

THE NIGHTINGALE SONG OF DAVID

by Octavius Winslow

An exposition of Psalm 23 portraying Christ as the Divine Shepherd who knows, guides, and sustains His flock through His divine knowledge, power, and redemptive sacrifice.

12 Chapters

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Preface

PREFACE

Of the Divine Inspiration of the Book of Psalms the Psalmist himself shall speak: "These are the last words of David: David, the son of Jesse, speaks- David, the man to whom God gave such wonderful success, David, the man anointed by the God of Jacob, David, the sweet psalmist of Israel. The Spirit of the Lord speaks through me; his words are upon my tongue." 2 Samuel 23:1-2. Fortified with such a testimony, we may accept without hesitation the Twenty-third of this "Hymn Book for all times" as not only a divine, but as the divinest, richest, and most musical of all the songs which breathed from David's inspired harp; and to which, by the consent of the universal Church, the palm of distinction has been awarded. No individual, competent to form a judgment in the matter, and possessing any pretension to a taste for that which is pastoral in composition- rich in imagery- tender in pathos- and sublime in revelation- will fail to study this Psalm without the profoundest instruction and the most exquisite delight. Its melodies- divine and entrancing, and which may well suggest the expressive title we have ventured to give it- have echoed through all ages of the Christian Church- instructing more minds, soothing more hearts, quelling more fears, and inspiring more hopes- than, perhaps, any other composition in any language, or of any age. It begins with CHRIST, and ends with HEAVEN; and all that intervenes between this true and precious starting-point, and its certain and glorious goal, portrays every divine feature, and meets every spiritual need of the believer's religious experience, from his first step into grace, to his first step into glory. If no other blessing results from the present exposition of this Psalm, than the refreshment it has afforded the writer in its composition, he will have been richly rewarded for the labor and weariness of preparing it. To the divine blessing of the One Shepherd, and to the gracious acceptance of the One Fold, he devoutly and affectionately commends his work and to the Triune Jehovah shall be the glory!

Christ, the Shepherd

Christ, the Shepherd

"The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not be in want." Psalms 23:1.

"The Lord is my Shepherd; I have everything I need." Psalms 23:1.

The Divinely-inspired lyre of David, "the sweet singer of Israel," never awoke its chords to melody more rich, or to truths more precious, than when he poured forth his soul in the utterances of this magnificent and comprehensive Psalm. And well was his heart attuned to the song! Himself a shepherd- the office he extols was to him sacred and significant; Christ the substance- his theme was elevated and entrancing. Recalling to memory his early history, when God "took him from following the ewes great with young," and tracing all the way he had thus been divinely led- from the sheep-fold to the throne- from the pastoral to the kingly office- we do not wonder that of all the strains which breathed from his magic touch, this should be, par excellence, the Nightingale Psalm of all.

The key-note of earth, is, Christ the Shepherd- as the key-note of heaven, is, Christ the Lamb. In that world of music the song is all and ever of Christ. His Name warbles from every tongue- His beauty resounds from every harp- His Atonement the substance of every anthem- His love the inspiration of every minstrel chanting the "new song before the throne" - "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain." 'New' though that song will be, we yet are 'learning' it in the house of our pilgrimage. We read- "No man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, who were redeemed from the earth." The song was thus learned- learned on earth -the scene of our training for heaven. My soul! are you training for heaven? are you learning this song? have you caught the key-note? are you practicing its scales- rehearsing its music? Remember, it must be learned on earth, or it can never be sung in heaven! Put if thus learning it- learning it, it may be, in the humbling region of self-knowledge, or in the painful school of personal suffering, and beneath the shadow of the cross- when the first burst of this song shall fall upon your ravished senses, you will wonder how familiar to your ear were the notes it breathed, and how precious to your heart the truths it uttered! We now turn to the Psalm itself. And may the Divine Spirit, by whose inspiration it was penned, unseal our ear to the voice of the charmer!

"The Lord is my Shepherd." The office David thus assigns to Christ- and this is the key-note of the Psalm- is one of the most appropriate and expressive. It would seem to have been His own favorite designation, "I am the good Shepherd." Both Testaments, the Old and the New- Messiah's two faithful witnesses- unite in investing Him with this office. He was early revealed under this title. When the family of good old Jacob clustered around his dying bed, eager to catch the parting blessings breathing from his lips, the expiring patriarch pointed his offspring to the Author of all his mercies as the "Shepherd of Israel," who by covenant engagement had promised a continuance of those blessings to His posterity. Still more distinctly and emphatically is Christ spoken of by Evangelists and Apostles under this title. The evangelist John records the assumption of it by our

Lord Himself; and the apostle Peter ascribes it to Him as the "Chief Shepherd and Bishop" of His Church. This passage infers the existence in the Church of subordinate, or under shepherds. Such are all Christ's true ministers whose office it is to call out of the world, gather into the fold, and feed, the one elect Flock of God. They are Christ's 'under-shepherds', or overseers, infinitely subordinate, and solemnly accountable to Him, the "Chief Shepherd and Bishop" of His Church, in the administrative authority which they wield, in the divine gifts which they possess, and in the spiritual functions which they perform. Their office is not priestly, but ministerial; they are anointed with no sacerdotal grace, and are clothed with no divine prerogative, and are ordained to present no sacrificial offering. Nevertheless, their office is holy and honorable; their responsibility, tremendous and solemn; their duties, arduous and trying; their anxieties many, and their trials sore; and they are to be "esteemed very highly in love for their works' sake." Woe unto them if they preach not the gospel! woe unto those who reject the gospel they preach! and woe to the world who by slander, falsehood, and persecution touch God's anointed, and seek to do His prophets harm. My soul! has the Lord blessed you with a true and faithful gospel minister? Remember your duty to him, and your responsibility to God; and in both act as one who is soon to give an account at His bar. But let us turn from the 'subordinate' shepherds to Christ, the 'Chief' and "good Shepherd of the sheep."

"The Lord is my Shepherd." A brief enumeration of some of CHRIST'S ATTRIBUTES is necessary to our due appreciation of this His office as the Shepherd of His flock. We need every view of Christ that will elevate our thoughts of His person, strengthen our faith in His work, and expand our view of His glory. And if Christ is "made of God unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption"- if our knowledge of the Son is the measure of our knowledge of the Father- and if in proportion to the clearness of our views and the closeness of our intimacy will be the silvery flow of our peace and the golden brightness of our hope- then, it follows that we cannot pay too great and earnest heed to the apostle's injunction, "Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

What, then, are some of the attributes of the Lord our Shepherd? Christ is a Divine Shepherd. We place this view of Christ in the foreground of our exposition. It is the loftiest and sweetest note in our song. Our Shepherd derives His office, authority, and fitness, exclusively from His personal dignity. The entire superstructure of the Work of Christ rests upon the foundation of the Person of Christ. A denial and rejection of the one, involves a denial and rejection of the other- they stand or fall together. The title our psalmist applies to Christ expresses His personal Divinity, "The Lord" -JEHOVAH- "is my Shepherd." Divinity was essential to His office. A mere human shepherd would have been inadequate to the requirements of His office and to the demands of His flock. Divine knowledge is an essential perfection. He must possess a perfect knowledge of His sheep, collectively and individually. He must know their persons, their names, their requirements; in a word, all their individual circumstances, positions, and needs. How else could He meet the demands of each and all of a flock composed of countless numbers, and scattered far and wide over the face of the earth? "I know my sheep," is His own declaration of this glorious truth, and a more precious truth- one more replete with assurance and comfort- never flowed from His grace-anointed lips. My soul, ponder this truth in the light of your individuality, and reason the matter with yourself thus: Jehovah, my Shepherd, knows me individually. He calls me by my name; recognizes my person; is acquainted with my needs; and is cognizant of the path I tread. And

although others may but imperfectly know me, or know me not at all; my actions misunderstood, my motives misconstrued; ignorant of my daily cross, my veiled sorrow, and the narrow and difficult path I tread; nevertheless, Jesus the Shepherd has declared; "I know my sheep." Enough, my Lord! Not a path perplexes me; not a cloud shades me; not a difficulty embarrasses me; not a need grieves me; not a grief distresses me; not a being wounds me; but You, the Lord my Shepherd, know it altogether. He knows the way that I take; and when He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold."

Christ is a guiding Shepherd. "He leads Joseph like a flock." It is a part of His office as a Shepherd to go before His sheep. He knows the way to heaven- Himself the Way- through the entangled wilderness- across the dreary desert- down the deep valley- over the swelling flood- and up the steep ascent- Jesus knows all the way! Confide yourself to His convoy. He will lead you in no path which God's purpose has not ordained, which His wisdom has not mapped, and for which the everlasting covenant has not provided; yes more, you will tread no path in which you may not trace the travel of Him who, "when He puts forth His own sheep, goes before them." It is no untrodden path you tread. Lonely and footsore, Jesus has left the imprint of His weary, dust-saddled, nail-pierced feet along that very road, that you might follow His steps, and have fellowship with His sufferings. Oh! what a privilege- what an honor this! Lord! the way I travel is solitary, tearful, and suffering; but Your wisdom has appointed, and Your love has planned, and Your grace sustains it; and, toilsome and dreary though it be, it blooms with the flowers, and is fragrant with the perfume of Your own travel of love; and you will lead me along no more darksome or thorny way than You Yourself have trod. "You shall guide me with Your counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory."

Divine power is equally a perfection of Christ our Shepherd. A shepherd powerless to cope with every circumstance of His flock, would be unequal to his office. In this respect, Christ is the perfection of power. "All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth"- given to Him irrespective of His divine power as God, in view of His office as the Shepherd of His sheep. The conduct of His saints to heaven demands the utmost resources of Deity. Nothing short of this could bring a single saint to glory. "Kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation," is the history and the testimony of every saved sinner. Not a foe invades the fold- not a beast of prey worries the sheep- not a storm-cloud threatens them- but the power of Christ is present to cover with its shield the flock entrusted to His keeping. How strikingly David, as a personal type of Christ the Shepherd, foreshadowed this! Narrating his exploits as a shepherd, he thus addressed Saul the king: "Your servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock: and I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth: and when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him. Your servant slew both the lion and the bear. The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, He will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine." The apostle records a similar rescue by the same Divine power on his behalf: "Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; . . . and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion." The same Divine power is momentarily exerted on our behalf. "You have given Him power over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him," is the assertion in His intercessory prayer of our Divine-human Shepherd.

What need have we of this power! "Without me you can do nothing." Corruption within- temptations without- a subtle foe never sleeping- the world ever alluring- and grace ever decaying-

O how could we hold our own were Christ our Shepherd to withdraw His Divine power for one moment? But fear not, you assailed and trembling sheep! You have the assurance of the Shepherd- "They shall never perish, neither shall any one pluck them out of my hand."

But Jesus' power to save is the crowning view of this perfection. "He is ABLE to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by Him." In no part of His mission is His power so appropriately and sublimely exerted- no, not even in the creation of the universe- as in saving from guilt and condemnation one poor lost sinner. Oh, it is the costliest and brightest gem in the mediatorial diadem of His glory! Do you think, then, O you sin-burdened one, laden with the iniquities and bowed down with the guilt of years, that Jesus is not able to save you? Do you doubt the love of the mother who bore you? Do you doubt the affection of the being who wedded you? Doubt, if you will, your very existence; but cast not one cruel, dishonoring doubt upon the POWER of Jesus to SAVE you from the guilt, dominion, and condemnation of all the transgression you have ever committed from the first breath you drew until now. The "blood that cleanses from all sin," in its divine efficacy, in its sovereign virtue, in its gracious freeness, has a present and unlimited power to wash you, even you, whiter than snow. In view of this divine attribute of our Shepherd- His power to convert, His power to keep, His power to deliver, His power to save- may we not blend our voice with the chorus of the apostle- "Unto Him that is ABLE to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Anon."

The crowning attribute of our Shepherd remains to be considered- His redeeming character. We have pronounced this the crowning perfection of our Lord. What were all His other perfections- illustrious though they are- were He not a Redeeming Shepherd? His intelligent knowledge, His guiding skill, His shielding power had not met the necessities of His flock apart from its redemption by the sacrifice of Himself. And now were to be fulfilled the remarkable prophecies concerning this sacrifice. "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all." "Awake, O sword, against any shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, says the Lord of hosts: smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered: and I will turn my hand upon the little ones." Our Shepherd claims the verification of these wonderful predictions. "I am the Good Shepherd: the Good Shepherd gives His life for the sheep." "I lay down my life for the sheep." Oh what a precious view does this present of the love of Christ for the flock of His pasture! We needed a sin-bearing; a sin-atoning; a sin-sacrificing Shepherd; one who by His sinless obedience would honor the rigid claims of the law, and by His sacrificial death would satisfy the righteous demands of Justice; be, the plague of death, and the destruction of the grave, on behalf of His elect church. The Lord our Shepherd did all this. All the sins of His church were made to meet upon Him. Your sins, oh you doubting, trembling sheep! Fear not! Christ, your Redeeming Shepherd, has ransomed you- died for you- has paid all your great debt- has drowned all your sins in the fathomless sea of His blood- and has clothed you with the robe of His righteousness, making you in God's eye lovely through His loveliness put upon you. "He was made sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." Hold fast this doctrine of substitution- Christ dying in our stead. It is the marrow and pith of the gospel- our sanctification in life, our hope in death, our song in eternity.

"MY Shepherd," the sweetest note in our nightingale song! It is the privilege of faith to turn a general into a particular truth, a collective blessing into an individual one. The apostle illustrates

this, " Who loved ME, and gave Himself for ME." My soul! put in your claim to a personal proprietorship in a personal Shepherd. He is as much you as though there were not another sheep of His flock. He loves you individually, chose you individually, died for you individually, called you and lives for you individually; and it is your privilege to join in the lofty melody of David the king- "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want." "MY Lord and MY God," echoed Peter the apostle.

There is no reasoning so logical and accurate as that of faith. What inference could be more natural, what deduction more true? Mere human reason is sure to err when it attempts to solve the mysteries and grapple with the truths of divine revelation. But the moment we summon faith to the study- faith accepting what reason discards- the heart believing what the mind cannot understand- the whole soul bowing down to revelations and facts which infinitely transcend, but do not in the least degree contradict, reason, that moment we are made to know the doctrine whether it be of God. All our difficulty then vanishes, the mist dissolves, the soul is uplifted, and a landscape of divine truth, clothed with beauty, bathed in sun-light, and vocal with song, bursts upon our view. Receive the Bible as a little child, not citing it to the bar of your reason, but prostrating your reason unquestioningly and humbly before it, and you shall be saved. "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple." "Your word is truth." Such, then, is the deduction of faith- "The Lord is my Shepherd "- and because He is my Shepherd- "I shall not be in need." It is impossible that it should be otherwise, since it is the office of a shepherd to look well to the needs of his sheep. We shall not lack temporal supply. He instructs us to watch the sparrow lighting upon the earth in quest of its morning meal- to admire the lily clothed with a beauty eclipsing the most gorgeous attire of Solomon- bids us not be anxious what we shall eat or what we shall drink, or wherewithal we shall be clothed, since our heavenly Father knows we have need of all these things; and that He, as our Shepherd, is pledged to meet our every temporal necessity. Faith may be tried- and its very trial be found among our most precious blessings- yet sooner or later the supply of His providence will come, and the promise be verified, "My God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus."

Still more, is He pledged to meet all the soul's requirements. What are our temporal needs in comparison to our spiritual? In this light we interpret those wonderful words, "It pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell," "Full of grace and truth." Christ, our Divine-human Shepherd, holds the keys of all the resources of Deity, of all the provisions of the covenant, of all the supplies of the Church. What is your need, O my soul? Is it grace? Christ is "full of grace." Is it power? "All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth." Is it comfort? Christ is "the Consolation of Israel." Is it supply? "He shall feed His flock like a Shepherd." Is it counsel? "His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor." Is it sympathy? "He is touched with the feeling of our infirmities." "Jesus wept." In view of these precious declarations confirmatory of the all-sufficiency of Christ our Shepherd, let faith exclaim in every circumstance- "I shall not lack."

When I come with troubled heart,

Jesus bids me not depart- Until He stills it.

When I come with empty urn,

Jesus bids me not return- Until He fills it.

Once I came in tattered dress,

And the God of holiness- Did not loathe me.
Bringing nothing for the payment.
When I came for change of raiment- He did clothe me.
When I dared not nearer draw,
For the terrors of the law- He compelled me.
Then He showed me how the Son
Has my full salvation won- By His dying.
How the law's demand He met,
The poor bankrupt's total debt- Satisfying.
Still He bids me to draw near,
With my every grief and fear- And He quells it.
All unworthy, yet I learn,
Just to bring my empty urn- And He fills it.
"The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not be in want."

Green Pastures

Green Pastures

"He makes me lie down in green pastures." Psalms 23:2.

"He lets me rest in green meadows." Psalms 23:2.

David had affirmed his belief- predicated upon the all-sufficiency of his Shepherd- that he should not be in need. It was, as we have remarked, the natural and logical conclusion of faith from the promise. He now proceeds to justify and confirm it: "He makes me to lie down in green pastures." It is one of the most natural and essential duties of a shepherd that he should provide suitable and ample nourishment for his flock; and then skillfully and timely to conduct them to it. Such is the office to which our Psalmist now refers.

There is no evidence of the truth of the Bible so convincing as the evidence of personal experience. "You are my witnesses," says God. He who can lay his hand upon his heart, and say- "I have the testimony here that God's word is true," is fortified against the most sophistical and powerful assaults of the foes of the faith. "He that believes on the Son of God, has the witness in Himself." If this weapon, my reader, is yours, let it not slumber in the scabbard; but draw it thence, and wield it manfully, "valiant for the truth upon the earth," and "contending earnestly for the faith once delivered unto the saints." You need not then tremble before the atheism and rationalism of the day; your sword is invincible- your soul invulnerable. Bend your ear to this sweet refrain of our song- "He makes me lie down in green pastures."

It will be observed that David employs the plural number- "pastures." The Lord's flock is composed of many sheep, of various orders of mind, degrees of knowledge, and attainments in grace. As in His Family there are 'babes,' 'little children,' 'young men,' and 'fathers;' so in His Fold there are the 'lambs' and the 'sheep'- representing different degrees of grace and stages of maturity in the Christian life. But, for the nourishment of all these- the 'lamb,' the 'sheep,' and 'those that are with young', Christ, the Shepherd, has suitably and richly provided. What a precious truth meets us here! No member of Christ's flock scanning these pages need retire from their perusal with the sigh- "Alas! my case is not recognized- my need is not met- my way is hid from the Lord- my judgment is passed over from my God." Come and walk amid these pastures, and see if there is not 'milk for babes' in grace- 'tender grass for lambs'- and 'strong food for those who are of full age,' -admiring and adoring the love and wisdom of the Divine Shepherd who so graciously and amply provided them.

We place in the foreground, the green pastures of God's truth. All other nourishment flows from, and is subsidiary to, this. All sacred literature- embracing those works of sanctified minds through whose channels biblical illustration, spiritual teaching, and practical and comforting truth are conveyed- is based upon the divine authority and teaching of God's revealed Word. The divine life in the regenerate can only be sustained and nourished by nourishment congenial to its nature; divinity must be met with what is divine; the indwelling Spirit, with what is spiritual; the renewed

intellect, with the thoughts and revelation of the mind of God. To attempt to satisfy its hungering with the light and worldly literature of the day- the fiction, the story, the play- were to starve its cravings and dwarf its growth. The Bible is the granary of the spiritual life of the regenerate, from where it draws the "daily bread" that feeds and nourishes it that it may grow thereby.

