which no human hand can turn. It will never be turned unless you can open a rival joy, wider and deeper, on the other side. And, blessed be God, greater are those joys that are for us, than all that are against us! The enticements on the side of holiness and safety are in themselves greater than all that Satan can spread out; and when a distracted mind can see, and a laden heart can feel them as they are, it is forthwith won. "The love of Christ constraineth us." It is pleasure that can compete with pleasure. When you are entangled by the allurements of sin, and oppressed by the terror of wrath, "the joy of the Lord is your strength."

The lowliness of the prodigal's place, the hunger he endured, the loathsome appearance of the husks and the swine,—these things, doubtless, made some impression; but, alone, they could not save him. They might have crushed him in despair to the ground, but could not have borne him home in hope. It was the yearning of his father's love, it was the image of his father's open embrace, it was the presentiment of his father's weeping welcome, that drew the prodigal at once from his miseries and his sins.

Even the truth of God entering the heart, and fastening on the conscience, has not power to turn a sinner from the error of his ways, so long as it comes in simply as a terror. What the law could not do God did by sending his Son. What naked righteousness, with ven-

geance at its back, failed to do, manifested mercy in Christ achieved. Righteous mercy—justice satisfied by Emmanuel's sacrifice, and divine compassion flowing free upon the lost—this is the thing of Christ which the Holy Spirit wields as the weapon to win a human heart.

This heart, young man, is a space that must and will be occupied. It is the battle-field between Satan and Satan's manifested Destroyer. Within you this holy war must be waged. How long halt ye between two opinions? Who is on the Lord's side? let him come. Unless Christ dwell in your heart by faith, the enemy will return, or abide, in triumph. You cannot fight the *enticements* of sinful pleasure in your own strength. These iniquities, like the wind, will carry you away; but under the Captain of your salvation you may fight and win. The deceits and corruptions of your heart, which your own resolutions cannot overcome—bring forth these enemies and slay them before Him Drag forth these enticements of sinners that seemed so fresh and sweet to the carnal eye—drag them forth and expose them there;—their root will become rottenness, and their blossom will go up like dust. The faces of these tempters that beamed with mirth in the glare of kindled passions, will, when seen in the light of His love, appear hideous as spectres of the night.

His entrance into the heart will turn the tide of the conflict; and He is willing: "Behold I stand at the door and knock. If any man open, I will come in." "Even so: come, Lord Jesus!"

VII.

FILTHY LUCRE.

"So are the ways of every one that is greedy of gain;
which taketh away the life of the owners thereof."—i. 19.

THESE "ways," as described by Solomon in the preceding verses, are certainly some of the very worst. We have here literally the picture of a robber's den. The persons described are of the baser sort: the crimes enumerated are gross and rank: they would be outrageously disreputable in any society, of any age. Yet when these apples of Sodom are traced to their sustaining root, it turns out to be *greed of gain*. The love of money can bear all these.

This scripture is not out of date in our day, or out of place in our community. The word of God is not left behind obsolete by the progress of events. "All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: but the word of the Lord endureth for ever." —1 Peter i. 21, 25. The Scripture traces sin to its fountain, and deposits the sentence of condemnation there, a sentence that follows actual evil through all its diverging paths. A spring of poisonous water may in one part of its course run over a rough rocky bed, and in another glide silent and smooth through a verdant meadow; but, alike when chafed into foam by obstructing rocks, and when reflecting the flowers from its glassy breast, it is the same lethal stream. So

from greed of gain—from covetousness which is idolatry, the issue is evil, whether it run riot in murder and rapine in Solomon's days, or crawl sleek and slimy through cunning tricks of trade in our own. God seeth not as man seeth. He judges by the character of the life stream that flows from the fountain of thought, and not by the form of the channel which accident may have hollowed out to receive it.

When this greed of gain is generated, like a thirst in the soul, it imperiously demands satisfaction: and it takes satisfaction wherever it can be most readily found. In some countries of the world still it retains the old-fashioned iniquity which Solomon has described: it turns freebooter, and leagues with a band of kindred spirits, for the prosecution of the business on a larger scale. In our country, though the same passion domineer in a man's heart, it will not adopt the same method, because it has cunning enough to know that by this method it could not succeed. Dishonesty is diluted, and coloured, and moulded into shapes of respectability to suit the taste of the times. We are not hazarding an estimate whether there be as much of dishonesty under all our privileges as prevailed in a darker day: we affirm only that wherever dishonesty is, its nature remains the same, although its form may be more refined. He who will judge both mean men and merchant princes requires truth in the inward parts. There is no respect of persons with Him. Fashions do not change about the throne of the Eternal. With Him a thousand years are as one day. The ancient and modern evil doers are reckoned brethren in iniquity.

despite the difference in the costume of their crimes. Two men are alike greedy of gain. One of them being expert in accounts, defrauds his creditors, and thereafter drives his carriage: the other, being robust of limb, robs a traveller on the highway, and then holds midnight revel on the spoil. Found fellow sinners, they will be left fellow sufferers. Refined dishonesty is as displeasing to God, as hurtful to society, and as unfit for heaven, as the coarsest crime.

This greed, when full grown, is coarse and cruel. It is not restrained by any delicate sense of what is right or seemly. It has no bowels. It marches right to its mark, treading on everything that lies in the way. If necessary in order to clutch the coveted gain, "it taketh away the life of the owners thereof." Covetousness is idolatry. The idol delights in blood. He demands and gets a hecatomb of human sacrifices.

Among the labourers employed in a certain district to construct a railway was one thick-necked, bushy, sensual, ignorant, brutalized man, who lodged in the cottage of a lone old woman. This woman was in the habit of laying up her weekly earnings in a certain chest, of which she carefully kept the key. The lodger observed where the money lay. After the works were completed and the workmen dispersed, this man was seen in the grey dawn of a Sabbath morning stealthily approaching the cottage. That day, for a wonder among the neighbours, the dame did not appear at church. They went to her house, and learned the cause. Her dead body lay on the cottage-floor: the treasure-chest was robbed of its few pounds

and odd shillings; and the murderer had fled. Afterwards they caught and hanged him.

Shocking crime! To murder a helpless woman in her own house, in order to reach and rifle her little hoard, laid up against the winter and the rent! The criminal is of a low, gross, bestial nature. Be it so. He was a pest to society, and society flung the troubler off the earth. But what of those who are far above him in education and social position, and as far beyond him in the measure of their guilt? How many human lives is the greed of gain even now taking away, in the various processes of slavery? Men who hold a high place, and bear a good name in the world, have in this form taken away the life of thousands for filthy lucre's sake. Murder on a large scale has been, and is done upon the African tribes by civilized men for money.

The opium traffic, forced upon China by the military power of Britain, and maintained by our merchants in India, is murder done for money on a mighty scale. Opium spreads immorality, imbecility, and death, through the teeming ranks of the Chinese populations. No opium is cultivated on their own soil. The governments, alike the Tartar dynasty and the patriot chiefs, have prohibited the introduction of the deadly drug. Our merchants brought it to their shores in ship-loads notwithstanding, and the thunder of our cannon opened a way for its entrance through the feeble ranks that lined the shore. Every law of political economy, and every sentiment of Christian charity, cries aloud against nurturing on our soil, and letting loose among our neigh-

bours, that grim angel of death. The greed of gain alone suggests, commands, compels it. At this hour the patriot army in China, who, with all their faults and their ignorance, certainly do circulate the Bible, and worship God, oppose the introduction of opium, with all their moral influence and all their military force. How can we expect them to accept the Bible from us, while we compel them to take our opium? British Christians might bear to China that life for which the Chinese seem to be thirsting, were it not that British merchants are bearing to China that death which the Chinese patriots loathe. It is an instance of the strong coveting the money of the weak, and, in order to reach it, taking "away the life of the owners thereof"

A bloated, filthy, half naked labourer, hanging on at the harbour, has gotten a shilling for a stray job. As soon as he has wiped his brow, and fingered the coin, he walks into a shop and asks for whisky. The shopkeeper knows the man—knows that his mind and body are damaged by strong drink—knows that his family are starved by the father's drunkenness. The shopkeeper eyes the squalid wretch. The shilling tinkles on the counter. With one hand the dealer supplies the glass, and with the other mechanically rakes the shilling into the till among the rest. It is the price of blood. Life is taken there for money. The gain is filthy. Feeling its stain eating like rust into his conscience, the man who takes it, reasons eagerly with himself thus;—"He was determined to have it; and if I wont, another will." So he settles the case that occurred in the market-place on

earth; but he has not done with it yet. How will it sound as an answer to the question, “where is thy brother” when it comes in thunder from the judgment-seat of God?

Oh that men's eyes were opened to know this sin beneath all its coverings, and loathe it in all its disguises! Other people may do the same, and we may never have thought seriously of the matter. But these reasons, and a thousand others, will not cover sin. All men should think of the character and consequences of their actions. God will weigh our deeds. We should ourselves weigh them beforehand in his balances. It is not what that man has said, or this man has done; but what Christ is, and his members should be. The question for every man through life is, not what is the practice of earth, but what is preparation for heaven. There would not be much difficulty in judging what gain is right, and what is wrong, if we would take Christ into our counsels. If people look unto Jesus, when they think of being saved, and look hard away from him when they are planning how to make money, they will miss their mark for both worlds. When a man gives his heart to gain, he is an idolater. Money has become his god. He would rather that the Omniscient should not be the witness of his worship. While he is sacrificing in this idol's temple, he would prefer that Christ should reside high in heaven, out of sight, and out of mind. He would like Christ to be in heaven, ready to open its gates to him, when death at last drives him off the earth; but he will not open for Christ now that other dwelling-place which he loves—a

humble and contrite heart. "*Christ in you*, the hope of glory;" there is the cure of covetousness! That blessed Indweller, when he enters, will drive out—with a scourge, if need be—such buyers and sellers as defiled his temple. His still small voice within would flow forth, and print itself on all your traffic,—"*love one another, as I have loved you.*"

On this point the Christian Church is very low. The living child has lain so close to the world's bosom, that she has overlaid it in the night, and stifled its troublesome cry. After all our familiarity with the Catechism, we need yet to learn "*what is the chief end of man*" and what should be compelled to stand aside as a secondary thing. We need from all who fear the Lord, a long, loud testimony against the practice of heartlessly subordinating human bodies and souls to the accumulation of material wealth.

VIII.

THE CRY OF WISDOM.

"Wisdom crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the streets she crieth in the chief place of concourse, in the openings of the gates: in the city she uttereth her words, saying, How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scorers delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge?"—
i. 20-22.

THE evil doers are not left without a warning. The warning is loud, public, authoritative. But who is this monitor that claims the submissive regard of men? WISDOMS. —Wisdom from above is the teacher: the lesson that follows is not after the manner of men. We recognise already the style of that Prophet who came in the fulness of time, speaking as never man spake. It was in this manner that Jesus, in the days of his flesh, stood and cried to the multitude—to the simple who loved simplicity, and the scorers who loved scorning—"if any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink." Before He was manifested to Israel, His delights were with the sons of men. In the provisions of the well ordered covenant, He had the means of sounding an alarm in human ears before He became incarnate. He found and used a willing messenger to preach righteousness to rebellious spirits in Noah's days. Neither did He leave Himself without a witness in the time of Solomon. The eternal Son of God is not only wisdom in himself, He is "made unto us wisdom." He who was seen by Abraham afar

off, was heard by Abraham's seed in later days. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God. The Word and Wisdom of God made Himself known to men at sundry times, and in divers manners, before He took flesh and dwelt among us.

In the Scriptures, Wisdom cried to men. "They testify of me," said Jesus. The prophets all spake of his coming, and prepared his way. The sacrifices offered year by year, and day by day continually, proclaimed aloud to each generation the guilt of men, and the way of mercy. The history of Israel, all the days of old, was itself Wisdom's perennial articulate cry of warning to the rebellious. The plains of Egypt and the Red Sea, Sinai and the Jordan, each had a voice, and all proclaimed in concert the righteousness and mercy that kissed each other in the counsels of God. The things that happened to them, happened for ensamples; and the things were not done in a corner. In the opening of the gates, in the city's busiest haunts, the proclamation was made to unwilling listeners. The cry of Wisdom, in those days of old, if it did not turn the impenitent, was sufficient to condemn them. It was so manifestly from God, and so intelligible to men, that it must have either led them out of condemnation, or left them under it, without excuse.

But the wisdom of God is a manifold wisdom. While it centres bodily in Christ, and thence issues as from its source, it is reflected and re-echoed from every object, and every event. There is a challenge in the prophets, "Oh, earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord!" The

receptive earth has taken in that word, and obediently repeats it from age to age. The stars of heaven, and the flowers of earth, facing each other like the opposite ranks of a choral band, hymn, alternate and responsive, the wisdom of God. He hath made all things for Himself. He serves Himself of criminals and their crimes. From many a ruined fortune, Wisdom cries, "Remember the Sabbath-day, to keep it holy." From many an outcast in his agonies, as when the eagles of the valley are picking out his eyes, Wisdom cries, "Honour thy father and mother that thy days may be long." From many a gloomy scaffold Wisdom cries, "Thou shalt not kill." Every law of nature, and every event in history, has a tongue by which Wisdom proclaims God's holiness, and rebukes man's sin.

But is there any prophet of the Lord besides these? Is there any other organ by which Wisdom cries to men? There is one. Giving force to all other intimations there is a prophet of the Lord within every man—his own conscience. We are fearfully made. That witness within us is often feared and shunned, more than armed men, more than gates and bars, more sometimes than the dungeon, the scaffold, and the drop. It is the case of the ancient king over again. He is a prophet of the Lord, "but I hate him because he never prophesies good concerning me."

But it is not conscience proclaiming God's anger against the man's evil, that has power to make the man good. All the instincts of the transgressor's nature are leagued in an effort to smother the disturber, and they generally

succeed. It is the conscience sprinkled with the blood of Christ that at once speaks peace, and works purity.

Three classes of persons seem to be singled out here, and to each is administered an appropriate reproof:

1. The simple who love simplicity; 2. The scorers who delight in scorning; 3. The fools who hate knowledge.

1. *The simple who love simplicity.* Probably we would not be far from the truth if we should accept this term in the Proverbs as intended to indicate that class of sinners whose leading characteristic is the absence of good, rather than positive activity in evil. The root of bitterness has not shot forth in any form of outrageous vice, but it remains destitute of righteousness. They do not blaspheme God indeed, but they neglect his salvation, and they cannot escape. Their hearts by a law of inherent evil depart from Him; He in judgment lets them go, and gives them over.

The simple for time are always a numerous class. They cannot be intrusted with money, for it will all go into the hands of the first sharper whom they meet. They will let the day pass, with no provision for the night, and never think it needful until the darkness has fallen down. They will let the summer come and go without laying up a store for the time to come. When the winter arrives they have neither house nor clothing, neither money nor food. Somehow they did not think of these things. The sunshine was pleasant while it lasted; they basked in its rays; and it did not occur to them that a cloud might soon darken the face of the sky.

But the simple for eternity are more numerous still. While they have food and raiment they pass the time pleasantly and never think of sin. As for righteousness, they do not feel the want of it, and form no high estimate of its worth. As to the judgment-seat of God, they have lived a long time, and have never seen it yet; they don't trouble themselves with anticipations of evil. The great white throne has always kept out of their sight, and they keep out of its sight. How many simple ones are going fast forward to death, with no life to triumph over it! How many are drawing near the border in utter listlessness, as if there were no sin, and no judgment—no God, no Heaven, no Hell!

2. *The scorers who love scorning.* This is another feature of the fallen—another phase of the great rebellion. This class meet the threatening realities of eternity not by an easy indifference, but by a hardy resistance. They have a bold word ever ready to ward solemn thought away,—a sneer at the silliness of a saint, an oath to manifest courage, or a witty allusion to Scripture which will make the circle ring again with laughter.

There have been scorers in every age. There are not a few amongst us at the present day. They may be found on both the edges of society. Poverty and riches become by turns a temptation to the same sin. It is not only the shop of the artizan that resounds with frequent scoffs: the same sound is familiar in the halls of the rich. Many of the young men who have been educated in affluence, belong to this class. They have large possessions, and larger prospects; they wish to enjoy what

they have. The triumph of grace in their hearts would dethrone the god of this world, and spoil his goods. The running fire of profane jests proceeds from advanced earth-works which Satan has thrown up around his citadel, in his earnestness not only to keep his goods in safety from the overthrowing power of conversion, but in peace from the troublesome assaults of conviction.

Scorners love scorning. The habit grows by indulgence. It becomes a second nature. It becomes the element in which they live. And what gives them confidence? Have they by searching found out that there is no God? Or have they ascertained that He has no punishment in store for the wicked? No they have not settled these questions at all, either to the satisfaction of mankind, or their own. These scoffs are generally parrying strokes to keep convictions away. These smart sayings are the fence to turn aside certain arrows which might otherwise fix their tormenting barbs in the conscience. The scorner is generally not so bold a man as he appears to be. He keeps the truth at arms length. He strikes at it vehemently before it gets near him. All this betrays a secret sense of weakness. He cannot afford to come into close contact with the sword of the Spirit. These violent gesticulations against the truth indicate the unerring instinct of the old man resisting that which advances to destroy him. "What have we to do with thee thou Jesus, art thou come to torment us before the time?"

3. *The fools who hate knowledge.* By a comparison of various scriptures in which the term occurs, it appears

that fools are those who have reached the very highest degrees of evil. Here it is intimated that they hate knowledge; and knowledge has its beginning in the fear of God. All the branches springing from that root, and all the sweet fruit they bear, are hateful to fools. The knowledge has come to men, in so far as to be presented to their minds, and pressed on their acceptance. Some, the simple, never think of it at all; and others, the scorners, bar its faintest approaches; but these fools, after it has made its way into the conscience, exclude it from their hearts. They have not been able to keep Truth's heavenly form out of their minds, but they hate it when it comes in. Others only live without Christ, keeping Him at a distance; but these are against Him, after He has been revealed in majesty divine. The emphatic "No God" of the Fourteenth Psalm indicates, not the despair of a seeker who is unable to find truth, but the anger of an enemy who does not like to retain it. It is not a judgment formed in the fool's understanding, but a passion rankling in his heart.

How long is all this to last?

"How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity?"

God is weary of your indifference; how long will it cleave to you? How long will a man continue to be regardless of his soul? Till death? It will certainly be no longer. He who would not cry in hope for mercy to pardon his sin, did cry without hope for a drop of water to cool his tongue.

"How long will the scorners delight in their scorning?"

Will they not cease from blaspheming God, until God,

ceasing to be gracious, stop their breath, and take them away? If you continue this scorning till your dying day, do you expect to continue it longer? Will you make merry with the judgment-seat? Will you be able to argue against the wrath of the Lamb? Depart from me, ye cursed—that word will crush the scorning out of the boldest blasphemer. Would that the profane might make the discovery now; for it will be too late to make it when the day is spent.

“How long shall fools hate knowledge?” Unless they learn to love it soon, they will hate it for ever. They might learn to love it now; for the same word that rebukes sin reveals mercy. Well might the fool learn to love the knowledge which presents Christ crucified as the way of a sinner’s return; but if a man do not love knowledge revealing mercy, how shall he love it denouncing wrath? The only knowledge that can reach the lost is the knowledge that the door is shut. How long will they hate that knowledge? Evermore.

IX.

A REVIVAL.

"Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my Spirit unto you."—i. 28.

"TURN you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my Spirit;"—the command and the promise joined, and constituting one harmonious whole. How strictly in concord are the several intimations of the Scriptures! "Work out your own salvation; for it is God that worketh in you" (Phil. ii. 12). To him that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance. It is to those who turn that the promise of the Spirit is addressed. These two reciprocate. The Spirit poured out arrests a sinner, and turns him; then, as he turns, he gets more of the Spirit poured out. The sovereignty of God, and the duty of men, are both alike real, and each has its own place in the well ordered covenant. It is true, that unless a man turn, he will not get God's Spirit poured out; and it is also true, that unless he get God's Spirit poured out, he will not turn. When the dead is recalled to life, the blood, sent circling through the system, sets the valves of the heart a-beating, and the valves of the heart, by their beating, send the life-blood circling throughout the frame. It would be in vain to inquire what was the point in the reciprocating series to which the life-giving impulse was first applied. The mysteries of the human spirit are

deeper still than those of the body. The way of God, in the regeneration of man, is past finding out. One, part of it He keeps near himself, concealed by the clouds and darkness that surround his throne; another part of it He has clearly revealed to our understandings, and pressed on our hearts. His immediate part is to pour out the Spirit; our immediate part is to turn at his reproof if, instead of simply doing our part, we presumptuously intrude into his, we shall attain neither. If we reverently regard the promise, and diligently obey the command, we shall get and do—we shall do and get. We shall get the Spirit, enabling us to turn; and turn, in order to get more of the Spirit. The command is given, not to make the promise unnecessary, but to send us to it for help. The promise is given, not to supersede the command, but to encourage us in the effort to obey. Turn at his reproof and hope in his promise; hope in his promise, and turn at his reproof

Religion, when it is real, is altogether a practical thing. It disappoints Satan; it crucifies the flesh; it sanctifies the character; it glorifies God. It is a thing that acts, and acts mightily. It is a thing, not of words, but of deeds. There is an enormous amount of mere imitation religion amongst us. If there were as great a proportion of counterfeit coin circulating in the kingdom, we would be all on the alert to detect and destroy it. We would feel the danger of being ourselves deceived, and losing the riches for which we care. There ought to be greater jealousy of a spiritless form, a gilded word religion, passing current in the Church; for he who is

taken in by this "name to live," though he should gain the whole world, will lose his own soul.

A valorous hand to hand struggle with inherent corruptions is distressingly rare, in the wide spread religious profession of the day. You read and pray, and worship in the assembly, and complain that, notwithstanding, your souls do not prosper; you have not comfort; you are not sensible of growth in grace. But all this is mere hypocrisy, if you be not "turning"—tearing yourself asunder from besetting sins, as from a right arm or a right eye. The evil speaking, watch it, catch it on your lips, crush it as it swells and germinates in the seed-bed of your thoughts within. The equivocations, the half-untruths, down with them. Out with the very truth, although it should break off the nearly completed bargain—although it should freeze the friendship that seems necessary to your success. Anger, malice, envy,—seize these vipers, that twist and hiss in your bosom; strangle them outright there. Your religion is nothing better than a cheat, if you are not busy with the work of ceasing to do evil. "Herein do I exercise myself:" said Paul, "that I may have a conscience void of offence." How can the feeblest learners of the truth attain, by an idle wish, that actual progressive purification, which its greatest human teacher only strove after by incessant exercise?

In the manifold diversities of sin, there is such a thing as the pride of self-righteousness. You fall into this error when you pretend to turn from evil without trusting in God. You fall into the opposite snare of

hypocrisy, when you pretend to trust in God, and do not turn at his command. Getting freely and doing faithfully, together constitute true religion. Get and do, do and get. Nor is it a partitioning of salvation between God and man, as if a part of it were his gift, and a part of it man's act. The turning which constitutes salvation is, supremely, all God's gift, and, subordinally, all the doing of the man. From the spring-head in the heart, to the outermost streams of life, He makes all things new; and yet the man himself must, at God's bidding, turn from all iniquity.

We speak of a revival; we pray for it; perhaps we long for it. But all this, and an hundredfold more in the same direction, will not bring it about. God's arm is not shortened: his ear is not heavy. Our iniquities separate between us and Him. The way to invite his presence is to put away the evil of our doings: for He cannot dwell with sin. And if any one, conscious of his knowledge and jealous of orthodoxy, should say in opposition, it is God's presence, sovereignly vouchsafed, that makes the visited man put away his evil, we answer, that is a glorious truth, but is not an argument against our injunction. That is the upper end of a revealed truth which reaches from earth to heaven. It is too high for us. If you put forth your hand to touch it at the top, it will consume you. That high thing is for God to handle, and not man. The end that leans on earth and lies to your band is—*turn, you at my reproof*. The only safe way of moving the heaven-high extreme of the divine sovereignty for revival, is by throwing ourselves

with our whole weight on this which is the visible, tangible, lower end of that incomprehensible mystery—this *turning* from our own evil in obedience to the command of God.

The grand hinderance to a revival by the Spirit poured out is the general conformity of Christians to the fashion of the world. The short road to a revival is to turn from the error of our ways. If there were more of the doing which religion demands, there would be more of the getting which it promises.

Turn at *my reproof*. God looketh on the heart. He measures the motive as well as the deed. There is such a thing as a proud atheistic morality, which is as offensive to God as more vulgar vice. To abstain from common and gross transgressions, is not holiness. It is a partial process. It is to diminish the bulk of wickedness on one side, by directing all the stream of internal corruption to the other side. When a man turns from wickedness because God hates it, he will turn alike from every sin. If we reform ourselves, we will select despised and shameful lusts of the flesh to be sacrificed, but retain and cherish certain favourite lusts of the mind. If we permit God's word to search, and God's authority to rule, idols alike of high and low degree will be driven forth of the temple. If the turning be at His reproof, it will be a turning both complete in its comprehension and true in its character—a turning without partiality and without hypocrisy.

When we turn at his reproof, He will pour out his Spirit: when He pours out his Spirit we will turn at

his reproof. Blessed circle for saints to reason in. He formed the channel wherein grace and duty chase each other round. He supplied the material alike of the getting and the doing. He set the stream in motion, and He will keep it going, until every good work begun shall be perfect in the day of Christ Jesus.

Hear that voice from heaven, "I will pour out." Yea, Lord; then we must draw away. We are placed at the open orifice in the lowest extremity of the outbranching channel: the fountain head is with God on high. When He pours out, we draw forth: when we draw forth, He pours out. It is because there is a pressure constant and strong from that upper spring of grace, that we can draw any here below for the exercises of obedience; but the covenant is ordered so that, if we do not draw for the supply of actual effort, none will gravitate toward us from the fountain head. It is the still stagnant dead mass of inert profession, sticking in the lower lips of the channel, that checks the flow of grace, and practically seals for us its unfathomable fountain. If there were a turning, a movement, an effort, an expenditure, a need, a vacancy, at our extremity below, there would be a flow of the divine compassion to make up the want, and charge every vessel anew with fresh and full supply. Prove Him now herewith; exert and expend in his service, and see whether He will not open the windows of heaven and pour out a blessing, greater than the room made vacant to receive it.

X.

SOWING DISOBEDIENCE, REAPING JUDGMENT.

"Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me."—i. 2 4-28.

AT sundry times and in divers manners, the Omniscient Witness of men's wickedness has invited the evil doers to draw near, ere yet the judgment should be set and the books opened, that He may "reason together" with them on their state and prospects. One of those marvellous reasonings of the Judge with the criminal is recorded here.

I. *God in mercy visits a rebellious generation.*—There are four terms employed to describe this visit, and although they are arranged to suit the exigencies of Hebrew poetry, they follow each other in natural order and issue in a climax. He calls, stretches out His hands, gives counsel, and administers reproof.

1. *The call.* Men with one consent were departing from the living God. They had turned the back on Him, and not the face. He does not leave Himself without a witness. He has many ways of uttering His voice. It is in the earthquake and in the storm. Day unto day

proclaims it, and night unto night. There is no speech nor language where it is not heard. Even where its only effect is to drive the scared culprit to superstitious observances, it has been heard, and the superstitious are accountable. The call has come with more distinct articulation from the lips of prophets and apostles. It sounds with authority in a human conscience. Whether men obey the call or disobey it, they are secretly conscious that the call has reached them, and are left without excuse.

2. *The hands stretched out.*—When the call has come and startled the prodigal; when the prodigal, aroused, looks toward the quarter whence the voice proceeds, lo, a Father whom he has offended is opening his arms wide to clasp the outcast in the embrace of an everlasting love. Is. lxxv. 1, 2. When busy men lift up their heads from the dust to which their souls are cleaving, and listen to the voice of God, they find out that He is not yet against them a consuming fire. His hands are outstretched: there is a way, and the way is open unto the Father. There is no obstruction: there is no forbidding: there is no upbraiding. Chief sinners are even now entering in. Behold, they are arising and going to the Father. They are converging frequent and swift, as doves to their windows, They are neither kept back, nor thrust down among hired servants. They are welcomed as sons and daughters. They are made heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ. Their sins are remembered no more.

3. *The counsel.*—Some who have heard the call and lifted up their heads and looked, and seen the door of mercy open, are glad, and take encouragement to continue

a little longer far from God and righteousness. They see the arms of mercy stretched out all day long, although a people continue disobedient. Seeing this, they secretly feel, if they do not venture to say, that there is no cause for alarm. The door will remain open to-day, and, to-morrow, and the next day: we shall run in before it be shut. What does God do for these deceivers? He does not let them alone. He counsels them. "Flee to the stronghold, prisoners of hope." "Wherefore spend ye your money for that which is not bread?" "Come unto me, ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" If they resist still, will He shut the door now, and shut them out? No, not yet: He will administer,

4. *Reproof*—Mercy interposes with the plea, let them alone yet this once. There is One yearning over the callous, who have no mercy on their own souls. "How can I give thee up?" He remembers mercy, and makes judgment stand back. He makes judgment his strange work, not permitting it to appear early or often to strike the decisive blow. He has yet another resource. When counsel is despised, He will bring forward reproof. If they will not be enticed by the promise of heaven, He will threaten them with the fear of hell. "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God." "Except ye repent, ye shall perish." "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Inconceivably great is the weight of that wrath which is treasured up against the day of wrath, to be poured all on the impenitent then. But that reserved wrath is not left meantime lying useless in its treasure-house. Everlasting love needs

a strong hard instrument wherewith to work out her blessed purposes on an unpliant race. Mercy, in this the day of her reign, sovereignly seizes judgment before its time, and works that mighty lever to move mankind. The terrors of the Lord are not permitted to sleep unnoticed and unknown, till the day when they shall overflow and overwhelm all his enemies: they are summoned forth in the interval, and numbered among the all things that work together for good. Though kept like it reserve in the rear, their grim hosts are exposed to view, in order that they may co-operate with kindlier agencies in persuading men to yield, and fight against God no more. "Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out" Kindly plies the sweet promise next to a wounded heart: but the gentle promise is backed by a terrible reproof. *Cast out*—there it is; judgment looming in reserve; serving meantime by its blackness to make the invitation more winning, but there, unchangeable, omnipotent, to receive on its awful edge, the crowds that rush reckless over the intervening day of grace, and fall into the hands of the living God.

He suffers long, and pleads: but even in Him compassions will not, cannot farther flow. He calls, stretches out his hands, counsels, and, when men still refuse, He makes the threat of wrath mercy's instrument to compass them about, and compel them to come in: but He stops there. God will not put forth a hand to lift a man to heaven in his sleep; or drag him in against his will. When counsel and reproof are rejected, then "there remaineth nothing but a fearful looking for of judgment

82 SOWING DISOBEDIENCE, REAPING JUDGMENT.

and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversary." Those who withstand all these means and messages, will be left like Esau without the blessing. "He cried with an exceeding great and bitter cry, and said unto his father, Bless me, even me also, oh, my father:" but the time was past, and the door was shut.

II. *A rebellious generation neglect or resist the gracious visitation of God.* "I have called, and ye refused: I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded: Ye have set at nought all my counsel; and would none of my reproof." This is an appalling indictment uttered by the God of truth. Who are the guilty? "Lord, is it I? Lord, is it I?"

"He that hath an ear to hear let him hear what the Spirit saith." Men have ears and stop them. The Lord made the ear of man, and a wonderful work it is. Strange that it should be open to every voice but the entreaty of its Maker. In times when vile men held the high places of this land, a roll of drums was employed to drown the martyr's voice, lest the testimony of truth from the scaffold should reach the people. Thus they closed the ears of the multitude against the voice of the servants. Not by a roll of drums at a single tyrant's bidding, but by a strong deep hum of business, kept up through common consent, is the ear closed now against the Master's own word. So constant is the noise of mammon, humming day and night, that the partial silence of the Sabbath is felt an unwelcome pause. As arts advance, and more is crammed into the six days, so much the more

eager are mammon's worshippers to fill the Sabbath with the same confused noise. The word says, "Be still and know that I am God:" those who don't want this knowledge are afraid to be still, lest it should steal in and disturb their peace. God's mighty hand sometimes interferes to quiet this hubbub in a heart, or a house. It is when the inmates are compelled to go about the house with whispers, that his voice is best heard. I know of nothing more fitted to touch a conscience than this tender complaint from our Judge. He stretched out his hands: no man regarded. What then? He complains of the neglect, and addresses his complaint to the neglecters. Here is mercy full, pressed down, and running over. He whom men reject, pleads with men for rejecting him. When he so stretched out himself to us, how shall we answer if we turn our back on Him?

III. *They shall eat the fruit of their own ways, and be filled with their own devices.*

This life is the spring time of our immortal being; the harvest is eternity. Harvest is not the time for sowing. We shall reap then what we sow now. This law is of God. It is like the laws by which He regulates all nature. If a man sow tares or thistles in his field in spring, it is probable that a bitter regret will seize upon him in the harvest day. He will loathe the worthless crop that he gets to fill his bosom. But he cannot, by a sudden and energetic wish, change all the laws of nature, and make his field wave with ripened grain. As certainly as a husbandman in harvest reaps only what he sowed in spring,

84 SOWING DISOBEDIENCE, REAPING JUDGMENT.

shall they who in life sow sin, reap wrath in the judgment. The provisions of his covenant are steadfast as the laws of his world. His promises are sure as the ordinances of heaven, and his threatenings too.

It is true that God destroys his enemies: but it is also true that they destroy themselves. They throw themselves into the fire, and by his laws they are burned. He has laws that are everlasting and unchangeable. He has not hidden them from men. He has plainly declared them. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." Those who cast themselves on revealed wrath are their own destroyers. These outstretched hands of his are clear of a sinner's blood.

Judgment will be an exact answer to disobedience, as fruit answers the seed, or an echo the sound. The strictness of retribution at last will correspond to the freeness of mercy now. There would be no glory in God's present compassion, if it had not the full terror of immutable justice behind it to lean upon. Even the divine long-suffering would lose its loveliness if it did not stand in front of divine wrath. You cannot paint an angel upon light: so mercy could not be represented—mercy could not be, unless there were judgment without mercy, a ground of deep darkness lying beneath, to sustain and reveal it. That there may be a day of grace pushed forward within the reach of men on earth, there must be a throne of judgment as its base in eternity. When the day of grace is past, the throne of judgment stands alone, and the impenitent must meet it.

The anguish comes first within the conscience of the ungodly, when the life course is drawing near its close.

Desolation comes like a whirlwind. The body is drooping: the grave is opening: the judgment is preparing. He has no righteousness, and no hope. Behold now the prospect before the immortal, when death, like a rising wave, has blot-
ted out the beams of mercy that lingered to the last. It is now the blackness of darkness. Hope, that flickered long, has gone out at length. And how rigidly strict must the retribution be. They would not hear God in the day of mercy: in the day of vengeance God will not hear them. They laughed at His threatenings: He will mock their cry. This reciprocity is the law of his kingdom. It cannot be changed.

Let those who live without God in the world mark what it is that He counts the heaviest retribution upon sin. It is this--"They shall call upon me, but I will not answer." When, groping darkling on the shore of eternity, they cry in terror, "O God, where art Thou?" only their own voice, mocking, will return from, the abyss, "Where art *thou*?" A man's life has a language which the Judge understands. The life utterance of the carnal, when divested of all its pretences, and gathered into one, is "No God!" That concentrated intensified expression, issuing forth from time, has generated an echo in the receptive expanse of eternity. That echo meets the entrant on the border, and conscience, not clouded now, is constrained to acknowledge it a truthful answer to the essence of his life. It is a fruit exactly after the kind of the seed which he had sown. "No God!" was the meaning of his course in time: "No God!" rebounding from the judgment-seat, at once fixes his place for eternity,

and proclaims that it is the fruit of his own doing
 Consider this all ye who live for your own pleasure,
 and leave the long-suffering Saviour stretching out his
 hands to you all day in vain: your life, thrown up, a
 sullen, bold, defiant no, from you to God in the day of
 his mercy, will rebound from the throne a *no* unchange-
 able, eternal, from God to you in the day of your need.
 Reciprocity runs through. When mercy was sovereign,
 mercy used judgment for carrying out mercy's ends.
 When mercy's reign is over, and judgment's reign begins,
 then judgment will sovereignly take mercy past and
 wield it to give weight to the vengeance stroke.

This terror of the Lord in eternity is clearly set forth
 in time with the gracious design of persuading men to flee
 to the hope set before them.

At the close of this line of terrors there is a sweet and
 gentle word. It is a Father's voice, this still small voice
 that speaks when the storm and the thunders have passed
 by. "Whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and
 shall be quiet from the fear of evil." A safe dwelling-place!
 There is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ
 Jesus. No plague shall come nigh them there. One
 would think this is enough. Himself our everlasting por-
 tion, if now we yield unto Him; and a rest remaineth for
 the people of God. Enough indeed: sinners saved could
 not of themselves expect more: but He provides and pro-
 mises more. He will give them not only deliverance from
 death at last, but freedom from fear now; safety from
 evil to come, and safety from the apprehension of its
 coming; justification at the throne of God, and peace

within the conscience. When Christ came to work deliverance for all his own, he expressly provided both these blessings. It is not only to deliver them from death by receiving himself its sting; but also to deliver them from that fear of death, which otherwise would have held them all their lifetime subject to bondage (Heb. ii. 15). "Godliness is profitable unto all things." Eternal life secure in the world to come casts a beam of bright hope across, sufficient to quiet the anxieties of a fainting fluttering heart, in all the dangers of the journey through. For his Redeemed Israel, who have already passed over the divided sea, he has provided a safe dwelling-place beyond the Jordan; and under the shade of the Almighty, the pilgrims, even in the wilderness, will be *quiet* from the *fear* of evil.

XI.

SEEK AND YE SHALL FIND.

"If thou seekest her as silver . . . thou shalt find the knowledge of God."—
ii. 4, 5.

WISDOM continues still to cry unto men with the affectionate authority of a parent. The incarnation of the Son is God's grand utterance to mankind. The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us. He came to make known the Father. "No man hath seen God at any time: the only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared him."

Such is the speaker, and such the theme. Wisdom cries, "Incline thine ear unto wisdom." Christ calls on men to come unto Christ. It was He who opened the Scriptures; and He taught from them the things concerning Himself He is Prophet and Priest. He gives the invitation; and the invitation is "Come unto me." It is Christ offering Christ to sinners; the teacher and the lesson alike divine. The preacher and the sermon are the same. He is the beginning and the ending. He is all in all.

The matter of the whole passage, ii. 1-9, consists in a command to seek, and a promise to bestow. The same speaker, at a later day, condensed his own discourse into the few emphatic words, "Seek, and ye shall find." In this passage there is a needful expansion and profitable repetition of these two great pillar thoughts.

The seeking is in verses 1-4; the finding in verses 5-9. A Father speaks, and He speaks as unto children. He demands a reasonable service, and promises a rich reward.

In the fourfold repetition of the command there seems an order of succession; and the order, when observed, is both comely and instructive. It combines the beauty of the blossom and the profit of the fruit

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|-------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1. Receive my words, | and hide my commandments. |
| 2. Incline thine ear, | and apply thine heart |
| 3. Cry after knowledge: | lift up thy voice for understanding. |
| 4. Seek her as silver: | search for her as for hid treasure. |

1. "Receive my words." This is the first thing. Practical instruction must ever begin here. The basis of all religion and morality is the word of the Lord, taken into the understanding and heart. When the sower went forth to sow, some fell by the wayside, and the fowls came and devoured it. This is the first danger to which the published truth is exposed. It does not enter the ground at all. It tinkles on the surface of the mind, like seed on a beaten path, and next moment it is off, no one knows whither. It never penetrated the soil; it was never received. Corresponding to that first danger is the first counsel, "My son receive my words;" and if there should be any doubt about the meaning of the precept, the clause which balances it on the other side supplies the comment, "hide my commandments with

thee." Our adversary the devil goeth about like a roaring lion, or ravening bird, seeking whom he may devour. He carries off the word from the surface of listless minds as birds carry away the seed that lies on the surface of unbroken ground. The word of God is a vital seed, but it will not germinate unless it be hidden in a softened receptive heart. It is here that Providence so often strikes in with effect as an instrument in the work of the Spirit. Especially, at this point, bereaving providences work together for good. Even these, however, precious though they have been in the experience of all the saved, are only secondary and subordinate agencies. Sorrow is not seed. A field that is thoroughly and deeply broken may be as barren in the harvest as the beaten pathway. The place and use of providential visitation in the divine administration of Christ's kingdom, is to break up the way of the word through the incrustations of worldliness and vanity that encase a human heart and keep the word lying hard and dry upon the surface.

Every one is capable of perceiving the difference, between merely hearing the word and receiving it. It is a blessed thing to have that word dwelling richly within you; felt in all its freshness touching your conscience and enlightening your mind, during the busy day and in the silent night, giving tone to your spirit within, and direction to your course through life.

The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us. Behold, He stands at the door and knocks; if any man open, He will come in. To as many as receive Him, He gives power to become the sons of God.

2. "Incline thine ear." The entrance of the word has an immediate effect on the attitude of the mind and the course of the life. The incoming of the word makes the ear incline to wisdom; and the inclining of the ear to wisdom lets in and lays up greater treasures of the word.

In practice it will be found that those who hide the word within them, feeding on it as daily bread, acquire a habitual bent of mind towards things spiritual. On the other hand, when the truth touches, and glances off again, like sunlight from polar snows, it is both a symptom and a cause of an inclination of the mind away from God and goodness. The great obstacle to the power and spread of the gospel lies in the averted attitude of human hearts. The mind is turned in another direction, and the faculties occupied in other pursuits. How hopeful the work of preaching becomes when the lie and the liking of the listener's soul is towards saving truth. When the heart is applied to it, some portion of the word goes in, and that which has obtained an entrance prepares the way for more. To him that hath that little will be given much, and he shall have abundance. A man inclines his ear to those sounds which already his heart desires; again to turn the ear, by an exercise of will at God's high command, to the word of wisdom, is the very way to inoculate the heart with a love to that word passing the love of earthly things. The lean of the disciples' hearts in the days of old drew them to Jesus; and Jesus near, made their hearts burn with a keener glow. The ear and the heart!—precious gifts. He

that hath an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit saith. He that hath a heart to love, let him love with it the altogether Lovely. The ear inclined to divine wisdom will draw the heart; the heart drawn will incline the ear. Behold one of the circles in which God, for his own glory, makes his unnumbered worlds go round.

3. "Cry after knowledge." The preceding verse expressed the bent heavenward of the heart within and the senses without: this verse represents the same process at a more advanced stage. The longing for God's salvation already begotten in the heart, bursts forth now into an irrepressible cry. It is not any longer a Nicodemus inclined toward Jesus, he cannot tell how, and silently stealing into his presence under cloud of night; it is the jailor of Philippi springing in, and crying with a loud voice, "What must I do to be saved?" While the man was musing, the fire burned; and now it no longer smoulders within, it bursts forth into a flame. He who gave Himself for his people loves to feel them kindling thus in his hands. Men may be offended with the fervour of an earnest soul—God never. "Hold thy peace," the prudent will still say to the enthusiastic follower of Jesus: but he feels his want, and hopes for help; he heeds them not: he cries out all the more, "Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on me." Even disciples, apparently more alarmed by what seem irregularities in the action of the living than they were by the silence of the stiffened dead, may interpose with a frown and a rebuke; but compression will only increase the strength of the emotion struggling within. That word hidden in

the heart will swell and burst and break forth in strong crying and tears, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides Thee. My flesh and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever." Psalm lxxiii. 25, 26.

4. "Seek her as silver." Another and a higher step. The last was the earnest cry; this is the persevering endeavour. The strong cry is not enough: it is a step in the process, but the end is not yet. It might be Balaam's cry, "Let me die the death of the righteous," while in life he loved and laboured for the wages of iniquity. Fervent prayer must be tested by persevering pains.

Seek wisdom. Not only be inclined to spiritual things, and earnestly desire salvation, but set about it. Strive to enter in; lay hold on eternal life. Work out the salvation. "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." The Christian life is a battle to be fought: the reward at last is a crown to be won.

More particularly, the search for wisdom is compared to another search with which we are more familiar. Seek her as silver. Those who seek the treasures that are at God's right hand are referred to their neighbours who are seeking treasures that perish in the using, and told to go and do likewise. The zeal of mammon's worshippers rebukes the servants of the living God. We are invited to take a leaf from the book of the fortune-seeker. Besides the pursuit of money in the various walks of

merchandise, there is, in our day, much of a direct and literal search for treasures hid in the earth. A prominent part of our daily public news, for years past, has been the stream of emigration from the settled countries of Europe to the western shores of America, and the great Australian Continent in search of hid treasure. The details are most instructive. Multitudes of young and old, from every occupation, and every rank, have left their homes, and traversed stormy seas, and desert continents, to the place where the treasure lies. Not a few have perished on the way. Others sink under privations on the spot. The scorching sun by day, and the chill dews at night; labour all day among water, and sleeping under the imperfect shelter of a tent; the danger of attack by uncivilized natives on the one hand, and by desperately wicked Europeans on the other,—all these, and a countless multitude more, are unable to deter from the enterprise, or drive off those who are already engaged. To these regions men flock in thousands, and tens of thousands. Those shores lately desolate are in motion now with a teeming population.

Search for her as for hid treasure! He knows what is in man. He who made the human heart, and feels every desire that throbs within it, takes the measure of men's earnestness in their search for silver. He pronounces it sufficient for the object which he has at heart, the salvation of sinners. He points to it as a fit measure of the zeal with which a being, destitute by sin, should set out in the search for the salvation by grace. He intimates this will do—this earnestness, if directed upon

the right object. How all this puts to shame the languid efforts of those who do seek the true riches! There may be an inclination on the whole rather to the imperishable riches—a wish to be with Christ rather than left with a passing world for a portion. There may be the desire in that direction, but another question comes in, what is the strength of that desire? That blessed portion in Christ is what you desire; well, but how much do you desire it? Will not the far reaching plans, and heroic sacrifices, and long enduring toil of Californian and Australian gold diggers rise up and condemn us who have tasted and known the grace of God? Their zeal is the standard by which the Lord stimulates us now, and will measure us yet. Two things are required in our search—the right direction, and the sufficient impulse. The Scriptures point out the right way; the avarice of mankind marks the quantum of forcefulness, wherewith the seeker must press on.

But the search for hid treasure, which reads a lesson to the Church, is not confined to the gold regions, and the gold diggers. They dig as hard at home. It cannot be told how much of plan and effort, of head and hand, are expended in making money. It is no business of ours here to draw the nice distinctions between the rightful industry of a Christian merchant, and the passage through the fire of mammon's child. This is not our present theme at all. What we want is to get our slackness in seeking a Saviour rebuked and quickened by the parallel movement of a more energetic search. Our question here is not how much is gold worth? but is

gold worth as much as the grace of God in Christ to a sinner? You answer, No. This is our unanimous reply. It is true in its own nature; and sincerely it is uttered by our lips. Out of our own mouths then will we be condemned, if He who compasseth us about like air in all our ways, feels that we strive with our might for the less, and but languidly wish for the greater. Seek first the kingdom.

Those who seek thus shall not seek in vain; we have the word of the true God for it in many promises. Among the gathered multitudes in the great day, it will not be possible to find one who has sought in the right place for the right thing, as other men seek money, and who has nevertheless been disappointed. No doubt there are some who seek after a fashion, and gain nothing by it; who vent a wish to die the death of the righteous, and never attain to the object of their desire. But none fail who seek according to the prescription of the word, and after the example of the world.

Many people proceed upon a principle the very reverse of that which the word inculcates. They search for money as if it were saving truth, instead of searching for saving truth as if it were money. These must be turned upside down ere they begin to prosper. There is no promise to indolence. The hand of the diligent maketh rich. As to what ye should seek, hear what the Lord says: as to the earnestness of the search, observe how the world does. Those who keep between these two lines are sure to gain in godliness.

XII.

PERILS IN THE DEEP.

"To deliver thee from the way of the evil [man], from the man that speaketh froward things; who leave the paths of uprightness, to walk in the ways of darkness; who rejoice to do evil, and delight in the frowardness of the wicked; whose ways are crooked, and they froward in their paths: to deliver thee from the strange woman, even from the stranger which flattereth with her words; which forsaketh the guide of her youth, and forgetteth the covenant of her God: for her house inclineth unto death, and her paths unto the dead. None that go unto her return again, neither take they hold of the paths of life."--ii. 12-19.

"THE wicked are like the troubled sea when it cannot rest." Here an arm of that sea is spread out before us, and we are led to an eminence whence we may behold its raging. We must one by one go down into these great waters. We see many of our comrades sinking beneath the surge. It is good to count the number, and measure the height of these ranks of raging waves, that we may be induced to hold faster by the anchor of the soul, which is sure and steadfast

The dangers are delineated here in exact order, continuous succession, and increasing power. They come as the waves come when the tide is flowing; they gradually gain in strength until they reach their height; then, when Satan has done his worst, he retires sullenly, leaving all who have not been overwhelmed, high, and safe, and triumphing..

1. "The way of the evil." Whether they be persons or

principles, whether they be men or devils, the word does not expressly say. The announcement, in the first place, is couched in terms the most general; the particulars are enumerated in the verses following. The way of the evil is the way which Satan trod, and by which all his servants follow. It is the way whereon all the wicked travel to their doom.

2. But more specifically, the first item of the evil is "the man that speaketh froward things." "The tongue can no man tame, it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison" This little fire kindles a flame which spreads and licks up all that is lovely and of good report in a wide circle of companionship. The man who speaks froward things is one of the foremost dangers to which the young are exposed at their first start in life. In a workshop, or warehouse, or circle of private friendship, there is one who has a foul tongue. It is difficult to conceive how quickly and how deeply it contaminates all around. There may be much specific variety in the forms of frowardness. In one case the pollution assumes the shape of profane swearing. In another it is the frequent injection of obscenities amidst the conversation of the day, feathered with wit to make them fly. In a third it is infidel insinuation. In a fourth it is one huge mass of silliness, a shapeless conglomerate of idle words, injuring not so much by the infliction of positive evil, as by occupying a man's heart and his day with vanity, to the exclusion of all that is substantial either for this world or the next.

