

THE DAY OF TROUBLE.

PLAIN WORDS

FOR

THE SUFFERING AND SORROWFUL.

SELECTED FROM THE WRITINGS OF

THE REV. W. B. MACKENZIE, M.A.,

LATE VICAR OF ST. JAMES', HOLLOWAY.



SEELEY, JACKSON, & HALLIDAY, 54, FLEET STREET,
LONDON. MDCCCLXXI.

141. k. 457.

CONTENTS.

I. THE TIME OF OUR TRIBULATION.

	PAGE
TROUBLE IS COMMON TO ALL MEN	I
TROUBLE IS A CONDITION OF THE LIFE OF FAITH .	4

II. GOD'S VOICE IN THE STORM.

WHERE IS YOUR TREASURE?	7
HOW ARE YOU LIVING?	11
NEW THOUGHTS ABOUT LIFE	14
REAL LIFE	18
WHAT IS YOUR EXPECTATION?	21

III. THE BENEFITS OF SANCTIFIED AFFLICTION.

IT DRIVES US TO PRAYER	26
IT SUBDUES THE STUBBORN WILL	29
IT PREPARES FOR FUTURE SERVICE	32
THE SANCTIFYING PROCESS	35

IV. NO CROSS, NO CROWN.

	PAGE
BELIEVERS MUST EXPECT THE CROSS	37
EACH HAS HIS OWN CROSS	39
IT IS A MARK OF SONSHIP	43

V. COMFORT FOR CROSS-BEARERS.

COMFORT FOUND IN WAITING ON GOD	45
THE REFINING PROCESS	47
THEIR SECURITY IS IN GOD	51
THE CONSOLATIONS OF GOD	54
GOD ONLY HIS PEOPLE'S PORTION	58

VI. THE CROSS OF BODILY SICKNESS.

THE TRIALS OF SICKNESS	60
JOYFUL THROUGH HOPE	65

VII. CROSSES IN THE WORLD.

CHRISTIANS MUST EXPECT A REAL STRUGGLE	68
THEY MUST FIGHT AGAINST THE STREAM	71
CHRISTIANS MUST LEARN TO MEET STORMS	73

VIII. SPIRITUAL TRIALS.

HEART SORROWS	76
FAILURE OF FAITH	79
THE HIDING OF GOD'S FACE	82

IX. THE LORD'S PRESENCE WITH HIS PEOPLE IN TRIAL.

	PA
UNSEEN YET EVER NEAR	86
THE LORD STRENGTHENS HIS PEOPLE IN SORROW .	89
HE STRENGTHENS OFTEN BY PRACTICE	93
CHRIST'S WHISPERS OF PEACE	97

X. THE CROSS MISTAKEN.

TROUBLE IS SOMETIMES A CURSE, AND NOT A CROSS .	100
NEEDLESS ANXIETIES	102
MISTAKES	105

XI. JOY IN THE MIDST OF SORROW.

THE STRENGTH OF THE LORD	110
STRONG CONSOLATION	113
THE END WILL CERTAINLY BE JOYFUL	115
THE PROMISES OF GOD	118
JESUS KNOWS HOW TO COMFORT	121

XII. BLESSED EFFECTS OF GOD'S CHASTENING.

NOT SEEN AT THE TIME	124
BLESSINGS IN DISGUISE	127
IT WORKS IN US THE LIKENESS OF CHRIST . .	131

XIII. PEACE IN CHRIST.

	PAGE
THE GREAT CHANGE	134
NONE CAST OUT	139
ONLY BELIEVE	143

XIV. THE GREAT COMFORTER.

HIS WORK IN THE WORLD	146
HE IS THE COMFORTER OF HIS PEOPLE	150
THE GREAT TEST	156
THE HELPER IN PRAYER	159
THE INWARD WITNESS	163
HOW ASSURANCE MAY BE OBTAINED	166
FURTHER SIGNS OF GRACE	169

XV. THE BELIEVER'S PROSPECT.

DEATH SWALLOWED UP OF LIFE	172
THE TREASURE LAID UP ABOVE	175
THE HOME ABOVE	177

I.

THE TIME OF OUR TRIBULATION.

TROUBLE IS COMMON TO ALL MEN.

"Yet man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward."—JOB v. 7.

To know that many who struggled against sin and hardship as we do, are now for ever at rest, and that the same mighty hand which held them up, and the unfailing promises which were the sure anchor of their hearts, avail day by day for us: this is strong consolation. But the rest is not ours yet. Much rough ground must be trodden, and many a tear shed, before we hear the welcome invitation to enter the joy of the Lord. Our comfort here, and glory yet to be revealed, depend upon the single-minded obedience with which we

2 THE TIME OF OUR TRIBULATION.

strive to pass through life's tribulations. It is unwise to imagine or anticipate trouble : it may never come. Let us enjoy the sunshine and calm breezes when we can. One day the storm will gather when we must take in the sail, shut up the lights, and prepare in earnest; but it is time enough to do that when the sky is dark and lowering. Still, let our minds be made up that life is a dangerous sea; in the smoothest times the aspect of things may suddenly change, and we find to our surprise that trouble is hard at hand. Whether men are climbing by faith to mansions in the sky, or travelling along a broad and beaten highway, to "make their bed in hell," both ways have their hardships. If David cried, "Have mercy upon me, O Lord, for I am in trouble," Saul and Ahitophel had troubles far greater. If good Hezekiah was oppressed by his troubles, wicked Ahab had trouble enough.

THE TIME OF OUR TRIBULATION. 3

to crush him down to the grave. If Peter wept for the bitterness of his soul trouble, it was not the want of trouble that kept the eyes of Judas dry. If the saint of God betakes himself to his closet to give utterance to his sorrows, in strong crying and tears, before the Father of spirits, let us not imagine that the man, who makes not God his refuge, has nothing to weep for. Trouble is not peculiar to the household of faith: it is "common to man." It is the fruit of sin. Every language has its vocabulary to express it. Every heart knows its burden. Every countenance has been sprinkled with tears. Every house in every street, every cottage, however humble and sequestered, every mansion embellished with golden splendour; all are at times the scene of trouble, and hear no other sounds but lamentation and woe.

TROUBLE IS A CONDITION OF THE LIFE
OF FAITH.

"We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God."—ACTS xiv. 22.

TRIBULATION is inevitable. It is the condition of the life of faith. This conclusion is confirmed by each new sorrow. Paul had been forewarned by the Lord on his conversion—"I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake." We also have learnt among our earliest lessons, that the cup of life will often be mixed with bitterness; yet when we put it to our lips, the taste is strange and unexpected. But life is far more full of trouble than we think at first. The arrows that wound the heart fly thick on every side; but we persuade ourselves that somehow they will not reach us. When the stroke actually comes home, and our own

heart is smitten, our first trembling utterance is that of astonishment that evil should happen to us. In time we see our error. This is God's law, "through much tribulation." Still we have intervals of ease, often undisturbed, affording a large share of earthly happiness. The sky is azure, the clouds radiant with brightness. "He will not always chide." Certainly not. God spares his people, even as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. Still, this is the condition on which they willingly accept the promise of eternal life. Tribulations are strewn thickly around. Travellers to the heavenly country must advance in the midst of them. If we journey that road at all, there are the tribulations, and we must go through them.

Ill health is the tribulation of many. The pain and wakeful weariness of a sick room—to feel burdensome to oneself, and still more burdensome to others—the

6 THE TIME OF OUR TRIBULATION.

sighs and tears shed in secret, when the body is racked with pain—oh! how many of God's people are learning, in these silent solitudes, week after week, and month after month, that it is through much tribulation they must enter the kingdom.

And what shall we say to the house of mourning, which death has lately visited? Oh! the tribulation which is to be gone through there! It bowed the noble spirit of Abraham when he had to pass through it. It well-nigh brought Jacob in sorrow to the grave. Job had stroke upon stroke. It broke the heart of the widowed mother of Nain. Streams of manly tears ran down the face of Jairus. It filled the house of Bethany with mourning. It made Jesus weep. Oh! to find one's own house invaded by the great destroyer, making a blank which leaves us to pursue life's journey heavy-hearted and desolate: this is tribulation.

II.

GOD'S VOICE IN THE STORM.

WHERE IS YOUR TREASURE?

"Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth."—
ST. MATT. vi. 19.

OBSERVE the religion of prosperous men. You sometimes find persons professing godliness "in great prosperity;" they are "blessed in the work of their hands, and their substance is increased in the land." But did the thought never occur to you, whether that is a sort of religion which would endure trial? Satan looks at the prosperous Christian and condemns him, as all hollowness and show. So many others think, and sometimes with truth. At any rate, let the man be tried who combines prosperity with the profession of

piety. So says the devil himself maliciously : "that is what I want." So say others too ; let the man's integrity of faith be put to the test, and the Lord himself does not object. As to his own believing people, whether rich like Job, or poor as Lazarus, the issue of the trial is certain.

It were hard to tell the many ways in which sorrow reaches the poor hearts of God's tried people. How many, of whom the world little thinks, are going through some tearing process which is to strip them of the world's last solace, and they see health, and fortune, and friends leaving them further and further off, and life becoming very, very dreary ! Some there are, too, whose names are written in heaven, down in depths of bitter bereavement ; joys are gone, and life seems to have lost its relish ; wounds faintly healed are opened again, and the heart aches day by day to ponder its sad desolation. And

some there are, too, whose sorrows spring from within—the keen pangs of the wounded spirit; it may be that the conflict with indwelling sin has grown up to severity hard to bear; or it may be that, from some cause or other, God hides his face, and the soul is troubled: and such trouble none can ever heal but He, whose great office it is to comfort the broken-hearted.

But remember, that trials, and chastisements, and tears, are an indispensable ingredient among the things which accompany salvation. The eternal purpose of Almighty God fixes upon tribulations.

Some of you seem to think that trials are sent only to make you sad and shed silent tears. But if that be all the result, then, alas! the process fails. Your suffering is yet in vain. Remember that these chastisements are sent to quicken your languid soul, that you may wake up to

10 GOD'S VOICE IN THE STORM.

all the energies and duties of Christian obedience, to make you live less to self and more for Christ, less burdened by the world and sin, more buoyant in faith, more fervent in spirit, and more joyful in hope; that, indeed, you may look off from things which are perishing around you, and fasten your eye and heart, with a firm and unfailing hold, upon the things which are unseen, and heavenly, and eternal.

HOW ARE YOU LIVING?

"For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous : but the way of the ungodly shall perish."—PSALM i. 6.

THE lives of most persons whom we meet are spent in continual occupation—mental, or bodily, or both. Work, care, anxiety, saddened with disappointments, yet bright with hope—to-day wearisome, to-morrow buoyant : this is life to many. Now and then sorrow, heavy and heart-breaking, tinges their days with its dull hue. Some, as if life went too slowly, squander their time in folly, accelerate their days by mad revelry, and infuse grains of bitterest remorse into life's cup, the last dregs of which they will be forced to drink, when age and weariness come on. "My life," says some thoughtful reader, "is not like other people's. I seem to have no object,—to me life has no meaning ; I don't see

why I live at all ; I sometimes wish I never had lived. Others prosper in their plans, I prosper in nothing. Others have fixed principles, I am tossed about in uncertainty. Others have settled belief as to another world, I have nothing sure and firm which can yield good hope. The life which I live in the flesh is all unhappy, everything goes wrong with me. I review the past with dissatisfaction, the present looks all dark and unsettled ; the future, when I calmly think upon it, fills me with dread." Is it so, reader ?

The journey is soon over, but the recollections of it will all return ; we shall ever think about them, in all their minute circumstances, in the world to come. We have not done with life when death comes. It will all revive in strong, clear, abiding remembrance, in another world, on which we shall enter, when the heart and flesh fail here ; so that life leads to death, and

death is the beginning of life. We no sooner begin to live than we begin to die. We no sooner die than we begin to live, and die no more. For, if we lived no other life than this, it would be of less importance how we spent it. But it is not so. It is the grave certainty that, after the flesh, "when worms destroy this body," we shall be clothed with the power of an endless life in another world—a life which springs out of this, as corn from the seed; I say, it is the life to come, with its issues of blessedness or of sorrow for ever, which stamps the impress of unutterable importance on all that we do, and think, and are, while here living this "life in the flesh." "After death the judgment."

NEW THOUGHTS ABOUT LIFE.

"Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord."—LAM. iii. 40.

THE world itself in which we live is the source of daily, grievous wants. How many things we fervently desire, which the world as resolutely denies us. Moreover, what wants are created by domestic reverses! Comforts, once abundant enough, poured a stream of joyfulness into your unthankful lap, for then you never thought of the Giver: but, one by one, they have disappeared; alienated affection has withered some; sudden losses have rudely torn away others; the grave, perhaps, has swallowed some. Losses, changes, bereavements, which you cannot think upon without tears, have befallen you, many and very grievous, each reducing the sum of earthly comforts to less and less, until,

to your astonishment and secret grief, instead of your wonted affluence, you find yourself an impoverished man ; instead of walking, as you used to do, "upon the high places of the earth," you are minished, and even brought to a position which once you thought it impossible for you to occupy.

But since the soul and its eternal condition have become your chief anxiety, new wants have multiplied upon you. So long as the formalities of religion seemed sufficient, the salvation of your soul was a thing too shadowy, too unreal, to disturb you with any wants. But now the Spirit of the Lord has awakened you to feel the weight and value of eternal things, you discover affections and lusts which assault and encumber the soul, and keep you groaning under the wretched bondage of indwelling evils. So long as you lived in your sins, contented with the world and

yourself, and left the future without anxiety, you could not be said to feel any wants about things beyond the grave. But now that the darkness is past, and light from that eternal world is poured into your soul, you start up and inquire with astonishment, "What have I been living for?" Now your wants begin. You bless God that at length you are brought to feel, and desire these feelings to deepen into tenfold earnestness. New wants rise before you upon matters so unutterably *30* momentous, that you wonder how it could be that you never felt these things before. That world now stands before you in all its reality and nearness, so that new wants come upon you with their irresistible demands. Sin, wrath, and judgment to come, the pit of hell, the worm, the fire, and the groans that lost souls utter without ceasing—all are real things now to you and create real wants, which it

were madness now not to feel as wants. You stand guilty before God, and you want righteousness and pardon. You are burdened with a debt of sin too heavy to bear, and you want deliverance and rest; you are as wretched with indwelling sin as a polluted soul can well make you, and you want a fountain to wash in, and a Physician to heal; you are traveling on to eternity, and you want food from heaven to eat, and garments of salvation to wear; you want to know whom you have believed, and to feel sure that He will keep you until that day; you know that the road is narrow, and the gate straight: but you want, above all things, to be one of the few faithful and believing souls that walk humbly thither, and endure steadfastly to the end.