Listen to the testimony of all the saints, "How sweet are your words unto my taste! yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth!" "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works." Let this be the first and chief meadow to which your soul travels for its nourishment. Permit no uninspired volume, however sacred- still more, allow no worldly literature, however intellectual and entrancing- to supplant in your study and meditation the pure word of God. What David said of the "sword of Goliath" may with yet more significance be said of the "sword of the Spirit," "There is none like that; give it to me." By the devout and close study of this sacred volume, accompanied with the teachings of the Holy Spirit, by whose inspiration it was given, your acquaintance with God's character will be close, your views of divine truth will be sound, your knowledge of Christ will increase; and the graces of the Spirit thus strengthened and nourished, you will put forth the might and prowess of "a perfect man in Christ Jesus." In this divine fold all may roam; the 'lambs may feed in their way,' and the sheep in yet richer pasture.

Here are gracious invitations for the sin-laden; precious promises for the sorely tried; real consolation for the bereaved mourner; a glorious hope for the most deeply depressed and most profoundly despairing sinner; a balm that heals every wound, a hand that dries every tear.

"Lord, I have made Your Word my choice,

My lasting heritage;

There shall my noblest powers rejoice,

My warmest thoughts engage.

"I'll read the histories of Your love,

And keep Your laws in sight,

While through Your promises I rove

With ever fresh delight.

"Tis a broad field of wealth unknown,

Where springs of life arise,

Seeds of immortal bliss are sown,

And hidden treasure lies.

"The best relief that mourners have,

It makes our sorrows blest

Our fairest hope beyond the grave,

And our eternal rest."

The doctrines of grace supply rich and appropriate pasture for Christ's flock. It must be acknowledged, with a sigh, that these divine and precious truths are not received by many modern Christians with the reverence and love of other days. And yet, how instructive and establishing, how comforting and sanctifying, are the doctrines of electing love-finished redemption-sovereign mercy- free grace-effectual calling-and final salvation. How the spiritual mind loves to roam amid those green meadows, to feed among those rich pastures; and is nourished and established by those truths which lay the boast of human merit, and the pride of man's power in the dust; and ascribe to the Triune Jehovah, the glory of that 'salvation which is of the Lord.' Hold fast these distinguishing doctrines of grace theologically, live upon them spiritually, and exhibit them practically in all their holy and sanctifying influence.

Not less nourishing is the preceptive teaching of God's word. How significantly and indissolubly interwoven are the doctrines and the precepts of the bible! Who can study devoutly the Pauline epistles addressed to the Ephesian and Colossian churches, and not be profoundly impressed with this truth? Doctrine is the basis of precept, and precept is the handmaid of promise. Built up in the divine doctrines, the believer will study to walk in the holy precepts; and walking in the precept, he may fully expect a fulfilment of the promise; and thus the preceptive part of God's word, which "teaches us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world"- will realize to him the precious promise- "looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ; who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." Lord, make me as intensely to love the precepts, as I firmly believe the doctrines, and earnestly plead the promises of Your word!

But how can we adequately picture the real and ample pasture provided in the fulness and all-sufficiency of Christ Himself, the Shepherd of the flock? It is a marvellous, and not less precious, truth that the sheep live upon the person, resources, and supplies of their Shepherd. Could any argument in support of His Essential Deity be more conclusive? A Being who, from Himself, could meet all the needs of His church-collectively and personally- in all ages- in all climates- and at all times- must be absolutely and essentially Divine. "In Him dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." And, touching the mediatorial relation to the flock as their Redeeming Shepherd, it is written: "It pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell." From this, His own infinite and boundless sufficiency, the Shepherd supplies all the needs of His flock. You have not a sin His grace cannot pardon- not a corruption it cannot subdue- not an infirmity it cannot help- not a burden it cannot sustain- not a sorrow it cannot sooth-not a difficulty it cannot surmount. "ALL FULNESS"- "FULL OF GRACE." Oh live in your emptiness and poverty by faith upon the all-sufficiency of Christ! He is honored and glorified when the 'hungry sheep, looking up' to the under shepherd 'and are not fed'- repair to Him for the food for which they crave, but cannot find, and from whom they receive it with no reluctant and measured hand. Oh what music in the Shepherd's ear is the feeble bleat of the lamb- the plaintive cry of the sheep- appealing in times of sorrow, danger, and need, to His sympathy, power, and protection! "I know my sheep, and am known of mine."

He leads us too in the green pastures of the ministry of His word. It is no light blessing to be led into the fertile fold of a purely and fully preached gospel. The Christian ministry is as divinely an appointed institution as any ordinance of the Church of God- not one whit less so than Baptism or the Lord's Supper. Any religious sect or system that ignores the gospel Ministry, and sets up in its place another, and an unscriptural one, as diametrically opposed to the appointment of Christ, and the teaching of God's word. In recognition of this institution, the glorified Shepherd, "when He ascended up on high, gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." And what language can fully set forth the immense blessing to the flock of a Christ-exalting ministry, fragrant with the anointing, rich with the fulness, and glowing with the beauties of the Shepherd? Oh, if He has so favored you, estimate highly the worth, weigh accurately the responsibility, and study prayerfully the duties involved in a boon so divine, precious, and priceless. "Know those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and esteem them very highly in love for their works' sake;" remember them in your intercessions, and consider that the frequency and fervor of your prayers on their behalf will be the measure and richness of your profit by them. Nor this alone. The responsibilities of the Christian ministry, and of the Christian Church, are mutual and reciprocal. You have a duty to perform even as they; and this is your duty- that you see that their temporal necessities are justly and amply cared for. In pressing this duty upon you we have the mind of the Spirit, and the injunction of the apostle. "Who feeds a flock, and eats not of the milk of the flock? . . . If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your earthly things? . . . The Lord has ordained that those who preach the gospel should live of the gospel." Look well to this sacred duty- no, this sweet privilege- and see that he who leads you into the green pastures of the gospel- feeds and nourishes your souls in the faith- is lightened of all needless temporal anxiety through your bountifulness. If it is his solemn and bounden duty to preach to you the whole counsel of God, not less is it your individual and bounden duty- yes, your holy and sweet privilege- to see that his temporal necessities are so equitably and suitably met as that, freed from anxiety and care, he may give himself wholly to prayer and meditation; and thus your soul profit withal. We verily and solemnly believe that to a neglect of this divine precept and apostolic injunction may, to a great extent, be traced the fact that in the Church of God so "many are weak and sickly, and many sleep." There is a 'withholding' from Christ's ministers temporally, and it tends to the poverty and leanness of those who thus withhold spiritually. There is a just and righteous law regulating spiritual as well as temporal things. "Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over. . . . For with the same measure that you mete withal it shall be measured to you again." Thus, the measure of your temporal liberality shown towards Christ's ministering servants- especially him who ministers to you- will be the measure-pressed down and running over- of what you will be the recipient through the channel of his ministrations. Oh to remember that we are not proprietors, but stewards- not the owners, but the trustees of our intellectual endowments, and worldly possessions; and that before long we shall hear the summons- "Give an account of your stewardship; for you may be no longer steward." May that account be with joy, and not with grief- with honor, and not with shame- when standing before the Master, we bend our ear to His approving voice, "Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things: enter you into the joy of your Lord."

The Ordinance of the Lord's Supper is not the least nourishing and refreshing of the pasturage provided by Christ for His flock. The ordinance, in its original institution by Christ, was to compass two purposes- the one, the perpetual memorial until His Second Coming, of His one, great, sacrificial oblation of Himself once offered for sin; the other, to keep the Christ-believing, loving heart in life and bloom, as it roamed through this luxuriant and fragrant meadow, and reposed upon its green and sunlit slope. An institution of His own appointment, and designed to be a memento of Himself, and the channel of blessing to His saints, what less could we expect than that the King should preside at His own Royal Banquet; and that, influenced by His spiritual presence, our graces of penitence, faith, and love, should breathe their fragrance, to His ineffable complacency and delight.

"While at the table sits the King,

He loves to see us smile and sing;

Our graces are our best perfume,

And breathe like spikenard round the room."

There is, probably, no occasion- if we may speak of degrees in the Savior's love- on which the heart and ear of Christ are so widely expanded as when in faith and love we meet thus in obedience to His command, and in remembrance of Himself. With a heart thus dilated, and an ear thus inclined, He waits to catch the softest sigh of grief- the deepest groan of desire- the most urgent appeal of neediness- saying to each guest, "What is your request, and what is your petition? "Hasten- for the audience is brief and precious, the moments are few and fleeting- to pour out your whole heart before Him, telling Him all your cares- all you feel- and all you need. But examine yourself, and ascertain whether your views of the Lord's Supper are in strict accord with the teaching of the Lord Himself. Beware of being seduced from the nature, design, and simplicity of this ordinance by the Romish perversions of the day! The moment you substitute the material for the spiritual- sense for faith- the corporeal for the spiritual presence of Christ in the Sacrament- that moment a withering mildew will fall upon your observance of the rite; and, thus ceasing to be "afield which the Lord has blest," no nourishment or refreshment will flow through it to your soul. But, oh, how expressive and precious the ordinance, when in faith and love we cluster around that solemn Banquet! Then it is we realize, in some degree, the significance and fulness of the Savior's words- "He that eats my flesh, and drinks my blood, dwells in me, and I in Him." And then, too, our swelling, joyous hearts respond- "I sat down under His shadow with great delight, and His fruit was sweet to any taste. He brought me to the banqueting house, and His banner over me was love." Thus, Lord, ever feed and nourish my soul, until at Your call I exchange the Feast of Earth, for the Banquet of Heaven, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, prophets, apostles, and martyrs, and all the saints in glory, at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb."

The health and nourishment of a flock often demand a variety and change of pasture. The Lord, our Shepherd, acts upon this principle. He leads His sheep from one pasture to another, varying it as best suits the circumstances and condition of His saints. The ministers of Christ are not, happily, all alike endowed. The same law of variety which pervades all God's works exists in the Church of God. All ministers have not the same order of gifts, or the same degree of grace, as all have not the same office and work. Some are apostles- some evangelists- some pastors, and

some teachers. Marvel not, then, if the Lord sees fit to change either your shepherd or your pasture. Rest assured that, in removing your minister from you, or you from your minister- as He often does with His people- He is but consulting your highest interests, and His own greatest glory. He is the fittest Judge of your soul's requirements, and how best to meet them. He may see the necessity of a change in your pasturage. You have, perhaps, been roaming in fields rich and luxuriant in intellectual and philosophical teaching, and, like Jeshurun, have "grown fat and kicked." Or, on the contrary, you have been browsing upon the stony and barren moor, with scarcely a turf or a spire- intellectually or spiritually- to keep your soul alive in famine- and your cry is- "O my leanness! my leanness!" -and no marvel! The ever-varying circumstances of life- its chequered history of joy and sorrow- personal advance in knowledge, intelligence, and grace- often necessitate another and a different order of ministry than that upon which we have been wont to wait. We have- in our spiritual education- grown 'wiser than our teacher'; perhaps, more deeply rooted and grounded in the faith- more advanced in doctrinal truth and experimental religion- and we need a ministration of the Word more harmonizing therewith- more in sympathy with our matured judgment and our sorrow-disciplined heart. If, then, the Lord sees fit to change your Shepherd, and thus your pasture, be assured that He is but consulting your soul's greatest need and His own highest glory.

One feature yet remains to be noticed. They are "GREEN PASTURES" into which our Shepherd leads us. The image is beautiful and suggestive. They are always green; like the oasis of the desert, bright and radiant amid dreariness and sterility. Time does not change them- age does not impair them- neither the drought of summer nor the frosts of winter affect them. Like the "Tree of Life" planted in the New Jerusalem, they yield their verdure and their fruit 'every month,' every day; yes, always, in every place, and under all circumstances, they are bright with verdure and rich in nourishment. Come to God's word, when you may- to the Mercy Seat, where you may- to the Savior's fulness, as you may- with your most depressed frames, your most pressing need, your bitterest grief, your most embarrassing difficulty- your profoundest unworthiness- you will find these pastures ever the same. Change is written upon everything out of God, and Christ, and His word. All other sources of happiness pass away like 'the morning cloud and the early dew.' The warm springs of human affection congeal- the fervor, the promises, and the faithfulness of earthly friendship change- your features, yes, your very name, fading from its memory- and over the entire scenery of life, adversity may breathe its wintry blast and scatter its thick snows, and the green and pleasant pasture of earthborn good wither and die; but the love of God and the sufficiency of the Savior undergo no change- "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, today, and forever."

The 'grass' of these pastures never withers- the 'flowers' of these gardens never 'fade'- the springs of these meadows never dry- approach them, and you will find them always rich in nourishment, replete with comfort, inspiring of joy; ever strengthening, soothing, and sanctifying. Oh, forget not that, beneath the cross of Jesus the richest pasture, the sweetest flowers grow. There are experienced the truest penitence, the strongest faith, the warmest love, and the brightest hope- and when barrenness, dreariness and sorrow mantle and becloud every other position and prospect of life, at the foot of the cross are found a precious Savior- perfect peace- fulness of joy- the love of God, and the hope of glory!

Still Waters

Still Waters

"He leads me beside the still waters." Psalms 23:2

"He leads me beside peaceful streams." Psalms 23:2

It is not into a dry land, a land where no water is, our Shepherd leads His flock. "Give me a blessing," said the daughter of Caleb to her father-in-law; "for you have given me a south land; give me also springs of water. And he gave her the upper springs, and the nether springs." Such is the blessing conferred upon the sheep of Christ's pasture. We have considered the "green pastures" in their varied character and perpetual verdure; but, apart from the springs of water- "the upper and the nether springs" -it would be at best but as a south, or a dry land, lacking not only the beauty, but the nourishment, of the pasturage fitted for the needs of the flock. How rich and precious the Divine promises which assure us of this! "When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue fails for thirst, I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them. I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys. I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water."

What a fulfilment of this magnificent promise is found in the gracious invitation of Jesus- "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink." Here was the true smitten Rock- the breaking forth of waters in the wilderness- springs of water in a dry place, where no water was, "And they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ." It is to these waters- these springs in the desert- our inspired Songster refers, by the side of which the Shepherd led him, upon whose banks He caused him to lie down.

Before we meditate upon the repose, let us contemplate THE WATERS themselves. Of what spiritual gospel truths are these "still waters" the emblem? Will not a spiritual and reflective mind return- as the first truth- to the everlasting love of God, from whose Infinite Ocean all other springs of grace flow? This is the fountain- the sea- the source of every covenant and redemptive blessing conferred upon the Church of God. "There is a river, the streams whereof make glad the city of God." This River is the Divine- infinite- eternal love with which He has chosen, and with which He has drawn, us to Himself. "I have loved you with an everlasting love therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn you." Now it is to this River the Lord Jesus delights to lead us. With what emphasis and distinctness He declared the great love of the Father, of which He was the revelation and the gift! "God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." "I say not unto you that I will ask the Father for you: for the Father Himself loves you;" that is, My intercession is not the cause, but the effect- not the inspiration, but the expression of my Father's love. Oh how blessed to repose in confidence upon the bank of this Divine River, and know that God loves us- that these waters are for us- to feel that His love is causing all the events and incidents of our history to work together for our good- that He, who spared not His Son for us, will send no evil thing, and will withhold no good thing that we

need! Do not be content, O my soul, with a mere taste of this River- though to have only "tasted that the Lord is gracious" is an unspeakable blessing; and one draught of God's love is infinitely sweeter and more satisfying than a life-long draught of the worldling's richest, purest nectar- of whom it has been said that he—

Drank every cup of joy, heard every trump

Of fame; drank early, deeply drank; drank draughts

That common millions might have quenched-then died

Of thirst, because there was no more to drink!"

My soul! outbid and outstrip this poor worldling- a noble and splendid poet though he was- and drink abundantly and often of these "still waters" which flow down from the throne of the Eternal; for the River is full, inexhaustible, and free.

Nor drink only; lie down upon its sylvan, mossy bank. You are sad and weary. The sun of affliction has smitten you- the heat and burden of life's toilsome day has exhausted you- and, footsore and faint, you seek that repose and restoration found only in the assurance that God loves you! Approach, then, and take your rest upon the slopes of this River which makes glad the Church of God; it will cause your spirit of lassitude and sadness to sing for joy; and, blending with your Marah's bitterest waters, will make them sweeter than honey. "The Lord" (the Spirit) "direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ."

Not less true and emblematic are these "still waters " of the pure water of life which flows from Christ, the Shepherd, and to the fulness of which He leads His flock. All spiritual life flows from "Christ, who is our life." "I have come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." "Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." Beloved, learn the secret of the high, and still ascending, life- it is your privilege here to live, until you pass to that life that knows no chill- no cloud no end. It is not you that live- it is Christ, your life, that lives in you. And the life you live of battle, of service, and of suffering, is maintained and matured only as you live by faith on the Son of God; and this living by faith implies the confession of every sin at His cross- the hanging of every burden upon His arm- the sobbing of every grief upon His heart. Reclining upon the bank of these still waters of life, your soul will bloom, and your life will blossom with all the graces and fruits of the Spirit.

How sweet and refreshing the still waters that flow through the channel of communion with God! There the Shepherd loves to lead the footsteps of His flock in the sultry heat and in the faint weariness of the day. Is there a pasture more verdant, a spot more shaded, a slope more sunny than the meeting-place with God? "Come, my people, enter you into your chambers, and shut your doors about you- hide yourself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be over past." How gently did the Shepherd lead His sheep to those still waters when He bade them ask, and they should receive; seek, and they should find; knock, and it should be opened to them. Are you weary? are you wounded? are you faint? Come and lie down by this flowing river, and drink of these waters of communion with God, and your soul shall be refreshed; your peace will flow as a river, and your joy as the waves of the sea. Oh the power, the repose, the comfort of prayer!

'Having boldness,' or privilege, 'to enter into the Holiest- the pleading blood of Jesus upon the Mercy Seat- the Father's scepter of grace extended- all the resources of Deity at your command- can you for a moment hesitate, through fear and unbelief, to arise and give yourself to prayer? One draught of these 'still waters' of calm, confidential, filial approach to God will be infinitely more powerful and efficacious than all the oblivious waters of the fabled river of Grecian mythology- you shall drink, and forget your sorrow, and drown in oblivion your misery and care. Oh listen again and yet again- you sin-burdened, sorrow-stricken one- to the divinest words, the sweetest melody that ever chimed upon the ear- "Come unto Me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest!"

"Are you weary, are you languid, are you sore distressed? 'Come to Me,' says One, 'and coming, be at rest!'

Has He marks to lead me to Him, if He be my guide?

In His feet and hands are wound-prints, and His side.

Is there diadem, as monarch, that His brow adorns?

Yes, a crown, in very surety- but of thorns!

If I find Him, if I follow, what His promise here?

Many a sorrow, many a labor, many a tear!

If I still hold closely to Him, what has He at last?

Sorrow vanquished, labor ended, Jordan past!

If I ask Him to receive me, will He say me no?

Not until earth and not until heaven pass away!

Tending, following, keeping, struggling, is He sure to bless?

Angels, martyrs, prophets, pilgrims, answer, "Yes!" (Written by Stephen before the Eastern Church became corrupted by Papal superstitions.)

But let us turn our thoughts to the expressive POSTURE OF THE FLOCK. "He makes me to LIE DOWN." Beautiful and expressive image! There is not a spectacle more truly pastoral and picturesque than that of a flock of sheep reposing amid the luxuriant verdure of a sunlit meadow. Contemplate the spectacle in its spiritual aspect: "He makes me to lie down." It is, first, the rest of faith. No grace brings the soul into such perfect repose as faith in God's character- in Christ's all-sufficiency- in the unchangeableness of the divine promises. Faith can lie down in the midst of trial, and sorrow, and need, in the 'quiet resting places' where the Divine Shepherd causes His flock to repose at noon.