It is hardly possible that one who is much in con-

tact with these froward words should come off unscathed. Even when a person does not sympathize with the evil, and imitate it, his conscience gets a wound. Only one has ever appeared on earth who was entirely safe under the fiery darts of the wicked. "The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in Me" (John xiv. 30). If there were perfect purity within, these onsets from without would leave no stain. But upon our impure hearts, even when the temptation in the main is resisted, and the tempter put to flight, the marks are left behind. Some of the filth sticks, and will not off, to the dying day. For us even in our best estate it is not good, in that experimental way, to know evil. The foul tongue of the froward is one grand cause of dread to godly parents in sending their youths to a business, and even in sending their children to school.

How good are pure words! Set a watch upon your mouth. "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt." Bad as it is to hear froward words, it is inconceivably worse to speak them. It is more cursed to give temptation than to receive it

3. "Who leave the paths of righteousness." When the imagination is polluted, and the tongue let loose, the feet cannot keep on the path of righteousness. Thinking, and hearing, and speaking evil, will soon be followed by doing it. The world is startled from time to time by the report of some daring crime. But if the history of the criminal were known, however much grief there might be, there would be no surprise at the culmination of his wickedness. When you see a mighty tree in the

forest, you assume that it did not leap into maturity in a day, although you saw not its gradual growth. You may as confidently count that full-sized crime did not attain its stature in a day. In all of us are the seeds of it, and in many the seedlings are growing apace. The ways follow the thoughts and words, as trees spring from seeds. He who would be kept from the path of the destroyer, must crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts. Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, and soon after murders and adulteries follow. In the matter of watching for one's soul, as in all other matters, the true wisdom is to take care of the beginnings.

4. "To walk in the ways of darkness." There is a, strictly causal and reciprocal relation between unrighteous deeds and moral darkness. The doing of evil produces darkness, and darkness produces the evil-doing. Indulged lusts put out the eye-sight of the conscience; and under the darkened conscience the lusts revel unchecked. "From him that hath not, shall be taken away."

5. "Who rejoice to do evil." This is a more advanced step in guilt. At first the backslider is ashamed of his fall. He palliates, alleges the strength of the temptation, and promises amendment. As the hardening process goes on, however, he begins to feel more easy. He ceases to make excuses, and at last he glories in his shame. "Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? Nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush" (Jer. vi. 15). This is a measure of evil which should make even the wicked tremble. He has become the very essence of antichrist, when it

is his meat and his drink to oppose the will of our Father who is in heaven.

6. Profligacy can yet one step farther go. They who "delight in the frowardness of the wicked," are more abandoned than the wicked themselves. To take pleasure in sin is a characteristic of fallen humanity; to delight in seeing others sinning is altogether devilish. Some monsters in human form have presided over the process of torture, and drunk in delight from a brother's pain; but it is a still clearer evidence that a man is of his father the Devil, when he lays snares for a brother's soul, and laughs at his own success. There are not a few amongst us who have reached this stage of depravity, and yet have no suspicion that they are in any way more guilty than others. They have so drunk into the spirit, and been changed into the image of the first tempter, that they relish as dainty food the pollution of a neighbour, and let never perceive that there is anything out of the way. "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled." Cursed are they that hunger and thirst after wickedness, for *they shall be filled too*. They shall be filled with food convenient for them. It is the Lord's way both in mercy and judgment to provide for every creature abundance of that which it loves and longs for. This principle is announced with terrific distinctness in the prophet Habakkuk (ii. 15, 16). Those who have a relish for the sin of others, will be filled with the food they have chosen; and although the horrid sweet pall upon the taste by reason of its abundance, there is no variety,

and no diluting of sin by fragments of good in the place of the lost. The same—the same that they loved on earth, the lost must abide for ever; sin—nothing but sin, within and around them.

To complete the picture of the danger, one other peril of the world's deep is marked on the chart which is mercifully placed in the voyager's hands—it is "the strange woman." Thanks be to God for his tender care in kindling these beacon-lights on the rock to scare the coming passenger away from the quicksands of doom.

The deceiver is called a "strange" woman. Whoredom is distinguished from marriage, which God appointed and approves. When man and woman are given to each other as helps meet from the Lord, they become "one flesh." They are not only known to each other, but, in an important sense, they lose their individual personality, and are merged into one. "A man shall leave father and mother and cleave unto his wife." To follow the "strange woman" is the Satanic reversal of this divine ordinance. There is no love, no holy union, no mutual helpfulness; but wild, selfish passions, followed by visible marks of God's vengeance. For it is not his word only; with equal clearness his providence frowns on licentiousness. That vice eats in like a festering sore on the body of society. If all should act as libertines do, the very nation would dwindle away. We are fearfully and wonderfully made; we are fearfully and wonderfully *governed*. It is in vain that the potsherds of the earth strive with their Maker. His anger will track lust through all its secret doublings. He

makes sin generate its own punishment. Vengeance against that evil thing circulates through the veins, and dries up the marrow in the heart of the bones. Verily, there is a God that judgeth in the earth. Of the strange woman, it is said, "Her house inclineth unto death, and her paths unto the dead." Mark well this description, ye simple ones who are enticed to follow her. There is an "incline on the path. It goes *down*. She leads the way, you follow. It is easy to go down—down a slippery, slimy path; but its issue is death. What death? The death of the soul, and the body too. It leads to "the dead." It brings you to the society of libertines, and they are dead while they live. This lust is a canker-worm that quickly withers the greenness of spring in the soul of youth. We have no trust in the patriotism, the truth, the honesty, the friendship of a licentious man. When you get down into their company, you are among the dead. They move about like men in outward appearance, but the best attributes of humanity have disappeared—the best affections of nature have been drained away from their hearts.

XIII.

THE MEANS OF SAFETY.

"When wisdom entereth into thine heart, and knowledge is pleasant unto thy soul; discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee."—ii. 10, 11.

CHRIST'S prayer for his disciples was not that they should be taken out of the world, but that they should be preserved from the evil that is in it. Life is a voyage on the deep: there are perils which we must pass; how shall we pass them safely? The grand specific is the entrance of wisdom into the heart. As already explained, you may understand by Wisdom either the Salvation or the Saviour. The entrance of the word giveth light, and chases away the darkness. If the truth as it is in Jesus come in through the understanding, and make its home in the heart, it will be a purifier and preserver. "Sanctify them through the truth." The word of God and the way of the wicked are like fire and water; they cannot be together in the same place. Either the flood of wickedness will extinguish the word, or the word will burn and dry up the wickedness.

If we understand the Word personally of Christ, the same holds good. Where He dwells, the lusts of the flesh cannot reign. Evil cannot dwell with Him. When the Light of the world gets entrance into the heart, the foul spirits that swarmed in the darkness disappear. His coming shall be like the morning.

The other strand of the two-fold cord which keeps a voyager in safety amid all these perils is, "when knowledge is pleasant to thy soul." The pleasantness of the knowledge that comes in, is a feature of essential importance. Even the truth entering the mind, and fastening on the conscience, has no effect in delivering from the power of evil, while it comes only as a terror; what the law could not do by all its fears, God did by sending his Son. The love of Christ constraineth us, when all other appliances have been tried in vain. The Spirit employs terror in his preparatory work; but it is only when the redemption of Christ begins to be felt sweeter than the pleasures of sin that the soul is allured, and yields, and follows on to know the Lord. It is pleasure that can compete with pleasure. It is "joy and peace in believing" that can overcome the pleasure of sin. Felix trembled under Paul's preaching, yet offered to sell justice for money, and, to curry favour with the multitude, kept the innocent in bonds. The word of God, though it ran through him like a sword in his bones, left him wholly in the power of his lusts. A human soul, by its very constitution, cannot be frightened into holiness. It is made for being won; and won it will be, by the drawing on this side, or the drawing on that. The power on God's side is greater than all on the side of sin. As long as that power is felt to be repelling, the sinner creeps still farther and farther from the consuming fire. But whenever the love of God in the face of Jesus becomes "pleasant" to his soul, that love keeps and carries him, as the central sun holds up a tributary world.

XIV.

A GOOD MEMORY.

"My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments."—
iii. 1.

WISDOM—the wisdom from above—continues still to cry. How gentle and winsome is the voice of this monitor! "My son, forget not." Such pity as a father hath, like pity shows the Lord. Throughout his dispensations, the Eternal wears the aspect of a Father to his creature man. In the Bible, the parental regard is seen glancing through at every opening. When Jesus taught his disciples how to pray, Father was the foremost word of the inspired liturgy. With this tender name is the arrow pointed that is to penetrate the heavens. Those who have skill to read the hieroglyphs of nature, will find many a parallel text in earth and sea. The world is full of his goodness. The fatherliness of the Creator is graven on all his works.

The matter thus tenderly commended to the pupil's regard is nothing less than "my law." He who made us knows what is good for us. Submission to his will is the best condition for humanity. What shall be the guide of our life—our own depraved liking, or the holy will of God? Our own will leads to sin and misery. The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul, and making wise the simple. The two rival rules are set

before us. Choose ye whom ye shall serve. His servants ye are whom ye obey, whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness.

"Forget not my law;" another evidence that the Inspirer of the word knows what is in man. Silently to forget God's law is amongst us a much more common thing than blasphemously to reject it. To renounce God's law because your reason condemns it, is the infidelity that slays its thousands: to forget God's law because your heart does not like it, is the ungodliness that slays its ten thousands. The deceitfulness of the heart is a form of sin's disease much more widely spread and much more fatal than the hostility of the understanding. In the Bible, God displays more of jealousy than of wrath. He cannot endure that any idol should possess the dwelling-place which He has made for Himself. The very keynote of the Scriptures is, "My son, give Me thine heart."

"Let thine heart keep my commandments;" another step in the same direction—another stage in the process of dissecting the spirit, in order to reach the seat of sin. What the heart cleaves to is not readily forgotten. As a general rule it may be safely laid down, that what you habitually forget you do not care for. So true is it, that love is the fulfilling of the law. If you do not love it, so far from obeying it, you will not even remember that there is such a thing. It is often given as an excuse for evil doing, that it was done without thought—that the evil of it was not present to the mind. If you had observed at the time the real character of your action, you would have done otherwise. What is this but to tell

that your heart does not keep God's commandment? If that law had been at hand, in God's name forbidding the word or the deed, you would have refrained. No thanks to you. That is as much as to say you would not of set purpose oppose the Almighty to his face. But you did what He complains of; you forgot Him and his law. You had extruded these from your heart as unwelcome visitors, and now you say, if they had been within, the mischief would not have happened. But why were they not within? Why was the word not dwelling richly in you? Why was your heart not its hidden home? The house was full of the company that you liked. The law of the Lord, weary waiting on outside, had slipt away unnoticed. It was not there—it was not in sight, with its holy frown, when the temptation pressed suddenly; and prevailed. If it had been there, the enemy would not have gained an advantage over you; and this is an excuse or palliation! What you put forward as an excuse, God marks as the very essence of the sin. The heart keeps what it loves; what it dislikes it lets go. The very soul of sin is here; "an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God."

One ever-ready excuse of those who live without God in the world is "a bad memory." Where there is real imbecility in the nature, the excuse is good; but then it is never pleaded as an excuse. The skill which can plead a treacherous memory as an excuse for not knowing the truth, would have charged the memory with the truth if it had been so applied. Those who intend to plead a short memory at the judgment-seat of God, would need

to see to it that other things should slip as quickly and as cleanly off from the mind as the word of Christ. When Saul averred to Samuel "I have performed the commandment of the Lord, I have destroyed all that belonged to Amalek," Samuel replied, "What meaneth, then, this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and this lowing of the oxen which I hear?" The king was confounded when his pretence was laid bare. What confusion must cover those who pass through life with scarcely a conception of how a sinner may be saved, when they put in the plea, "We had a treacherous memory," and are met by the question, "What mean, then, all these rules, and numbers, and events concerning the world, that crowded your memory through life, and clung there undefaced in your old age?"

Let us not deceive ourselves. When there is a hungering for the truth, the mind takes it in; when the heart loves divine truth, the memory retains it. Turn the excuse into an aggravation, while yet there is time. Plead no more a feeble memory; begin to grieve over an evil heart.

XV.

THE ART OF PRINTING.

"Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck;
write them upon the table of thine heart."—iii. 3.

THE matter to be recorded is "mercy and truth:" the tablet for receiving it is the human heart; and here we have some instructions on the art of printing it in.

Look first to the legend itself—"mercy and truth." These two, meeting and kissing in the Mediator, constitute the revealed character of God himself; and He desires to see, as it were, a miniature of his own likeness impressed upon his children. As we cannot have any printing without a type, we cannot have mercy and truth in holy union raised on the life of a human being, unless we get the exemplar brought from above, and transferred to man.

What God desires to see in man, he showed to man. He who dwelleth between the cherubim, merciful and true, shone forth upon his creatures, that those who look might be transformed into the same image, as by the Spirit of the Lord.

It is only in Christ that we can know God. As manifested there, He is just and forgiving. Mercy and truth meet in the person and sacrifice of the Son. Without the Saviour, we can conceive of mercy *or* truth being displayed by God to the rebellious. We could at

least conceive of mercy without truth; but then it would let the unclean into heaven: we could also conceive of truth without mercy; but then it would cast mankind without exception into hell. In order that there might be mercy and truth from the judge to the sinful, Christ obeyed, and died, and rose again. "God so loved the world, that He gave his only-begotten Son;" but God so hated sin, that He gave Him up to die as an expiation to justice. Mercy reigns, not over righteousness, but through righteousness.

"Be ye followers [imitators] of God as dear children" (Ephesians v. 1). If we receive grace reigning through righteousness, they will be seen upon us in their union. The reception of these into the heart is, as it were, the sowing of the seed; and that seed will bring forth fruit after its kind. If, conscious of guilt and condemnation, you accept and rejoice in free grace from God, this doctrine will not lie barren within you. It will burst forth in meekness, gentleness, pity, love, to all the needy. If you mark, as you get pardon, how it comes—pardon through Christ crucified—if you take it as it comes, bought by His blood, you will never make light of sin, either in yourselves or others. In all religions, true and false, there are an original and a copy. Either God manifested leaves the impress of his own character on the receptive heart of a believing man, or man unbelieving transfers his own likeness to the gods whom he makes in his imagination or by his hands. "Mercy and truth"—there is the type let down from God out of heaven. Are our hearts open, soft, receptive, to take the impression on?

"Let them not forsake thee: bind them about thy neck." These injunctions indicate that there is a fickleness which makes the printing difficult, and the impression indistinct at the best. This command to bind them about the neck (Deuteronomy vi. 8) was adopted by the Jews in the letter, and neglected in spirit. It degenerated into a superstition; and hence the phylacteries, the amulets worn by the Pharisees. The command here is more specific—"Write them upon the table of thine heart" The reference obviously is to the writing of the law on tables of stone. These tables were intended to be not a book only, but also a type. From them we may read the law indeed; but off them also an impress should be taken on our own hearts, that we may always have the will of God bidden within us. This idea is with marvellous fulness expressed by Paul—"The epistle of Christ, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God: not in tables of stone, but in fleshly tables of the heart" (2 Corinthians iii. 3). Men can easily read the word from the old table of stone; but they are slow to learn "the art of printing" it on their own nature, so that it may be legible in all their life. This impression can be effectually taken only in the melting down of the regeneration, as Paul expresses it, Romans vi. 17—"Ye have obeyed from the heart that mould of doctrine into which ye were delivered."

This fleshly table of the heart lies open, and it is continually receiving impressions of some kind. It seems to harden after youth has passed, so that what it has previously received it tenaciously keeps; what is afterwards

applied, it does not so readily take on. Of great moment it is, therefore, that right impressions should go deeply in, while the mind is still in a receptive state. But in this promiscuous life, the table of a young man's heart lies open for all comers; it is often seen indented deeply and crowded all over with "divers lusts and pleasures," so that no room is left, whereon the things of God may mark themselves.

At places of public resort, such as the summit of a lofty mountain, or the site of some famous monument, you may see tables of wood or stone or level turf. All over them inscriptions have been chiselled so thickly, that you could not now find an unoccupied spot to plant a letter on. The characters are various: some old, some new, some well-formed, some irregular scrawls, some mere scratches on the surface, which a winter's storms will wash out, some so deep that they will be legible for ages. As to matter, some are records of personal ambition, others a spurt of thoughtless jollity, others the date of some great event; some are profane, and some obscene. The table lies there, the helpless recipient of ideas, good or bad, that stray corners may choose to impress on it.

I have thought, as I looked on the Babel-like confusion, that the heart of a man, which the Bible calls a "table," is like one of these common public receptacles. In youth it is peculiarly soft, and affords an inviting material for every adventurous sculptor to try his hand upon. It often lies exposed, and receives the accidental impressions of every passer by. Many legends of mere emptiness have been written on it, and were thought innocent; but

there they are, at life's latest day, taking up room, and doing no good. Some impure lines have been early carved in, and now they will not out, even where the possessor has been renewed, and learned to loathe them. Parents, set a fence round your children; youth, set a fence round yourselves. Perhaps you may have seen one of these monumental tablets suddenly enclosed, and a notice exhibited over the gateway, doing all men to wit, that "whereas some evil disposed persons have imprinted vain and wicked words on this table, it has been surrounded by a strong fence, and henceforth no person shall be admitted to write thereon except the owner and his friends." Go thou and do likewise. Warn, ward the intruders off. Reserve that precious tablet for the use of the King its owner, and those who will help to occupy it with His character and laws.

Take these three in the form of practical observations.

1. The duty of parents is clear, and their encouragements great. Watch the young. Stand beside that soft receptive tablet. Keep trespassers away more zealously than ever hereditary magnate kept the vulgar from his pleasure-grounds. Insert many truths. Busily fill the space with good, and that too in attractive forms. This is the work laid to your hand. Work in your own subordinate place, and the Lord from above will send you the blessing down.

2. Afflictive providences generally have a bearing on this printing process. God sends what will break the heart; nay, sometimes a fire to melt it like water within you; and this, in wise mercy, to make it take on the

truth. When the pilgrims compare notes in Zion at length, it will be found that most of them learned this art of printing in the furnace of affliction. "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now have I kept thy word" (Psalm cxix. 67). The heart, in contact with a busy world, was rubbed smooth and slippery. The type, when it touched, glided off the surface, and left no mark behind. This bruising and breaking opened the crust, and let the lesson in.

3. Whether in youth or in age, whether in sickness or in health, it is not an effort from within or a Providence from without that will make the heart new and the life holy. It is the type, by the Spirit's ministry impressed on the prepared page; it is the mercy and truth united in Christ crucified for sin, embodied love let down from heaven and touching the earth; it is Christ clasped to a softened heart, that will reimprint the image of God upon a sinful man.

XVI.

TRUST.

"Trust in the Lord with all thine heart;
and lean not unto thine own understanding."—iii. 5.

FAITH is not fear, and fear is not faith. The terrors of the Lord beaming in upon the conscience, using guilt as fuel for the flame of a premature torment—this is not religion. Christianity is not a dark ground, with here and there a quivering streak of light thrown in. Blessed hope is the very basis of it all. Many spots of darkness daub it over at the best; but the ground is a bright ground. It is a positive and not a negative thing. It has many diseases and pains, but it is in its nature a life, and not a death. It flies to God, not from him. It is not a slave's struggle to escape from divine vengeance: it is a dear child's confidence in a Father's love. Christ is the way; but it is unto the Father that the prodigal returns. The only method of reconciliation is the looking unto Jesus, and looking on until confiding faith spring up; but the religious act of a soul saved is a trust in God.

This is an unseen thing, and it is misunderstood by those who look toward it from without. The reason why those who are wedded to their pleasures count religion to be dull and painful seems to be this. They see religious people really renouncing the pleasures of sin and sense

They know, they feel what that renunciation would be to themselves; but they do not know, they cannot conceive the consolation which the peace of God gives even now to a human heart. They see what a religious man lets go; but they do not see in that other region the worth of the equivalent which a religious man gets; for it is spiritually discerned, and they are not spiritual. In their conception religion is a grim tyrant, who snatches every delight from the grasp of a youth, and gives him nothing in return.

The servant of the man of God sees on the one side an host of enemies pressing round, and on the other side no help at hand. "Alas, my master!" he cried, "how shall we do?" (2 Kings vi. 16, 17). "Fear not," said Elisha, but it was not until the young man's eyes were opened to see the mountain full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha that he could be confident, or even composed. We need the same re-creating Spirit to open the blind eyes of the carnal, ere they can see that the joys which God in grace gives are more than the pleasures of sin, which his presence drives away. The green apple does not like to be twisted and torn from the tree; but the ripened fruit, that has no more need for the root's sap, drops easily off. Trust in the Lord, when a soul attains it, loosens every other bond, and makes it easy to let go all which the world gives. When you feel your footing firm in the peace of God, you will not be afraid though the very earth should sink away from beneath you.

Trust is natural to the creature, although trust in the Lord be against the grain to the guilty. It is our nature to be dependent. It is our instinct to lean. In regard

to the unseen, man has an innate consciousness of his own frailty, and in general it is not difficult to persuade him to lean on something beyond himself. Ever since sin began, gods many and lords many have invited men's confidence, and offered them aid. It is easy to persuade Papists to lean on priests and saints, on old rags and painted pictures—on any idol; but it is hard to get a Protestant really to trust in the living God. It is a common remark that Papists have more devotion in their way than we have in ours. The fact is obvious: the reason of it is not always seen. Popery sails with the stream when it bids men trust, for this falls in with a tendency of nature; but it puts forward to receive the confiding soul a dead idol, whose presence is no rebuke to indulged sin. Among Papists you will find real devotion in all who are conscious of nature's weakness, and willing to trust; but among Protestants you can find real devotion only in those who are prepared to crucify the flesh--who, at enmity with their own sins, bound forward to meet the offered embrace of "our God," and so plunge their bosom lusts into a consuming fire.

"With all thine heart." God complains as much of a divided allegiance as of none. A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways. In cleaving to Christ the effort to reserve a little spoils all. It endangers ultimate safety, and destroys present peace. The soul should grow into Christ, as grows the branch on the vine; but the reserved part is dead matter lying between the two liven preventing them from coalescing into one. The somewhat which the soul refuses to surrender sticks in between, so that you

cannot have your life hid in Christ; Christ cannot live in you. Your hope cannot find way into his heart, his peace cannot flow into yours. "Except ye be converted and become as a little child, ye cannot enter into the kingdom."

"In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." Observe the universality of the command. There is no hardship in this. The commandment is holy and just and *good*. If we keep back any of the conditions, we lose all the promised return. This injunction is aimed, not at the speculative atheism which denies that there is a God, but at the much more common practical ungodliness which keeps Him at a distance from human affairs. Few will refuse to acknowledge a superintending Providence at certain times, and in certain operations that are counted great. If the commandment had been, "Acknowledge God in the uncertain and difficult ways of life," it would have met with a more ready compliance. To uphold the world and direct its movements, to appoint the birth and the death of men, to provide redemption from sin, and open the way into glory—in these grand and all comprehensive operations men would be content to acknowledge God, provided they were allowed to retain all minor matters under their own management. They will treat God as subjects treat a king, but not as a wife treats her husband. The large, and the formal, and the public, they will submit to his decision; but the little, and close, and kindly, they will keep to themselves. Let Him compass you about, as the atmosphere embraces the earth, going into every interstice, and taking the measure of every movement

"Trust in the Lord at all times; pour ye out your hearts before him:"

The command is encouraging as well as reproofing. It, is not merely the promise that is encouraging, but also the command which precedes it. Does God claim to be acknowledged in all my ways? May I trouble the Master about everything, great or small, that troubles me? May I lay before the Almighty Ruler every care of my heart, every step of my path? Yes, everything. The great and glorious sun shines down from heaven upon the daisy; and the feeble daisy sweetly opens its breast? and looks up from earth upon the sun. God is the maker of them both. Both equally enjoy His care, and equally speak His praise. The genuine spirit of adoption may be best observed in little things. The distant and unconfiding will come on occasion of state formalities to the sovereign; but the dear child will leap forward with everything. The Queen of England is the mother of a family. At one time her ministers of state come gravely into her presence to converse on the policy of nations; at another her infant runs into her arms for protection, frightened at the buzzing of a fly. Will she love less this last appeal, because it is a little thing? We have had fathers of our flesh who delighted when we came to them with our minutest ailments: How much more should we bring all our ways to the Father of our spirits, and live by simple faith on Him?

XVII.

THE HEALTH OF HOLINESS.

"Fear the Lord, and depart from evil. It shall be health to thy navel, and marrow to thy bones."—iii. 7, 8.

By a striking and strongly figurative expression, which can be perfectly comprehended by readers of any age or clime, it is intimated that a religious rectitude preserves mental and physical health, and gives fullest play to all the human faculties. All God's laws come from one source, and conspire for one end. They favour righteousness and frown on sin. The law set in nature runs parallel, as far as it goes, to the law written in the word. It is glory to God in the highest, as governor of the world. Vice saps the health both of body and mind. Every one of us has seen monuments of this awful law, almost as deeply blighted as the warning pillar on the plain of Sodom, only they stalk about, and so publish their lesson more widely. When the brain has been dried, and the eye dimmed, and the countenance bleared, and the limbs palsied, and the tongue thickened by drunkenness, and other vices that march in its company or follow in its train, what remains of the man should be to us as dread a warning against his course, as if he had been turned into a salt statue, and stood upon the wayside to scare the solitary passenger. It behoves us to walk circumspectly, and not as fools. All around us, sin is withering

the bloom of youth, and wasting manhood's strength-- is shrivelling the skin upon the surface, and drying up the marrow in the heart of the bones. Verily we are in the hands of the living God. In Him we live, and move, and have our being. We cannot elude His observation, or break from His grasp.

Dreadful though its results be, I rejoice in these providential arrangements. The law by which disease and imbecility closely track the path of lust, is of God's own making, and behold it is very good. It is righteous, and merciful too. The link which connects the suffering with the sin, I would not break though I could. Even so, Father! for so it seemed good in thy sight. These wastings of the marrow are the terrors of the Lord set in array against evil. If they were wanting,, human governments could not withstand the tide of universal anarchy. These providential arrangements clog the wheels of evil, and so secure for the world a course of probation. If the Creator had not fixed in nature these make-weights on the side of good, the tide of evil that set in with sin would have soon wrought the extinction of the race. It is especially those sins that human governments cannot or will not touch, that God takes into his own hands, and checks by the stroke of his judgment He has bowed his heavens and come down. He concerns Himself with the details of human history. He who does the great things, neglects not the less. He who makes holiness happy in heaven, makes holiness healthful on earth. Gather up the fragments of his, goodness, that none of them be lost. Set them all in the song of praise.

XVIII.

CAPITAL AND PROFIT.

"Honour the Lord with thy substance,
and with the first fruits of all thine increase."—iii. 9.

THE two terms, substance and increase, exist, and are understood in all nations and all times. They correspond to capital and profit in a commercial community, or land and crop in an agricultural district. Although the direct and chief lesson of this verse be another thing, we take occasion, from the occurrence of these terms, first of all, to indicate and estimate a grievous malady that infests mercantile life in the present day. It manifests itself in in these two kindred features: (1), A morbid forwardness to commence business without capital; that is an effort to reap an increase while you have no substance to reap it from; and (2), A morbid forwardness to prosecute business to an enormous extent, upon a very limited capital; that is an effort to reap more increase than your substance can fairly bear.

In former, and, commercially speaking, healthier times, those who had no money were content to work for wages until they had saved some, and then they laid out to the best advantage the money which they had. This practice is honourable to the individual, and safe to society. An unfair and unsafe standard of estimating men has been surreptitiously foisted upon this community. Practically

by all classes, the chief honour should be given, not to the great merchant, but to the honest man. A man who has only five pounds in the world, and carries all his merchandise in a pack on his shoulder, is more worthy of honour than the man who, having as little money of his own, drives his carriage, and drinks champagne at the risk of other people. A full discussion of mercantile morality under this text would be unsuitable, and therefore we now refrain; but a note of warning was demanded here on the one point which has been brought up. We must have truth and righteousness at the bottom as a foundation, if we would have a permanently successful commerce. Let men exert all their ingenuity in extracting the largest possible increase from their substance; but let them beware of galvanic efforts to extract annual returns at other people's risk, from shadows which have no body of substance behind. This is the epidemic disease of commerce. This is the chief cause of its disastrous fluctuations. This is the foul humour in its veins that bursts out periodically in wide spread bankruptcy. If all merchants would conscientiously, as in God's sight, confine their gains to a legitimate increase of their realized substance, the commerce of the nation would circulate in perennial health.

When the increase is honestly obtained, honour the Lord with its first fruits. To devote a portion of our substance directly to the worship of God, and the good of men, is a duty strictly binding, and plainly enjoined in the Scriptures. It is not a thing that a man may do or not do as he pleases. There is this difference, however,

between it and the common relative duties of life, that whereas for these we are under law to man, for that we are accountable to God only. For the neglect of it no infliction comes from a human hand. God will not have the dregs that are squeezed out by pressure poured into his treasury. He depends not, like earthly rulers; on the magnitude of the tribute. He loveth a cheerful giver. He can work without our wealth, but He does not work without our willing service. The silver and the gold are His already; what He claims and cares for is the cheerfulness of the giver's heart.

XIX.

A FATHERLY WORD ON FATHERLY
CORRECTION.

"My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord; neither be weary of his correction: for whom the Lord loveth He correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth."--iii. 11, 12.

This passage is taken entire out of the Old Testament, and inserted in the New (Heb. xii, 5, 6).

I have seen the crown of our present sovereign. It is studded all over with jewels, bright jewels of various hue. The eye can scarcely rest upon it for radiance. Some of these jewels have been found and fashioned in our own day; others have been taken from the crowns which English monarchs wore in ancient times. But the gems that have been taken from an ancient crown, and inserted in the newest, are as bright and as precious as those that were never used before. Jewels are neither dimmed by, time, nor superseded by fashion. A prince will wear an old one as proudly as a new.

Such are these words, these tried and pure words, spoken of old by the Spirit in Solomon, and recalled for use by the same Spirit in Paul. This word of God liveth and abideth for ever. The king who uttered it at first has passed away with all his glory like the grass. The kingdom which he swayed is blotted out from the map of the nations. The temple where they may have been read

to the great congregation has been cast down. Jerusalem became a heap. But these words of Solomon remain at this day bright and pure like the jewels on the crown he wore. The very gems that sparkled in the diadem of David's son, appear again reset in a circlet of glory round the head of David's Lord. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but none of these precious words shall fail.

In quoting the words from the Old Testament, Paul perceived, and pointed out a tender meaning in the form of the expression, "my son." That formula occurs often in the Proverbs, and a careless reader would pass it as a thing of course. Not so this inspired student of the Scripture. He gathers a meaning from the form of the word before he begins to deal with its substance. The exhortation, he says, "speaketh unto you as unto children." Incidentally we obtain here a lesson on the interpretation of Scripture. Some would confine themselves to the leading facts and principles, setting aside, as unimportant, whatever pertains merely to the manner of the communication. By this method much is lost. It is not a thrifty way of managing the bread that cometh down from heaven. Gather up the fragments that none of them be lost. We give no license to the practice of building precious doctrines upon conceits and fancies, while there are solid foundations at hand laid there for the purpose of bearing them. We do not want any of your word; but we must have all that is the Lord's, great and small alike. We need every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God to live upon. Take and use all that is in the word, but nothing more.

"My son." The Spirit in Paul recognised this as a mark of God's paternal tenderness, and used it as a ground of glad encouragement to desponding believers. Of design, and not by accident, was the word thrown into that form, as it issued at first from the lips of Solomon. God intended thereby to reveal Himself as a Father, and to grave that view of his character in the Scripture as with a pen of iron and the point of a diamond, that the most distant nations and the latest times might know that as a Father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him.

Some men raise a debate about inspiration, whether every word be inspired, or only some. There was no such idea in Paul's mind. Not only the main propositions, but the incidental tone and cast of the language is understood to express the mind of God. We should not allow one jot or tittle of this word to pass away through our hands as we are using it

Turning now to the matter of this text; understand by chastening in the meantime, any affliction, whatever its form or measure may be. The stroke may fall upon your own person, your body, your spirit, or your good name; it may fall on those who are dearest to you, and so wound you in the tenderest spot; it may fall upon your substance to sweep it away, or on your country to waste it. Whatever the Providence may be that turns your joy into grief, it is a chastening from the Lord. Taking, in the first place, this more general view of chastening or rebuke, the command regarding it is twofold: 1. Do not despise it; 2. Do not faint under it. There are two

opposite extremes of error in this thing, as in most others; and these two commands are set like hedges, one on the right hand, and another on the left, to keep the traveller from wandering out of the way. The Lord from heaven beholds all the children of men. He sees that some, when afflicted, err on this side, and some on that. The stroke affects those too little, and these too much.

1. "Despise not." It means to make light of anything; to cast it aside as if it had no meaning and no power. The affliction comes on, and the sufferer looks to the immediate cause only. He refuses to look up to the higher links of the chain; he refuses to make it the occasion of communion with God. The disease comes upon him; it is a cold or a bruise; it has been neglected, and so aggravated; but the doctor has prescribed such a remedy, and he expects it will soon give way. The loss in business comes: he feels the uneasiness—it may be, the affront. He has grief for his own loss, and indignation against others. But he was in a fair way, and might have succeeded, if such an article had not suddenly fallen, or such a man had not become bankrupt. The bereavement comes; nature sheds bitter tears a while, and nature by degrees grows easy again. All this, what is it, and what is the degree of its guilt? It is specifically atheism. It is to be "without God in the world." The Father of our spirits touches us by certain instruments which are at his command; and we refuse to look up and learn from the signs on his countenance.

We forbid not the consideration of instruments and secondary causes. Let them be observed, and the reme-

30 A FATHERLY WORD ON FATHERLY CORRECTION.

dies which they suggest applied; but do not stop there. Do not finish off with these dumb messengers whom the Lord sends. They are sent for the very purpose of inviting you to a conference, secret and personal, with Himself. When you smart under the chastening, acknowledge the Lord. He is not far from every one of us. He speaks to us as to children. He means thereby to represent Himself as a Father. In that character he alternately visits us with mercy and judgment. He gives us life, and breath, and all things; He also at other times rebukes and bereaves. He takes it ill to be overlooked in either capacity. He is a jealous God. He will not allow idols to intercept the homage of his creatures; so also he is jealous, and his jealousy will burn like fire, if you give to his servants, whether diseases, or stormy winds, or mercantile convulsions, the regard which is due to Himself—your regard when success makes you happy, or when grief weighs you down: Do not meet sorrow by a mere hardihood of nature. Let your heart flow down under trouble, for this is human: let it rise up also to God, for this is divine.

2. "Faint not." This is the opposite extreme. Do not be dissolved, as it were—taken down and taken to pieces by the stroke. Do not sink into despondency and despair. You should retain presence of mind, and exercise all your faculties. Both extremes, when traced to their fountain-head, spring from the same cause—a want of looking to God in the time of trouble. If the bold would see God in his afflictions, he would not despise; if the timid would see God in them, he would not faint

As in other cases, the two opposite errors branch off originally from the same path, and converge upon it again. Truth goes straight over the hill Difficulty between. Godliness is profitable unto all things: it humbles the proud, and lifts up the lowly. It softens the hard, and gives firmness to the feeble.

The middle way is the path of safety. Be impressed by the stroke of the Lord's hand, but not crushed under it. Let your own confidence go, but lay hold on the arm of the Lord, that you may be kept from falling. Let the affliction shut you out from other helps, and up to the help that is laid on the Mighty One.

"Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth." We must not suppose from this that the trouble which a man endures on earth is the mark and measure of God's love. It is not a law of the kingdom of heaven that those who suffer most from God's hand are farthest advanced in his favour. Hitherto we have considered the afflictive stroke simply as a suffering; but it is specifically in "chastening" that the love lies, and all suffering is not chastening. It means fatherly correction for the child's good. The word indeed signifies "education."

God, the ruler of the universe, permits suffering to fall on all men indiscriminately. But the God of mercy stands by to make the suffering love's instrument in training every dear child. The same stroke may fall on two men, and be in the one case judgment, in the other love. "In vain have I smitten your children: they received no correction" (Jer. ii. 30). All were "smitten," but they only obtained paternal correction who in the spirit of adoption

"received" it as such. You may prune branches lying withered on the ground, and also branches living in the vine. In the two cases the operation and instrument are precisely alike; but the operation on this branch has no result, and the operation on that branch produces fruitfulness, because of a difference in the place and condition of the branches operated on.

In his comment on this text, Paul charges the Hebrew Christians with having "forgotten" it. He lays it expressly at their door as a fault, that this word of God was not hidden in their hearts, and ready in their memories. It is expected of Christians, in New Testament times, that they know, and remember, and apply the Old Testament Scriptures. When they forgot it, He who spoke it at first, repeated it again, accompanied with a complaint that their forgetfulness made the repetition necessary.

The warning has often been given, and it is needed yet, that terror in time of trouble may be no true repentance. The profligate, the vain, or the worldly has been laid low on a sick bed. So near has death come, that the very shadow of the judgment seat fell cold and dark over his heart, and took all the light out of his former joys. He grieves now that he has sinned so much. He resolves that if he recover he will fear God, and seek a Saviour. After quivering for a time, between death and life, he gets the turn toward the side of time, and enters on another lease of life. The breezes of slimmer, and the exercise of returning strength, refresh again his pallid cheek, and rekindle his sunken eye. The affliction is

over. The fear of death departs, and with it the repentance which it had brought. He returns to his pleasures again. He brings disgrace upon the holy name of Jesus, and provokes God to give him over. He deals by the Almighty as little children do by ghosts—cower down in breathless terror of them at night, and laugh at them when the daylight returns. He "will mock when their fear cometh!"

But unspeakably precious to dear children are the corrections of a Father's love, all these abuses notwithstanding. It is one of the finest triumphs of faith, when, in time of affliction, a Christian gets fresh confidence in a Saviour's love. How sweet, it is to lay your besetting sins and characteristic shortcomings beneath the descending stroke, and count it so much gain when they are crushed! It may well encourage a believer to be patient in the furnace, to see that some of the dross is separating, and coming away. Not a drop too much will fall into the cup of the redeemed, and it will all be over soon. Lord, pity our weakness! Lord, increase our faith!

XX.

TREASURES FOR THE TAKING.

"Happy is the man that findeth wisdom,
and the man that getteth understanding."—iii. 13.

WISDOM and understanding are to be received here in the same sense as that in which they occurred and were expounded in the second chapter. It is wisdom in its highest view; wisdom in regard to all the parts of man's being, and all the periods of his destiny. This wisdom is embodied in the person of Christ, as light is treasured in the sun, but thence it streams forth in all directions, and glances back from every object that it falls upon. He is the Wisdom of God, and by the Spirit in the Scriptures, He is made unto us wisdom. In Him the glory that excelleth is, and when our eyes are opened we shall behold it there, as the glory of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

Saving wisdom is to be "found" and "gotten." It is not required of us that we create it. We could not plan, we could not execute a way of righteous redemption for sinners. We could, not bring God's favour down to compass men about, and yet leave His holiness untainted as it is in heaven. This is all His own doing; and it is all done. All things are now ready. When we are saved, it is by "finding" a salvation, already complete, and being ourselves "complete in him." But while we are

not required to make a salvation, we are expected to seek the salvation which has been provided and brought near. The command of God is attached to his promise, and together they constitute his blessed invitation, "seek and ye shall find." It will be a fearful thing to come short of eternal life, thus completed and offered, from sheer want of willingness to seek. "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?"

Understanding is a thing to be gotten. It comes not in sparks from our own intellect in collision with other human minds. It is a light from heaven, above the brightness of this world's sun. The gift is free, and an unspeakable gift it is. Bear in mind that religion is not all and only an anxious fearful seeking: it is a getting too, and a glad enjoying. It is blessed even to hunger for righteousness; but a greater blessing awaits the hungerer, he shall be filled. The seeker may be anxious, but the finder is glad. "Happy is the man that findeth." It is a great glory to God, and a great benefit to a careless world, when a follower of Christ so finds salvation, as to rejoice in the treasure. When the new song comes from the mouth of the delighted possessor, many shall observe the change, and shall fear, and trust in the Lord (Psalm xl. 3). The joy of the Lord becomes a disciple's strength, both to resist evil and to do good. Those who, by finding a Saviour, have been themselves delivered from fear and let into joy, have the firmest foothold, and the strongest arm, to "save with fear" when it becomes needful to pull a neighbour out of the very fire (Jude 23).

XXI.

A GAINFUL MERCHANDISE.

"For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies: and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her."—iii. 14, 15.

WISDOM is compared and contrasted with other possessions. It is merchandise. There is a most pleasant excitement in the prosecution of mercantile enterprise. It gives full play to all the faculties. Those who prosecute it as a class have their wits more sharpened than other sections of the community. The plans are contrived, and the calculations made. The goods are selected, purchased, loaded, and dispatched. Then there is a watching for favourable winds. After all is clear at the custom-house, and the ship beyond his view, the owner left on shore, may be seen to turn frequently round as he walks leisurely in the evening from his counting-house to his dwelling. He is looking at the vane on the steeple, or the smoke from the chimneys, or any object that will indicate the direction of the wind. His mind is fixed on the probable position of the ship, and his imagination vividly pictures its progress down the channel. He strains mentally at it, as if he could thereby aid its speed. If a photograph of his soul could be taken at the moment, it would be found that his spirit bent after the distant ship, as the keen curler seems by his attitude to

direct the course of the stone that he has launched until it reach the mark. Next day he scans the newspapers to learn whether similar exports are flowing to the same market. Every succeeding day some new aspect of the object presents itself, until the result of the adventure is known. He makes much of it, and so he should; whatever a man does, he should do well.

But meantime, what of the merchandise for a more distant country than that to which his goods are going—what of the traffic for eternity? Are there no careful calculations, no instinctive longings, no vivid imaginings, as to its condition and progress? Are your minds never filled with glad anticipations of its success, or anxious fear of its miscarriage! Do you watch those symptoms which indicate its prosperity or decay? This merchandise is better and more gainful than any other. The world contains not any such promising field for speculation. It opens up a richer and surer market than any port of Time. In that region there is never any glut. He to whom you make consignment is ever faithful. What you commit to Him He will keep until that day. He is wise that winneth souls; his own first, and then others. There is no gain to be compared with this. It is a treasure that cannot be taken away. Thieves cannot penetrate its storehouse; moth and rust do not corrupt the goods of those who are rich towards God. It often happens that a merchant amasses a large fortune by the labour of many years, and then loses all by a single unfortunate speculation. Some dark tales hang on these catastrophes—too dark for telling here. When

such a crash comes, the wonder of the neighbourhood, passing from mouth to mouth, is, why did he not lay up his fortune, when it was realized, in some place of safety? But, alas, where is that place? It lies not within the horizon of time. All the riches that can be laid up here will soon take wings and fly away. If we do not invest in heaven, we shall soon be poor; for the earth, and the things therein, will be burnt up. The prosperous merchant must soon put on "the robe which is made without pockets;" and he is destitute indeed, if he have not the true riches in eternity before him, for all the others will be left behind.

By our own lips, and our own deeds shall we be condemned; if, being all energy for time, we be all indolence for eternity—if we fill our memory with mammon, and forget God.

XXII.

LENGTH OF DAYS IN THE HAND OF WISDOM.

"Length of days is in her right hand."—iii. 16.

IT is certainly not a uniform experience, that a man lives long, in proportion as he lives well. Such a rule would obviously not be suitable to the present dispensation. It is true that all wickedness acts as a shortener of life, and all goodness as its lengthener; but other elements enter, and complicate the result, and slightly veil the interior law. If the law were according to a simple calculation in arithmetic, "the holiest liver, the longest liver," and conversely, "the more wicked the life the earlier its close;" if this, unmixed, unmodified were the law, the moral government of God would be greatly impeded, if not altogether subverted. Wickedness shortens life; but God's government is moral; it is not a lump of mere materialism. He will have men to choose goodness, for His sake and its own; therefore, a slight veil is cast over its present profitableness. Some power is allowed to the devil, whereby to try them that are upon the earth. Here is one way in which it is used. A stray drunkard lives to a great age. All the neighbourhood know it. It is trumpeted at every carousal. The hoary debauchee, who has survived all the saints of a parish, is triumphantly pointed to by younger bacchanals, as evidence that a merry life will keep death long at bay. On

the supposition that a certain measure of power were conceded to Satan, he could not lay it out in any way that would secure a greater revenue to his kingdom, than to give a long term of life to one profligate in every county. By means of that one decoy, he might lure a hundred youths to an early grave and a lost eternity. Individual cases of long life in wickedness are observed, and fastened on, and exaggerated by the vicious, to prove to themselves that their course is not a shorter road to the grave; and yet it is a law—a law of God, in constant operation, that every violation of moral law saps, so far, the foundations of the natural life.

It is most interesting, and at the same time unspeakably sad, to observe how much more easily satisfied men are with evidence when they are about to risk their souls, than when they propose to risk their money. Investigations have been made of late years into the effect of intemperate habits on the length of life, not with a view to moral lessons at all, but simply in search of material for pecuniary transactions. It is expressly intimated that occasional drinkers are included in the calculations as well as habitual drunkards, and the tables exhibit among them a frightfully high rate of mortality. Out of a given number of persons, and in a given number of years, where 110 of the general population would have died, there died of the drinkers 357. Of persons between the ages of twenty-one and thirty, the mortality among drinkers was five times greater than that of the general community.* These views are acted on by Life Assurance Societies. A

* Paper by Mr. Nelson, in "Athenaeum."

young man will lean his life and his soul on the lie that his fast life is consistent with a long life; but let him try to effect a life assurance on himself, and he will find that the capitalist will not entrust his money on such a frail security.

Drunkenness is selected by the agents of assurance societies for their calculations, and mentioned here for illustration, not that it is more sinful before God, or more hurtful to life than other vices, but simply because it is of such a palpable character that, it can be more easily observed and accurately estimated. Others, if human eyes could trace them, would give the same result; but they are trackless, like a serpent on the rock, or an eagle in the air.

XXIII.

A PLEASANT PATH.

"Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace."—iii. 17.

WE are accustomed to the idea that the end of a good man's course is happy. We are well aware that when the pilgrim gets home he will have no more sorrow. But does not the journey lie through a wilderness from the moment when the captive bursts his bonds till he reach the overflowing Jordan, and, in the track of the High Priest, passing through the parted flood, plant his foot finely on the promised land? It does. It traverses the desert all its length, and yet the path is pleasant notwithstanding. To the honour of the Lord be it spoken, and for the comfort of his people, not the home only, but also the way thither, is pleasantness and peace. Those who have not trod it count it dreary. Those who see what it wants, and have not tasted what it is, naturally think that however safe the home to which it leads the traveller at last, it must make him in the meantime of all men most miserable. Those who abide in Egypt, by its flesh-pots and its river, may pity the host of Israel marching through a land not sown; but Israel, in the desert though they be, get their bread and their water sure from day to day; all the more sweet to their taste that the water leaps in their sight at the Father's bidding from a barren rock, and the bread is rained from heaven around their tents. The pilgrim who

flees from Egypt at God's command, and closely follows
then the guiding pillar, will go safe and sweetly over.
The young lion may suffer hunger, but they who wait
upon the Lord shall not lack any good. In the keeping
of His commandments there is great reward, The path
is peace, although storms rage all around it, if there be
peace in the heart of the traveller. The peace of God
keeping the heart within will beam out on the untrodden
way, and gild its jagged sides with gladness. The path
of the justified is like the shining light: from the first
struggling twilight it grows in beauty until it culminate
in day. The path is peace: eye hath not seen, nor ear
heard, what the home will be.

XXIV.

WISDOM MAKING AND MANAGING WORLDS.

"The Lord by wisdom hath founded the earth; by understanding hath he established the heavens. By his knowledge the depths are broken up, and the clouds drop down the dew."—iii. 19, 20.

THESE are specimens of Wisdom's mighty work on worlds. These are the well known tracks of God's goings in creation. There is a closer connection between creation and redemption than human philosophy is able to discover, or unbelieving philosophy is willing to own. The breach that sin has made in the moral hemisphere of the duplicate universe hides from our view the grand unity of the Creator's work. It is one plan from the beginning. The physical and the moral departments are the constituent parts of the completed whole. Throughout the present week (a thousand years is with the Lord as one day,) creation labours painfully, by reason of a rent that runs through its spiritual side: provision has been made for healing it; and even now the process is going on. These labour days sprung from a preceding holy rest, and they will issue in another Sabbath soon. Creation is groaning now for its promised rest. When it comes, the material world will again be a perfect platform for the display of its Maker's goodness. When the earth is made new, it will be the dwelling-place of righteousness. The material and the spiritual, like body and soul, each fearfully made,

and together wonderfully united, will be the perfect manifestation of divine wisdom and love.

A glance is gotten here into the circulation of the world. "The depths are broken up, and the clouds drop down dew!" He has instituted laws whereby the deep is divided. One portion rises to the sky, and thence drops down again to refresh the earth. "How wonderful, O Lord, are thy works; in wisdom hast thou made them all!"

By his knowledge, too, another depth is broken up. The wicked, a whole worldful, lie outspread beneath his eye, "like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest" (Isaiah lvii. 20). What wisdom can separate the pure from the impure, and draw from that unholy mass a multitude, whom no man can number, to be fit inhabitants of heaven? God's wisdom has done this. Christ, set in the firmament of revelation, lets his beams of love fall upon the lost, and thereby wins them out from their impurity, and upward unto Himself. There is a double upbreaking of these depths, and a double separation of the pure from the vile; the one is personal, the other public.