REAL LIFE.

"To me to live is Christ."—PHIL. i. 21.

WHAT is life, then? How does life here bear upon the life hereafter? St. Paul, one of the holiest and most energetic men whom God's Spirit ever quickened, tells us what life was to him—"For to me to live is Christ." Abrupt and striking these words are. He waits neither to explain nor expand them. Full of power and meaning, but rugged in form, he throws out his description, and leaves it, as it is, for his readers to search into its richness and depth. Put Paul's two great thoughts together, side by side—Life, Christ—just as they were joined in his mind, running into, and interlacing each other. Life was so identified with Christ; Christ so blended with every purpose and object of

life, that he could not disconnect them. Life to him was nothing, had nothing, led to nothing, but as it was spent for Christ; while Christ was the key and meaning of his life. He could not even think of life—of his own life, at least, apart from Christ; before he knew Christ, he was counted dead before God; after, Christ was his life, its being, end, aim. His life was “hid with Christ;” in fact, for him to live was Christ.

Christ is the object for which the Christian lives. Every man has some leading purpose. That purpose creates his element. One lives among the vanities of life, and flutters from folly to folly. Another revels in the abundance of its luxuries. Some, eager and unsatisfied, grasp at its wealth; others spend their lives among weary cares and grinding poverty, barely living to eat, and eating to live; while others loathe life as a constant

struggle with vexation and disappointment. If you were to ask the first twenty persons whom you meet, what they are living for, most of them would probably exclaim : "For me to live; I hardly know what life is to me : it is a strange medley ; certainly it is not what it ought to be, not what I wish it to be, not what I trust it will be, before it is finished." But, if you chance to find one among them, in whose heart the Spirit dwells, he will meet your inquiry with the grateful avowal, that life has no object for him, apart from Christ : his plans are guided by Christ's precepts, his strength is Christ's presence, his aim is Christ's honour, his joy is Christ's smile.

WHAT IS YOUR EXPECTATION?

"My expectation is from Him."—PSALM lxii. 5.

WE misplace our trust, if our expectation be fixed on anything below the throne of God, and Him that sits thereon. Defeat and disappointment must result. Vanity is written on every created thing, and we cannot reverse it. God is jealous of his own glory. Power is his—his prerogative alone. Power to create, uphold, destroy; power to direct in perplexity, to deliver from perils, to make all things work together for good to them that love Him; power to convert, restrain, sanctify; power is his, over all beings, in all worlds. On this strong basis, then, the Christian builds his confidence—"My expectation is from Him."

Make this holy soliloquy your own.

Try this method of conversing with yourself. Commune with your own heart, in your chamber, and be still. Many shut themselves up in unsocial isolation, and hold but little intercourse with others; but, for anyone not to converse with his own soul—to live on terms of unsocial estrangement from himself—this is the worst isolation. It is chilling and hurtful in many ways, to keep aloof from the sympathies of our fellow-travellers in the great journey of life; but it is death not to know one's own self. We converse with men of intelligence and practical wisdom, in all the daily events of life, who yet never search and prove themselves. Whether their own soul is yet dead in sin, through "the one man's transgression," or "alive unto God through Jesus Christ," they never inquire; whether they are daily travelling the broad road, and nearing its eventful termination, or struggling among the heirs

of salvation, to lay hold on the predestined inheritance of glory, they ask no question. This is living as a stranger and a pilgrim, in a fearful sense—"a stranger" to one's own soul, a "pilgrim" travelling to explore the dark mysteries of the second death, never to return.

"The desire of the righteous is as a tree of life, but the expectation of the wicked shall perish." Not that the righteous appears so just yet ; but he continues waiting only upon God, in earnest prayer, in filial obedience, in joyful hope, content with that station of life to which it has pleased God to call him ; he seeks to be diligent in daily duty, not desiring great things for himself, but living in and for Christ, building all his expectation upon the Lord, whose he is, and whom he serves. He "expects" just what the Lord promises, neither more nor less. He knows what to "expect" during life—at its closing scenes

—and after this life is all over. In temptation he “expects” strength to bear it, and a way of deliverance to escape. In sorrow he “expects” grace to comfort, and in duty, grace to help. In hours of weakness he “expects” that Christ will put around him his everlasting arms ; and, in the valley of death, he “expects” that Christ’s presence, and rod and staff, will preserve him from evil, and comfort him in that dark passage. He knows that he must die, but he “expects” that absence from the body will bring him into the presence of the Lord. He knows that the solemnities of the judgment await him after death, but he “expects” that every hostile tongue will be silenced by the sentence of complete acquittal. He knows not what he shall be, when this earthly tabernacle is dissolved, but he “expects” to occupy a mansion in the Father’s house, to wear an undying crown, and to receive an inherit-

ance which sin will not defile, nor time impair. "My soul, wait thou only upon God, for my expectation is from Him."

* Reader, ask yourself — My expectation! what is it? When all the hopes and prospects of this life are quenched for ever, what have I to expect beyond the grave?

III.

THE BENEFITS OF SANCTIFIED AFFLICTION.

IT DRIVES US TO PRAYER.

“Being in an agony, He prayed more earnestly.”—
ST. LUKE xxii. 44.

DAYS of trouble are unspeakably important periods in a man's spiritual history; for then God comes with fulness of blessing to the soul that is waiting to receive Him. But there is one specific duty which lies at the outset—that trouble must bring him to prayer. St. James expresses this plainly: “Is any afflicted? let him pray.” It is a great thing to feel prayer my privilege—I *may* go. But it is far better to feel it my necessity—I *must* go. Then we have real words—real entreaty—there

is depth, and life, and meaning : “ I feel real wants ; I wait for real answers. I am in the deeps ; Lord, deliver me. I sink ; Lord, save me. I am a poor bark, tossed on the rough ocean ; Lord, keep me safe. I am but a worm, a broken vessel ; do not despise me, for thy name’s sake.”

Trouble brings a man direct to God. Ceremonies will not suffice then. He will not stop short till he comes into His presence-chamber. It makes the soul urgent, resolute, craving ; you have a great message to deliver, which you must pour into his ears. “ Call upon me,” is the command. “ Unto Thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul !” is your immediate reply.

Every one notices what life, what earnestness, what reality, trouble gives to prayer. There is nothing like it. It seems to bring every energy of the soul into life. We must go to God. The soul is full of eternal things. All is present and real

28 BENEFITS OF SANCTIFIED AFFLICTION.

now. Faith brings them all before the soul, and this gives a man power in prayer.

In the day of trouble this work is going on. Trouble deepens the impressions of spiritual feeling. It brings us to close dealing with a living Saviour. In trouble, our most serious prayers seem but trifling with the realities of the soul and eternity. "The sorrows of my heart are enlarged. Oh! quicken thou me!" Jonah could trifle with God and with duty, while things went smoothly, but when sunk in the deeps he found his need of prayer. It is said of Him, whom in every step of life's journey we should learn to imitate, that, "being in an agony, He prayed more earnestly;" and many of his people know well, that when they have been pressed down out of measure, they found such nearness of access to his throne that they rejoiced even in such tribulation.

IT SUBDUES THE STUBBORN WILL.

"Shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?"—HEB. xii. 9.

THE great struggle which every Christian has to go through, is whether his own will shall prevail, or the will of God. In theory, the question is easily settled. We have all said, times without number, like the Psalmist, "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel;" we are convinced that among the seductive perplexities of life, we are unable to guide ourselves. "It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." None can choose so well for us as He, whose All-seeing Eye takes in every minute circumstance, and understands things afar off. He has arranged so well for us hitherto, that we have every reason to leave ourselves in his hands, who takes infinitely more interest in our wel-

30 BENEFITS OF SANCTIFIED AFFLICTION.

fare, than the best and wisest of our earthly friends can.

The leading purpose in all our trials is doubtless that we may be "in subjection." God dealeth with you as with sons. Subjection is the highest filial virtue. Dwelling in his earthly home at Nazareth, the youthful Jesus was a perfect example of it. Subjection under trial is not the same thing as reckless indifference or insensibility. Not to feel, or not to care, is that "despising the chastening of the Lord" against which we are warned. There is something revolting in a hard, callous indifference, when brought under the chastening hand of God. The spirit of levity is even more unnatural. Chastisements are God's solemn dealings. There is nothing austere in his intentions and discipline, nothing arbitrary or unfeeling, but all is deeply solemn. To put his children to pain is no light thing with Him. Were

He not constrained, as it were, by regard to their highest interests, He would never put them to grief. "He doth not willingly afflict nor grieve the children of men."

If it has ever been your lot to witness one, who in any signal degree showed this spirit of subjection, you could not fail to mark the "peace," exemplary and divine, which "ruled his heart and mind." No turbulent and stormy feelings were indulged, but all was subdued and tranquil. You marked the "still silence" of the sufferer. Not a question was breathed—why is this? None of that saucy expostulation with God's sovereignty, which falls from the fretful lips of the ungodly. He accepts it as the Lord's doing, and holds his peace.

IT PREPARES FOR FUTURE SERVICE.

“For it became Him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.”—HEB. ii. 10.

THERE are two great parties in the world : they who serve the Lord with humility and love, and they who refuse to have Him to reign over them. The author of evil is employed, without ceasing, walking up and down, tempting mankind, in a thousand ways, with the world's vain glories. “All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.” And multitudes, alas ! accept his terms. The Prince of Peace, on the other hand, issues his invitations : “If any man will be my disciple, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.” And some, thank God ! are made willing to comply.

BENEFITS OF SANCTIFIED AFFLICTION. 33

They who do, however, have no more idea what are the trials of faith they shall have to go through, than what heights of glory they shall at length attain. This much, however, is certain, it was not without great suffering that even the Captain of our Salvation Himself was made perfect. When upon earth, He was, in the most expressive manner, a man of sorrows. So, it is through like tribulation that the little flock of his own people must enter the kingdom. Thus, "as He was so are we in this world."

You never exercise any one with severe discipline who can do already all that is required. It is his unfitness which makes all this discipline necessary. In heaven the spirits are all made perfect; there is no chastising. Training implies that something is seriously wanting. But training implies also a determination that the evil shall be got rid of. Many a child's faults are

34 BENEFITS OF SANCTIFIED AFFLICTION.

not corrected; not because there is nothing to improve, but there is no one to do it.

Now, the children of God are not so. Because they are his children God dealeth with them as with his sons. He has called them to his eternal glory. And his determination is to make them meet for that station. It must be done. He does it all in love. If God did not love his people they would escape numberless trials which now make us sad. Others do not suffer as some of us do. We can see persons who have no more thought of pleasing God than if there were no God; and yet "they are not plagued like other men." No. It is love that trains the child. It were easy to let us alone—to eat the fruit of our own ways; but to mark our many faults—to be so concerned about them as to devise the best means to get rid of them, and then to bring us under discipline, and to make it effectual; this is the fruit of love.

THE SANCTIFYING PROCESS.

"Nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby."—HEB. xii. 11.

GOD takes great pains to fashion his own instruments; and that which He intends to use much, He has often his own tools upon. For a long time we are very useless to Him. We want melting, and subduing, and tempering in ten thousand ways before the Lord can trust us. It is a great honour to be employed for God; and we need much preparation for it. Could Paul have written the eighth chapter of Romans, if he knew but slightly what the mercies of God were? Years of trouble may be needed to gain the tenderness of heart, and the mellow wisdom, which may be uttered to a fellow-sufferer during a short visit in the house of mourning.

36 BENEFITS OF SANCTIFIED AFFLICTION.

What did it cost Peter to be enabled to “strengthen the brethren”? And “ye who are spiritual,” what lessons have you had to learn, before you can restore some tempted and downcast penitent “in the spirit of meekness”? “No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost.” No man can well and tenderly build up another but he who has been broken down, emptied, bruised in his own soul. Then, using those bruised reeds, God does wonders. Man is nothing accounted of in the matter. It is all God’s work—it is pure Deity glorified in man’s behalf. “Be thou exalted in thine own strength : so will we sing and praise thy power.”

“I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”—
Rom. viii. 18.

IV.

NO CROSS, NO CROWN.

BELIEVERS MUST EXPECT THE CROSS.

“If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.”—ST. MATT. xvi. 24.

WHAT are the eternal results of these fiery trials patiently endured, we must die to know. Could we see the Church triumphant now gathering in heaven, we should learn what an abundant weight of glory is given to them who thus overcome by the blood of the Lamb. Their time of suffering here is but for a moment, but eternal and boundless the results in the world to come. It is a sad sight to behold the saints of God struggling with many sorrows, and often forgotten here—but immortal glory awaits him that overcometh. A few more days to dawn and clouds to darken life's sky, then the morn-

ing will arise without a cloud. "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." (Rev. vii. 14.)

Think it not strange, then, concerning the fiery trial which is to try thee, thou afflicted child of God; this is no unusual scene for his people to pass through. It is often in the times of fierce and scorching tribulation that God witnesses to his people their election of grace—"I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction." Seek, while the trial lasts, to secure its blessings in purifying you from sin and assuring you of your final salvation. Plead the promise of God, that He "will bring them through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and try them as gold is tried: they shall call upon my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, The Lord is my God." (Zech. xiii. 9.)

IT IS A MARK OF SONSHIP.

“If ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.”—HEB. xii. 8.

GOD brings no children to heaven but along the pathway of affliction. We assent to this as a truism which nobody questions; and yet it is a long time before we fairly understand that our own state on earth is to be an arrangement of trials and sorrows. Trial is not to be just an occasional thing, but the condition in which God now places us. Nor are we any worse off than our brethren in this. Abraham and the other patriarchs found things rough and dark in their day; the prophets were men versed in sorrows; the apostles warned the churches not to think it strange concerning fiery trials which were to try them. We see that Elijah and the widow had their trials. Then it was their turn; and they fought the good

fight ; they finished their course, and kept the faith ; now our turn is come. First one and then another of us is called out to learn obedience by the things which we suffer. I know it is so with you. He calls up this man, and then that, to go through some new course of trial, to see whether we have learnt to suffer according to the will of God. And angels, and perfect spirits, and Christ himself, are looking on to see if patience has her perfect work. On ! let us not fear or flinch. Remember who placed you there, who stands by you with all needful help. We shall have done with this soon, and then will come the crown and the triumph, and the multitude of sufferers who have gone before ; then, too, will that precious promise become all real, and all who have lived by faith, and patiently borne their allotment of trials, shall enter upon the rest which remaineth for the people of God.

EACH HAS HIS OWN CROSS.

"The fellowship of his sufferings."—PHIL. iii. 10.