It is the posture of perfect satisfaction. Dissatisfaction shades the brow of every worldling. It is impossible in the nature of things that it should be otherwise. The world, with all its greatness, is too small a thing to fill the human soul. That must needs be a vast void which Infinity alone can fill! But perfect satisfaction is found only where the flock of God lie down amid the green pastures of

His love, and the fragrant meadows of His word. Oh how satisfied, beloved, God can make you with all the way by which He is conducting your trembling footsteps homewards! The way, at times, may be thorny and dark- intricate and solitary- faith sifted- patience tried- principle tested- love wounded; nevertheless, the soul can lie down in a quiet resting-place, satisfied with all God's dealings- that He, the Lord of all the earth, must do right. "Whom have I in heaven but You? and who is there on earth that I desire beside You?" "Not my will, O my Father, but Yours be done!" "And now, what do I wait for? My hope is in You." "I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with Your likeness." Return, you wanderer, from your roamings in quest of that which no worldly good or creature here can give you, and come and rest your weary spirit amid the 'green pastures' of God's love in Christ Jesus, and your "soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness."

Perfect safety is expressed by this posture of the soul. There is not a more exposed object to every form of assault and danger than the Flock of God. It is well termed, "the Flock of the slaughter." "For Your sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." But where can we repair for perfect security but where the Shepherd leads His flock, and causes it to lie down? The moment we wander from the side of Christ- swerve from the purity of His truth- and turn from the simplicity of His worship- roaming amid other and forbidden pasture that looked so fair and promised so much, but tasted so bitter and proved so false- that moment we exchange the place of safety for the place of danger; and well for us if, while thus wandering from the Shepherd and the Fold, into dangerous enclosures, we lose not all evidence of our Christianity, and meet the 'last enemy' with a beclouded, if not a shaken and uncertain hope!

We have made but passing reference to THE ESPECIAL CHARACTER OF THESE WATERS. They are emphatically

"still," or, "quiet waters." Where does the gentle Shepherd lead thus His flock? Not by the thundering fall- not to the foaming cataract- not even by the low-murmuring brook- these would alarm and agitate His sheep! But He leads them to the still, gentle, peaceful waters of His love, and there He causes them to lie down. "When He gives quietness, who then can make trouble?" Come away, my soul from the strife and turmoil and excitement of this busy life, and lie down upon the slopes of these quiet waters. "You will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You." See how lovingly Jesus invites us to these 'still waters,' and how gently He causes us to lie down.

"These things I have spoken unto you, that in Me you might have peace. In the world you shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer ; I have overcome the world." "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you." Here is perfect quietness- here is unruffled repose. "In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength." How fierce the storm! How loud the tempest! How surging the billows oft-times of God's providences! "Be still, and know that I am God." "The Lord on high is mightier than the noise of many waters, yes, than the mighty waves of the sea." Be still- be trustful- be prayerful- be hopeful! The night is dark and long- it is the fourth watch, and Jesus has not yet come! Be still! He is on His way- He will come- and presently you shall hear His divine voice of power and His human voice of compassion rising above the tempest- "Peace, be still!" -and sweet will be the hush- perfect the quietness and peace Christ will give you. "O Lord, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I." Yes, to the quiet waters of Your love, from where all my fresh springs flow. "Tell me, O you whom my soul loves, where you feed, where you

make your flock to rest at noon: for why should I be as one that turns aside by the flocks of your companions?"

When my heart is likely to break,

When the surging billows shake

My feeble bark,

Lead me to the Rock most high

The Rock that higher is than I ;

even in the dark.

When I see my sin so great,

When no comfort I can get,

No place to hide,

Lead me to the Rock most high

The Rock that higher is than I;

The smitten side.

When no refuge I can find,

No shelter for the weary mind,

No cooling shade,

Lead me to the Rock most high

The Rock that higher is than I;

No more afraid.

When thirsting for the living stream

Of that eternal life in Him,

No more to die,

Lead me to the Rock most high

The Rock that higher is than I;

To Him I fly.

In the cleft of that dear Rock,

From the surging billows' shock,

I'll hide me ever.

In His righteousness so pure,
In His covenant so sure,
I'll dwell forever.

The Restored Sheep

The Restored Sheep

"He restores my soul" - Psalms 23:3.

David, the king of Israel, would, from his early occupation as a shepherd, be thoroughly conversant with the roaming instincts of his flock- its natural proneness to wander, and its utter inability, by any self-faculty, either of memory or skill- to retrace its steps back to the fold. His own spiritual history- as a sheep of Christ's flock- would supply Him with a striking and melancholy illustration of this fact in natural history. If ever there were a sad wanderer from the sacred fold- or one who, when restored, more sincerely deplored his backsliding- frankly confessed his sins- and deeply felt his inability by any self-effort to return to God- it was David.

What a confirmation of this fact is his close of the hundred and nineteenth Psalm- "I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek Your servant!" Conscious of his departure, he was as deeply conscious that God alone could restore him. The points suggested by this verse for our present meditation are- the wandering sheep- the Restoring Shepherd- the path of righteousness in which He led him; in other words, the departure- the restoration- the walk. "He restores my soul"- a subdued, yet joyous note of our Song- penitence and praise sweetly blended!

THE DEPARTURE-

Soul-restoration clearly and logically implies soul-departure. We speak not now of the life of the unregenerate. Alas! the life of an unconverted individual is one entire, unbroken, unrestored departure from God! What hue sufficiently dark can portray the life of an unrenewed man? He may be upright and honorable as a man of the world- faithful in all the relations of life- admired for his private, and honored for his public character and career. His morality, stainless- his virtue, unquestioned- his liberality, generous- his philanthropy, distinguished- his religion, admired; and yet, destitute of the converting grace of God- a stranger to the great change of the new birth- an unbeliever in the Lord Jesus Christ, his life is but a blank- a negation of all that is evangelically good- and with a 'righteousness not exceeding the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees,' dying in this condition, he can in no way enter into the kingdom of heaven. Reader! marvel not that you must be born again!

But, our present view of the departure of the soul from God must be confined to the sheep of Christ's flock- accepting David's case as an instructive and impressive illustration. We are now to consider backsliding, not before, but after grace; not previous to, but succeeding, conversion; the wandering, not of a rebel, but of a child! And yet fidelity compels us to remark that this condition, though not finally fatal, is of an inexpressibly aggravated character. The soul-departures of the believer are from a God we have known- from a Savior we have loved- from pastures in which we have roamed with delight. We have tasted that the Lord was gracious- have heard His voice, and have fed at the Shepherd's hand- have walked in the footsteps of the flock- and have rested where they lie down at noon on the banks of God's river of love- and yet, we wandered! Is there a

character of sin more aggravated, a turpitude of guilt more deep, than this? But our view of this sad state must assume a more limited range. Passing by the overt acts of backsliding Christians- which, like David's, beginning at the house-top, from the house-top are proclaimed- we direct our thoughts to the hidden declensions of the soul- the veiled backslidings of the heart, unseen by others, scarcely suspected by themselves, and therefore all the more insidious and fatal, and demanding yet more vigilance and prayer.

The word of God speaks of "the backslider in heart." It is there that all departure from God begins. The human heart is the most subtle and treacherous thing in the world; it is described as "deceitful above all things." The wind is unpredictable- the sea is treacherous- the serpent is subtle- but the heart of man is more fickle, and treacherous, and subtle than all! Thus, there may be growing in the soul- deeply veiled from every eye- a declension of faith, an alienation of love- a decay of grace- a restraining of prayer- a weakening of the power of spiritual life, while the believer may remain almost entirely unconscious that the 'grey hairs'- the unmistakable evidences of spiritual relapse and attenuated strength- are whitening and thickening upon him. Oh how should this fact lead to a close searching of heart- to honest probings of conscience- lest the sin, that lies at the door ready to avail itself of the slightest opening should enter, and, obtaining a momentary ascendancy, should dishonor God- wound the Shepherd- and bring deep and long distress into the soul!

All this declension, too- and this is one of its most startling aspects- may be advancing without any visible or marked disturbance of the external rites and duties of religion! These may be uninterrupted in their beautiful and hallowed continuity- the sanctuary attended- the sacrament observed- the district visited- the class instructed- the stereotyped forms of devotion rigidly honored- while the insidious process of spiritual decay may be silently and unsuspectedly, yet most surely and fatally, advancing in the soul. Oh it is here we have need to be whole nights on our watchtower- not so much guarding against an external and foreign invasion- as against the treacherous and never-slumbering foe of our own house. We may 'hold the fort' gallantly and successfully against a besieging foe, while the betraying enemy within may be undermining the very foundation of our faith, the evidences of our grace, and the stability of our hope!- and all this sickliness of spiritual life- chilled affection- distant walk from Christ- deadened devotion, and worldly-mindedness, exist in close alliance with religious observances, flaming zeal, and charitable gifts- its unhappy subject the 'observed of all observers,' and the admired of all admirers, in the Christian world- living, and yet dead!

Not the least evidence of the decay of spiritual life in the soul may be the carriage and spirit of the believer under the afflictive dealings of God. In the very height of your hidden declension you may be overtaken by some heavy dispensation of providence. The chastening hand of God is heavy upon you. He has frustrated some earthly plan- has withered some cherished flower- has disappointed some fond hope- has touched your health- has given wings to wealth- or taken from you all that lent to life its sweetest charm. And what is the effect? Alas! alas! your heart rises in rebellion against the God who has smitten! You deem His discipline harsh- His heart unsympathizing- His government arbitrary- you refuse to be comforted, and you do you think do well to be angry- and so you kick against God! What an evidence do you now afford- in thus flying in the face of your Heavenly Father, instead of falling down humbly and submissively at His feet- of the real and secret declension of the life of God in your soul!

THE RESTORATION-

But let us change our theme. Are we assuming too much in supposing that the Holy Spirit has interposed His power to arrest your wandering- to reveal to you your declension- and has awakened the cry in your heart- "Oh that it were with me as in days that are past, when the candle of the Lord shone round about me!"? If this be so, then chant to the plaintive note of the sweet songster- "He RESTORES my soul."

WHO is the Restorer, but the Shepherd, whose the sheep are, and from whom they have wandered! There is but one Being who would or could go in quest of the stray sheep- traversing the bleak mountains and the lonely valleys, and the dark, stormy night, until He finds it, bringing it back upon His shoulder rejoicing. Christ alone knows the existence and extent of our heart-declensions- our soul-backslidings. With His hand upon the pulse- His eye upon the heart- acquainted with every fluctuating thought and emotion of the soul- who so fitted as He to seek and restore the wanderer from His fold? Oh what a throb of gratitude should beat in our hearts at the thought that Jesus knows us altogether- all our infirmities, and all our graces- all our declensions, and all our revivings- when the pulse of love beats faintly-or when, in the sincerity of our hearts, we can appeal to His Omniscience, and exclaim- "You know that I love You!" "I know my sheep."

And what an evidence of the restoring grace of Jesus, and of David's restoration, do we possess in the fifty-first Psalm! Oh, it is a Psalm which should be read and pondered every day of the Christian's life! for there is no Psalm which so fully embodies and expresses the experience of the man of God as it. It is a portion upon which a child of God can lay his dying head, and depart peacefully. This was the experience of one distinguished for his gifts, eminent for his usefulness, and honored above many in the Church of God. When the time of his departure had come, and his life and labors passed in solemn review as from a dying bed, the only portion of God's word that seemed the most appropriately and fully to embody and express the humble feelings and prayerful utterances of his mind, and to impart comfort and peace to his departing spirit in the near prospect of eternity, was this penitential Psalm of David, so expressive of the feelings of a contrite soul- the acknowledgment of sin- the washing of the blood- restored joy- and renewed consecration to God.

Dear Shepherd, draw me to your fold;

I am cold, cold!

I've wandered in forbidden paths,

Far from your fold.

I left the "pastures" fresh and "green,"

Where rest your sheep;

The sweet "still waters" of your love,

For mountains steep.

I'm weary, and my soul does yearn

For your embrace

Oh, bear me from this mountain pass,

This dreary place!

You only can "restore my soul."

Oh, hear my cry!

Nor let me in this wilderness,

Forgotten die.

Dear Shepherd, draw me near to you;

I am cold, cold!

And me in your warm arms of love,

I pray, enfold.

THE LEADING-

"He leads me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake." The Shepherd that restores, leads the soul into higher and more advanced stages of grace, experience, and holiness; and thus by a sanctified result of arrested declension and more quickened life, the restored soul walks in a new and hitherto untrodden path of righteousness, joy, and peace in the Holy Spirit. Wanderer from the fold! return! The Shepherd calls you- seeks you- invites you, implores you to return. He waits to be gracious. Listen to His heart-melting words- "Return, backsliding Israel, says the Lord; and I will not cause my anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful, says the Lord, and I will not keep my anger forever. Only acknowledge your iniquity." "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Restored! -wander no more from the Shepherd and the flock, lest a worse thing come unto you! Knowing the cause of your declension- the temptation which led to your departure- be prayerful, be vigilant. "Remember therefore, from where you are fallen, and repent, and do the first works." Was it unguardedness? unwatchfulness? -be vigilant, be sober. Was it undevoutness? -give yourself more constantly and earnestly to prayer. Was it the influence of the world? -come out from it, and touch not the unclean thing. Or, was it the power of some easy-besetting sin which overcame you? -lay it down beneath the cross, and with your eye of faith upon the Crucified One, exclaim, "By Your agony and bloody sweat, by Your cross and passion, I will henceforth die to sin, and live to You!" Thus, whatever the cause of your departure from God- your wandering from the fold of Jesus- the power of sin, the influence of the world- the idolatry of the creature- the love of self- lay it at Jesus' feet, and exclaim-

"Is there a thing beneath the sun

That strives with You my heart to share?

Take it away, and reign alone,

The Lord of every motion there."

Oh bend your ear to the loving, entreating voice of the Shepherd- retrace your steps- return to the fold- once more feed and lie down with the flock- and saints below and angels above will be summoned to unite in the celebration of your recovery- "Rejoice with Me; for I have found my sheep that was lost."

"Return unto your rest, my soul,

Return unto your rest!

Too long these wandering feet have strayed

In paths, of God unblest;

The tempting gate stood open wide,

The way was broad and fair,

While breath of flowers and song of birds

Filled all the sunlit air.

"The flowerets faded before the noon,

The bird-song died away;

And, lowering over the tangled path,

The skies seem ashen gray.

Oh, weary, lonely, frightened soul,

By toil and storm distressed;

One only refuge waits for thee,

Return unto your rest!

"No chiding words of stern rebuke

Or anger wait for thee;

Your erring steps have grieved your Lord,

But pardon still is free.

Poor, trembling soul, 'look up and live!'

Obey such love's behest;

From downward paths of woe and sin,

Return unto your rest!

"The child upon its mother's heart

Forgets the weary day;

So love divine shall fold you close,
And soothe each grief away.
Come, burdened soul, your wanderings over,
Your follies all confessed,
With hastening feet that rove no more
Return unto your rest!"

The Valley

The Valley

"Yes, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for You are with me." - Psalms 23:4.

"Even when I walk through the dark valley of death, I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me." - Psalms 23:4.

Plaintive and pensive refrain of our Song is this- yet how inspiring and melodious! What a marvellous combination of note, and harmony of sound! It speaks of soul-depression; the pathway of the valley; the shadow of death; the presence of the Shepherd; and the triumph of the sheep! "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for You are with me." The spiritual landscape of the Christian- like the natural- is diversified in character, feature, and tint. Mountains and hills, rivers and valleys, forests and glens, grassy mounds and sunny slopes, compose it; and each succeeding and varied scene, presents some new and brighter view of the divine character, and brings the saints of God into the experience of some yet unstudied and unlearned lesson in the divine life. It is in this way our education for heaven is advanced: it is thus our acquaintance with God is promoted. We only experimentally and closely know God by personal relationship. A theoretical or intellectual religion is of little or no practical avail. We must know God, not by hearing and reading merely, but by personal understanding and feeling; the emotional, as well as the thinking, faculty must be brought into play: the heart must, so to speak, discourse with the head- there must be a communication, a harmony of the intellect and the affections in the religious training of the soul. Perhaps we conceive of God as so infinitely great that He can only deal with us- and we with Him- in the greater events of our history; while the smaller incidents- the little affairs of daily life- are left to the government and molding of blind chance, or fortuitous circumstance! But this is practical atheism of the worst description. It is the privilege of the believer to recognize and practically act upon the truth that, there transpires not an event or incident in his history but marks the hand and echoes the voice of his Divine Shepherd. The Lord is in it. "The very hairs of your head are all numbered"- Christ thus teaching us that our Heavenly Father takes cognizance of the minutest event and circumstance of our individual history, and that there is nothing too trivial or common to be beneath His interest and control. And thus, although the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain Him, yet He seeks a dwelling-place amid the sighs and groans and desires of a humble, broken, and contrite heart; and all the interests of that heart- its faintest desire, gentlest sigh, and softest prayer- are entwined with the purposes, thoughts, and affections of His. "You are NEAR, O Lord," should be the consciousness of every believing mind: You, God, see me! You, God, hear me! You, God, shield me! Jesus meets us in every bend of our path, and speaks to us in every circumstance of our history- in the cloudy pillar, as in the golden beam; in the soft, 'still small voice,' as in the roar of the tempest and the vibration of the earthquake- and thus, were there less atheistical unbelief in our hearts- alas! so natural and so strong- we should feel that God has to do with us, and we with God,

in the most infinitesimal event and incident of our history. Oh deem nothing too small for God! If it concerns you, it yet more deeply concerns Him; if it is your care, it is still more His. "Casting all your care upon Him; for He cares for you;" and how could He care for you, felt He not your care? You are His child by adopting grace, and nothing that attaches to you as a child is alien to Him as a Father. But let us now bend our ear to this pensive yet triumphant strain of our song- "Yes, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for You are with me."

The course of the flock- as mapped in this verse of the Psalm- is clearly that of THE VALLEY- and rich and holy is its teaching. There are VARIOUS VALLEYS which trace the journey of the Christian- and in each of which some especial blessing is found, and found in no other. The first stage of the divine life commences in the valley- the valley of repentance and humiliation for sin. All pass through this valley who are called by grace, and have set out for heaven. It is, indeed, the first step in real conversion. Until we are led down into this valley, we tread the high mountain of self-righteousness and pride, in the self-inflated, boasting spirit of Nebuchadnezzar, who walked in the palace of his kingdom exclaiming, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honor of my majesty?" Alas! there are many heights, each one more elevated than the other, traversed by the natural man, from the towering summit of which he fondly, yet vainly, hopes to reach heaven, as easily and surely as Moses from the top of mount Pisgah! But, from all these elevations, divine grace, by a descent gradual yet effectual, removes him, leading him down into the valley of his own sinfulness, emptiness, and poverty, extorting from him the only prayer expressive of his felt condition- "God be merciful to me a sinner!" Oh, blessed valley of death is this! There is something more than shadow here- there is reality! -it is death itself! The sentence of death is now written upon all imaginary holiness- imaginary merit- and spurious hopes of salvation by the works of the law. The "commandment" has been applied by the Spirit to the heart and conscience- 'sin,' that lay dead and dormant, is 'revived,' quickened as into new life; and we 'die' to all our own righteousness, false hopes, and vain expectation of mounting to heaven from the Babel we had so zealously, yet so foolishly and fatally, reared. And now the lofty look and the proud heart are brought low, and with the hand upon the mouth, and the mouth in the dust, the humbled soul exclaims, "I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

In this valley of repentance, self-renunciation, and godly sorrow for sin, Christ is found- and found only here! This that was, in a sense, the valley of death, now becomes the valley of life! It is here our first discovery of Christ is made. Where else should we look for Him but "outside the camp," and in the valley- the scorn of the Pharisee, and the rejected of the worldling- but the attraction and the treasure, the Savior and the Friend of every poor, penitent sinner; who, feeling the plague of his own heart, and casting away the leprous-tainted, sin-soiled, worthless garment of his own righteousness, comes to Jesus, and accepts Him as all his salvation and all his desire? Oh how real and precious does Christ now become! and how true and glorious does the gospel appear! Truly it is a new creation within; and the old and material creation outside is now clothed with a beauty and a charm unseen, unfelt before; for lo! "old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new!" Every object in nature- the flowers of earth, and the stars of heaven- as now seen with a spiritual and new-born vision- bloom with a beauty and shine with a splendor, the most brilliant imagination could never have conceived; and, recognized as the work of the Incarnate God- of Him who died upon the cross- appear as though the universe had but just sprung from

chaos at the fiat of its Maker, clothed with the splendor, fragrant with the perfume, and vocal with the song of its first-born creation! It is only to the Christian's eye- and as seen to be the work of Jesus- that this world appears, even in its sin-tainted and curse-blighted condition, to be surpassingly beautiful. It is true, the painter, the poet, and the philosopher may revel amid the sublimities and wonders of 'nature'- portraying them upon canvas, chanting them in song, and illustrating them in science- but, until there is a new visual faculty of the soul, a veil conceals even from the most artistic eye, and the most brilliant fancy, and the most learned mind, more than half the grandeur and splendor of the universe. Creation, recognized as the handiwork of Christ- God seen in it- oh then it is the sentiment comes with a power perfectly irresistible- "He has made all things beautiful!" "How great is His beauty!"