In an individual there is a great sea of sin. When the love of Christ comes in power, it dissolves the terrible cementing by which the soul and sin were run into one. Forthwith there is a breaking up and a separation. The man throws off himself; the new man puts off the old, and the old man lets on the new. The ransomed soul is severed from what seemed its very being, sin, and tends upward toward the Head. Sins trouble him still, and keep him low, but he is delivered from the law of sin.

In the whole community of the fallen there is a breaking up. The wisdom of God is rending asunder things that sin had pressed into one. The word of invitation is, "Come out of her my people," and there is power with the word. A separating process is going on over all the surface of sin's sea. This kingdom cometh not with observation. It is now an unseen thing within the separated; but a time is coming when the separation shall be as manifest, and the distance as wide, as that which now divides these raging waves of the sea from the white sunlit clouds of glory that have been lifted up, and now congregate and culminate in majestic beauty, as if around the throne of God. The white-robed multitude that do in very deed stand round it, were drawn from a sea of sorrow and sin, for they came out of great tribulation, and their robes were not white until they were washed in the blood of the Lamb.

XXV.

CONFIDENCE IN GOD THE TRUE SAFEGUARD
FROM TEMPTATION.

"The Lord shall be thy confidence, and shall keep thy foot from being taken."—
iii. 26.

BEWARE of mistakes here. Let us not deceive ourselves by words without meaning. Do not say God is your confidence, if he be only your dread. An appalling amount of hypocrisy exists in Christendom, and passes current for devotion. He who is in Himself most worthy, and has done most for us, is often more disliked than any other being; and, as if this ingratitude were not enough, men double the sin by professing that they have their confidence in Him.

I have observed that seagoing ships do not trust to themselves in the windings of a river. Where they are hemmed in between rock and quicksand, grazing now the one and now the other, they take care to have a steam-tug, both to bear them forward and guide them aright. They hang implicitly upon its power. They make no attempt at independent action. But I have also observed, that as soon as they get clear of the narrows—as soon as they have attained a good offing and an open sea, they heave off, and hoist their own sails. They never want a steamer until they come to narrow waters again.

Such is the trust in God which the unreconciled experience. In distress they are fain to lean on the Almighty. While they are in the narrows, death seeming near on every side, conscious that they have no power and no skill, they would hang on the help of a Deliverer. "My God, we know thee" (Hosea viii. 2), is then their cry. Most devout they are, and most earnest. At every hour of their day and night they are exercised in spirit about pleasing God, and gaining his help in their need. The line of their dependence seems ever tight by their constant leaning. But when they begin to creep out of these shoals of life—when the path opens up wide and clear and safe again, they heave off, and throw themselves on their own resources. They become a God unto themselves, whenever dangers are out of sight. Forthwith and henceforth they live without God in the world, until they are driven into straits again. Then they remember God and pray, as a distressed ship makes signals for help when she is entering a tortuous channel (Isa. xxvi. 16; Ps. lxxviii. 34-37). This is not to have confidence in God. This is to provoke Him to anger. He deserves a soul's confidence, and desires it.

Confidence in God is not to be attained by a wish whenever you please. You may, when you like, say, "Lord, I trust in Thee," but to make the just Judge his confidence, does not lie in the power of a sinner's will. There is a way of reaching it; and the way is open, and all are welcome, but no man can reach it except by that way. Coming through Christ, and being accepted in the beloved, you will indeed confide in God; but this is to be turned

from darkness to light, to pass from death unto life.

When any man enters by this way into grace, he will be ready to confess that it is the Lord's doing, and marvelous in his eyes.

It is this confidence that has power for good on the life. It is not terror, but trust, that becomes a safeguard from the dominion of sin. It is a peculiar and touching promise that God, when He becomes your confidence, "will keep your foot from being taken." Here incidentally the terrible truth glances out, that snares are laid for the traveller's feet in all the paths of life, in all the haunts of men. Our adversary, like a roaring lion, goeth about seeking whom he may devour. Alas, multitudes are entrapped, like birds in the fowler's snare. Many who set forth hopefully in the morning of life are caught ere they have gone far in some of these pit-falls, and bound over unto the second death. It is a fearful thing to pass by and hear their screaming, and have no power to help.

In my childhood, I sometimes saw rabbits that damaged the corn-fields, caught in snares. My first experience of the process melted me, and the scene is not effaced from my memory yet. The creature was caught by the foot. It was a captive, but living. Oh the agonized look it cast on us when we approached it! The scared, helpless, despairing look of that living creature sank deep in the sensitive powers of my nature. As a child, I could not conceive of any more touching thrilling appeal than the soft rolling eyes of that dumb captive; but "when I became a man," and entered both on the experience of the world and the ministry of the word, I met with scenes that cast

these earlier emotions down into the place of "childish things." Soon after I began to go my rounds as a watchman on my allotted field, I fell upon a youth (and the same experience has been several times repeated since) who but lately was bounding hopefully along, bidding fair for the better land, and seeming to lead others on, caught by the foot in a snare. I went up to him, surprised to find him halting so; but, ah, the look, the glare from his eyes, soon told that the immortal was fast in the devil's toils. He lived; but he was held. All his companions passed on, and soon were out of sight, while he lay beating himself on the ground. He lives; but it is in chains. The chains have sunk into his flesh. They run through the marrow of his bones, and are wrapped around his soul, filthy as firm, firm as filthy. Oh, wretched man, who shall deliver him? Not I; not any man. We must pass on, and leave him. The same voice that wrenched from Death his prisoner is needed to give liberty to this captive. Only one word can we utter in presence of such a case: "Nothing is impossible with God." Having uttered it, we pass on with a sigh.

Cure in such a case is difficult—is all but impossible. Is there any method of prevention? Yes: the Lord thy confidence will keep thy foot from being taken. The Lord your dread will not do it, almighty though He be. Many who have an agonizing fear of a just God in their conscience, plunge deeper even than others into abominable sins. It is the peace of God in the heart that has power to keep the feet out of evil in the path of life. "He that hath this hope in Him, purifieth himself even as

He is pure." "Sin shall not have dominion over you;" and the reason is added—"for ye are not under the law, but under grace" (Rom. vi. 14). A son has wantonly offended an affectionate father, and fled from his face. After many days of sullen distance, the prodigal returns, and at nightfall approaches his father's dwelling. He is standing outside, shivering in the blast, yet afraid to enter, and meet the frown of an injured parent. Some abandoned youths, companions of his guilt, pass by, and hail him. By a little coaxing, they break his resolution of repentance, and carry him off to their haunts of vice. It was easy to sweep him off when they found him trembling in terror outside. He was like chaff; and iniquities, like the wind, carried him away. But if the youth had entered before the tempters came up, and the father, instead of frowning or upbraiding, had fallen on his neck and kissed him, setting him in the circle of brothers and sisters, and showering on him the manifold affections of a united family and a happy home and if the same godless band had been passing then, and had beckoned him to join their revelry, they would not have succeeded so easily. The soul of this youth is like a ship at anchor now, and the current does not carry him away. Specifically, it is "the God of peace" who will bruise Satan under our feet (Rom. xvi. 20). Those who stand outside, with just as much religion as makes them afraid, are easily taken in the tempter's snare: the reconciled whom the Father has welcomed back with weeping, has now another joy, and that joy becomes his strength: "his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord" (Ps. cxii. 7).

XXVI.

THE RIGHT THING DONE AT THE RIGHT TIME.

"Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it. Say not unto thy neighbour, Go, and come again, and to-morrow I will give; when thou hast it by thee."—iii. 27, 28.

IT is in general the law of righteousness between man and man. Do justly to all, and do so now. Pay your debts, and pay them to-day, lest you should lack the means to-morrow.

But it is probable that the precept has special reference to the law of love. Every possessor of the good things, either of this life or the next, is bound by the command of the giver to distribute a portion to those who have none. To withhold from any one that which is due to him, is plainly dishonest. But here an interesting inquiry occurs; how far and in what sense the poor have a right to maintenance out of the labour and wealth of the community? The answer is, the really poor have a right to support by the law of God, and the debt is binding on the conscience of all who have the means; but it is not, and ought not to be, a right which the poor as such can make good at a human tribunal against the rich. The possessors of this world's good are not at liberty to withhold the portion of the poor. It is not left to their choice. It is a matter settled by law. Disobedience is a direct offence against the great Law-giver. But the poor have not a right which they

can plead and enforce at a human tribunal. The acknowledgement of such a right would tend to anarchy. The poor are placed in the power of the rich, and the rich are under law to God. It is true that in heathen and other degraded countries the poor perish, but it does not follow that any other principle would place them in a better condition. Whatever may be the law, the possessors in every country must administer it; and so there cannot in the nature of things be any other law laid upon them than the law of love. They are made answerable to God in their own conscience for their conduct to the poor; and if that do not prevail to secure kindness, nothing else will. If they make light of a duty that may be pleaded at the judgment-seat of God, much more will they make light of it as against the poor who cannot enforce their own demands. The assessment for the poor, in a highly artificial state of society, is not the concession of their right to maintenance exigible against the rich by the laws of men. It is a mere expedient by those who give, to equalize and systematize the disbursement of charity.

It seems to be the purpose of God in the present dispensation to do good to his creatures, by the inequality of their condition. The design of the providential arrangement is to produce gentle, humble, contented thankfulness on the one side, and open-hearted, open-handed liberality on the other. If God had not intended to exercise these graces, he probably would have made and kept men, as to external comforts, all in a state of equality. But this would not have been the best condition for human beings, or for any portion of them. Absolute equality of condi-

tion may do for cattle, but not for men. It appears that the same all-wise Disposer has arranged that there shall be great and manifold diversities of elevation in the surface of the material earth, and in the condition of its intelligent inhabitants. For similar purposes of wisdom and goodness have both classes of inequalities been introduced and maintained. Levellers, who should propose to improve upon this globe, by bringing down every high place and exalting every low, so that no spot of all its surface should remain higher than another, would certainly destroy it as a habitation for man. The waters would cover it. In attempting to make a level earth, they would make a universal sea, The grand comfort is that the mischief cannot be done. The mountains are too firmly rooted to be removed by any power but that of the world's Maker.

We suspect the other class of levellers aim at a change as perilous; and our consolation is, that it is equally impossible. We believe that for the present dispensation, the inequalities in the condition of individuals and families is as needful to the general prosperity of the whole, as the diversity of hill and valley in the surface of the globe. We believe, also, that the arrangement is as firmly fixed. It would be as easy to level the world as its inhabitants. What may be in store for the earth and man in the future we know not; there may be a time when the globe shall be smooth like an ivory ball, but then there must be no more sea: and if ever there come a time when all men shall be and abide equal, it must be that time when there shall be no more sea of sin to over-

flow them. If ever there come a time when there shall be no more master and servants, it must be the time when all shall serve one Lord.

In many ways society is consolidated and strengthened by inequalities. He who made man, male and female, receptive weakness on one side and protecting strength on the other, welding both by the glow of love into a completer one, has thereby made the mass of humanity hold more firmly together. He has also provided diagonal girders running in a different direction—the relations of rich and poor, master and servant, in order to interlace the several portions of humanity more firmly into each other, and so make society as a whole strong enough to ride out the hurricanes of a tempestuous time.

“When it is in the power of thine hand to do it;” a touching memorial this. Many who have cherished sound principles, and desired to do good, have permitted the time irrevocably to pass. When they had it in their power to do good they procrastinated, and now the means have fled. This is a bitter reflection in old age. There is only one way by which any man may make sure that such a bitterness shall not be his, and that is by doing now what his hand finds to do. If it is in the power of your hand this year to do good, it may not be so next year. The abundance may be taken from you, or you taken from your abundance,. The secret of a happy life is to set the house in order, and keep it in order. Above all, keep as few good intentions hovering about as possible. They are like ghosts haunting a dwelling. The way to lay them is to find bodies for them. When they are

embodied in substantial deeds they are no longer dangerous.

But there is yet another way in which it may be beyond the power of thine hand to do a duty to-morrow which has been deferred to-day. The hand has much power and skill, but it cannot move except at the command of the will. If the willingness of the heart were conclusively frozen up within, the hand, which is merely the heart's servant, can do nothing. When the rich refuse to do the duties of the day with their means, they are in danger of falling into the miser's madness. When you have contracted a diseased love of money which you do not use, it is not in the power of the hand to do the plainest duty. The man who loves money cannot part with it. He has let his opportunity pass. On the one side, there may be lavishness without generosity—the mere habit of letting money run out like water: on the other hand, there may be close carefulness without the virtue of frugality—the mere habit of holding the grip. Both conditions are most dismal. There is a tendency to fall into the one snare or the other. The way in the midst is a strait way. It is not easy to walk in it. It is necessary to exercise our faculties in that operation. If we begin early, and keep going, the work will become easy at length.

Observe how remarkably specific is the command not to postpone a gift. We ought to make up our minds, and act. Those who have the means of doing good in the community at the present day, are much tried, and should look well to their path. There are many good objects

pressing, and as in all such cases, the very multitude of the good notes suggests and makes room for the circulation of bad ones, caution and discrimination are not only permitted; they are peremptorily required.

The injunction of the text is a most useful rule in one department of this difficulty. If we have not the means, or if the object be unworthy, there ought to be a distinct declination. A clear unambiguous negative is, in many transactions, of incalculable worth. It is no man's duty to give to every one who asks, or to any all that he asks. There is such a thing as giving when you should not, from lack of courage to say No. Farther, when the object is not worthy, and your mind is clear, and you determine to do nothing, it would be profitable both to yourself and others to say so at once. It is not altogether straightforward to another, or safe for yourself, to announce a postponement if you have resolved on a refusal. Softness may lead to sin. But the worst of all is when the cause is good, when you are convinced of its goodness, when the means are in your power, and yet you put the pleader off. Even though you should afterwards give, you have lost the blessing. God loves a cheerful giver, and though you have given, you gave with a grudge. When the fruit needs a violent pulling to wrench it from the tree, the tree itself is torn in the process.

XXVII.

THE CURSE AND THE BLESSING UPON THE
HOUSE.

"The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked:
but He blesseth the habitation of the just.—iii. 33.

WE have often, in the course of these expositions, had occasion to point out the effects of sin upon the person who sins. Here is yet another of its bitter fruits: it brings a curse on the house. Our interests are more closely connected with each other than we are able to observe, or willing to allow. The welfare of one is largely dependent on the well-doing of another. Let every wicked man learn here, that over and above the ruin of his own soul, his sins bring a curse on his wife and children, his neighbours and friends. Such is God's government, that you cannot live in sin, any more than in small pox or the plague, without involving others in the danger. For wise purposes, it has been so ordained. This law is calculated to lay an additional restraint upon a wayward spirit. A man, reckless of his own character and fate, might be ready to act out the daring maxim, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." When pity for himself did not arrest him, he might be arrested when he saw that his own abandoned life would curse his dwelling. Doubtless this law of the Lord has been bit and bridle to hold in a man, who would have burst through all other

restraints. In blind despairing rage, he might pull down the pillars upon his own unhappy head. Yet when he feels his little ones clinging to his knees, and his wife leaning on his breast, he may stand in awe, and turn and live. "Fear and sin not." The providence of God gives terrible momentum to that sharp word. In addition to the weight of divine authority upon the conscience, all the force of nature's instincts is applied to drive it home. When the fear of perdition to himself has not power enough, the laws of Providence throw in all his house as a make-weight to increase the motive. He is held back from evil by all that he ever felt of tenderness in his youth, or feels of compassion still. And if in the last resort these weights avail not to keep him from sinning, they will be effectual in adding to his punishment,

This dark curse hanging over the dwelling of the wicked, is balanced by the blessing that falls on the habitation of the just. Here is pleasant work, and plenty of wages. Trust in Christ, and serve Him besides the saving of your own soul, you will be a blessing to your habitation. How sweet the privilege of being the parents of your children both for this life and the life to come! And not only the parents every one in the house may become the channel of blessing from on high. If God has a child in a family, he will have many an errand there. You who are fathers know how frequently you find occasion to visit the house where your own dear child is boarded out for education. Our Father in heaven so visits his own, in whatever habitation their education is going on, and all the house will get the benefit. The disciples of Jesus

are a preserving salt, even when the mass preserved by their presence are unconscious of the boon. To be good is the shortest and surest way to do good. Jonathan in his lifetime was dear to David; and therefore Jonathan's son, an orphan and a cripple, sat daily at the royal table. If you be the king's friend, your children will get the benefit in some hour of need. It is a noble position, and should encourage one to bear trials with patience, to be the channel between a house and heaven, bearing them up to God, and getting down from Him the blessing.

XXVIII.

PRECEPT AND EXAMPLE.

"Hear, O my son, and receive my sayings. . . . I have taught thee in the way of wisdom: I have led thee in right paths."—iv. 10, 11.

IT is a great matter for a parent, if he is able to say to his grown son, "I have taught thee in the way of wisdom; I have led thee in right paths." Teaching and leading are closely allied, but not identical. It is possible, and common, to have the first in large measure, where the second is wanting. They are two elements which together make up a whole. With both, education in a family will go prosperously on: where one is wanting, it will be halting and ineffectual. Many a parent who acquits himself well in the department of teaching his children, fails miserably in the department of leading them in the right path. It is easier to tell another the right way, than to walk in it yourself. To lead your child in right paths implies that you go in them before him. Here lies the reason why so many parents practically fail to give their children a good education. Only a godly man can bring up his child for God. It is not uncommon to find men who are themselves vicious, desiring to have their children educated in virtue. Infidels sometimes take measures to have Christianity taught to their children. Many will do evil; few dare to teach it to their own offspring. This is the unwilling homage which the evil are constrained to pay to goodness.

Great is the effect when parents consistently and steadfastly go before their children, giving them a daily example of their daily precepts; but to teach the family spiritual things, while the life of the teacher is carnal, is both painful and fruitless. A man cannot walk with one leg, although the limb be in robust health; more especially if the other limb, instead of being altogether wanting, is hanging on him, and trailing after him dead. In this case it is impossible to get quit of the impediment. It will not off. The only way of getting relief from its weight is to get it made alive. An example of some kind, parents must exhibit in their families. If it be not such as to help, it will certainly hinder the education of the young. God, in the providential laws, permits no neutrality in the family. There, you must either be for or against Him.

One of the broadest and best defined experiences that passed under my observation, and was imprinted on my memory in early youth, was that of a family whose father stood high above all his neighbours in religious profession and gifts, and yet returned from market drunk as often as he had the means; and whose sons turned out graceless vagabonds. Nothing is impossible with God; but it would have been indeed a miracle of mercy if these young men, who were accustomed from childhood to see in their own father a lofty spiritual profession wedded to the vilest vice, had themselves, as they grew up, lived soberly, and righteously, and godly in the world.

XXIX.

HOLD FAST.

"Take fast hold of instruction;
let her not go keep her, for she is thy life."—iv. 13.

OFTEN a ship's crew at sea are obliged suddenly to betake themselves to their boats, and abandon the sinking ship. Such a case was lately reported, of an American whale ship in the South Seas. The huge leviathan of the deep, wounded by the art of man, ran out the distance of a mile by way of getting a run-race, and thence came on with incredible velocity against the devoted ship. Such was the shock that she instantly began to fill, and was gradually settling down. The sea was calm: there was opportunity for effort, but not time for delay. They were not only far from land, but far from the usual track of ships on the sea. In the dreary region of the antarctic circle, they might wander a whole year, and see no sail on the desolate horizon. There was little probability of rescue until they should regain those latitudes through which the thoroughfare of nations runs. The word was given. All hands went to work, and soon all the seaworthy boats were loaded to the gunwale with the prime necessities of life. The deck was now nearly level with the water, and the boats shoved off for safety. After they had pulled a hundred yards away, two resolute men leaped from one of the boats into the sea, and made

towards the ship. They reached it while still afloat. They disappear down a hatchway. In a minute they emerge again, bearing something in their hands. As they leap into the water the ship goes, down; the men are separated from each other and their burden, in the whirlpool that gathers over the sinking hull. They do not seem to consult their own safety. They remain in that dangerous eddy, until they grasp again the object which they had carried over the ship's side. Holding it fast, they are seen at length bearing away to their comrades in the boat. What do these strong swimmers carry, for they seem to value it more than life? It is the compass! It had been left behind, and was remembered almost too late. Now they have taken fast hold of it, and will not let it go. Whatever they lose, they will at all hazards keep it, for "it is their life."

When shall we see souls, shipwrecked on the sea of time, take and keep such hold of the Truth as it is in Jesus, because it is their life? When will men learn to count that the soul's danger in the flood of wrath is as real, as the body's danger on a material ocean? When will men begin to make real effort for the Eternal life, such as they make to preserve the present life when it is in danger? There is not an atom of hypocrisy about a man, when he is in instant danger of drowning or starvation. He lays about him with an energy and a reality that brook no delay, and regard no appearances. If we could truly believe that the life of our souls is forfeited by sin, that they must be saved now or lost for ever, and that there is, none other name given under heaven

among men to save them, than the name of Jesus; then there would be a corresponding reality in our cleaving to the Saviour. Although, in a sense, we seek the right things, all may be lost by reversing the order in which, by divine prescription, they should be sought. The rule is, Seek first the kingdom of God, and then it is intimated that other things may be innocently "added." Those who seek first these other things as their heart's portion, may also strive earnestly to attain the kingdom; but their labour is lost, because they do not "strive lawfully." "Lord, what wouldst thou have me to do," and how wouldst thou have me to do it? "Send out thy light and thy truth: let them lead me."

XXX.

THE PATH OF THE JUST.

"The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day. The way of the wicked is as darkness: they know not at what they stumble."—iv. 18, 19.

THE essentials of a just man's character have been in all ages the same. The just in every dispensation have lived by faith, and walked with God: they have hoped for his salvation, and done his commandments (Psalm cix, 166): they believe, and obey; they are bought with a price, and glorify God.

The path, the life course of such a man, is like the shining light. I do not think that the path of the justified is compared to the course of the sun, from the period of his appearance in the morning to the time of his meridian height. The sun is an emblem, not of the justified, but of the Justifier. I have always felt uneasy in hearing the life of a believer likened to the sun's course from horizon to zenith. The comparison does not fit. An effort to adjust the analogy either spoils its beauty, or gives a glory to man which is not his due. That grandest object in the visible creation is used as an emblem of the Highest One, and for his service it should be reserved. Christ alone is the Light of the world: Christians are the enlightened. The just are those whom the Sun of Righteousness shines upon. When they come

beneath his healing beams, their darkness flies away. They who once were darkness are light now, but it is "in the Lord."

The new life of the converted is like the morning light. At first, it seems an uncertain struggle between the darkness and the dawn. It quivers long in the balance. At one moment the watcher thinks, surely yonder is a streak of light: the next, he says with a sigh, it was an illusion: night yet reigns over all. When the contest begins, however, the result is not doubtful, although it may for a time appear so. The first and feeblest streaks of light that come mingling with the darkness, have issued from the sun; and the sun that sent these harbingers, though distant yet, is steadily advancing. Ere long the doubt will vanish, and morning will be unequivocally declared. Once begun, it shineth more and more unto the perfect day; and it is perfect day when the sun has risen, as compared with the sweet but feeble tints of earliest dawning. Sometimes there are irregularities and back-goings. Clouds deep and dark creep in between the sun and the world's surface. After the morning has so far advanced, the darkness may increase again; but, even in this case, the source of light is coming near without any faltering. The impediment which has partially intercepted his rays, is moveable, and will soon be taken out of the way. There are similar irregularities in the progress of a just man's course. Sometimes he halts, or even recedes. After experiencing the light of life, and exulting in a blessed hope, he again comes under a cloud, and complains of darkness. But the Source of his light

and life will not fail. He changeth not; and therefore that seed of Jacob, though distressed, will not be consumed (Malachi iii. 6). The breath of His Spirit will drive the intercepting clouds away, and the law of the kingdom, relieved from hindering exceptions, will yet have free course: the path of the just will be like the morning; it will increase until dawn break into day. If a thousand years may in the Lord's sight be accounted one day, much more may the life course of a disciple from the first throes of the new birth, to the moment when faith is lost in sight. That day is an high day in the eternal life of the saved. It is a day much to be remembered in the circle of victors that surround the throne. Now that the Lord God and the Lamb are their light, they will think of the time when the earliest dawn began to struggle faintly in their breasts. The remembrance of its mysterious birth out of primeval darkness, and its gradual growth into perfect light, will make them say and sing of that day, in adoring wonder, What hath the Lord wrought!

The analogy holds good more exactly still, if we take into view the actually ascertained motions of the planetary system. When any portion of the earth's surface begins to experience a dawn diminishing its darkness, it is because that portion is gradually turning round toward the sun, the centre of light fixed in the heavens. While any part of the earth lies away from the sun, and in proportion to the measure of its aversion, it is dark and cold: in proportion as it turns to him again, its atmosphere grows clearer, until, in its gradual progress,

it comes in sight of the sun, and its day is perfect then. The path of the just is precisely like this. Arrested in his darkness by a love in Christ, which he does not understand as yet, he is secretly drawn toward Him in whom that love in infinite measure is treasured up. As he is drawn nearer, his light increases until at last he finds himself in the presence of the Lord. Day is not perfect here in a believer's heart, and yet the light of the knowledge of God from the face Jesus shines into a believer's heart while he sojourns here. The dark get light, the dead get life from the Lord—in the Lord before his glorious appearing. They who thus get light from a Saviour unseen, shall, at his appearing, be like Him, and see Him as He is. The machinery of the everlasting covenant is meantime going, softly and silently, as the motion of the spheres; and they that are Christ's here, whatever clouds may dim their present prospect, are wearing every moment farther from the night and nearer to the day.

There follows a counterpart intimation fitted to overawe the boldest heart "The way of the wicked is as darkness; they know not at what they stumble" (iv, 19). "If the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness?" (Matthew vi. 23.) Its greatness consists chiefly in this, that it is "in you." A dark place on the path might be got over; but darkness in his own heart, the traveller carries with him wherever he goes. To the blind, every place and every time is alike dark. It is an evil heart of unbelief. Because of this they stumble upon that very Rock which has been laid in Zion to sustain a sinner's hope. He who is a sanctuary to

others, is a rock of offence to them. "He shall be for a sanctuary: but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel" (Isa viii. 14). Even when they fall they know not at what they stumble.

Dreadful thought! to be crushed against Him, who has been given as a Refuge and a Rest to weary souls escaping from a sea of sin. The way to get light is to turn from evil. The pure in heart shall see God."

XXXI.

THE FOUNTAIN AND ITS STREAMS.

"Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life. Put away from thee a froward mouth, and perverse lips put far from thee. Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee. Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established. Turn not to the right hand nor to the left: remove thy foot from evil."—iv. 23-27.

FIRST the fountain, then the streams: first the heart, and then the life-coarse. The issues of life are manifold: three of their main channels are mapped out here—the "lips," the "eyes," and the "feet."

The corruption of the heart, the pollution of the spring-head, where all life's currents rise, is a very frequent topic in the Scriptures. It occurs in many places, and in many forms. In proportion to the opposition which it is fitted to excite, is the doctrine reiterated and enforced. The imaginations of man's heart are only evil, and that continually. The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. As a fountain casteth out her waters, Jerusalem casteth out her wickedness. God foreknew that a deceitful heart would be unwilling to own its deceitfulness, and therefore the truth is fortified beyond most others in the word.

"Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." This precept of the Proverbs sounds very like some of the sayings of Jesus. His ear caught prophetically before the time, what we have heard his-

torically after it, as if the word had echoed either way. You may stand in the morning on a height so great that you see the sun's disc emerging from the eastern horizon sometime before he has risen upon the plain. Solomon, as a teacher of righteousness, was elevated far above the common level of humanity. By special gift, and by the Spirit's intervention, he was exalted much above other men in all knowledge, and especially the knowledge of divine truth. So high was the mountain-top he stood upon, that, like Abraham, he saw Christ's day afar off, and felt a beam from the Sun of Righteousness long before he had personally arisen upon the world.

A greater than Solomon has said, "Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries." Keep therefore according to Solomon's precept; keep with all diligence that prolific spring. Here, as in all other cases, prayer and pains must go together. We cry to God in the words of David, Create in me a clean heart; and He answers back by the mouth of David's son, Keep thy heart. We must keep it, otherwise it will run wild. The Almighty Lord will bruise Satan; but it is "*under your feet*:" yourselves must tread on his writhing folds.

"Keep it with all keepings" is the word. Leave no means untried. Out of our own conduct will we be condemned if we do not effectually keep our own hearts. We keep other things with success as often as we set about it in earnest—good things from getting, and bad things from doing, harm. One who loves his garden, keeps it so well that travellers pause as they pass and look admiring on. You keep your family, your house, your money, and you

keep them well. Even your clothes are kept, so that no stain shall be seen upon them. On the other side, dangerous creatures are kept with a firm hand and a watchful eye from doing evil. We keep in the horse or mule with bit and bridle. Even the raging sea is kept back by the skill of men, and ripening fields bask safely in the autumn sun below the level of its waters, and within hearing of its roar. In other keepings man is skilful and powerful too; but in keeping his own heart, unstable as water, he does not excel.

Keep it with all keepings. Keep it from getting evil, as a garden is kept; keep it from doing evil, as the sea is kept at bay from reclaimed netherlands. Keep it with the keeping of heaven above, and of the earth beneath--God's keeping bespoken in prayer, and man's keeping applied in watchful effort. Keep it with all keepings, for out of it are the issues of life. The true principle on which an effectual' restraint can be put upon the issues of the heart is indicated in the 21st verse—"Keep" my words "in the midst of thine heart." The same prescription for the same disease occurs in that great hymn of the Hebrews (Psalm cxix. 11)—"Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee." The word of life, —this is the salt that must be cast into these bitter springs of Jericho, to save the surrounding land from barrenness,

1. The first of the three streams marked on this map as issuing from an ill-kept heart is "a froward mouth." The form of the precept, put it away, reveals a secret of our birth. The evil is there at the first in every one: He who is free of it was not born free. We have not a

clear ground to begin upon. When a man would erect a temple to God within his own body, the first effort of the builder is to clear the rubbish away. Of the things from the heart that need to be put away, the first in the order of nature is the froward mouth. Words offer the first and readiest egress for evil.

The power of speech is one of the grand peculiarities which distinguish man. It is a wonderful and precious gift. Wanting it, and all that depends on it, man would scarcely be man. While we use the gift, we should remember the Giver, and the purpose for which he bestowed it. While we speak, we should never forget that God is one of the listeners. Men sin in comfort when they forget God, and forget God that they may sin in comfort. If the Queen were present, hearing every word, on a given day, in a given company, a restraint would be put upon every tongue; gravity and gentleness would breathe in every sentence. Yet that same company is not refined and sobered by the presence of the King Eternal. Like Israel, in a backsliding time (Mal. i. 8), we bring unto God the blind and the lame, sacrifices that we would not offer to our sovereign and that she would not accept at our hands. He who has a tongue to speak should remember that the bestower of the gift is listening, and keep back whatever would displease Him. Take the principle of Hagar's simple and sublime confession, accommodated in form to the case in hand, "Thou God, *hearest* me." If our words were all poured through that strainer, how much fewer and purer they would be! If all the words of our week were gathered and set before us at its close, the boldest head

would hang down at the sight. When all the words this tongue has uttered are written and opened in His sight on that day, how shall I appear, if the dark record remains still mine? While for that reckoning we must trust all and only in the blood of Christ, that taketh sin away, we should diligently set about the business of watching and restraining the perverseness of our own lips. The work is hopeful. They who try it in the right way will be encouraged by seen progress. A vain, a biting, an untruthful, a polluted, a profane tongue cannot be in the family of God, when the family are at home in the Father's presence. The evil must be put away; the tongue must be cleansed; and now is the day for such exercises: that which remaineth for the people of God is a Sabbath on which no such work is done, in a heaven where no such work is needed.

2. The next outlet from the fountain is by the "eyes." The precept is quaint in its cast—"let thine eyes look right on;" and yet its meaning is not difficult. Let the heart's aim be simple and righteous. No secret longings and side glances after forbidden things: no crooked by-ends and hypocritical pretences. Both in appearance and reality let your path be a straightforward one. In a mercantile community especially this is the quality that should be chiefly in request. Much mischief is done when men begin to look aside instead of straight before them. A manufacturer glances to the side one day, and sees a neighbour making as much by a lucky speculation in an hour as he has won by the regular prosecution of his business in a twelvemonth. He throws for a prize, and draws

a blank. In the speculation the capital which sustained his business has disappeared: his legitimate creditors are defrauded, and his family ruined.

Deviations from the straight line have become so many and so great, that the deviators, keeping each other in countenance, begin to defend their own course, and whisper a desire to establish a new code of laws which may coincide with their practice. We have here and there met with an appalling measure of obtuseness in comprehending the first principles of justice, which should regulate all commercial transactions. Men may be found amongst us holding their heads high, and conducting business on a large scale, who have not gotten the alphabet of honesty yet. It is ground of thankfulness, indeed, that these are the exceptions. The body politic of commerce is in a much sounder state than it appears to a superficial observer, judging from instances whose abnormal criminality has thrust them more prominently into view. If the life were not on the whole robust, it could not bear diseased tumours so many and so great; but the body whose beauty they mar, and whose strength they waste, should, for its own health's sake, be ashamed of the deformities, and intolerant of their growth. With this view, let every man, besides joining in the general condemnation of full-grown detected dishonesties in other people's transactions, search for and crush incipient secret aberrations in his own.

When the eye is single, the whole body will be full of light. Straightforwardness is the fairest jewel of our commercial crown. Those who spend their life in traffic

should be jealous of themselves, and lean hard over from the side on which sly, sinister selfishness lies, Anything on the right side; uprightness, even downrightness, if you will; but let us keep far away from every form and shade of duplicity. It is true that mercantile pursuits tend to develop some noble qualities of humanity; but let it not be forgotten that some noxious weeds can thrive in the riches of its soil. Love and cultivate, by all means, the generous plants; but carefully watch the weeds, and resolutely cast them away.

3. The last of these issues is by the "feet." Ponder, therefore, their path. The best time to ponder any path, is not at the end, not even at the middle, but at the beginning of it. The right place for weighing the worth of any course, is on this side of its beginning. Those who ponder after they have entered it, are not in a position either to obtain the truth or to profit by it Those who rush headlong into a path of conduct because they like it, and then begin to consider whether it is a right one, will probably either induce themselves to believe a lie, or refuse to follow discovered truth.

The injunction applies to every step in life, great and small. Ponder well what family you will be a servant in, what trade you will learn, what business you will engage in, what colony you will emigrate to. Every step is great, because it affects the destiny of an immortal soul More particularly, by way of example, ponder your path at that great step which binds you for life to another human being as one flesh. God has made marriage a weighty matter—let not man make it a light

one. Weigh well itself and all its accessories. Those who take this leap in the dark, may expect to find themselves in a miry pit. Those who weigh at it, until they find the burden all too heavy for their strength, and cast it therefore on the Lord, will be led out of their temptations, and through their difficulties. Most true it is that "marriages are made in heaven;" for the dear children refer the matter implicitly to their Father there, and he undertakes for them.

But the value of weighing anything depends all on the justness of the balance and the weights. Many shamefully false balances are in use and in vogue for weighing paths and actions. "Fashion," and "use and wont," are the scales that most people cast their intentions into, before carrying them out into fact. These are the instruments which quacks supply, and fools employ. They are mean and contemptible cheats; and yet the multitude trust them. If nothing valuable were risked, one might be content to smile at their silliness, and pass on; but the path which these false balances induce their dupes to take, leads to perdition. Although the acts be transparent folly, we cannot afford to turn them into mirth. We dare not laugh at the stupidity of the entrance whose issue is in woe. These false balances are ruin to men, and abomination to the Lord! Cast them away. Here is a standard weight stamped as true by the imperial seal of heaven. By the word of God paths and actions will be weighed in the judgment. By the word of God, therefore, let paths and actions, great and small, be pondered now.

X.XXII.

FAMILY JOYS.

"Drink waters out of thine own cistern,
and running waters out of thine own well."—v. 15.

A PAINTER lays down a dark ground to lean his picture on, and thereby bring its beauty out. Such is the method adopted in this portion of the word. The pure delights of the family are about to be represented in the sweetest colours that nature yields,—wedded love mirrored in running waters; surely we have apples of gold in pictures of silver here. And in all the earlier part of the chapter the Spirit has stained the canvass deep with Satan's dark antithesis, to the holy appointment of God. An instance of the same high art you may see in the work of another master. Paul sets forth, in Eph. v. 2, his favourite theme, the love of Christ, in terms of even more than his usual winsomeness; and you may see, in the verse that follows, how dark a ground he filled in behind it. Such fearful contrasts, under the immediate direction of the Spirit, make the beauty of holiness come more visibly out. But it is only at a great distance, and with extremest caution, that we dare to imitate this style in our expositions. The danger would be great, if the attempt were rashly made, of staining the pure by an unskilful handling of the impure. A reverent look towards the depths of Satan, as they are unveiled in the word of God, may alarm the

observer, and cause him to keep farther from the pit's mouth; but we fear to touch them in detail, lest our well-meant effort should be snatched, and used as another fiery dart by the wicked one. All round, this region seems infected. We have known some who, in venturing near to rescue others, fell themselves; as miners, descending the pit to bring out a suffocated neighbour, have been known to perish with him. It is meet that even those who, from fear of God and love to men, run to the rescue, should hold in their breath, and pull hastily out of the fire whatever brand they can lay their hands on, and come back with all speed from the opening mouth of those descending "steps that take hold on hell" Indeed this is the substance of all these warnings which occur in the fifth chapter, and are repeated in the seventh. The key note of the whole is, "remove far from her." The word assumes that men are weak, and warns them off from the edge of the whirling stream that sucks the unwary in. It is the same lesson that Jesus himself gave, when he taught that in this matter a look is already sin. In wise tenderness, He would keep the fluttering bird clear beyond the reach of the vile charmer's fascinating eye. "Hear ye Him," young men, as you love your life, and value your souls. We protest that we are clear from the blood of those that perish there, although we stand no longer near the deadly spot to warn them back.

The Lord condescends to bring his own Institute forward in rivalry with the deceitful pleasures of sin. The pure joys of a happy home are depicted in the fifteenth

and subsequent verses. The saying of Cowper, "God made the country, man made the town," although it contains no poetic brilliance, has obtained a wide currency for its pithy expression of a great and obvious truth. We may be permitted to use the poet's mould in giving form to our own conceptions, which we believe to be equally true, and more urgent. "God made the family, man made the casino, the theatre, the dramshop, the ball-room." The list might be largely extended, of Satan-suggested, man-made things, which compete with God's institute the family, and drain off its support.

How beautiful and how true the imagery in which our lesson is infolded! Pleasures such as God gives to his creatures, and such as his creatures, with advantage to all their interests, can enjoy—pleasures that are consistent with holiness and heaven, are compared to a stream of pure running water. And specifically the joys of the family are "running waters out of thine own well." This well is not exposed to every passenger. It springs within, and has a fence around it. We should make much of the family, and all that belongs to it. All its accessories are the Father's gift, and He expects us to observe and value them. It is no trifling to apply the microscope to the petals of a flower, in order to magnify and so multiply its beauties. In like manner, it is worthy employment for the greatest to scan the minutest objects that are the genuine parts of the household apparatus: for, as the Lord's works, they are all very good.

But remember, although the stream is very pure—nay, because it is so very pure, a small bulk of foreign matter

will sensibly tinge it. You may have observed that if a drop of coloured matter be poured into pure water, it makes its polluting presence very widely felt. Had the water been discoloured from the first, the effect of another drop would not have been discernible. Thus the very purity of the family joys in themselves magnifies the effect of any infringement. Perhaps the drop that discolours for days the waters of his own well, may fall in an unguarded moment from the lips of the husband and father himself. A biting word, reflecting on the wife and mother in presence of the children, when something in her department is found out of order, will stir the mud at the bottom, and make the stream run turbid for many days. His absence, frequent or unnecessary, in the evening, till the children have gone to bed, and the wife feels that much of her labour in making everything neat has been thrown away, without an eye to see, or a tongue to applaud it—this will soon change “your own well” into the appearance of a river in flood. From the other side also the disturbing element may come. Even little neglects on the wife's part will damp the joys of the house, as a very small cloud may suffice to take all the sunlight out of the landscape. A slovenly dress for the husband's home-coming, made tidy only when strangers are expected, may be sufficient to tinge the whole current of conjugal intercourse. Something is felt to be wrong, and yet neither may know what the ailment is, or where it lies. Sharp, discontented words, a continual dropping from a woman's lips, whether with or without cause, will be a poisonous acid in the well,

and all joy will die around its borders. The children, too, have much in their power both for good and evil. Heavy cares are strong temptations to the parents. Their spirits are burdened, and the burdened spirit is apt to give way. If the children, by ready obedience, and mutual love, would contrive to sit light as a burden on their parents' shoulders, the lightened parents might rejoice together, and the beams of glad contentment on the faces of father and mother would radiate through all the house. Children are sometimes little peacemakers, blessing their parents, and blessed by God.

But careful abstinence from evil is only one, and that, the lower side of the case. There must be spontaneous outgoing activity in this matter, like the springing of flowers, and the leaping of a stream from the fountain. The command is peremptory, v. 18, "Rejoice with the wife of thy youth." It is not only feed and clothe her, and refrain from injuring her by word or deed. All this will not discharge a man's duty, nor satisfy a woman's heart. All the allusions to this relation in Scripture imply an ardent, joyful love. To it, though it lie far beneath heaven, yet to it, as the highest earthly thing, is compared the union of Christ and his redeemed Church. Beware where you go for comfort in distress, and sympathy in happiness. The Lord himself is the source of all consolation to a soul that seeks Him; yet nature is His, as well as redemption. He has constructed nether springs on earth and supplied them from his own high treasures; and to these he bids a broken or a joyful spirit go for either sympathy. "Drink waters out of

thine own cistern," is the express command. "Rejoice with the wife of thy youth"—this is not to put a creature in the place of God. He will take care of His own honour. He has hewn that cistern, and given it to you, and filled it, and when you draw out of it what He has put in, you get from Himself, and give Him the glory. Husband and wife, if they are skilful to take advantage of their privileges, may, by sharing, somewhat diminish their cares, and fully double their joys. They twain shall be one flesh, and when the two are one, it will be a robuster life, as two streams joined become a broader river.

But we must take care lest the enjoyments of home become a snare. God is not pleased with indolence or selfishness. When He gives that fountain, He expects it will "be dispersed abroad." To keep all to yourself will defeat your own end. To hold it in will make it stagnate. The only way of keeping it sweet for ourselves is to let it run over for the good of others. If the family is well ordered, ourselves will get the chief benefit: but we should let others share it. Those especially who are in providence deprived of this inestimable blessing, a home—those who have no parents, or whose parents are far away, should be admitted to taste of, these pleasures. This is a charity which God-fearing families might distribute without cost to a class who need no material alms, and are therefore liable to be neglected in schemes of ordinary benevolence.

XXXIII.

THE METHOD OF PROVIDENCE FOR RE-
STRAINING EVIL

"The ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord, and he pondereth all his goings. His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself, and he shall be holden with the cords of his sins."—v. 21, 22.

GOD announces Himself the witness and the judge of man. The evil-doer can neither elude the all-seeing eye, nor escape from the Almighty hand. Secrecy is the study and the hope of the wicked. This word booms forth like thunder out of heaven into every human heart where evil thoughts are germinating into wickedness, proclaiming that the ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord. A sinner's chief labour is to hide his sin: and his labour is all lost. Darkness hideth not from God. The Maker of the night is not blinded by its covering.

He who knows evil in its secret source is able to limit the range of its operation. There is a special method by which this is done. It is a principle of the divine government that sin becomes the instrument of punishing sinners. Both for restraint in this life, and final judgment at last, this is the method employed. It is not only true in general that the wicked shall not escape, but also in particular that his own sin is the snare that takes the transgressor, and the scourge that lashes him. The maker and Ruler of all things has set in the system of

the universe a self-acting apparatus, which is constantly going for the encouragement of good and the repression of evil. The providential laws do not, indeed, supply a sufficient remedy for sin and its fruits; another physician undertakes the cure; but these laws, notwithstanding, exert a constant force in opposition to moral evil. The wind may be blowing steadily up the river, and yet a ship on the river's bosom, though her sails are spread and filled, may not be moving up, but actually dropping down the stream. Why? Because the stream flows so rapidly down, that the breeze in the sails, though a force in the opposite direction, cannot overcome it. The wind does not, in spite of the current, give the ship momentum upward, but it makes the ship's progress downward much more slow. That force does not make the ship move upward, but it prevents the ship from rushing down with such a headlong velocity as to dash itself in pieces. The providential laws are directed against the current of man's sinful propensities, and tell in force thereon. They do not, however, overcome, and neutralize, and reverse these propensities. They were not so intended. They impede the stream's velocity, and restrain its fury. The providential laws prevent the present system from clashing itself into chaos, but they do not supersede the redemption by Christ, and the renewing by the Spirit.

"His own iniquities shall take the wicked." This is an evident and awful truth. Retribution in the system of nature, set in motion by the act of sin, is like the "Virgin's kiss" in the Romish Inquisition. The step of

him who goes forward to kiss the image touches a secret spring, and the statue's marble arms enclose him in a deadly embrace, piercing his body through with a hundred hidden knives. Verily a man under law to God would need to "ponder his path," for the ground he stands on is mined beneath him, and the first step from virtue's firm footing aside into the yielding slough of vice, sets unseen swords in motion which will tear his flesh, and enter the marrow of his bones. "The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice." He is to be praised for the righteousness of his government. His judgments will go into a song as well as his mercy.

XXXIV.

SEVEN HATEFUL THINGS.

"These six things doth the Lord hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, an heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, a false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren."—vi. 16-19.

SOME of these hateful things are characteristics of particular members in the body, and some are characteristics generally of the man. I do not perceive the principle of arrangement in the nature of the things; perhaps the order is modified by the exigencies of Hebrew poetry.

It is a claim which the Lord puts forth as the Maker and Giver of all our faculties. These are some of the marks by which His wisdom is visibly manifested in creation. He is displeased when they are plunged into lusts, and employed as tools in the service of Satan. These eyes, this tongue, these hands and feet, are instruments of surpassing skill and beauty. They declare God's glory as articulately as the stars of heaven or the flowers of earth. Who shall dare to corrupt the allegiance of these tributaries, and enrol them rebels against the King of kings? The Maker cares for all his works. To pervert any part of them provokes Him to anger. Every purpose to which the members of our body are put is noticed by the All-seeing. If we are in spirit his dear children, we have

opportunity to please God as often as we exercise any faculty of our mind, or member of our frame.

There is one parallel well worthy of notice between, the seven cursed things here, and the seven blessed things in the fifth chapter of Matthew. In the Old Testament the things are set down in the sterner form of what the Lord hates, like the "thou shalt not" of the Decalogue. In the New Testament the form is in accordance with the gentleness of Christ. There we learn the good things that are blessed, and are left to gather thence the opposite evils that are cursed. But, making allowance for the difference in form, the first and the last of the seven are identical in the two lists. "The Lord hates a proud look," is precisely equivalent to "blessed are the poor in spirit;" and "he that soweth discord among brethren," is the exact converse of the "peacemaker." This coincidence must be designed. When Jesus was teaching his disciples on the Mount, he seems to have had in view the similar instructions that Solomon had formerly delivered, and while the teaching is substantially new, there is as much of allusion to the ancient Scripture as to make it manifest that the Great Teacher kept his eye upon the prophets, and sanctioned all their testimony.

XXXV.

MOTHER'S LAW.

"My son, keep thy father's commandment, and forsake not the law of thy mother: Bind them continually upon thine heart, and tie them about thy neck. When thou goest, it shall lead thee; when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee; and when thou awakest, it shall talk with thee. For the commandment is a lamp; and the law is light; and reproofs of instruction are the way of life: To keep thee from the evil woman, from the flattery of the tongue of a strange woman."—vi. 20-24.

A FATHER'S commandment is the generic form, and is usually employed to signify parental authority; but here, in addition to the general formula, "the law of a mother" is specifically singled out. The first feature that arrests attention in this picture is, that effects are attributed to the law of a mother which only God's law can produce. The inference is obvious and sure; it is assumed that the law which a mother instils is the word of God dwelling richly in her own heart, and that she acts as a channel to convey that word to the hearts of her children. To assume it as actually done, is the most impressive method of enjoining it. Parents are, by the constitution of things, in an important sense mediators between God and their children for a time. What you give them they receive; what you tell them they believe. This is their nature. You should weigh well what law, and what practice you impress first upon their tender hearts. First ideas and habits are to them most import-

ant. These give direction to their course, and tone to their character through life. Your children are by nature let into you, so as to drink in what you contain; the only safety is that you be by grace let into Christ, so that what they get from you, shall, be, not what springs within you, but what flows into you from the Spring-head of holiness. To the children, it is the law of their mother, and therefore they receive it; but in substance it is the truth from Jesus, and to receive it is life. It is the law which converts the soul and makes wise the simple, poured through a mother's lips into infants' ears.

It is a sweet employment, and an honourable place, to be mediators for our own children, bearing up to God their need, and bringing down to them God's will. This is a kind of mediation not derogatory to Christ. It is no presumptuous priesthood; it is a humble ministry, appointed and accepted by himself. It belongs to the structure, both of the kingdom of nature, and the covenant of grace. There is in the spiritual department something corresponding to the birth, when the parent travails again until the child be born to the Lord; and there is here also, something corresponding to the nursing. Great must be the delight of a mother, herself renewed, when she becomes the channel through which the "milk of the word" flows into her child (I Peter ii. 2); more especially when she feels the child desiring that milk, and with appetite drawing it for the sustenance of a new life.