ONE of the laws of discipline which the Lord appointed was the cross, which his followers must carry. For this, also, Christ set the example. Christ carried his cross. It was appointed him by the Father. Ages before He came into the world, He covenanted that He would carry his cross. Burdened as He knew it would be by the load of the world's guilt, yet He took it up willingly, and bore it, till the purpose for which it was appointed Him was fully completed. But the Lord has ordained crosses, too, for his people. I have to carry my cross. You also have yours. But Christ's cross and our crosses are for very different purposes. Christ went through that scene on Calvary, as an expiation for

our transgressions. He suffered death upon the cross for our redemption. On his cross He made a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world. Our cross has no atoning virtue. Nor is any needed. The atonement is complete without it. If it were not complete, our cross can have no virtue, because our sufferings are sinful, and need to be forgiven. Christ's cross gives us the right to heaven; our cross subdues our indwelling sin, and prepares us for heaven. Christ's cross has infinite value before God; our cross has chastening virtue before men. Christ's cross opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers; our cross prepares us to be numbered with his saints in glory everlasting.

Every disciple of Christ has something which may well be called his cross—some sacrifice to make, some loss or trial to endure, some affliction or other which He

appoints us to go through ; just as God the Father appointed his cross for his own Son, so He appoints some cross for every son and daughter who belongs to his universal family.

It may vary in form. Sometimes the world makes our cross, with its hatred and contempt. Sometimes it comes from our household : it may be unruliness in children, or want of sympathy in tender relationships, or poverty, or some kind of domestic hardship ; or it may be the fear of these things. Sometimes the cross may be in one's self : a suffering body, nervous, over-sensitive, dispirited, unequal to the world's rough usage. Sometimes it is in our worldly affairs : the anxieties of business, or the unknown, and often unappreciated, cares of home. Some people's cross is conspicuous ; others see it laid on them ; while others carry theirs in secret, in the wounded spirit, which none can discern. Sometimes the cross comes

suddenly. You may feel no cross to-day ;
but before another week is gone you may
be crushed to the ground with a burden
which you cannot bear.

V.

COMFORT FOR CROSS-BEARERS.

COMFORT FOUND IN WAITING ON GOD.

“Wait on the Lord ; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen thine heart ; wait, I say, on the Lord.”

—Ps. xxvii. 14.

MANY a penitent soul, awakened to see his peril, and set to carry sin's heavy burden, waits long, seeking, and inquiring, and praying, before he is enabled to cast his burden at the foot of the cross, and to believe that God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven him.

Many a child of God is left to walk in darkness without any joy, and almost without any hope, and fears that he is utterly shut out from his favour ; and, in this unhappy state, waits, in tears, fearing that his mercy is clean gone for ever. In his providential dealings, too, no trial is more

wearisome than long-continued disappointment. "Hope deferred maketh the heart sick." Oh, how weary some are left to be! Some burden is laid upon them, and there it lies—a dead weight upon the spirits. Time seems long, the trial gets heavier, the heart fainter. "Mine eyes fail with waiting so long upon God." These are sore trials, but they are not strange things. They are frequently allotted to the heirs of salvation. Wait still upon God. Remember that promise given by a waiting God to his waiting people: "Therefore will the Lord wait, that He may be gracious unto you, and therefore will He be exalted, that He may have mercy upon you; for the Lord is a God of judgment; blessed are all they that wait for Him." (Isaiah xxx. 18.)

THE REFINING PROCESS.

"Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried."

DAN. xii. 10.

TIMES of providential trial and suffering lead the people of God to wait specially on Him. At such times we learn some deep lessons of the vanity of man. Life often becomes a rougher journey the longer we pursue it. Many enter upon the morning of life with everything bright and smiling around them. Others set out among rugged hardships, which try the temper and discipline the will. The bright scenes of this life seldom last long. We all hope to fill our cup brimful of worldly comforts—and many, at times, obtain no small portion; mercies are added to mercies in such rich abundance that, astonished at the Lord's great goodness, we exclaim with grateful hearts : "My cup runneth over;"

but it will not always run over. Few of the Lord's people wait with much diligence upon Him, when they are carrying a full cup of worldly prosperity. Lot's cup was full, too full, when he settled at Sodom; but he did not wait on the Lord there. David's cup was too full when tranquillity reigned in Jerusalem, and victory crowned his arms in foreign warfare. But these scenes of worldly prosperity passed away; then, desolate and broken-hearted, they learned by bitter experience the nothingness of man and the vanity of the world. Recollecting afresh, in times of trouble, that God is our refuge and strength, we say, with tenfold fervour of meaning: "Now, my soul, hew thee no more broken cisterns; adorn thy garden with no more strange slips; touch thy lips no more with these mock grapes of Sodom; but, wait, wait thou only upon God."

Continue to wait upon Him. He may

not answer your request on your first asking, or second. He may keep you waiting, to try you, as He tried the Syrophenician applicant. He may seem not to answer a word, when, all the while, his heart yearns over you, like Joseph at the sight of his brother Benjamin standing before him. Then state your case to the Great Physician ; leave it with Him ; He may take time to “consider your soul in adversity,” but He will assuredly give the forgiveness you need, if you will “quietly wait for the salvation of God.”

It is of little use to carry our troubles to man. Let the Lord be at the helm of your ship. Take Him on board. Make Him the pilot. Take your trouble, whatever it is, to the throne of God. There, on your knees, lodge the whole matter with Him, and you will not go far wrong. Enemies may tempt, and storm, and threaten, but He will not suffer your foot

to be moved. Be sincere with God. Beware of seeming to consult Him, asking Him to lead you and guide you, when in fact you have made up your mind already which way you will go. Many pretend to "wait only on the Lord," when, it is quite plain, they lean to their own understanding, and have taken counsel first at their own will. Such dissemblers will have to remember, that "with the upright the Lord will show Himself upright, but with the froward He will show Himself froward." If with honest sincerity of purpose you put the matter fairly into the Lord's hands, and wait for his guidance, He will "keep you in perfect peace," and give you to see the gracious interpositions of God.

THEIR SECURITY IS IN GOD.

"My God will supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus."—PHIL. iv. 19.

WHEN sentiments full of truth and wisdom are given to us by men of experience who have evidently put them to the trial, we are prepared to receive such lessons with deep seriousness, and desire to profit by them. The assurance of St. Paul, that God will supply the needs of his people, is of that kind. If Balaam had expressed that sentiment, or Simon Magus, or Judas, or any other man that is now withering in immortal sorrow, still the truth stands—God will supply all the needs of his people. But this assurance is all the more weighty when we remember that it was given by a saint of God, who lived upon it for well-nigh thirty years of a life of

unparalleled necessities, and who had drawn upon those "riches in glory" more largely than any other man that ever breathed. He wrote this assurance within the very walls of a prison. Thus it is no mere conjecture, but the matured fruit of his own experience, after undergoing hardships which made privation familiar, and God's promises needful; and here he lays it down for the comfort of tried believers in every age. Be ye sure of this: "My God will supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus." (Phil. iv. 19.)

We learn, then, that when persons receive the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ into their hearts, so that they experience its transforming power and share its blessings; when they have received Christ Jesus as their life and their righteousness, and are willing to endure hardships for his sake; when this inward experience works itself

out in all the consistencies of every-day godliness, and faithful pastors confidently look upon them as the spiritual fruits of their labour, and expect to meet them again with joy in a better world ;—these are the persons who are to be comforted with this blessed assurance, that whatever be their necessities in this world of trial, their God will supply them all out of His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

THE CONSOLATIONS OF GOD.

"I, even I, am He that comforteth you."—ISA. li. 12.

THIS is certain, that no creature in God's world is so full of needs as his own believing children. Want, here, is discipline for glory hereafter. God's first lesson is to teach us how needy we are; and when we feel ourselves ready to perish for want, and to sink into the very depths of despair, then He comes with his own rich supply, lifts the poor out of the mire, and sets him with the princes, even with the princes of his people.

But think of the supply which is laid up to meet these wants. Let the first thought bring you at once to the Fountain Head, from whom all blessings flow. If we stop short by going to any creature, instead of betaking ourselves at once to Him who is the sovereign Giver of all

mercy, we make a great mistake. David understood this. "The Lord is my Shepherd,"—then he could say, "I shall not want." And again, "God is our refuge and strength,"—then he drew the comfort from it, "therefore will I not fear." If you expect man to supply your wants, you will be woefully disappointed. The experience of every one, whether religious or worldly, confirms him in this conclusion. Put no trust in man. Do not calculate upon man. He is a cloud without water. He is an unreal thing. He is a broken reed at the best. Do not lean there. It will give way. Look to the everlasting hills. There mercy shall be built up for ever. Dig deeper, down into the everlasting covenant of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit, and say with confiding heart to Him, "All my fresh springs are in Thee." St. Paul felt all this when he said, with unfaltering assurance, "My

God shall supply all your need." And so said another, in our day, who knew well how faithful God is:—

"Though troubles assail, and dangers affright,
Though friends should all fail, and foes all unite,
Yet one thing secures us, whatever betide,
The Scripture assures us,—the Lord will provide."

In order to gain this confident assurance, that God will supply all our need, we are reminded of the riches of God. We are prone to be discouraged by misgivings, whether He can supply such wants as ours. To silence all unbelieving fears, go into the treasure-house of God, and survey "his riches in glory." The Apostle loved to think of those divine riches, and encouraged others to think of them too. In one place he speaks of God as "rich in mercy;" in another, as "rich in goodness;" he tells the Romans of "the depth of the riches of his wisdom," and the Ephesians of "the exceed-

ing riches of his grace;" and, as to all imaginable earthly good, "the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof." Whatever be our necessities, has not Christ "unsearchable riches" to supply us? Myriads of needy sinners go to Him daily with their urgent wants and empty hands, nor does one ever come back disappointed; then how can his people want? If they do, surely it is not because they are straitened in Him. "He is able to do above all that we ask;" yea, "exceeding abundantly above all that we ask;" yea, "exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think." Well might David exclaim, with wonder and gratitude, "Oh! how great is Thy goodness which Thou hast laid up for them that fear Thee." (Psa. xxxi. 19.) With such supplies reserved in the treasury of heaven, let us distrust no more, but confidently believe, that "they who fear the Lord shall not want any good thing."

GOD ONLY HIS PEOPLE'S PORTION.

"Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her."

—HOSEA ii. 14.

BUT when God brings his people into the wilderness, He never forgets to speak comfortably to them there. He speaks directly home to their hearts. *We* would fain do this, too. But, alas! *we* can only reach the ear, or at most the understanding and the feelings. How powerless man's words are! You go to church, longing for spiritual direction and comfort; or you take up some consoling book, hoping there to find some words in season: but in vain! Perhaps you turn to your Bible, seeking consolation from some of those deep wells; but the soul is weary still. Thus He is teaching you that man cannot comfort,—ordinances cannot—books cannot

—even the letter of the Bible cannot—and there you remain, “afflicted and tossed with tempests, and not comforted.” But, by these failures you are learning the great lesson, “that all your fresh springs are in Him,” and all your consolation and hope must come immediately from God himself.

We are not always able to receive his comfort. God has spoken, but we are backward to hear. He speaks by various means, but the heart is not awake. Too many interruptions are still permitted—too much occupation—too much of the world’s bustle. So God puts an end to all this; brings you to the wilderness; there pleads with you face to face; makes you attentive, contrite, serious. “I, even I, am He that comforteth thee.” We understand it then.

VI.

THE CROSS OF BODILY SICKNESS.

THE TRIALS OF SICKNESS.

*“Have mercy upon me, O Lord, for I am weak ;
O Lord, heal me, for my bones are vexed.”—*

PSALM vi. 2.

SICKNESS is one of our most common afflictions. We do not travel far along the journey of life, before we find that the body is a frequent cause of suffering. The seeds of disease are inherited, which no care or skill can eradicate. Many are the inevitable ills that flesh is heir to ; but many others, persons bring culpably upon themselves. Some diseases are produced by careless neglect ; some by sloth and indolence ; some by pernicious indulgence ; and some by habits of excess and crime, that must ruin any man’s strength and dig

an early grave. While such causes exist, no wonder that sickness is so prevalent.

Sickness is an enemy whose invasion we cannot prevent. No vigilant coast-service can deter its approach—no iron-plated vessels are invulnerable to its assaults,—nor can any combination of patriotic heroes defend us against its attack. We may mitigate the severity of sickness, and remove some elements of corruption ; but when we have done our utmost, if we could cleanse away every pollution, could curb the excesses of luxury, and abate the temptations to crime, even then we should find the evil too deeply seated, and the dark wing of sickness still hover around our dwellings.

Sickness is very hard to bear. Other trials are hard too ; disappointment, unkindness, poverty, losses and bereavements, are sore trials. But many an one has gone through these with marvellous equanimity,

62 THE CROSS OF BODILY SICKNESS.

who is crushed to the ground by an assault of sickness. Nothing is so personal as sickness. There is no escaping. It comes home to the heart; lays its hand upon us,—“Thou art the man.” It isolates us, too, and brings us to silence and to solitude. Other trials leave many things as they were. We can still repair to our accustomed scenes of business, though with a sad countenance and a heavy heart. We can go in and out, meeting familiar faces,—we can buy, and sell, and pursue the usual routine of life, though saddened with sorrow. But when sickness comes it alters all this. It shuts us up. It makes the day all strange. We want to be busy as usual, but cannot. Things of urgent importance make us anxious and uneasy, but we cannot move. We seem useless, and we must yield. Nay, we feel that we are a burden upon others and an interruption to them. The loss of independence is very

mortifying ; we fret under it, but we cannot help it.

And the feebleness, the prostration, too, of sickness is a new thing. The silent tread ; the darkened room ; the whisper ; the muffled noise ; the utter sinking in ourselves ; the indescribable weariness, which nothing can relieve ; the fevered brain restlessly at work, yet without any aim or control ; the heart and flesh failing,—all this is an element of sickness from which man's nature cannot but shrink.

The circumstances of our trials vary. But even these strong descriptions of the heart overwhelmed by the incoming tide of sorrows, will awaken the feelings of sympathy in many bosoms.

Physicians wisely dwell no more on the symptoms of disease than is needful to apply the remedy. Nor would I linger on minuter delineation of the stormy trou-

64 THE CROSS OF BODILY SICKNESS.

bles of God's people, than is requisite to quicken the cry of faith, "Lead me to the Rock that is higher than I." There is no religion in merely thinking over the calamities of life. Providence places a cross in every man's way. He must think about it. But while people of the world spend time in murmuring and regret, the believer knows that these things have a meaning. They are messages from God, which he tries to read. They are a voice to which he listens, for he knows who speaks. He feels the trial most sensitively, but it is the Lord's doing from first to last. The Lord casts down and raises up. Trouble or quietness is his gift. Days of tribulation come from the same hand as times of our wealth. If the heart be glad, He made it glad. If overwhelmed, He raised the storm.

JOYFUL THROUGH HOPE.