Study Creation with the Christian's eye- not with the eye of a Byron, dimmed with the mist of an atheistic philosophy, but with the eye of a Milton, lit up with the noontide splendor of the Sun of Righteousness! And when you look down at the flowers- those stars of earth, and up to the planets- the jewelry of heaven, and when you gaze upon the rainbow, kissing the valley, then springing to the sky, arching and tinting hill and cloud with its mysterious beauty- and when you gaze upon the cloud-piercing Alps, capped with its eternal snows, inaccessible to the foot of man- oh let the devout thought, the rapturous feeling, leap from your adoring soul- "My Father- my Redeemer made it all!" -and lo! the curse will seem to have rolled from creation, and "instead of the thorn will be the fir tree, and instead of the brier, the myrtle tree; the mountains and the hills will break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands."

My reader, have you been brought into this valley of humiliation? and have you there found- where alone it can be found- the "Rose of Sharon" -the "Plant of renown" -the "Lily of the valley" -the "Tree of life" -even the Lord Jesus Christ, the Savior of sinners, discovered alone by the soul led down into the depths of its own conscious sinfulness.

There is the valley of affliction which lies in our pathway to heaven, along which all the sheep travel, and was trodden by the Shepherd of the flock Himself; for, "though He was a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered." Thus the valley of sorrow is the royal road through which all traveling to the delectable mountains are led by the Shepherd. It is an essential part of our education for heaven- our learning of the New Song- that we should pass through this valley- often profoundly deep and densely shaded. Our descent into it may be singularly mysterious. We are, perhaps, led down by the Shepherd from some verdant hill-side, where we fed so luxuriantly- or from some silvery stream, upon whose soft bank we reclined so peacefully- into the loneliness and gloom of the valley of tears, to learn some new lesson, to experience some new truth, to taste some new spring, found only there. It is not always upon the consecrated heights of devout communion, Christian joy, and entrancing song, that we find the richest fruit, the sweetest flowers, the purest streams of the divine life. All no! "He sends the springs into the valleys, which run among the hills;" and so He fulfils the precious evangelical

promise- "I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys: I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water." And so it is when God brings us low, we discover the springs of life and grace and truth, found nowhere so full, so sweet, so refreshing, as in the valley winding among the 'hills' of difficulty and doubt, weariness and neediness, which lie in our path to glory. Oh there are blessings found in the shaded valley, that are not on the sun

gilded height; even as there are sublimities seen by night, invisible to the eye by day! It is here the character of God is unfolded- the compassion of Christ is felt- the consolation of the Spirit is experienced. We have found it good to be in the valley. Almost paralyzed with wonder, and overwhelmed with emotion, in the shaded valley into which the Shepherd has gently led us we have plucked our ripest fruit, cropped our richest pasture, and drank our purest spring of divine truth, sweet peace, and holy joy! The discipline of sorrow thus hallowed, we have echoed the lofty note of our sweet-singing Psalmist- "Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept Your word. It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn Your statutes." Shepherd of my soul! if this be the pasture, these the blessings, found in the valley of sorrow, the valley of tears- my rebellious will disciplined- my heart's idolatry surrendered- my worldly-mindedness removed- and You made more precious to my soul- then,

"Your way, not mine, O Lord,

However dark it be!

Lead me by Your own hand,

Choose out the path for me.

"Smooth let it be, or rough,

It will be still the best;

Winding or straight, it leads

Right onward to Your rest.

"You take my cup, and it

With joy or sorrow fill,

As best to You may seem;

Choose You my good or ill."

But the most solemn valley we have yet to pass- "the valley of the shadow of death." "It is appointed unto men once to die," and even the believer is no exception to this divine appointment. The Shepherd Himself was not exempt. He must pass through the valley of death before He could "open the kingdom of heaven to all believers." We must keep in view the essential distinction of Christ's death and ours. Christ suffered death as the Substitutionary Offering of His Church; consequently, death was to Him not what it is to us, (a covenant blessing), but an unrepealed, unmitigated curse. He met, not the shadow, but the substance of death; not the phantom, but the reality- suffering countless million deaths in one! If it is an appalling event for one individual to die, what must have been the "bitterness of death" to Christ, dying the death- the sting of each buried in His heart- of every individual sheep of His flock? Oh, had He not been God, as He was man- and had not His love been equal to His Deity- infinite, boundless, fathomless- how could He have drank and exhausted that tremendous cup of death's unmingled bitterness? Consider its ingredients- all the sins of His Church- the curse entailed by those sins- the condemnation involved in that curse- yet all this He endured in the sacrificial, sin-atoning sufferings and death

through which He passed.

Turn we now to THE DEATH of those for whom He thus died. Christ's death has essentially and entirely changed the character of ours. The believer, in the words of Jesus Himself, "shall not see death." Literally, it is death- symbolically, death is a shadow. Poetically, death is a sleep. "Those who sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him." And what is this sleep? It is not the sleep of the soul- the soul loses not for a moment its consciousness. It is the sleep of the body- an euthanasia- in which the mortal part of our nature only reposes in unconsciousness until the trumpet of the Archangel wakes and bids it rise a "spiritual body" 'the body of our humiliation fashioned like unto Christ's glorious body.' Banish from your mind and your creed the freezing, cheerless idea that the soul of the believer sleeps until the resurrection morn! No! the soul- even of the lost- in its transit to eternity is not the subject of a moment's insensibility. 'Absent from the body'- that instant the believer is 'present with the Lord.' The moment that the body closes its eyes upon all the sin and suffering of earth, the ransomed soul opens its rapt vision upon all the glory and splendor of heaven- and JESUS is the first Object which meets, fastens, and feasts its ravished and wondering gaze!

"I will fear no evil!" An elevated note of our song is this! What! "no evil" in the approach of the 'king of terrors'? "No evil" in the assaults of the Evil One? "No evil" in the near prospect and realities of eternity? "Yes," responds the dying believer, "I fear no evil! Death cannot sting me- Christ has died! The grave cannot hold me- Christ is risen! Sin cannot condemn me-Christ has atoned! Satan cannot touch me- Christ has conquered! The fetters I wore so long and so wearily, now fall broken and shattered at my feet- and I am free!" What, in reality, has the believer to fear in death? When Christ passed through the valley, He destroyed the substance of death, and left nothing but its shadow- its phantom- its dream! Oh, believer in Jesus! are you afraid of a shadow? And have you forgotten the exceeding great and precious promise- "As your day, so shall your strength be"? "As your day" -and not before your day! The grace laid up for a dying hour is wisely reserved by God for its 'day,' and never given ahead of time. Oh, how prodigal we should be of the precious treasure were the deposit entrusted to our own keeping! It is the prerogative and design of faith to live upon God by the day. This is evidently His purpose and arrangement. "As your day, so shall your strength be." We have daily demands for grace quite enough, irrespective of anticipating our reserves, and antedating our need. We need living grace for life's daily duties and responsibilities, temptations and trials- and we have it all in Christ, our Depositary and Head, and it is ours- affluently and freely- by pleading the promise- "My grace is sufficient for you." Our dying grace will come at the appointed time, and when most we need it; and as we experienced the grace of Jesus all-sufficient for life- its deepest sorrows, its sorest trials, its strongest temptations, its greatest difficulties- so shall we find it all-sufficient for death- its fears and doubts, its tremblings and faintings- once more, and for the last and closing scene, presenting the precious promise- "My grace is sufficient for you." Wait, then, trustfully, calmly, hopefully, God's appointed time for the divine strength, grace, and comfort, that will bear you safely, yes, triumphantly through the shaded valley.

"His wisdom is sublime,

His heart profoundly kind;

God never is before His time,

And never is behind."

No! "I will not fear" -why should I, with such a Father- such a Savior- such a Comforter at my side, as I traverse the swellings of Jordan, my foot of faith firmly planted upon the precious promises that pave my pathway to glory? Oh, what must be the power of the blood and righteousness of Christ, which annihilates every fear at that dread moment when the "King of terrors" brandishes his uplifted dart, prepared to strike, but powerless to sting! Where this boldness at a moment when the stoutest heart might quail- this calmness, when the most sublime heroism might succumb- this smiling at the pale messenger, when nature is dissolving, and loving watchers are weeping and sobbing?

"Come, death, shake hands!

I love your bands;

It is happiness for me to die!

What! do you think that I will flinch?

I go to immortality!"

Where, we again ask, does this sublime victory over death come from? Our sweet Songster shall supply the answer.

"For You are with me." The presence and power of the Savior in the hour and point of death, alone explain the phenomenon. There is no fact in the believer's history more certain, as there is not one more precious, than that the Divine Shepherd walks side by side with each departing member of His flock. If ever the Savior is manifestly and sensibly with His saints, it is then. Never did He permit one of His sheep, not a lamb of His fold, to pass down the valley unsustained by His arm, uncheered by His voice, unblest with His smile. It may be that the loved ones who shared and soothed our earthly pilgrimage are absent now; or, if present, we may be unconscious that they are at our side. A fond parent may watch in silent agony the closing scene- a devoted husband, a loving wife, may tenderly wipe the cold death-damp from our brow- an affectionate child may bend to catch the last sigh from our lips- and yet we are utterly unconscious of their presence and their love! But of one presence- of the nearness of one Friend- your departing spirit is fully, blessedly sensible. "You me with me!" breathes from the dying lips- resounds through the valley! Hell trembles! Heaven rejoices! And all the saints and angels shout for joy!

"Death comes to take me where I long to be;

One pang, and bright blooms the immortal flower.

Death comes to lead me from mortality

To lands which know not one unhappy hour.

I have a hope, a faith- from sorrow here

I'm led by death away- why should I flinch and fear?

"A change from woe to joy- from earth to heaven

Death gives me this- it leads me calmly where
The souls that long ago from me were riven
May meet again! Death answers many a prayer.
Bright day, shine on! be glad! Days brighter far
Are stretched before my eyes than those of mortals are!"

The Rod and the Staff

The Rod and the Staff

"Your rod and Your staff they comfort me." Psalms 23:4.

"Your rod and your staff protect and comfort me." Psalms 23:4.

When David spoke these words he was, in anticipation, passing down the 'valley of death,' his spirit poised upon its wing for heaven. It is befitting and profitable to pause amid the engagements and turmoil of this present life, and forecast the hour and the scene when its business and its probation will close- lost amid the realities and solemnities of the life that knows no ending. He is a wise man who meditates frequently and seriously upon his latter end. Common and certain as death is, alas! it is the last event of our history with which we make ourselves familiar! Wiser far the heathen monarch who, amid the pomp and splendor of his court- the wine and the music of the banquet- ever and anon bent his ear to catch the warning of the attendant at his side- "Remember, O king, you are mortal!" Less eccentric, and more real, was the mode by which Joseph of Arimathea sought to familiarize his mind with his certain dissolution. In the excavation of a rock, encircled by the flowers and foliage of his garden, he built a tomb for his body- "a new sepulcher, wherein was never man yet laid. There laid they Jesus." And as, at eventide, he walked in his garden, and gazing upon its beauty and breathing its fragrance, he would pause before his prepared tomb, and recall the impressive 'cry' of the Prophet- "All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field: the grass withers, the flower fades." If, in the sublime language of the Burial Service, "in the midst of life we are in death," then should the thought, the imagery, and the preparation of death be ever present with our minds. And we hold that there is nothing inappropriate or incongruous in the idea that, in whatever place or engagement we may be occupied, the prospect of our dissolution should impart a tone to every feeling, a character to every circumstance, and a sanctity to every thought, word, and action of our life. It were no mere fanciful exaggeration of the sentiment were the muffled death knell to blend with the joyous music- the bridal robe to suggest the image of the pale shroud- and the thronged and sumptuous hall, thoughts of the lone and vaulted tomb- for 'in the midst of life'- the most busy, festive, and hilarious- 'we are in death.' We now turn to the Christian's "Rod and Staff," -his guidance and support in that eventful and solemn hour.

"Your rod and your staff." The image is pastoral and exquisitely beautiful. There are few objects more picturesque than that of the shepherd and his crook. The 'rod and the staff' are essential to the office of the shepherd as to the guidance and protection of the flock. The spiritual and practical significance of the symbol will be obvious to every reflective mind. The first is that of designation. The first and primary use of the shepherd's rod is that of marking the sheep, by which they are distinguished from all others, and recognized as his own. This is the meaning of God's word- "I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant." And again, "In the cities of the mountains, in the cities of the valley, shall the flocks pass again under the hands of Him that tells them, says the Lord." And yet once more, "Concerning the tithe of the herd, or of the

flock, even of whatever passes under the rod, the tenth shall be holy unto the Lord." How clear and precious the teaching! Christ's Church is a chosen flock, distinguished and separate from all others by an act of eternal, sovereign, and most free election. Hence our Lord said- "I am the good Shepherd, and know my sheep." If a member of Christ's Fold, you have 'passed under the rod' of electing love, and have upon you His own secret and distinguishing mark that you are His. Deny it not! To that everlasting love- to this election of grace from where it sprang- to your having thus passed under the Shepherd's rod- you owe all that you are as a child of God, and all that you hope for as an heir of glory. Your views of the doctrine of Election may be misty, and your faith in it hesitating; nevertheless, your crude conception and hesitating belief do not negate the doctrine itself, nor release you from the solemn obligation to believe it humbly, to accept it gratefully, and to live it holily. It is a blessed thought, that the unbelief of the believer cannot invalidate any truth of God, or lessen his obligation to receive it, though it may shade the luster and impair the power of that truth in his personal experience, thus robbing him of its blessing, and God of its glory!

While yet upon this subject, however, let me remind you that a divinely revealed doctrine though Election is, and one of the central truths in the mediatorial scheme, yet the question of your personal election of God is not the truth with which your faith has primarily and mainly to deal. Election is nowhere in the Bible placed before you as an essential tenet of your faith, but rather as a doctrine which imparts symmetry and consistency to the entire scheme of divine truth- renders lucid and harmonious doctrines otherwise obscure and dissonant- involves the divine glory- and supplies the believer with one of the most potent and influential motives to personal holiness- "According as He has chosen us in Him [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love."

Salvation recognizes but one Object of faith- the Lord Jesus Christ. You are not called upon to believe that you are one of the Elect; but you are to believe in the Savior, as a sinner saved wholly by God's free grace, only and entirely through the Lord Jesus Christ, the one Name given under heaven whereby we must be saved. Do not be, then, troubled in your mind touching your election; it is one of the secret things of God with which He alone has to do. The revealed thing is, the absolute necessity of faith in Christ, who for your encouragement has declared- "He that believes in me shall be saved." No longer, then, stumble at this stumbling-stone; divine and revealed though it be- but, be anxious and earnest to know that you are called by grace. This great question once fairly settled, you may remain perfectly composed as to your election of God; for, your "calling made sure," you have logically and theologically, "made sure your election of God."

Another use of the shepherd's "Rod" is that of separation. With it he separates the sheep. By passing under the rod, God thereby intimated that His people were especially separated and set apart from all other nations for Himself. Here we have what, to use a logical term, may be called the corollary of election- the certain conclusion to which it conducts us. All the elect of God are the called of God. "Whom He did predestinate, them He also called." With this calling, then, we have first and chiefly to do- the antecedent act- your election- so to speak, transposed; that coming last in your experience which is the first in God's mind. Grasp in faith this the last and lowest link in the mystic chain of your salvation, and it will by-and-by raise you to the first and highest. The people of God, then- the sheep of Christ's flock- are a separated people. They have passed under the separating, consecrating rod of the Shepherd. "He calls His own sheep by name, and leads them out. And when He puts forth His own sheep, He goes before them." Sweet and precious truth!

Divine and sovereign grace has taken you out of the world, and set you among those who are

"called to be saints," "the called according to His purpose." "It pleased God," says the apostle, "who called me by His grace, to reveal, His Son in me." Oh, high and holy calling! What are all others- the most imperious and brilliant- in comparison? Oh let the thought never be absent from your mind, that you are called out of, that you should be separate from, this ungodly world- "a holy nation, a peculiar people, a royal priesthood" -separated, set apart from all others to be Christ's especial treasure. My soul! have you heard the call of Christ? Outwardly, again and again, the gospel call has fallen upon your ear; but has the inward and effectual call of the Spirit penetrated the ear of your soul, bidding and constraining you to arise and come to Jesus? Rest not short of this!

The shepherd's "Rod" is equally employed for the guidance of the flock. By a single wave of his "rod," by a gentle touch of his crook, the shepherd of the east was wont skillfully and effectually to lead his flock in the way in which they should go. How clearly our Lord appropriates this. "When He puts forth His own sheep, He goes before them, and the sheep follow Him." As one of Christ's Fold, from the moment you 'passed under the rod,' you became an object of His especial guidance and care. Henceforth, "I will guide you with my eye," is the promise He has made individually yours, and which your faith is to plead. You are passing through an enemy's country- your path often intricate and perplexing- you see not a step before you, and are often called to descend a valley deeply shaded with dark and trying providences. But you have divine and precious promises- "I will bring the blind by a way that they know not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them."

Blessed Shepherd! I am perplexed to know the path of duty! My way is hedged, and I can't see a step before me. Show me now Your way that I may know You. Let Your guiding-rod- the word of Your truth, and the eye of Your providence- indicate the way in which I should walk- Your way. And when that way is made plain, give me grace to walk in it; be it the path of service, the most self-denying; of suffering, the most severe; or of loneliness, the most solitary.

Commit yourself, then, unhesitatingly to the guidance of Christ's rod. He will most assuredly lead you by the best way. He is leading you now in the right path. Clouds and darkness may be round about you; but all is light to Him, in whom is no darkness at all. Around your path the events of Divine providence may be as a complete web, baffling your every effort to unravel; but He 'knows the way that you take,' and will guide you through the labyrinth and the maze, bringing you 'out of a strait place into a broad place, because He delights in you.' Blessed Shepherd! "You shall guide me with Your counsel; and afterwards receive me to glory."

The shepherd's "Rod" is for protection. It is a weapon of defense with which the flock are shielded from the prowling beasts of prey. There is not a moment that danger is not near, and not a moment that Christ's Rod is not outstretched in our defense. There is not a being in the vast universe more exposed to assault, nor yet one more divinely and safely kept, than a saint of God. Loved with a love that passes knowledge- redeemed with the precious blood of the Shepherd- and made a temple of God through the Spirit, is it possible that he can ever perish? Listen to the Shepherd's declaration of this truth- "I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, who gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is

able to pluck them out of my Father's hand." Take comfort from this, O my soul! You do often tremble at the prowling beasts of prey, causing the forest to shake with their roar- yet more do you dread the veiled and subtle foe- the sin that dwells in you- ever present, never slumbering, treacherous and strong, and therefore the more dangerous and dreaded, often extorting the cry, "I shall one day perish by my enemy!" Do not be dismayed! Every sheep and lamb of the flock is kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation; and shall be delivered from the mouth of the lion, the paw of the bear, and the fangs of the serpent.