The injunction is in form addressed to a grown son, that he forsake not in manhood his mother's law. It has

often been repeated that mothers have much in their power, in virtue of their position beside the nascent streams of life, where they are easily touched and turned. The observation is both true and important. It is this weight, cast into woman's otherwise lighter scale, that turns the balance, and brings her to equality with man, as to influence on the world. In spite of man's tyranny on one side, and her own weakness on the other, woman has thus in all countries, and even in the most adverse circumstances, vindicated her right to a place by her husband's side, and silently leaves her own impress as deeply stamped as his upon the character of the coming generation.

In the pliant time of childhood, the character is moulded chiefly by the mother. Many melting stories are told on earth, and, I suppose, many more in heaven, about the struggle carried on through youth and manhood, between present temptations and the memory of a mother's law. Almighty grace delights to manifest itself in weakness; and oft the echo of a woman's voice, rising up in the deep recesses of memory, has put a whole legion of devils to flight. Oh, woman, if it cannot be said, great is thy faith, even although it should be small as a grain of mustard seed, yet great is thy opportunity! The Spring season and the soft ground are thine; in with the precious seed; sow in hope, even though it be also sometimes in tears; a glad harvest will come, here or yonder; now or many days hence.

If parents give to their children a law which they get not from God, their influence will be great for evil. As

to form, the law of evil, like the law of good, distils chiefly in small dew-drops through the temper and tone. Few parents have the hardihood directly to teach wickedness to their offspring.

The mother should be much with the children herself. Wherever that is impracticable, it is either a calamity through the visitation of Providence, or a great fault on the part of the parents. The difficulties, the mistakes, and the transgressions of mothers are different according to their position in society, and the character of their employment. Working-men should take care not to lay too much on their wives. The mother, as a general rule in this country, undergoes not the outdoor labour whereby the bread is won; but her hours are longer, and her task equally outwearing. Let the husband and father do his utmost by every contrivance to lighten her labour, and cheer her heart. The wounded spirit of a neglected wife cannot bear its own weight, far less sustain with buoyant, smiling countenance, the continual tension of several children hanging about her, with all their wants and all their quarrels, from morning till night. A father, whatever the effort might cost him, would not permit his infant child to suck a fevered nurse; he should beware, as far as it lies with him, lest the child's spirit should sustain a greater damage, by drawing its mental nourishment from a mother fretting, desponding, despairing.

In the case of mothers who live in affluence, perhaps trifling is the most pressing danger. Don't cram your children with unreal forms, like blown bladders, which

occupy all the room, and collapse at the first rude rub on real life. In pity to your children, put something into them that will last, and wear. Don't expend all your energies in tying ornaments on them, to attract the gaze of the curious on the street; get into them, if you can, some of that ornament which is in the sight of God of great price (1 Peter iii. 4). Mothers, if your hearts have been quickened by the Spirit, take your fashions from the word of God. Occupy yourselves mainly in moulding the heart and life of your children, after the pattern which Jesus showed and taught. This will give you most enjoyment at the time, and most honour afterward.

Hitherto we have been sketching from the reflection a parent's duty, but the command of this passage is directly addressed to the child. Very graphic and memorable is the advice here tendered to a son. Bind a mother's laws continually upon thine heart, and tie them about thy neck. The idea no doubt refers to the Mosaic precept about binding the law of the Lord on the person, which in practice degenerated into the phylacteries of the Pharisees. From this strong figure the moral meaning stands out in bold relief. If a piece of dress or a bag of money hangs loosely upon you, in the jolting of the journey it may drop off and be lost. Life is a rough journey. The traveller must crush through many a thicket, and bear many a shake. If that law of truth, which you get in childhood through a mother's lips, be loosely held, it may slip away. "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip" (Heb. ii. 1).

It is intimated in the 22d verse that this law will be a close and kind companion to you all your days, if you treat it aright. It will be with you when you lie down to rest, and when you awake it will be there still, ready to talk with you. It is beyond expression valuable to have this law, impressed with all the authority of God who gave it, and all the tenderness of a mother who taught it, adhering to the memory through all the changes of life. A friend in need, it is a friend indeed. Although it be neglected for flatterers at night, when you awake it meets you at the moment, and talks over its saving truth again. Several kind offices of that true friend are enumerated here, and a crowning one is recorded at the close. Bound and kept in the heart as a friend, that law will prevail to keep the youth "from the strange woman." Observing a great swelling wave rolling forward to devour him, this faithful teacher imparts to the young voyager on life's troubled sea, a principle which will bear him buoyant over it. A slender vessel floats alone upon the ocean, contending with the storm. A huge wave approaches, towering high above her hull. All depends on how the ship shall take it. If she go under it, she will never rise again: if she is so trimmed that her bows rise with its first approaches, she springs lightly over it, and gets no harm. The threatening billow passes beneath her, and breaks with a growl behind, but the ship is safe. The law and love of the Lord, taught by his mother in childhood, and maintaining its place yet as the friend of his bosom and the ruler of his conscience, will give the youth a spring upward proportionate to the magnitude of the

temptation coming on. Saved as by fire, with reference to the greatness of the danger, yet surely saved, the victor, as he leaps over the last wave and enters into rest, will cry out to the welcomers who line the shore, "I am more than conqueror through Him that loved me."

There must be many joyful meetings in the better land; but when a son, saved by the truth his mother taught him, enters into rest, and meets his mother there, the joy—oh, one would think that ministering angels must reverently stand back from it, as one too deep for them to intermeddle with!

XXXVI.

THE WORTH OF WISDOM.

"Receive my instruction, and not silver;
and knowledge rather than choice gold."—viii. 10.

IT is not necessary to inquire whether the wisdom that cries here be an attribute of God, or the person of Emmanuel. We may safely take it for both, or either. The wisdom of God is manifested in Christ, and Christ is the wisdom of God manifested. The cry, concentrated in the Scriptures, and issuing forth through manifold providential ministries, is public, "She crieth at the gates, at the entry of the city;" impartial, "Unto you, O men, I call, and my voice is to the sons of men;" perspicuous, "They are plain to him that understandeth."

The very first warning uttered by this wisdom from above is the repetition of a former word, "Receive my instruction, and not silver; and knowledge rather than choice gold." The repetition is not vain. Another stroke so soon on the same place indicates that He who strikes feels a peculiar hardness there. The love of money is a root of evil against which the Bible mercifully deals many a blow. There lies one of our deepest sores: thanks be to God for touching it with "line upon line" of his healing word. When a man is pursuing a favourite object with his whole heart, it is irksome to hear a warner's word continually dropping on his unwilling ear, telling

that the choice is foolish. A father who is merely fond will discontinue the warning, that he may not displease his wilful child. Not so our Father in heaven. He is wisdom as well as love. He wields the same sharp word until it pierce the conscience and turn the course. It is only while you kick against this warning that it pricks you: when you obey it, you will find it very good.

A ship bearing a hundred emigrants has been driven from her course, and wrecked on a desert island far from the tracks of men. The passengers get safe ashore with all their stores. There is no way of escape, but there are the means of subsistence. An ocean unvisited by ordinary voyagers circles round their prison, but they have seed, with a rich soil to receive, and a genial climate to ripen it. Ere any plan has been laid, or any operation begun, an exploring party returns to head-quarters reporting the discovery of a gold mine. Thither instantly the whole company resort to dig. They labour successfully day by day, and month after month. They acquire and accumulate heaps of gold. The people are quickly becoming rich. But the spring is past, and not a field has been cleared, not a grain of seed committed to the ground. The summer comes, and their wealth increases, but the store of food is small. In harvest they begin to discover that their heaps of gold are worthless. A cart-load of it cannot satisfy a hungry child. When famine stares them in the face, a suspicion shoots across their fainting hearts that the gold has cheated them. They loathe the bright betrayer. They rush to the woods, fell the trees, dig out the roots, till the ground, and sow the seed. Alas, it is

too late! Winter has come, and their seed rots in the soil. They die of want in the midst of their treasures. This earth is the little isle--eternity the ocean round it. On this shore we have been cast, like shipwrecked sailors. There is a living seed; there is an auspicious spring-time: the sower may eat and live. But gold mines attract us: we spend our spring there--our summer there: winter overtakes us toiling there, with heaps of hoarded dust, but destitute of the bread of life. Oh, that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end! Seek first the kingdom of God, and let wealth come or go in its wake. He who, in the market of a busy world, gains money and loses his soul, will rue his bargain where he cannot cast it.

XXXVII.

HATE EVIL.

"The fear of the Lord is to hate evil."—viii. 13.

HE formally defines here the fear of the Lord. The definition is needful, for the subject is often grievously misunderstood. I know not an emotion more general among men than terror of future retribution under a present sense of guilt. To vast multitudes of men, this life is embittered by the fear of wrath in the next. To dread the punishment of sin seems to be the main feature in that religion which under many forms springs native in the human heart. This is the mainspring which sets and keeps all the machinery of superstition agoing. It was a maxim of heathen antiquity that "Fear made God." It is chiefly by the dread of punishment that an alienated human heart is compelled in any measure to realize the existence of the Divine Being. In proportion as that terror is diminished by a process of spiritual induration, the very, idea of God fades away from the mind.

To fear retribution is not to hate sin. In most cases it is to love it with the whole heart. It is a solemn suggestion that even the religion of dark, unrenewed men is in its essence a love of their own sins. Instead of hating sin themselves, their grand regret is that God hates it. If they could be convinced that the Judge would regard it as lightly as the culprit, the fear would collapse like

steam under cold water, and all the religious machinery which it drove would stand still.

All the false religions that have ever desolated the earth are sparks from the collision of these two hard opposites—God's hate of sin, and man's love of it. As they strike in the varied evolutions of life, strange fires flash from the point of contact—fires that consume costly and cruel sacrifices. In Christ only may this sore derangement be healed. It is when sin is forgiven that a sinner can hate it. Then is he on God's side. The two are agreed, and "He is our peace" who hath taken away sin by one sacrifice. Instead of hating God for his holiness, the forgiven man instinctively loathes the evil of his own heart, and looks with longing for the day when all things in it shall be made new. Such is the blessed fruit of pardon when it comes to a sinner through the blood of Christ.

XXXVIII.

RANK AND RICHES.

"Riches and honour are with me; yea, durable riches and righteousness. . . . That I may cause those that love me to inherit substance; and I will fill their treasures."—viii. 18, 21.

WISDOM from above cries in the gate, and enters into competition with the world's most powerful attractions. In the matters of rank and riches, the two strong cords by which the ambitious are led, the two reciprocally supporting rails on which the train of ambition ever runs,—even in these matters that seem the peculiar province of an earthly crown, the Prince of Peace comes forth with loud challenge and conspicuous rivalry. Titles of honour! their real glory depends on the height and purity of the fountain whence they flow. They have often been the gift of profligate princes, and the rewards of successful crime. At the best the fountain is low and muddy: the streams, if looked at in the light of day, are tinged and sluggish. Thus saith the Lord, "Honour is with me." He who saith it is the King of glory. To be adopted into the family of God,—to be the son or daughter of the Lord Almighty,—this is honour. High born! we are all low born, until we are born again, and then we are the children of a King.

The riches which this King gives to support the dignity of his nobles are expressly called "durable riches." This is spoken to place them in specific contrast with those riches

that make themselves wings and fly away. They are also said to be coupled with righteousness for company. Surely the Spirit who dictates this word knows what is in man, and the wealth which man toils for. Its two grand defects—the two worms that gnaw its yet living body—are the unrighteousness that tinges the most of it, and the uncertainty that cleaves to it all. The riches which the King of saints imparts along with the patent of nobility to support its dignity withal, are linked to righteousness, and last for ever. Anointed by the Spirit, they are secure from both the rust spots that eat into the heart of the world's wealth. Pure and imperishable, they have been by a double metaphor called "the silver springs of grace, and the golden springs of glory."

The Lord will cause those that love him to "inherit substance." Here is a withering glance from the countenance of the Truth himself at the cheat which the world practises upon its dupes. Those who are rich in grace inherit substance; this is obliquely to say that those who give themselves to the pursuit of wealth are chasing a shadow. They are ever grasping at it; and it is ever gliding from their grasp. Such is the dance through which Mammon leads his misers. It is kept up throughout all life's vain show, until the dancers drop into the grave, and disappear in its darkness. They who seek the substance shall find it; and as to the amount of their gain, the promise is precise—"I will fill their treasures." This is a great promise. It is made in a kingly style. There is no limit. It will take much to fill these treasures; for the capacity of the human spirit is very large. God

moulded man after his own image, and when the creature is empty, nothing short of his Maker will fill him again. Although a man should gain the whole world, his appetite would not be perceptibly diminished. The void would be as great and the craving as keen as ever. Handfuls are gotten on the ground, but a soulful is not to be had except in Christ. "In him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, and ye are complete (that is full) in him." Hear ye him: "I will fill their treasures." "Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

XXXIX.

THE REDEEMER ANTICIPATING REDEMPTION.

"The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth: while as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the highest part of the dust of the world. When he prepared the heavens, I was there: when he set a compass upon the face of the depth when he established the clouds above: when he strengthened the fountains of the deep: when he gave to the sea his decree, that the waters should not pass his commandment: when he appointed the foundations of the earth: then I was by him, as one brought up with him: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him; rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth; and my delights were with the sons of men."—viii. 22-31.

HITHERTO, in this chapter, we have found it possible to speak of wisdom alternately as a property and a person. Henceforth the terms compel us to keep by the personal view. Towards the beginning something may be understood as applying to divine wisdom in general; but toward the close, the wisdom incarnate, in the person of Emmanuel, stands singly and boldly out. If the terms are not applied to Christ, they must be strained at every turn. On this subject, we who enjoy the fuller revelation, should remember that the Old Testament institutes were necessarily shadows. Before Christ came in the flesh, He could not be so clearly declared as now. Of design He was presented to faith under a veil. More could not have been done in consistency with the pur-

pose of God, and the nature of things. In the book of Proverbs by Solomon, it could not be written that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, and died upon the cross. One might profitably put the question to himself, if the Spirit designed to make known something of the personal history of Christ before His coming, how could He have done so in plainer terms than this chapter contains

Regarding this divine person, we learn here, that being with God before creation, He looked with special interest upon the preparation of this world as the habitation of men, and the scene of redemption. This gives us a sketch of cosmogony, with the Eternal Word as spectator, and for view-point the throne of God. Here is the genesis of the world, as it appeared to Him, who even then longed to redeem it from sin. Out of previous indefinite water-depths the mountains were lifted up and settled. Out of a moving chaos the solid earth arose, one grand step in the process of providing a domicile for man. The heavens were prepared as a circle, by setting a compass on the face of the deep. The clouds were established above, and the home of the sea beneath was strengthened to keep its raging inmate. By the same law He established the clouds in the upper air, and fixed the ocean in the nether caverns of the earth. If a heap of solid water were poised on pillars over our heads, how dangerous would our position be, and how uneasy our life! But no such precarious propping is needed, when the Omniscient would construct a habitation for man. By heat, portions of the water are made lighter than air, and forthwith the same law which keeps one part beneath

the atmosphere raises another into its higher strata. During this process of creation, the Son was with the Father, and already taking his place as Mediator between God and man. In verses 30th and 31st, these three things are set in the order of the everlasting covenant (1.) The Father well pleased with His Beloved, "I was daily His delight" (2.) The Son delighting in the Father's presence, "rejoicing always before him." (3.) That same Son also looking with prospective delight to the scene and subjects of his Redemption work, rejoicing in the habitable parts of his earth, and my delights were with the sons of men." On that early morning of time, you see on the one side the High and Holy one, and on the other the sons of men, with Jesus already in the midst, laying his hand upon both.

It is a touching view of the Saviour's love. When He saw the earth undergoing the process whereby it was furnished as a habitation for man—the mountains upheaving, the valleys subsiding, the vapour arising, and the clouds moving in the sky—He rejoiced in the prospect of being man, for behoof of the fallen, on that emerging world, nor letting go His hold until He had borne back many sons and daughters into glory.

The exhortation which follows could not come from any other lips than His own. None but Christ is able to say, "whoso findeth me findeth life." From the New Testament we know that He only is the Light, and that the Light is the life of men. The counterpart, terror, is equally His own:—"he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul; and all they that hate me love death."

There is no, salvation in any other, and they who refuse or neglect Him cast themselves away. The perdition of the lost is their own doing, for redemption is nigh. "Ye have kindled a fire in mine anger," said the prophet (Jer. vii. 4), "which shall burn for ever." A child or an idiot may kindle a fire which all the city cannot quench. In spite of their utmost efforts; it might destroy both the homes of the poor and the palaces of majesty. So a sinner, though he cannot do the least good, can do the greatest evil. The Almighty only can save him, but he can destroy himself.

XL.

THE MARRIAGE SUPPER FOR THE KING'S SON.

"Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars; she hath killed her beasts; she hath mingled her wine; she hath also furnished her table. She hath sent forth her maidens: she crieth upon the highest places of the city, Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither: as for him that wanteth understanding, she saith to him, Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled. Forsake the foolish, and live; and go in the way of understanding."—ix. 1-6.

IN the preceding chapter, Wisdom appears, forming worlds, and peopling them; anticipating the need of man, and covenanting a sufficient remedy. There Wisdom stood, and spoke from the high stage of the heavens; here we get a nearer view. The Word has come nigh. His habitation is among men. The colours for the picture here are taken from things that we know. The head of her own family, sovereign of her own realm, builds her house, provides her feast, sends out the invitation, and presses the invited guests to come. From the same materials, and with the same design, the Word of God framed similar parables, when He "was made flesh, and dwelt among men."

1. The house.—The frame is set up from everlasting, well ordered in all things and sure. The tried foundation is the Lord our righteousness. The temple which Solomon built, and the altar within it, whereon he sacrificed, were emblems of this house eternal. The seven pillars

210. THE MARRIAGE SUPPER FOR THE KING'S SON

indicate, in oriental form, that its supports and ornaments are perfect in strength and beauty. The seven things (vi. 17-19) which the Lord hates seem to be the clearing of the rubbish away from the foundations; and the seven beatitudes (Matt. v.) the pillars of positive truth which the great master builder erected there. He removeth the first, that He may establish the second. He takes the curse away, and brings the blessing in its stead, seven-fold each. Both the curse which Jesus bears away, and the blessing which He brings, are measureless.

2. *The feast prepared.*—The provisions of God's house are wholesome, various, plentiful. Whatever the covenant provides, the true church diligently sets forth in the ordinances before the people. The word, preaching, prayer, the sacraments, the service of song: a feast of fat things is provided. "Blessed are they that hunger, for they shall be filled." In the Father's house there is enough and to spare, in the Father's bosom a weeping welcome: prodigals perishing, arise and go.

3. *The inviting messengers*—These correspond to the servants sent forth by the King in the New Testament parable. To keep up the idea of a matron householder, the messengers are here called maidens, but obviously in both cases they are the ambassadors whom Christ employs to carry the message of his mercy to their brethren. They have no strength, and no authority. All the power they wield lies in the Spirit that moves them, and the good news which they bring. Gentleness and purity are the qualifications most in request for those who bear the invitation from Divine Wisdom to a thoughtless world.

4. *The invited guests.*—The message is specially addressed to the simple. Those who are conscious of ignorance are ever most ready to learn the wisdom from above. Empty vessels fill best when plunged into the fountain. Those who are filled already, with their marrying and giving in marriage, their cattle markets, and their landed estates, send their excuse for absence, and do not themselves come to wisdom's feast. From hedges and lanes of conscious nakedness and need, the marriage festival is furnished with guests. To the poor the Gospel is preached, and the poor in spirit gladly listen, whether they are clothed in purple or in rags.

5. *The argument by which the invitation is supported is positive*, "Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled;" *and negative*, "Forsake the foolish and live."—The bread and the wine are the provisions of our Father's house, the plenty on a Father's board, every word of God for the prodigal to feed on when he returns; but the grand turning point is to get the prodigal to break off from that which destroys him. Forsake the foolish,—the foolish place, and the foolish company, and the foolish employments; and what strong reason do you employ to induce the slave of lust to wrench himself away, although he should leave his right arm behind him? Reason! It is his life. Life and death eternal hang in the balance of this decision. The Lord by his prophet in the time of old, uttered in the ears of men the brief command, "Turn ye," and followed it up with the awful argument, "*Why will ye die?*" The same Lord, in his own person breathed from his

breaking heart the tender plaint, "Ye will not come unto me *that ye might have life*." There, from His own lips, you have a command to come, and a reason for coming. The argument to enforce his invitation is life—from Himself in Himself life that will never die. This Scripture, too, speaks from Him and like Him. It is the resound of his own words, afar on these heights of ancient prophecy, "Forsake the foolish and *live*." By line upon line throughout all the Bible He is saying, Ye must be separate from them, or Me.

XLI.

REPROOF.

"He that reproveth a scorner getteth to himself shame: and he that rebuketh a wicked man getteth himself a blot. Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee: rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee. Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser: teach a just man, and he will increase in learning."
—ix. 7-9.

THE subject is obvious, interesting, important, urgent. The supposed case is of frequent occurrence. It is seldom well met. We need wise counsel to guide us in this difficult step of the daily life-course. The lesson here is about Reproof; how to give it, and how to take it. Reproofs are like sharp knives, very needful and very useful; but they should not be in the hands of children. Those who handle them rashly will wound both themselves and their neighbours. We are all, by the constitution of nature, much in contact with others. We see their faults: they see ours. Reproofs are often needed and often given. Sometimes they are unskilfully administered, and sometimes unfaithfully withheld. This is a matter that bulks largely in life. Great practical difficulties surround it. It is a subject on which we need to be instructed. Some of its chief regulating principles are concisely given here.

It is not difficult to realize the character of the scorner, who is the principal figure in the scene. The man is in a state of nature. He has no spiritual life or light. He

is ignorant, but thinks himself knowing, and is proud of his skill. He has no modesty, and no tenderness for others. He is a blusterer. He is hollow sounding brass: a tinkling cymbal. He is surrounded by a knot of companions who ignorantly applaud, or at least silently listen to him. Thus encouraged, he speaks great swelling words of vanity. He magnifies himself. As he proceeds with his display, he affects a superiority to scruples of conscience. He laughs at the good, and at goodness. He boasts of evil. Accustomed to exaggerate everything, he exaggerates even his own wickedness. He scatters blasphemies, and is intoxicated by the wonder wherewith the circle regards his boldness. He rejoiceth in iniquity. He glories in his shame. You are a spectator of the scene: you have heard the blasphemer. You fear God, and are jealous for his honour. You observe, moreover, that some youths are there, ignorantly wondering after this beast, and in danger of learning to count such conduct manly. You grow warm—indignant. At last, after some daring and foulmouthed sally from the scorner, you break silence, and interpose a reproof. In God's name, and out of God's word, you charge him with his sin, and challenge him to the judgment. You have reproved a scorner, and you will probably then and there get to yourself shame. You have trampled on a snake, and it is his nature to spurt forth his venom on you. But the circumstances are even more formidable than the nature of the man. His place as ringleader is at stake. Unless he retrieve his honour in their presence, the ring of ruffians will melt away. He is a god among them; but if his thunders

are silent now, they will lay no more incense on his altar. Your stroke has stirred up every motive within the scorner, to redouble his blasphemy. He is shut up either to submit, to you as a conqueror, or to assault you as a foe. The first he will not, and therefore the second he must do. He raises the laugh against you, and against that blessed name which you invoked. Such is the filthiness of the weapons employed, that you cannot maintain the combat. To reply would be to defile your own tongue. You are obliged to be silent, because, if you should follow him, you could not maintain your footing on the slimy path. Truth is silent before falsehood and filth, not from her weakness or their strength, but from the place and circumstances in which the challenge was given and the battle accepted. His pride is touched: he knows that his chieftainship is conclusively forfeited, if he is seen to quail before a saint. Expressly, he will "hate thee." You have struck a piece of wood while it is lying hollow, and instead of cutting it, yourself will be injured by the rebounding blow. There is a possibility of approaching it carefully and turning it skilfully, and getting it laid solid before you strike. Then both you will sever it, and it will not rebound on you.

If you could find the scorner alone, his courage would not be so great. Conscience makes cowards of us all. Whisper softly into his ear your solemn reproof. Tell him that he is trampling under foot that blood of the covenant which alone can wash his sin away; and if you tell him this weeping, your word will go the deeper in. There are many arts by which a wise reprover might

approach the man on the unguarded side. Find a soft spot about him, or make one by deeds of kindness. Touch him so as not to stir the evil spirit at the first, and perhaps the evil spirit may not be stirred at all. If you gain a brother thus, it is a bloodless victory. The joy is of the purest kind that lies within our reach on earth. It brings you as closely into sympathy as a creature can be, with the satisfaction of the Redeemer when He sees of the travail of his soul.

But in all this we have in view chiefly the scorner himself. A witness for Christ may be so situated, that he ought to reprove the scorner, although he knows that the scorning will be redoubled by the reproof. It may be more important, for the sake of others, to strike in, although the evil doer should in judgment be more hardened. These principles regarding the blasphemer's tendency are most important. We should be aware of the laws that regulate all cases, and the circumstances that modify them in each; but no absolute rule can be laid down. We must get daily direction, as well as daily bread. Two things are needful—the swelling spring, and the well-directed channel for the stream to flow in. There should be jealousy for the Lord's honour, and compassion for men's souls like a well-spring ever in the heart; and then the outgoing effort should be with all the wisdom of the serpent, and the harmlessness of the dove; and "if any lack wisdom, let him ask of God."

Hitherto we have handled only the half of the lesson, and that the harsher half. Its complement is a kindlier thing: "rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee."

There is a double blessing; one to him who gets reproof, and one to him who gives it. Is it, then, the mark of a wise man that he loves the reprover who tells him his fault? Judging by this test, we are forced into the conclusion that there are not many wise men amongst us. To tell a friend his fault is too often the signal for a breach of friendship. On both sides, error is frequent, and wisdom rare. But wisdom here is precious in proportion to its rarity. It will repay all the labour of seeking and striving for it. The wisdom may be possessed on either side alone, or on both together. The Lord's meek and poor afflicted ones may get good from a reproof, although the reprover sinned in giving it: on the other hand, the witness of evil may rightly reprove it, and so keep his own conscience clear, although the evil doer have not grace to profit by the reproof. On both sides the wisdom is difficult; but when it is found, it is very gainful. "Harmless as doves;" that is the word of Him who knows what is in man. The froth of human passion swells and spurts out, and impudently calls itself faithfulness. When Samuel was instructed to reprove Saul for his sin, "he cried unto the Lord all night," and uttered his faithful reproof in the morning (1 Sam xv. 11). Such a preparation would take none of its strength away, and greatly add to its softness. For rightly receiving reproof, the short and simple rule is, be more concerned to get the benefit of the reproof, than to wreak vengeance on the reprover. He who should habitually act on this plain maxim, would grow rich by gathering the gold which other people trample under their feet.

"Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser," is an interesting fact under the great gospel law, "to him that hath shall be given, and he shall have more abundance." Some of the true wisdom is a nucleus round which more will gather. A little island once formed in the bed of a great river, tends continually to increase. Everything adds to its bulk. The floods of winter deposit soil on it. The sun of summer covers it with herbage, and consolidates its surface. Such is wisdom from above, once settled in a soul. It makes all things work together for good to its possessor.

XLII.

THE TALENT AND ITS PRODUCT.

"If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself:
but if thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it."—ix. 12.

THE principle involved in the parable of the Talents (Mat xxv.) is embodied in the intimation, "If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself." The talents are in the first instance not won by the servant, but given by the master. So wisdom is specifically the gift of God (James i. 5). Those servants who use the talents well, are permitted to retain for their own use both the original capital, and all the profit that has sprung from it: whereas he who made no profit is not allowed to retain the capital. Thus the Giver acts in regard to the wisdom which is His own to bestow. The wisdom, with all the benefit it brings, is your own. Every instance of wise acting is an accumulation made sure for your own benefit. It cannot be lost. It is like water to the earth. The drop of water that trembled on the green leaf, and glittered in the morning sun, seems to be lost when it exhales in the air unseen; but it is all in safe keeping. It is held in trust by the faithful atmosphere, and will distil as dew upon the ground again, when and where it is needed most. Thus will every exercise of wisdom, although fools think it is thrown away, return into your own bosom, when the day of need comes round.

Equally sure is the law that the evil which you do survives and comes back upon yourself: "If thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it." The profane word, the impure thought, the unjust transaction—they are gone like the wind that whistled past, and you seem to have nothing more to do with them. Nay, but they have more to do with you. Nothing is lost out of God's world, physical or moral. When a piece of paper is consumed in the fire, and vanishes in smoke, it seems to have returned to nothing. If it bore the only evidence of your guilt, you would be glad to see its last corner disappear ere the officers of justice came in. All the world cannot restore that paper, and read those dreaded lines again. The criminal breathes freely now; no human tribunal can bring home his crime. But as the material of the paper remains undiminished, in the mundane system, so the guilt which it recorded abides, held in solution, as it were, by the moral atmosphere which encircles the judgment-seat of God. Uniting with all of kindred essence that has been generated in your soul, it will be precipitated by a law; and when it falls, it will not miss the mark. Thou alone shalt bear it. Those who have not found refuge in the Sin-Bearer, must bear their own sin. Sins, like water, are not annihilated, although they go out of our sight. They fall with all their weight either on the sin-doer, or on the Almighty Substitute. Alas for the man who is "alone" when the reckoning comes!

XLIII.

THE PLEASURES OF SIN.

"A foolish woman is clamorous; she is simple, and knoweth nothing. For she sitteth at the door of her house, on a seat in the high places of the city, to call passengers who go right on their ways: whoso is simple, let him turn in hither: and as for him that wanteth understanding, she saith to him, Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant. But he knoweth not that the dead are there; and that her guests are in the depths of hell."—ix. 13-18.

WE have heard Wisdom's cry, and learned what are his offers to men: the next scene exhibits Wisdom's great rival standing in the same wide thoroughfare of the world, and bidding for the youth who throng it. The evil is personified, that it may be set more visibly forth, in all its deformity, over against the loveliness of truth. All that is contrary to Christ, and dangerous to souls, is gathered up and individualized, as an abandoned woman lying in wait for unwary passengers, baiting her barbed hook with the pleasures of sin, and dragging her victims down the steep incline to hell. One of the foul spirits that assail and possess men is singled out and delineated, and this one represents a legion in the background.

The portrait is easily recognized. We have met with it before, both in the pages of this book, and in other places of the Scripture. It is no fancy picture,—it is drawn from life. Neither is it a peculiarity of Eastern

manners, or of ancient times. It concerns us, otherwise it would not have met us here. The plague is as rampant in our streets, as it is represented to be in the Proverbs. Mankind have sat for the picture: there is no mistake in the outline; there is no exaggeration in the colouring. It is a glass held up for the world to see itself in. Dark as the lines are in which the importunate, shameless solicitations of a wanton woman are drawn on this page, they are not darker than the reality, as seen in our crowded thoroughfares by day and by night. The vulture, with unerring instinct, scents the carrion, and flutters round the place where it lies, until an opportunity occur of alighting upon it and satiating her appetite on the loathsome food. These vultures would not hover around our exchanges, and banks, and warehouses, and manufactories, unless the carrion that feeds them were scented there. While we have cause to thank God for the measure of truth, and love, and purity, that His word and Spirit have transfused through our families, we have cause also to weep in secret that so many whited sepulchres glitter pharisaically in the sun of the world's prosperity, while rankest corruption revels within. We again cry, "with a great and exceeding bitter cry," to all that is morally sound in society, resolutely to withdraw their countenance from the impure, however great their wealth may be, and however high their position in the world. The specific occupation of the foolish woman is "to call passengers who go right on their ways," and persuade them to turn aside for her "stolen waters." A multitude of the young, issuing from their parents' homes,

where they have been trained in virtue, start in life's wide path, with the intention of going "right on;" and of these, alas, how many are suddenly enticed aside, entangled in the net, and lost! Beware of the turning aside. Let not a youth ever once or for a moment go where he would be ashamed to be found by his father and his mother. "Forsake the foolish and live." Go not at her bidding aside; "the dead are there."

But although the argument that stolen waters are sweet is, for the sake of vivid representation, put into the mouth of a "foolish woman," we must understand by the figure all evil—the devil, the world, and the flesh, whatever form they may assume, and whatever weapons they may employ. The one evil spirit dragged forth from the legion, and exposed, is intended not to conceal but to open up the generic character of the company. From above, Divine Wisdom cries (v. 4), "Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither;" from beneath, a multi-form lust, that is earthly, sensual, devilish, cries, "Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither." There they are, conspicuously pitted against each other, the two great rivals for possession of a human heart. No man can serve two masters. No heart can follow both of these drawings. No man can choose both death and life, both darkness and light. Every one must go this way or that. Every sinner must turn his back either upon his Saviour or upon his sin. In this life every human being is placed between these two rival invitations, and every human being in this life yields to the one or to the other.

The power of sin lies in its pleasure. If stolen waters

were not sweet, none would steal the waters. This in part of the mystery in which our being is involved by the fall. It is one of the most fearful features of our case. Our appetite is diseased. If our bodily appetite were so perverted that it should crave for what is poisonous, and loathe wholesome food, we would not give ourselves up to each random inclination. The risk of death would be great, and, valuing life, we would set a guard on the side of danger. But in man fallen, there is a diseased relish for that which destroys. Sin, which is the death of a man's soul, is yet sweet to the man's taste. There is much to appal us, in this state of things. It should make us walk circumspectly, not as fools. When the redeemed of the Lord shall have come to Zion, with songs of joy, they may indulge to the full unexamined, unrestricted, all their tastes. There will be no sinful things to taste there, and no taste for sinful things. There will neither be the appetite nor its food. Nothing shall enter that defileth. But here, and now, it should make us tremble to know that there is an appetite in our nature which finds sweetness in sin. Oh wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from myself? God's children, while in the body, watch their sinful appetites, and endeavour to weaken and wither them by starvation. They who give rein to the appetite are daily more brought under its power. It grows by what it feeds on. If sin had no sweetness, it might be easier to keep from sinning. Satan might fish in vain, even in this sea of time, if he had no bait on his hook that is pleasant to nature. Beware of the bait, for the barb is beneath.

It is only in the mouth that the stolen water is sweet: afterwards it is bitter. Sin has pleasures, but they last only for a season, and that a short one. On the side of sin that lies next a sinner, Satan has plastered a thin coating of pleasure: a deceived soul licks that sweetness, deaf to the warning that behind it an eternal bitterness begins. If a grand bazaar were erected, filled from end to end with sweetmeats of every form, and laid out in the most fascinating aspects, but all poisoned so that to swallow one were death; and if it were a necessity laid on you to introduce your little child by a door at one end, and let him traverse the enticing avenues of death alone, till from without you should receive him at the other; you would warn your child with a voice of agony that would thrill through his frame, not to touch, not to taste, until, beyond the precincts of the pest house, he should be safe in your arms again. Notwithstanding all your warning, you would stand trembling, perhaps despairing, as you waited at the appointed door till your child emerged. You would scarcely expect that your little one would, all the way through, resist the attractions of the poisoned sweets. Such are the world's sweetened death-drops to us; and such, as to infantile thoughtlessness, are we in the world. Oh, for the new tastes of the new nature! "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness." When a soul has tasted and seen that the Lord is gracious, the foolish woman beckons you toward her stolen waters, and praises their sweets in vain. The new appetite drives out the old.

One part of the youth's danger lies in his ignorance.

He knoweth not, when he is invited to the place of pleasure, "he knoweth not that the dead are there, and that her guests are in the depths of hell." What he knows not, Divine wisdom tells. He can tell us what is there, and He only. Who knoweth the power of God's anger? Only Christ. None other can warn us what the guests of the strange woman suffer in the depths. The saved cannot tell, for thither they never go. The lost cannot, for they never return thence. Only He who bowed under wrath, and rose again in righteousness, can give warning as to the bitterness that lies behind the momentary sweet of sin.

That section of the Proverbs which closes here is characterized throughout by varied, pointed, unsparing rebuke of prevailing sins. We have gathered some lessons from this page of the Bible, and plied our lever to press them in. We desire humbly to cast the effort, so far as it has hitherto proceeded, on the quickening Spirit for power. Those who have escaped these corruptions, through the power of grace, will have their gratitude stirred anew by a backward glance on the bondage; the young and inexperienced may, by the forewarnings, be better forearmed ere the heat of their battle come; but the objects of chief interest, while these reproofs are resounding from the word, are those who have been snared and taken—who have sunk, and are lying yet in the deep mire. Sins are sweet, and therefore men take them; they are soporific, and therefore those who have taken them are inclined to lie still.

A man has fallen into the sea and sunk: he soon

becomes unconscious. He is living yet, but locked in a mysterious sleep. Meantime, some earnest neighbours have hastily made preparations, and come to the rescue. From above, not distinguishing objects on the bottom, they throw down their creeper at a venture, and draw. The crooked tooth of the iron instrument comes over the face of the drowning man, and sticks fast in the dress of his neck, It disturbs the sleeper, but it brings him up. It scratches his skin, but saves his life. The saved, when he comes to himself, lavishes thanks on his saviours, mentioning not, observing not, the hardness of their instrument, or the roughness of its grasp. Beneath the surface of society, sunk unseen in a sea of sin, lie many helpless men. Slumbering unconscious, they know not where they are. They dream that they are safe and well. They have lost the sense of danger, and the power of crying for help. Help comes, however, without their cry. Over the place where we know the drowning lie, we have thrown these sharp instruments down. We have been raking the bottom with them in all directions. If the case had been less serious, we might have operated more gently. If any be drawn up, they will not find fault with the hardness of the instrument that reached and rescued them. The slumbering may wish it were soft to slip over them, but the saved are glad that it was sharp to go in.

When a world of human kind lay senseless in a sea of sin, one wakeful eye pitied them, and one Almighty arm was stretched out to save. The Highest bowed down to man's low estate. He sent His word, and healed them;

but the word was quick and powerful. The sleepers cry out when first they feel it in their joints and marrow. The evil spirit in them still resists the coming of Jesus as a torment; but when they are restored to their right mind, they sit at that Saviour's feet, and love Him for His faithfulness.

XLIV.

THE PLACE AND POWER OF A SON.

"The Proverbs of Solomon. A wise son maketh a glad father:
but a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother."—x. 1

"THE Proverbs of Solomon." Hitherto, although the style has been in the main proverbial, there has been a large measure of connection and continuity in the argument. At this stage we enter a new section of the book. Here we touch the edge of a vast miscellaneous treasure, contrived or collected by Solomon, and transmitted in safe keeping down to our own day. It is like a heap of wheat; the grains are small, but they are many; they lie close together, and yet each is a separate whole; they are fair to look upon, and good for food.

The first proverb is a characteristic specimen of its kind. Every reader may see at a glance how its words and clauses are poised upon each other, so as both to condense and reiterate the sentiment—both to retain it on the memory and impress it on the mind. "A wise son maketh a glad father." Do you hear this, young man? It is in your power to make your father glad, and God expects you to do it. Here is an object for your ambition; here is an investment that will ensure an immediate return. Come now, make your choice. Whether will you try, to please these fools who banter you here, or to gladden your father's heart that is yearning for you

there? He loved you in your childhood, and toiled for you all the best of his days. He was proud of you when you promised well, and clings fondly to the hope that you will be something yet. These companions that come between you and him—what have they done for you, and what would they do for you to-morrow, if you were in distress? They would desert you, and mind their own pleasures. They have never lost a night's rest by watching at your sick bed, and never will. But your father—what has he done, and yet will do? The command of God to you is that you gladden that father, and not grieve him. Your conscience countersigns that command now. Obey.

In former lessons we found out where the root of wisdom lies—in the fear of the Lord: here is one of its sweetest fruits—A son's wisdom is a father's joy! Alas, how often do we see a son in manhood becoming a burden which a father must bear, instead of a support that his weary heart may lean upon! A heavier burden this than was the helpless child.

"A foolish son is the heaviness of his mother." It is difficult to deal with this word. The conception is easy, and the examples manifold; but though it is easy to comprehend, it is hard to express it. It is an almost unutterable thing. A son who breaks his mother's heart—can this earth have any more irksome load to bear! Foolish son, do you ever allow yourself to think that you are bruising the bosom which you lay upon when you were a helpless infant? It is not your mother only with whom you have to deal. God put it into her heart to

love you, to watch over you night and day, to bear with all your waywardness, to labour for you to the wasting of her own life. All this is God's law in her being. Her Maker and yours knew that by putting these instincts into her nature for your good, he was laying on her a heavy burden. But He is just. He intended that she should be repaid. His system provides compensation for outlay. There are two frailties—a frailty of infancy, and a frailty of age. God has undertaken, in the constitution of his creatures, to provide for both. Where are his laws of compensation written? The counterpart laws answer each other from two corresponding tablets, His own hand-work both, as the curse and blessing echoed and re-echoed alternate from the sides of Ebal and Gerizim, when first the Hebrews entered the promised land. One is written on the fleshly table of the heart, and the other on the table of the ten commandments—both, and both alike by the finger of God. A mother's love! You do not read in the Decalogue, "mother, take care of your infant." So deeply is that law graven on a mother's heart, that God our Saviour compares to it His own everlasting love to His redeemed (Isaiah xlix. 15). To that law the safety of infancy has been intrusted by the author of our being. The bed provided for the child is its mother's breast. There is the provision for humanity's first period of feebleness, and where lies the security for the next? It is partly in nature too; but it would appear that He who knows what is in man, would not confide to that instinct the care of an aged parent. He spoke the command

from the mountain that burned with fire; He engraved that command on the tables of the covenant, "Honour thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long." There, foolish son, there is thy mother's title to her turn of cherishing. You dare not dispute her right, and you cannot withstand her Avenger. There will be compensation. All God's laws re-adjust themselves, and woe to the atoms of dust that are caught resisting, and crushed between their dreadful wheels. How much more perfect and uniform is the parent's instinctive love than the child's commanded obedience, may be seen in all the experience of life, and is well embodied in the Spanish proverb, "One father can support ten sons, but ten sons cannot support one father."

I never knew a mother. I have been an orphan, almost from the first opening of my eyes. If at any time my mind breaks loose from sober submission to my lot, and wanders into wishes for what cannot be, the keenest longing of my heart is that I had a mother. One of the fountains of affection within me has been sealed up from my birth; I would fain have an object to let it flow upon. Oh, how sweet it must be to a son in his manhood strength to be the gladness of his mother! Foolish sons are compassing sea and land to obtain pleasure, and trampling under their feet untasted a pleasure stronger, sweeter far, even to nature, than that which they vainly chase.

Let sons who are not prodigal—who seem to be fairly doing their filial duty, remember that their time for that duty is short and uncertain. Let those who now love

and cherish a mother much, love and cherish her more.
Occupy the talent, lest it be taken. Be yet more tender
of your mother while you have her, lest you suffer by
unavailing regret when it is too late—lest there should
be thorns in your pillow the first night you lie down,
after her voice is silent, and her eyes closed.

XLV.

DILIGENT IN BUSINESS.

"He becometh poor that dealeth with a slack hand:
but the hand of the diligent maketh rich."—x. 4.

THIS rule applies alike to the business of life, and the concerns of the soul. Diligence is necessary to the laying up of treasures, either within or beyond the reach of rust. Debts will rise above the gains, corruptions will gain ground on the graces, unless there be a watchful heart and a diligent hand.

The law holds good in common things. The earth brings forth thorns, instead of grapes, unless it be cultivated by the labour of man. This is an infliction because of sin, and yet it has been turned into a blessing. Even human governments have learned so to frame the necessary punishment as to make it a benefit to the culprit. The Governor of the nations did this before them. A world bringing forth food spontaneously might have suited a sinless race, but it would be unsuitable for mankind as they now are. If all men had plenty without labour, the world would not be fit for living in. The fallen cannot be left idle with safety to themselves. In every country, and under every kind of government, the unemployed are the most dangerous classes. Thus the necessity of labour has become a blessing to man. It is better for us that diligent application is necessary to suc-

cess, than if success had been independent of care and toil. The maxim has passed into a proverb among ourselves, "If you do not wait on your business, your business will not wait on you."

That diligence is necessary to progress in holiness, is witnessed by all the word of God, and all the experience of His people. Indeed, it would be a libel on the character of the Divine economy to imagine that the tender plant of grace would thrive in a sluggard's garden. The work is difficult; the times are bad. He who would gain in godliness, must put his soul into the business. But he who puts his soul into the business will grow rich. Labour laid out here is not lost. Those who strive, and strive lawfully, will win a kingdom. When all counts are closed, he who is rich in faith is the richest man.

XLVI.

POSTHUMOUS FAME.

"The memory of the just is blessed:
but the name of the wicked shall rot."—x. 7.

SOME are remembered for good, some are remembered for evil, and some are forgotten soon. This is a feature which is set in the machinery of God's moral government, as a power impelling to righteousness. How many motives good doing are in providence brought to bear upon man! Besides all that pertain to our own life on earth, and the higher hopes that look up to heaven, a power from the future of this present world is directed now upon a human heart to aid in keeping it from wickedness. It seems an instinct of humanity to desire honour and dread disgrace to the memory after death. Like other good things, it may be overlaid and smothered by a great excess of vice; but its operation is very general, and all in some measure are sensible of it. Few are entirely indifferent to the reputation in which they shall be held among men after their departure. The desire to diminish the depth of the stigma on their name, is found in the greatest criminals when their end is near. To observe the memory of a bad man execrated by the people is, as far as it goes, in favour of goodness. "Jerroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin," is an expression that occurs frequently in the Old Testa-

ment, but the repetition is not vain. By many strokes on the same place the Spirit in the word at last stamped very deep upon the heart of Israel a detestation of the idolatry which Jeroboam introduced.

As it is not pleasant to the living to think that their bodies after death shall be torn by dogs, so it is not pleasant to the living to anticipate that their names shall be infamous in the generation following. Although David's sins are faithfully recorded, David's name, was savoury in Israel for the good that predominated in his history. This memory of the just must have stimulated many an Israelite to emulate the spirit and the deeds of the Shepherd King.

As skilful men, finding wind, and water, and steam powers existing in nature, have combined and directed them so as to make them all help in propelling useful machinery; so the Supreme Ruler has directed many streams from different quarters, and made them converge upon the wayward will of man, to impel it in the direction of righteousness. This curious appetite for a good name to abide in the world behind us, is not left like a mountain stream to waste its power. It is let into the system of Providence, and plays its own part in palliating the results of the fall. No man would like his name to "rot" among posterity. This motive is not strong enough to make a bad man good; but, along with others, it contributes to diminish the force of wickedness, and so to avert the absolute extinction of the race.

XLVII.

THE WISE TAKE ADVICE: FOOLS ONLY
GIVE IT.

"The wise in heart will receive commandments:
but a prating fool shall fall."—x. 8.

WE have already learned what wisdom is, and where it comes from. Here is one of its most valuable results. It is not what it gives, but what it receives. It receives commandments. This receptiveness is a prime characteristic of the new heart. The new-born babe desires the sincere milk of the word, that it may grow thereby. The good well-broken ground took in the seed, while other portions kept it lying on the surface. This was the chief cause of the great difference in the result. As the thirsty ground drinks in the rain, so the wise in heart long for and live upon God's word. They are glad to get commandments. "It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." "O send out thy light and thy truth: let them lead me." "What I know not teach thou me." This is a wise man, and he will soon be wiser. To him that hath shall be given. This receptiveness is a most precious feature of character. Blessed are they that hunger, for they shall be filled,
"A prating fool shall fall." All his folly comes out. Every one sees through him. The fool, being empty, busies himself giving out, instead of taking in, and he

becomes more empty. From hint that path not shall be taken. He is known, by the noise he makes, to be a tinkling cymbal. People would not have known that his head was so hollow if he had not been constantly ringing on it. If ever he become wise, he will begin to receive commandments; and when he receives them, he will grow wiser thereby. To receive a lesson and put it in practice implies a measure of humility; whereas to lay down the law to others is grateful incense to a man's pride and self-importance. The Lord himself pointed to the unsuspecting receptiveness of a little child, and said that this is the way to enter the kingdom.

XLVIII.

THE CENTRE OF GRAVITY.

"He that walketh uprightly walketh surely;
but he that perverteth his ways shall be known."—x. 9.

THE term upright, as applied to character, seems eminently direct and simple; yet, in its origin, it is as thoroughly figurative as any word can be. It is a physical law declared applicable to a moral subject. When a man's position is physically upright, he can stand easily or bear much. He is not soon wearied; he is not easily broken down. But if his limbs are uneven, or his posture bent, he is readily crushed by the weight of another; he is soon exhausted even by his own. There is a similar law in the moral department. There is an attitude of soul which corresponds to the erect position of the body, and is called uprightness. The least deviation from the line of righteousness will take your strength away, and leave you at the mercy of the meanest foe. How many difficulties a man will go through, whose spirit stands erect on earth, and points straight up to heaven! How many burdens such a man will bear!

There is evidence enough around us that righteousness presides over the government of the world. Although men are not righteous, yet righteousness is in the long run the surest way to success even among men. As an upright pillar can bear a greater weight than a leaning

one, so moral rectitude is strong, and obliquity weak. The world itself has observed this truth, and graven it in a memorable proverb of its own—"Honesty is the best policy."

A true witness will bear an amount of cross-questioning which is sufficient to weigh twenty false witnesses down. Truth stands longer, and bears more among men than falsehood. This law, operating in the world, is a glory to God in the highest. It visibly identifies the moral Governor of mankind with the Maker of the world. A lofty spire bears its own weight, and withstands the force of the tempest, chiefly because it stands upright. If it did not point plumb to the sky, it could not stand—it could not even have been erected. Wonderful likeness between material and moral laws! Like body and soul, they are joined for parallel and united action. In trying times, the safety of a man or a tower lies mainly in uprightness. For want of it, many mighty are falling in our day, and great is the fall of them. Many confiding families are crushed under the ruins of one huge speculation that has been reared without the plummet of righteousness.

XLIX.

WELL OF LIFE.

"The mouth of a righteous man is a well of life."—x. 11.

SEE what the Lord expects, and the world needs, from Christians. The mouth is taken as the principal channel by which the issues of life flow out for good or evil. It, is a well. If it be full, it flows over; and if the overflow be sweet water, the border will be fresh and green.