"I shall yet praise Him."—PSALM xlii. 5.

No circumstances in which the people of God can be placed are so trying, but they can say, and ought to say, "I shall yet praise Him." How long it may be first—how much rougher the tempest, and darker the sky, I cannot tell. For how long time I may have to carry this heavy cross, and drink this bitter cup, is not for me to say; but this is my confidence—"I shall yet praise Him." These things will all look very different one day. When everything runs smoothly, and our hearts find all their desires supplied, it is very easy for any one to sing praises then. But there is no faith that brings glory to God, no breathings of the believing soul, no fruit of the Spirit there. It is when oppressed

with sickness, and sorrow, and care; when called to give up our own will, and suffer losses and bereavements, wasting the strength and making life bitter—it is then you see that living, enduring, conquering faith, which looks through all these clouds, and says, in filial submission, “I shall yet praise Him.” Yet, “yet will I rejoice in the Lord; I will joy in the God of my salvation.” Oh! let this hope never depart from you. Let the things of the world go roughly as they may; let the world frown and Satan rage; keep firm hold of this full assurance of hope, “I shall yet praise Him.” Jacob was cast down, “but he trusted in God, and he praised Him.” Moses’ soul was disquieted within him, but after the trial of his faith he praised Him. The Canaanitish woman was disquieted about her daughter, but her faith saved her, and she praised Him. And since then, myriads more, cast down

and disquieted as you are, have all come out of their great tribulations, and are now praising Him with sinless and joyful lips.

God can prepare and take us to Himself, without giving much of this world's good—but, without suffering, He will take none. “For what son is he whom the Father chasteneth not?” But no one has any idea of the abundant consolations which fill and rejoice the souls of God's suffering people. They shrink from trial as they see it coming ; but when they are in it, they find such inward strength, such strong confidence in God, such filial submission, that, “they are filled with comfort, they are exceeding joyful in all their tribulations.”

VII.

CROSSES IN THE WORLD.

CHRISTIANS MUST EXPECT A REAL STRUGGLE.

"I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world."—ST. JOHN xvii. 15.

THE position which God appoints for his sons, is "in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation." He selects this rough world to be their dwelling-place, and the scene of their daily trials, fidelity, and mercies. Anxious parents seek to isolate their children, and protect them from contact with the world, as if ignorance of the world's evil would give wisdom, or they might become good soldiers of Christ without enduring the discipline or hardness of warfare. This is not God's method. He never meant his people to keep aloof

from others, to waste their energies in indolent seclusion, or beat the air in imaginary conflicts. His aim is not to hedge his people round by any restrictive separation. Many people are "of the world" though not "in the world"—kept outwardly separate, but all the while, in heart and will, are servile idolaters of the world—reversing the Christian's maxim, "In the world, but not of the world." The Lord prayed, "not that they might be taken out of the world, but kept from the evil." They must breathe the same air with the ungodly and profane, and yet keep themselves from contamination; must meet under the same roof, conferring with men of ungenial minds and dissimilar aims; must transact together the daily business of life, with all courtesy, yet with watchful caution. Placed intentionally in the midst of the world, the "sons of God" are compelled to see how corrupt and fictitious it

is. Unwilling witnesses indeed they are, daily wounded in spirit and grieved by its obtrusive evils, which their efforts try to mitigate, or their example, silently, it may be, but yet solemnly, condemns; still, there they are, "the sons of God in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation," often left there, too, to be "sifted as wheat," and endure, year after year, the searching trial of their faith.

THEY MUST FIGHT AGAINST THE STREAM.

"As He is, so are we in this world."—I JOHN iv. 17.

HERE, then, "in the world," the Lord's people have to live. Once they were "of the world," lived in its congenial society, imbibed its spirit, and heartily loved its ways. Then sin worked in them, and by them, and produced its fruits. But grace has worked too. Sin brought death instead of life. Grace brings again new life from the dead. Sin has overspread the heavens with its darkness; grace sets its stars to shine there, as the brightness of the firmament for ever and ever.

When Christ raised his eyes to the Father, and uttered his great prayer, eleven true-hearted men were gathered around Him, adoring his sovereign grace, that they were no longer of the world. He had chosen them out of the world; and

through their labours, others, in coming ages, were to be gathered out also.

Yet, well does the Lord know this world, from the evil of which He would have his people kept. It is a mighty stream, which carries away, in its impetuous torrent, the restraints of conscience, reason, and religion, and plunges myriads in sorrow and ruin. It perverts men's opinions, and corrupts their principles; it misguides the judgment, and panders to a vitiated taste. Its stronghold is among the great, the learned, and wealthy. Flattered by their sanction, and easily tempted to copy their example, others live as they live, and each age perpetuates its own corruption. Thus, the world, fermented by the spirit of evil, presents a combination of unceasing dangers to the people of Christ, wherein every device is used, fraudulent or forcible, to draw them away from their steadfast fidelity to Him.

CHRISTIANS MUST LEARN TO MEET
STORMS.

*“Consider Him who endured such contradiction of
sinners against Himself.”—HEB. xii. 3.*

MIXED society, with its exhibitions of personal vanity and attractive ostentation, affords no congenial element for spiritual minds. Few Christians, it may be feared, would resemble their Master there, when He sat, as a guest, at the Pharisee's table. No test of a man's Christianity is more severe, than to maintain his fidelity to Christ, if called to mingle in the social festivities of the world. Few have grace to do it. The salt has too little savour. The light shines too feebly to be seen. Such scenes make them forgetful of the Lord's solicitude, that the Father would keep them from the world's evil; from the evil of its seductive smiles; the evil

of its vain show and false colours; the evil of its unreal professions and fantastic hopes; the evil of its scenes which captivate, and persons who flatter, and seduce their hearts from better things—keep them from the evil of the world's weary cares, its over-exhausting occupation and un-resting toil, drying up the soul, and leaving nothing for God but weariness and formality.

It is for the world's good that Christ's real people are kept in it. As soon as He renews the sinner, it were easy to take him out of the world, never to let him shed another tear, face another temptation, or commit a sin. But they must remain awhile in the world, and fairly encounter its temptations, snares, and sorrows. They would prefer to live in the tranquil sunshine of some Goshen, far withdrawn from the sights and sounds of evil, where they might nurse their comforts, and enjoy their privi-

leges in seclusion. But the Lord appoints otherwise. The sore conflict; the daily struggle; the cross to be taken up, with its burden and weariness—this is the Lord's will. Go, then, and honour Christ in the rough and evil world. He places you where your faith will be best tried, your will subdued, your proud and foolish self mortified; you must learn to meet storms, and not be discouraged; to endure temptations, and not sin; to suffer pains, and not flinch; to bear prosperity, and not grow proud; to suffer privations, and not murmur; to carry weary burdens, and not faint—thus, to task and train the soul of his people, He detains them awhile, “yet in the world.” So exceedingly important is the period of their sojourn in the world, that He disclaims the wish to shorten it. “I pray not that Thou wouldest take them out of the world.”

VIII.

SPIRITUAL TRIALS.

HEART SORROWS.

"The heart knoweth its own bitterness."—

PROV. xiv. 10.

BUT many a heart, wherein the Spirit of God dwells, is wearied with its own peculiar burdens. The world will hear little of them, and understand less, but their secret communion with the Father of spirits makes it plain that "we who are in this tabernacle do groan being burdened." It was under his heavy burden that Job confessed his soul was weary of his life; David was weary with groaning; and though we may not know them, many whose names are written in heaven, are nevertheless "weary and faint in their minds."

Some are weary under the convictions of an awakened conscience. It is not any of the sorrows of life, although perhaps such "trouble is hard at hand;" but it is sin, that has "laid hold upon them," and fixed its sting in the conscience. The heart is wounded. The sins of a whole lifetime come appallingly to remembrance. They hardly dare lift up their eyes to heaven. They go mourning all the day long. Once, nothing of this was felt; they were "alive without the law once;" but now "sin has revived," and become a burden too heavy to bear. They may seem cheerful, but "the heart knows its own bitterness." The iron enters into their soul. They dread the future still more. And thus they live oppressed with a burden which is intolerable, and find none to comfort them.

This is the weariness of many. Perhaps their earlier experience was calm, or

even joyful, but “now they are in heaviness.” They have no comforting sense of peace with God through the atoning death of Christ; dark suggestions of all kinds, casting doubts upon their interest in Christ, trouble them; they are “in divers temptations,” but cannot “count it all joy;” they walk in darkness, and have no light, so that they pass their days and nights “in weariness, and painfulness, and watchings.” “I am as a man that hath no strength,” said one. “My soul,” said another, “is full of troubles: I am like one that is at the point to die.”

FAILURE OF FAITH.

*"Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel,
My way is hid from the Lord?"—ISA. xl. 27.*

It is said, though in slander, that religious people are often complaining; that they are out of humour with everything and every one, and often with themselves too. If this be true, if they give way to a fretful and impatient spirit, they are an unhappy specimen of the religion they profess. But the fact is that God's people, now made alive to eternal things, have so much to watch over—see so many dangers—encounter such oppositions, perils, conflicts—endure discipline of all kinds, and trials of their faith so severe—that, faint and cast down in heart, they often say to themselves, "My way is hid from the Lord, my judgment is passed over from my God." "My way"—here the whole

circumstances of our lives, the outward events of Providence, and the inward condition of our hearts, are called our "way." St. Paul says: "My way of life know all the Jews"—my conduct, my history. Job—"He knoweth the way that I take."

We have all our own "way." Every man is the hero of his own history. Every traveller marks the road and occurrences of his journey. Some find it smooth, others difficult. As years go, on the "way" changes; some find their rough days come first, and the journey of life grows smoother as they advance, while the bright morning with which others set out, becomes overcast, and, in the evening of life, dark storms gather thickly around.

The Christian is no stranger to trying scenes. His "way" often lies through rough places; things strange and dismal gather around; his comforts run low, friends

drop off one by one ; his strength of body and mind seems to fail ; and, altogether, he feels so desolate, fainting, bewildered—so different from what he used to be—so different from other Christians, as he thinks, that he is down-hearted and unhappy. He looks within. The things of the spirit are so feeble—little to distinguish him from the world—the signs of a good work, once hopeful and encouraging, are obscure—sins seem so many, temptations severe, his conscience troubled, communion with God less refreshing than formerly—Providential events, too, one after another, like Job's messengers, portentous and gloomy—that, whether he looks within or around, all things seem against him—it is a dark and cloudy day.

THE HIDING OF GOD'S FACE.

"Surely against me is He turned."—LAM. iii. 3.

The worst complaint is when the Lord seems not to care for us. "My way is hid from the Lord." As a person is said to be hidden from another, if he neglects him, knows nothing about him, makes no inquiry, leaves him to himself, so, when the Christian is dejected by all sorts of trials, tossed among waves and storms boisterously rolling over him, he thinks that the Lord is quite out of sight—He knows nothing about him, nor cares for what he is going through,—“this dark strange way of mine,” he thinks, “is hid from the Lord; I am left to get on as best I can; I have no help, no guide, no deliverer; I am like a poor defenceless suitor in a court, my cause is hopeless,

there is no one to say a word for me, but all is going against me ; God leaves me alone ; I am utterly forsaken, and I cannot help it. ‘ My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God.’ ” Such has been the condition of many of God’s people in former ages ; and I doubt not such is the utterance of some who may read this page,—“ My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God.”

If it be so, then, let us see whether the Lord’s treatment of the Jewish Church, in her trouble, may not meet you.

Mark, the first word is that of reproof. This is not the language for God’s people to use. There is nothing in their trials to warrant such discouragement. Sometimes, indeed, they are very sorrowful. Sorrow is quite consistent with faith. The highest saints of God are pressed down with trials. They may enumerate them to others, and

confess, as St. Paul did, that they are pressed down beyond measure, and despairing even of life; but, when they cast any reflections upon God, as if He disregarded them, and left them to struggle in the storm as best they can, this is charging God foolishly. He censures this. He calls upon you to explain, "Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the Lord?" Why this murmuring? Why should you say anything so ungrateful, so dishonourable to the Lord as this?

It is true that you are going through deep trials; changes have befallen you; God has been showing you heavy things; your way is crooked and full of troubles; but why, why do you say that your way is hid from the Lord? Cannot his eye pierce these dark clouds? Cannot his right hand lead you, and guide you even in crooked paths? Things are changed with

you, your experiences, your Providential circumstances, your comforts, and way of life, but why say they are changed with Him? You may not see any way of escape; but why do you say that He sees none? You are brought to your wit's end; but why do you speak as if the Lord were at a loss what to do? Why this? Is there no wisdom in his counsels? Is there no power in his arm? Is there no faithfulness in his promise? Is there no constancy in his care and love?

IX.

THE LORD'S PRESENCE WITH HIS
PEOPLE IN TRIAL.

UNSEEN, YET EVER NEAR.

"Fear not, for I am with thee."—ISA. xliii. 5.

UNBELIEF is always assailing the Lord's tried people with the blustering question, "Who is that God that shall deliver you out of" this or that trial? "Our God whom we serve is able to do it," is the confiding answer of faith; and ten thousands of his people, tried to the uttermost in mind · body, estate—tossed with waves and storms of trouble, and tried by furnaces of fiery tribulations—yet all come to this blessed and soul-comforting assurance, that their God whom they serve is able to deliver them.

It seems strange to us that God should remain quiet, and permit his own people,

who are so precious in his sight, to endure such heavy sufferings. But experience shows that there is no kind of trial which God will not permit his own people to endure, in order to prove the genuineness of their faith, and promote their ripeness for heaven. What are the feelings of suffering believers while passing through their fiery trials, we cannot describe.

But when the trials of God's people seem come to extremities, then is the time that He shows that all is not over. When actually in the furnace, how different a place did the three children find it from what they feared! There were the waves of fire, lashing around and above their heads, beneath their feet the embers glowing with excessive brightness, and yet, in that strange position, instant death to all the world but them, they preferred that burning floor to the marble of Nebuchadnezzar's palace, and the flames of fire that

waved and darted in all directions were harmless and pleasant as the summer's breeze. The solution of this mystery is, because the Lord was with them in that furnace of fire. There was a banner floating over that furnace, inscribed, Jehovah Shammah—"the Lord is there!"

How little the external circumstances of God's people affect their real felicity! We dread these fiery trials, getting, perhaps, hotter and hotter, and shrink at the idea of being put in there; we think they will be certain death to every comfort and every hope; but when we are in the midst of the furnace, we find the Lord is there, so graciously near, so manifest—He looses our bonds; He quenches the violence of the flame; He preserves us unhurt—that we realize to the letter the truth of the Divine assurance, "When thou passest through the river it shall not overflow thee, and through the fire it shall not burn thee."