Nor must we overlook the restraining use of Christ's Rod and Staff. The restraints of Christ's grace are not less conspicuous in the believer's experience than the constraints of His love. There is a strong tendency in us to go before the Lord, rather than follow His leading hand. We desire to anticipate His will and antedate His way concerning us, rather than in quietness and confidence wait the movement of His guiding rod. Peter- impulsive and self-reliant, went before the Lord when He asked Jesus to bid him come to Him upon the water. The consequence was, he began to sink; and but for the hand of Christ, the proud waves had whelmed him in their depths. Impetuous and distrustful, we would dictate to God the way by which He should lead, and the means by which He should deliver, and the lessons by which He should instruct, and the discipline by which He should sanctify us. But Jesus, consulting our greatest good, orders otherwise. "When He puts forth His own sheep, He goes before them." Oh blessed restraints of Christ! Restraining our rebellious will- our impetuous spirit- our blind zeal- and our erring judgment- Christ interposes His "rod and His staff," and in a thousand instances keeps us from falling. Significant words of God to David- "I kept you from sinning against Me"! Among your costliest mercies, count the restraints and checks of Christ's "rod and staff." We shall never fully know, until we arrive in heaven, in how many instances and ways we were kept by God- from how many a precipice, and from how many a broken bone, and from how many a fatal mistake, the Lord went before to preserve us. We rebelled, perhaps, at the interference of the "rod"- we murmured at the checks of the "staff"- we felt the sickness sore- the suffering acute- the disappointment bitter- nevertheless, when the mist and the cloud uplifted, revealing the imminent peril to which we had been exposed, we then saw clearly the wisdom and mercy of our God in imposing those divine and salutary restraints, but for which we should blindly and inevitably have wrecked all that was precious to us in this life, and glorious in the life that is to come.

Nor would we omit the employment of the "Rod" as a disciplinary agent in the hands of our Divine Shepherd. This symbol is frequently used as illustrating the afflictive dispensations through which God's people pass. "Hear the rod, and He who has appointed it." The rod of Divine discipline is not less essential to the completeness of our Christian character, and thus our fitness for heaven, than any other use in which the Lord employs it. The reference in God's word to this is striking and instructive. "If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him," says God, "with the ROD of men." Listen to the words of the sorely afflicted patriarch- "Let Him take His ROD away from me, and let not His fear terrify me." How necessary this "Rod" of reproof, judgment, and restraint, by which the Church of God is disciplined! It is fearful to contemplate the result of its absence! Dissever a timely and wholesome exercise of discipline from a church- or a nation- or a school- or a family, and how soon would lawlessness, anarchy, and ruin ensue! And thus, exempt the Church of God- collectively and individually- from the discipline of Christ- let Him extinguish the furnace, and suspend the flail, and lay aside the knife, and what would be the result? The dross would then hide the gold- the

chaff would spoil the wheat- the sucker would ruin the vine- and incalculable would be our soul's loss!

But the "Rod" of Christ's discipline has a voice. "Hear the rod, and Him who has appointed it." It is the voice of a Father, whose love for us is not a blind, unwise affection, but infinitely holy and intelligent. It is the voice of a Savior bidding us not shrink from the pruning, but accept its severing as designed but to promote our fruitfulness. "He opens mine ear to discipline." And when the ear bends humbly and submissively to the Divine voice in this discipline of sorrow, then it may be said that, like Aaron's, it "brought forth buds, and bloomed with blossoms." Sanctified affliction- hallowed grief- is no bare and barren rod of God. There is power and vitality in it: it quickens the divine life- awakens the spirit of prayer- strengthens and purifies faith- enthrones Christ supremely upon the heart- and though 'at present not joyous, but grievous, yet afterward it yields the fruits of righteousness unto those who are exercised thereby.' And thus it is, when the Heavenly Husbandman prunes the branch, and the Divine Refiner purifies the gold, that the one brings forth more fruit, and the other reflects the more perfect likeness; and He that prunes and He that refines receives all the glory.

"Your rod and your staff they comfort me." Divine discipline and divine comfort are synonymous terms. The Lord tries the righteous, that He might comfort them. He wounds to heal- creates a channel for His divine consolations often through the furrows and fissures of a broken heart. Jesus told His disciples that He was about to leave them- and sorrow filled their heart. But at the first burst of grief He hastens to apply the balm- "Let not your heart be troubled: you believe in God, believe also in Me"- thus creating a way for His richest consolations through the channel of their bitterest sorrow. In what other school do we learn that the Lord is full of compassion- that Christ is touched with the feeling of our infirmities- that His strength is perfected in weakness, and His grace all-sufficient for us- but in the school in which He Himself, though a Son, learned the great lesson of 'obedience' to the will and behest of His Father? Oh yes, the "Rod and the Staff" are channels of divine "comfort" which flow to us through no other. Bow humbly and submissively to the "Rod" of God's correction- grasp believingly and firmly the "Staff" of Christ's truth- and, in the multitude of your thoughts within you, His comforts will delight your soul. The cross may be heavy- the furnace fiery- the knife sharp- the rod crushing- but all the richer and sweeter will be the "strong consolation" flowing into your soul from the "God of all comfort."

Oh shrink not from the burden your Father lays upon your shoulder, however weighty- turn not your eye from the cross your Savior bids you carry, however sore- for here often are found the richest pastures and the stillest waters of the soul. Bearing this cross to the brink of Jordan, you shall then exchange it for the crown- and, looking unto Jesus, you shall pass triumphantly over its swellings, and all the minstrels of heaven will celebrate your coming! Lord! if such the fruit of the "Rod"- and such the support of the "Staff"- and such the blessing of the "Cross"- do with Your servant as seems good in Your sight!

"Heavier the cross, the nearer heaven;

No cross without, no God within;

Death, judgment from the heart, are driven

Amid the world's false glare and din.

O happy he with all his loss,
Whom God has set beneath the cross!
"Heavier the cross, the better Christian;
This is the touchstone God applies.
How many a garden would be wasting,
Unwet by showers from weeping eyes!
The gold by fire is purified;
The Christian is by trouble tried.
"Heavier the cross, the stronger faith;
The loaded palm strikes deeper root;
The vine juice sweetly issues
When men have pressed the clustered fruit;
And courage grows where dangers come,
Like pearls beneath the salt sea foam.
"Heavier the, cross, the heartier prayer;
The bruised herbs most fragrant are.
If sky and wind were always fair,
The sailor would not watch the star;
And David's Psalms had never been sung
If grief his heart had never wrung.
"Heavier the cross, the more aspiring;
From valleys we climb to mountain crest;
The pilgrim of the desert tiring,
Longs for the Canaan of his rest.
The dove has here no rest in sight,
And to the ark she wings her flight.
"Heavier the cross, the easier dying;
Death is a friendlier face to see;
To life's decay one bids defying,

From life's distress one then is free.
The cross sublimely lifts our faith,
To Him who triumphed over death.
"Crucified One! the cross I carry,
The longer, may it dearer be;
And lest I faint while here I tarry,
Implant such a heart in me,
That faith, hope, love, may flourish there,
Until for the cross, my crown I wear."
(From the German of Smolk)

The Banquet

The Banquet

"You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies." Psalms 23:5

"You prepare a feast for me in the presence of my enemies." Psalms 23:5

How soon is true and simple faith crowned with its reward! The first and exultant refrain of our song had scarcely died upon the ear- "I shall not want"- before another and still more jubilant one ravishes the soul. "You prepare a table before one in the presence of my enemies." God, when He gives faith in Himself- in His love to promise, in His faithfulness to fulfil, in His power to perform- seldom keeps the believing, waiting soul in long and anxious suspense. It is true He may, in some instances, test the sincerity, exercise the faith, and prove the love of His suppliant child by causing the 'vision awhile to tarry;' but sooner or later it comes, and the faith that trusted, and the prayer that petitioned, and the hope that expected, and the patience that waited, meet their due reward- never a whit less, but oftener far beyond the utmost limit of the request- from "Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us."

Sheep without nourishment, would be as incongruous as a flock without a shepherd. The very relation Christ sustains to you, is a pledge that your needs shall all be met. The existence of a table- the table emblematic of an appropriate and ample banquet- a banquet, too, where famine and foes prevail- is a demonstrative proof of the power and expectation of faith- "I shall not lack." It is no little comfort to be well and divinely assured that, in whatever part of the wilderness your lot may be cast- however weary and pressing your need, numerous and potent your enemies- yet there the Shepherd has prepared a table of the most appropriate and costly viands, and invites you to partake- He Himself presiding at the banquet.

Shall we remind you of the table of His Providence- provided for you in the face of your enemies- which, though the least, does not the less exhibit the thoughtful, tender care the Lord takes of His own? He will have us as much live a life of dependence upon Him as the God of providence, as the God of grace. Jesus has taught us to pray- "Give us this day our daily bread." Nowhere did our Lord speak lightly of our temporal need, or discourage the prayer of those that petitioned for its supply. It is not likely that He who made the body- Himself a partaker of its nature and its infirmities, often pinched with hunger and parched with thirst- would speak lightly of its needs, or fail to meet them when they occurred. No lesson did He more frequently or emphatically inculcate than that of a humble dependence upon God's regard of our temporal necessities. His simple, yet inimitable, illustration of the 'sparrow' and the 'lily,' were designed to impress us with the duty and the happiness of seeking from God's hand the loaf that should enrich and adorn our daily board. "Do not be anxious, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, With what shall we be clothed? Your Heavenly Father knows that you have need of all these things." And are you not a living witness of God's providential care? Has He not hitherto prepared a table for you in the wilderness, and in the sight of all your foes? And when faith has been sharply tried- like the

Shunamite widow, nothing in the house but a handful of meal- and unbelief- your greatest enemy- has tauntingly asked, "Where is now your God?"- has not He who fed the five thousand in the wilderness with five small loaves and two fishes, as marvelously, and almost as miraculously, appeared on your behalf, sending an ample supply at a time, and with an affluence which has filled you with amazement-extorting the praiseful acknowledgment- "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies." Oh that every meal were as a sacrament, uplifting the heart to the Source of all our mercies, in grateful and devout acknowledgment of His daily providential care- in everything giving thanks! Is this your invariable habit, my reader, when you take your place at the table God has furnished with the bounties of His providence? is His hand recognized, and His goodness acknowledged, and His blessing invoked? Oh let not yours be an atheist's, but a Christian's table, where God is always acknowledged, and Christ is often a welcomed guest!

It is possible that these pages may find you straitened and tried in your temporal circumstances. Your income is, perhaps, inadequate- your supplies are failing- your demands multiplying- and your heart fails you for fear. Forget not that He who hears the raven's cry- feeds the sparrow- clothes the lily, is your Father and Benefactor, and that He knows your needs, and has promised, and is able, to supply it. And now, "have faith in God." Cry unto Him mightily; trust His word implicitly; wait His time and way patiently; and sooner or later the promise will be fulfilled- "Your bread and your water shall be sure;" "and truly you shall be fed!" Be it so that you have nearly come to the end of your supplies- that there is nothing in the house but the poor widow's portion- "a little meal and a pot of oil;" He who sent Elisha the prophet at the moment of her need, and more than met it, will appear in His wonder-working providence for you; and help shall come from a quarter you least expected, and at a time when you looked not for it, even though He work a miracle to accomplish it- multiplying the few loaves, and so blessing the barrel of meal and the cruse of oil, that they cease not. We lose much blessing and God much honor, by not more simply and implicitly living upon His providential care. It is an old and familiar aphorism, that "they who watch God's providence shall never lack a providence to watch." The simple meaning of which is- that they who see God's goodness in all their temporal supplies- who recognize His superintending and molding hand, ordering and shaping all the events- the most minute of their personal history- shall never be left without some marked and unmistakable evidence of God's care and bountifulness in providing for their temporal need, and His wisdom and faithfulness in ordering and directing all their worldly concerns. Be, then, a close student of God's providence. Seek a dislodgment from your mind of that atheism which would exclude God from the government of the world, but what is a far worse species of practical atheism- from the events and circumstances of our individual history. The terms 'chance', 'accident', 'contingency', as they are employed by the world in connection with the events of human life, should be entirely expunged from the Christian's vocabulary. They belong solely to the dictionary of the atheist, and should never pass the lips of the believer. It is the privilege of the believing mind to do with God in the most infinitesimal incident of individual life. Tossed amid the waves of second causes, faith often loses its anchorage on God in dark and mysterious calamities; and the believing and devout mind, thus for the moment loosed from its divine fastening, drifts away amid the breakers and the shoals of doubt and perplexity; and but for the restraining power and the restoring grace of the Divine Shepherd would become an utter wreck.

But a richer table is, the Banquet of His Grace. In nothing is the broad line of distinction more clearly drawn between the Church and the world than in the provision God has made for His own people. The blessings of Providence with which He favors us- though covenant mercies, as all our blessings are- yet are shared in common with an ungodly world- for He makes the sun of His goodness to shine upon the evil and the good. But the saints of God have infinitely more than this. There is another table, at which only His own people sit- the Family Table, around which cluster the adopted children of His love. "I have food to eat," said Jesus, "of which you know nothing." And in the same language may the children of God address the poor worldling, feeding upon wind, and starving upon husks- "We are fed and nourished with bread to which you are an utter stranger." What a rich banquet is the gospel of Christ: a "feast of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined."

To this banquet our Lord referred when He compared His Gospel to a "great supper," to which the poor and the needy and the penniless were bidden. How divine, costly, and precious this Banquet! Well may it be called- "the glorious Gospel of the blessed God." Next to God's unspeakable gift of His beloved Son, is the glorious gospel of His grace which makes Him known. What a banquet for poor sinners! How rich and varied its viands!- the full pardon of our sins- the free acceptance of our persons- our gracious adoption into God's family- and our joint heirship to the inheritance of glory. "Blessed are the people who know the joyful sound" of this full and free gospel! Alas! how few hear it- and when heard, how few know it! It is a jubilant sound- but to thousands, within its reach, it possesses no music, attraction, or charm.

How many religious professors, contemplating a change of abode, make the existence of a faithful, evangelical ministry the very last consideration in their search! Health- society- and scenery are points of attraction which take precedence of all religious questions; and a purely-preached Gospel is the very last- if at all considered- that awakens a moment's thought or enquiry! Like Lot, the situation is chosen because pleasant to the eye and well watered; and like him, we have lived to rue the choice that involved us in such worldliness,

temptation, and sin. Oh, in solemn consideration of the souls of your family, your domestics, and your own- and with death and Eternity before you- pitch your earthly tent on no spot where a famine of the bread and water of life exists! Avoid as you would a plague-smitten spot the place where soul-destroying doctrine, and God-dishonoring worship, have superseded an evangelical and faithful ministry of God's word, and a spiritual and devout worship of God's name. See well to it, that both the preaching of the truth and the rendering of the service are profitable to you and glorifying to Him!

A present salvation is an essential element of this Gospel Banquet thus provided for us in the wilderness. For the lack of a more simple recognition of this aspect of the gospel, many of God's people are deprived of much blessing. If saved at all- we are saved now. The believer is as entirely pardoned- as completely justified- as fully adopted at the present moment, as he will be when glorified. "By

grace you are saved." "Accepted in the Beloved." "You are complete in Him." Could any truth be expressed in terms more strong, or placed in light more lucid? Oh marvellous banquet, that meets and satisfies all the requirements of the soul! Come to it with what infirmity- with what need- with what sorrow- with what frame you may, there is a place and a viand for you; a loving welcome, and

a most free meal. "You prepare a table for me in the presence of my enemies."

And what a divine and rich banquet is God's word! Here is a table furnished with "all pleasant fruits," -the costliest and the richest God can give, for the instruction and nourishment of His own life in the soul. Here are doctrines for establishment; precepts, for guidance; promises, for comfort; and hopes which scatter the shadow of death, and light the soul's path to glory with an effulgence shining more and more unto the perfect day. Be a firm believer- a prayerful student- and an uncompromising defender of God's word.

This Divine table stands in the presence of many enemies. It is assailed on every hand. Never was there a time when the word of God was more universally, virulently, and insidiously attacked than the present. It behooves, therefore, the true believer in Scripture to grasp firmly this "Rod and Staff" of the Divine Shepherd; and thus armed and strengthened, to "contend earnestly" against the prevalent atheism and infidelity of the age, "for the faith once delivered to the saints."

We must not conclude this chapter on the Banquet of the Flock without a passing allusion to the Lord's Supper- not the least table of spiritual nourishment provided by the Shepherd in the presence of our enemies. We have, in the preceding pages, already alluded to this; but the subject at the present moment has assumed so important an aspect, we make no apology for returning to it again. As the present work is designed to be of a spiritual and experimental, rather than of a theologically controversial character, we pass by those views of the Lord's Supper by which its nature is perverted, and its simplicity and efficacy are destroyed. All that we can venture to premise on that head briefly is the declaration that, the Lord's Supper is not- as the Romanists maintain- a sacrifice, but simply and only the commemoration of a sacrifice; and that, consequently, those who officiate as 'celebrants' are not 'Priests'- in an official or sacerdotal sense of the term- but ministers only, possessing no authority whatever to change the elements into any other than their original nature, and no power whatever to impart to them any other than their appointed efficacy. How explicit and clear the words of 'consecration'- "Who made there (by His one oblation of Himself once offered) a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world." Here- in the very terms by which the officiating minister invokes the Divine blessing, and presents hearty thanks to Almighty God, in connection with the simple, yet most expressive symbols- is the entire exclusion of all idea of a corporeal presence- the offering of a sacrifice, or the office of a sacrificing priest. Neither of these pretensions have the shadow of a shade of existence in the original institution of the sacrament. The words of our Lord, when He instituted this Holy Supper, are as explicit and lucid as they are simple and touching. "And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and broke it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." The figurative meaning of our Lord- "This is my body", "This is my blood "-is explained by similar passages, and admits of no more literal interpretation than the metaphorical language which He employed on another occasion, when He said- "I am the Door." The argument of Zwingle, in the famous Marburg Conference on the Lord's Supper, that "a body cannot be without place; and that the body of Christ, being in heaven, could not be at the same time in the bread," holds as strongly now as it did then; and if reasonably and dispassionately weighed, would produce the same rational impression on all thoughtful minds as it did upon those of that learned Conference, presided over by "that pious hero

and Christian Prince, the Landgrave." The Lord of His mercy grant that we may never hear in this Protestant land the echo of the shouts which then rang through the streets of Switzerland- "Down with a God of bread! a baker God!"

And yet, while avoiding the Sacramentarian theory of the Lord's Supper, let us not run into an opposite extreme, and be betrayed into light and indifferent views either of its nature, its object, or its blessing. There is great danger of turning the back upon one of the most significant institutions, and one of the richest means of grace, the Divine, Redeeming Shepherd has provided for the sheep of His pasture. There are three aspects in which the devout mind may contemplate it. The first is, retrospective. It is the remembrance, or a memorial of a fact the most stupendous, of a transaction the most noble, in the history of the universe- Christ dying for our sins! And, when humbly and believingly we approach this table, how should our fondest thoughts wing back to the scenes of Gethsemane and Calvary, and muse awhile amid the soul-sorrow and blood-sweat of the one, and the lingering sufferings and the torturing death of the other! Oh, forget not, my soul, what it cost your Lord to furnish this table for you in the wilderness!

"It cost Him death to save our souls;

To buy our souls, it cost His own;

And all the unknown joys He gives

Were bought with agonies unknown."

The Lord's Supper is a banquet of present enjoyment. Who can adequately describe the refreshment and strength which flows through this channel, "as often as we eat this bread, and drink this cup?" We re-produce the experience, and re-echo the exultant language of the church of old- "I sat down under His shadow with great delight, and His fruit was sweet to my taste. He brought me to the banqueting house, and His banner over me was love." We come believingly to the Lord's Supper, weary and jaded and we find sweet repose; we come sorrowful and depressed- and we find joy and uplifting; we come languid and cold- and we retire with hearts burning within us as He communed with us by the way. Revived- refreshed- invigorated by the spiritual nourishment thus received- we go forth to service and to conflict, to duty and to suffering, as the bridegroom out of his chamber, and as a giant refreshed with new wine.