The well's supply falls in rain from heaven, and secretly finds its way by hidden veins to the appointed opening. The overflow fringes the well's brim with green, although the surrounding soil be barren. As the world is a wilderness, and the righteous are wells in it, there is urgent need that they should get supply for themselves in secret from above, and that the outcome of their conversation should be the means of reviving to all around.

In a hot summer day, some years ago, I was sailing with a friend in a tiny boat, on a miniature lake, enclosed like a cup within a circle of steep bare Scottish hills. On the shoulder of the brown sun-burnt mountain, and full in sight, was a well, with a crystal stream trickling over its lip, and making its way down toward the lake. Around the well's mouth, and along the course of the rivulet, a belt of green stood out in strong contrast with the iron surface of the rock all around. "What do you make of that?" said my friend, who had both an

open eye to read the book of nature, and a heart all aglow with its lessons of love. We soon agreed as to what should be made of it. It did not need us to make it into anything. There it was, a legend clearly printed by the finger of God on the side of these silent hills, teaching the passer-by how needful a good man is, and how useful he may be in a desert world.

Let your heart take in by its secret veins what comes pure from heaven in showers of blessing; so shall itself be full, and so shall its issues, as far as your influence extends, contribute to fertilize the wilderness. The Lord looks down, and men look up, expecting to see a fringe of living green around the lip of a Christian's life-course. If we get good, we shall be good: if we be good, we shall do good. This by a law of the new nature. Every creature after its kind, and the new creature too.

The wicked have a power similarly exerted, but in an opposite direction, and with an opposite effect. The wicked are like the sea—the troubled sea. It is always heaving from its depths, and casting up refuse and salt spray upon the shore. A belt of barrenness runs all round. It scalds the life out of every green thing within its reach. The sea cannot rest, and herbs upon its border cannot grow. Thus the ungodly act, constantly, inevitably by a law. The evil get evil, and do evil. Sin propagates sin, and produces death.

In our great cities there are many such restless salt seas. There are many clubs of corrupt men who, by the law of their nature, corrupt their neighbours. There are men of false principles, of foul tongues, of callous hearts,

of vicious lives. These cannot lie still. They swing to and fro, and clash upon each other, and fling their own bitterness all round. Alas for unsuspecting youths who saunter careless on the edge! Each tender shoot of grace that may, in kindlier exposures, have begun to spring, is scorched out by these corrosive drops. All the borders of that sea are barrenness. Linger not within its tide-mark. Escape for your life.

L.

EXPERIENCE KEPT FOR USE.

"Wise men lay up knowledge."—x. 14.

ANOTHER brief definition of true wisdom. Many get knowledge, and let it go as fast as they get it. They put their winnings into a bag with holes. They are ever learning, and never wiser. The part of wisdom is to treasure up experience, and hold it ready for use in the time and place of need. Everything may be turned to account. In the process of accumulating this species of wealth, the wonders of the philosopher's stone may be more than realized. Even losses can be converted into gains. Every mistake or disappointment is a new lesson. Every fault you commit, and every glow of shame which suffuses your face because of it, may be changed into a most valuable piece of wisdom. Let nothing trickle out, and flow away useless. After one has bought wit at a heavy price, it is a double misfortune to throw it away. As a general rule, the dearer it is the more useful it will be. The wisdom which God gives his creatures through the laws of nature is of this sort. The burnt child has, at a great price, obtained a salutary dread of the fire. None of the wisdom comes for nothing, either to old or young. Our Father in heaven gives us the best kind: and the best kind is that which is bought. The saddest thing is when people are always paying, and never pos-

sessing. Some men gain very large sums of money, and yet are always poor, because they have not the art of keeping it: and some learn much, yet never become wise, because they know not how to lay up the treasure.

The cleverest people are in many cases the least successful. A man of moderate gifts, but steadfast acquisitiveness, lays up more than a man of the brightest genius, whether the treasure sought be earthly substance or heavenly wisdom. It is often found that the meek and quiet spirit, whose life casts no glare around him, has a supply of oil in his vessel which will keep his lamp from going out in seasons of sudden surprisal, or long continued strain. Men, looking on the outward appearance, make great mistakes in judging of men. Those who give out little noise may have laid up much wisdom. There is great encouragement. In the Fountain Head is exhaustless supply, and "He giveth liberally." It is a form of wealth that lies in little bulk; one contrite heart will hold more than the world's balances are able to weigh.

LI.

THE MONEY POWER

"The rich man's wealth is his strong city:
the destruction of the poor is their poverty."—x. 15.

HERE he is describing what is, rather than prescribing what ought to be. The verse acknowledges and proclaims a prominent feature in the condition of the world. It is not a command from the law of God, but a fact from the history of men. In all ages and in all lands money has been a mighty power; and its relative importance increases with the advance of civilization. Money is one of the principal instruments by which the affairs of the world are turned; and the man who holds that instrument in his grasp, can make himself felt in his age and neighbourhood. It does not reach the divine purpose; but it controls human action. It is constrained to become God's servant; but it makes itself the master of man.

It is an interesting and remarkable fact, that the Jews wield this power in a greater degree than any other people. Other channels of effort have been shut up from them, and consequently the main stream of the nation's energies has turned in the direction of money. This circumstance explains at once how their position has been acquired; but the ultimate design of Providence in the riches of the Jews cannot be seen as yet. Already the

germs of vast power are in possession of the Jews, but in the meantime, the want of a country of their own effectually checks its exercise. The mighty lever is in their hands, but they are comparatively powerless for want of a fulcrum to lean it on. The proposal to buy the land of Canaan has often been mooted among them. They could easily produce the price; but other difficulties interpose. The power that "letteth" may soon be taken out of the way. In those eastern countries in our own day the angel of the Lord is doing wondrously; it is our part, like Manoah and his wife, reverently to look on. All powers, and the money power among them, are in the hands of our Father; nothing can happen amiss to his dear child.

Over against this formidable power stands the counter-part weakness,—"the destruction of the poor is their poverty." This feebleness of the body politic is as difficult to deal with as its active diseases. If pauperism be not so acute an affection as crime, it is more widely spread, and requires as much of the doctor's care. Besides being an ailment itself, it is a predisposition to other and more dangerous evils. All questions have two sides, and so has this. On one side the rich ought to help the poor: on the other, the poor ought to help themselves. By both efforts, simultaneous and proportionate, pauperism may easily be managed: under either alone it is utterly unmanageable. It is the part of those who have strength without wealth, to labour diligently for daily bread, that those only who have neither strength nor wealth may be cast for support upon the rich. If the community are obliged to support the poor only,

the exertion will be healthful; but if they are compelled to bear also the profligate, they will sink oppressed themselves beneath the load. The poor we have always with us. This is the appointment of the Lord. To support them will do us good. It is more blessed to give than to receive. The vicious we have also with us, but to support them is pernicious both to them and us. We should correct and train them. But let it be known and revered as a providential law, that no possible amount of rates or contributions can relieve the poverty that is caused by idleness and intemperance among the population. The disease is in its own nature incurable by that species of appliance. All such appliances feed the disease, and nourish it into strength. Though all the wealth of the nation were thrown into the jaws of this monster, it would not be satisfied. The lean kine would eat up all the fat ones, and be themselves no fatter. A poor-rate increased to supply the children, while every enticement is offered to the wretched parents to spend their wages in dissipation, is like pouring water into a cistern which has not a bottom, and wondering why it is never filled: When you have poured in all your substance, it will be as empty as when you began.

We are under law to God. The wheels of his providence are high and dreadful. If we presumptuously or ignorantly stand in their way, they will crush us by their mighty movements. We must set ourselves, by social arrangements, to diminish temptations, and by moral appliances to reclaim the vicious, if we expect to thrive, or even to exist as a community. Vice, positively cherished

by erroneous legislation, and neglected by a lukewarm religion, threatens to produce a poverty, such in magnitude and kind as will involve rich and poor in one common destruction. Money answereth all things in its own legitimate province of material supply; but when beyond its province you ask it to stop the gaps which vice is making, it is a dumb idol—it has no answer to give at all.

The struggle between manufacturers and mechanics in the form of strikes, a kind of intermittent fever to which this country is eminently subject, offers a luminous commentary on this text. In these conflicts, the rich man's wealth is his strong city, and the destruction of the poor is their poverty. The masters have most money, and fewest mouths to fill. They hold longer out, and generally gain the victory, as the Russian army captured Kars, by starving the garrison. The men have little capital, and many thousand hungry wives and children. Poverty makes them weak, and the weak go to the wall. Their defeat is a great calamity: perhaps their victory would have been a greater.

I would fain see the men in a position of greater independence; but it would not be good for any class of the community if they had power, by numbers and combination, to stop the channels of trade and overturn the relations of society. The method is dangerous, and the measure of its success is fixed within narrow limits. In some instances and to some extent it may succeed, but as a general rule it must fail.

A large proportion of the penniless are in a greater or less degree reckless. Partly their recklessness has made

them poor; and partly their poverty has made them reckless. There is a reciprocal action in the process which enhances the result. When a multitude, who are all poor, combine for united action, rash and regardless spirits gain influence and direct the course. Such a spirit, powerful by the numbers whom it wields, is dangerous to every interest of the community. In this country, working men might take possession of the strong city as well as their masters. They might make this "unrighteous mammon" their own friend. Money, though a bad master, is a good servant. Money to the working men would answer all the ends which the strike contemplates, if each, by patient industry and temperance, would save a portion for himself. If a thousand men, in a particular town, or of a particular trade, possessed on an average a free capital of fifty pounds each, the fruit of their own savings, they could maintain their own ground in a conflict with employers. Their success would be sure, as far as their claim might be legitimate; and their success would be salutary, both to themselves and their neighbours.

Any great community of men is like a body. All members have not the same office, but each is useful—each is necessary in its own place. In virtue of their union, if one member suffer, all the members suffer with it. Thus, by the constitution of things, each has an interest in the welfare of all. In arranging the laws of his universe, the Creator has given a bounty on the exercise of charity, and imposed heavy taxes for the discouragement of quarrels between man and man, or between class and class.

The whole community of rich and poor, linked together in their various relations, may be likened to a living body. Suppose it to be the body of a swimmer in the water. The limbs and arms are underneath, toiling incessant to keep the head above the surface; and the head, so supported, keeps a look-out for the interests of the whole. If the head be kept comfortably above the water, and no more, the labour of the limbs will not be oppressive. But if a disagreement occur, and one member plot against another, damage will accrue to all.

If the head thoughtlessly and proudly attempt to lift itself too high, thereby and immediately a double effort is entailed upon the labouring limbs—such an effort as they cannot long sustain. Wearied with the unnatural exertion, they soon begin to slacken their strokes, and, as a consequence, the head that unwisely sought to tower above its proper height sinks down beneath it. On the other hand, if the limbs beneath, jealous of the easy and honourable and elevated position of the head, should intermit their strokes of set purpose to bring it down to their own level, they would certainly accomplish their object. When the limbs beneath cease to strike out, the head helplessly sinks beneath the water. The head would indeed suffer, but the limbs which inflicted the suffering would have nothing to boast of. When the head came down, the breathing ceased and the blood got no renewing. The heart no longer, by its strong pulsations, sent the life blood through its secret channels to the distant limbs, and a cold cramp came creeping over them. Glad were they therefore, if it were not too late, to strike forth again in order

to raise, the head above the surface, is the only means of preserving their own life.

The promiscuous mass of human beings that are welded together by their necessities and interests in this island is like a strong swimmer in the sea; and alas! it is too often like "a strong swimmer in his agony." Easily might the huge but well-proportioned body lie on the water in a calm, and successfully buffet the waves when a storm comes on, if all the parts were willing to work in harmony. We have the knowledge and the power, and the material means, sufficient to maintain in comfort the whole population without turning any into slaves; but half our productive capacity is lost by the want of concert and co-operation. The head—and here we mean by that term merely those who have wealth and superior position—the head, in selfishness or silliness, unduly exalts itself. There is a competition in costly luxuries which throws heavier toil down on the labouring class. In the shape of long hours, and night-work, and diminished wages, it entails an agony in those members of the body which minister to its demands. In some poor garret, or in some dark cellar, the racking strain is felt, and the inmates know not whose weight has brought it on. In like manner, when the derangement begins below, the hurt is quickly thrown up to the head, and thence reverberates down to its sources, working reduplicated sorrow there. Head and members are all on the water. A great deep yawns beneath. Moderate exertion, if it be steady and uniform, will keep every part comfortably buoyant; but mutual animosities work common ruin. The stoppage of

labour which brings down the head will soon paralyze the members: the inordinate uplifting of the head, which overtasks the toiling limbs, will rebound from the sufferings of the multitude a stroke of vengeance to lay the lofty low.

Two truths stand conspicuously out from all this confusion. The world has a righteous Ruler, and the Ruler has a dislocated world to deal with. They speak of the progress and the perfection of the species. We are far from the goal as yet, even if we be in the way to it. The sign from heaven that most surely marks its neighbourhood is, *One is our Master, even Christ, and all we are brethren*. When we see that beauteous bud swelling and bursting and blooming all over our land, we may safely conclude that her millennial summer is nigh.

LII.

THE LIPS AND TONGUE.

"He that hideth hatred with lying lips, and he that uttereth a slander, is a fool. In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise. The tongue of the just is as choice silver: the heart of the wicked is little worth. The lips of the righteous feed many: but fools die for want of wisdom."—x. 18-21.

IT is not safe for a man or woman to open the lips and permit the heart to pour itself forth by that channel without selection or restraint. If the spring within were pure, the stream could not be too constant or too strong. But the heart is full of corruption; and from a corrupt fountain sweet waters cannot flow. It is the part of a wise man to set a watch upon his own lips. This is a more profitable exercise, if it be less pleasant, than to set a watch on the lips of our neighbours. If we fling the door open, and allow the emotions to rush forth as they arise, it is certain that many of our words will be evil, and do evil. One who knows himself, if he cannot prevent evil thoughts from swelling and swarming in his breast, will at least lay a restraint upon his lips, and check their outgo. Weigh the words: those of them that are allowed to take wing should be few and chosen.

To refrain, that is, to bridle back the lips, is an exercise hard and healthful to our spirits. It requires some practice to make one skilful in it; but skill in that art will be very profitable in the long-run. It is easier, and

more natural, when one is full of emotions, to open the sluices, and let the whole gush forth in an impetuous stream of words. It is easy, but it is not right; it is pleasant to nature, but it is offensive to God, and hurtful to men. You must consider well, and pull the bridle hard, and permit no false or proud words to pass the barrier of the lips. Strangle the evil thoughts as they are coming to the birth, that the spirits which troubled you within may not go forth embodied to trouble also the world.

"The tongue of the just," that is, the stream of words that, flows from it, "is like choice silver." Silver is bright, and pure, and not corrosive. It may safely be applied to the body, whether on a sound place or on a sore. Certain surgical instruments, that penetrate the human body, and come in contact with the blood, must be made of silver. Other materials would be liable to contract rust, and thereby inflame the wound. Silver, applied as a healing instrument, does not bite like an adder, and leave a poison festering behind. Thus, when an operation of faithfulness becomes necessary, the tongue of the just is a safe instrument wherewith to probe the sores of a brother's soul. Its soft, sweet answer turneth away wrath. The truth spoken will perform the needful operation; and spoken in love, it will not leave the seeds of fever behind. A biting, corrosive tongue is a curse alike to the serpent who wields it, and the victims whom it strikes.

There is another object, which in common language is constantly said, and in common understanding is instantly

felt, to be like a belt of silver. It is a river, when it is seen from a great height following its graceful windings over the plain. All along its margin the watered ground is fresh and green. So would it be if we could obtain a heaven-high viewpoint, whence the eye could trace the stream of love and truth which flows from a good man's lips as he plods over the plain of human life from the spring-head of his new birth to his point of disappearance on the shore of eternity. Softly and sweetly it shines, like a silver stream, on the dark ground of life, and like it too is fringed on either side with a growth of goodness.

"The lips of the righteous feed many." Themselves satisfied from the Lord's own hand, they will feed others. This bread of life which the disciples distribute is not like common bread. The more you give of it to the needy, the more remains for your own use. It is the bread which Jesus blesses in the wilderness—the bread from heaven, which Jesus is; and when from his hand, and at his bidding, you have fed three thousand on five loaves, you will have more bread remaining in your baskets than the stock you began with. Christ's miracles had a body and a soul. The inner spirit was embodied in sensible act, and the sensible act enclosed an inner spirit. In the act of feeding hungry thousands, through the ministry of the twelve, he was training them in the elements of their apostolic work. As their hands then distributed bread to the body, so their lips fed many souls, by the bread of life which came down from heaven, and dwelt richly within them. It is a high calling to be stewards of

these mysteries. The Lord's disciples are made mediators between the source of life and those that are perishing. He blesses. He breaks, He is the bread of life, but all the disciples stand round Him, getting from His hands, and giving to those who will receive. A Christian's lips should keep knowledge; in the heart a precious store, through the lips a perennial flow for the feeding of many.

Behold the mutual relations of faith and love—of trust in Jesus the Saviour, and active effort for the good of men. Getting much from Him, you will feel the necessity of giving to others; giving much to others, you will experience more the necessity of drawing ever fresh supplies from the fountainhead. They who abide in Christ will experience a sweet necessity of doing good to men; they who really try to do good to men will be compelled to abide in Christ, as a branch abides in the vine.

"Fools die for want of wisdom." So far from being helpful to others, they have nothing for themselves. They have taken no oil in their vessels, and the flame of their lamp dies out.

LIII.

THE BLESSING OF THE LORD MAKETH RICH.

"The blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it"—
x. 22.

THE truth here is twofold. The cord, as it lies, seems single, but when you begin to handle it, you find it divides easily into two. It means that God's blessing gives material wealth; and also, that they are rich who have that blessing, although they get nothing more.

(1.) The silver and the gold are his, and he gives them to whomsoever he will. A business may prosper at one time, and decay at another, while no one is able to detect the cause. It is not by accident. He who rules in the highest, reaches down to the minutest concerns of this world, and controls them all. Long ago, a certain people diligently plied their agricultural labours, and carefully watched over their household affairs; and yet misfortune succeeded misfortune, and general poverty was closing round the commonwealth. They could not read on earth the causes of their failure, but a voice from on high proclaimed it:—"Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages, earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes. Thus saith the Lord of hosts, Consider your ways" (Hag. 1. 6, 7). They had forgotten

God, and he had withheld his blessing. There is the religion of the case, and the philosophy of it too. Will a poor, short-sighted creature prate about the causes of things to the exclusion of God's displeasure against sin, as if there were no causes of things which lie beyond our view? There are causes of things, which we have never seen yet. He is a sounder philosopher, as well as a better Christian, who owns that the blessing of the Lord has something to do with the prosperity of his business.

(2.) But his blessing makes rich—His blessing is riches, although the wealth of the world should all flee away. "Godliness, with contentment, is great gain." Here is a nature prescribed by the All-wise, for satisfying a soul, and attaining success in life.

"He addeth no sorrow with it." The word seems to imply that there are two ways of acquiring wealth. Some people grow rich without God's blessing, and some grow rich by it. It would appear that the god of this world gives riches to his subjects sometimes, when neither giver nor getter owns the supremacy of the Almighty, and that God himself gives riches to some who are his children. Wherein lies the difference, since both the godless and the godly have gotten wealth? It lies here: He addeth no sorrow with it, but that other lord does.

When you are permitted to obtain wealth on which you do not seek and do not get God's blessing, that wealth becomes a sorrow. There is no more manifest mark of a righteous providence now seen protruding through into time, than the sorrow that comes with ill-gotten wealth. It lies like a burning spark on the con-

science, which will not out all the rich man's days. Sometimes the wealth is scattered by means that the public, with one voice, pronounce judgment-like. Sometimes it becomes waters of strife, to desolate his family after the winner has been laid in the dust. There are many arrows of judgment in the Almighty's quiver. Men may well tremble, when they find themselves growing rich on a trade whose secrets they are obliged to hide in their own hearts, and dare not pour out before the All-seeing day by day. To heap up these treasures, is to treasure up, wrath over their own head.

If you take God into your counsels, and so grow rich, there will be no bitterness infused into your gains. It is a common practice to constitute firms for trade, and exhibit their titles to the public with a single name, "and company." Most partnerships, indeed, appear to the world in that form. Such a man, and company; this is all about the business that the passing stranger learns from the sign-board; but, under that indefinite and comprehensive addition, who are included? What deeds and what doers does that mercantile formula conceal? Ah what some do in the dark beneath that veil! Now and then the world is startled by its accidental rending, and the exposure of a nest of night-birds in the light of day; but the full disclosure awaits another rending and another light. Reverently take the All-seeing into your commercial company and counsels. If you cast Him out, there is no saying, there is no imagining whom you may take in. When these counsels cease to be godly, they are "earthly and sensual;" and a terrible experience tells

"that no effectual barrier lies between these and the next step—"devilish." More especially those who have once made a Christian profession, if they allow themselves to engage in transactions on which they dare not ask God to look—if they glide into a business, for its gain, which is incongruous with prayer for a blessing, will probably be left to go greater lengths in shame than other men.

One peculiar excellence of the riches made in a company from whose councils God is not banished is, that the wealth will not hurt its possessors, whether it abide with them or take wings and fly away. A human soul is so made that it cannot safely have riches next it. If they come into direct contact, they will clasp it too closely; if they remain, they wither the soul's life away; if they are violently wrenched off, they tear the soul's life asunder. Whether, therefore, you keep them or lose them, if you clasp them to your soul with nothing more spiritual between, they will become its destroyer. Certain tortures that savages have invented and applied to human bodies, bear an analogy to the process by which his money makes the miser miserable, alike when it abides with him and when it departs. They wrap the body of the living victim all round in a thick impermeable plaster, and then set him free. If the covering remains, all the pores of the body are clogged, the processes of nature are impeded, and the life pines away; if it is torn off, it tears the skin with it—the pain is sooner over, but it is more severe. Thus the soul of a thorough worldling is either choked by wealth possessed, or torn by wealth

taken away. Out of that dread dilemma he cannot wriggle. The laws of God have shut him in.

Those who get riches should beware lest a sorrow be added to them, more weighty than all their worth. The Maker of the soul is its Portion; He made it for Himself. When riches are clasped closest to the heart, He is slighted and dishonoured. An idol has usurped his throne. "Covetousness is idolatry." For this very end Christ has come that a man might take the Holiest, into his bosom, and yet not be consumed. Put on Christ. Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and these other things may be safely added outside. If riches be added outside, while Christ is taken closest in, the riches there will, not hurt their owner while they remain, nor tear him asunder when they depart. When your "life is hid with Christ in God," you will live there, whatever amount of the world's possessions may be attached outside; and though, in some social concussion, all the world's thick clay should drop off, you will scarcely be sensible of a change. If you be Christians, if you have put on Christ, great riches may come and go; you will not be clogged while you have them; you will not be naked when they leave. But if the wealth be the first and inner wrapping of the soul, how shall that soul ever get into contact with the Saviour, that life from its fountain may flow into the dead? Many disciples of Jesus prosper in the world: few who have courted and won the world in their youth, become disciples in their old age. It is easy for a Christian to be rich, but hard for a rich man to become a Christian.

LIV.

A FOOL'S SPORT.

"It is as sport to a fool to do mischief."—x. 23.

"Fools make a mock at sin."—xiv. 9.

COSTLY sport this: We are wont to wonder at the stupid despot who set fire to his capital that he might see the blaze; but there are many greater fools in the world than he. The fire that Nero kindled in Imperial Rome was soon put out; the flame which sin for sport lights up can never be quenched. "Ye have kindled a fire in mine anger, which shall burn for ever" (Jer. xvii. 4).

To do mischief is one evil; to make sport of the mischief which you have done is another and a worse. A swearer frequently pours out a volume of filth and blasphemy in a fit of exuberant mirthfulness. "The Lord will not hold him guiltless who taketh his name in vain." To be held guilty by the Judge of men in that day, is a heavy price for a moment's mirth. Besides offending the Divine Majesty, an oath offends also the little ones for whom our Father specially cares. The sounds fall upon a tender conscience like drops of scalding fire upon the flesh. The fool pays dear for his mirth, when he incurs on account of it the anger of the orphan's Almighty Friend. Another species of mischief often done in sport is to make a neighbour drunk by practising upon the

experience of the young, or the depraved tastes of the aged. We have all seen some instances of this amusement, and heard of more. This is wickedness of the very worst kind. The crime of a robber who maims your body, is venial in comparison of his who by stealth lays a paralysis at once upon your soul within, and your limbs without. We often hear of those who deal in strong drink giving it for money to children, until the children are laid helpless in the gutter. To do this for gain is a great crime, but to do it for sport is a greater. I cannot find a name for the man who deliberately makes amusement for himself by defacing God's image from a brother's soul. If any of these occupy the position, they have certainly forfeited the character of gentlemen. They are destitute alike of godliness and manliness. Brutal would be an improper designation; devilish, though insufficient, is the most suitable that language can supply.

There is not so much of this in our day as there was in the past generation. Of late there has been some faithfulness and earnestness in dragging these abominations to the light. The light these deeds of darkness cannot bear.

Perhaps the arrow would more readily find a joint in the harness to penetrate by, if I should name some sins that seem really lighter, and more fit for sport. Some people tell lies to children, with the view of enjoying a laugh at their credulity. This is to make a mock at sin, and they are fools who do it. The tendency in a child to believe whatever it is told, is of God for good. It is lovely. It seems a shadow of primeval innocence glancing by. We should reverence a child's simplicity. Touch it

only with truth. Be not the first to quench that lovely trustfulness, by lies.

It is emphatically the part of a fool to mock at sin. God, counted it serious, when, to deliver us from its power, he covenanted to give his Son to die. Christ counted it serious, when he suffered for it. All holy beings stand in awe before it. Angels unfallen look on in wonder, and converted men who have been delivered from it, fear it with an exceeding great fear. Only the victims who are under its benumbing power, and exposed to its eternal curse, can make light of sin.

The laugh is a symptom of cowardice, rather than of courage. It is not in the power of a human being to laugh at sin, if he look in its face. The mirth of these mockers is but a violent effort to shut their eyes or turn round. Sin in its two grand alternative aspects—sin putting Christ to grief, or casting men into hell—sin is not a laughable thing at all. He who mocks at it, expecting thereby to gain a character for courage, is a coward who dares not to confront its issues, and hysterically strives to stifle his fear.

To mock at sin now, is the way to the place of eternal weeping. They who weep for sin now, will rejoice in a Saviour yet. Blessed are they that so mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Those who make a mock at sin are obliged also to mock at holiness. This is the law of their condition. "Evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse." To laugh at sin and to laugh at holiness are but two sides of one thing. They cannot be separated. Those who make

mirth of goodness persuade themselves that they are only getting amusement from the weakness of a brother. Let them take care. If that in a Christian which you make sport of be a feature of his-Redeemer's likeness, He whose likeness it is, is looking on, and will require it. Let the merry-makers see to it, when they are raising a laugh at the softness of a Christian, lest they be really scorning the gentleness of Christ, reflected in the mirror of a disciples life-course. God is not mocked.

LV.

FEARS REALIZED AND HOPES FULFILLED.

“The fear of the wicked, it shall come upon him:
but the desire of the righteous shall be granted.”—x. 24.

WE are not to understand from this verse that the wicked have only fear, and the righteous have only desire or hope. The wicked have hope as well as fear: the righteous have fear as well as hope. Both characters experience both emotions. In this respect, one thing happens to all. The dread of evil and the desire of good tumultuate and struggle for the mastery in a human breast all through this present life, whether the person be a child of God or the servant of sin. The difference between the righteous and the wicked lies not in the existence of these emotions within them now, but in their issue at last. In each character there are the same two emotions now: in each, at the final reckoning, one of these emotions will be realized and the other disappointed. The wicked in life both hoped and feared; at the issue of all things his fear will be embodied in fact, and his hope will go out like a lamp when its oil is done. The righteous in life both hoped and feared; at the issue of all things his hope will be satisfied, and his fear will vanish, as imaginary spectres that terrified the benighted traveller disappear with the day. Fear and hope were common to the two in time; at the border of eternity

the one will be relieved from all his fear, the other will be deprived of all his hope. The wicked will get what he feared, and miss what he hoped; the righteous will get what he hoped, and miss what he feared. Ah! how deep this difference is! One has his hopes all realized, and his fears all disappointed; the other has his fears all fulfilled, and his hopes quenched in despair.

It is not very difficult to ascertain what are the chief fears and desires of a wicked man. Cleaving to his sins, he is in enmity against God. The terrors of the Lord glance from time to time like lightning in his conscience, and he trembles at every quiver of the light, lest it be a bolt of wrath sent to strike him through. When one flash has passed and not smitten him, he gathers breath again, and is glad he has escaped; but ere he is aware, he is wincing beneath another. He fears the wrath of God and the punishment of sin. What does he desire or hope? His desire for time is the indulgence of his appetites; his desire for eternity is that there should be no God, or, at least, that he should not be just to mark iniquity. This desire shall not be gratified; for God is, and is the rewarder of them that seek Him. It is a desperate throw to risk your soul and its eternity on the expectation that God will turn out to be untrue, and that the wicked shall not be cast away. This is the desire of every unrenowned, unreconciled man, whether he confess it to himself or not; and this desire must be disappointed. The hope of the sinner will perish when Christ shall, come in the clouds of heaven and sit upon the throne of judgment. But the fear of the wicked—what did he fear?

In spite of all his hopes, he feared death, and judgment, and eternity. His fear shall come upon him. All that a sinner feared shall come upon the sinner—all that he feared, and more. The fruits of good and of evil are equal as they are opposite. Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the terrible things which God hath prepared for them that hate Him. Those who heard Noah preaching righteousness, and refused to repent, would nevertheless sometimes be conscious of fear under the patriarch's denunciations. But even those of them who feared the most had no conception of such a flood as that which came and covered them. The terrors of wrath that sometimes work in a sinner's conscience are but drops from an ocean infinite. The fear of the wicked, when it comes, will be greater than all that the wicked feared—greater by the difference between time and eternity. The expectation of the wicked shall perish. If the master of a ship at sea should, through carelessness or wilfulness, in spite of warnings, deviate from his course and hold on, with all sail set, by a false reckoning; and if he should expect and say, when told of his error, that he would escape—that there would turn out to be no rock to strike upon, that he would no doubt get safe into the desired haven—what would become of his expectation? It would perish when his ship struck on a stormy shore.

In the voyage over life to eternity there is, indeed, one difference. No one has gone over the voyage and returned to tell that the rocks are really there. And if men persist in refusing to believe whatever they cannot

see, they must even be left to themselves. But a message has been sent out to us. We can make only one voyage over this sea, and the Lord of that better land has sent out directions and a chart to guide us in. Most certain it is, if heaven and hell—if sin and salvation, be real, the expectation of the wicked shall perish.

The desire of the righteous shall be granted; what, then, shall become of his fears? What becomes of the darkness when the daylight shines? It is gone. Such are the fears that agitate the bosoms of God's dear children here in the body. When Christ comes, His coming shall be like the morning. But, meantime, let it be carefully noted that the saints are subject to fears. The promise to believers is not that they shall never fear; it is that the thing feared will never come upon them. What are their fears? They fear sometimes that God's anger will lie upon them yet; and sometimes they fear that, in time of temptation, they may fall away. But though these terrors disturb them, the thing they dread can never come. "There is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus;" and "they are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed." Their desire shall be granted; and what is their desire? It is twofold: that they may be pardoned through the blood of Christ, and renewed after his image. When these are the desires of our souls, how safe we are! If these desires were left unfulfilled, God our Saviour would be disappointed in His plan, and stript of His glory. These desires are the desires of the Almighty Redeemer of men, and He will do all His pleasure.

When I fear what He hates, my fears will be driven away like smoke before the wind; when I desire what He loves, all my desires will be gratified, even to the whole of the kingdom. Behold the golden chain on which a disciple's hope hangs down from heaven—"All things are yours, and ye are Christ's and Christ is God's" (1 Cor. iii. 22, 23).

LVI.

THE PASSING WHIRLWIND AND THE SURE
FOUNDATION.

"As the whirlwind passeth, so is the wicked no more:
but the righteous is an everlasting foundation."—x. 25.

THE course of the wicked through time is like the passage of a whirlwind over a continent. Life moves quickly, like the wind. When seen from eternity it is as nothing. A wicked life is like the wind in the violence and eccentricity of its movements. The soul that has no hope in Jesus is driven up and down like chaff in a tempest. It is dashed from side to side a while, and at last thrown into the sea or the flames. The righteous is an everlasting foundation. He cannot be moved. Though the mountains should be cast into the sea, the righteous man's standing remains unshaken, untouched. The heavens and the earth shall pass away, but he who has made the Eternal God his refuge will never be removed. "Neither death nor life, neither things present nor things to come," neither men nor devils, can ever drive or draw the feeblest disciple from his confidence. The Lord will "lay a sure foundation;" and "he that believeth shall not make haste" (Isa. xxviii. 16). These two promises lie together in the scripture. When your heart's hope is fixed on that precious corner stone, you need not be thrown into a flutter by the fiercest onset of the world and its god.

LVII.

THE GREATNESS OF LITTLE THINGS.

"As vinegar to the teeth, and as smoke to the eyes,
so is the sluggard to them that send him.—x. 26.

THE minor morals are not neglected in the Scriptures. Cleanliness and punctuality have their place in religion as well as the weightier matters of the law. These lesser features must be all filled in ere the beauty of the Lord be seen upon us. There may be the main things that constitute the backbone of Christianity, and yet the character may be imperfect and ungainly. There may be faith, righteousness, and truth, and yet little of the loveliness of the bride prepared to meet her husband. Even a Christian has much need to pray that the Lord would perfect that which concerneth him. Even when the substantial groundwork has been attained, you can do little to honour the Lord, or to win a brother, until the minuter features of the heavenly pattern be imprinted on your life.

You would not select activity and punctuality as the cardinal tests of a man's condition before God: and yet these things are by no means of trifling importance. To be a sluggard is a great blemish. Such a spot may sometimes be on one who is a child of God, but it is not the spot of God's children. "What thy hand finds to do, do it with thy might." Sluggishness is a continual injury

inflicted on others. It is a cutting, vexing thing. If we are Christ's we should crucify this self-pleasing affection of the flesh. One of the Christian laws is to look, not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. If we would adorn the doctrine of Christ, we must be active, early, punctual. It is a sin to waste another man's time, as much as to waste his property. "Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." No doubt it is the natural disposition of some people to be slovenly, and unexact. But what is your religion worth if it do not correct such a propensity? A person who is nimbler in body and spirit than you may find it an easier thing to fulfill, his appointments; but he has some other weak side which he must watch. "Watch and pray," each at his own weak side, "that ye enter not into temptation." If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature. If the new life is strong in the heart, it will send its warm pulses down to the extremest member. It should be the delight of a disciple, to be leaving the things that are behind, and pressing forward to what lies yet before. It should be like the meat and drink of a disciple to be making progress in bringing unto captivity to the obedience of Christ those thoughts that hitherto have been allowed to run wild. Ye are God's husbandry. Our effort should be to bring all the outspread field of life under cultivation—to leave no corner lying waste. In olden times when land in this country was not so much valued, many portions, a strip by the roadside here, and a corner beside a stream there, were allowed to escape notice, and to lie unsown. But as its value in-

creased, and became better known, useless roads were broken up, and useless hedges pulled out, and every yard of soil turned to account. A man's life is the field that belongs to the great heavenly Husbandman. It is not enough to cultivate its middle. Every corner should be turned up and occupied. Those who are bent on making rich, know well how much depends on taking care of small fragments. If we were wisely ambitious of becoming rich towards God, we would not cast anything away. The farthest advanced Christian may be known by his care to serve Christ in little things, which others leave to chance—by his care to cultivate for Christ those little corners of life, which others allow to be filled with weeds. When any portions of the field, even outside edges and corners, are left unsown, uncared for, the roots and seeds which grow on these, spread widely and injure all. It is sad to see the whole field damaged by the weeds that run to seed on its borders. Do we not see a Christian life marred and made almost useless by certain minor outside parts of it not being Christianized. The smallest extremity should be occupied for the Lord as well as the heart. And remember, although the heart is the chief thing as to acceptance with God, the smallest things of life often become the most important for his service in the world. It is precisely at the extremities of our life-course, those parts that run out into diminutive points, that we come into contact with others. If these little outside things which they feel be not baptized in the spirit of Christ, we have no means of letting them feel our Christianity at all. A Christian in the city may be called to make a

bargain with a man, or keep an appointment with him, a hundred times for once that he is called to tell his views of the Gospel, and the ground of his hope. Therefore, unless in these common things, these little outside points, we witness for Christ, we shall seldom have it in our power to witness for him at all. Let every one please his neighbour for his good to edification.

There is in your house a central cistern for containing water, and it is supplied from the river or the spring. Out from that cistern, at its lip, go many channels leading to all parts of the house, for the use of all the inmates. If the cistern be nearly full—filled in almost all its bulk, and yet not filled to the lip, so as to cover the mouth of the outgoing channels, all these channels will remain dry, and none of the inmates will get any supply of water. The cistern is almost full,—a little more would make it overflow,—and yet to the household, in their several departments of labour, it is very much the same as if it were empty. They get none. There is not an overflow. It is not so full as to go into these branching channels, and appear at their farthest extremities, with constant pressure, ready to burst out at a touch.

I think I see many a Christian useless to the world in this way. He is almost full, but not overflowing. He is concerned about the great things of eternity; but he is not so completely possessed as to let the spirit of Christ flow over into the smallest, commonest things of daily life. These remain hard and dry like the world. But it is by these that he touches others, and therefore, real Christian though he be, he does little good to others; perhaps he

does harm to others by misrepresenting Christ to them, and even misrepresenting himself

He who is a Christian in little things, is not a little Christian. He is the greatest Christian, and the most useful. The baptism of these little outlying things shows that he is full of grace, for these are grace's overflowings and they are ever the overflowings of the full well that refresh the desert. The great centre must be fully occupied before the stream can reach that outer edge.

LVIII.

HONESTY IS THE BEST POLICY.

"A false balance is abomination to the Lord;
but a just weight is his delight." —xi. 1.

FROM my youth I have been better acquainted with this verse than with any other in the book, because I was wont to read it with much interest when I was a little boy, engraved in antique characters on a mouldering stone over the gateway of a market in the city of Perth. In the times immediately after the Reformation, when the word of God was new to the people, it was much valued. Through the spread of that word the nation had been emancipated from a bondage of many generations. After the long darkness, men rejoiced in the light. They were not ashamed of their deliverer. All classes felt and acknowledged their obligations to the Bible. In this respect our lot has fallen on worse times. Direct appeal to the scriptures seems to be counted a violation of taste in places of power. When that writing from the law of the Lord mouldered away by age, the magistrates did not engrave it again in their restored market-place. The motto of another city, "Let Glasgow flourish by the preaching of the word," has dwindled down to "Let Glasgow flourish." The legend became curt when the age grew carnal. These straws show how the current has been running; but there is reason to hope that the tide

has already turned. It is refreshing to observe how the early reformers appealed to the scriptures as the supreme arbiter in human affairs. It was an evil day for the nation when rulers began to ignore the Bible, and govern as if God had never spoken to men. Rulers and subjects, buyers and sellers alike should love the Bible. Its law only can keep the world right.

The precept is abundantly plain. It requires no exposition. One of the ways in which dishonest selfishness strives to attain its ends is to use false weights and measures in the market. As civilization advances, fewer opportunities occur of successfully accomplishing this trick. Other forms of deceit have crept in and cast into the shade the old-fashioned dishonesty. The modern dealer finds it more possible to cheat in the quality than in the quantity of the article. Dishonesty of either kind, of every kind, is abomination to the Lord. Justice is His delight, alike in the weight of the goods and their worth. Though an honest man should get no thanks from the world, he ought to count it an abundant reward for all his self-sacrifice that the world's Judge sees every righteous deed, and delights in it. God claims to be in merchandise, and to have his word circling through all its secret channels. When this set is awanting, forthwith they become corrupt. Many men would fain banish God from his world. They are not Atheists. They are willing to meet Him by appointment on the Sabbath, and in the church, on condition that they shall be allowed to buy and sell without Him all the rest of the week. You may as well expect to escape from the air as from His presence. "In

Him we live and move and have our being." The only man who in merchandise is happy or safe, is the man who, while trying to please his customer over the counter, tries also to please God. We ought, in this bustling community, to be aware that unfair trickery in disposing of goods is a sin that "doth most easily beset us." When a practice becomes common, it ceases to attract attention, and if it be evil, it escapes reproof, by reason of its prevalence. It would be our wisdom to suspect ourselves on our exposed side. It is in a crowd that you are apt to lose your money, or your good conscience. When you have cleverly concluded a bargain by concealment and falsehood, the loss is not all on one side. The seller suffers more by that transaction than the buyer. He leaves the shop with a damaged article, you remain with a defiled conscience. It is more blessed to give than to receive; and the counterpart is a terrible truth,—it is more cursed to be an intake than to be taken in.

But there is much actual dishonesty where the parties have not a deliberate intention to deceive. A man's judgment leans sadly over to the side of his own interest. He has a bias in his own favour, and unless he be both watchful and prayerful, he will enter ere he is aware into the temptation, and give a false tone to his statements without admitting to himself the design of telling lies. This kind of dishonesty is still dishonest. A man may indeed innocently make a mistake, but the innocent mistakes will, on an average, as frequently favour your customers as yourselves. If they are all on your own side, they are not innocent. There is a rule by which we may

escape this danger. I have seen a mechanic working with the appropriate tools upon a piece of wood, in order to bring its surface to a perfect level. After he had wrought some time, he took a rule and laid it along his work, bending his head and looking, to ascertain whether the rule and the wood plied to each other along their whole length, or whether daylight appeared anywhere between them. When the work had so far advanced that the rule and the wood touched each other throughout their length, the workman, not yet satisfied, turned the rule round the other way, and looked again. Why? He did not trust the rule; there might, for aught he knew, be a slight bend in it; and though the plank and it agreed, both might be uneven. By reversing the rule, he removes all chance of deception. His object is not that the plank should appear, but that it should be straight. Go and do likewise. You lay your rule along the transaction, and the two agree. But one's heart is deceitful; perhaps it is inclined to yourself a little. Reverse the rule. Put yourself in the customer's place, and the customer in yours. Would you then like the same representation to be made, and the same price to be paid? This is a method for detecting an unfair bias in our bargains, which the Redeemer himself condescended to supply—"Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them."

If I speak plainly, even bluntly, against dishonest shifts, it is not that I have any prejudice against trade. I honour merchandise. I place merchants on equality with princes in my esteem. I think the time is coming

when their position will be more honourable still. To a greater extent every year, the surplus produce of one country is required to supply the increasing wants of another. This is a great providential arrangement for bringing and binding the nations into one. Merchants are the true ambassadors of nations, conducting their intercourse and interlacing their interests. The longer the world lasts, it will become more difficult for nation to go to war with nation. They are undergoing a dovetailing process, and every year interpenetrating each other with deeper and deeper indentations. Merchants are the engineers and artificers in that mighty process of Providence for binding the peoples of the earth together by their interests, and perhaps for preparing among them the way of the Lord. Between east and west, north and south, barbarian and civilized, merchants are the mediators accredited and sent by the Supreme. As the atmosphere touching both, mediates for blessed purposes between the sea and the earth, relieving the sea of its surplus water, and pouring it over the thirsty ground; so the class of merchants mediate between the different countries of the world, making the produce of all the property of each, and the produce of each the property of all.

It is because I see the greatness of merchandise that I strive for its purity. When the truth of God, as a preserving salt, shall pervade the fountain in the merchants' hearts, the outgoing streams of traffic will be pure, and the whole landscape will wave with the blossoms of love and the fruits of righteousness. Though dishonesty be concealed, its effects cannot be diminished. The world is

under law to God. Falsehood, in proportion to its amount, poisons and paralyses the whole mercantile system. It is a bitterness in the spring which, according to its extent, will infallibly tell in scorching the land with barrenness. The system of nature is constructed so as to fit into truth. The world has been made for honest men. The dishonest rack and rend it, like gravel among the wheels of a machine. But if lies impede the motions of the social system, the social system in its slow and solemn revolutions brings down heavy blows upon the liar's head.

LIX.

ASSORTED PAIRS.

"When pride cometh, then cometh shame:
but with the lowly is wisdom." —xi. 2.

IN morals, things go in pairs as rigidly and regularly as living creatures in nature. The Bible contains the history and the rules of God's government, and therefore the unions that exist in Providence are written in the word. Here is one of them. Pride and shame constitute a pair. They must go together whether they will or not. All the wriggling of the victims cannot break the chain that binds them. For wise and righteous ends, they have been made twins by the Author and Ruler of the world. As well might you try to tear away the shadow, so that it should not haunt the body, as to prevent shame from dogging the steps of pride. The laws of nature cannot be overturned by the power, or overreached by the cunning of men. It is not only that shame will appear as the punishment of pride on some future day, "Pride cometh; then cometh shame." There is always something at hand to gall pride, where there is pride to be galled. A proud man is never at ease. He is always apprehensive of danger, and always on the watch. It is certain that no man has good ground for being proud; and to have ideas at variance with your circumstances, is to steep your life in misery.

A proud man, having nothing to be proud of, is like a boy trespassing in a field not his own: the pleasure is all embittered by the fear of being caught. In this life, the condition of humanity at the best is one of suffering; but pride adds other irritants of its own. Two men are confined in cells of equal capacity: neither habitation can be reckoned roomy; neither inhabitant can be altogether content. But if one meekly submits, and makes the best of it, his lot will be endurable; whereas the other, if he dash himself continually on the sides of his prison, will make his life miserable while it lasts, and soon bring it to a close. Both the humble and the proud man are in a low confined condition; but the one, by bowing his head, escapes the blow; the other, by stretching aloft, brings his body into destructive collision with the barriers which the Omnipotent has set round the sinful.

Pride? what is the man proud of? Money? It will not procure for him one night's sleep. It will not buy back a lost friend. It will not bribe off approaching death. Land? a very little bit of it will serve him soon. Birth? what has he inherited, but sin and corruption. Learning? If he is equal to Newton he has gathered one little pebble on the ocean's shore, and even that one he must soon lay down again. It would be better that shame should come now on the proud like a flood to cover them, that their hearts may melt in godly sorrow: for if shame come first when mercy has finally passed away, how dreadful will its coming be! Then it will be "shame and everlasting contempt"

With the lowly is wisdom,—the wisdom from above.
The lowest parts of the land are warm and fertile the
lofty mountains are cold and barren. The secret of the
Lord is with them that fear him. "Blessed are the poor
in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

LX.

DIPLOMACY.

"The integrity of the upright shall guide them:
but the perverseness of transgressors shall destroy them."—xi. 8.

ALL obliquity and trick in the intercourse of men is a libel on Providence. Every recourse to falsehood is a direct distrust of God. Truth is both the shortest and the surest road in every difficulty. How much labour is lost by adopting tortuous paths. A great part of life's labour consists in following a crooked course, and then trying to make it appear a straight one. The crooked line is far more difficult at the first, and the defence of it afterwards doubles the labour. The intercourse of nations with each other, designated by the general term diplomacy, is proverbially a game of dexterity. We do not certainly know what goes on, for we have never been admitted into their secrets; but if diplomatists be not much maligned, there is a great deal of double dealing in their art. It seems to be understood that a man of transparent and scrupulous truthfulness is not fitted to be a diplomatist. It is a prevalent idea among politicians, that though truth is best in the abstract, yet in some cases it is not safe to depend upon it, while others are endeavouring to circumvent you. You are in difficulty and danger; you must fortify to the uttermost; you must do the best; therefore you will twist together a few lies in order there-

by to defend your position, and foil your adversary!
That is, when there is a stress you cast aside the straight line of truth, and trust to the crooked course of hypocrisy. The cripple, at a rocky part of the road, throws away his sturdy oak-staff, and grasps a bruised reed, by way of making sure that he will get safely over. Vain hope! "Truth is great, and it will prevail" Truth is the most potent weapon of attack, and the surest covering for the head in the day of battle. Each party throws the blame of lying on his adversary, and continues himself to lie. The ever-recurring justification of diplomatic trick is, though we were willing to be true, we have lying rogues to deal with. What then? The question remains entire; in dealing with them, what is your strongest weapon and surest defence? Is it truth, or a lie? Meet them with transparent truthfulness. Your truth will, in the long run, be stronger than their lie, and you will overcome. We are confident that if a nation, in all its intercourse with neighbours, were transparent and true like sunlight, that nation would soon be in the ascendant. Truth is God's law, as well as gravitation. Those who conform to these laws, in their several departments, are safe; those who contravene them are crushed by their self-acting vengeance-stroke. Their own act brings down the retribution. "The perverseness of transgressors shall destroy them."

LXI.

THE DESTROYER OF A NEIGHBOUR.

"An hypocrite with his mouth, destroyeth his neighbour."—xi. 9.

AN untrue man is the moral murderer, his mouth the lethal weapon, and his neighbour the victim. Horrid employment! For what purpose have we been placed in the world? Look unto Jesus, and learn in His life what is your own errand here. He came to seek and save the lost. He went about doing good. Let no man deceive himself with words. Nothing in nature is surer and truer than this, that Christians are like Christ; and they who are not like Christ are not Christians. Let that mind which was in Him be also found in you. He has left us an example that we should follow His steps. The destroyers of a neighbour are as far from the track of Jesus as men in this life can be. Beware of carrying deadly weapons. For what end did God give to man and to man alone, a speaking mouth? The Maker of that tongue meant it not to be a dart to pierce a brother with. Remember every morning who gave you that wonderful instrument, and how He intended it to be used. When a kind parent sends to his distant child a case of curious mechanical instruments, he takes care to send along with them printed "directions for use." Even such a set of directions has our Father in heaven sent to us along with the ease of cunning instruments which our

living body contains. Look into the directions and see what is written opposite the mouth and tongue; for "speaking the truth in love" (Eph. iv. 15). Every dear child will do what his Father bids him. He tries the edge of the weapon on truth to honour the giver God, and on love to soothe the sorrows of brother men. The tongue is one, and that not the least, of the ten talents. "Occupy till I come," is the condition of the loan; near, though unseen, is the day of reckoning.