THE LORD STRENGTHENS HIS PEOPLE
IN SORROW.

*"The Lord stood with me and strengthened
me."*—2 TIM. iv. 17.

THE Lord stands by, to watch the conduct of his suffering people. In the interesting records which are sent by our soldiers in foreign warfare, we see their eager expectation, that their deeds of valour should be noticed at home. Each one longs to find his own name emblazoned in the records of military fame, testifying that the eye of observant generalship was attracted towards him, and that his heroic actions are known and commended to the admiration of his country.

Unseen, indeed, but ever vigilantly observant of his people, the Lord stands by them in their daily warfare. Invisible to them, still He has many ways by which

He makes his presence known. Perhaps St. Paul, in that Roman tribunal, actually beheld Him standing by his side; discerned by no other eye, but manifested to his chosen servant, with outstretched arms, it may be, as if shielding his faithful confessor in that great time of need. And if so—if, in that eventful crisis, the Divine Saviour whom he had served with unfaltering faith for more than thirty years, were then visible—not in the heavens standing at the right hand of God, as dying Stephen beheld him, but there, by his very side, looking in his face, whispering undying words into his ear, pointing out to him that heavenly world, to which Paul would soon be taken—then no forms of death, no sights of suffering to come, could terrify the Apostle's heart, sustained mightily, as he was, by the sight of Jesus himself, standing close at his very side.

But, by the side of every suffering

servant of his, Jesus is really, though invisibly, standing. After the Lord's first agony in the garden, St. Luke specially records, "There appeared unto Him an angel of God, strengthening him." Whether that elect angel stood by, and sustained his human frame, then sinking under the burden of insupportable sorrow; or how that angel fulfilled his great commission by strengthening the Son of God, in his hour of mysterious agony; we know not. But if, in the times of restlessness and sorrow, some bright spirit were seen hovering over your bed of sickness, or with outstretched wings overshadowing you in the hours of wakefulness and pain, would not such attendance abundantly compensate for all you had to go through? But, if angels are not sent to strengthen, "the Lord of angels" Himself is there. Not a scene of suffering are his people called to go through, but the Lord stands

by hour after hour, and strengthens them. And they feel it. The eye of faith can discern the form of the Son of God walking with them amidst the flames of the furnace ; or treading, in majestic triumph, upon the billows of every storm. Other comforters may be withdrawn, and their voices not heard ; enough, if but his assuring voice be heard, in the wild fury of trouble, " Fear not, for I am with thee ; be not dismayed, for I am Thy God : I will strengthen thee ; yea, I will help thee ; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of My righteousness." This will soothe every fear, and establish your hearts—and nothing else but his presence ever will.

HE STRENGTHENS OFTEN BY PRACTICE.

"I have learned in whatsoever state I am therewith to be content."—PHIL. iv. 11.

THERE is wisdom in the Lord's way of strengthening his people. Strength is not given while we sit still and think about our weakness, but when brought into straits and difficulties which make us feel that we are weak. Paul tells us the humbling process which he went through to gain this strength. It was by the stern discipline and changes of life ; by transitions, sometimes rapid, sometimes tedious, from comfort to want ; rejoicing at one time in abundance, then facing severe privations and biting hardship. Hear his own confession : I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound ; I am instructed ; I am initiated into the opposite lessons of trial and prosperity—both

to be full and to be hungry—to abound and to suffer need. I have acquired great strength by this discipline. Things which seemed too hard for me to do, or suffer, are less formidable by these exercises. I have learnt that the secret of the Christian's power is this, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

The gift of strength is best appreciated when we fail through weakness. An expert swimmer saw a man fall into the sea; he watched his ineffectual struggles, and yet left him alone. Presently he sunk, then rose again to the surface; still nothing was done. Soon he showed signs of exhaustion, when instantly the deliverer sprang into the water, and rescued him from death. To the inquiry, why he delayed, he replied that the best time to rescue the man was when he felt that his own strength was gone. Just so, the Lord often waits till we show signs of

exhaustion. When He sees us struggling with rough waves, and beginning to sink, then He stretches forth his hand, and, with infinite tenderness, holds us up in safety. Beset with all sorts of trial—some to-day, which perplex, others to-morrow, which dishearten; some which awaken our fears, others which try our faith; then, betaking ourselves to the Lord, our strong Deliverer, his strength is made perfect in our weakness. He gives us strength for our day—strength to do and to bear what each day brings—just strength for that, and often not more than enough.

The Lord reserves his strength, then, till the time of need really comes. Imaginary trials often seem harder to bear than real. "If such an event were one day to befall me, my heart would break, I should utterly sink!" So I often think. But when the trial comes, I am astonished at my power to bear it. The truth is,

we are not strengthened beforehand. We have no promise that the Lord will give grace to help under anticipated trials; his help is reserved for times of need — present, urgent need.

CHRIST'S WHISPERS OF PEACE.

"Be not afraid for I am with thee."—

ACTS xviii. 9, 10.

PROMISES are plain and easy to understand, but providences are often obscure and forbidding. We must interpret mysterious providences by direct promises, and not think that promises fail when providences are contrary. The Lord promises that He will ever be with his people; and yet conflicts and perils, temptations and deaths, befall them as well as others. The three Hebrews were in the furnace, and Daniel was among lions; yet the Lord was with them. Job was tried in mind, body, and estate, and Jonah plunged into indescribable terrors; yet the Lord was with them. Many are now almost sinking among waves of sorrow, or their feet just crossing the dark river of death; but the promise

sustains them in their hour of need—"Fear not, for I am with thee ; be not dismayed, for I am thy God. I will defend thee ; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness."

Why your heart is cast down, reader,—what need, sorrow, sickness, or what other necessity may press heavily, and turn your days into mourning,—may be unknown to any, except Him whose ear is ever open to the mourner's cry. It is not for man to promise that the Lord will come to you, standing visibly in glory by your side, and speak words audibly into your ear : but if you are Christ's, his consolations are as sure for you as they were for St. Paul. The Lord is as present with you now, this hour, and ever will be, as He was when St. Paul saw his glory, and heard his voice. The Apostle saw and believed. Seeing helped his faith. To you belongs the greater blessing promised

to faith without sight,—“Because thou hast seen thou hast believed; blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.”

Strength for time of need is gained only by real personal communion with the Lord. Cheered by this blessed vision, the heart of St. Paul was no more heavy, nor did the aspect of anxiety and fear again cloud his brow. For him enemies have now no terror; dangers inspire no fears; peril loses its forbidding look; he is strengthened with all might by the Spirit in the inner man. This is the secret of that amazing fortitude which upholds God's servants in their time of tribulation and need.

X.

THE CROSS MISTAKEN.

TROUBLE IS SOMETIMES A CURSE, AND
NOT A CROSS.

"Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

—GAL. vi. 7.

SOME people mistake their cross. When I see a spendthrift clothed in rags, the trembling and emaciated drunkard crying childish tears, or the dishonest man broken-hearted in despair; these men's troubles are not their cross. They are the curse brought on them by their own folly, not the chastisement measured out for them by the paternal wisdom of God.

The command which the law gives to each one about his own cross is direct,—that he take it up and carry it, be it what it may. Some of life's sorest evils

have sprung from turning aside from the path of obedience, in order to avoid hardship. Sin is often a short road to an object. It seems so. Through bad companions, and expensive habits, a young man gets into money difficulties. He thinks, if he were just to abstract something from his employer, that would cut the knot. He does it. Instead of walking along the highway of uprightness, he turns aside. But what then? Has sin brought him out of difficulties? It never did. It never will. "As for such that turn aside to crooked paths, the Lord shall lead them forth with the workers of iniquity."

NEEDLESS ANXIETIES.

"Be careful for nothing."—PHIL. iv. 6.

BEYOND the seriousness which results from faith, the Christian is prone to a fretful solicitude about many things, which shows that his faith is weak. He has learnt to commit his soul to the Lord; but he finds it no easy thing to cast his burden on the Lord. As to his sins—once, indeed, a burden felt too heavy to bear—they he has brought to Him who bore them in his body on the tree; and as to the daily recurrence of sins, he lays them before that Advocate with the Father who is also the propitiation for our sins; but as to his cares, they go on accumulating, day by day, week by week, new ones added, till they are become a load of anxieties, under which he seems to find no relief and

no strength. Some cares are about matters so trifling that he should blush to mention them to the dearest friend—some so beyond our reach, that our most fretful solicitude cannot make the least change—some are about things already gone by which no thought can undo ; others about the future, which, for aught we know, may never occur. With some it is just the common cares of every day which make their weary burden ; while others seem as if the cares of a whole lifetime were brought together into one heavy load, which their poor aching heart is set to carry. But are we right in this? Many a burden, truly, God really means us to carry. So long as we are in this tabernacle, we shall groan, being burdened. But does He mean these daily cares to be one of our burdens? Surely not. “Be careful for nothing.” These things are not appointed as loads for you to carry ;

but they are occasions to lead you to the Lord. "Cast thy burden on the Lord," is the Psalmist's direction, "and He will sustain thee."

"God moves in a mysterious way,
His wonders to perform;
He plants his footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm."

The Bible is full of promises and examples to encourage you to confide all these anxieties to your heavenly Father, whose paths are mercy and truth to them who love Him and keep his commandments.

It ought to allay our anxious cares to remember that our heavenly Father knoweth that we have need of these things. But, sometimes, it is those very things which the Lord sees we have no need of, which create our heaviest anxiety. No doubt, a full cup, a full purse, a home resounding with the voice of gladness; a

friend's bosom for our heart to repose on ; or grandeur, or pomp, or power, the sky smiling above us, and the welcome of friends circling around : these may be all gratifying enough, but they are not necessary. We can live happily and usefully even if we were left without them. If, therefore, we so set our affection on things below as to think needful for our well-being "the vain delights of earth to share," no wonder we burden ourselves with heavy anxieties simply from the want of passive acquiescence in the will of God.

MISTAKES.

"My grace is sufficient for thee."—2 COR. xii. 9.

WE have no reason to expect that God will supply our fancies. We are very apt to confound real with imaginary wants. We often set our minds upon what God as resolutely forbids. Ahab wanted Naboth's vineyard ; but God never intended him to have it. The two disciples wanted places of honour in Christ's kingdom ; He took care that they should lack nothing, but He assured them they should drink his cup of suffering. David wanted to flee away like a dove, and be at rest ; God supplied his wants, but left him to be hunted like a partridge on the mountains. Jonah wanted exemption from a self-denying mission to Nineveh ; God sent him down to the depths of the ocean, and there made him

a marvellous specimen of his sustaining care. Abraham wanted Ishmael to live before him ; God rejected his unbelieving wish, and gave him Isaac, the child of promise. The Shunammite wept for her child's recovery ; God let him die, but supplied the widow's want by raising him from the dead.

So we are apt to say : " I want this burden removed. I want that sorrow taken away. I want my path to be smooth again, as it used to be." God leaves the burden, and the sorrow, and the rough path, to keep you dependent, but supplies your utmost need while encompassed with necessities ; just as He chose to send his own disciples on their first mission with no money and no food, and then, on returning, He asked them with divine tenderness, " Lacked ye anything ? " And they said, blushing and downhearted at their distrust, " Nothing."

But we must leave the time and mode of our supply to God. Children have no idea of waiting patiently for any promised good ; they put out their hands with fretful eagerness to have it now. But God constantly says, " Wait upon Me ; I will supply all your need ; but you must wait my time." We should remember that God's usual way is to allow things to run on to extremities. He lets the prospect grow quite dark ; shuts us up in utter perplexity so that we see no outlet. He tries our faith, whether it staggers or not, and when we are just sinking, then comes the blessing. He sent wonderful deliverance to Abraham, but not till his very hand was raised to slay his son. He interposed for Joseph, but not till he was cast into the pit and the prison. He sent deliverance to Jacob, but not till Joseph was gone, and Simeon was gone, and they would take Benjamin also. He granted marvellous

interpositions to David, but not till he felt, with sinking heart, that there is but a step between him and death. Be sure, then, your God will supply all your need; but never forget that your times are in his hand.

XI.

JOY IN THE MIDST OF SORROW.

THE STRENGTH OF THE LORD.

"The name of the Lord is a strong tower."—

PROV. xviii. 10.

THE absolute sufficiency of the Lord Jesus for the necessities of his believing people is a great reality. Cases often occur in which a man is obliged to say to some fainting fellow-sufferer, "I can truly pity you, but I am sorry I cannot help you." This can never happen to the people of Christ. He is able to comfort in life's darkest scenes; able to deliver from the most trying perplexities; able to uphold under the heaviest burdens; able to pardon, to sanctify, to keep—in fact, able to save to the uttermost all that come

to God through Him. Well, then, may his people say, "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength:" righteousness to stand accepted before God; strength to stand firm while tested and proved, and appointed to labour and suffer among men.

Our days change. Our necessities and trials change too. Our fears, and fightings, and feebleness change; then it is a great help to be assured that his strength will be proportioned to our days. Not before our day, but strength for our day. He will give strength when we want, as we want, and all we want. We often alarm ourselves by anticipating future troubles, and murmuring that we have no strength to stand against them. But such future troubles are not our day. They never may be. Jacob thought the loss of his children would bring him to the grave; but they were bereft of him, not he of them. David feared he should fall by

Saul's hand, whereas he lived to wear Saul's crown. God never gives according to our fears or fancies, but He promises to supply our needs. Whatever may come under the significant description of "our day," a faithful God engages we shall have proportionate strength to meet. "Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof."

The Lord does not promise that our difficulties shall be few or small, but He assures us that we shall be brought safely out of them. We shall have our share of life's burdens, and feel its heat, but out of all the Lord engages to deliver. The promise is, that his strength shall be according to your day. It shall come at the right time. It shall yield proper help,—not too much, to supersede your effort; not too little, to let you sink under your burdens. "My grace is sufficient."

STRONG CONSOLATION.

"Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God."

—ISA. xl. 1.

WHY these fears? You have your enemies and your conflicts, strong, and formidable and appalling. But what of them? The question is not, Who is against you? but, On which side is the Lord? What put such might into the soul of Joshua and his companion? "If the Lord delight in us, then He will bring us into the land." That is really the question. "If the Lord himself had not been on our side, now may Israel say, then the waters would have overwhelmed us, the stream had gone over our soul." Yes, certainly it had. But the Lord is on the side of his believing people. "God is their refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble; therefore they will not

114 JOY IN THE MIDST OF SORROW.

fear, though the earth be removed, and the mountains carried to the midst of the sea." The cities may be walled to heaven, and the people tall as the sons of Anak; but what then? "If God be for us, who then can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but freely gave Him for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" But perhaps you ask, despondingly, Is the Lord on our side? Perhaps that question may be answered by asking another, Are you on the Lord's side? Your love to Him is the token that He first loved you. If you have chosen Him to be your God, that is the mark of his choice of you to be his people.