There is also a prospective aspect of the Lord's Supper- it points to the future Advent and glory of the Lord, with all His saints. "As often as you eat this bread, and drink this cup, you do show the Lord's death until he comes." Like the two arms of the cross of Jesus, the one pointing to the types and shadows of the past- the other, to the realities and glories of the future- this divine banquet directs our thoughts and anticipations to the Second Coming of our Lord- "that blessed hope, and glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ." How marvelously do the cross and the crown meet in this ordinance- the dark, cold shade of the one, and the splendid radiance and warm glow of the other; thus falling in blended hues upon this holy Banquet of love!

The cross of Jesus, deep and dark as was its shadow, was never designed to eclipse the crown of Jesus, bright and resplendent with its glory. "We look for the Savior"- a Personal Savior- who will come to wake the holy dead, and translate the righteous living- the waking and the rapture of both contemporaneous: "For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and

remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." Thus the sacrament of the Lord's Supper- as often and wherever we observe it- with the morning light, or in the evening shade- amid the public services of the sanctuary, or the more private and solemn scenes of the sick and dying chamber- teaches us to keep in memory the sacrificial death, and to anticipate the coming glory, of our Divine and adorable Redeemer. My soul! draw near the Holy Table of your Lord- with the humility of contrition- the simplicity of faith- the fervor of love- and the anticipation of hope. Hesitate not to take your place at this family feast, this banquet of love, since all the merit that provided the feast, and all the worthiness that supplies your plea, and all the fitness that warrants your approach is in Him who prepared the table- who is, spiritually, the substance of the feast- who bids you 'do this in remembrance of Him' -and whose gracious welcome meets you upon the threshold- "Eat, O friend, and drink; yes, drink abundantly, O beloved."

But oh what a table awaits us in heaven! From the banquet of grace below- which often strengthened and refreshed us in the wilderness, when weary and faint- we pass to the banquet of glory above, and sit down with apostles, prophets, and martyrs, and all the ransomed, whom no man can number- Jesus Himself coming forth to serve us. And what a Banquet will that be! How costly, how precious

its materials! The beatific sight of the glorified Redeemer- reunion with departed saints- the new song before the throne- unmingled happiness- perfect holiness- and eternity perpetuating all! "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."

Truly, when our Lord comes, and the wicked shall be summoned to judgment, will this Table be spread 'in the presence of all our enemies'- devils and men! Those who hated and persecuted the saints on earth- who maligned, slandered, and tortured them- will now gnash their teeth and gnaw their tongues with rage, when they see the objects of their malice and the victims of their torture sitting down with "the glorious company of the apostles, and the goodly fellowship of the prophets, and the noble army of martyrs," in the kingdom of their Father, and they themselves forever shut out! My soul, live and labor, suffer and die, looking for this blessed hope! "And He says unto me, Write, Blessed are those who are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb." Blessed are they now- yet more blessed when the Lord comes to re-unite them to their risen and glorified body. Lament not, then, the holy dead! They are done with toil and sorrow, with suffering and sin, and are with Christ now, and Christ will bring them with Him when He comes in glory, "to be admired by His saints, and adored in all those who believe."

"High in yonder realms of light,

Far above these lower skies,

Fair and exquisitely bright,

Heaven's unfailing mansions rise

Built of pure and massy gold,
Strong and durable are they,
Decked with gems of worth untold,
Subjected to no decay.

"Glad within those blest abodes
Dwell the enraptured saints above,
Where no anxious care corrodes,
Happy in Emmanuel's love!

Once indeed, like us below,
Pilgrims in this vale of tears,
Torturing pain and heavy woe,
Gloomy doubts, distressing fears;

"These, alas! full well they knew,
Sad companions of their way,
Oft' on them the tempest blew,
Through the long, the cheerless day!

Often their vileness they deplored,
Wills perverse, and hearts untrue,
Grieved they could not love their Lord,
Love Him as they longed to do.

"Oft' the big unbidden tear,
Stealing down the furrowed cheek,
Told, in eloquence sincere,
Tales of woe that could not speak;

But, these days of weeping over,
Past this scene of toil and pain,
They shall feel distress no more,
Never, never, weep again!

"Mid the chorus of the skies,

'Mid the angelic lyres above,
Hark! their songs melodious rise,
Songs of praise to Jesus' love!
Happy spirits! you are fled
Where no grief can entrance find;
Lulled to rest the aching head,
Soothed the anguish of the mind!
"All is tranquil and serene,
Calm and undisturbed repose;
There no cloud can intervene,
There no angry tempest blows;
Every tear is wiped away,
Sighs no more shall heave the breast;
Night is lost in endless day
Sorrow- in ETERNAL REST!"
(Raffles)

The Anointing

The Anointing

"You anoint my head with oil." Psalms 23:5

The holy anointing of the believer is a subject occupying a significant and prominent place in the teaching of God's word. Nor is this to be wondered at. It constitutes one of the most expressive emblems of spiritual blessing, as it is one of the divinest elements of the Christian life. Indeed, apart from its possession, spiritual life has no existence or reality in the soul. The indwelling of the Spirit in the regenerate is nothing less than the anointing of the Spirit; and the anointing of the Spirit indicates our priestly relation as a part of the "Royal Priesthood," of which the Lord Jesus Christ is the Great High, and only sacrificing, Priest over the House of God. The limits of the present chapter restrict our illustration of this subject to the reference David makes to it in the Psalm- "You anoint my head with oil." Having spoken of the Banquet provided for him by the Shepherd, David naturally and appropriately adverts to a related blessing- the anointing which in Eastern countries was considered an essential and inseparable requisite on all great festive occasions. Homer, Aristophanes, Pliny, and other ancient classic writers, frequently refer to its use as a mark of respect shown by the host to his guests before the meal. But not the head only was it customary thus to anoint. The feet- shod with sandals, and therefore rendering the act all the more appropriate and grateful- were wont to be bathed, and then anointed with fragrant oil. This often a filial office on the part of the daughter, not more reflecting the affection and reverence of the child, than it was honoring and refreshing to the parent.

To this Eastern custom, doubtless, reference is made in the frequent allusion to the symbol. For example- "Let your garments be always white, and let your head lack no ointment." Again- "You, when you fast, anoint your head." And what reader of his Bible does not recall that touching narrative of the woman recorded by the Evangelist, who, following her Savior into the Pharisee's house, bearing an alabaster box of precious ointment, "stood at His feet behind Him weeping, and began to wash His feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head, and kissed His feet, and anointed them with the ointment." Pause for a moment, and ponder this exquisite picture! It is too beautiful and significant to be superficially studied. She had been a sinner lost- but Jesus found her, and she was now a sinner saved. She loved much. Her affection for Jesus was not a mere sentiment evaporating in words; it was a real and practical principle, embodied and expressed in an act not less grateful to Jesus than expressive of her true affection. Oh there is no bath so acceptable to the Savior as the tears of penitence- and no anointing so precious to Him as the service of love! We now turn to the subject more immediately before us- "You anoint my head with oil."

THE SOURCE AND NATURE OF THE BELIEVER'S ANOINTING.

We must place in the foreground the truth that, all true spiritual anointing centers in, and flows from, Christ the Head and Depositary of His Church. It is in this light we shall understand the

frequent and significant references to Christ as the Anointed of God. Thus for example, at Solomon's dedication of the temple- "O Lord God, turn not away the face of Your Anointed." Again- "You love righteousness, and hate wickedness: therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness above your fellows." And David prayed- "Behold, O God, our shield, and look upon the face of Your anointed." Once more- "God has anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power." And to crown all, we have Isaiah's glorious prophecy- "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord has anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek." And what, it will be asked, was this anointing of which Christ was the Object? As God, He needed it not; but as Man, it was necessary to the accomplishment of His mission that His Humanity should be filled with the Spirit; and this was the anointing which He received- "for God gives not the Spirit by measure unto Him." "Your holy child Jesus, whom You have anointed." From this rapid glance at the source and nature of the believer's anointing, let us show in what way it becomes ours.

HOW THIS ANOINTING BECOMES OURS.

It becomes ours in virtue of our union with Christ. Engrafted into Him, we partake of His anointing, as the branch partakes of the sap of the vine- as a member participates in the life of the body. Apart from union with Christ, there can be no life from Christ. "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His." "Hereby we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit which He has given us." On this truth we need not enlarge. Clear is it to every spiritual and reflective mind that, united by the Spirit to Christ, we partake of all that Christ is- His fulness of the Spirit as Man, which is the 'anointing which teaches us of all things.' Oh, beloved, realize your union with Christ! in proportion to this will be the spiritual vitality of your soul. "You anoint my head with oil."

ELEMENTS OF THIS ANOINTING.

What are some of the ideas suggested by this anointing of the believer? The first clearly is that of consecration. To consecrate, or set apart, to a particular and holy office or function, anointing was invariably employed. We find this in the consecration of Aaron and his sons to the office of priesthood. "You shall put upon Aaron the holy garments, and anoint him, and sanctify him, that he may minister unto me in the priest's office." Thus, by the Holy Spirit we are anointed and set apart to be Christ's Royal Priesthood- the only priesthood in the Church of God, of which all true believers of every name partake. How high the office! how solemn the consecration! how divine and precious the anointing! Forget not, O my soul, that you are, as one with Christ- sanctified and set apart by the consecrating oil of the Spirit to be a royal priest of God! The holy unction is upon you, and henceforth you are a priest of God, in union with all His saints, anointed to "offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." "You anoint my head with oil."

Spiritual illumination is another property and effect of this holy anointing. "As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit- just as it has taught you, remain in him." The anointing of the Spirit- that is, His divine teaching- renders us in a manner independent of human teaching in divine truth. "You do not need that any MAN teach you." Thankful indeed should we be for any spiritual aid in the understanding of the Scriptures, and in our travel heavenward, afforded by holy and well-informed minds. But the authorised Teacher and Interpreter of God's word is the Holy Spirit alone, independent of all human or ecclesiastical

teaching or authority. And where human assistance is lacking, the Holy Spirit is ever present with His own inspired Word- the Author with the Book- to loosen the seals thereof, making known to us the hidden things of God's mind and will and heart as therein revealed.

Oh, my soul! seek plentifully this anointing! Honor the Spirit as your Divine Interpreter. What is dark, He will illuminate. What is discrepant, He will harmonize. What is hard to believe, He will elucidate, and give you faith to accept; and so He will-as Christ did of old- "open your understanding, that you might understand the Scriptures."

And how sanctifying is this anointing! He is emphatically the "Spirit of holiness" -the "Holy Spirit." As He is the Author of our spiritual life, so is He its divine Promoter. We have no holiness which is not His fruit in the soul. The Holy Spirit is our Sanctifier, as Christ is our Sanctification. And He sanctifies us by bidding us wash daily in the blood of Christ- and to draw all our supplies of grace from the fulness of Christ- thus taking of the things of Christ, and showing them unto us, and by anointing enabling us to reflect Christ- to live Christ- to labor for Christ- to suffer for Christ- and, if need be, to die for Christ. If, then, you would be holy- and, "without holiness no man can see the Lord " -seek large supplies of this sanctifying anointing of the Spirit, that your experience may be an echo of the Psalmist's- "You anoint my head with oil."

Nor must we- in conclusion- overlook the comfort which this divine anointing conveys to the soul. It is the "oil of gladness." As the Divine Paraclete, the Holy Spirit is the Comforter of the Church. "I will send the Comforter," was the precious promise of the ascending Savior. Christ is the Comfort, the "Consolation of Israel." The Holy Spirit is the Comforter- by whom the sympathy, and grace, and consolation of Christ is conveyed into our sad and disconsolate hearts. The Holy Spirit is pledged by His office to pour the 'oil of joy' into the broken and sorrowful heart. You are, perhaps, spiritually and sorely tried. You may imagine that the Lord has forgotten to be gracious; that in anger He has shut up His tender mercies; that your past spiritual experience has been a delusion, and your religious life a pious fraud- and that you have no part or lot in the matter. And now you refer your present affliction- your mental gloom and spiritual despondency- to Divine anger, and have resigned your present to dark despair, and your future to inevitable woe! But this is your infirmity! You are not in a position to judge of your true condition, to form an intelligent and correct opinion of your real case. Oh! how comforting is the thought that the Lord does not endorse our self-condemnation: when we condemn ourselves, He does not! "My thoughts are not yet your thoughts, says the Lord."

But whatever may be the sword that has wounded you- the arrow that has pierced you- the cloud that has darkened your mind- or the sorrow that has broken your heart- lo! the loving Shepherd stands prepared to pour the 'oil of gladness' on your head- to give you the "oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness." O Lord! "You have turned my mourning into joyful dancing. You have taken away my clothes of mourning and clothed me with joy, that I might sing praises to you and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give you thanks forever!" Psalms 30:11-12

In conclusion. Be exhorted to seek large communications of this holy anointing. The growth of your spiritual life- the holiness of your Christian walk- the glory of Him whose you are and whom you serve, demand that your head should be anointed- daily and abundantly- with holy oil. "Be filled with the Spirit." The anointing of Christ, our true Aaron, flows down to the fringe of His robe; and

those who sit lowest and the closest at His feet in the spirit of penitence, love, and docility will partake the most richly of this holy unction. Oh with what power you will then testify for Jesus! If a minister of Christ, you will preach as with 'a tongue of fire,' with such unction, wisdom, and demonstration of the Spirit as no enemy of the truth shall be able to gainsay; sinners shall be converted to God, and the flock confided to your care will exhibit all the marks of a manly, vigorous Christianity, built up in sound doctrine and holiness of life. Oh! never cross the threshold of your pulpit but with the prayer- "Anoint me, O Christ, for this service with fresh oil."

If a Christian laborer, your work, your visits, your prayers will be attended with an energy and force perfectly irresistible; and "the ointment of your right hand will betray" you as one upon whose head the holy anointing has truly and richly fallen. Thus go forth to service and suffering- to toil and labor- to spend and to be spent for Christ- your garments always white, and your head lacking no ointment.

The Overflowing Cup

The Overflowing Cup

"My cup runs over." Psalms 23:5

"My cup overflows." Psalms 23:5

"My cup overflows with blessings." Psalms 23:5

God's goodness to His people is meted out with no begrudged or measured hand. Our Shepherd is Divine, and Deity is the source, and Infinity the measure, of His supplies. "My cup runs over." This would appear the crown and climax of the blessings of which our Nightingale Psalmist had been sweetly singing. The Lord his Shepherd had given him not a full cup merely, but a brimmed one; not brimmed only, but overflowing; a cup like, and worthy of, Himself- "exceeding abundantly above all that he had asked or thought." The emblem is familiar and expressive: the Bible abounds with its use, and presents it in a variety of beautiful and suggestive forms; to some of which let us direct our devout study.

There can be no such contemplation of the symbol as that suggested by the history of OUR BLESSED LORD HIMSELF. What was the life of Jesus but a life-long cup of humiliation, destitution, and need? Think of His homelessness- "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has no where to lay His head." The only bed the world He had created afforded Him, was the lowly pallet of straw upon which as an infant He lay in the stable of Bethlehem! He was poor and destitute. With nothing with which to purchase bread- He hungered; parched with thirst- He craved at the hands of an alien from His religion and His race, a draught of cold water; and when Caesar's tax was demanded- which He hesitated not to pay- He had nothing to pay it with. O Son of God! what wealth Your life has imparted to honest poverty- what dignity to virtuous lowliness- what sweetness to sanctified sorrow- and what sublimity to a life of faith on God!

Think too, of the persecution and insult which traced His daily life! Hounded by His foes from place to place- assailed by the most ingenious deceitfulness- accused of complicity with devils- denounced as a glutton and an inebriate- stigmatized as the friend and associate of publicans and sinners- yes, with every species of shame and insult cast upon Him!- O my soul! was ever cup of humiliation like unto this, which your Savior drank for you?

And what was our Lord's life but the foreshadowing of the suffering and death which overflowed the cup now brimmed? It is here the symbol finds its most significant and impressive illustration. We accompany Him to the garden- we behold the Incarnate God bowed in grief- His impurpled brow pressed to the cold, damp sod- the cup of trembling in His hands- and the cry of anguish- Oh how piercing, yet how submissive!- bursting from His quivering lips, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me!" We follow Him to Calvary, staggering and swooning beneath the instrument of His torture; we behold the legions of hell let loose upon His holy soul, 'bruising the

heel of the woman's seed,' we listen to the insulting taunts of the bald-headed priests as to and fro they swaggered beneath the cross: rising above all, we hear the Voice issuing from the "secret place of thunder"- "Awake, O sword, against my Shepherd, and against the Man that is My fellow, says the Lord of hosts: smite the Shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered." The sun is clothed in sackcloth- the earth trembles upon its axis- the granite rocks are rent asunder- and amid the darkness, convulsion, and earthquake of the globe, a cry is heard-louder and more agonizing than all, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?"

Listen once more- "Is it nothing to you, all you that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto Me, with which the Lord has afflicted Me in the day of His fierce anger." And now the chalice of woe overflows! but not a drop is lost- for the Divine-human Sufferer emptied it to its lees, leaving for His church- on whose behalf He drank and drained it- nothing but AN OVERFLOWING CUP OF LOVE!

To this cup let us now turn. And first- It is the cup of salvation. "What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the Name of the Lord." Surely the emblem finds no illustration more true and precious than this. If Christ exhausted the cup which could not pass from His lips undrunk- for thus it behooved Him to suffer- it was that thus drained He might return it to our hands brimmed and overflowing with a salvation in whose ingredients not a taint of sin- not an atom of the curse- not a drop of wrath- not a spark of hell could be found. Oh wondrous elements of this cup!

All sin forgiven- the soul fully justified- the person graciously adopted- and an heirship conferred to "an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fades not away." Well may the believer exclaim- "My cup runs over!" Drink, yes, drink deeply of this cup, O my soul! Are your sins so many, and your guilt so great- your faith so weak, and your fears so strong, that you hesitate pressing this overflowing cup of a full, finished, and free salvation to your lips? Hesitate no longer! it is all for you! Receive it at your Savior's hand, with no price in your own, exclaiming- "By grace I am saved! I accept and drink it, not as a saint, but as a sinner; not as worthy, but as hell-deserving; not as a lost sheep who of his own will and power found his way back to the Flock; but as one in quest of whom the Shepherd traveled in the cloudy and dark day over hill and dale, mountain and river, until He found and brought me with rejoicing to His fold. I was a sheep going astray, but am now returned unto the Shepherd and Guardian of my soul, and my cup runs over."

And is not the cup of holy joy at times brimmed and overflowing? If there is a joyful being in the world, it is the true believer in Christ Jesus. There is everything to contribute to this joy. If our Divine-human Surety drained the cup of wrath, what is left for us but the overflowing cup of love? "Whom having not seen, you love; in whom, though now you see Him not, yet believing, you rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." Rejoice then in the Lord! No longer travel with your head bowed down like a bulrush- your harp, every chord of which should vibrate with shouts of praise- suspended in silence upon the willow. But, as you count each link in the golden chain of your salvation- sin forgiven- person accepted- soul adopted- hell closed- heaven opened- Oh! how should a deep, holy joy thrill your whole soul- your life uplifted far above the crested billows, and threatening clouds, and veiling mists of your present light and momentary afflictions, into the pure sunlit region of a "joy unspeakable and full of glory." "These things," said the Savior, "have I said unto you, that your joy might be full." "Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice."

"Jesus has all my powers possessed,
My hopes, my fears, my joys,
He, the dear Sovereign of my breast,
Shall still command my voice.

"Some of the fairest choirs above
Shall flock around my song,
With joy to hear the Name they love
Sound from a mortal tongue.