LXII.

A TALEBEARER

"A talebearer revealeth secrets:
but he that is of a faithful spirit concealeth the matter."—xi. 13.

A TALEBEARER [double tongued] is an odious character. He takes in all your story, if you are weak enough to give it to him, and then runs off to the next house, and pours it into the greedy ears of jealous neighbours. His character is a compound of weakness and wickedness. He is feared less than bolder criminals, and despised more. If he were not weak, he would not act so wickedly; but if he were not wicked, he would not act so weakly. He breeds hatred, and spreads it. He carries the infection from house to house, like a traveller, from city to city, bringing the plague in his garments. Families soon begin to mark him as a dangerous man; and, in the exercise of sovereign authority within their own borders, they prescribe a rigid quarantine. They prescribe for him an offing wide enough to ensure their own safety. The true antithesis to the talebearer is a "faithful spirit." Poets have often sung the sweetness of true friendship, but they can never reach the bottom of it. It is a spring in the desert. Without it the weary pilgrim would not get forward at all. Beyond computation, precious is the friend who, instead of the weakness and wickedness of a talebearer, possesses the opposite

qualities of strength and goodness,—who is soft enough to take in your sorrows, and firm enough to keep them. It is a substantial help to suffering humanity, when a being of the same nature with yourself goes into your very heart, and yet will not divulge the secrets which he has witnessed there. The Lord, who knows what is in man, takes notice of these things. He provides helps meet to us in our griefs. He provides human sympathy for human sorrow to lean upon. He approves when any one, for his sake, and at his bidding, acts the part of a friend to a needy brother. He gives, indeed, to his own people such duties as these to exercise their graces on. "Without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing," is their ultimate, acquirement, and should be their present aim. They are glad to be employed by Him, and like Him. Apprentices learning a trade, they do not look for wages. Rather they count themselves obliged, when subjects and opportunities are afforded to try upon, that by exercise they may grow more skilful in acting the part of faithful friends.

LXIII.

DEBTS AND SURETIES.

"He that is surety for a stranger shall smart for it;
and he that hateth suretiship is sure."—xi. 15. See also ch. vi. 1-6.

RASH suretiship, and the ruin that follows it, seem to have been common in those days, as well as our own. The traffic of ancient times was small, in comparison with the vast system of exchange which now compasses the whole world, like network; but the same vices that we lament marred it, and the same righteousness that we desiderate would have healed its ailments. Neither the law of gravitation nor the law of righteousness has changed since the time of Solomon; both are as powerful now as they were then, and as pervasive. The things are different in form and bulk, but ancient and modern merchandise are of the same nature, and subject to the same laws. As to the laws, whether physical or moral, there is nothing new under the sun.

In those primitive times, it seems, as in our own, some men desired to get faster forward in the world than their circumstances legitimately permitted. They were determined to get up, although they had nothing to stand upon. Their ambition fretted at the slow and vulgar method of climbing up by patient industry; they would ascend by a bound. They must get a neighbour to become security for them, that they may get the use of

money which is not their own. They will throw for a fortune to themselves at another's risk. There were also others, it appears, so simple as to become surety for the adventurers, perhaps because they could not command enough of courage to refuse a friend, although they thereby cast into a lottery the home and the food of their own families.

The warning does not of course discourage considerate kindness in bearing a deserving man over a temporary pressure. When you have ascertained the character of the person, and measured the amount of his need; when you have balanced your own affairs, and discovered that they have buoyancy sufficient to bear both yourself and your brother over the strait, then do a brother's turn, and enjoy a brother's love. No precept of the Bible demands that we should harden our hearts against the claims of the needy. The Bible permits and requires more of kindness to our brother than we have ever shown him yet; but it does not allow us to do a certain substantial evil, for the sake of a distant shadowy good. It condemns utterly the rash engagements which, under pretence of doing a kindness to one, inflicts injustice on a hundred. Righteousness, in all times, and all circumstances, reclaims against the blind effort which, for the sake of supporting a tottering fabric, incurs the risk of bringing your own house down about your ears, and crushing beneath its ruins many innocent victims.

We make no inquiry into the method of conducting pecuniary transactions in the days of Solomon. Our object is not antiquarian research, but the rebuke of pre-

sent wrong, and the establishment of righteousness. The most convenient method will be to apply what we count the straight line to a number of cases that are daily occurring in business. We shall thread them on like beads upon a string, and every one, with the Bible in his hand, and a conscience in his breast, may judge for himself whether they hang fairly.

(1.) If a merchant, possessing unencumbered twenty thousand pounds, desires to get the use of ten thousand more, he may legitimately obtain it in money or goods from bankers or brother merchants, if he do not misrepresent the real state of his affairs. But although he really possesses twenty thousand, and think himself safer if he convey to others in any way the impression that he has forty thousand, in order to obtain more credit, he infringes the law of righteousness as certainly and sinfully as the trickster on a lower platform, and a smaller scale.

(2.) A man who has not more than ten pounds may legitimately borrow ten thousand, if he can get it, after revealing the whole case to the capitalist as thoroughly as it is known to himself. He may be such a man, that his character and ten pounds in hand are a better guarantee than another man can give who has ten thousand pounds, but not a character. Let the whole truth be known—make a clear breast, and if another choose to take the risk, you may accept the money. The same principles would of course bind you to be at least as careful of the money so obtained as if it were your own.

(3.) A merchant is engaged in extensive business.

He began it with a large capital, and good credit. In process of time he meets with heavy losses. He discovers from his balance that his assets will not cover his liabilities. What should he do? A common maxim in such a case is—take care not to change your house; on no account dismiss your coachman, or sell your horses; invite dinner parties more frequently this winter than you did the last, and see that the luxuriance be not in aught diminished, all to keep up your credit. Measured by the line of God's law, all this is unmitigated dishonesty. It is to fence your position all round with a battery of lies. It is to keep money on false pretences. When you have nothing, if you keep up a show for the purpose of persuading your creditors that you are as rich as ever, you are cheating your neighbours. When the ground on which a man gave you credit has fallen away, you must let him know it. If, after revelation and explanation, he think it better on the whole that you should make another effort, it is well; let the effort be made, but concealment in these circumstances is sheer dishonesty.

(4.) A man has lost on his business this year. He hopes that he will make good the loss in another and better season. He borrows from his friends, and pushes forward. Again at the balance it is discovered that he is still sinking. He is below the horizon of solvency. He owes now more than all that he has. He borrows again, not revealing to the creditors the state of the case. Is he justified? No, verily. The act is dishonest, and there is a loathsome selfishness in the dishonesty; he is

pushing forward, knowing that if he succeed the gain will be his own, if he fail, the loss will lie on his neighbours, for he has nothing to lose.

(5.) A man, honest and honourable, is conducting a legitimate business in a legitimate way. He is indebted to his customers, and his customers are indebted to him. The whole process goes regularly and fairly on. He gains a few hundreds every year for the support of his family, and there is at all times a balance in his favour over the transactions in the mass. A friend not connected with him in business comes to this man, and requests the favour of his name to a bill by which he may obtain the use of ten thousand for a few months, to enable him to take advantage of a promising speculation (speculations are always promising). He yields. In an evil hour he writes his name on that paper. Now his position in relation to his ordinary creditors is wholly changed. They knew him only in the transactions of business. They had, in the course of these transactions, given him credit to a legitimate amount, and for a reasonable time. When they gave it, he had the means of repaying all. Now he has contracted, without telling them, a liability which, if it become due, will swallow up all his substance, and leave his lawful creditors unpaid. To contract that liability was unjust.

(6.) One case more we shall adduce, connected like the last immediately and directly with suretiship, and selected as a specimen of the extravagant and dangerous excesses to which speculation runs in this feverish age. Suretiship, as distinct from money lending, has been

converted into a business, and prosecuted for profit. A species of underwriters has sprung secretly up, who insure against losses, not on the sea of water, but on the more treacherous waves of gambling speculation. You are engaged in business, with large assets and heavy liabilities, but with the reputation in society of substantial wealth. Another man is struggling against the tide, and is no longer able to keep his head above water. He applies to a neighbour as needy as himself. A bill with both names attached is presented to the banker. The man of money shakes his head, and requests time to consider. But time is the very thing which the two adventurers cannot spare. Money they must have, and they must have it now. They present themselves with their bill in your counting-house. They want your name; you will never be troubled—all that they want is your name, to enable them to clear a pressing difficulty. You have no interest in them, and will not give them your name for love; but you have an eye to your own interest, and will give it for money. The terms are discussed—how much per cent for your name; the terms are adjusted, and the bargain struck. If the applicant is needy, he will offer a large premium—not for the loan of money, be it observed, for the poor borrower is obliged to pay the interest to the bank besides, and you do not give him a farthing, even in loan—he agrees to pay a large premium to you for the use of your name, to enable him to borrow in another quarter. If traffic becomes extensive, large profits may come in for a time; but in the nature of things the medicine aggravates the speculator's disease.

The traffic becomes more and more dangerous. The hollow principals fail to meet their engagements. The liability falls back on you. Your capital is swallowed up, your family ruined, and your ordinary creditors defrauded.

Enough of these examples: now for the elucidation of the principles of truth and righteousness as applied to modern trade. We are met here by the old cry, that business cannot be conducted at all if these principles are closely insisted on. Let business perish if it must needs rise on downcast and dishonoured Truth! Let business creep on the ground, in isolated acts of exchange, like the diminutive and simple transactions of children and savages, if its vast and symmetrical structure can be reared only upon the wreck of righteousness. But we are not shut up to such a dire alternative. Business, in all its extent, and through all its complications, will stand more securely on a basis of perfect righteousness, and move more sweetly when every wheel turns in a bedding of transparent truth. The goodly machine needs no underhand dealing and false representation to keep it going. These are the things that make it jerk and creak, and break and rend those who handle it.

Specifically, as to sureties, the law of the Lord gives no harsh recommendation, and countenances no selfish neglect of a neighbour in need. Help him, if he is deserving and you are able; but help him out of your own means, and do not mortgage for that object the money that really belongs to another man. You have a right to pledge your own money in the case, if you think the

case is good; but you have no right to pledge mine also in it, however good it may be: but you do pledge the money of other people, the moment that you bind yourself for more than you have of your own.

We are very far from saying or thinking that, in the intricate avenues of modern merchandise, a strictly conscientious man will always see his way clearly, and never meet with difficulties. We are well aware that, in the evolution of circumstances, an honest man may suddenly find himself in an inclosure where it is exceedingly difficult to determine in what direction righteousness leads. Let it be supposed that he fears God and regards man; that he would do justly at all hazards if he were sure what course would, on the whole, be most just. We grant readily that the line of duty may, in some cases, be involved in great darkness, and that with a pure purpose the man may sometimes take a step which involves himself and others in the direst disasters. Flesh and blood ourselves, and knowing that even when pure principle reigns in the heart, the path of practical duty, in any line of life, may be involved in many doubts, we would not proudly dictate to a brother on difficulties which beset his steps, and from which our different profession, not our superior probity, keeps us free. First, in the name of the Lord and in the cause of righteousness, we denounce all dishonesty and untruth, however large and intricate the transactions in question may be. And then, with human sympathy and in conscious weakness, we counsel all good men engaged in business to be aware of its dangers, and to watch and pray that they enter not

into temptation. In this line of life as in every other, there are trials of faith and of other graces. All that we demand, and all that is needed, is that Christian merchants take their Christianity with them into merchandise, and keep it with them all the way. In every case seek the Lord's will and you will find it. Consult the honour of Christ and the safety of your soul as to what business you will go into, and how far in you will go. You have not fulfilled your duty when you are able to say that you did not of set purpose do any wrong. The question is, where the path is slippery and many falling, how painful and prayerful were you that you might not stumble unconsciously into evil. A Christian is not forbidden to go into business; but if he look within and around, he will discover that his watchword there should be "Fear, and sin not."

LXIV.

VIRTUE ITS OWN REWARD.

"The merciful man doeth good to his own soul;
but he that is cruel troubleth his own flesh."—xi. 17.

BLESSED are the merciful., All the good they do to others returns with interest into their own bosoms. "It is more blessed to give than to receive." In every act that mercy prompts there are two parties who obtain a benefit,—the person in need, who is the object of compassion, and the person not in need, who pities his suffering brother. Both get good, but the giver gets the larger share. In common life, the act of showing mercy to the needy is very good for the man who shows it. The good Samaritan who bathed the wounds and provided for the wants of a plundered Jew, obtained a greater profit on the transaction than the sufferer who was saved by his benevolence. It is like God to constitute his world so. Even Christ himself, in the act of showing mercy, has his reward. When He sees of the travail of his soul He is satisfied.

Like other fixtures in nature, this principle has its counterpart. When light departs, darkness comes in its stead. When a human bosom is a stranger to the blessedness of the merciful, it tastes the misery of the cruel or the careless. As mercy blesses, cruelty torments both the parties,—the one who bears and the one who inflicts

it. This is a law of God, set deep in the constitution of things—a law that magnifies his mercy. A man cannot hurt a neighbour, without hurting more deeply himself. The rebound is heavier than the blow. The man who chastises his brother with whips, will himself; by the movements of providence, be chastised with scorpions. Such is the fence which the Creator has set up to keep man off his fellow. This dividing line is useful now to check the ravages of sin; but when perfect love has come, that divider, no longer needed, will be no longer seen. It is like one of those black jagged ridges of rock that at low water stretch across the sand from the edge of the cultivated ground to the margin of the sea, an impassable, an unapproachable barrier: when the tide rises, all is level and it is nowhere seen. This law of God, rising as a rampart between man and man, is confined to this narrow six thousand year strip of time. In the perfect state it will act no more, for want of material to act upon.

LXV.

EVERY SEED BEARS FRUIT OF ITS OWN KIND.

"The wicked worketh a deceitful work:
but to him that soweth righteousness shall be a sure reward."—xi. 18.

WICKEDNESS is a work that deceives its performer. It may do the harm which he intended to a neighbour, but it cannot procure the good which he expected for himself. By necessity of his condition, every man's life, and every moment of it, is a sowing. The machine is continually moving over the field and shaking; it cannot, even for a moment be made to stand still, so as not to sow. It is not an open question at all whether I shall sow or not to-day; the only question to be decided is, Shall I sow good seed or bad? Every man always is sowing for his own harvest in eternity either tares or wheat. According as a man soweth, so shall he also reap. He that sows the wind of vanity shall reap the whirlwind of wrath. Suppose a man should collect a quantity of small gravel and dye it carefully, so that it should resemble wheat, and sow it in his field in spring, expecting that he would reap a crop of wheat like his neighbours in harvest. The man is mad; he is a fool to think that by his silly trick he can evade the laws of nature, and mock nature's God. Yet equally foolish is the conduct, and far heavier the punishment, of the man who sows wickedness now and expects to reap safety at last. Sin is not

only profitless and disastrous; it is eminently a deceitful work. Men do not of set purpose cast themselves away. Sin cheats a sinner out of his soul. The devil, man's great adversary, acts by deceiving. He is a liar from the beginning.

The same law sparkles brightly and beautifully in the counterpart: "To him that soweth righteousness shall be a sure reward." The reward is mine, because it comes in the way of natural law: The reward follows righteousness as fruit follows the seed. The only righteous man that ever lived, the Righteous One, sowed in this desert world--sowed in tears; but he sowed righteousness. Out of that sowing a great increase, has already sprung, and a greater coming. From that handful on the mountain top a harvest shall wave like Lebanon. "Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom." Behold the husbandman returning home with joy, bringing his sheaves with him. To his members in their own place the same law holds good. Sowing righteousness is never, and nowhere, lost labour. Every act done by God's grace, and at His bidding, is living and fruitful. It may appear to go out of sight, like seed beneath the furrow but will rise again. Sow on, Christians! Sight will not follow the seed far; but when sight fails sow in faith, and you will reap in joy soon. More of the word of God is scattered over the world in our day than at any previous period of the Christian dispensation. The result, though unseen, is not doubtful. In grace as in nature, things proceed by law, and the ultimate result is sure.

LXVI.

GOD'S PEOPLE ARE GOD'S DELIGHT.

“They that are of a froward heart are abomination to the Lord:
but such as are upright in their way, are his delight.”—xi. 20.

To think of God only as "angry with the wicked" but half truth; and half a truth becomes practically a falsehood. To picture our Father in heaven all in shade is to hide half His loveliness, and keep His creatures terrified away. There is another side of His character, and the two together make up the divine perfection. The righteous Lord loveth righteousness. It is an encouraging and not a presumptuous thought, that the Holy One delights in every good, thing which grace has wrought in His children. "Ye are God's husbandry." That field He watches and waters night and day. Many weeds grow there to grieve Him, and many spots lie barren; but our "Father is the Husbandman;" the Husbandman is a Father, and He suffers long. He bears with the barrenness of His garden; and, in so far as it thrives, he tastes the fruit and counts it pleasant. It was a wilderness until. He, in sovereign mercy, took it in, and many things mar its fruitfulness yet; but He does not therefore despise or desert it. He loves all that He recognises as His own there. That humble and broken heart becomes His dwelling-place.

LXVII.

A JEWEL ILL SET.

"As a jewel of gold in a swine's snout,
so is a fair woman which is without discretion."—xi. 22.

THE lines of this picture are few and bold. The details are not elaborated; but by one stroke the likeness is caught, and with unwavering hand it is held up to public gaze. The conceptions and expressions here are peculiar and memorable. They are remarkable alike for the unvarnished homeliness of the allusion, and the permanent, palpable truth of the picture. The very rudeness of the imagery is designed, and serves a purpose. An analogy might have been found fitted to convey a true sentiment on the point, and steering clear of associations which affect the mind with a measure of disgust. But that very disgust is an essential part of the impression to be conveyed. The words of the Lord are tried words. The comparison is chosen for the purpose of setting before us an outrageous incongruity—the conjunction of two things whose union is palpably and monstrously inappropriate. Both the judgment and the taste must be educated. It is necessary that we should both see the thing to be wrong, and feel it to be revolting. We need both to have the understanding enlightened and the affections exercised. Christian's affections should be trained to strike out positive and strong in both directions; he

should love the lovely and hate the hateful. Both emotions should start quickly, like instincts, when their objects appear; both should be hearty and effective. A good man loathes evil as much as he loves good. The law that action and reaction are equal and opposite holds good in morals as well as in physics. The righteous Lord loveth righteousness, and it is but the other side of that same glory that glances in the rebuke of lukewarm Laodicea, "I will spue thee out of my mouth" (Rev. iii. 16.)

Personal beauty is not a thing to be despised. It is a work of God, and none of his works are done in vain. We do not count it a man's duty to be unimpressed by the grandeur of a lofty mountain, or the loveliness of a starry sky. It is obvious that human kind are the chief of God's works on earth, and that in the human form is displayed the highest beauty of creation. Beauty is a talent, and has a power. Call it, if you will, a power like that of a sharp knife, dangerous in the hands of the weak or the wicked; but still it is a power the gift of God, and capable of being ranked among the all things that advance his glory. Like wealth or wisdom, or any other talent, it may be possessed by the humble, and employed for good. If the heart be holy and the aim true, personal beauty will enlarge the sphere and double the resources of beneficence. The same spread full sail may speed the ship on her course, or dash her on the rock of doom. If the beautiful be not also good, beauty becomes an object of disgust and a cause of ruin. For such a spread of sail, and such a breeze as it is sure to catch, a

greater than ordinary amount of solid deep ballast is needed in the body of the character, not only for tended usefulness; but even for simple preservation from quick perdition.

The lesson on this subject appears in the word in form of peculiar homeliness: we must beware, lest, in straining after refinement, we let its, strength slip through our fingers. If we would maintain congruity between the comment and the text, we must go to our object, by a straight short line. Let a man beware of being tricked and caught and chained by a woman's beauty, so as to be dragged through the mire by the bewitching bond. When an impure character is clothed, in corporeal loveliness, it is the spirit of darkness appearing as an angel of light, enticing to devour. A beautiful woman who is proud, flippant, selfish, false, is miserable herself, and dangerous to others. It is a combination to be loathed and shunned. A swine wallowing in the mire is not a creature that you would follow and embrace, although she had a jewel of gold in her snout! Such is the glass in which the Bible bids us see the sin and folly of the man who gives himself over to the fascination of a worthless heart, because it is covered by a fair skin.

Women who have beauty above the average should be peculiarly watchful on that side, lest they sin and suffer there. You have a jewel of gold; don't put it in a swine's snout. The misapplication, will prostitute the gift; the incongruity will be repulsive to all whose tastes are true. It will attract the vain, and repel the solid. There are diversities of operation under the ministry of

the same spirit. For discipline to human souls in time, deformity is given to one, and beauty to another. The chief consideration for each is how she may best bear the trial, so as to get it enlisted among the workers for good, and instruments of saving. If both are saved, it will be a pleasant exercise to compare notes of their several paths and several burdens, when they meet in equal loveliness, without, spot or wrinkle, in the presence of the Lord. If it were our part to judge, most of us would think it probable that beauty is the greater trial, and that under it a greater proportion stumble and fall. But we are not permitted to judge, for we are not able to judge aright. We do not see far. The Lord is judge himself and the day shall declare whether beauty, in filling the soul with vanity, or deformity, in fretting it with envy, has been actually the more successful instrument of evil in Satan's hands. Meantime, those who on either extremity have a weight to bear, should watch unto prayer, and cast their burden on the Lord; while we, the mass of humankind, in the middle, who in that respect have neither poverty nor riches, should be humbly thankful to God for casting our lot in a safer place, and marking out for us an easier path.

LXVIII.

THE DESIRE OF THE RIGHTEOUS.

"The desire of the righteous is only good.—xi. 23.

IN the preceding chapter, we learned that "the desire of the righteous shall be granted:" here we are told that it is good. The fruit we gathered on a former page; and now the tree that bore it is displayed. A good tree bringeth forth good fruit. Holy desires implanted in the heart will issue in glad enjoyments. "Delight thyself also in the Lord, and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart" (Ps. xxxvii. 4).

The new nature has new affections. Every creature after its kind. The desires of this new man which has been "put on" in conversion are "only good;" but the desires of the old nature are not yet destroyed, and a life-long conflict is maintained between them. In every Christian while he lives there is a warfare between two opposite principles. Paul stands forth as the type of the truly converted, but not perfectly sanctified disciple—"When I would do good, evil is present with me" (Rom. vii. 21). There is a great tumult in a human breast where these two contrary currents contend. It is like the meeting-place of the rising tide and the descending torrent. One stream, pure and transparent, is rising mysteriously up; another, yellow and turbid, is rushing, according to its constant nature, down. The contention

is sharp; but it is soon over. The pure overcomes the impure. That which rises up, apparently contrary to law, overcomes that which flows down obviously according to law. The ocean, entering that channel, overpowers and beats back the mountain stream. It is thus that the tide which issues from the Infinite, and acts against the law of the carnal mind, arrests and throws back the carnal mind, notwithstanding its long possession and its impetuous flow. The tide that rises is under law, as well as the stream that descends; but the law lies deeper among the things of God. That rising tide is not only pure in itself, it has Omnipotence behind to urge it on. There will be a mixture at the point of contact, and while the conflict rages; but soon the unclean will be driven back, and the channel will be filled from brim to brim by a pure ascending stream.

Pure in character, and upward in direction, is the current of a righteous man's desire. This description is a standing rebuke of our poor attainments. How faintly is the attraction from heaven felt, how feebly flow the heart's emotions thitherward, how deeply tinged, even in their upward course, by the mingling remnants of the downward current! And yet there is encouragement here, as well as rebuke; this purity of desire is attainable, in some measure, on the earth. The design of discipline is to increase it; and it will be perfect when the discipline is done. The hope of final and complete success is a powerful motive to present exertion. When the new man is perfect, his desires will be only good, with no admixture of evil; and when the desires are

only good, they will all be gratified. When the last ruse of the flesh is crucified, disappointments will cease. If my heart's desires were all and only good, they would be like God's; and when my will is God's will, it shall be accomplished, for He will do all his pleasure.

LXIX.

SCATTERING TO KEEP, AND KEEPING TO
SCATTER

"There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it teadeth to poverty."—xi. 24.

THE maxim, although in form approaching the paradox, has become familiar by frequent use. If any of us should hear it now for the first time, we would be startled by its boldness; but the proverb, like a well worn coin, has become smooth by long continued handling, and it passes easily from mind to mind; in the intercourse of life. To have undergone so much wear, and yet to be accepted in the market-place for "all its original worth, is evidence, both that the metal is pure, and that the stamp of royalty is on it. Day by day this proverb of Solomon is offered and accepted on our streets, as a ground, legitimate and authoritative, for giving freely of our means in behalf of objects that are acknowledged good. By Christians, who labour for the good of men, it is boldly applied; and wherever there is an enlightened conscience, and a sound understanding, it is felt to be applicable. As the formal and authoritative expression of a fact which may be observed in the history of Providence; it is a word of great practical value. It is a sharp weapon, always at hand, by which a man may deal a blow against incipient selfishness in himself or his neighbour.

The conception is similar to the sowing of righteous-

ness which occurred before. In agriculture, to scatter corn, is the sure and only way to increase it. It is a species of faith that the cultivator of the soil exercises when he casts good grain into the ground. In point of fact, the exercise is easy, and the mind is not racked by stretching far into the dark future for a pillar of truth to support its trust; still, in its nature, it is faith in the unseen. The direct design is to increase corn, and with that view the man who possesses it scatters what he has. His faith is rewarded by a manifold return: if, in stupid, wilful, short-sighted penuriousness; he had withheld the seed, the hoarding would have tended to poverty.

To distribute portions of our wealth in schemes and acts of wise philanthropy, is like casting into the ground as seed a proportion of the last year's harvest. It goes out of your sight for the moment, but it will spring in secret, and come back to your own bosom, like manna from heaven.

An unwise man may indeed scatter his corn on barren rocks, or equally barren sands, and though he sow bountifully, he will reap sparingly there. So, in the moral region, the increase is not absolutely in proportion to the profusion of the scattering. When a man lays out large sums on unworthy objects, to feed his own vanity, or gratify his own whim, he neither does nor gets good. The outlay is in its own nature, and necessarily unprofitable. Sound judgment is as necessary, in selecting the objects of philanthropy, and determining the proportion of effort that should be bestowed on each, as in deciding where and when the seed should be sown. To give money, for example, indiscriminately to street beggars,

who tell a whining tale, and cunningly enact distress, is worse than to sow precious seed on the sand of the sea-shore. The seed cast on the sand will be lost: money given to the profligate is lost, and more. It is not barren; it multiplies and replenishes the earth with vice. There are many fields for scattering contribution and effort on, both needful and promising. In educating the young, in reclaiming the vicious, in supporting the aged poor, in healing the sick, and in making known the gospel to all, we have ample fields to cultivate, and the prospect of large returns to cheer us in the toil.

The law that judicious liberality does not impoverish, and selfish niggardliness does not enrich, may be seen in its effects by any intelligent observer. If one, not content with the homely evidence of experience, should demand how this can be, it would be sufficient answer simply to repeat that it is, and appeal to the history of the city or the generation. But, farther, we may answer, by another question, how does the material seed grow in the material ground? In point of fact, it does grow; and this is the sum of our knowledge regarding it. Only the pride of the rankest ignorance imagines that we know how or why it grows. A step deeper, as was to be expected, are the ways of God in the moral processes, and on those borders where moral causes touch the material to produce sensible effects; but in both regions, man must ever be speechless under the challenge, "Cast thou by searching find out God?"

If we understand the maxim, we should act on it; and if we would act on it more, we would come to understand

it better. Both to our money and ourselves, it is better to wear than to rust. This it an earnest time. Seek a good investment lay it out. In the tides and currents of that commercial sea which now as one connected ocean encircles all the earth, it is observed as a law that when many and great losses are incurred in one region, there is a flow of money into some other channel. Of late, investments in man's hands for time have not been secure. In that department we have heard many a heavy crash, and been called to pity the mangled victims as they crawled from beneath the ruins. Might we not expect that after these disappointments men would be seen streaming over to the other side, and hastening to invest in God's hands for eternity? This lending to the Lord, when a surplus accrues, affords the best security, and ensures the largest return. if the Son of Man should now come, would He find faith in the earth? We think ourselves eminently a practical generation; but we should beware lest we mistake the merely unspiritual for the profitably practical. A carcass will not serve the purposes of a man. Action is useless or worse except in so far as it has true faith to energize and direct it. The material acquisitions of the age will become a heavier heap on the grave of humanity, if the Spirit of God be grieved away. The large and complicated body of our material prosperity will, if its soul goes out, only encumber us with a greater bulk of corruption. Faith it the animating soul of practice. Men cannot get forward even in things temporal unless they believe that God is; and that He is the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.

LXX.

THE WATERER IS WATERED.

"The liberal soul shall be made fat;
and he that watereth shall be watered also himself." —xi. 25.

IT is announced here that the bountiful shall be enriched; and that law is expressed in a simple, intelligible, and memorable figure. —"He that watereth shall be watered also himself." How wisely and kindly God has bound his worlds into one, making all depend on each, and each on all! When we look up to the heavens, the moon and the stars which He hath made, we find there a law by which all the worlds of space are linked together. Our earth affects the moon, and the moon affects the earth; each planet influences all the rest: the removal of one would disturb the order of the whole. The well-being of all is concerned in the right working of each. This law pervades the works of God. Souls are linked to souls in the spiritual firmament, by a bond equally unseen, but equally powerful. One necessarily, affects for good, or evil all the rest in proportion to the closeness of its relations, and the weight of its influence. You draw another to keep him from error: that other's weight which you have taken on keeps you steadier in your path. You water one who is ready to wither away; and although the precious stream seems to sink into the earth, it rises to heaven and hovers over you, and falls again upon yourself in refreshing dew.

It comes to this: if we be not watering we are withering. There are only two things in time worthy of having the whole force of an immortal mind directed upon them, and these two are both here. The one is to be in Christ ourselves saved; and the other, to be used by Christ in saving others. "None of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's " (Rom. xiv. 7, 8).

To water green flowers that they may not wither, or withered ones that they may revive, is one of the sweetest employments that fall to the lot of man. Moral and natural beauty are so entwined together in the act, that his spirit must be dull indeed who is not drawn by the double attraction. When the tastes of the spiritual life are kept keen by frequent exercise, it must be a strong and pure pleasure to be employed as a vessel to convey water from the well of life to souls which would wither for want of it. To be the instrument of keeping fresh a lively plant, or making fresh a drooping one, in the garden of God, is an occupation that angels might eagerly apply for; but this work is all reserved for the children of the family: servants are employed in other and outer things. There are diversities of occupation for the children, as well as diversities of operation by the Lord. To water flowers in a sheltered garden, at the going down of a summer's sun, is one work for man; and to ply the hatchet on the hoary trunks of the primeval forest is another. The works are very diverse, and yet the same

hand may do them both. The department of the Lord's work which this text commends is of the gentlest and most winsome kind. It differs as much from direct assault on Satan's stronghold for the first conviction of sinners, as that clearing of the first spot in the solitude which tries the strong arm of the emigrant differs from the watering of a garden-flower, which may be done by a woman's hand; but it is a work commanded by God, and needful for a brother. If we are his, and yield ourselves to him as instruments, he will at one time nerve us for rough work, and at another solace us with gentle occupation. He has both departments in his power, and in dividing he does all things well.

Opportunities and calls swarm at every turn. The blind may never see the case or the time in which he can do any good; but where the eyes are opened the willing man sees a mountain full of them.

Here is a young woman, into whose heart the word came with power in early youth. Through a storm of terrible conviction she emerged into peace. She sat down at the Lord's table in the church, and took the standing of the Lord's disciple in the world. She has grown up, and come out: perhaps by her parents she was ostentatiously brought out from the kindly shade of youthful retirement into the blaze of the world's hot light. Passions are kindled in her breast, —passions for dress, for company, for pleasure, which formerly she felt not and feared not. The sun has risen with a burning heat on the tender plant, not yet deeply rooted. Forthwith it droops, and is ready to die. Run and water that weakling.

Mingle faithful reproof with patient kindness. At the same moment touch her weakness with human sympathy, and her sin with God's awful word. When she feels that a disciple cares for her, she may be more easily convinced that the Lord cares for her too. Gently lead her to the beauty of holiness, that there she may lose relish for the pleasures of sin. She may be saved, and you may be the instrument of saving her. I have seen a plant of a certain species that had been exposed all day, unsheltered, unwatered, beneath a burning sun, bent and withered towards evening, and to all appearance dead; but when one discovered its distress, and instantly watered it, the plant revived so suddenly and so completely as to strike inexperienced observers with astonishment.

Oh, it is sweet employment to be the waterer of a withering soul! It is gentle work for tender workers. "Who is on the Lord's side let him come," and labour in this department. The work is pleasant and profitable. In the keeping of this commandment there is a great reward. To be a vessel conveying refreshment from the fountain-head of grace to a fainting soul in the wilderness is the surest way of keeping your own spirit fresh, and your experience ever new.

LXXI.

RAISING THE MARKET—THE PRACTICE AND
THE PENALTY.

"He that withholdeth corn, the people shall curse him:
but blessing shall be upon the head of him that selleth it."—xi. 26.

To keep up grain in order to raise the market is a practice of very old standing, and the world has not done with it yet. The manner in which this word deals with it is worthy of observation. This law bears no mark of having emanated from the ruling class of a nation. Here, as elsewhere, the Bible holds the balance even between the wealthy few and the needy many. Either class possesses its own peculiar power; one the power of wealth, another the power of numbers. The domination of any part over another is tyranny: liberty lies in the just balance of all interests. In this brief maxim no arbitrary rule is laid down to the possessor of corn, that he must sell at a certain period, and at a certain price: and yet the hungry are not left without a protecting law. The protection of the weak is entrusted not to small police regulations, but to great self-acting providential arrangements. The double fact is recorded in terms of peculiar distinctness, that he who in times of scarcity keeps up his corn in order to enrich himself is loathed by the people, and he who sells it freely is loved. This is all. There is no further legislation on the subject.

The wisdom of this course lies in its reserve. The history of some modern nations, especially that of France, reveals the disastrous consequences of forcing sales and regulating prices by arbitrary legislation. When a ruler rashly puts his hand to the wheel of providence to guide its movements, although it is done from the best of motives, he hurts both himself and his subjects. In the Bible no law is enacted, and no penalty prescribed. The evil doer is left under a penalty which legislation can neither abate nor enforce: "the people shall curse him." He becomes an object of detestation to the community in which he lives. No law and no government can shield him from that punishment. They might as well attempt to prevent the clouds from coming between his corn-fields and the sun. Nor is the punishment light. To be the object of aversion among his neighbours is a heavy infliction upon a human being. No man can despise it. What though I be lord of the land, as far as my eye can see on every side; if the men and women and children who live on it loathe and shun me, I am miserable. When from the battlements of my castle I survey the landscape, and see the blue smoke from many a cottage curling up to the sky, the scene will to me have no sweetness, if I know that there rises with it a sigh to the Husband of the widow and the Father of the orphan for a judgment on my head. My barns may be full, but my heart will be empty. This, in the last resort, is the protection of the poor and the punishment of the oppressor. The mightiest man desires the blessing of the people, and dreads their curse. Wealth would be a weapon too powerful for the

liberty of men, if he who wields it were not confined within narrow limits by the weakness of humanity, common to him with the meanest of the people. In the necessary dependence of man upon man lies the ultimate protection of the weak and the ultimate limit of the powerful.

In our country, and in our time, the scale of operations has been prodigiously enlarged, but they do not, in virtue of their magnitude, escape from the control of the providential laws. Latterly the contest with us has not lain between a single holder of grain and the labouring poor of the nearest village; the whole nation was divided into two hostile camps. Agriculture and manufactures were ranged against each other. In the main it was a battle between those who sell bread and those who buy it. The bone of contention was not precisely whether corn should be hoarded or sold, but whether the buyers should be permitted to range the world freely for a market. The price of food in this country was formerly kept up, not by individuals withholding it from sale, but by the legislature preventing free importation. The land-owners held that peculiar burdens were laid on them, and claimed, therefore, corresponding protection in the form of a tax on foreign corn. Whatever amount of reality there might be in their plea, the form in which the issue was submitted was to their side altogether adverse. Their demand was, close the foreign market from the people, that we may get a higher price. They believed that they had a right to compensation; but their position was most unfortunate. It was defended at a great disadvantage; its

defenders accordingly were driven away before the onset of the multitude. All this was accomplished by peaceful moral means. It proceeded with utmost regularity under the great providential law or fact, "He that withholdeth corn, the people shall curse him." The tide of the people's displeasure, stimulated and directed by vigorous leaders, was steadily rising, and the opposing line, fearing that it should swell into a "curse," and burst into civil broil, gave way and submitted to defeat. The issue has been, not the triumph of one class and the prostration of another, but, the equal benefit of all. Scarcely a remnant of party conflict, or even party feeling on that subject, now lingers within our borders. Buyers and sellers agree that corn shall not be withheld, come from what quarter of the world it may. The muttering curse has died away, and mutual blessings circulate from side to side of our favoured island home. "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits!"

LXXI.

THE TREE AND ITS BRANCH.

"He that trusteth in his riches shall fall:
but the righteous shall flourish as a branch."—xi. 23.

SUPPOSE the world to be scorched by drought, as completely as it was deluged by water in Noah's day. Vegetable life disappears. Trees, shrubs, and plants remain where they were; but they are the sapless monuments of a former glory. Every root is rottenness, and the stiffened blossoms will at a touch of the finger go up like dust. The circulation is arrested, the life-sap is exhaled, and the vegetation of a world lies dead upon its surface. On hill or dale the observer's weary eye can find no green or growing thing to rest upon. On every side are the withered remnants of what once were trees, but no life. The branches are very many and very dry—dry as the bones of the unburied dead.

Can these dry branches live? No; *they* cannot. Moisture now would not restore them. Rain may preserve living plants, but cannot quicken the dead.

As you stand gazing on the desolation—weeping over a barren world, a new sight attracts your eye. From heaven a living tree descends. It is planted in the unmoistened dust—the living among the dead. It grows by its own life, in spite of the earth's barrenness. It spreads over the land. The hills are veiled by its shade.

It stretches its boughs on the one hand to the sea, and on the other to the river. This heavenly plant is a root in a dry ground, but not a dry root. While all earth's own growth lies withered round, it is full of sap and flourishing. But now another wonder: the withered branches begin to grow into that living root. One and another that have no life in themselves are successively grafted into it, and as soon as they are in it, live. No hand is seen to touch them, yet they move. Like the hewing of the stone out of the mountain, the process is accomplished "without hands." Branch after branch they begin to quiver where they lie, like the bones under Ezekiel's preaching, and by a mysterious power are drawn towards the tree of life and let in. The branches which abide on their own old stock continue dry, and at an appointed time are cast into the burning. The engrafted branches are not dependent now on earth and air. They draw their life-sap from a fountain that never fails. They have life, and they have it more abundantly than any that this world's soil ever sustained.

The vision is of man's fall, and Messiah's mission. A native human righteousness flourished once on earth. The head of this material creation, like all its other parts, was very good as it came from its Maker's hands. Man was made in God's image. Trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, flourished in that garden which is now a wilderness. But the blight of sin came over it, and all moral life died. "There is none that doeth good, no, not one." Is there any hope that this desert will revive and blossom like the rose? No; this is not the languor that will be

refreshed by a shower. This is death. There can be no revival here, except by a new creation. These dry branches cannot of themselves live. Sin has cut sinners off from the Life, and a great gulf keeps the severed members away. We could not make our own way back to God, but he has come to us. He that is mighty has done great things for us. In amongst the dead came the living One. "In Him was light, and the light was the life of men." In Him the withered grow green, the dead become alive. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature." Standing within the circle of his own disciples, Jesus said, "I am the vine, ye are the branches" (John xv. 5).

Here lies the secret of spiritual life among men. The righteous,—and some such there have been even in the darkest periods of the world's history,—the righteous "flourish as a branch." They lean not on their own stem, and live not on their own root. From the beginning the same Jesus to whom we look was made known to faith. The manner and measure of making known truth to the understanding were in those days widely different; but the nature and the source of spiritual life were the same. They stood "afar off," but they looked unto Jesus. The medium of vision was diverse, but the object was identical. As to knowledge, the ancient disciples were children, whereas disciples now are grown men: but *life* was as true and vigorous in the Church's infancy as it is in the Church's age. There was in those ancient times a medium of union to the Redeemer: and blessed are all they that trust in Him. The branch will flourish when it is in the living tree.

But though all the real branches live, all do not equally flourish. Whatever girds the branch too tightly round, impedes the flow of sap from the stem, and leaves the extremities to wither. Many cares, and vanities, and passions warp themselves round a soul, and cause the life even of the living to pine away. When the world in any of its forms lays its grasp round the life, the stricture chokes the secret channels between the disciple and his Lord, and the fruit of righteousness drops unripe. It is only as a branch that Christians can flourish in this wilderness; they have no independent source of life and growth. It becomes them, therefore, to be careful above all things to keep clear the communion between themselves, and the root of their new life in the Lord. Ivy has climbed from the ground, and gracefully coiled itself round a majestic bough. Beautiful ornament! you say; it would be barbarous to cut it through, and tear it off. We dispute not the beauty of the parasite, and we have no enmity to elegance. We only desire to keep everything in its own place. According to the order which the Scripture prescribes, let us have first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and then, if we can get them, other things. Whether is its own life or the elegance of its ornament the chief thing for the branch? Let us not hear of any addition to its beauty, which may endanger its life. Granted that this adjunct adorns; the question remains, does it kill? If it strangles the living, I would ruthlessly tear off its tendrils: without compunction I would cast its green mantle in the dust. Let me have a flourishing and fruitful branch, although its stalk

should seem bare, rather than a sapless stick within a wrapping of treacherous ornament.

By this short process should many questions be settled, which become the weapons of this world's god, and wound the consciences of incautious Christians. Gain, honours, accomplishments, company, are bought too dear, when they obstruct the flow of grace from its fountain. We speak not against the refinements of society, but for the preservation of the soul's life. When bodily interests are in the balance, we generally judge righteously between rival claims. The order of arrangement is first life, next health, and last adorning. The same principles faithfully applied to higher issues would carry us safely through. Life spiritual as an independent tree is not possible: and seeing that we can have life only as a branch has, it, the first care is to be in the living tree; the second is to let nothing warp round the branch which would diminish its freshness; and then ornaments, hung loosely on, may be allowed to take their place. The first thing is to be "found in Him;" the next is to cast off everything that hinders us from receiving "out of his fulness:" and when these two are satisfied, let the embellishments that pertain to the world be content with the fragments that remain.

Even those who are branches in the tree of life may be impeded in their growth; but those who are not in union with the tree cannot grow at all. "He that trusteth in his riches shall fall." I have seen a row of branches profusely covered with leaves and blossoms, stuck by children in the earth around a miniature garden.

They appeared more luxuriant than those that were growing on the neighbouring trees, but they withered in an hour, and never revived. Behold the picture of a man who has gained the world and neglected the Saviour! The earth into which he plunges his soul has nothing to satisfy its craving, or sustain its life. All the gains and pleasures of time cannot contribute a drop of moisture to refresh a drooping soul in the hour of its greatest need. "The portion of Jacob is not like them" (Jer. x. 16).

LXXIII.

THE WISDOM OF WINNING SOULS.

"The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life;
and he that winneth souls is wise." —xi. 31.

To win souls seems to be the chief fruit which the trees of righteousness bear in time. It is sweet and precious. It is pleasing to God, and profitable to men. It is an everlasting memorial. In monuments of marble we commemorate for a few years the deeds of the great; but a soul won through your means will itself be a monument of the fact for ever. It is thus that "the righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance" (Ps. cxii. 6). The righteous, we learn in a previous verse, "shall flourish as a branch;" this is the secret of his fruitfulness. "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me" (John xv. 4). Christ is the source of a Christian's fruitfulness. From Him it comes and to Him it returns. This branch bears fruit after its kind. It is the life work of the won, to win others.

A soul won is a bright conception, but it suggests inevitably its dread counterpart, a soul lost. From the night's darkness the daylight springs; there must be a sense of loss ere there can be a real effort to save. We must begin at the beginning. Our defect lies at the root. If we knew the ailment, the cure is at hand. Food is

abundant; it is hunger that is rare. We seem to act as if men were safe in a competent hereditary portion, and might or might not lay themselves out for new acquisitions. The true state of the case is, all is lost already, and the soul that is not won shall perish. To realize this would embody theory in action, and change the face of the world. We would all labour more to win souls if we really believed them lost. "Fools " are "slow of heart to believe," and, therefore, they are slack of hand to work. Faith knows the death by sin, and the life through Jesus; therefore, the faithful work, and the workers win souls,—their own first, and then their neighbour's.

The charity that wins a soul begins at home; and if it do not begin there it will never begin. The order of nature in this work is, "save yourselves and them that hear you." But though this charity begins at home, it does not end there. From its centre outward, and onward all around, like the ripple on the surface of the lake, compassion for the lost will run, nor stop until it touch the shore of time. On this errand Christ came into the world, and Christians follow the footsteps of the Lord. He recognised the world lost, and therefore He came a Saviour. Those who partake of His spirit put their hand to His work.

To win an immortal from sin and wrath to hope and holiness—this is honourable work, and difficult. It is work for wise men, and we lack wisdom. On this point there is a special promise from God. Those who need wisdom, and desire to use it in this work, will get it for the asking. The wisdom needed is very different from

the wisdom of men. It is very closely allied to the simplicity of a little child. Much of it lies in plainness and promptness. Those who try to win souls must not muffle up their meaning: both by their lips and their life, they must let it be seen that their aim is not to make the good better, but to save the lost. Delays also are dangerous, as well as ambiguities. Get the word of life dropt on the conscience of the healthy, lest he be sick before another opportunity occur. Tell the whole truth to the sick to-day, lest he be dead before you return. None who try to win deal slackly, and none who deal slackly win, whether it be a fortune, or a race, or a battle; those should throw their whole might into the conflict, who wrestle with a more powerful adversary, and for a greater prize.

LXXIV.

A BITTER BUT HEALTHFUL MORSEL.

"Whoso loveth instruction, loveth knowledge;
but he that hateth reproof is brutish."—xii. 1.

REPROOF is not pleasant to nature. We may learn to value it for its results, but it never will be sweet to our taste. At the best it is a bitter morsel. The difference between a wise man and a fool is, not that one likes and the other loathes it,—both dislike it,—but the fool casts away the precious because it is unpalatable, and the wise man accepts the unpalatable because it is precious. It is brutish in a man to act merely according to the impulse of sense. We are not so foolish when the health of our bodies is at stake. When we were children indeed, if left to ourselves, we would have swallowed greedily the gilded sweetmeat that sickened us, and thrown away the bitter medicine which was fitted to purge disease from the channels of life; but when we became men, we put these childish things conclusively away. Day by day, in thousands of instances that concern this life, we accept the bitter because it is salutary, and reject the sweet because it destroys. Would that we were equally wise for higher interests "I hate him; for he doth not prophecy good concerning me" (1 Kings xxii. 8): there, in the person of that ancient Israelitish king, is humanity in the lump and without disguise. Grown

men lick flattery in because it is sweet, and refuse faithful reproof because it is unpleasant. The beat of us has much to learn here: and yet we think that, by pains and prayer, Christians might make large and rapid progress in this department. No advancement will be attained without particular and painstaking trial; but such trial will not be labour lost. Paul reached his high attainments not by an easy flight through the air, but by many toilsome steps on the weary ground: smaller men need not expect to find a royal road to spiritual perfection. "Herein do I exercise myself," he said, "that I may have a conscience void of offence." What he obtained only by hard exercise, we need not expect to drop into our bosom. Here is an exercise ground for Christians who would like to grow in grace. Nature hates reproof: let grace take the bitter potion, and thrust it down nature's throat, for the sake of its healing power. If we had wisdom and energy to take to ourselves more of the reproof that is agoing, and less of the praise, our spiritual constitution would be in a sounder state.

Some of the reproof comes directly from God by his providence and in his word. This, if there be the spirit of adoption, it is perhaps easier to take. So thought David. When he found that a terrible rebuke must come, he pleaded that he might fall into the hands of God, and not into the hands of man. Still these chastenings are painful, and wisdom from above is needed to receive them aright. But although all are ultimately at the disposal of the Supreme, most of the reproofs that

meet us in life come immediately from our fellow-men. Even when it is just in substance and kindly given, our own self-love kicks hard against it; and, alas! the most of it is mixed with envy and applied in anger. Here is room for the exercise of a Christian's highest art. There is a way of profiting by reproof, although it be administered by an enemy. It is in such narrows of life's voyage that the difference comes most clearly out between the wise and the foolish. A neighbour is offended by something that I have said or done. He becomes enraged, and opens a foul mouth upon me. This is his sin and his burden; but what of me? Do I kindle at his fire, and throw back his epithets with interest in his face? This is brutish. It is the stupid ox kicking everything that pricks him, and being doubly lacerated for his pains. It is my business and my interest to take good for myself out of another's evil. The good is there, and there is a way of extracting it. The most unmannerly scold that ever came from an unbridled tongue may have its filth precipitated and turned into a precious ointment, as the sewage of a city, instead of damaging the people's health, may as a fertilizer become the reduplicator of the people's food. The process is difficult, but when skilfully performed it produces a large return. When Shimei basely cursed David in his distress, the counsel of a rude warrior was, "Let me go over and take off his head." This was merely a brutish instinct—the beam that lay not on the solid, rebounding, by the law of its nature, to the blow. But the king had been getting the good of his great affliction. At that moment he had

wisdom, and therefore he got more. He recognised a heavenly Father's hand far behind the foul tongue of Shimei: he felt that the rebuke, though cruelly given, contained salutary truth. He occupied himself not with the falsehood that was in it in order to blame the reprover, but with the truth that was in it in order to get humbling for himself "Let him alone," said the fallen monarch, meekly; "let him alone and let him curse, for the Lord hath bidden him." Here is wisdom. It is wise to receive correction from God, although it come through an unworthy instrument. Although the immediate agent meant it for evil, our Father in heaven, can make it work for good.