THE END WILL CERTAINLY BE JOYFUL.

“O Lord, by these things men live.”—ISA.

xxxviii. 16.

THE trials through which God brings his people often turn out to their good, even as to this life. Go on with a single eye, seeking to please God; if friends withdraw, if suspicions are cherished, and slanders misrepresent you; if severe losses, and sickness and sorrow, bring you down; if one trouble succeed another, and the wheels of life drag heavily; still, be of good cheer; trust thou in the Lord—commit yourself to Him; do not murmur or distrust Him—He will take care of you. He knows your soul in adversities; He is leading you by the right way. “Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for those who are true of heart.” Remember, Job’s friends

saw their error, and came to him that he might pray for them. Others, too, who, like summer birds, forsook him in trouble, returned and brought him presents. God multiplied again his earthly possession ; his family again increased ; and the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than the beginning.

But it is in the world to come that the full results of these trials appear. His words are too true, that "in the world we shall have tribulation." Here we are under discipline, there we shall be perfect. Now, we weep, and sigh, and cover our faces ; there, sorrow and sighing shall flee away, and everlasting joy shall be on our heads. This is our pilgrimage, often rough and comfortless ; that will be our home. Here we see Him not, though we love Him ; there we shall see Him face to face : and then, farewell sorrows, and sighing, and sin ; farewell, a long farewell, to a world of

tribulation and a heart saddened by evil—
for there is no more death, nor sorrow, nor
crying, for the former things have passed
away.

“ HIMSELF HATH DONE IT.”

ISAIAH XXXVIII. 15.

“ Himself hath done it ” all ! O how those words
Should hush to silence every murmuring thought !
Himself hath done it ; He who loves me best,
He who my soul with His own blood hath bought.

“ Himself hath done it.” Can it then be aught
Than full of wisdom, full of tenderest love ?
Not *one* unneeded sorrow will He send,
To teach this wandering heart no more to rove.

“ Himself hath done it.” Yes, although severe
May seem the stroke, and bitter be the cup,
’Tis His own hand that holds it, and I know
He’ll give me grace to drink it meekly up.

THE PROMISES OF GOD.

“Not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you.”—

JOSHUA xxiii. 14.

THE tried believer is strengthened to trust in God, by the promises engaged to him by the everlasting covenant which Christ sealed by his precious blood. He has confirmed that covenant to a thousand generations. Not one jot of it can fail. The grand design of that covenant, enriched with its golden promises, is to prepare many sons for glory, and through Christ to bring them safely there. It is true, that many of his intermediate dealings with them seem to them to incline the opposite way. The finger of his grace points always to their heavenly home; all the promises look that way, too; but the hand of Providence often seems to obstruct

the way and forbid their progress. Still, be that as it may, the promises never fail. The covenant—that strong anchor that holds the poor affrighted souls of Christian people—is firmly fixed. He never guaranteed the permanence of earthly things. It is all your fault, and your mistake, in expecting them to abide. Afflictions are sent to warn you of this mistake. Flowers will fade, but the ground remains. Leaves will decay, but the root abides. Clouds pass away, but the heavens continue. The good things of this life are but the flowers, and leaves, and clouds—evanescent, and sure to leave us. But faith in God, as revealed in Christ Jesus, is the root that is never moved; it is the ground that He hath made continually; it is like the ordinances of heaven that endure to a thousand generations. Nay, even these are but faint emblems of the unchangeable fidelity of God; for “the heavens shall

vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall reel and be removed from its place ; these shall perish, but Thou remainest ; they shall all wax old as doth a garment, and as a vesture shalt Thou fold them up, and they shall be changed ; but Thou art the same, and Thy years shall not fail.” Oh ! the wisdom of that prayer, “ When my heart is overwhelmed, lead me to the Rock that is higher than I.” “ Build your nest upon no tree here,” says Rutherford, “ for God has sold the forest to death ; and every tree upon which we would rest is ready to be cut down ; to the end we may flee, and mount up, and build upon the Rock, and dwell in the holes of the Rock.”

JESUS KNOWS HOW TO COMFORT.

"He hath sent Me to heal the broken-hearted."—

ST. LUKE iv. 18.

OUR blessed Lord, when He was with them, knew how to comfort his people. The very first text He took was on that subject. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me; He hath sent me to bind up the broken - hearted." And when He was going away, tenderly anxious for his people whom He should leave yet in the world, hated, and scorned, and persecuted, He gives this supporting assurance of his unfailing care, "I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, and He shall abide with you for ever."

Full well did the Lord know that the condition of his people, as they passed through this life, would be such as to

require comfort. He forewarned them advisedly, that, "in the world they should have tribulation." Some have more, some less ; some begin to bear the yoke in their youth, some carry their burden all through life, and bring down their grey hairs with sorrow to the grave.

But all have it. Among the many privileges of God's children, there is no exemption even for them from the common lot of human sorrows. It is a cup which all must drink ; a path which all must tread ; a fruit of sin whereof all must partake. Indeed, as to his own people, they are continually warned against regarding tribulation as a strange thing. It is the discipline through which they are appointed to pass. Not, however, that they are a sad and melancholy people. Contradictory as it may seem to the world, they have learnt to rejoice even in tribulation. Tears may dim the eye while

gladness glows in the heart. Outwardly, things may be sorrowful ; but, inwardly, they have peace. Their sins are forgiven, and that gives peace ; they have God for their reconciled Father, and that is peace ; they know that all things will work together for good, and that is peace : so that they may “ greatly rejoice, though now, if need be, they are in heaviness through manifold temptations.”

XII.

BLESSED EFFECTS OF GOD'S CHASTENING.

NOT SEEN AT THE TIME.

*"Afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of
righteousness."*—HEB. xii. 11.

THE idea of God speaking to the heart is a new thought to many. He has often spoken to you, like another Pharaoh, but, not caring to hear, you answered, "Who is the Lord? I know not the Lord." Your ears were filled with the world's vain sounds, your eyes caught by the world's glare, so that you never thought of "hearkening what the Lord would say concerning you."

Learn this great lesson, God can make you serious; disturb your foolish trifling, and make you think. You may laugh,

and cavil, and make light of these things ; but presently He will make your home desolate, and your heart to bleed ; and then you will say, " Oh ! that I were holy and confiding as I ought to be ! Now I see that life is no vain dream ; there is something serious and real about it. I know what trouble and heaviness mean. My heart within me is desolate." If you are brought to this, cry mightily to the Lord to come to your aid, as Peter cried in the tempest ; beg Him, in the midst of these heaving sorrows, to make you thoroughly alive to the things which belong to your peace. When persons are first brought to the wilderness, and find themselves placed in a condition so unexpected and so desolate, they are apt to say, " Now I must make up my mind to lead a life of sorrow ; these wilderness trials will prove profitable, I trust ; but losses, and sorrow, and depression, must hence-

forth be my lot—I must go mourning all my days.” This is one way in which men “faint, when they are rebuked of Him.” What then, you ask, “will the Lord remember his people, and give them comforts even in the wilderness?” Yes; He has rich and glad blessings reserved for their times of desolation and trial. He does not say He will give what is barely needful in their times of trial—just grace to help in times of need—that in wilderness trials “thy bread shall be given, and thy water sure;” but He promises an abundance of rich blessings. He will give the filial spirit, the waiting heart, the right apprehension of the world’s vanity, of sin’s evil, of the soul’s worth, the Saviour’s preciousness. He will give near views of Himself, sweeter fellowship with Jesus, stronger assurances of his favour, brighter hopes of his presence. And these rich, clustering vessels, He will give while they are in the wilderness of trial.

BLESSINGS IN DISGUISE.

"Let patience have her perfect work."—ST. JAS. i. 4.

I AM not sure that we always reap immediately the good fruits of severe affliction. The natural feelings are often too keenly wounded; everything is thrown into distraction by severe chastening. The sufferer is brought into unexpected circumstances, and, no wonder, becomes unusually thoughtful. Now his habitual feeling is that of deep seriousness. Perhaps, on the first paroxysm of grief, a stream of rebellious feelings may issue from the heart, and it requires faith and prayer to keep them down. But, when all this has subsided, and the mind has recovered its tone, then it is that the real, substantial fruits of personal godliness appear. Planted in such a heart, affliction yields its fruits

through the whole future life. The wound has ceased to bleed ; but there is a process going on, influencing the temper, will, judgment, and whole character. The scene of trial has passed away, the heart is no longer wounded as it was ; but the child of God, who prays that he may not suffer so many things in vain, evidently comes out of the trial like gold tried in the fire.

When we come to die, and look back upon all the vanities of the world, and the sad part which we have taken among them, we shall call to mind those dealings with the deepest gratitude which helped us fairly to get rid of sin. The prophet compares these dealings to the process of making wine. The grapes are crushed, then the juicy liquor is drawn off from one vessel to another, to get rid of all sediment ; and at each time you can see it is becoming finer and finer. So where

God intends to purify the soul, He puts it under such a process as this. The man is pressed in spirit,—crushed down by sore trials, that bring down his proud looks; then brought to such extremities, that he is willing to be saved in the Lord's own way; and thus he is emptied from vessel to vessel, leaving his sins behind him, and becomes a holier and humbler man. (Jer. xlviii. 11.)

It is the people who are deeply exercised by God's wise discipline, who are made most thoroughly useful to others. A man wants experience,—deep, varied, soul-humbling experience, if he is to do any good in the world. Gifts and talents, and clear views of gospel truth, and zeal to be up and doing, are all very important. But the man that shall accomplish much, must have passed himself through stages of trial in which he would train others around him. What makes the Psalms of David so precious to the people of God? Be-

cause they all breathe the spirit of a man tried and exercised by the various chastisements with which God proves his people. What made Luther the mighty defender of the sinner's free justification by faith alone in Christ's finished work? It was his long and painful bondage of soul as a Papist, when seeking in vain for peace with God among the mazes of Romish superstition. God seldom trusts much influence to a man who has not been fairly tried, and humbled, and bruised. To be permitted to do good is one of his rarest privileges. Few, comparatively, can bear it. To be the vessel to carry blessings to others, needs that the hand of the Lord shall be often upon you. God accomplishes most good by his own bruised reeds. He often distributes his richest comforts by means of that man who has seen, and wept to see, earth's fairest vessels shivered at his feet.

IT WORKS IN US THE LIKENESS OF
CHRIST.

*"As we have borne the image of the earthy, so we
shall also bear the image of the heavenly."*—

I COR. XV. 49.

LET us be in subjection to "the Father of spirits," because of the blessed results. Whatever may have led the fathers of our flesh to correct us, it is only "for our profit" that the "Father of spirits" ever takes the rod to chastise his children. "He, for our profit." Yet this is slow work. We are soon cast down and brought to tears; if that were the object, it would soon be done. But all that series of discipline is "for our profit;" spiritual "profit"—abiding, unquestionable, diversified "profit." And this takes time. Much is to be done in our short lifetime. And especially in seasons of affliction, then

every circumstance is arranged for our profit. But has it done its work? We can acknowledge plainly to-day that we are men and women of sorrows,—we are acquainted with grief,—but has it proved for our profit? If so, it has more closely identified you with Christ. You are partakers by sympathy of Christ's sufferings. He wept, as you weep. He drank of that cup of which you are drinking. He was exceeding sorrowful—you are sorrowful too. It is for your profit when this is more entered into. This is the lesson that I would have for ever ringing in your ears, as God's waves and storms go over you—remember, “this is sent for your profit.” He sees it needful, or He would have spared thee this! The Great Physician of our souls sends this well-prescribed medicine to burn out thy wounds, and purify thee for his presence. Each chastisement has its work to do. Is it some worldly trouble?

Let it relax the world's hold on thee, and thy heart's hold on the world. Is it some loss? See that thy earthly losses lead thee to some heavenly gain. Is it bereavement? Let thy bleeding heart set her loosened affections on things above. If God humbles thee, lie low at his cross, and seek for life and strength from Him who laid thee low. Let sorrow bring sin to remembrance, and there abide in rich fellowship with Him, who by his sorrow gives thee joy, and, by his suffering, is preparing thee for that world, where sin and suffering are alike unknown. "As we have borne the image of the earthy, so we shall bear the image of the heavenly."

But is this going on? Let us examine ourselves, and see what progress we are making.

XIII.

PEACE IN CHRIST.

THE GREAT CHANGE.

“Marvel not that I said unto thee, ye must be born again.”—ST. JOHN iii. 7.

A MAN must be born again, or he can never be fit for heaven. That blissful inheritance of the saints in light no man can ever enter, unless he is first made meet. And what is that meetness, but an agreement between the character of the place and the character of the person? If the presence of a holy God is to constitute his perfect happiness in another world, then he must be holy. If it is to be his great joy to share Christ's glory, in any humble degree, then he must be like Him; he must be not of the world, even as He is not of the world. He must have his affec-

tions set on things above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God; though now he see Him not, yet believing he will rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory. It is a very different thing for the believer to see these things, "now, through a glass darkly," and "then, face to face;" but still, here, on this side the grave, he is not unfit for the world to come. He is but a child, and his views of God and heaven, and the things within the veil, are infantine and feeble; but he has the taste and faculties, the heart and sympathy, of a child of God. All he wants is their development, growth, maturity. And, assuredly, God will carry on his work to the day of Christ. When he shall leave this nursery of spiritual childhood, and take his place in the "general assembly and church of the first-born," he will be found fit for that high distinction. It is his new birth by the Spirit which makes him fit.

Converted in heart to God, the believer has no other change to undergo, but only that change to be perfected. He is here a child of God, though often in heaviness ; there, he will grow to be a man, and his discipline be over. Now it is the early dawn with him, but his spiritual experience and hopes will grow brighter and brighter to the perfect day.

Nothing can be more certain than the inheritance of glory which awaits them who are thus born again. The spirit even of the venerated disciple John kindled to intenser expectation, the more he thought of it. " Beloved, now are we the sons of God, but it doth not yet appear what we shall be." His thoughts soon lost themselves in the prospect of that perfect and immeasurable bliss. Then reverting from the glory to the Saviour, and fastening his eye upon Him, he adds, with inexpressible satisfaction, " But we know, that when He

shall appear we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."

But, on the other hand, nothing can exceed the lasting and remediless disappointment which that man must meet, who is calculating upon a futurity of bliss without being born again. As soon might a negro think to inherit the crown of England. Let us never forget that happiness springs from within, as well as without. The wicked man is miserable by the necessity of his own nature. Many restraints and influences modify him just now, so that he does not fully know himself, nor others either. But there is in him "the carnal mind, which is enmity against God," and that is enough. That disqualifies him for connexion with heaven, and fits him for the fellowship of the lost. It wants but development; and as soon as his body dies, that enmity is developed. No restraining influences act upon him then; the corrup-

tions of his evil nature are let loose ; his passions then swell and rage without control or limit—without the means or the hope of future mitigation. He is compelled to say—

“ Me miserable ! which way shall I fly ?
Infinite wrath, and infinite despair !
Which way I fly is hell ; myself am hell ;
And, in the lowest deep, a lower deep
Still, threatening to devour me, opens wide,
To which the hell I suffer seems a heaven.”