"I'll carve my passion on the bark,
Until every wounded tree
Shall drop and bear some mystic mark,
That Jesus died for me.

"They shall wonder, as they read
Inscribed on all the grove,
The Lord Himself came down and bled
To win a mortal's love."

The cup of divine, providential goodness- often overflowing- must not be omitted in these illustrations of the symbol. The Covenant God of grace, is the same Covenant God of providence. A sweeter, holier life we cannot live than a life of daily, childlike reliance upon the providential care of our Heavenly Father. "He cares for you." Oh how great is His goodness! "The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and He knows those who trust in Him." Can you recall to memory the gifts of His goodness- the almost miraculous interpositions of His providence on your behalf- His thoughtful anticipation of your need- His marvelous deliverance of you out of trouble- the unthought of quarter from where, and unlooked for time at which, your supplies have come- and not humbly, and praisefully exclaim, "My cup runs over"? Oh, let not all His benefits- your temporal needs supplied- pressing emergencies met- insurmountable difficulties removed- threatening dangers averted; be forgotten! "Return unto your rest, O my soul; for the Lord has dealt bountifully with you." "You have dealt well with Your servant, O Lord, according to Your word."

But it is given to the sheep of the flock on behalf of the Shepherd that, not only should they drink the cup of joy, but that at times, in His all-wise and loving dealings, their cup of sorrow should overflow. "Therefore His people return here: and waters of a full cup are wrung out to them." What numbers of the flock of Christ will echo these words of Asaph- "Waters of a full cup of sorrow are wrung out to me. My cup of affliction runs over!" How affecting the language of God to Jerusalem- expressive often of His dealings with His spiritual Jerusalem- "Awake, awake, stand up, O

Jerusalem- which have drunk at the hand of the Lord the cup of His Fury; you have drunken the dregs of the cup of trembling, and wrung them out!"

You, perhaps, are now holding in your hand the cup of trembling; God has bereaved you of the loved one of your heart- the prop of years, the hope of life, is removed- and your cup of grief runs over. Adversity has befallen you- the earnings and the hoardings of years are gone, and you are left in poverty and dependence- and your cup of trembling runs over. Disease has invaded your earthly house, and you lie prostrate upon a bed of suffering, and wearisome days and sleepless nights are yours- and waters of a full cup are wrung out to you. Your cup of sorrow is perhaps a relative; some object of your affection has swerved from the path of rectitude, and, linked as you are to the erring one, you feel the shock- and your cup of grief and shame runs over. Or, perhaps, your sorrow is spiritual and personal; your soul-sorrow, like that of your Lord, seems near unto death. A sense of sin- divine desertion- Satanic suggestions- the piercing of unbelief- the world's assaults- the loss of Christian evidence- the fear of death- the dread of condemnation- are the elements of the cup trembling in your hand- and it runs over! Be it so. All this soul-trouble validates your sonship- your heirship- your oneness with your suffering Head, your loving Father, whose hand has mingled, and gives you to drink, the cup now mantling in yours. Compare it with the bitter cup your Shepherd drank for you, and let your broken, sobbing, yet submissive heart echo His touching, yet sublime language- "My Father! Your will, not mine, be done!"

"How bitter that cup no heart can conceive,

which He drank quite up, that sinners might live!

His way was much rougher and darker than mine;

Did Christ, my Lord, suffer, and shall I repine?"

But the emblem is not without its pointed and solemn bearing upon the present condition and the future destiny of the unconverted. There is a cup of condemnation, as there is of salvation; and if the one- overflowing and free to all who will accept the proffered gift- is unbelievably neglected and scornfully refused, this must inevitably be followed by the other- the awful contents of which the lost soul will drink drop by drop to all eternity! "For the Lord holds a cup in his hand; it is full of foaming wine mixed with spices. He pours the wine out in judgment, and all the wicked must drink it, draining it to the dregs." Psalm 75:8. Again, "Upon the wicked He shall reign snares, fire and brimstone, and a horrible tempest: this shall be the portion of their cup." Unconverted reader! are you resolved- deliberately and wilfully resolved- to drink this cup- to endure the undying worm, the unquenchable fire, the wrath of God forever, rather than forego 'the pleasures of sin for a season'? Oh the folly! Oh the madness of your choice! The Savior- before long to be the Judge- has drawn aside the awful curtain- as He only could- of the lost in hell, and bids you look within, repent, and escape! "And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments.... And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame!"

Oh, by the solemnities of a hopeless, perhaps, a sudden death- by the torments of a certain and eternal hell- and by the ingredients of that 'cup of fire and brimstone' and wrath, which you must drink forever and ever- be persuaded to break off your sins by righteousness- repent before God- believe in the Lord Jesus Christ- and be forever saved! "Who is a God like You, that pardons

iniquity, and passes by the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He retains not His anger forever, because he delights in mercy."

In conclusion, fail not to take an empty cup to Christ's fulness. Who travels to the well with a full vessel? Who goes properly and hopefully to Christ, but the soul that travels to Him in its emptiness, poverty, and need? Such will ever find Him, and such He will never reject. He saves to the uttermost all that come unto God by Him. In the vital, stupendous matter of salvation, He is all to us, or nothing! The debt was great- and He canceled it; the satisfaction was necessary- and He made it; the death was awful- and He endured it; the cup was bitter- crimsoned with every ingredient which the turpitude of sin, the fire of justice, the fury of hell could pour into it- and He drank it! Oh, receive Christ in simple, unquestioning faith, and He will turn your "water of a full cup" into a cup of the wine of His love, brimmed and running over!

See that there is no waste in the overflowings of your cup of salvation and of joy. There was none in Christ's. Use the excess of your happy experiences for the help and comfort of others. Do not be a spiritual miser- hoarding in selfish niggardness your surplus. "There is one who scatters, and yet increases; and there is one who withholds more than is fit, but it tends to poverty." Oh to how many a saint, dear to Jesus, the waters of a full cup of suffering, sorrow, and need are wrung out, to whom you may repair, and in His name, and for His sake, share the overflowings of your cup- lightening their burden- soothing their grief- supplying their need- thus turning their sorrow into joy, their note of woe into a nightingale psalm of praise. Thus you will pour the alabaster box of the precious ointment of your love upon the head of Jesus- in the person of one of His members- and heaven will be filled with its undying fragrance, and eternity with its endless praise. "Inasmuch as you have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, you have done it unto Me."

Heaven, at Last and Forever

Heaven, at Last and Forever

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." Psalms 23:1-6

"Surely your goodness and unfailing love will pursue me all the days of my life, and I will live in the house of the Lord forever." Psalms 23:1-6

The closing note of our Nightingale Song is the most mellifluous and entrancing of all!

"Death darkens his eye, and unplumes his wings,

And the sweetest note is the last that He sings."

"Where with a soul composed of harmonies,

Like a sweet swan, he warbles as he dies,

His Maker's praise, and his own obsequies."

(Cotton)

And thus often is it with the departing saint. The pilgrimage has been long and dreary- the song of the wilderness often of a minor key- plaintive and pensive- but the end- the solemn yet glorious end has come; and just as corruption is putting on incorruption, and mortal is putting on immortality, lo! the soul puts forth a might and power unknown before- spiritual life beats its strongest pulse, divine love its deepest throb, holy faith achieves its sublimed victory, and the soul, poised upon the wing for heaven, chants its sweetest song!

The last meditations of the Christian- as from the shaded valley he reviews the goodness and mercy of God- must be composed of grateful love and adoring praise. Whatever may have been the chequered history of his life- sunshine and shade, flower and flint, his "song of judgment and mercy"- yet, tracing all the way God had led him, one theme fills his whole soul- "Surely goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life, and His statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage."

It is profitable to pause awhile in life's journey and survey the Divine dealings- number the milestones we have passed, and recount the Ebenezers we have reared- gathering from the review, material for present praise and future trust. David, when in soul-despondency, found it so. "O my God, my soul is cast down within me: therefore will I

remember you from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar." But the closing words of our sweet Psalmist point to the future of God's dealings: "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life." The past of the Divine goodness and mercy and faithfulness was to David an earnest and pledge of the future. All that God had been in his history, he well

knew He was now, and ever would be. And thus may our faith reason. We may have yet many a toilsome, lonely stage to travel before we reach the terminus- all wisely and kindly veiled from our view- the sorrows that may shade and the joys that may brighten it; nevertheless, of this we are certain, that Divine goodness, mercy, and faithfulness will shape and color the whole scene; and that the 'painting of our life'- whatever its form and hue- will have its place in the picture-gallery of heaven, perpetuating, in imperishable history, the Divine goodness, faithfulness, and love that brought us there. What a 'strong and beautiful staff' is this truth with which to travel on, confiding the future- all so profoundly enshrouded- to Him who has so skillfully and successfully guided the past- until the life that now is- with all its gloom, trials, and sorrows- shall be lost in the splendor, repose, and song of the life that is to come. "Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits." Again and again have You rescued my soul from destruction, and now that the shadows of its close are draping and darkening around me, You are placing upon it the crown of Your loving-kindness and tender mercy!

"Bless and extol His mighty name!

Bless, O my soul, your God and King!

Bless Him who was for sinners slain!

Bless Him who did salvation bring-

Whose tender mercies never fail,

Though earthly storms and ills assail!

"When you are weary, worn, and sad,

It is He alone can solace give-

Can bid your fainting heart be glad,

And all your wonted strength revive.

Even as a pitying father bends

O'er his weak child, so God befriends.

"He knows well our feeble frame,

Remembers we are only dust;

Strength in our weakness He became

A Rock wherein to place our trust;

And those who fear His name, shall prove

Emmanuel still a God of love.

"Man's days are as the fragile flower,

That bends beneath the wind's rude breath

It lives and blooms its little hour,
Then drops its head and sleeps in death;
But mercy shall endure forever
When heaven and earth shall pass away.
"Then bless the Lord, you heavenly host!
You ministers that do His will,
Bless Him who died for sinners lost,
Who lives to plead for sinners still!
Let songs of praise ascend above-
Bless evermore a God of love!"

"And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." Heaven at last and forever, is the loftiest and sweetest note to which our Psalmist could wake his sacred harp. He had loved the House of God on earth- but he now looked beyond it to the House of God, not made with hands, in heaven- of which the earthly temple- with its hallowed service, its Christ-pointing ritual, its holy incense and its divine song- had been to his soul the very gate and vestibule. We now turn to the House of God in heaven: what are some of the views which this beautiful and expressive image suggests?

Is not that of HOME the first that impresses the filial and devout mind? Our blessed Lord, who had come from heaven and was now on His return there, was the first to present it in this winning point of light. "In My Father's House are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you." HOME! How the heart leaps into the throat, stifling all utterance, at the mention of that little word! What a potent spell it weaves around our soul! What precious memories and hallowed thoughts it summons back from oblivion's deep cell, and we seem to live the past again! HOME! It is the charmed circle in which our best and purest affections move; the hive of the industrious- the temple of childhood- the shrine of age- the ark of the past, and the haven of the future. It is here the heart nestles- the mind reposes- and our whole being drops its anchor in the purest, sweetest, and calmest waters of earth-born life; and what is all the world to us beside?

The heart has many dwelling-places,
But only once a home."

But, it is around the Christian home the sweetest charms, and the richest blessings cluster- and within whose hallowed sanctuary the holiest and finest affections of the soul are inspired, developed, and trained. It is religion- family religion- that makes home the most sacred and conservative institution of earth- the center of Christian life, duty, and service. Here- where God is acknowledged and Christ is loved- where the claims of the life that is eternal take precedence over the thoughts and engagements of the life that is temporal- is experienced a happiness and joy found nowhere else. What a sanctifying, cementing, consecrating power has family prayer, as a means of promoting domestic happiness, cultivating mutual affection and sympathy, softening and preventing those petty but vexing misunderstandings, chafings, and recriminations which go so far

to roughen the edge and unravel the border of the web of daily life! Oh, let true religion breathe its holy atmosphere around your home!

Such is the image of Heaven. Child of God- pilgrim of earth- voyager on life's sea- you are traveling homeward, and will soon hear your Father's voice- "Child, come up here!" Heaven is the family mansion. With what a charm and attraction does this idea invest the "house of God" above! God's church is a family; for all believers are the "children of God by faith in Christ Jesus." Divide and dismember the one Body of Christ as you may- rear high your party walls- shout loudly your Shibboleths- disown, excommunicate, unchristianize as you will- the children of God, the Body of Christ- the temple of the Spirit are one family, essentially and indivisibly one, for all that? All true believers are one in "Christ Jesus, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named." How closely should this feeling of fraternity knit in affection and fellowship our hearts to all who reflect- however faintly- the family image; from whose lips- as from ours- breathe the endearing words- Abba, Father; and who, in different homes and with foreign tongues, address their every petition at the same mercy-seat, "Our Father who is in Heaven."

REUNION AND RECOGNITION are among the most sacred and precious features of attraction and tenderness expressed by this image. We delight to picture those who once traveled by our side- who went with us to the house of God, and with whom we took sweet counsel- but who have fled from our embrace to the Fatherland, as the occupants of the heavenly home. Filled with sorrow as are our hearts, our grief is not selfish; we wish them joy that they are safely housed, clustering with others of the "family in heaven" around the Father's table. There is an appropriate and graceful fitness of Heaven to the varied characters and employments of the departed saints who people it, which beautifully chime with, and immeasurably brighten, its enjoyment. Were they the Children of God? -then they are at home in the Father's house. Were they Christ's workers? -then they rest from their labors and their works follow them. Were they Christian soldiers? -then they have gotten the victory, and have laid down the sword for the palm and the helmet for the crown. Were they Christian mariners? -then they have reached the shore, and have dropped their anchor in the haven of eternal rest. Were they Christian pilgrims? -then they have terminated their weary pilgrimage, and have exchanged their traveled-soiled garments for the robe made white in the blood of the Lamb. "I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from henceforth: Yes, says the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them."

And now are experienced the reunion and recognition. The separation was not long. The 'little while' when we shall not see them is passed, and once more we are locked in their embrace. By what mode the recognition and communion of disembodied spirits in glory transpires is a mystery we attempt not to explain: God has made it so; and as we find it, so we leave it until that day when "what we know not now we shall know hereafter." But that there is a reunion and a recognition of the glorified spirits admits not of a moment's doubt. This communion is, of course, entirely restricted to the spirit-world. There are no revelations of departed spirits to the inhabitants of this sphere, neither are there any communications from us to them. The return of Paul from the world of spirits, and the seal of silence impressed upon his lips as to what he there saw and felt, should be enough to set this question of communication from the dead to the living forever at rest. Listen to his statement. "I was caught up into the third heaven fourteen years ago. Whether my body was there or just my spirit, I don't know; only God knows. But I do know that I was caught up into

paradise and heard things so astounding that they cannot be told." What testimony could possibly be more conclusive? To imagine the existence of such phenomena as revelations from the invisible and eternal world, other than those which we derive from a knowledge of the Bible, would not only throw a discredit upon the divine authority and sufficiency of the revealed Scriptures of truth, but would entirely reverse the divinely-established order of things; it would be to suppose departed spirits ceasing to be entirely spiritual, or we, yet in the body, ceasing to be entirely material.

But, with regard to the reunion and recognition of departed saints there cannot be the shadow of a doubt. The perfection of the heavenly state demands it. If we have pleasure in a knowledge of, and communion with, those we have seen- a pleasure of the highest and purest nature- it is not a forced inference to suppose that that pleasure will exist in glory, and exist to a heightened degree of which, in the present state, we can have but the faintest conception. What soothed the bereaved heart of David concerning his departed child? "Now he is dead, why then, should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me." Bereaved saint! let this reasoning and this prospect sooth your agonized mind. You cannot

nor would you- recall the happy spirit that has fled from suffering, sorrow, and sin to its heavenly home. Be comforted with the thought that a reunion and recognition await you. And if we are to "sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of God "- if they whom, having not seen, we yet shall then recognize, surely we shall know the loved ones whose image, affection, and sympathy were the unfading sun-pictures of our hearts; who lessened the sorrows, and increased the joys, of our earthly pilgrimage. Oh, with what reality and glory this thought invests our Home above!

But, with regard to the holy dead, let us not be misunderstood. While we do not impart the faintest scintillation to the delusion that there is any direct, personal, and intelligent communication between the dead and the living, we are far from ignoring the fact that there is a spiritual influence- silent and invisible- which the remembrance of departed saints should ever exert upon our minds. If we have lost their personal presence, let us remember that we have not lost the hallowed power which their holy life and sacred memory still exerts. If this were not so, why should it be recorded that, "The memory of the just is blessed"? Why should we be exhorted, "do not be slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises"? Oh yes we love to embalm their memories- to recall their holy deeds- their fervent prayers; to be guided by their still molding influence- and to live as though, being dead, they yet spoke to us words of heart cheer and comfort. Nor are we quite sure that they have ceased to love, shield, and guide us. "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?" 'Encompassed by so great a cloud of witnesses,' oh, let us live as though we heard their voices, bending from their thrones in glory, saying to us- "Persevere! Heaven is worth living, laborings, and dying for!"

Our dead are around us, we feel their pure breath!

They loved us while living, they loved us in death;

They love us in heaven; they watch from its towers;

They cherish us ever- the dead still are ours!

"Our dead are around us- not dead, but alive
To comfort us, guide us, and help us to strive;
They pity us, bear with us, weep for us, too
Not tears such as we weep, but tears like the dew
"And dropped in the darkness, as that falls on earth,
As silent, and softening, and bringing to birth
The good seed within us, in bitterness sown,
From which, at the harvest, comes sweet fruit alone.

"Our dead are around us, without and within;
Our spirit's clear vision, is darkened by sin;
We cannot discern them, though near they may be,
Because the flesh blinds us, while they clearly see.

"Our dead are around us, and with us will stay
All through this life journey, to show us the way;
These are our good angels; they lead on before,
And they will be ready, to open the door.

"When Death's key of iron, unfastens the lock,
And lets out the spirit, with one final shock;
Then, into the pearl-gates, with victory led,

We shall see that our leaders, were those we thought dead!"

But, soothing and healing to the bereaved heart as is this prospect of a reunion and recognition, infinitely transcending is the thought and anticipation of SEEING- KNOWING- AND TALKING WITH THE GLORIFIED SAVIOR. "With Christ, which is far better." It is not, O Jesus, to forget You that we still remember and love those whom You have taken from us to Yourself! Oh! if You were not there, heaven would be no heaven to us! To see You as You are- to love and adore- to worship and serve You, is our heaven on earth, and will be our heaven of heaven in heaven! "Whom have I in heaven but You? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside You."

Heaven at last! The surprise of glory will be well-near overwhelming! If wonder and emotion could seal the lips- strike mute the tongue- it would be when the glory of the Lamb- the splendor of the place- and the music of song burst upon the soul! But not these alone. Methinks the greatest surprise and wonder will be to find ourselves in heaven- at last! There were times and circumstances in our pilgrimage when our hope of heaven seemed in eclipse- an eclipse almost total. Dark clouds of grief enshrouded it- gloomy doubts and fears obscured it- strong corruptions

and sad relapses made it to tremble in the balance! -and we often despaired of weathering the storm- and breasting the waves- and of ever reaching the shore! But our Divine Shepherd, who would not lose a lambkin of His flock for whom His soul travailed in Gethsemane- whose goodness and mercy followed us all the days of our life- safely brought us there, and we find ourselves- in Heaven at Last! and forever! "I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

How great the contrast with earth! Here nothing is satisfying nothing real- nothing permanent. Passing away is inscribed upon the heart's fondest love- richest treasure. Our Christian experience alternates- our religious privileges change- our cherished friendships fluctuate; and we are scarcely in the house of our God before the sacred service closes- the solemn assembly dissolves- and with a sigh we leave the hallowed place that has been to our soul the banquet of love, and the very gate of Heaven. But, Heaven is forever; the house of God is forever; the society of the glorified is forever- "forever with the Lord." Eternity is stamped upon it all! Blessed hope! glorious prospect! My soul, fight on- toil on -suffer on! Jesus has promised- "He who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out."