LXXV.

A HUSBAND'S CROWN.

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

WOMAN's place is important; God has made it so, and made her fit for filling it. Man is incomplete without her; there is a blank about him which she alone can fill; it is here that her great strength lies. When she assumes an independent or rival place, she mistakes her mission and her power. Man, though made for the throne of the world, was found unfit for the final investiture until he got woman as a help. She became the completion of his capacity and title—she became his crown. Let woman ever be content with the place that God has given her; let her be what He made her, necessary to man, and not attempt to make herself independent of him. In her own place, her power has hardly a limit in human affairs; out of it, her efforts only rack herself and reveal her weakness. Elsewhere in this book we learn that "a gracious woman retaineth honour, and strong men retain riches." The comparison intimates that what strength is to man in maintaining his wealth, grace is to woman for securing her position and influence. This is a finger-post directing woman in her weakness to the place where her great strength lies. If there be the fear of the Lord as a foundation, with wisdom, truth, love, and gentleness rising gracefully upon it, a queenly

power is there. The winsome will win her way. Without the trappings of royalty, she will acquire the homage of a neighbourhood. The adaptation of the feminine character to be the companion and complement of man is one of the best defined examples of that designing wisdom which pervades creation. When the relations of the sexes move in fittings of truth and love, the working of the complicated machinery of life is a wonder to an observing man, and a glory to the Creator God.

But what horrid contrast have we here, like the echo of a glad song given back transformed into despairing wails from some pit of darkness; "she that maketh ashamed is as rottenness in his bones!" We need not be surprised by this announcement. It is according to law; the best things abused become the worst. The picture is an appalling one, but it is taken from life.

In many ways woman, when she is not virtuous, makes man ashamed. When she is slovenly and uncleanly in her person and her house; thoughtless and spendthrift in the management of her means; gaudy and expensive in her tastes for herself and her children; company-keeping, gipping, tale-bearing; quarrelsome with neighbours or servants; discontented, querulous, taunting, at home; and last of all (for what abounds in the world should go down on this page, though it be a noisome thing), drunken: when in these or in other of its legion forms, the unclean spirit possesses woman, he contrives thereby to penetrate everywhere, and to poison all. Woman is the very element of home, wherein all its relations and affections live and move. When that element is tainted, corruption

spreads over all its breadth, and, sinks into its core. It spreads shame on the husband's countenance, and infuses rottenness into his bones.

God did not take from among the creatures any help for man that came to hand, but made one meet for him. The Maker of all things took the measure of man's need, and constituted woman a suitable complement. This is God's part, and His work, in as far as it bears yet the mark of His hand, is very good. Every man on his part should seek an individual "help," "meet" for his own individual need. On that choice interests of unspeakable magnitude depend for time and eternity; he who makes it corruptly or lightly is courting misery, and dallying with doom. It is not in man that walketh to direct this step of his life; those who seek direction from above will be sure to find it. Our Father loves to be consulted in this great life-match for his children, and they who ask His advice will not be sent away without it. If men were duly impressed with the vastness of the interests involved in the transaction, that alone would go far to bear them steadily through. Let a man remember that woman, by constitutional character, goes into all, like water. She should be clean who plies so close. Let a young man know, while he is adjusting the balance of this momentous choice, what are the alternatives that depend on either side, and the weight of them will do much to keep his hand steady and his eyesight clear. In that act he is either setting a crown on his own head, or infusing rottenness into his own bones.

LXXVI.

THE TENDER MERCIES OF THE WICKED.

"A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast:
but the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel."—xii. 10.

CONSISTENT kindness to brute creatures is one of the marks by which a really merciful man is known. When the pulse of kindness beats strong in the heart, the warm stream is sent clean through the body of the human family, and retains force enough to expatiate among the living creatures that lie beyond. The gentleness of Christ is one beauty of the Lord, which should be seen on Christians. Over against this lovely light, according to the usual form of the proverb, yawns the counter-part darkness, habitation of horrid cruelty. Cruelty is a characteristic of the wicked in general, and in particular of antichrist, that one, wicked by pre-eminence, whom Christ shall yet destroy by the brightness of his coming. By their fruits ye shall know them. The page of history is spotted with the cruelties of papal Rome. The red blood upon his garments is generally the means of discovering a murderer. The trailing womanish robes of the papal high priest are deeply stained with the blood of saints. The same providence which employs the bloody tinge to detect the common murderer has left more lasting marks of Rome's cruelty. The Bartholomew massacre, for example, is recorded in more enduring charac-

ters than the stains of that blood which soaked the soil of France. By the accounts of those who did the deed, and favour Rome, 30,000; according to other estimates, 100,000 Protestants were slain. Such were the heaps, in some places, that they could not be counted. The Pope and his cardinals greatly rejoiced when they heard the news. So lively was their gratitude, that they cast a medal to record it on. There stands the legend, raised in brass and silver, "Strages Huguenotorum" (the slaughter of the Huguenots), in perpetual memory of the delight wherewith that wicked antichrist regarded the greatest, foulest butchery of men by their fellows that this sin-cursed earth has ever seen. That spot will not out by all their washings. That monument, reared by the murderer's own hands, exhibits to the world now a faithful specimen of his tender mercies, and will remain to identify the criminal at the coming of the Judge. "Blessed are the merciful." A curse lies on the cruel ever since Cain shed his brother's blood.

LXXXVII.

LIES, THE SNARE THAT LIARS ARE
CAUGHT IN.

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

THE Supreme has set many snares, in the constitution of things, for the detection and punishment of evil doers. The wicked are continually trailing into them, and suffering. The liar's own tongue betrays him. In some of its movements, ere he is aware, it touches the spring which brings down the avenging stroke. It is instructive to read with this view the detailed account of a criminal trial. In the faltering and fall of a false witness, you should see and reverence the righteousness of God. The first lie must be defended by a second, and that by a third. As the line of his defences grows in length, it grows in weakness. His fear and labour increase at every step. He is compelled at every question to consider what truth is like, and imitate it in lies. Ere long, when he is crossing his own path, he falls into a lie that he had left and forgotten there; he falls, and flounders, like a wild beast in a snare. When a man is not true, the great labour of his life must be to make himself appear true; but if a man be true, he need not concern himself about appearances. He may go forward, and tread boldly; his footing will be sure. Matters are so

arranged, in the constitution of the world, that the straight course of truth is safe and easy; the crooked path of falsehood difficult and tormenting. Here is perennial evidence that the God of providence is wise and true. By making lies a snare to catch liars in, the Author of being proclaims, even in the voices of nature, that he "requireth truth in the inward parts." All the labour of swindlers to dress up their falsehood, so as to make it look like truth, is Satan's unwilling homage to the true God. It is counted a glory to the Lord when his enemies feign submission unto Him (Psalm lxxxi. 15).

"The just shall come out of trouble;" that is the word; it is not said that he will never fall into it. The inventory which Jesus gives of what his disciples shall have "now in this time," although it contains many things that nature loves, closes with the article "persecutions" (Mark x. 30). The recorded description, "these are they who have come out of great tribulation," belongs alike to all the redeemed of the Lord, when they come to Zion. These, who wave their palms of victory, and sing their jubilant hymns of praise, were all in the horrible pit once: they were held helpless by its miry clay, until the Mighty One lifted them up, and set their feet upon a rock, and established their goings.

LXXVIII.

HOPE DEFERRED.

"Hope deferred maketh the heart sick:
but when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life."—xiii. 12.

THE rule, as expressed in the first clause, is universal; but in the second clause it is applied to a particular case. Hope deferred makes the heart sick, whether the person hoping, and the thing hoped for, be good or evil. Thus far one thing happens to all. But the second member is a dividing word. The accomplishment of the desire "is a tree of life." This belongs only to the hope of the holy. Many, after waiting long, and expecting eagerly, discover, when at last they reach their object, that it is a withered branch, and not a living tree. When a human heart has been set on perishable things, after the sickness of deferred expectation, comes the sorer sickness of satiated possession. If the world be made the portion of an immortal spirit, to want it is one sickness, and to have it is another. The one is a hungry mouth empty, and the other a hungry mouth filled with chaff. The cloy of disappointed possession is a more nauseous sickness than the aching of disappointed desire.

There is no peace to the wicked. They are all always either desiring or possessing; but to desire and to possess a perishable portion, are only two different kinds of misery to men. They are like the troubled sea, when it

cannot rest. You stand on the shore, and gaze on the restless waters. A wave is hastening on, struggling, and panting, and making with all its might for the shore. It seems as if all it wanted was to reach the land. It reaches the land, and disappears in a hiss of discontent. Gathering its strength at a distance, it tries again, and again, with the same result. It is never satisfied: it never rests. In the constitution of the world, under the government of the most Holy, when a soul's desire is set on unworthy objects, the accomplishment of the desire does not satisfy the soul. In the case here supposed, however, the desire must be pure, for the attainment of it is found to be a tree of life: it is living, satisfying, enduring. It has a living root in the ground, and satisfying fruit upon its branches.

Those who were enlightened by the Spirit before the incarnation, looked in faith, through the sacrifices, for Jesus; and they beheld his day, but it was afar off. They longed for Christ's coming as those that wait for the morning. While they waited for redemption in Israel, hope deferred made their hearts sick; but they waited on. Their desire, the Desire of all nations, came. The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among them, and they beheld his glory. That desire satisfied did not pall upon their taste. It was enough. "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation" (Luke ii. 29, 30).

The same experience is repeated in the personal history of disciples now. When a hungering for righteousness secretly rises in a human heart, the blessing is already

sure; but it is not enjoyed yet. The hungerer "shall be filled;" but in the meantime, his only experience is an uneasy sensation of want. The craving of that appetite, while yet it is not satisfied, is a painful thing. The heart is sick of that love. Far-seeing friends delight to observe the symptoms of that sickness beginning in a youth, not for the sake of the suffering, but because of the glad enlargement to which it leads. In God's good time that desire will be satisfied. That longing soul will taste and see that the Lord is gracious. The peace of God which passeth all understanding will come in and keep that heart and mind.

In the tumults of these latter days, some earnest spirits greatly long for the second coming of the Lord. Their hope has been deferred, and their hearts are sick; but "when the Desire cometh"—and He shall come without sin unto salvation—the sorrow will no more be remembered in the joy of their Lord. To them that look for Him he will appear, and his coming will be like the morning. This "Tree of life"—the redeemed of the Lord, when they come to Zion, shall sit under His shadow with great delight, and the days of their mourning shall be ended. "The Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and lead them unto living fountains of waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

LXXIX.

GOD'S WORD THE PRESERVER OF NATIONS.

“Whoso despiseth the word shall be destroyed:
but he that feareth the commandment shall be rewarded.”—xiii. 13.

THIS word has a private and personal, as well as a public application; but it is in the providential government of the nations that its truth has been most conspicuously displayed. The kingdoms of the world in these days prosper or pine in proportion as they honour or despise God's word. Show me a land where the Bible is degraded and interdicted, and I will show you a land whose history is written in blood and tears. Show me a land where the Bible is valued and spread, and I will show you a country prosperous and free. Number the nations over one by one, and see where property is valuable and life secure; mark the places where you would like to invest your means and educate your family; you will shun some of the sunniest climes of earth, as if they lay under a polar night, because the light of the truth has been taken from their sky. Traverse the world in search of merely human good, seeking but an earthly home, and your tent, like Abraham's, will certainly be pitched at "the place of the altar." Scotland is a kindlier home than Connaught. The Irish Papist abjures the Bible as an unintelligible or dangerous book, and implicitly submits to the spiritual guidance of his priest: the British

Protestant holds God's word in his hand, at once the standard of his teacher's doctrine, and the rule of his own life. Hence chiefly the difference, moral and material, between the two peoples. They who despise the word are a prostrate race. A nation of beggars starves at our doors, on an island that might become a garden. The map of the world is sufficient evidence that God is, and that He has revealed his will to men.

This country has been preserved safe in many convulsions, while others have been rent asunder. It has grown great, while others have wasted. It has been gradually growing more free, while other nations are robbed of their liberty, or retain it at the price of their blood. We should know Who makes us to differ, and what. The Bible has made us what we are; it is dark ingratitude to despise or neglect it. It is often observed that when a man rises in the world, he no longer knows the person by whom he rose. This is the mark of a low ungenerous mind. Symptoms not a few of this vulgar vice may be seen in high places of our own land. The preserved do not care to know their Preserver. A summer tour on the Continent is not a sufficient lesson. The power of Britain shields her subject during his travels, and the iron of Popish despotism does not enter into his soul. But a year of subjection to Italian rule, such as the Italians feel it, would teach politicians a truth which they are slow to learn. They might discover the worth of the Bible as the preserver of liberty, if they felt the want of it.

LXXX.

THE HARD WAY.

"The way of transgressors is hard." —xiii. 15.

Is not the way of transgressors pleasant in its progress, though it ends in death? No. Sin barter away future safety, but does not secure present peace in return. Things are not always as they seem to be. The pleasures of sin are not only limited in their duration, they are lies even while they last. They are "for a season" as to endurance, and for a show as to their character. There is a bitterness in the transgressor's heart, which only that heart can know. The man in the gospel history, who wore no clothes, and lived among the tombs, did not lead a happy life. The rocky, thorny grave-yard was a hard bed, and the dewy night air a cold covering for the naked man; but such was his will, or the will of the spirit that possessed him. It was the man's pleasure to take that way, but the way was hard. It is so still, and ever will be, for all whom the same spirit leads. It has neither the promise of the life that now is, nor of that which is to come. The race is torture, and the goal perdition. "Destruction and misery are in their paths, and the way of peace have they not known." Here is a glory of God reflected from the experience of men. It is far-seeing mercy that makes the way of transgressors hard. Its hardness warns the traveller to

turn that he may live. Two mechanics work side by side all day, and receive equal wages at night. One goes home when his toil is over, and rests in the bosom of his own family, enjoying doubly all that he has won, because he shares it with those who love him there: the other having no home to love, or no love to home, goes into a public-house, and remains there as long as his money lasts. Late at night he is driven to the street, penniless, hungry, and without a friend. He falls at every turn. His clothes are besmeared with mud; his bones are bruised; his face streams with blood. In pity for his misery, rather than in vengeance for his crime, the officers of justice drag or carry him to a prison cell, and lay him on its floor till morning. The man followed the way of transgressors, and he has found it hard. Day by day his body is bruised and torn on the rugged sides of that crooked path; and yet he will not forsake it. If any one inquire after the name of this foul spirit, we answer, his name is Legion, for they are many.

Nor is this the only crooked path that tears the feet of the wretched passenger: they are all hard however widely they diverge from each other--all that diverge from the line of righteousness. In some of them, the hardness is an iron that entereth into the soul, rather than the body, and therefore the wounds are not so palpable to others. The pain is not on that account, however, less pungent to the sufferer. "A wounded spirit, who can bear?"

But the right way is not a soft and silky path for the

foot of man to tread upon; and, if one thing happens to all in the journey of life, what advantage have the good? Much every way, and specifically thus: The hardness which disciples experience in following the Lord, is righteousness rubbing on their remaining lusts, and so wasting their deformities away; whereas the hardness of a transgressor's way is the carnal mind, in its impotent enmity, dashing itself against the bosses of the Almighty's buckler. The one is a strainer, made strait to purge the impurities away, through which the purified emerges into peace; the other is the vengeance which belongeth unto God, beginning even here to repay. The stroke of discipline under which a pilgrim smarts, as he travels towards Zion, is an excellent oil which will not break his head. The collision between transgressors and the law of God, hardens the impenitent for completer destruction at the final fall. As the pains of cure differ from the pains of killing, so differs the salutary straitness which presses the entrants at the gate of life, from the hardness which hurts transgressors while they flee from God.

LXXXI.

THE CHOICE OF COMPANIONS.

"He that walketh with wise men shall be wise:
but a companion of fools shall be destroyed.—xiii. 20.

LOVE of company is a steady instinct of the young. This tendency performs a great part in the economy of human life. Like many other forces under the control of a free moral agent, it is mighty for good or evil, according to the direction in which it is turned. It is the nature of certain plants, while they strike their own independent roots into the ground for life, to twist their tendrils round other trees for support to their branches. To this species in the animal department of creation belong the young of human kind. Physically, the organization of each individual is separate and complete, but morally they interweave themselves into others; so that, though the growth of their bodies is independent, the cast of their characters is largely affected by the companions to whom they cling. At this point, therefore, there is room and need for much prayer, and watchfulness, and effort both by and for the generation that is now tender, and taking the form of any mould that closes round and presses it.

The principle of reciprocal attraction and repulsion pervades all nature, both in its material and spiritual departments. Your character goes far to determine

the company that you will keep, and the company that you keep goes far to mould your character. But while these two are hanging in the balance, it is the place and prerogative of man, for himself or his brother, to rush in and lay his hand upon the scales, and cast a makeweight into the side of safety. By the warnings of God's word, and the lessons of our own experience, we know before they begin what the end of certain companionships will be. The awful end is opened up to make us fear the beginning.

Your heart takes to a companion who has been accidentally thrown in your way. You should not yield to that inclination merely because it works within you. The beasts that perish do so, and therein they never err. They associate with their kind, and are never corrupted by the company that they keep. Their instincts are perfect as they come from the Creator's hands. It is safe to trust them. But there is a bias to evil in a human heart. It must be watched and thwarted, if we would avoid error now and escape perdition at last. It is not for us to let our hearts have their own way in the selection of companions. On that choice depend interests too great to be safely left to chance. The issue to be decided is not what herd you shall graze with a few years before your spirit return to the dust; but what moral element you shall move in during the few and evil days of life, till your spirit return to God who gave it. I like this companion; he fascinates me; I cannot want him; an enforced separation would be like tearing myself asunder. Well, if that companion's heart be godless, and his

steps already slipping backward and downward, why not tear yourself asunder? The act will be painful, no doubt; but "skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life." Your soul's life depends on that painful act. It is better that you enter into life maimed of that member, than that your tempter and you should perish together. In this way the young are put to the test, whether they will obey Christ's word or no. On this side there are right arms to be cut off, and right eyes to be plucked out. Young men and women, God and all the good are looking on, and watching to see whether you will throw off the chain of charms by which brilliant but wandering stars have led you, and cling to the skirts of the meek and lowly, who follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth.

"He that walketh with the wise shall be wise." If he is wise he will walk with them, and to walk with them will make him wiser. To him that hath wisdom to choose the wise as his companions shall be given more wisdom, through their converse and example. Such is the blessed progress in the path of life, when fellow travellers towards Zion help each other on; but, alas! what of him who "hath not" any wisdom to begin with? Let him who lacks wisdom ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not. God takes peculiar delight in granting this request, when it comes up in earnest simplicity from the needy. Wisdom from above will be given to them that ask it for the purpose of selecting safe companions. No one, it may be safely affirmed, ever made this request in simplicity to God, and came away without an answer.

No; when people cling to unprofitable and dangerous associates, it is because they take what they like without asking counsel of God, not because they asked counsel and failed to obtain it. This dashing, clever youth makes sport of serious things and serious persons. He quotes a text so dexterously, that the gravest of the circle are surprised into laughter. He sings merrily, and perhaps drinks deeply. He affects to be skilled in the mysteries of vice, and kindles the curiosity of a novice by knowing hints, which seem to leave the most untold. Here is a fool who will probably entice some to be his companions. Before the bargain be struck, while this leader and his dupes are arranging the terms of his lead and their following, a voice bursts out above them—"The companion of fools shall be destroyed." It is God's voice; He speaks in mercy; hear ye Him. "Forsake the foolish and live."

LXXXII.

THE FATHER WHO HATES HIS SON.

"He that spareth his rod hateth his son." —xiii. 24.

You indulge your child and do not correct him: you permit selfishness, and envy, and anger to encrust themselves, by successive layers, thicker and thicker on his character: you beseech him not to be naughty, but never enforce your injunction by a firm application of the rod; and you think the fault, if it be a fault, is a very trivial one: perhaps you appropriate to yourself a measure of blame for loving your child too much. Nay, brother; be not deceived; call things by their right names. Beware of the woe denounced against those who call evil good. You do not love, you hate your child.

Love is a good name, and hate a bad one. Every one likes to take to himself a good name, whether he deserve it or not. To love one's own child, even though that love should run to excess, is counted amiable: to hate the child in any measure, is reckoned the part of a monster. In order to keep a fair character before the world, a deceitful heart so shuffles in secret the two things, that while hate is the real character of the deed, its outward appearance shall be love.

It is obvious to any careful observer of human nature, that even blame is pleasant to indulgent parents, when it is the blame of loving their own children too much. They

swallow the soft reproof as a luscious flattery. The scripture deals with them in another way. It does not gratify them by the soft impeachment of excess in parental love. It roundly asserts that they have no love at all. It comes down upon them abruptly with the charge of hating the child.

Sparing the rod is the specific act, or habit, which is charged against the parent, as being equivalent to hating his son. The child begins to act the tyrant. He is cruel where he has power, and sulky where he has not. He is rude, overbearing, untruthful. These and kindred vices are distinctly forming on his life, and growing with his growth. The matter is reported to the father, and the same things are done in his presence. He tells the child to do better, and dismisses him with caresses. This process is frequently repeated. The child discovers that he can transgress with impunity. The father threatens sometimes, but punishes never. The child grows rapidly worse. By the certainty of escaping, acting in concert with a corrupt nature, the habit of intentional evildoing is formed and confirmed. All the while this father takes and gets the credit of being, if not a very wise, at least a very loving parent. No it is mere prostitution of that hallowed name to apply it to such ignoble selfishness. Love, though very soft, is also very strong. It will not give way before slight obstacles. To sacrifice self is of its very essence. If it be in you, it will quickly make your own ease give way for the good of its object. When a father gives the child all his own way, yielding more, the more he frets, until the child finds out that he can get

anything by imperiously demanding it, he yields not from love to his child, but from loathsome love of ease to himself. It is a low animal laziness that will not allow its own oily surface to be ruffled even to save a son. If there were real love, it would be strong enough to endure the pain of refusing to comply with improper demands, and chastening for intentional or persistent wrong-doing. Parents who are in the habit of giving their children what they ask, and permitting them to disobey without chastisement, may read their own character in this verse of scripture. Such a father "hateth his son:" that is the word. To call it love is one of Satan's lies. It is unmingled selfishness. The man who gravely tells his child what is wrong, and, if the wrong is repeated, sternly chastens him,—that man really loves his child, and sacrifices his own ease for the child's highest good. It is enough to break one's heart to think how many young people are thrown off the rails at some unexpected turn of life by the momentum of their own impetuosity, for want of a father's firm hand to apply in time the necessary break. We need a manful, hardy love—a love that will bear and do to the uttermost for all the interests of its object

Let it be remembered here, however, that every blow dealt by a father's hand is not parental chastening. To strike right and left against children, merely because you are angry and they are weak, is brutish in its character and mischievous in its effects. A big dog bites a little one who offends him: what do ye more than they? Never once should a hand be laid upon a child in the hasty im-

pulse of anger. The Koh-I-Noor diamond, when it came into the Queen's possession, was a misshapen lump. It was very desirable to get its corners cut off, and all its sides reduced to symmetry: but no unskilful hand was permitted to touch it. Men of science were summoned to consider its nature and its capabilities. They examined the form of its crystals and the consistency of its parts. They considered the direction of the grain, and the side on which it would bear a pressure. With their instructions, the jewel was placed in the hands of an experienced lapidary, and by long, patient, careful labour, its sides were grinded down to the desired proportions. The gem was hard, and needed a heavy pressure: the gem was precious, and every precaution was taken which science and skill could suggest to get it polished into shape without cracking it in the process. The effort was successful. The hard diamond was rubbed down into forms of beauty, and yet sustained no damage by the greatness of the pressure to which it was subjected.

"Jewels, bright jewels," in the form of little children, are the heritage which God gives to every parent. They are unshapely, and need to be polished; they are hard, and cannot be reduced into symmetry without firm handling; they are brittle, and so liable to be permanently damaged by the pressure; but they are stones of peculiar preciousness, and if they were successfully polished they would shine as stars for ever and ever, giving off from their undimming edge, more brilliantly than other creatures can, the glory which they get from

the Sun of righteousness. Those who possess these diamonds in the rough should neither strike them unskillfully, nor let them lie uncut.

This boy placed in the dock before you, with his clothes torn, and his hair dishevelled, with an air of penitence put on, over a purpose of more mischief that gleams through the awkward covering, just one minute after your last lecture, has been caught up to the ears in another scrape. What is to be done with him? You have tried severity, and tried gentleness. All is in vain. He waxes worse in your hands. Do with him as the infant-school rhyme enjoins you, "try, try, try again." Don't let him alone, for he is all unshapely, and in this form he will have no loveliness in the sight of God or man. Don't strike rashly, for in one moment you may start a rent of hatred and discontent through and through a soul that no after discipline will ever obliterate. Cautiously, firmly, perseveringly, lovingly, polish away at your jewel. Get a right estimate of its value impressed upon your heart, and you will not give up in despair, although you have made many unsuccessful efforts. The work is difficult, but the prize is great. If he is won, he is won to himself, and to you, and to society, and to God.

While there should be a strong manly love to wield the rod firmly, there should also be a far seeing wisdom to judge, in view of all the circumstances, whether and when the rod should be applied. A parent must study carefully both his child's character and his own. If his own nature be now rigid, and incapable of going into

sympathy with the impetuous playfulness of robust youth, he may with the best intention fall into a fatal mistake. He may chasten for that which is not a fault, and so crack the temper of his child for life. We must learn to measure the instincts of boyhood, and make allowance for the muscular exercise, amounting almost to perpetual motion, which nature demands. Love will give ample room for the effervescence of a buoyant spirit; but, when it has separated so widely between sportiveness and sin, it will then all the more bring down the rod with the certainty and severity of a law of nature, for every discovered, definite, wilful wickedness. If a father on earth be like our Father in heaven, judgment will be his "strange work." Do not resort to it often, but let it be real when it comes.

I am disposed to set a high value on, not only the general principles of Scripture regarding this subject, but also its specific precepts. I would limit with jealous apprehension the application of the rule about duty changing with the change of circumstances. The only thing that I would leave open to be modified by circumstances is the mere instrument wherewith the chastening is administered. By all means let "rod" stand as a generic term, and under it let the most convenient implement be used; but the spirit of the text is abandoned, as well as the letter, when a parent abjures corporal chastisement altogether, and trusts exclusively to moral means. There is indeed no virtue in bodily pain to heal a moral ailment; it depends on the adaptation of punishment in kind and measure to the particular form of the

child's waywardness. If a child so act as seldom to need the rod, or never, then seldom or never let the rod be applied; but beware of determining and proclaiming beforehand that you will not in any case resort to corporal chastisement, lest you be setting up your wisdom against the law of the Lord.

I have heard of some educators who, in public assembly, with much pomp and circumstance, cut the tawse in a hundred pieces, and scattered the fragments in the wind, proclaiming, by way of contrast, the reign of love. There is more of quackery under this than the benevolent performers suspected. It is a shallow mistake. The rod and love are not antagonist. It is not necessary to banish the one in order to submit to the reign of the other. Love keeps the rod, and lifts it too, and lays it on when needful. This is the very triumph of true love, over a spurious imitation. When a father puts forth his strength to hold the struggling victim, and applies the rod, although every stroke thrills through his own heart, this is love such as God commands and approves. Our Father in heaven chastens every child whom He loves, and does not spare for their crying. Genuine parental love on earth is an imitation of His own.

Although it is an important rule not to trifle with this work when it is begun, yet the effect does not depend on the number or weight of the blows. The result is determined more by the side on which the force is applied, than by the mere magnitude of the force. The stroke in which the operator suffers more than he inflicts, powerfully impels the child in the direction which you approve,

but spurts of selfish anger drive him the other way. It is like admitting steam into the cylinder of an engine: if you admit it on this side, the machine goes forward; if you admit on that side, the machine goes backward. One characteristic mark of genuine love is to chasten a child "betimes." To do it early is both easiest and best. It is, cruel to let your son grow up without the correction which he needs. If you who love him do not bend him while he is a child, those who do not love him will break him after he has become a man.

The word is specifically "son," and not generally "child." There is a reason for this selection of terms. Although there may be here and there individual exceptions, the common rule is that boys are more stubborn than girls. In proportion to the hardness of the subject, must be the heaviness of the blow. The child must be subdued into obedience at whatever cost. This is the most important of a parent's practical duties in life. He should not permit any other business to push it aside into a secondary place. The boy is your richest treasure, and should be your chief care. He is the greatest talent which the Master has placed in your hands; lay it out well, even though other things should be neglected. Exert all the wisdom and foresight and firmness that you can command in the cultivation of this field, no other will yield a return so sure or so satisfying.

Prayer and pains must go together in this difficult work. Lay the whole case before our Father in heaven: this will take the hardness out of the correction, without diminishing its strength.

LXXXIII.

SECULARISM.

"A scorner seeketh wisdom and findeth it not:
but knowledge is easy unto him that understandeth."—xiv. 6.

IT is the constant profession of those who reject the Bible that they are seeking truth. Their likeness is taken here from life. They seek wisdom, but do not find it. They want the first qualification of a philosopher, a humble and teachable spirit.

There is a race of men, amongst us at the present day who scorn bitterly against faith's meek submission to God's revealed will. They desire to be free from authority. The papist, they say, submits to the authority of the church, and the protestant to the authority of the Bible. They count these only different forms of superstition, and cast off with equal earnestness both the bonds. They make a man's own feelings the supreme judge to that man of right and wrong, good and evil. The divinity, as they phrase it, is in every man; which means that every man is a god unto himself. It is, in its essence, a reproduction of the oldest rebellion. A creature, discontented with the place which his Maker has given him, strives to make himself a god.

If men really were independent beings, it would be right to assert and proclaim their independence; but as matters really stand, this desperate kicking against

authority becomes the exposure of weakness, and the punishment of pride. We are not our own cause and our own end; we are not our own lords. We are in the hands of our Maker, and under the law of our Judge. Our only safety lies in submission to the rightful authority, and obedience to the true law. The problem for man is, not to reject all masters, but to accept the rightful One.

Those who scorn the wisdom from above, seek laboriously for the wisdom that is beneath. The name "secularist" is adopted to indicate that they appreciate and study the knowledge that concerns the present world, and repudiate as unattainable, or useless, all knowledge that pertains to another. People sometimes lose their way in words as they do in mist; and then very vulgar objects seem mighty castles looming in the darkness. Let it be known, and remembered, that "secularism" is the Latin for *this-world-ism*, and means, attend to the world that you are now in, and let the next alone. Perhaps this translation of the name into English may help us to take the measure of the thing signified. Before we adopt this philosophy we must be sure that there is no immortality for man. For, if there be another world, obviously our course here will affect our condition there, and the view that we take of eternity will decisively influence our path over time. Granting even, that it is this world with which men have now to do, our present view of the world to come exerts a supreme control over the whole course of our conduct, and every step of our life. It is by faith in the unseen that men steer through this shifting sea of time. Cut us off from the future, and you have left the ship without

a chart, and without a star; without a compass to steer by, and without a harbour to steer for; you have left the ship an aimless meaningless log lying on the water, to be tossed up and down by the waves, and driven hither and thither by the winds, until it fall asunder or sink unseen.

These seekers of knowledge, who limit their search to the earth on which they tread, profess great zeal in the question of education. I am not aware that they do more in the work of education than others, but they say loudly, and oft, that the young of the nation should be educated according to their views. Children in the public schools, they say, should be thoroughly trained in secular knowledge, and religious dogmas should be left untouched. The public schoolmaster should be entirely neutral on the subject of religion. He should give no judgment for or against any of its doctrines. Verily, these men seek knowledge, and find it not. After all their efforts to learn, they are not yet very wise. They prescribe to the schoolmaster a task that is palpably impossible. Revealed religion has touched the world, and been the turning point of its history in all ages. The Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, claiming as they do to be the inspired record of God's will, have in point of fact influenced the conduct and history of mankind more than all other books together. Jesus of Nazareth was, through the unwilling instrumentality of the Roman, put to death by the Jewish priesthood, because he made Himself equal with God; and this event has done more to cast the civilized world into its present mould, than any or all the revolutions of kingdoms since the beginning of time. How

is the teacher to dispose of that book, and that event, in his complete course of secular instruction? Must he teach history and leave these things out of it? He may as well teach the elements of Euclid, omitting all the capital letters; he may as well weave without a warp, as exhibit the kingdoms of this world, without taking notice of the kingdom of God, and of his Christ. The religion of Christ has grasped the world, and penetrated human history through and through. If you exclude these topics, your disciple comes out of your hands a barbarian; and if you introduce them, you are compelled to take a side. For or against, Christ the teacher must be, and the scholar too. God has, in providence, not left it possible simply to pass the Bible by without letting it be known whether you believe it or not. The question, "What think ye of Christ?" was of old pressed upon the Jews, though they desired rather not to commit themselves to an answer; and by the same sovereign Lord, who rules over all, it is in these latter days pressed upon men so as to force an answer out of them whether they will, or be unwilling. No man can teach the history and condition of this world without indicating expressly, or by implication, whether he counts Jesus of Nazareth a blasphemer, or the Son of God. No man can be in this world without accepting or rejecting Christ's claim to be the Redeemer of his soul, and the sovereign of his life. Such have been the effects of the Bible, and such is the place of Christ among men, that we must take a side. The decision cannot be avoided; all depends on making it aright. The liberty of having no Lord over the conscience is not competent to man. Sub-

mission absolute to the living God, as revealed in the Mediator, is at once the best liberty that could be, and the only liberty that is.

In these days, when the pendulum is often seen swinging from scepticism over to superstition, and from superstition back to scepticism again, we would do well to remember that there is truth between these extremes, and that in truth alone lies safety for all the interests of men. We must beware of confounding two questions that are totally distinct—the existence of truth, and our perception of it. Although all the men that live on the earth should awake to-morrow blind, that would not prove that the sun had ceased to shine. It is fashionable in high places to laud religious indifference, and stigmatize as bigotry all earnest belief. This is a great mistake. They who fall into it cannot read even profane history aright. Let politicians learn to apply the grand test, "By their fruits ye shall know them." To believe nothing will produce as rank intolerance as to believe all the legends of Rome. Look to the history of modern Europe, and you will see that those who believed all dogmas and those who rejected all are equally stained with the blood of the saints, and have equally impeded the progress of men. To have no belief; and to believe a lie, are seeds that bear only bitter fruits. The conceit of the sceptic that outside of himself there is no truth to believe in, projects into human life only an empty shadow of liberty; but if He who is the truth "make you free, ye shall be free indeed."

I see two men near each other prostrate on the ground and bleeding, while one man stands between them, with

serenest aspect, looking to the skies: who and what are these? The two prostrate forms are Superstition and Unbelief. Superstition bowed down to worship his idol, and cut his flesh with stones to atone for his soul's sin. Unbelief scorned to be confined, like an inferior creature, to the earth, and was ever leaping up in the hope of standing on the stars. Exhausted by his efforts, he fell, and the fall bruised him, so that he lay as low as the neighbour whom he despised. He who stands between them neither bowed himself to the ground, nor attempted to scale the heavens. He neither degraded himself beneath a man's place, nor attempted to raise himself above it. He abode on earth, but he stood erect there. He did not proudly profess to be, but meekly sought to find God. This man understands his place and feels his need; to him therefore knowledge is easy. To him that hath shall be given. He has the beginning of wisdom, and he will reach in good time its glad consummation. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom."

LXXXIV.

FLIGHT, THE SAFETY OF THE WEAK.

"Go from the presence of a foolish man,
when thou perceived not in him the lips of knowledge." —xiv. 7.

IN nature some creatures are strong and bold, having both instincts and instruments for combat: other creatures are feeble but fleet. It is the intention of their Maker that they should seek safety, not in fighting but in fleeing. It would be a fatal mistake if the hare, in a fit of bravery, should turn and face her pursuers. In the moral conflict of human life it is of great importance to judge rightly when we should fight and when we should flee. The weak might escape if they knew their own weakness, and kept out of harm's way. That courage is not a virtue which carries the feeble into the lion's jaws. I have known of some who ventured too far with the benevolent purpose of bringing a victim out, and were themselves sucked in and swallowed up. To go in among the foolish for the rescue of the sinking may be necessary, but it is dangerous work, and demands robust workmen.

The ordinary rule is, "go from the presence of a foolish man:" "forsake the foolish and live" (ix. 6). Your first duty is your own safety. But on some persons at some times there lies the obligation to encounter danger for the safety of a neighbour. Man is made his brother's keeper. It is neither the inclination nor the duty of a

good man to be among the profane or profligate, but he sometimes recognises the call of God to go in among them for the purpose of pulling a brand from the burning. The specific instruction recorded in scripture for such a case is, "save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh" (Jude 23). He who would volunteer for this saving work must "save with fear"—fear lest the victim perish ere he get him dragged out, and fear lest himself be scorched by the flame. We often hear of a miner going down a shaft to save a brother who has been choked by foul air at the bottom. It is a work of mercy: but the worker must beware; if he linger too long in the deadly atmosphere of the pit, instead of saving his neighbour, himself will share his fate. There may be—there ought to be an effort made to lay yourself along the drunken, the licentious, the profane, and so bear them out into safety: but it should be a rush in and a rush out again. When one begins to dally in the place of danger he is gone. When your earnest interference is resisted, fall back upon the rule of scripture: "go from the presence of the foolish," lest your soul be polluted by contact with their blasphemy or vice.

LXXXV.

SYMPATHY.

"The heart knoweth his own bitterness;
and a stranger doth not intermeddle with his joy."—xiv. 10.

THE two extreme experiences of a human heart, which comprehend all others between them, are "bitterness" and "joy." The solitude of a human being in either extremity is a sublime and solemnizing thought. Whether you are glad or grieved, you must be alone. The bitterness and the joyfulness are both your own. It is only in a modified sense, and in a limited measure, that you can share them with another, so as to have less of them yourself. We speak of sympathy, and sympathy means community of emotions between two human hearts. Doubtless there is a reality corresponding to that attractive name, but the share which another takes is a thin aerial shadowy thing in comparison with the substantive experience of your own soul. Sympathy between two human beings is, after all, little more than a figure of speech. A physical burden can be divided equally between two. If you, unburdened, overtake a weary pilgrim on the way, toiling beneath a load of a hundred pounds weight, you may volunteer to bear fifty of them for the remaining part of the journey, and so lighten his load by a full half. But a light heart, however willing it may be, cannot so relieve a heavy one. The cares that press upon the spirit are as real as the load that lies on

the back, and as burdensome; but they are not so tangible and divisible. We speak of sharing them by sympathy, and there is some meaning in the words, some reality in the act; but the participation in kind and effect comes far short of the actual partition of material weight. The law of our nature in the last resort is, "Every man must bear his own burden." The weight that falls upon my body may be divided with you, but the weight that falls on my soul must lie all on my soul alone. You may indeed stand beside me, and hold me by the hand, and I may be abler to bear because of your presence and your love, but I alone must bear it all.

There are, indeed, some very intimate unions in human society, as organized by God, and existing even yet in a fallen world. The family relations bring heart into very close contact with heart, and joys or sorrows that abound in one flow freely over into another. The closest of them all, wonderful in name and in nature, the two "no longer twain, but one flesh," is a union of unspeakable value for such sympathy as is compatible with distinct personality at all. But when you estimate this union at its highest value, and take it all into account, there remains a meaning, deep and wide like the ocean, in this one touching word, "the heart knoweth his own bitterness." The wife of your bosom can indeed intermeddle with your joys and sorrows as a stranger cannot do, and yet there are depths of both in your breast which even she has no line to sound. When you step into the waters of life's last sorrow, even she must stand back and remain behind. Each must go forward alone. The Indian *suttee* seems nature's

struggle against that fixed necessity of man's condition. But it is a vain oblation. Although the wife burn on the husband's funeral pile, the frantic deed does not lighten the solitude of the dark valley. One human being cannot be merged in another. Man must accept the separate personality that belongs to his nature. In his relations to duty and to God, no partnership is permitted, no community of goods is possible.

But the isolation of every man from his fellow in the hour of extremity may become the means of pressing the sufferer nearer another companion, who is able even then to remain. "There is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother." Such is the person of Emmanuel, God with us, that the spiritual life of a believer is not a separate existence, but a part of His. As a branch in the vine or a member in the body, so is a disciple in the Lord. The Christian is one with Christ in such a way as no human spirit can be with another. When the fangs of the persecutor vexed the life of his little ones, the pain throbbed that moment in the heart of Jesus. The Head on high cried out when the enemy hurt His member, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" Only Christ's sympathy is real and complete; all other sympathy is but a pleasant image. He who suffered for our sins can make himself partaker of our sorrows. He who went through the wrath of God to make a safe path for his people, is able to keep them company in the swelling of Jordan. Long ago they saw His day, and rejoiced in His perfect sympathy. "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me" (Ps. xxiii. 4).

LXXXVI.

A MAN IS RESPONSIBLE FOR HIS BELIEF.

"There is a way which seemeth right unto a man,
but the end thereof are the ways of death."—xiv. 12.

THE way seems right, but is wrong; and the result accords, not with the false opinion, but with the absolute truth of the case. Its issue in death proves that its direction was erroneous. A tree is known by its fruits, and a life-course by the end to which it leads. A man follows a path which he thinks right, but which really is wrong; if he persist he will perish. This case is of frequent occurrence in the world, both in its material and its moral departments. Your opinion that the path is right does not make it right: your sincerity in that erroneous opinion does not exempt you from its consequences, whether these affect more directly the body or the soul. There is a mercantile company which bulks largely in the public eye, and turns over vast sums, and spreads its agencies widely over the world. You think the concern is solid, and court its alliance. You are accepted; your interests are bound to its fortune, and are ruined in its fall. Your favourable opinion of a hollow pretence did not prevent the loss of your means when the bubble burst. The law is universal. In the nature of things it cannot be otherwise. It is a hollow form of philosophy that deceives some men on this point. They say, surely

God will not punish a man hereafter who conscientiously walks up to his convictions, although these convictions be in point of fact mistaken. They err, knowing neither the inspired Scriptures nor the natural laws. Do men imagine that God, who has established this world in such exquisite order, and rules it by regular laws, will abdicate, and leave the better world in anarchy? This world is blessed by an undeviating connection between causes and their effects; will the next be abandoned to random impulses, and run back to chaos? The idea is not only false, but impossible and absurd. It is not even conceivable that the direction of a man's course should not determine his landing-place.

But here an element is introduced into the calculation which, it is thought, essentially modifies the result. In morals the motive is an effective constituent of every transaction: and if a man endeavour to form a right judgment, and yet fall into error, will not his sincerity exempt him from the consequences of his mistake? This supposition is contrary both to the testimony of the word, and to the analogy of nature. It sets up wilful fancy against uniform fact. A man contracts and pays for a ship of first-rate material and workmanship. In due time a vessel is delivered to him of goodly appearance, but built of unseasoned material, and not water-tight in the joints. He embarks with his family and his goods in the treacherous bottom. When he is out of sight, and the storm has begun to blow, the truth begins to circulate from lip to lip among his former neighbours that the ship is not seaworthy, and

the question is anxiously discussed whether she can accomplish the voyage. If one of them should reason that because the man did his best, and honestly believed the ship was good, a just God overruling all, would not permit the innocent to be drowned, while the guilty stood on dry land safe, the suggestion would be scouted by common consent as an unsubstantial dream. We all know that the laws of nature do not turn aside to shield a man from the consequences of his error, because his intention was good. Every man, also, may, by a little consideration, come to see that this arrangement is best for the interests of all. Such is the principle that operates with undeviating uniformity in all the region which lies within the view of man; and what ground have we for believing that order will be exchanged for anarchy in the government of God, whenever it steps over the boundary of things seen and temporal?

Perhaps the secret reason why an expectation, so contrary to all analogy, is yet so fondly entertained, is a tacit unbelief in the reality of things spiritual and eternal. We see clearly the laws by which effects follow causes in time; but the matters on which these laws operate are substantial realities. If there were a firm conviction that the world to come is a substance, and not merely a name, the expectation would necessarily be generated, that the same principles which regulate the divine administration of the world now, will stretch into the unseen and rule it all. On one of the latter days of a return voyage across the Atlantic, we paced the level deck beneath a brilliant sun, and on a placid

sea, in earnest and protracted conversation with a benevolent and accomplished Englishman. He was sincerely religious in his own way: and a part of his confession was that every man's religion would carry him to heaven whatever it might be in itself, provided he sincerely believed it. He accounted it rank bigotry to doubt the safety of any fellow-mortal on the ground of erroneous belief. His creed, although he would probably have refused to sign it, if he had seen it written out, was, Safety lies in the sincerity of the believer, without respect to the truth of what he believes. We plied him with the analogy of nature in the form which circumstances most readily suggested. We are here coursing over the ocean at the rate of three hundred miles a day. We have seen no land since we left the shores of America, nine days ago. We are approaching the coast of Ireland, and will no doubt pass about a quarter of a mile on the safe side of Cape Clear. The captain and his officers have been carefully taking their observations, and calculating their course. We have confidence in their capacity and truth. But if they should commit a mistake, and cast up an erroneous reckoning, whether by their own ignorance, or by a false figure in their tables, or a misplaced mark on their quadrant—whether by their own fault or the fault of others whom they innocently trusted—will the sincerity of their belief that they are in the right course save them and us from the consequences of having deviated into a wrong one? If the ship is directed right upon a rocky shore, will the rocky shore not rend the ship asunder, because the master thinks

he is in the accustomed track? Our friend was silenced, but he was not convinced. Argument alone will not remove such an error. It is not a clearer head that is needed, but a softer heart. When in conscious unworthiness and godly simplicity we are willing to have it so, we shall perceive that it is so. "Unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness." Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight.

It is fashionable, in some quarters, to deny responsibility for belief, on the ground that a man's opinion is not under his own control. There is precisely the same ground for affirming that a man cannot help his actions. His opinions do no doubt influence his actions, but his actions also influence his opinions. A bad life deranges the judgment, and a deranged judgment deteriorates still more the life. These two act reciprocally as causes, and emerge alternately as effects.

Truth shines like light from heaven; but the mind and conscience within the man constitute the reflector that receives it. Thence we must read off the impressions, as the astronomer reads the image from the reflector at the bottom of his tube. When that tablet is dimmed by the breath of evil spirits dwelling within, the truth is distorted and turned into a lie. It was because the man's deeds were evil that he missed the truths. He is responsible for his erroneous opinion as certainly as he is responsible for his unrighteous act.

It may be proved, by a large induction of facts, that among the multitude, those who become infidel in opinion have previously become vicious in conduct; and in other

classes, where the experience seems to be opposite, the difference may be only in the outward appearance. Pride, and other forms of spiritual wickedness in the high places of the cultivated human intellect, are as hateful to God, and as adverse to right moral perceptions, as meaner vices in the low places of ignorant, unrestrained sensuality. There is no respect of persons with God.

There is a way which is right, whatever it may seem to the world, and the end thereof is life. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature." "I am the way, and the truth, and the life, no man cometh unto the Father but by me." God's way of coming to us in mercy, is also our way of coming to Him in peace. Christ is expressly "the Apostle and High Priest of our profession" (Heb. iii. 1). He has come forth God's messenger to us, and returned as our advocate with the Father.

LXXXVII.

THE BACKSLIDER.

"The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways."—xiv. 14.

IF the secret history of backsliders were written, many startling discoveries would be made. Whatever the enormity it may end in, backsliding begins unseen in the heart. The Christian in name, whose fall resounds through the land, filling the mouths of scorers with laughter, and suffusing the faces of disciples with shame, did not descend to that depth by one leap from the high place on which he formerly stood. He does not by a sudden resolution of mind turn from virtue into vice. He does not even abandon his Sabbath school, or desert the prayer-meeting, by a deliberate judgment. A slipping begins secretly and imperceptibly in his heart, while appearances on the surface are kept unchanged. He ceases to watch and pray, He admits vain thoughts, and gives them encouragement to lodge within him. Having no hunger for righteousness, he neglects the bread of life. He grows weary of religious exercises and religious society. If he continue to attend them, it is a bodily service, endured for the purpose of maintaining the place which he has attained. Duties become more irksome, and forbidden indulgence more sweet.

There is a weighing beam exposed to public view, with one scale loaded and resting on the ground,

while the other dangles high and empty in the air. Everybody is familiar with the object, and its aspect. One day the curiosity of the passengers is arrested by observing that the low and loaded beam is swinging aloft, while the side which hung empty and light has sunk to the ground. Speculation is set on edge by the phenomenon, and set at rest again by the discovery of its cause. For many days certain diminutive but busy insects had, for some object of their own, been transferring the material from the full to the empty scale. Day by day the sides approached an equilibrium, but no change took place in their position. At last a grain more removed from one side, and laid in the other, reversed the preponderance, and produced the change. There is a similar balancing of good and evil in a human heart. The sudden outward change results from a gradual inward preparation.

All engineering proceeds upon the principle of reaching great heights or depths by almost imperceptible inclines. The adversary of men works by this wile. When you see a man who was once counted a Christian standing shameless on a mountain-top of open impiety, or lying in the miry pit of vice, you may safely assume that he has long been worming his way in secret on the spiral slimy track by which the old serpent marks and smooths the way to death.