NONE CAST OUT.

“Him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out.”

—ST. JOHN vi. 37.

JESUS showed that his great aim was to win sinners back to God, teaching every man, warning every man. He would not that any should perish. He came to seek and to save that which was lost; therefore he looks, with infinite compassion, upon the whole multitude, and, in order to encourage every soul among them, he uttered this invitation in the most open and blessed terms, “Him that cometh unto Me, I will in no wise cast out.”

Mark the object. “Him that cometh *to* Me.” The Apostles never said so; St. Paul never set himself up as the object of universal attraction; St. Peter never claimed the pre-eminence, or usurped the place of

Christ. He never said, "You must unite yourself to the Holy See which I establish at Rome;" but, "Him hath God exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance to Israel, and remission of sins." "He is Lord of all." This is no new truth. Speaking of Christ Jesus, dying Jacob foretold, "Unto Him shall the gathering of the people be;" and Isaiah, xxvii. 13, "The great trumpet shall be blown, and they shall come which were ready to perish in the land of Assyria, and the outcasts in the land of Egypt, and shall worship the Lord in the holy mount at Jerusalem." "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me."

The strongest encouragement is also given in describing the persons whom the Lord promises He will not cast out. He does not say, Him that repenteth, or him that believeth, or him that the Father gave to Me, or him that is renewed in heart

and life. No. If the Lord had described the character in such a way, many a penitent and broken-hearted mourner would say, "Alas ! the promise is not for me ; I am not a true penitent ; I have no faith ; I am not elected ; I am yet in my sins : therefore I shall be cast out." But the Lord described the character as one who is coming to Him—"Him that cometh." Nothing is required, but coming. "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." When the Lord was upon earth, they came to Him literally, personally, told Him their griefs, and found Him ready to help. Thus the Syrophœnician woman came, and He healed her dying daughter ; the centurion came, and He restored his servant ; the father of the demoniac boy came, and the Lord cured him of that malady ; Mary Magdalene came, and He pardoned all her sins.

Now, this is the character before us ;
“Him that cometh.” It is not said that
he is to bring anything with him. It is
not said, Do not come until you feel so and
so. When the Lord leaves it open and
free, man must not place any obstacles.
We dare not place any difficulties in the
way. It is true, many came and received
nothing. But the fault was their own ;
Christ never cast them out.

ONLY BELIEVE.

“ Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.”—ACTS xvi. 31.

LET the anxious inquirer remark, that Paul mentioned to the jailer of Philippi nothing but Christ ; he committed the whole business of eternal salvation solely to his hands. Why or how salvation is in Christ, he did not then explain. And we understand it only in part. But there it is—salvation is in Him. He “ came into the world to save sinners.” Whosoever believeth on Him shall not perish, but shall have everlasting life. He gave Himself, the just for the unjust, “ to save sinners.” He rose again from the grave, and is now exalted, “ to save sinners.” “ Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.”

Familiar as all this is, yet there are multitudes of professing, but unawakened, Christians, who never sincerely asked this great question, "What must I do to be saved?" What must you do? Feel that you need salvation. Grasp, in thought, the boundless scope of coming ages, where sorrows without end must be the lot of unpardoned men. Realize the sorrows of the world to come as the just retribution for your own sins. Think and inquire, with all the importunity of awakened fear, "What *must* I do to be saved? For something *must* be done—done by me—done by me now—with a view to my salvation. Tell me—tell me—what must it be?

And yet remember that there is nothing for you to do, for the sake of which you will be pardoned and saved. In that sense I say, "Do nothing; abandon the idea of your doing. Salvation left for you to *do*! The *doing* is all finished by Him who came

to seek and to save. He, by his doings and by his sufferings, has made an end of sin. Your doing is of another kind. To you this is the work of God, that ye *believe* on Him whom He has sent. Believe on Him—who He is. Believe on Him—whence He came. Believe on Him—what He did. Believe on Him—what He suffered. Believe the *fact* that He died. Believe that the *purpose* for which He died was to be a sacrifice for sin. Believe on Him, that He rose again. Believe on Him, that He ever liveth, having all power in heaven and earth to save to the uttermost. Believe on Him as now willing, mighty, ready, waiting to save—yea, to save *you*—to save you *now*.

XIV.

THE GREAT COMFORTER.

HIS WORK IN THE WORLD.

"So is every one that is born of the Spirit."—

ST. JOHN iii. 8.

SUCCESS demands a right beginning. Men imagine that worship makes the worshipper. God first prepares the worshipper, and then accepts his worship. Man comes with all his sins upon his head, and lays his gifts anyhow upon the altar; God directs him first to go and obtain reconciliation through Christ, then come and offer his gift; just as if a nation at war re-opened all pacific intercourse with their enemy, without having settled and signed the treaty of peace. Until a man has peace with God through the Lord Jesus

Christ, he is an enemy, his services are nothing. "Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto Me; your new moons and solemn feast days my soul hateth; I am weary to bear them" (Isa. i. 13, 14). Until the person is accepted before God, his services have no value; they are like a row of cyphers, signifying nothing; only put one figure in front of them, and that figure confers a high value upon all. Christ is that figure. He it is that gives value to his people's services, because they are accepted in the Beloved. You put Him first, his blood and righteousness; "put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ," and then, the poorest services, done from love to Him—the gift of two mites; the cup of cold water; the visit of benevolence to one of his people; the prayer stifled in utterance; the praise sung with stammering lips—all are pleasing to Him as tokens of love to Christ, and evi-

dences of his Spirit dwelling in the heart. But none *can* do these things unless the Spirit shall give the power to will and the will to do. They must have spiritual motives, spiritual intentions, and spiritual powers, "with good-will doing service as unto the Lord, and not unto men;" then their worship is acceptable, because the service is accepted in Christ, and renewed by his Spirit.

A man must be born again, or he can never be fit for heaven. That blissful inheritance of the saints in light no man can ever enter, unless he is first made meet. And what is that meetness but an agreement between the character of the place and the character of the person? If the presence of a holy God is to constitute his perfect happiness in another world, then he must be holy. If it is to be his great joy to share Christ's glory in any humble degree, then he must be like Him

—he must be not of this world, even as He is not of the world; he must have his affections set on things above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God;—though now he see Him not, yet believing, he will rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

HE IS THE COMFORTER OF HIS PEOPLE.

"Walking in the comfort of the Holy Ghost."

ACTS ix. 31.

ACCORDING to the covenant, the Spirit comforts the people of Christ. It is unspeakably consoling to know that in the scheme of our salvation a Divine Person has specially engaged to comfort the heirs of glory, and to administer relief to them when sorrow comes. How utterly mere human consolation fails at such times, we have continual proof! Friends gather around to soothe the disconsolate mourner; but they cannot reach the troubled heart. Yet, although other comforters may fail, there is no case of need, sorrow, sickness, or other adversity so aggravated but the Spirit can administer his effectual consolations.

In what especial manner does the Holy Spirit bind up the wounds of his mourners?

The comforts of the Holy Spirit must, of course, correspond with his own divine nature. They are not worldly, not drawn from things seen and temporal, but inward comforts—seated in the heart, and spiritual in their nature. They are also real, genuine, truthful comforts. Men often try to comfort others by false representations, which only dissemble evils; such remedies are hollow and delusive. But the comforts which the Spirit of truth gives are solid realities, drawn from things as they are, so that the mourner who receives them will find them everlasting consolations. They are holy comforts, else they could not be given by the Holy Spirit; an unholy, worldly man cannot receive or enjoy them. They belong to the things of the Spirit which none can undertake or relish, until he has that spiritual nature which is imparted only to him who is born again of the Spirit.

By what means, then, does the Holy Spirit yield these spiritual, abiding, holy comforts?

By the Holy Scriptures. You will remember that this is one purpose for which they were inspired—"that by patience and comfort of the Scriptures we might have hope."

But they must be searched and understood, or else they will yield no comfort, and to unfold them is the work of the Holy Spirit. For, whatever the Scriptures may contain, they cannot comfort you or me, if we do not read, mark, learn, inwardly digest, so as to understand them. When David said with evident thankfulness, "This is my comfort in my affliction, thy word hath quickened me" (Ps. cxix. 50), he meant that the Holy Spirit had enabled him to understand its hidden meaning. It was this which filled the Ethiopian treasurer with joyous consolation in his journey,

that the truths he read had found their way to his understanding and heart. Many a believer is cast down, and almost destitute of the consolations of God, not because there are none for him, but because they are imbedded in the Scriptures, into which as yet he wants greater diligence to search and the Spirit to unfold.

The Holy Spirit comforts by revealing Christ to the soul and your interest in Him. If your sorrows arise from fears about your spiritual safety; whether your sins be really forgiven; whether you are indeed one of those who are called, and chosen, and faithful; or whether you shall continue to the end;—these troubles are met by the Spirit revealing Christ more completely to your soul. The Spirit shows you from the Scriptures that the blood of Christ cleanses from all sin, and if your sins are “like crimson, they shall become as snow.” Every want is met by the Lord’s work.

Your misgivings are removed by the Spirit revealing the glories of Christ to you, as the wisdom, the righteousness, the sanctification, the redemption of his people. He inclines you to confide in Him, so that, emerging from your doubts and fears, you can say, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him until that day" (2 Tim. i. 12). This is comfort indeed.

And as to all dark and bewildering providences, in which the people of God are involved, the Holy Spirit provides effectual consolations. He reminds you who sent the affliction; shows you something of the needs-be for such dealings, to make you a holier, humbler, and better man, and assures you that all these things are working together for good—nothing unsuitable, nothing unreasonable, nothing superfluous. We cannot discern as yet

how they will effect these results, but we shall understand this one day ; for we must remember that “ now we see through a glass darkly,” but then “ face to face.” “ Now we know in part, but then shall we know even as we are known.”

THE GREAT TEST.

"Even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive."—ST. JOHN xiv. 17.

THE indwelling of the Spirit in the soul constitutes the real distinction between those who are Christ's and those who are not. Tell me not what are a man's religious opinions—opinions do not save; nor what are his feelings—feelings are deceptive; nor what are his Church privileges, for many heard even Christ whom Christ never knew; but the criterion of a man's personal salvation is the Holy Spirit dwelling in his soul. That is the test—having, or not having, the Spirit. "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." Nay, but for the Spirit we see not how Christ would have had a people at all, for no man can say that Jesus is the Lord but by the Holy Ghost.

Without the Spirit, no man is aware that he needs Christ, or begins to seek Him. He must unseal the mind's eye darkened by sin, and enable you to behold the Lamb of God. He must draw the heart to believe, and open the mouth to confess Him unto salvation. If Christ had not come, there had been no way opened to the Father; if the Spirit had not come, no soul of man would have trodden that way. Christ came that He might reconcile God to man; the Holy Spirit came that He might reconcile man to God. It is Christ by his own death, the Just for the unjust, that brings us back to God; but it is the Spirit, by his indwelling power, that quickens and brings us to Christ. As without Christ we should die in ignorance of the Father's love and mercy, so it is only the Spirit that takes of the things of Christ and shows them to us. Are we desolate? The Spirit comforts us with the

sympathy and communion of Christ. Are we in prayer? The Spirit helps our infirmities, and guides to Christ. Are we searching the word? The Spirit shows how it testifies of Christ; so that without Christ there can be no peace with God, no pardon of sin, no hope of heaven; so without the Spirit there is no symptom of returning life, no spiritual fellowship with Christ, and no entrance to the kingdom.

The indwelling of the Spirit in the soul of man is, therefore, the great central point of experimental Christianity. Without it, a man's faith is a mere creed—his worship, an empty shadow—his life, selfishness—his death, an eternal loss.

THE HELPER IN PRAYER.

“The Spirit also helpeth our infirmities, for we know not what we should pray for as we ought.”—
ROM. viii. 26.

ONE often observes in prayer, that there lacks the sorrowful acknowledgment of indwelling sin in its secret workings, hardening, hindering, resisting, and raising numberless barriers between God and the soul. People pray as if their heart was no plague, and all was smooth within and bright around ; whereas the “ fightings without and fears within,” a world full of wickedness and a heart full of deceit, seldom let the experienced Christian call things smooth. But this the Spirit teaches him, whenever he bends the knee in prayer, He soon shows that it is the enemies within, the wretched deadness of his soul, the stupid insensibility to eternal things, the

leaden heaviness which weighs him down ; these are things over which he grieves with bitter tears, against which he strives with energetic boldness, that he may lose none of the things wrought, but receive a full reward.

You may see that St. Paul's prayers are like a vessel freighted with an amazing richness of spiritual blessings. For instance, he prays for the Philippians, for their love, knowledge, experience, wise discrimination, sincerity, blamelessness, fruitfulness, perseverance to the glory of Christ. So for the Colossians—for their knowledge, wisdom, understanding, holy walking, spiritual fruitfulness, strength, patience, joy, gratitude to God for having made them meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. These may serve to illustrate how the Spirit awakens in the soul these various wants, then pours them out in a fulness of importunate supplication, one

earnest petition after another, receiving out of Christ's fulness grace upon grace. In this way the Holy Spirit, in prayer, takes of the things of Christ, shows them to us, and teaches us to know the things that are freely given to us of God, and kindles that holy importunity which will not let Him go unless He bless us.

What again shall we say to these things? People seem often much at a loss to determine their spiritual condition. They deplore their cold hearts and useless lives—their lack of joy, and the power of indwelling evil. They want to find some criterion which would decide the question. That criterion is here—are they persons of real prayer? In most other respects the saints differ. But here is one uniform feature of spiritual character. God has children without assurance, or comfort—without this world's goods, and often desponding about the glories of a better;

• but He has no children without prayer. Every child of God cries to Him in prayer. The man who does not pray, does not repent, believe, love, endure, labour, hope ; he feels nothing, desires nothing, has nothing, is nothing. This is the criterion of life. Prayer is the utterance of spiritual life.

THE INWARD WITNESS.

"I will joy in the God of my salvation."—

HAB. iii. 18.