"Yes, beyond the grave's cold portal,

We shall meet the friends we love,

Sing with them in strains immortal

In the fairer worlds above.

When we cross the narrow river,

We the sweeter rest shall share,

Love and dwell with Christ forever,

Re-unite with dear ones there.

"What, oh what were heaven without it,

Could we not those pleasures share!

Where's the heart, oh who can doubt it!

Yes, we'll know each other there!

We shall meet that father, mother,

Who await, in yonder sky,

Each dear sister, loving brother,

In that better world on high.

"They have only gone before us;

Soon our journey will be over,

And we too shall join the chorus,

Meet where partings are no more!
Are you seeking for that treasure,
The immortal crown to win,
For that life of endless pleasure,
Free from sorrow, death, and sin?
"Would you meet when life is over,
Would you join the friends you love,
See that sainted father, mother,
In that brighter world above?
Who's so poor but has some dear one,
Some loved kindred, gone before;
Some kind friend, ev'n one sincere one,
Waiting on yon fairer shore?
"How we love to hold communion,
Muse over some departed friend,
Sweetly contemplate our union
In the life that never shall end!
What a comfort in our sorrow,
What a joy amid the gloom,
To feel, to know, that on the morrow
Loved ones meet beyond the tomb!
"Look aloft amid bereavement,
Seek above the Shepherd's care!
Christ has won the great achievement,
He will guide you safely there.
Life is transient, time is fleeting;
Soon from earth we pass away!
Are you Christ and loved ones seeking
In those realms of endless day?"

Hell, at Last and Forever

Hell, at Last and Forever

"And in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments." Luke 16:23.

The indescribably solemn subject with which we close the present volume, does not necessarily grow out of our exposition of the Psalm we have been considering; nevertheless, the work would be incomplete were it entirely omitted. Having considered the heaven which awaits the flock of Christ, it is proper that we should place in direct contrast the condition and doom of all those of the race who, on the great day of account and division, will be found outside the fold, when "before Him shall be gathered all nations: and He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats: and shall set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on His left." It is with the profoundest awe that we venture upon a theme so solemn, and yet so momentous. It is one in which the whole human race have individual interests at stake more precious than the universe itself; for what will be the destruction of this material planet, which the conflagration of the last day will consume, in comparison with the loss of one soul? The words we have selected as the foundation of the present subject, shall guide us in its discussion- "In hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments."

That there is a hell- the place of the finally lost- is as clearly revealed as that there is a heaven- the place of the finally saved. Before advancing some of the arguments upon which we base the doctrine, a passing observation upon the exact definition of the term may be instructive. The word "hell" has two different significations in the Bible- both, however, referring to the condition of the soul after death. In the original Greek the word translated "hell" in some passages is, 'hades'- which refers to the whole unseen world, and not especially to the place of torment. In those instances in which the word "hell" occurs with a direct reference to the condition of the lost, the original word is 'Gehenna'- and quite distinct in its origin and import from the other. Concerning the English word "hell," it may be instructive to remark that it is derived from an Anglo-Saxon, word, 'helan', which is, "to cover." Hence the old English verb, "to hell," has an apt appellation as being 'helled over,' that is to say, hidden or covered in obscurity. And in some parts of the West of England a man employed as a thatcher, who covers a barn, or a slater, who roofs a house, is called in the provincial dialect "a heller;" that is, an individual who covers a thing. In this sense, as I understand, we are to interpret the familiar phrase which occurs in the Apostles' Creed in reference to Christ, and which has occasioned perplexity to so many- "He descended into hell." The original word, doubtless, in the minds of the learned and holy compilers of the "Book of Common Prayer," was 'hades'- the place of departed spirits; and not 'Gehenna'- the place of lost spirits, which is the signification we assign to it in our popular theological language. It is nowhere intimated in the Bible that the soul of our blessed Lord went into Gehenna- the word expressive of the state of final suffering- but into hades- the place of disembodied spirits. We may adduce a passage corroborative of this idea from the Psalms, quoted by the apostle Peter as referring to our Lord- "You will not leave my soul in hell; neither will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption;"

that is, "My soul will not remain in Hades, and my Body will not see corruption."

In these words, therefore, there is no foundation whatever for the extraordinary theory as sustained by some, that, in order to the complete Atonement of Christ, it was necessary that He should actually suffer the torments of the damned! There is not the vestige of a reasonable argument in favor of an idea so absurd and groundless. To maintain, therefore, that our Lord's sufferings were those of the consciously guilty, who were enduring the insufferable torments of remorse, is not only forced and unnatural, but goes far to invalidate the perfection of the Atonement He presented upon the cross, when, before His soul departed, He exclaimed, "It is finished." The only passage that would seem to give the slightest shadow of support to the absurd theory we are combating is that found in the Epistle of Peter, "By which also He went and preached unto the spirits in prison." Interpreting these words by the context, it appears clearly that the apostle refers to the Holy Spirit preaching to the Antediluvians through the instrumentality of Noah; not after they were confined in prison, but, "while the ark was being prepared," and which, doubtless, some of them had aided to build! "By which [Spirit] He also went and preached unto the spirits [now] in prison." Noah was "a preacher of righteousness," and by the Holy Spirit he preached the gospel of salvation- of which the ark was the type- to the sinners before the flood, but who, when the apostle wrote, were "now in prison."

Let us direct our thoughts to a consideration of the solemn subject before us- the argument by which the existence of a hell- the final and eternal place of suffering is established.

And in the first place we remark that, it is clearly a divinely-revealed truth. We predicate our belief of this appalling state mainly on the authority of the Bible. The fact is too vital and solemn to place it exclusively on any other ground, though there are other evidences which will presently occur. If the Bible does reveal this truth, woe unto us if, carried away by the sophistical teaching of men, endorsed by the depravity of our own hearts, we deny and reject a fact upon which are suspended interests of such eternal consequence! There can be but two conditions of the soul after death, and but two are revealed in the Scriptures of truth- heaven and hell. On a question of such vital moment, it were insanity of the worst kind to accept any authentic guide other than the Bible. Among the "Books that will be opened" in the great day of judgment, the Word of God will be pre-eminent; for, upon the things written in this volume will the equitable decisions of the judgment, and of each individual, be made. Disbelieve the Bible as you may- bring your philosophy- falsely so called- and the results of your scientific researches, to disprove the Divine Inspiration and integrity of the whole, or of any part of this Book, if you will- but, remember that out of it you will be judged in the great day when, "every one of us must give account of himself to God." Oh, what will be your dismay when you see that Book unfold its awful leaves, whose truth you denied- whose revelation you disbelieved- and whose great salvation you rejected! But what are some of the more direct and conclusive Scripture proofs of the existence of hell? "What says the Scripture?"

The passage which introduces our subject would seem conclusive were there no other to sustain it. They are the words of Christ Himself, of Him who had descended from the invisible and eternal world, and who is described as the "Faithful Witness." It may be objected that our Lord spoke a parable only; but we must not forget that the parabolic mode of communicating His revelations was a familiar and common one of the Great Teacher. "Without a parable spoke He not unto them." The parable, then, is that of the rich man and Lazarus; and it must be acknowledged by every

thoughtful mind, that it forms one of the most vivid and instructive word-pictures our Divine Artist ever painted. It is with the state of the "rich man" we are at present concerned. The Lord describes his place of abode- the suffering he endured- and the fruitless petition he made. And what was the place in which he was? "in Hell." And what was his condition? "lifting up his eyes in torments." And what his fruitless prayer? "Send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this fame." No statement could be more lucid- no argument more conclusive- and no picture more appalling concerning the place and condition of the lost: he was in Gehenna- the final and inevitable abode of the damned!

Take again the words of our Lord as revealing this doctrine. "Fear not them who can kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do: but fear Him, who after He has killed, has power to cast into hell." Gehenna- the place of torment- is the word our Lord here employs- a mode of expression which no ingenuity can disturb, or sophistry gainsay.

In two passages taken from the Old Testament, we find the awful truth for which we contend distinctly and solemnly stated. Job, speaking of the Infinite immensity of God, illustrates it thus, "Can you by searching find out God? Can you find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is as high as heaven; what can you do? deeper than hell; what can you know?" Heaven has its heights of knowledge, glory, and happiness, to which, perhaps, the glorified will be ever ascending- yet never fully reach! Hell, too, has its depths of place, of suffering, and of woe- termed, "the bottomless pit"- into which the lost soul will be ever descending, and yet never touch! Oh, could there possibly be an idea more appalling- an image more horrific, than this- the soul ever and forever sinking, yet never reaching the ocean-bed of its unquenchable flames? The Psalmist is not less pointed in his allusion to the place of suffering, "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God." In both these passages the word 'sheol' is used, which clearly teaches that, not to the place of departed spirits only- 'hades'- but, to 'Gehenna'- the abode of the condemned- is that to which the writers refer.

We turn to two more passages taken from the New Testament. How terrible and withering our Lord's denunciation of the subtle and hypocritical scribes and Pharisees! "You serpents, you generation of vipers, how can you escape the damnation of hell?" Could language be more distinct or awful? and, coming from the lips of the Lamb of God, they are tenfold more emphatic and expressive. The words of the Apostle Peter shall close our Scripture testimony. "God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment." To this place of torment our Lord refers when He speaks of Gehenna as "prepared for the devil and his angels" -observe, 'prepared,' not for men, but for demons. Suggestive and solemn thought! But from the Scripture proof, let us turn to another and scarcely less striking and conclusive line of argument. Two only shall suffice.

The first argument is drawn from the Personal Character and the Moral Government of God. God is holy- and His holiness must be vindicated; God is just- and His justice must be honored. Thus, from the very necessity of the case, God is bound, both by His holiness and justice, to punish sin and condemn the sinner. What would be the impression of the Celestial Intelligences were God to allow sin to pass unnoticed, and the guilty to remain unpunished? What would be their idea of His character and government but the very reverse of what they are, were this the case? But, God is holy; and Holiness is the bond and perfection of all the Divine Attributes. A denial of God's

Holiness involves a denial of God Himself- it would be the worst species of Atheism- Infidelity in its most repulsive and malignant form. It were an infinitely less wrong done to God to count Him as nothing, than, acknowledging His existence, yet deny His Holiness. Thus, Holiness is the bond of perfectness of all God's attributes. Omnipotence is His Arm; Omniscience, His Eye; Mercy, His Affections; but Holiness is the girdle and beauty of them all.

"Who is a God like unto You, glorious in holiness?" The greatness of this, His most glorious perfection, is inferred from the fact that, it is the ground of His oath- "Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David." To swear by His holiness is to attach a confirmation and solemnity to His oath which no other perfection could supply; thus placing the crown of honor upon this His most illustrious and sublime perfection. He has demonstrated His holiness in the most emphatic and solemn way. Go to Mount Sinai- and behold the awesome emblems of His holiness! Travel to Mount Calvary- and gaze upon the Son of God impaled upon the cross- the Sin-bearer of His Church suffering and dying, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God! Look into Hell- and behold the quenchless flames, and hearken to the awful groans of the lost! Gaze up into Heaven, and behold its glory, and bend your ear to the song of Cherubim and Seraphim- "Holy, holy, holy Lord God of heaven and earth,"-and then deny, if you will, the holiness of God, and the equity of His moral government in that, "by no means will He clear the guilty."

There remains yet one other reason why the wicked should be punished with everlasting destruction, and with which we close the argument. We refer to hell as the most befitting place and condition of the finally impenitent and unbelieving. There is a moral fitness of the soul, progressing in the present life, for its future state. See how this reasoning applies. Heaven is holy- the abode and state of the holy- consequently, the sinner after death could not enter there. Heaven would be Hell to him. Dying unconverted, unpardoned, unsanctified, he could not exist in Heaven. Its atmosphere would be too pure- its society, too holy- its employments, too sacred- its music, too divine- and he would exclaim, "Take me out of here! for this world of holiness I am unfitted- with its employments I have no sympathy- with its society I have no congeniality- and for its condition I never prepared!" It is recorded of the betrayer of Christ that, "he, went to his own place"- words pregnant with the most solemn meaning! It is not said to what place Judas went- but, "to his own place." The studied obscurity that veils it, renders the expression all the more significant and impressive. We are left to the most strictly logical and scriptural inference it is possible to draw; namely, that, Judas went to the place most suitable to his nature, befitting his character, and congenial to his spirit. If he were a holy and righteous man, then he went to the most fitting and proper place- he went to Heaven. If, on the contrary, he was a sinful and ungodly man, then, the place for which he was fitted was the one to which he went- he went to Hell. He "went to, his own place," is the record of the sacred penman, and there he leaves it. What a momentous truth are we here taught! Not one revealed in the Bible is more true than this, that, every individual of the race is educating for a future state- is training for Eternity- is going to his own place- Heaven or Hell! Retribution will be just what Probation makes it. "Do not be deceived; God is not mocked for whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap. For he that sows to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that sows to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting." Reader! for which are you preparing- for which are you fitted? Of Heaven it is recorded- "Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life." And of Hell it is written- "Whoever was not found written in the

book of life was cast into the lake of fire." All who have departed the present life are gone to their own place; and we who survive shall die and go to ours: if it be Heaven- to heaven; if it be Hell- to hell. Which, my reader, is your present place? Is it beneath the cross of Jesus- the place of penitence and pardon, of faith and love? Is it among the sons of God, the holy and the good? Is it in the house of God- listening to His gospel, and worshiping Him in the beauty of holiness? Is it at the Table of the Lord's Supper- spiritually and believingly eating of His flesh and drinking of His blood? In a word- are you enrolled among the 'poor in spirit,' the 'pure in heart,' -the 'meek and peaceful'- those who 'hunger and thirst after righteousness'-and the loving, cross-bearing followers of Jesus?- then, when you die, you will go to your own place- and that place will be- Heaven forever!

One most solemn aspect of our subject yet remains. The Eternity of Future Punishment, and the consequent Deathlessness of the soul, are truths as clearly revealed as is any doctrine of the Bible. The word of God nowhere- not in a solitary instance- speaks of either the annihilation of the lost, or, of the terminable nature of their punishment. We hold that the idea of the annihilation of the wicked is as un-philosophical as it is unscriptural. It is un philosophical. Man has an immaterial, invisible property, which we call the soul: and a material, visible substance which we call the body. The soul is spiritual, pure and uncompounded, and, therefore, indestructible- nothing can touch, separate or destroy it. There is but one Being in the universe who could annihilate the soul- He who created alone can uncreate. He who made, alone can destroy it. If, then, God does not annihilate the soul, it cannot be annihilated. And is it conceivable that, having made man in His own image- intellectual, moral, and immortal- He will everlastingly destroy the chief work of His creative power- marred and tainted though that image be? Would the Sovereign of a nation command the coin of the realm to be utterly destroyed, simply because time and use had defaced the royal image and superscription, rendering it almost invisible? And, is it reasonable to suppose that God will command to utter annihilation that which partakes the most essentially of His own immortal nature, and which reflects the most distinctly His own Divine image- even though that nature be fallen, and that image be obscured? We maintain, then, that it is purely un-philosophical to suppose the soul capable of annihilation. The immortality of man is not 'conditional,' as some teach. It is entirely independent of 'life in Christ.' Life in Christ is totally and essentially distinct from the natural immortality of the soul- the soul of man lives forever, independently of spiritual life from Christ. Saved or lost, my reader, you are born to immortality as your intrinsic and inalienable inheritance- it is the birthright of your soul, of which none can divest you but God Himself. Your being, once commenced, never eases to exist-

"The inextinguishable flame burns on,

And shall FOREVER burn."

The doctrine of the soul's annihilation, and the terminable nature of future punishment, is as contrary to sound theology, as it is to sound philosophy. We can only select a few, from among the many, Scripture evidences. The writings of the Old Testament teach the certain punishment and endless damnation of the lost. When the wicked spring as the grass, and when all the workers of iniquity do flourish; it is that they shall be destroyed forever. Destruction nowhere in the Bible can be predicated of annihilation, without the most ingenious perversion of the term. We speak of the destruction of a person- of a house- of a city. Who with the most ordinary understanding of the

term would attribute to it the idea of annihilation? A fortune- a picture- a reputation may be destroyed- but neither one nor the other can resolve itself into its original element of nothingness. Take a yet stronger passage: "The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction away from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power." Mark the words, "everlasting destruction"- if the destruction of the wicked means in the Bible annihilation, this everlasting destruction is a misnomer- words to which we can attach no definite or intelligible meaning whatever. "Everlasting destruction" must- grammatically and intelligibly interpreted- be accepted as meaning the interminable punishment, and not the utter annihilation of the finally lost. If annihilation is the final condition of the wicked, what meaning are we to attach to the solemn words which our Lord spoke concerning His betrayer: "It had been good for that man if he had not been born." If there were no future punishment- or if that punishment were ever to terminate- how inexplicable the words of Christ thus used of Judas! But to him- as to all who die in their sins- will be addressed by the same Redeemer and Judge the appalling sentence- "Depart from Me, you cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels." and then comes the great separation- "these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal." If the happiness of the saved is eternal, equally eternal is the condemnation of the lost!

Let us close these solemn passages with one of the most momentous, searching questions, ever propounded- "Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?" Who? Who that reads these pages shall come under this "eternal damnation"? Lord is it I? Oh banish from your creed- eject from your mind- efface from your thoughts of the future- the idea that your soul will ever cease to be- or, that, if lost- which God of His infinite mercy in Christ Jesus forbid! -your righteous doom will ever be reversed; or your indescribable sufferings will ever terminate! Ally yourself with false doctrine- abandon yourself to superstitious worship- sell yourself to sin- and make a covenant with Hell- as you will- then will follow the appalling, righteous, and inevitable doom- "The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of His indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: and the smoke of their torment ascends up forever and ever."

But, why will you die? Jesus Christ came down into this fallen, sinful world to save the lost- to save sinners- the vilest. The God against whom you have sinned is "ready to pardon." He has pledged His word, confirmed with an oath- swearing by Himself- "As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn, turn from your evil ways; for why will you die?" God is prepared to treat with you. If you have no merit- as merit you have none- if your unworthiness is great- as immeasurably great it is- Christ supplies all. It is all the merit and all the worthiness God demands, or you require. What if your sins are countless as the stars- your guilt, deep as crimson- fly to His pierced heart- wash in His cleansing blood- hide in a cleft of this smitten Rock- and you shall be saved. Let your place now, be the sheltering cross- then, when you die, you will go to your own place, God had from eternity ordained- which Jesus has gone to prepare- and for which- by all His dealings in providence and grace- He is preparing you. Relinquish every false hope- escape from every lying refuge- renounce every other name; and, "None but Jesus" be your boast in life- your hope in death- your

song through eternity. "There is salvation in n o other; for there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved"- but the one name of Jesus. "This man receives sinners, and eats with them."

"None but Jesus Christ I see;

Other Saviors I have none;

Jesus died on Calvary,

Jesus has the battle won.

Many waters could not drown

His deep love for you and me;

Love from glory brought Him down,

Love o'ercame Gethsemane.

"None but Jesus, still I cry;

Other Saviors cannot save;

Jesus made death's channel dry,

Opened up the gloomy grave.

Jesus sets an open door,

Earth and Hell can never close,

That we may for evermore

Follow Him wherever He goes.

"None like Jesus can do good,

Other remedies are vain;

Plunged beneath His healing flood,

He my soul restores again.

He my nature sanctifies

By His Holy Spirit's power

Gives the hope which purifies,

Gives me strength in Satan's hour.

"None but Jesus I would see

In my trouble and my grief;

He alone can comfort me,

He alone can bring relief.

'None but Jesus,' I shall cry

When in Heaven His face I see;

Lesser lights escape the eye

Near the sun's bright majesty."

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