On the same branch of an apricot-tree that leant against the south side of a garden wall, I have seen two fruits, large and luscious, hanging side by side, and ripening apace in the sun. They were of equal size and equal

loveliness. Their stainless bosoms peeped from beneath the leaves, to bask in the noonday heat. Nothing in nature could be more lovely to look upon, or more rich in promise. Yet, ere to-morrow's sun is hot, one of them grows black on the side, and bursts, and collapses, and becomes a mass of rottenness, while the other remains in undiminished beauty and fragrance by its side. Whence the diverse fates of these twin beauties? Especially, why did the catastrophe happen so suddenly? It happened thus:—yesterday, when you stood looking on the two, admiring their equal beauty, one of them was hollow in the heart. If then you had taken it in your hand, and turned it round, you would have seen corruption already pervading its mass. On the dark side, next the wall, it has been pierced and entered. Its inside has been scooped out and devoured, while it continued to present to the passenger as fair an appearance as ever. And see, black, crawling, loathsome creatures are nestling and revelling: in that hollow heart, beneath that beautiful skin.

Thus are fair promises in the garden of the Lord suddenly blighted. You have known two, standing long side by side in a goodly profession, and labouring hand in hand for the kingdom of Christ. One of them falls headlong into a pit of vice, and next day the whole neighbourhood rings with the scandal. Diverse are the emotions, but all are moved. Christ's enemies sneer, and his members sigh. How sudden the fall has been, sorrowing disciples say to each other in a suppressed whisper, when they meet,—how sudden and unexpected! No,

friends; it was not a sudden fall. In the heart, unseen, there has been a long preparation of backsliding. Vain thoughts have lodged within, and vile thoughts have been welcome visitors. Persons first vain and then vile have by degrees found their way into his presence, and charmed him, so that he cannot want them, though he knows they are stinging serpents. By such a process his heart has been hollowed out, and inhabited by creatures more loathsome than crawling vermin, while the skin of profession was kept whole, and its fairest side turned to public view. A cry of wonder rises from the crowd, when the hollow shell falls in, because they did not know its hollowness until the fall revealed it.

There is a warning, in such a case:—beware of backsliding in heart; small beginnings may issue in a fearful end. But there is encouragement even here to disciples who are humble, and trustful, and watchful. There is no such thing as a sudden collapse of a sound heart. "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength."

LXXXVIII.

THE TRUSTFUL AND THE TRUTHFUL.

"The simple believeth every word:
but the prudent man looketh well to his going." —xiv. 15.

"THE simple believeth every word;" and why not? If it were the universal rule, it would make a happy world. Trust is a lovely thing; but it cannot stand, unless it get Truth to lean upon. When its tender hand has been often pierced by a broken reed of falsehood, it pines away, and dies of grief. A man would find it easier to be trustful, if his neighbours were trust-worthy.

It is a well-known characteristic of little children to believe implicitly whatever you tell them. This is one and not the least, of those features which make up their beauty, and draw forth our love. It remains a feature of the child until it is worn off by hard experience of the world. Perhaps we should recognise in it a broken remnant of our unfallen state. It is an obvious fact in nature, that the infant expects truth, until that expectation is burned out of him by many disappointments. Suspicion does not appear until it has been generated by falsehood.

A great responsibility is attached to all our intercourse with children. Offences will come; but woe to him by whom the offence cometh. The child expects truth; let him have it. Be not the first to wring his simplicity out

of him by double dealing. A lie told by seniors for their amusement threw a dark shadow over my childhood, and took much of the sunshine out of it. Some person in a military dress, interested in the child for his father's sake, took me fondly in his arms, when I was between four and five years of age, and slipped a shilling into my hand. I either never knew, or have long since forgotten, what his name was, and what relation he sustained to the family; but the instant he passed, older children and grown-up people told me, with an air of seriousness, that I was enlisted, and that whenever I should be old enough, the officer would return, and take me off to the wars. This intimation sank into me, and lay at my heart like lead, all the period of my childhood. I was afraid to speak of it, and suffered in silence. The terror was never taken off by a serious explanation, for no one knew how great it was. I obtained no relief until my understanding gradually outgrew it. That lie wrought grievous harm to me. Besides overclouding life at its very dawn, it left within me, when it departed, a general grudge against mankind for wantonly wounding the helpless. When the boy was big enough to shake off the phantom, he was full of indignation against the world for amusing itself by torturing a child. The Almighty has constituted himself the Helper or Avenger of the weak, whatever the form of their weakness may be; beware of hurting a little child by any untruth. It is a great wickedness when older children or servants torment the little ones by inventing false terrors. Stand in awe, and speak only sacred truth to the timid confiding infant, for the

Almighty Friend of the feeble is looking on. Even in little things He will carry through the principle, "inasmuch as ye have done it to one of these little ones, ye have done it unto me." God has made the infant trustful, and then cast him upon you: if you take advantage of that trustfulness to deceive, whether in great things or small, you are mocking its Author. The child is poor, and lying threats oppress it: "He that oppresseth the poor, reproacheth his Maker." "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord." As the young of birds instinctively open their mouths for food, and their mothers never—not even once since the creation of the world—have thrown in chaff to mock their hunger; so the trustfulness of children is the opening of their mouth for truth: if we fling falsehood in, and laugh at their disappointment, the Lord will require it. It is not amusement; it is sin. It is both a crime and a blunder. They are called Goths and Vandals who deface the precious remnants of Greek statuary that have descended to our times. What name would fitly designate the barbarian who, in sheer wantonness, spoils the beauty of a finer, fairer form—who rubs off by vulgar lies the lovely trustfulness of a little child?

"The prudent looketh well to his going;" and good cause he has so to do. In this world a man is obliged to be suspicious. Man suffers more from man than from the elements of nature or the beasts of the field. A time is coming when this species of prudence will be no longer needed. When the people shall be all righteous, there will be no deception on one side, and no distrust on the other. How sweet even this life would be, if there

were no falsehood and no distrust. If every speaker were true, and every hearer trustful, already the new world would have begun. As yet, we must walk circumspectly at every step, lest a neighbour deceive us. In the new heavens and new earth, truth will pervade all like air. "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the Lord." Oh, that will be joyful, joyful, when there shall be no lie to generate suspicion, and no suspicion generated by a lie!

LXXXIX.

THE FOOL'S CONFIDENCE.

"A wise man feareth, and departeth from evil:
but the fool rageth, and is confident."—xiv. 16.

A WISE man fears sin, and distrusts himself He knows that the enemy is strong, and that his own defences are feeble. His policy, therefore, is not to brave danger, but to keep out of harm's way. He seeks safety in flight. The character of the wise man may be read most distinctly in the dark but polished mirror that stands on the other side—"the fool rageth, and is confident." From the glossy surface of this intensified folly, the wisdom of modesty shines brightly out.

The fool's picture is truthfully sketched here, in few lines. His character is mainly made up of two features: he thinks little of danger, and much of himself. These two ingredients constitute a fool He stumbles on both sides alike. That which is strong he despises, and that which is weak he trusts. The dangers that beset him are great, but he counts them nothing; the strength that is in him is as nothing, but he counts it great. Thus, he is on all hands out of his reckoning, and stumbles at every step.

The end of such a fool was described lately in the newspapers. Many must have read and shuddered at

the tragic tale. A certain man was employed by the Zoological Society of London, as a keeper in their collection of animals. His department was the care of the serpents. A separate building was appropriated to them, and stringent regulations laid down for their management. The keeper's wages were good and his work was light. If he had been cautious and careful, his life would have been safe and his labour easy. Those of the serpents that are venomous must be closely confined and cautiously tended. The front of the cage is of strong glass. It is divided into two equal parts by a partition, in which there is a door. The serpents lie in one of these divisions, while the other is empty. It is the duty of the keeper, at certain times, to introduce an iron rod through a small opening, and therewith remove them by the door in the partition from the one compartment into the other. This done, he makes fast the door, and then enters the emptied cage, for the purpose of cleaning it and depositing food. One morning the keeper opened the door, before the serpents were removed, took one of them in his hands, hung it around his neck, and thus attired ran after his companions, sportively pretending to throw it upon them. He was warned that it might sting, and its sting might be death. He laughed at the warning. He then put the creature back into the cage, without having received any harm. Next he drew out a cobra capella, and placed it in his bosom beneath his coat, calling out, "I am inspired; it will not hurt me." Waxing bolder by impunity, he grasped the deadly reptile by the middle, and held it up before his face pretending to speak to it.

Drawing itself back to take aim, the creature made a sudden dart, and fixed its fangs in his nostrils. Sobered by fear, he screamed out, tore the fangs out of his flesh, and flung the serpent back into the cage. He was carried to an hospital, and died in fearful agony about an hour afterwards.

The fool raged and was confident; but he was drunk at the time, otherwise he would not have taken a venomous snake in his hand and held it up to his face. The man was not himself: it was strong drink that raged within him. Yes, he was drunk. His own act brought madness on, and then the snake plunged its poisonous fangs in the madman's blood. The snake did not abstain from stinging him; the poison did not abstain from destroying his life because he was drunk: and will God abstain from judging him because he was drunk when he stumbled into eternity? How many in our land, every year, die as that fool died? They inflame their appetite by a little strong drink, and then blind the eye of reason by more. With reason laid asleep, and passions heated into sevenfold fury, they sally forth and get or give a mortal wound. Every man who even once maddens himself by drink is a fool of the same stamp with the serpent-keeper. He has allowed a snake to coil itself round his body: no thanks to him if it creep off without spurting death into his veins. The confidence of fools is their ruin. The safety of a wise man lies in that modest sense of his own infirmity, which makes him fear and depart from evil. Solomon's advice is, "Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour

in the cup, when it moveth itself aright: at the last it biteth like a serpent and stingeth like an adder" (xxiii. 31, 32).

We seem as a nation to derive little benefit from the warnings which reach us through the newspapers by hundreds every year, in the form of frightful deaths caused by drunkenness. A man will readily resolve, as he reads these tragedies, that he will neither murder his neighbour nor walk over a quarry himself: but his resolution may avail him nothing if he dally with strong drink. This people are paying a heavy price, and yet they will get no wisdom in return, if they content themselves with punishing murder and loathing suicide, and continue to think lightly of drunkenness, which is the most prolific seed of both. He would be the greatest benefactor of his country, in all its interests, who should lodge in the public mind an adequate estimate of drunkenness, as a sin in the sight of God, an injury to the individual, and a crime against society. As long as public opinion makes light of this germ-sin, its fruits will work us heavy woe.

XC.

WITNESSES.

"A true witness delivereth souls."—xiv. 25.

"TRUTH is great and it will prevail;" but truth in the abstract is like a disembodied spirit, and cannot exert a power upon the world. It must be incarnate in a living witness ere its effect be felt.

One witness, faithful and true, has appeared among men, and this witness delivers souls. He is the Truth in human nature, and the truth makes the captive free. If the Son make you free, ye shall be free indeed. Of the sin of men and the holiness of God, of the curse and the blessing, the fall and the rising again, He is witness. He is the way and the truth and the life. There is no salvation in any other. If we would see evidence either of God's anger against sin, or His mercy to sinners, we must look unto Jesus.

But in Him, and by Him, and for Him, Christians are witnesses too. In this respect, "as He is, so are we in this world" (1 John iv. 17). Every one whom Christ saves from the world He uses in it. Deserters from the powers of darkness are, one by one as they come over, incorporated in the armies of the living God, and sent back to do battle against their former lord. If you are a Christian, these two things are true of you: first, you have need of Christ, and, second, Christ has need of you.

He saves you, and you serve Him. All things are in His hand. Those who are bought with His blood He loves, with a love that is wonderful, passing the love of mothers: He would call them home, and give them rest, if He had not some needful work for them to do in this outer world. The very fact of a Christian being here and not in heaven, is a proof that some work awaits him.

And the special work for which Christians are left in the world is to be witnesses. Himself told his disciples so when He was about to leave them: "Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto me" (Acts i. 8). On high, whither he was then going, he does not need witnesses. There they behold his glory. The Lamb is the light of heaven, and they who bask in His rays need none to tell them that He is great and good; but in this outfield, where enmity and ignorance prevail, Christ has need of witnesses, and He has chosen to this office those who trust in His salvation and are called by His name.

He does not send angels to proclaim His message and wield His power. He does not command the thunders to pronounce His name, and the lightnings to write His character on the sky. The epistle in which He desires to be read is the life of His disciples. The evidence by which the Spirit will convince the world is His truth, uttered from the word, and echoed, still and small, from the meek and quiet life-course of converted men. It should be encouraging, stimulating, elevating to the humblest disciple to learn that the Lord who redeemed him has appointed his time and his path. It is required that

we be witnesses unto Him wherever we are and whoever may question us. Two qualifications are required in a witness, *truth* and *love* (Eph. iv. 15): these are needed, but these will do. With these one will chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight.

The place of a witness for Christ in the world is honourable, but arduous. A witness, in contested cases, after giving evidence in chief, is subjected to cross-examination. A Christian's profession is, and is understood to be, his direct and positive testimony that he is bought with a price, and bound to serve the Lord that bought him: but as soon as this testimony is emitted, the cross-examination begins. If he be not a true witness, he will stumble there. Either or both of two persons, with very different views; may subject a witness to cross-examination—the judge or the adversary. It is chiefly done by the adversary, and in his interests. The Supreme himself puts professing disciples to the test before the public court of the world; but when He so tries his children, the truth comes forth purer and brighter by the trial. He who goes about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour, tempt, to destroy. He puts the witness to the question in order to break him down. An inquirer who saw you at the Lord's table meets you in the market-place. If he saw the solemnity of a trustful worshipper there, and feel the gripe of an overreacher here, he counts your testimony for Christ not true, and sets his conscience free from the restraints of begun conviction. The keen eye of an adversary, sharpened into more than natural intensity by the reproof which your

profession administered, tracks you into the world, and questions you there. Every inconsistency raises a shout of triumph in the circle who will not have this Man to reign over them, and draws a sigh in secret from the broken hearts of the Lord's meek and poor afflicted ones.

They speak of the evidences of religion, and much has been done in our day to multiply and confirm them. But, after all, Christians are the best evidences of Christianity. Alas, we have for eighteen hundred years been printing books to prove Christianity true, and living so as to make men think we do not believe it. Living witnesses, if they be true, have far more power than dead letters of a book, however accurate they may be. The last words of Jesus on the earth were to leave this, charge upon his members, "Ye shall be witnesses unto me, both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth; and when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up, and a cloud received him out of their sight" (Acts i. 8, 9). His last command is, in the place where ye happen to be, and in all the neighbourhood as far as your influence reaches, and when opportunity occurs to all mankind, be ye witnesses unto me. After this he departed in a cloud. He will come again in the clouds, and every eye shall see Him. Occupy till He come. At His coming we would like to be found faithful and busy in the very work which he prescribed. There is no other work worth living for, or fit for dying in. How much you have gotten from Christ, and how much you have done for needy men while passing through life—these are the

only things that will be important when the closing hour has come. To be saved, and to commend the Saviour,—this is the double aim fit to fill a human heart and a human life.

"A true witness delivereth souls;" and a false witness? He is the stone over which they stumble. It is not in the power of any man to be neutral in the conflict between light and darkness. Good and evil in actual life are like land and sea on the globe. If you are not on the one, you must be on the other. There is no belt of intermediate territory for the irresolute to linger on. Let no man who bears Christ's name lay the unction to his soul, that if he does no good he at least does no evil. One of the heaviest complaints made in the prophets against Jerusalem for her backsliding, is that she was a "comfort" to Samaria and Sodom (Ezek. xvi. 54); that those who had the name and place of God's people, so lived is to make the wicked feel at ease. If the salt retain its saltness, surrounding corruption will be made uneasy by the contact. If Christians live as like the world as they can, the world will think itself safe in its sin; and those who should have been the deliverers, will become the destroyers of their neighbours.

XCI.

THE PLACE OF REFUGE.

"In the fear of the Lord is strong confidence;
and his children shall have a place of refuge."—xiv. 26.

FEAR is confidence: the words sound strangely. They are like that blessed paradox of Paul, "when I am weak, then am I strong." They are strange indeed, but true. To fear God aright is to be delivered from all fear. "His salvation is nigh them that fear him." To have such a neighbour is strong consolation to a human spirit in this howling wilderness. The fear which brings a sinner submissive and trustful to the sacrifice and righteousness of the Substitute is itself a confidence. The great and terrible God becomes the "dwelling-rock" of the fugitive. Those who went early to the sepulchre and looked into the empty grave where the Lord lay, departed from the place with "fear and great joy." A human soul, made at first in God's image, has great capacity still. In that large place fear and great joy can dwell together. There are different kinds of fear: there is a fear that "hath torment," and perfect love, when it comes, casts that kind out (1 John iv. 18). Like fire and water, these two cannot agree. The fear that hath torment by its very nature keeps or casts out confidence from a human heart. But the filial fear of the dear children may be known by this, that it takes in beside itself

a great joy, and the two brethren dwell together in unity. When the fear of God, which a sinner feels, is plunged in redeeming love, the torment is discharged, and confidence comes in its stead.

"His children shall have a place of refuge." God is their refuge and their strength: they will not fear though the earth be removed. They "are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation" (1 Pet. 5). There are two keepings very diverse from each other, and yet alike in this, that both employ as their instruments strong walls and barred gates. Great harm accrues from confounding them, and therefore the distinction should be made and kept clear. Gates and bars may be closed around you for the purpose of keeping you in, or of keeping your enemy out. The one is a prison, the other a fortress. In construction and appearance the two places are in many respects similar. The walls are in both cases high, and the bars strong. In both it is essential that the guards be watchful and trusty. But they differ in this—the prison is constructed with a view to prevent escape from within; the fortress to defy assault from without. In their design and use they are exact contraries. The one makes sure the bondage, the other the liberty of its inmates. In both cases it is a *keep*, and in both the *keep* is strong—the one is strong to keep the prisoner in, the other strong to keep the enemy out.

The fear of the Lord to those who are within, and have tasted of his grace, is the strong confidence of a fortress to defend them from every foe; to those who look

at it from without, it often seems a frowning prison that will close out the sunlight from all who go within its portals, and waste young life away in mouldy dungeons. Mistakes are common on this point, and these mistakes are disastrous.

Life to the Christian is a warfare, all the way. He is safe, but his safety is not the peace of home. It is the protection of a strong tower in the presence of enemies. The children of the kingdom are safe though weak, not because none seek their hurt, but because greater is He that is for them, than all that are against them. This is the condition of all who have turned to the Lord, and have not yet entered into rest. They are out of the kingdom of darkness, but have not reached the presence of God. In all this middle region they are safe, but their safety cometh from the Lord.

Danger surrounds them: but they are kept in safety. Before they were converted they did not desire this keeping; when they are glorified they will not need it. But in all this passage through the wilderness, after they have burst forth from Egypt, and before they have reached the promised land, "His children" need and get "a place of refuge."

This is their best estate on earth, His children though they be. It is good to know precisely what we have a right to expect. If we carelessly count on advantages which have not been promised, and not provided for us. we shall be thrown off our guard and suffer loss. The utmost request that Jesus made for His disciples was, not that they should be taken out of the world, but kept

from the evil (John xvii. 15). This, therefore, is the utmost that will be given. Enemies swarm around—His children are feeble; the safety provided is confidence in Himself, the strong tower into which the righteous run.

But often a trembling fugitive mistakes the fortress for a prison, and refuses to go in. A single soldier in an enemy's country is crossing the plain in haste, and making towards a castle whose battlements appear in relief on the distant sky. A man who appears a native of the place joins him from a bypath, and asks with apparent kindness whither he is going. To yonder fortress, says the soldier, where my Sovereign's army lies in strength. The stranger, under pretence of friendship, endeavours to persuade him that it is a prison. He is an emissary of the enemy, sent to detain the fugitive until it be too late, and then cut him off. In this way many are turned back from the place of refuge after they seemed to have turned their faces thitherwards. Agents of the enemy, under various disguises, join themselves to the young, and insinuate that to be seriously religious is to throw their liberty away. Multitudes, whom no man can number, are thus cheated and lost. They would like to be safe, but cannot consent to go into a dungeon yet. When they grow old, and the appetite for pleasure is comparatively weak, they think they can submit to the sombre shade of those towers where the regenerate have taken refuge; but as yet they love life too well to plunge into a living death.

A little religion is a painful thing. It destroys one

pleasure, and supplies no other in its stead. In this land of light and of privilege, many go as far forward in a religious profession as to embitter the joy of the world; few seem to advance far enough in the "new and living way" to reach a refuge in the joy of the Lord. Safety lies in drawing near to God, and the distinguishing mark of an unbelieving heart is that it departs from Him. If the fortress were some pile of self-righteousness, or even a huge, shapely heap of penances and fastings, men with their corruption all about them would be content to take shelter there; but since the offered resting-place is under the eye, and even in the bosom of the Holiest, they will not and cannot go in, unless they are made willing to put off the old nature and leave it behind. "His children shall have a place of refuge," and the refuge is such that only the children count it a boon. The Great Teacher told Nicodemus first about seeing the kingdom of God, and next about entering it (John iii. 3, 5). No man will go into the kingdom until he has some spiritual perception of what it is. Though the Refuge is provided, and the gate standing open, and the invitation free, poor wanderers stand shivering without, because a suspicion clings to the guilty conscience, that the "strong tower," offered as a safe dwelling-place, will turn out to be a place of confinement from genial society and human joys. We must take up Philip's simple prayer, "Lord, shew us the Father." If the prodigal could know the Father's love, he would arise and go to the Father's bosom.

XCII.

ENVY—THE DISEASE AND THE CURE.

"A sound heart is the life of the flesh;
but envy the rottenness of the bones."—xiv. 30.

AN object is sometimes so situated that you can see it better by looking away from it to the surface of a mirror opposite than by attempting to look directly upon itself. If you want to know what is meant by a sound heart, look over to the other clause, and learn that envy is the rottenness of the bones. Soundness of heart is generous love to a brother, kindled there by Christ's love to us. "Love one another as I have loved you." When that grace of the Lord is transferred to a disciple, and written by the Spirit so deeply upon the fleshly table within, that it can be read by the passer-by on the man's outer life, the new creature is sound at heart and vigorous in action. "Perfect love casteth out fear" in relation to God, and envy in relation to fellow-men.

Among the many diseases to which the living body is liable, some are much more appalling and repulsive than others, though not more deadly. Perhaps there is not one of all the ghastly host that casts a deeper shadow of dismay before it over a human spirit than rottenness in the bones. The very conception of it in the imagination is enough to send a cold shudder through the frame. Such is the tried word chosen by the Spirit to designate

envy, an evil disease which is endemic among mankind. Like other diseases that affect the spirit rather than the body, its nature is such, that they who are most deeply tinged by the infection are least alive to the danger. To arouse the envious out of their indifference, that ailment of the soul is named after one of the most frightful maladies that preys upon the human frame and wastes its life away. New creatures in Christ Jesus, if the spiritual life be in healthful exercise, dread every tincture of envy felt working within them as they would dread the symptoms of incipient caries in their bones.

Envy is called a passion; and passion means suffering. The patient who is ill of envy is a sinner and a sufferer too. He is an object of pity. It is a mysterious and terrible disease. The nerves of sensation within the man are attached by some unseen hand to his neighbours all around him, so that every step of advancement which they make tears the fibres that lie next his heart. The wretch enjoys a moment's relief when the mystic cord is temporarily slackened by a neighbour's fall; but his agony immediately begins again, for he anticipates another twitch as soon as the fallen is restored to prosperity.

No species of sensitive pleasure can be greater or purer than that of the convalescent when the disease has been cast out, and he walks forth without pain to breathe the fresh air, and look on the green fields again. Those who have long pined in disease, and been at last delivered, relish most keenly the blessing of health. Such is the delight of being delivered from the tormenting presence of envy, and emerging into love. It is the sensation of

renewed health, when rottenness has been purged out of the bones. They who are led into love walk at liberty. It is a large place. Your path would never be crossed, and your person never jostled, although all the world were beside you there. As to the room that is in him and about him, a disciple is, according to his capacity, like his Lord.

But the cure of envy, as it is wrought by the love of Christ, is not only a deliverance from pain; it is, even in the present world, an unspeakable gain. That man will speedily grow rich who gets and puts into his bag not only all his own winnings, but also all the winnings of his neighbours. Whenever love like Christ's takes possession of a man, and drives the rottenness from his bones, the capital of his enjoyment is increased by all his own prosperity and all the prosperity of others. His peace, according to the simple and sure imagery of scripture, is like a river. A river that follows its own course in solitude does not grow great. The Nile, contrary to the analogy of other great streams, flows more than a thousand miles without receiving the waters of a single tributary; the consequence is, that it grows no greater as it courses over that vast line. Other rivers are every now and then receiving converging streams from the right and left, and thereby their volume continually increases until it reach the sea. The happiness of a man is like the flow of water in a river. If you enjoy nothing but what is your own, your tiny rivulet of contentment, so far from increasing, grows smaller by degrees, until it sinks unseen in the sand, and leaves you in a desert of

despair; but when all the acquisitions of your neighbours go to swell its bulk, your enjoyment will flow like a river enriched by many affluents, growing ever greater as life approaches its close. It is some such river that makes glad the city of our God. Envy will be unknown there. "Faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity." Charity is very pure, and very great. When the rottenness that mingled with it shall be all cast out, and charity without spot or wrinkle shall be the element of heaven, the redeemed will be the happy inmates of a happy home. If there were no envy, but only love—if each should count and feel his neighbour's good to be his own gain, this earth would already be a heaven.

To have constituted the world so that envy is as rottenness in the bones, and love is felt like the glow of health permeating the frame, is a glory to the world's Maker. Every sensation of glad enlargement enjoyed by a loving heart, at the sight of a neighbour's prosperity, is a still small voice, announcing to him who hath an ear that God is good; and every pang that gnaws the envious, like rottenness in his bones, is the same word, God is good, echoed unwillingly back from the suffering of sin.

XCIII.

THE MERCIFUL

"He that oppresseth the poor, reproacheth his Maker;
but he that honoureth Him hath mercy on the poor."—xiv. 31.

FAITH in God is the foundation that sustains the goodly superstructure of relative duties. A greater than Solomon imparted the same instruction to the apostle who leant on His breast. This commandment have we from Him: "That he who loveth God, love his brother also" (1 John iv. 21). The Almighty casts his shield over those who have no other help. He espouses the cause of the poor. To oppress them is to reproach Him. In the arrangements of His providence, the poor we have always with us, as tests to try our love, and objects to exercise it on. Love of God is the root of the matter in a human heart: but the root, though the chief thing, is from its nature unseen. It is known by its fruit, and its fruit is philanthropy. The necessary dependence of human duty upon divine faith is laid down by Solomon as clearly as by John: "He that honoureth Him, hath mercy on the poor." If the heart is right with God, the hand will be open to a brother; but a profession of faith by a merciless man the Most High will repudiate as hypocrisy. The ancient Church possessed in full the glorious truth, that of all the real compassion which flows through human channels, the fountain-head is on high. He who gets mercy shows it.

In His own teaching on this subject, Jesus said, "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full;" and immediately added, "This is my commandment, that ye love one another" (John xv. 11, 12). The connection between these two intimations is interesting and obvious. First, his own joy; next, that joy flowing into his disciples, so that they shall be full; and then these full vessels flowing over in streams of Christ-like love on all the needy within their reach. It is this union to the Head that will enable—that will compel a disciple to love his brother. From this fountain, through this channel, a love-stream will flow of volume sufficient to carry down before it a whole legion of obstructing jealousies.

These are the principles; and now, some suggestions as to the practice of mercy to the poor.

1. We must not confine our aim either to the sins of the soul on the one hand, or to the sufferings of the body on the other. You cannot effectively or permanently help your poor brother, if you treat him merely as a body with life in it. The laws of Providence forbid. Whom God hath joined, no man can with impunity put asunder. Soul and body are so united, that the one cannot really be elevated while the other is left low. Those who attempt the material elevation of the species by material means alone, do and must fail. Soul and body are bound together for better and for worse. We cannot keep our brother's body and neglect his soul. If we would rescue the falling, we must lay hold of the whole man. On the other side, we will not succeed in influencing

the spirits of the wretched, if we are callous to their bodily sufferings. If we leave behind unnoticed the body's privations, we shall not reach the soul to deal with its sins. The avenue to the spirit lies, in part at least, through the bodily senses. If we do not approach in that way, we shall be kept out, and our spiritual counsels, however good, will strike against the closed door of an anguished heart, and rebound in our faces, like an echo that mocks us from a rock. The double rule for the whole case is—as to the supply of spiritual destitution, this ought ye to do; and as to the healing of physical ailments, that ought ye not to leave undone.

2. Every one must do his part in the great work of helping those who cannot help themselves. To prescribe other people's duty, and neglect our own, is a foolish and mischievous habit. We must not suppose that philanthropists are a few eminent personages, standing out in high relief on the page of history—men born, like poets, to their destiny, whose office is to cure human ills on the stage of a continent, and in sight of an admiring world. Honour to the greatly good of every age and every country; but the bulk of mercy's work must everywhere be done by the many thousands of kind hearts and busy hands that are never heard of half a mile from home. Most of the light we work by on the surface of the earth, comes to us reflected from unnumbered objects near that get it from the sun; and so the glimpses of compassion that fall in all directions on the poor, from every heart that basks in the love of Jesus, constitute, by aggregate of many little things, the bulk and substance of the effort that mitigates

the sufferings of men. Let every man do his best in the place which he holds, and with the means at his disposal

3. Mercy to the poor must be a law operating from within, and not a system adopted from without. Where ever genuine coin is going, counterfeits appear. There is a species of charity, got up according to the fashion, that flourishes in benevolent societies abroad, and comes home to snarl at a servant who is doing her best to please. You never find the law of gravitation acting on a steeple, and forgetting itself in the shaft of a coal-pit where it is out of sight. The laws of God never put on appearances, whether they be the laws that are stamped on creation, or those that are written by the Spirit on a renewed heart. If there be truth in the inward parts, the outward actions will be consistent. The legs of the lame are unequal, and he makes no progress in this race of benevolence. I would estimate at a low price the philanthropy of the man who has spent ten thousand on an hospital, and oppresses his own dependents in detail. The ills of life are real; we must have a real love to cope with them. Mercy to man must have its spring in the heart, that its streams may be ever ready to flow, wherever there is an opening. The sufferings of humanity cannot be conjured away by a *name*: a *nature* is needed to secure a steady supply of mercy, and that nature must be new. Howard was a man of great mercy, but he was not a great man. He was not great, but he was true, and the secret of his power lay in his truth. It was conscious union to Christ as a sinner saved that animated, sustained, and directed him. Mercy in him acted by a

law of the new creature, and it was steady like nature's other laws. It acted on every object and at every time, without partiality and without hypocrisy. If the unhealthy cottages of Cardington had been left wet above and wet below, while Howard sewed the rents from their squalid inmates, he would not have been able to have poured the balm of humanity on the barbarism of British and continental prisons. Inconsistency, if he had been guilty of it, would have unnerved his arm and undermined his influence. Neglect of smaller oppressions near his own dwelling would have shorn the locks of his strength; and the mighty Philistines whom he met abroad, instead of falling by his sling, would have put out his eyes and made sport of his blindness. It was love that led him forth, and truth that made him strong. If a man is not merciful all over, he is not merciful at all.

4. There must be regulating wisdom as well as motive power. There must indeed be an impulse in order to energetic action, but we must not act by impulses. We need all the power that we possess; it is a pity that any of it should be wasted. To give alms to little children sent by profligate parents to enact misery on the street is money thrown away, and mercy too. Of late years much has been done to indoctrinate the public mind on this subject. Whether the public have learned the lesson yet, I know not; but certainly they have been often taught that it is useless and mischievous to give pence indiscriminately to beggars on the street or the wayside. This doctrine is true, but it does not contain the whole truth in regard to that subject. One side of truth may

become practically falsehood. We need the counsels which have of late been largely addressed to us from many quarters, to harden us against giving by sudden impulse to persons unworthy or unknown; but we don't need any lecture to repress within our hearts the movements of mercy to the poor. I am jealous for myself and others, lest, in leaning hard over from the side of lavish expenditure on the unworthy, we should fall, on the other side, into a callous indifference to human sufferings. We must not check the impulse because counterfeit poverty has abused our compassion and wasted our gifts. Direct it upon genuine poverty, and stimulate it to the utmost. Such is the constitution of the world, and the condition of men, that if the relations are rightly managed, the rich may get more good from the presence of the poor than the poor get from the gifts of the rich. The flow of compassion is healthful; obstruction in the channel breeds disease in the moral system. It is both health and happiness to a mother to have a helpless, little, living thing hanging on her breast, and drawing its sustenance from her body. To want it would be neither a pleasure nor a profit. The poor we have always with us, and it is a double blessedness to give.

The discovery of abuses should induce us not to seal the fountain, but to direct the stream. Where no water runs, no ships, with their precious burdens, navigate the interior of a country. Even where there is it stream constant and strong, it does not follow that you can have safe and profitable inland navigation. If the water turn sharply round a corner here, and leap white and frothing

over a rock there, it will be better to entrust no ship to its impetuous movements. What then? Then neither entrust your floating treasures to that wayward stream, nor let the country lie lean for want of commerce. Dig a canal. Your canal will do nothing for you dry, and your river will do nothing for you although it is filled to the brim; but let, the river into the canal, and forthwith ply your traffic. The whole neighbourhood will be enriched. Let us beware of either checking or wasting any impulse of humanity; we need it all, and more. Direct it wisely, and let it flow.

5. Another important rule for the practice of mercy to the poor is, whatever share you may be able to take in the wholesale benevolence of organized societies, you should also carry on a retail business, by personal contact with the sufferers. Societies and pecuniary contributions are necessary, in their own place; but even although they should satisfy the wants of the receive; the greater blessing to the giver cannot come through these channels. Personal contact—face to face, heart to heart, hand to hand—this is the best way to do good, and get good. We are indebted to our Father in heaven for all the good that we enjoy; and as our goodness reacheth not unto Him, He has made the account payable to the poor. No man has any right to lift himself up in pride; no man has any right even to count that he condescends, when he enters the houses, and listens to the tale of the sufferers. He is only owning, we cannot say paying, a lawful debt. It is simply the act of honouring his Maker. When he has done all, he is an unprofitable servant.

XCIV.

THE TWO DEPARTURES—THE HOPEFUL AND
THE HOPELESS.

"The wicked is driven away in his wickedness:
but the righteous hath hope in his death."—xiv. 32.

THE peculiarities of the Hebrew proverb shine conspicuously in this specimen. The two arms of the sentence are nicely balanced, and move round a common centre. There is a mixture of similarity and difference, which makes the meaning perspicuous and the expression memorable. But if there is peculiar beauty in the words, there is terrible sublimity in the thoughts which they convey. Unspeakably great are the two things which the two balanced branches of this proverb hold in their hands. These two arms, outstretched and opposite, direct the observer, by their piercing finger-points, to Death on this side, and Life on that—endless both. Looking this way, you read the doom of the wicked; that way, you descry the hope of the just.

1. The doom, of the wicked—He "is driven away in his wickedness." As smoke is driven by the wind, so will the wicked perish in the day of wrath. I think I hear arguments fitfully muttering through pauses of the blast, that "God would not make creatures, and then torment them." The smoke complains that it is hard to be driven by the wind; and yet it is driven by the wind.

This very word will justify the Judge, and shut the convict's mouth. It comes to warn the wicked, that he may turn and live. If he come out of his wickedness at God's invitation, he will not be driven away in it by His wrath.

We are not able to form a right conception of what it is to be and abide in wickedness. Because it is so near us, we do not know it. If it were a body standing before us, we could examine its proportions, and describe its appearance; but because it is a spirit transfused through us, we remain ignorant of its character and power. To be in sin is a fearful condition; yet he who is in it may be at ease. A ship is lying in a placid river when winter comes, and is gradually frozen in. The process was gentle, and almost imperceptible. There was no commotion and no crash. The ice crept round, and closed in upon the ship without any noisy note of warning. If it had been a foreign body brought by human hands to bind the ship withal, the operation would have been observed. If men, whether professing to be friends or foes, had carried trees or stones, and piled them round the ship, suspicion would have been aroused; the owners would have heaved their anchors, and worn her down to the sea for safety. As it was, no one approached the ship. Her own element, the water on which she lay, closed and held her. It was not possible to prevent that lockfast, except by taking the ship out of the river in time.

But what is the effect? The ship is not shaken. No creaking is heard—no strain is felt. She feels firm and

easy. Even when the pines of the neighbouring forest are bending to the blast, she sits unmoved in her solid bed. That bed she has made for herself, and therefore it fits her. This is very like the wicked in his iniquity, and before he is driven away. When it closed round him, he was not afraid. It was not some danger threatening from without, and pressed forward by another. It was his own; it was what he had always been in. It was his element. Silently and surely, that which he lived in congealed and locked him fast. Nor is he in any way alarmed. In its closing embrace, it does not thwart him. It humours him all round. It yields to every feature of his character, only it holds him fast. He is more at ease now than others, or than himself was before. His neighbours may be sometimes agitated, but he is at peace. He stands steady in his element, and no ripple disturbs its surface.

When the ice of the river goes away, the imbedded ship goes with it. It is a dreadful departure. The rupture of the ice on a large river is one of the sublimest scenes in nature. The water swells beneath; the ice holds by the crooked banks a while; but after a period of suspense, the flood prevails, and the trembling rending mass gives way. Reeling icebergs and foaming yellow waves tumble downward in tumultuous heaps, and the ship is swept away like a feather on a flood.

If we had a sense for perceiving spiritual things, the most heart-rending sight in the world would be a sinner set fast in his element, and the flood, of wrath secretly swelling from beneath. They speak of angels weeping,

and the figure may in its own place be useful; but we do not need the aid of such a supposition here. The Lord of angels wept indeed, when he saw sinners fixed and easy in their sin, with the tide of divine vengeance rolling forward to drive them away. That same Jesus looks in pity now on the wicked in their wickedness, and continues sweetly calling, "Come unto me."

No remedy is possible to the wicked in his wickedness; and the remedy which consists in bringing him out, he is not willing to accept. For all who are sinners—that is, for all men—a rending is prepared. Every one must either be riven out of his wickedness, or driven away in it. This tearing or that every one must endure. The alternative is, Come out of her, my people; or, Be partaker of her plagues. Pain there must be; either the pain of the new birth, or that of the final judgment. A process is ready for drawing the victims out. The power is Christ's love; the means the gospel message. Some lie locked fast in wickedness, who know that wrath is coming, and yet refuse to let the line of that Almighty love be laid about their souls. Why do they choose death rather than life? Because they are so closely bedded in their element, that to be drawn out of it is to be torn asunder. Such is the feeling of the captive soul: and the answer which the possessing spirit suggests is, "What have we to do with thee, thou Jesus; art thou come to torment us before the time?" But the love of Christ, when a repentant sinner casts himself confidently upon it, melts the fastenings away, and makes the out, gone easy. When from the iron icy bondage, hope, the

anchor of the soul, goes out, and up, and into Jesus our Advocate within the veil, not only is ultimate safety secured, but present severance accomplished. Down the line of hope's hold flows a melting heat from the Sun of righteousness, which loosens the gripe of sin, and sets the soul at liberty. But the sentence remains sure; he who is not so drawn out of wickedness, will be driven away in it.

2. The hope of the just.—"The righteous hath hope in his death." Certain it is that the faithful in ancient times believed God, and it was counted to them for righteousness; but at this distance of time we are not able to determine how far their faith was like an appetite of the renewed nature, and how far it attained to understanding also. The regenerate in the childhood state of the Church were alive, and lived upon the sincere milk of the word, and grew thereby, whatever the measure of their knowledge or their ignorance may have been. The righteousness that justified Abraham was the same as that which Paul put on. The righteous of those days knew that, by birth-right and personal desert, he was on the same standing with the wicked, and that the difference was due to redeeming love. If Israel's first-born were not destroyed like Egypt's, it was because of the Lamb's blood marking their dwellings. On the ground of a perfect righteousness imputed, an actual obedience begins. He is bought with a price, and therefore serves the Lord. By birthright he was a child of wrath: he has been "begotten again into a living hope." This man has hope at the time when humanity needs it most--when death draws

near. A friend in need is a friend indeed. Stars are a grateful mitigation of the darkness; but we do not want them by day. Hope, always lovely, is then sweetest when it beams from heaven through the gloom that gathers round the grave.

There are diversities in this department of the Spirit's ministry. Some even of the children depart under a cloud, and others in sunlight, softer at the setting than it was at noon. Some are glad when they are passing through the flood, and others do not begin their song till they are safe on the farther shore. The various notes of their varied experience, when the redeemed tell the story of their life, will give richer music to the hymns of heaven.

There is one class of experiences of which many examples occur. A youth who has been seeking first the kingdom of God with alternate hope and fear, but without violent emotions on either side, comes suddenly and unexpectedly in sight of death. There is at first, and for a time, a very great tumult of alarm. When that tumult subsides, a peace that passeth all understanding keeps the heart and mind, until the spirit is released from flesh, and darts away.

The ship has set sail, and kept on her course many days and nights, with no other incidents than those that are common to all. Suddenly land appears; but what the character of the coast may be, the voyagers cannot discern through the tumult. The first effect of a near approach to land is a very great commotion in the water. It is one of the coral islands of the South Pacific, en-

circled by a ring of fearful breakers at some little distance from the shore. Forward the ship must go. The waves are higher and angrier than any they have seen in the open sea. Partly through them, partly over them, they are borne at a bound; strained and giddy, and almost senseless, they find themselves within that sentinel ridge of crested waves that guard the shore, and the portion of sea that still lies before them is calm and clear like glass. It seems a lake of paradise, and not an earthly thing at all. It is inexpressibly sweet to lie on its bosom, after the long voyage and the barrier ridge. All the heavens are mirrored in the water, and along its edge lies a flowery land. Across the belt of sea the ship glides gently, and gently touches soon that lovely shore.

It is thus that I have seen a true pilgrim thrown into a great tumult when the shore of eternity suddenly appeared before him. A great fear tossed and sickened him for some days; but when that barrier was passed, he experienced a peace deeper, stiller, sweeter, than any he ever knew before. A little space of life's voyage remained, after the fear of death had sunk into a calm, and before the immortal felt the solid of eternal rest. On life's sea, as yet, was the spirit lying, but the shaking had ceased; and when at last the spirit passed from a peaceful sea to a peaceful land, the change seemed slight. The righteous had hope in his death. "Blessed hope!"

XCV.

THE TRUTH IN LOVE.

"A soft answer turneth away wrath;
but grievous words stir up anger."—xv. 1.

WE greatly need an instrument capable of turning away wrath, for there is much wrath in the world to be turned away. It is assumed here that the anger is sinful in character, or excessive in degree; but there are occasions in which a good man may do well to be angry. It is recorded of Jesus once, in the days of his flesh, that He was angry; but the explanation is immediately added, He was "grieved for the hardness of their hearts" (Mark iii. 5). It is safe for a disciple "to follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth." If all our anger were grief for sin, and grief for sin our only anger, the emotion would neither displease God nor disturb men. If our love were like Christ's, our anger would be like his too. In the meantime, most of the anger that prevails is sinful and dangerous. On that side there is especial need for watching and prayer, lest we enter into temptation.

We are on dangerous ground when we are contending in our own cause. A man may indeed, through divine grace, rule his spirit aright even there; but it is his wisdom to be jealous of himself. Self-love ties a bandage on the eyes of the understanding, and then leads the blind astray. A great part of the danger lies in the suddenness of the explosion. To obtain a delay of a few

moments is half of the victory. "He that is slow to wrath is of great understanding; but he that is hasty of spirit exalteth folly" (xiv. 29). Some knowledge of human nature is displayed in the advice once given to a passionate man, to count a hundred after he felt the fire burning within, before he permitted it to blaze forth by his lips. The monitor shrewdly calculated that in many instances the passion would cool down during the interval, and the explosion be altogether prevented. An improvement on that method might be suggested. Instead of securing merely an empty interval, fill it with an air that the flame of anger cannot live in—fill it up with prayer. Employ the same space of time in prayer for yourself and for the offenders. Nehemiah adopted this method to subdue another passion. He was oppressed by fear. The Jewish captive betrayed his patriotism before the despot, and symptoms of the royal displeasure appeared. "Then was very sore afraid." Then and there, however, notwithstanding the monarch's presence, Nehemiah "prayed to the God of heaven." Courage came, and wisdom with it. He asked skilfully, and obtained his desire (Neh. ii) The same resource would afford deliverance when anger is the passion that suddenly assails. After praying to "our Father" for your offending brother and yourself; you may speak to him safely. "The Christian's vital breath" is fatal to all the spawn of the serpent. Pass your resentment through a period of communion with Him who bought you with his blood, and it will come out like Christ" a simple grief for a brother's sin, and a holy jealousy for truth.

In some such way should we treat our aim anger; but how shall we meet the anger of other people. Turn it away by a soft answer. In man as he is, a sally of wrath from another seems to produce a similar sally in return, as naturally as a mountain-side gives back an echo of the sound that strikes it. If you listen to the quarrel of two men or women who have neither been purified by Christian principle, nor smoothed by a liberal education, you will observe the working of the natural law. Wrath generates grievous words, and grievous words aggravate the wrath that produced them. The reciprocating series goes on, until some accident break the chain, or the sounds die away from the exhaustion of the combatants.

There is an instrument for receiving anger on, so as to make it harmlessly expend its force, like lightning led by a conducting rod into the ground; and even if there be a rebound at first, the force gradually melts away, like a dying echo from a single sound. That patent shield for warding off the sharp strokes of wrath, is "a soft answer." Christianity makes it of the solid metal, and education supplies at a cheaper rate a plated article, useful as long as it lasts, and as far as it goes. The principle: of softness increasing the strength of a defence is common to the physical and moral departments of the world. The Roman battering ram, when it had nearly effected a breach in walls of solid stone, was often baffled by bags of chaff and beds of down skilfully spread out to receive its stubborn blow. By that stratagem the besieged obtained a double benefit, and the besiegers suffered a double disappointment. The strokes

that were given proved harmless, and the engine was soon withdrawn. In our department a similar law exists, and a similar experience will come out of it. If the person assailed hang out in time his soft answer; the first stroke will not hurt him; and the second will never come.

In the effort to avoid one extreme, however, we must beware lest we fall into another. Mere softness will not do. The down beds of the besieged. Jews within Jerusalem would have been no defence against the battering rams of Titus, if there had not been a solid wall of masonry behind them. A glove of velvet should cover the hand of iron, but an iron hand should be within the velvet glove. Faithfulness naked, may in its effect be little better than vulgar obstinacy; and gentleness unsupported, may, in the miscellaneous strife of time, count for nothing more than lack of courage; but when faithfulness is gentle in its form, and gentleness faithful in its substance, these two meet helps, made one in a marriage union, constitute the best preparation which man's imperfect state permits, for meeting rough jostling in the moving crowd of life. Truth alone may be hated; and love alone despised: men will flee from the one, and trample on the other; but when truth puts on love, and love leans on truth, in that hallowed partnership lies the maximum of defensive moral power within the reach of man in the present world.

There is a contrivance to prevent the destructive collision of carriage against carriage in a railway train, which human beings might profitably imitate. On the outer

extremities, where they are liable to strike against each other, there is a soft spongy covering. Within, and at the very centre, is a spring, strong, but yielding; yielding, but strong. There is both a soft surface without, and an elastic spring in the heart. If the impact of another body were met by mere hard unyielding strength, both would fly into splinters at the first shock. On the other hand, if there were in one of the carriages softness only, with no recuperative spring, the others would soon drive it from the rails, or crush it to pieces. The destroyed carriage would be lost to the owners, and its debris would cause additional mischief. These machines move in company like ourselves, and they move quickly, and jostle each other by the way. The managers have marked the danger, and made skilful provision for escaping it. They take advantage of the great pervasive law, that firmness and softness united in each is the best arrangement for the safety of all.

The apparatus employed to keep these mute racers off each other, in the swift course of life, might almost be counted a modification of our great law, "speaking the truth in love." Although the two departments lie so far asunder, a parallelism is plainly perceptible in their laws. One inventing mind is at the fountainhead of creation, and the so-called discoveries, in the various departments, are so many drops from its diverging streams. It seems a reversal of the usual order, and yet we are assured the rule is reasonable and useful;—observe how carriages on a railway keep their own places, kindly meeting, yet firmly repelling every blow from a neigh-

hour in the rapid race. Observe how they do, and do likewise.

A little girl came to her mother one day and inquired, in a tone which showed that the words were not words of course, if every word of the Bible is true. "Yes, child; but wherefore do you ask?" "Because the Bible says, a soft answer turneth away wrath; and when Charlotte spoke to me in a rage, I gave her a soft answer, but it did not turn away her wrath." It was a natural, but a childish thought. It is true that such is the tendency of a soft answer,—in that direction it puts forth a power; but, alas, that power is often exerted without effect on a callous heart. "The goodness of God," says the Scripture, "leadeth thee to repentance" (Romans ii. 4). Many who distinctly feel its drawing refuse to follow it. The obstinate perish unrepentant, and yet the word is true.

The most important practical rule, for our guidance under provocation, is to consider, not how hard a blow we can deal in return, consistently with a character for Christian meekness, but how far we can yield, without being faithless to truth and to God. In view of our own corruption, and the temptations that abound, a leaning to this side seems the safest for a Christian man. But when all rules fail to reach the case, let us have recourse to the great Example. He walked over our life-path, in order that we might have His foot-prints to guide us. Alike in love of good, and resentment against evil, the Master's conduct is the disciple's rule.

"Be ye followers of God, as dear children" (Eph. v. 1). The word is "imitators," and we know what that means

in the instincts and habits a loved and loving child. Our Father in heaven has given us an example, and if we have the spirit of dear children, Our constant impulse and tendency will be to do as He has done. This lifts out eyes at once to the deepest counsel of eternity—the greatest event of time. To the enmity against Himself, which reigned and raged in human kind, God replied by sending His Son, to seek and save them. Look unto Jesus, and learn, the answer from heaven to the auger of earth. Jesus is God's answer to the wrath of man. The answer is soft, and yet it is the greatest power that can be applied—the only power that will prevail to turn the wrath away, and win the wrathful back to love.

Please report any errors to Ted Hildebrandt:
ted.hildebrandt@gordon.edu