ASSURANCE is one of the things of the Spirit, which form the experience of the people of God. It is not the same thing as faith, but grows out of it. Faith is the tree, assurance is the blossom. Every child of God has faith; many have no assurance. Faith is an abiding grace, essential to salvation, so that the Lord prays it may never fail; assurance is not essential—it may fail, it may be lost, and again it may be recovered. Both faith and assurance are the work of the Holy Spirit; but faith has reference to God's revealed word; whereas assurance has reference to myself, my personal interest is that word. Faith looks to the Scripture, and says, that word is eternal truth. As-

assurance says, all that that word reveals belongs to me. Faith says, the Lord Jesus Christ there set forth is the one Almighty Saviour for mankind. Assurance says, that Divine Saviour is mine. Faith, however weak, brings salvation; assurance brings all the present comfort of salvation. Faith brings the soul infallibly to heaven; assurance gives the soul something of heaven upon earth.

Assurance, then, is the well-grounded persuasion which the Spirit imparts to a believer, that he is now a child of God, and shall hereafter obtain his promised glory. To enjoy this blessing must make him the happiest being in the world. To know that, however the world frowns, there is no displeasure upon the Father's brow; whatever accusing reflections conscience may bring, still he has peace with God; whatever enemies he may have, God is his refuge, strength, friend; whatever

storms, and tears, and separations, may await him in this life, they do not touch his eternal interests, nor endanger the "life hid with Christ in God" (Col. iii. 3); to feel sure that, notwithstanding all the vicissitudes, all the dark evils, all the hindrances from a deceitful heart, and a world lying in wickedness, still he has the solid persuasion, that whatever course things may take, all is well, and all will turn out well at last. This assurance cannot but be a source of unspeakable happiness at all times, of strength and comfort in life's stormy perplexities, and unfailing support when the heart and flesh fail.

HOW ASSURANCE MAY BE OBTAINED.

“Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith.”—

2 COR. xiii. 5.

MANY people's boasted assurance when examined, is not worth much. It is frequently nothing more than an elevated degree of joyous feeling, without any solid foundation, nor can they give the reason why. Sometimes it is a sort of dreamy vision, and such-like fancies. There is nothing in all this. Such hallucinations bring Christian truth into discredit. It was well stated by the Synod of Dort, in 1619: “The Holy Scripture everywhere draweth this assurance, not from special extraordinary revelations, but from the proper marks and signs of God's children, and the unfailing promises made by God himself, as St. John says: ‘He that keepeth His com-

mandments dwelleth in Him, and He in him: and hereby we know that He abideth in us, by the Spirit which He hath given us' " (1 John iii. 24).

Assurance, then, is gained by spiritual self-cultivation. There is a work wrought by the Spirit on the heart of every real Christian; if you have reason to believe that that work is wrought in you, then you are a real Christian. Do you ask me to furnish you with some of the marks of the Spirit's work? Take these as a specimen: the conviction of sin as the plague and ruin of your soul, and the appropriation of Christ's righteousness as the ground of your peace with God; so that "you count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus your Lord." This is one of the Spirit's works. Sincere love to Christ is another; for this love to Christ is the Spirit's work. So again, if you really love the Scriptures—this is

another good token. The soul which is renewed by the Holy Spirit, "as a new-born babe desires the sincere milk of the word, that it may grow thereby" (1 Pet. ii. 2). This eager relish for the Scriptures is an invariable sign. In his Epistles, St. John dwells much upon the love which one Christian bears to another, as a certain evidence of grace. It must be so. For the Spirit dwelling in their hearts, just as He does in yours, convinces all alike of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment; renews, enlightens, comforts; teaches all how to pray, and shows the things of Christ to all. This oneness in Christ by the Spirit must produce such a oneness of mind, purpose, aim, among all Christ's true people, that, notwithstanding lesser differences, they will love each other for Christ's sake.

FURTHER SIGNS OF GRACE.

"Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts."—2 COR. i. 22.

A SPIRITUAL relish for the means of grace is a good sign of the heart being right with God. When the Sabbath-day is loved and honoured as a time of sacred rest, and blessed fellowship with God and his people; when public worship is thoroughly enjoyed as a season of varied spiritual edification, the prayers, the Scripture reading, the songs of Zion, the preaching, the Lord's Supper, all are relished as a burdened and hungry traveller enjoys his refreshment by the way, and sets out with new zeal upon his journey; and again, when there are real life, power, and nearness to God in secret prayer—the Spirit evidently making intercession for us—and the soul pours out

its wants, fears, sins, and hopes, as freely as a child tells his whole case to his father,—this, again, is one of the most certain tokens of a soul quickened by the Spirit, and made alive unto God.

And once more. When a man evinces a heartfelt, habitual concern for the salvation of other persons, he may feel sure that the Holy Spirit has wrought that gracious element into his character. I now speak of the heart. It is not uncommon for persons to subscribe to societies for missions, home or foreign, just as a custom, and not from any principle ; it is sadly too possible that a man may even minister in holy things to others, and yet feel no real concern at heart for their recovery to God ; but when it is plain that his eyes are opened to see the value and peril of souls—that Christ's Gospel provides the remedy, and he labours in season, out of season, employing his talents, few or many,

to awaken sinners to see their danger, and to bring them to receive Christ—when this is not an impulse, but his habit and his joy too—to spread Christian knowledge, to seize or to make opportunities for usefulness, to be ready to work, ready to give, ready to co-operate with others; making no show, seeking no man's notice, but, like his Master, diligently going about doing good, because he deplores the calamity of a soul lost, while he knows that there is such a Saviour, just within reach : this disposition, abiding, working, expanding in his character, is a token that God has chosen him to obtain that salvation to which he longs and labours to bring others.

XV.

THE BELIEVER'S PROSPECT.

DEATH SWALLOWED UP OF LIFE.

"For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."—

PHIL. i. 21.

KNOWING that his life is valuable, for many reasons, the Christian "loves life." But, as years go on, and the wheels of life drag heavily, he is admonished that his course is well-nigh finished. Death brightens on its nearer approach. Thinking no more of his losses, he calculates that "for him to die is gain." Once across that river, his gains every way accumulate. Comparing what he is with what he was, now count his gains. Here, lies

his lifeless body—there, is his spirit, at last made perfect. Here, the destroyer triumphs—there, death is swallowed up of life.

Reader, does this prospect belong to you? Is Christ your life? If not, then death will be no gain. It will be a change—an appalling change—in your dwelling, companionships, employment, prospects; but it will be no gain. Nay, everything you remember, or behold, will remind you what you have lost. Sabbaths, and all their privileges; Christian friends, their prayers and efforts; the promises of Christ and the strivings of his Spirit; life, with its unceasing comforts; the body, with its curious structure; the soul, more precious than worlds;—all is involved in one disastrous, irreparable loss to him who will not come to Christ that he may live. You have often wept, but there is no weeping like his, who wakes up after death, to

find that he has missed the purpose for which he was created and redeemed. Oh! God, spare the reader from facing death without Christ, and futurity without hope!

THE TREASURE LAID UP ABOVE.

"For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us."—ROM. viii. 18.

To see Him in all his glory, and to find yourself sharing his joy, and yet to remember that whenever He took a step which crossed your will, or raised your fears, you fretted inwardly against Him; these recollections will make you blush with shame that you should be so unbelieving and ungrateful. You will then understand that all these crosses are answers to your prayers that He would fit you for his heavenly kingdom. Let men of the world have their good things now; the next scene in their history will be dark enough. But, purchased with his own blood, you are too precious to let you have your own way. He has treasure

laid up for you, the least glimpse of which would make your heart flutter with ecstasy. And for all that He is now preparing you. Let there be no complaining then. Events which you cannot understand—wait, and He will interpret. Crosses which you find heavy—ask for his strength to enable you to carry. Don't rush to unbelieving conclusions. These things which happen seem strange to you, but are not strange to Him—

“ Then let your songs abound,
And every tear be dry ;
We're marching through Emmanuel's ground
To fairer worlds on high.”

THE HOME ABOVE.

"I go to prepare a place for you."—ST. JOHN xiv. 2.

"ALL the ways of the Lord are mercy and truth to such as keep his covenant." He has not stayed his hand so far from scattering the flowers of paradise along your path; nor will He. He will lead you onward to his holy hill, turning darkness to light, opening rivers of comfort in your dry places, making the wilderness of life and its solitary places glad. You will have abundant ground for adding your testimony to that of myriads of souls already redeemed from all evil—"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever." Blessed assurance, which fell too from the Saviour's lips! "Let not your heart be troubled. Believe in Me. In my Father's

house are many mansions." Lord, this is all I want. Many dwell there already. I love to think of that better country. Better to dwell there than sojourn here. Better to wear the crown than carry the cross. Better to sing the praises of the Lamb in his heavenly temple, than to cry out among the billows of this stormy world, "Save, Lord; I perish."

It is good to be renewed in heart, and belong to his Church on earth. It is better to be a spirit made perfect, and to reign for ever with Christ in his kingdom. It is good to be here, to mix with kindred minds, to search into the word and will of God, and hold sweet communion with the Saviour of his people. It is far better to be with Christ, and to "dwell in the house of the Lord for ever." Happy, holy, eternal home! Bright abode of angels and the blessed company of Christ's faithful people! There they dwell without

sin, or sorrow, or fear of evil—knit in enduring bonds of brotherhood with all the elect of God, whose number, in these latter days, He is now rapidly accomplishing. There they dwell, in ineffable communion with the Father who chose, the Son who redeemed, the Spirit who renewed; and there, in the house of the Lord, they will dwell for ever.

THE END.



WORKS RECENTLY PUBLISHED.

In crown 8vo, 2s. 6d. cloth, gilt edges.

A Second Edition of

COMFORTING THOUGHTS FOR THE WEAK

AND WEARY. Being brief Meditations selected from the works of the Rev. EDWARD BICKERSTETH, formerly Rector of Watton.

In crown 8vo, Frontispiece, 3s. 6d. cloth.

A Third Edition of

THE END OF LIFE, AND THE LIFE THAT

HAS NO ENDING. By the Author of "Copsley Annals," etc.

In crown 8vo, 3s. 6d. cloth.

HOMeward ; or, The Rest that Remaineth. A

Memoir. By ELLEN BARLEE.

"An interesting and, in some respects, a remarkable memoir. A life of Christian devotion and usefulness, closed by a peaceful and blessed death."—*Record*.

In crown 8vo, price 5s. cloth.

A Third Thousand of

WHERE DWELLEST THOU? or, The Inner

Home. By the Author of "Ministering Children."

"This book will be a favourite with those who have to read to mother's meetings or working-parties. The chapters on our Lord's temptation and baptism are particularly interesting."—*Record*.

BY THE REV. W. B. MACKENZIE, M.A.

SAUL OF TARSUS: his Life and its Lessons.
With Map and Frontispiece, Second Thousand, crown 8vo, price 5s. cloth.

HELP FOR THE HELPLESS. Third Edition,
small 8vo, price 5s. cloth.

THE WANDERER AND HIS RETURN HOME: Thoughts for Young Men. Fourth Thousand, small 8vo, price 1s. 6d. cloth.

THE WORD OF LIFE. Third Thousand, fcap. 8vo, price 3s. 6d. cloth.

WORDS IN SEASON FOR THEM THAT ARE WEARY. Sixth Thousand, fcap. 8vo, price 3s. 6d. cloth.

THE ABIDING COMFORTER: the Person and Work of the Holy Spirit. Fifth Thousand, fcap. 8vo, price 3s. 6d. cloth.

BIBLE CHARACTERS. Fourth Thousand, fcap. 8vo, price 5s. cloth.

REDEEMING LOVE. Sixth Thousand, fcap. 8vo, price 2s. 6d. cloth.

MARRIED LIFE: its Duties, Trials, and Joys.
Fifteenth Thousand, 18mo, price 1s. 6d. cloth; price 4s. 6d. white silk.

DWELLINGS OF THE RIGHTEOUS. Seventh Thousand, 18mo, price 1s. 6d. cloth.

MARRIED LIFE AND THE DWELLINGS OF THE RIGHTEOUS. New Edition, in small 4to, with ornaments by J. Leighton, F.S.A. Price 6s. in cloth, gilt edges; white vellum cloth extra, 7s. 6d.; white silk, 10s.; morocco, 12s.

THE LAMP TO THE PATH; with a Calendar for Reading the Scriptures. Fifth Edition, 18mo, price 1s. cloth.

BY MRS. CAREY BROCK.

A Sixth Thousand of

**A THIRD SERIES OF SUNDAY ECHOES IN
WEEK-DAY HOURS :** a Tale of the Journeyings of the Israelites.
In crown 8vo, price 5s. cloth.

Thirteenth Thousand.

**A SECOND SERIES OF SUNDAY ECHOES
IN WEEK-DAY HOURS :** being a Tale illustrative of the Church
Catechism. In crown 8vo, price 5s. cloth, red edges.

Twenty-seventh Thousand.

SUNDAY ECHOES IN WEEK-DAY HOURS :
being a Tale illustrative of the Collects. Crown 8vo, price 5s. cloth,
red edges.

Eighth Thousand, with Frontispiece, price 5s. cloth.

MARGARET'S SECRET, AND ITS SUCCESS.

Sixth Thousand, with Frontispiece, price 5s. cloth.

THE RECTORY AND THE MANOR : A Tale.

Tenth Thousand, with Frontispiece, price 5s. cloth.

**CHILDREN AT SCHOOL : A Tale from Real
LIFE.**

Ninth Thousand, with Frontispiece, price 5s. cloth.

WORKING AND WAITING : A Tale.

Eighth Thousand, with Frontispiece, price 5s. cloth.

**HOME MEMORIES ; or, Echoes of a Mother's
VOICE.**

Fifth Thousand, with Frontispiece, price 5s. cloth.

CHARITY HELSTONE : A Tale.

Third Thousand, with Four Engravings, price 2s. 6d. cloth.

**MY FATHER'S HAND, & OTHER STORIES
AND ALLEGORIES FOR THE YOUNG.**

The Fifth Thousand of

**DAME WYNTON'S HOME : A Tale illustrative
of the Lord's Prayer. Crown 8vo, Eight Engravings, price 3s. 6d.
cloth.**

BY MISS WINSCOM.

Crown 8vo, with Frontispiece, price 5s. cloth.

THE MAINSPRING; or, "For Thy Sake." A
Tale.

"It is not easy to estimate the value of the influence diffused by such
tales as this."—*Record*.

Fifth Thousand, with Frontispiece, price 5s. cloth.

ONWARD; or, The Mountain Clamberers. A
Tale of Progress.

Ninth Thousand, with Frontispiece, price 5s. cloth.

VINEYARD LABOURERS. A Tale for those
who Long to be Useful.

Price 1s. cloth.

REST AND RESURRECTION; or, the Sabbath
and the Sunday.

32mo, sewed, price 5s. per hundred.

THE INFANT'S LITURGY. Designed for the
use of Sunday Services in Infant Schools.

SEELEY, JACKSON, & HALLIDAY, 54, FLEET STREET.

